HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, October 22, 2026

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2027) BILL, 2026

[Fourth Day]

The Standing Finance Committee of the whole House resumed its deliberations on the Bill and Estimates.

[*Chairman*: *Mr. Singh*]

10.00 a.m.

Mr. Chairman: Good morning, everyone, once again. This meeting of the Standing Finance Committee shall resume, and we go to Head 28, Ministry of Health.

Head 28: Ministry of Health, $7,474,075,200.

Mr. Chairman: I now invite the Minister of Health to come forward and make a brief opening statement. Minister.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, could you kindly indicate what page that is in the documents?

Mr. Chairman: I am sorry, I beg your pardon?

Mr. Imbert: Could you kindly indicate what page that is in the documents?

Mr. Chairman: Well, I normally indicate when we get there.

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]—and then you skip over in a second, could you kindly indicate the page, please?

Mr. Chairman: Look, Diego Martin North/East—

Mr. Imbert: I have watched the videos so I know what goes on.

Mr. Chairman: Yeah, well, listen, it is a little too early for you to try to engage me in this kind of hurly-burly, all right?

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, I have asked for something, I am entitled to ask for it.

Mr. Chairman: You will get it in due course. That is the short answer. Hon. Minister.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning, colleagues. Mr. Chairman, the Ministry of Health is responsible for providing health care for the over 1.4 million citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Policy formulation, oversight and direction remain the role of the Ministry of Health. Delivery of health care services is the responsibility of the various regional health authorities via the nation's several major hospitals and the numerous district health facilities and health centres.

The $7.4 billion-plus budgetary injection into the Ministry of Health by the hon. Minister of Finance in this budget, as prescribed by the hon. Prime Minister, will be utilized to continue to provide quality care in a timely manner to those who require it. The chronic, non-communicable disease burden in this country remains our biggest health and economic challenge. Mr. Chairman, 62 per cent of annual deaths in Trinidad and Tobago are directly attributable to NCDs. Next September will be 20 years since the landmark Declaration of Port of Spain was signed with the theme: "Uniting to Stop the Epidemic of Chronic NCDs".

Whilst I acknowledge in the public space, discourse on the occasional drug shortage, here and there, for diabetes and some cancers, I want to give the population the assurance that the supply chain and procurement issues surrounding this matter are being dealt with. CDAP remains an important programme for citizens, and we will continue to strengthen it. However, the debate on prevention of NCDs, cancer screening and mental health needs, needs to be ramped up. The hon. Prime Minister has taken the lead by way of the recent legislative amendments to curb alcohol, tobacco and marijuana use in young people.

Mr. Chairman, sugar remains an enemy of the health of our people. Limiting its use is next in our list of health protection measures to be advanced. Mr. Chairman, every weekend in this country there are several 5K events and health fairs. This is an encouraging trend, and I take the opportunity to commend the various organizers and congratulate those citizens who participate in these events which are aimed at reversing sedentary lifestyles, which is a major risk factor for NCDs.

Reducing childhood obesity is a major goal of this administration. It is one of the ways of protecting the future of our nation's children, while recent innovative amendments to the Children's Life Fund Authority continue to cater for children requiring treatment for complex conditions. Mr. Chairman, the Ministry will continue its efforts to fully operationalize all public health care institutions in financial '27. In addition to dealing with these plans, we will also focus on people and processes.

The great majority of our health care workers give of their very best on a daily basis in our nation's health care institutions, and I wish to sincerely thank them for their service, Mr. Chairman. The process by which citizens receive health care is reviewed regularly in order to tweak the Government's policies and programmes to ensure effective and efficient care, whilst providing value for money. In particular, Mr. Chairman, the operations at our emergency departments, and the mechanisms for receiving and treating with complaints from those waiting for care in casualty departments and clinics, remain a high priority for the Ministry.

Mr. Chairman, allow me to thank the Minister in the Ministry of Health, my parliamentary colleague Dr. Rishad Seecheran for his support, together with Permanent Secretary Fortune, other Ministry of Health staff, and the Boards and

executives of the RHAs for their assistance. Mr. Chairman, the hon. Prime Minister views this budgetary allocation to health as an investment in our nation's future and, for this, I thank her on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Chairman, I remain at the disposal of the Standing Finance Committee to answer any questions. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister.

Question proposed: That Head 28 stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: As Members are aware, the said sum for Head 28: Ministry of Health is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, the *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*, and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*.

We shall now consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, which starts at page 190 and continues onward to 194. Sub-Head 01 is to be found between pages 191 to 194, inclusive. Item 001: General Administration. Laventille West.

Mr. Marcelle: Thank you very kindly, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Minister, line Item 01/001/14: Remuneration to Members of Cabinet-Appointed Committees. In 2026, there was an original allocation of $627,120, and I am seeing a Revised Estimate of $351,300. My first question is, the original Estimates of being $327,000, what was the intended use in terms of which Cabinet-appointed committees?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Thank you, Member, for your question. Sorry, can you repeat

the last question?

Mr. Marcelle: The 2026 Estimates, originally you allocated $627,120, what was the original scope in terms of which Cabinet-appointed committees were going to be paid from this, in fiscal 2026?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Member, this allocation is to pay the Cabinet-appointed committees, as you pointed out. Therefore, the are several Cabinet-appointed committees: the Clinical Assessment Committee, the Drug Advisory Committee, the Food Advisory Committee, and the National AIDS Coordinating Committee. If I understand your question correctly, Member, you are wondering about the revised expenditure of $351,000 as opposed to the $627,000 allocated, and the reason for that is because the Food Advisory Committee and the National AIDS Coordinating Committee were not yet appointed in the last fiscal year, but it is the intention to have those appointed, and that will also explain the increase in the allocation under this Item.

Mr. Marcelle: The work of the committees in terms of 2026 that were actually executed, is the tenure of that committee completed or they would move over to fiscal 2027?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Member, the work of all these committees remains continuous based on government policy and the Ministry of Health policy, so the short answer to that is, yes.

Mr. Marcelle: Thank you. That is all for this Head. I think the Member for North/East—

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Listen, I went in order whose hand I saw first.

Mr. Young SC: I will give way to the Member for Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Chairman: Let me just explain so that the Member does not need to—

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: You really need to desist that—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Imbert: No, you really need to look at me to see that my hand is up.

Mr. Chairman: I tell you, sometimes that is a difficult proposition.

Mr. Imbert: You could say what you want, you know. May I be allowed to speak, Mr. Speaker?

10.10 a.m.

Mr. Chairman: No one is stopping you. Go ahead.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you very much. Mr. Chairman, 01—page 191, Sub-Item 01, I notice that the difference between the original Estimate under 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, and the Revised Estimate on that same Sub-Item, the difference is $8.3 million. Could the Minister explain the reason for that change?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yes. Thank you, Member, for that question. Member, are you—Member, so were you referring to the increase in the allocation, the difference?

Mr. Imbert: I will repeat what I said.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yes, please.

Mr. Imbert: Page 191, 01: Personnel Expenditure; 001: General Administration; 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, there has been an increase of $8.326 million.

Hon. Member: "He on de wrong one".

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: No, I think—

Mr. Imbert: This is from the original Estimate. I am talking about 2026 to—I was very clear, eh. When you compare the original Estimate and the Revised

Estimate under this Sub-Item, you will see an increase of $8,326,600, a 36 per cent increase—actually, 36.5. Could you kindly explain the reason for this increase?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Member, that difference would be due to the mid-term allocation for the—[*Minister confers with technocrat*] That would have been based on the negotiations. There would have been some arrears. So that would have accounted for that increase at mid-term.

Mr. Imbert: So that increase includes an increase in salary, a possible increase in COLA and payment of back pay?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Those payments, I am advised, Member, were made in December and the Ministry would have reimbursed those payments.

Mr. Imbert: That is not an answer to my question. Does it involve an increase in salary, a possible increase in COLA and payment of back pay to the category of public servants that are paid under this Sub-Item?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: I want to ensure that I answer your question specifically, Member. So, you are asking about the categories?

Mr. Imbert: No, I am simply saying there is a Sub-Item on page 191, 01/001/01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, original allocation in 2026, $22.8 million; Revised allocation, $31,126,600; a change of $8,326,600, a 36.5 per cent increase from original to Revised. What was that for? Why the increase of 36.5 per cent; original to Revised?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: This would have been to facilitate the payments based on the outcome of the wage negotiation. Member, I think I mentioned that already.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. This is for the fiscal year 2026. So, this ended on September 30, 2026, this year, a short while ago. Did this involve the payment of 100 per cent of the back pay owed to these employees? You are nodding. Could you answer? I

would like a word, please, not a nod.

Mr. Tancoo: It did not include 100 per cent—

Mr. Imbert: Thank you.

Mr. Tancoo:—of any back pay—

Mr. Imbert: Thank you.

Mr. Tancoo:—owed because the matter is still under consideration.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. I was just asking. I was just asking. No problem. Okay, 191, 01/001/05, I notice that the original allocation for national insurance was $2,100,000, the Revised allocation is $2,505,600; an increase of $405,600, a 19.3 per cent increase. Can you explain this increase?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: This allocation, Member, would cover the increased contribution to the NIS following the revised rates.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. So, this is based on the increase in NIS contributions.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yes, Member.

Mr. Imbert: I see. All right. Can I go now to 01/001/08? I see you had an original allocation of $1,171,540 for vacant posts without incumbents. According to this document, which we have realized yesterday may not be 100 per cent accurate, the expenditure on vacant posts, or the filling of vacant posts without incumbents was zero. Can you explain why?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Member, this explanation for that is that even though efforts would have been made to fill these positions through the Service Commissions, we were not able to fill those positions in 2026.

Mr. Imbert: So, you were not able to fill any vacant posts without incumbents. That is why there is a zero there.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Based on our submissions to the Service Commissions.

Mr. Imbert: No problem. No problem. Can I, therefore, look at Group Health Insurance–Monthly Paid Employees? Original allocation, $350,000; Actual spend, if this number is correct, $273,400; a reduction of almost 22 per cent. Why was there this reduction for the group health insurance plan for the monthly-paid workers?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: I want us to make sure we are both on the same page. Is it Item 20 you are speaking about?

Mr. Imbert: I am—listen—okay. No problem. I am on page 191. I am at 01: Personnel Expenditure; Sub-Item 001: General Administration. I have gone now to Sub-Item 27—

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Got you.

Mr. Imbert:—I just want to make sure, you know—Gov't Contribution to Group Health Insurance - Monthly Paid Officers, a reduction of 22 per cent. What caused that?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Essentially, Member, this would have been based on the number of employees that were eligible at that point in time.

Mr. Imbert: Okay, so the original Estimate was an overestimate?

Mr. Tancoo: Member, as indicated before, these are for monthly-paid staff. I think the Member indicated previously that there was a lot of expectation that more staff would have come on board. That did not materialize. As a result of which, the number here, which would have been proposed, was not utilized.

Mr. Imbert: I see. Even though the allocation for vacant posts could barely fill two posts. Okay. But a reduction of 22 per cent, that is your explanation? Okay. No problem. Can I also ask the same question with respect to the Group Health Insurance—which is Sub-Item 20, same page—Daily-Rated Workers, a reduction

of 19 per cent?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Member, this would be the same reason. There were 24 invisible, after two years' continuous service, daily-rated general administration employees on this—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Imbert: But the explanation given by the Minister of Finance cannot apply here with respect to daily-rated workers because those positions are not filled by the Service Commissions. So, how come there is a 19 per cent reduction in payment of Group Health Insurance–Daily-Rated Workers?

Mr. Tancoo: Member, there is no 19 per cent reduction in payment. There was an Estimate based on the projection for hiring of staff. That hiring of staff did not materialize. So, you ended up with a Revised Estimate, which is very similar to the Actual in 2025.

Mr. Imbert: So, if you reduce from 48 to 39, that is not a reduction? I guess that is an increase.

10.20 a.m.

Mr. Tancoo: You have—there was an Estimate based—Member, you are being very—

Mr. Imbert: Deliberate.

Mr. Tancoo: Yeah. Ironically though, you are very well aware—

Mr. Imbert: Very deliberate.

Mr. Tancoo:—that these are Estimates. The Estimates would have been based on a projection for Employment. The Employment did not materialize and a result of which the Estimate is at the same level as it was in 2025.

Mr. Imbert: I see. Well, I see the same pattern occurring under Vertical Services, same thing.

Hon. Member: You have gone to Vertical Services?

Mr. Imbert: No, well, that is all on 01.

Hon. Bodoe: So, we are on to Vertical Services?

Mr. Imbert: I am assuming, Mr. Chairman, before we jump, that we are all on 01 and all the various Sub-Items in 01, which would be 004, 005. Am I correct, Mr. Chairman, that you are dealing with 01? And I could deal with the Items within 01?

Mr. Chairman: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Imbert: I am asking you.

Mr. Chairman: Member, I think that much is pretty plain and obvious.

Mr. Imbert: No problem. Fine. So if I go now—

Mr. Young SC: Mr. Chairman, you are sure that is how you are dealing with it? Because in the past, that has varied, 004: Vertical Services then goes into the whole line Item breakdown of 01—

Mr. Chairman: We are at 001: General Administration.

Mr. Young SC: Administration, right, 01—

Mr. Chairman: I have not moved on from there. It has gone from 01 to 031 from what I am seeing here. Okay?

Mr. Young SC: And now—

Mr. Chairman: If it is your intention is to move on, simply say that you have exhausted your questions in so far as the Sub-Item is concerned.

Mr. Imbert: Me? "Nah. At all. I only reach 004, within 01".

Mr. Chairman: That is a matter entirely for you. Thank you.

Mr. Young SC: No, well, hold—Mr. Chair, I interrupted having regard to how the goalpost seems to move. Because, of course, my friend from Diego Martin

North/East will ask all of the questions but I do not want that he moves to 004 and then we are told we if we have questions—

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Young SC: Yeah.

Mr. Imbert: Yeah.

Mr. Young SC: —on 001: General Administration.

Mr. Chairman: I have not moved from 001: General Administration.

Mr. Young SC: Okay, but my friend has just said and asked you whether he can go now to 004 and—

Mr. Chairman: No, let us stick to the line Item so that it does not get blurred. Let us stick to the Sub-Head we are dealing with and then if you wish to move to 004, kindly indicate that you have exhausted your questions in so far as 001 is concerned.

Mr. Imbert: Over to my colleague.

Mr. Young SC: You see what I mean.

Mr. Imbert: Over to you.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: No, that is what I am saying.

Mr. Young SC: Correct, which is why I intervened because I did not want any—

Mr. Chairman: Well—Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: So 01—

Mr. Chairman: Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West. Let me just—

Mr. Young SC: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: I have checked the *Hansard* and that is how it has traditionally been done. Alright?

Mr. Young SC: Which is why I intervened.

Mr. Chairman: Right. So, unless I say we move forward, we stick to that. Once you all have indicated that you wish to move to another Sub-Item, just simply indicate that to me.

Mr. Young SC: Right.

Mr. Chairman: But where there is a lull in the questioning, I am entitled to reasonably assume that we have exhausted it. So let us go on, let us not waste time.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you. Which is why I intervened—

Mr. Chairman: So—

Mr. Young SC:—to say I would like to ask something under 01/001: General Administration.

Mr. Chairman: Right.

Mr. Young SC: 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. Minister, there is now an Estimate of $86.1 million, right, for Salaries and COLA, which is an increase of $55 million and then in the explanation it continues to say: Includes provision for vacant posts with incumbents. So does this include any vacant posts that have no incumbents, that if they are filled by the PSC over the next fiscal, there will not be money here?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Sorry, Member, I am advised that this allocation is not to fill Vacant Posts. There is under Vote 08, if I may guide you.

Mr. Young SC: That is what, sorry?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: It is under 08, later down in the—

Mr. Young SC: Right. So there is $600,000 under 08: Vacant Posts - Salaries & C.O.L.A. (without incumbents), right? Just what you pointed us to, 08: Vacant

Posts - Salaries and C.O.L.A. (without incumbents), whereas 01, has a note that says this is for vacant posts with incumbents.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Correct.

Mr. Young SC: Right. So now, let us go to that increase of the $55 million. This $55 million is to do what?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: So Member, that increase in $55 million is to facilitate the payment of arrears following the wage negotiations with the PSA and the CPO.

Mr. Young SC: Okay. So it is to pay arrears, which is back pay? That is the projected 40 per cent—

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Projected 40 per cent.

Mr. Young SC: Estimate, right?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yes, Member.

Mr. Young SC: But you just told my colleague and he was very careful in asking his questions, Member for Diego Martin North/East, that the increase —because we have established, my first question, that this is not for any new people coming into the post, right, this line Item. You just told my colleague from Diego Martin North/East, he was very careful in his questioning that the increase from $22.8 million in the original Estimate for 2026, to $31.1 million, which is the Revised Estimate, that included arrears and some—that included the increases in salaries, right, that have agreed. The outstanding Item now is the payment of back pay or arrears and you said that also included some payment of arrears. So is it that some people have broken ranks and they have taken their arrears payment?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: No, that is not true, Member.

Mr. Young SC: Right. Because I was a little confused when you said it included arrears. I suspect what this really only includes is the increase in the salary that

they have agreed to. They have agreed to an increase in salary, so obviously monthly salaries have gone up, but no one has been paid those arrears under the PSA for this period. Yes, Minister of Finance, help him.

Mr. Chairman: Minister of Finance.

Mr. Tancoo: Alright. So as indicated previously, the fiscal 2026 Revised Estimate included a partial payment of arrears which was paid in, I think it was in December. Yes.

Mr. Young SC: Okay.

Mr. Tancoo: The increase that you are looking at of the $55 million, which will be above the Revised Estimate, that increase includes consideration for a partial payment again of arrears, averages about 40 per cent of the proposed arrears that we are looking at. So that there is an arrears component in the Revised Estimate and there is an arrears component in the increase.

Mr. Young SC: But okay, so Minister, you started, let us focus first on the $8 million jump from the original 2026 Estimates to the 2026 Revised Estimates that you said a partial payment of arrears was made in December. So is it then that there was a partial of payment of that 40 per cent in cash in December, that is what you are telling us?

Mr. Tancoo: If you are looking at this particular Revised Estimate—

Mr. Young SC: Yeah, just on the Revised Estimate.

Mr. Tancoo: Okay. All right. That includes two components, one will be a part payment, which was in December, and the other part would be the increase in salaries.

Mr. Young SC: Increase in salaries. I understand the increase in salaries.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Mr. Young SC: But what I am a trying to get at, I am a little surprised that there has been a part payment of a part payment. Because as we understand it, there has been no agreement as yet with the Public Service Association, we have gone through this for the whole week to accept the 40 per cent in cash. But you are now telling us under this line Item that that $8 million included a part payment of the part payment of 40 per cent in December. So I am asking, did some break with the ranks and take the 40 per cent or was it that you said all said, well look, we are still negotiating 40 per cent in cash, in the meantime, take something?

Mr. Tancoo: In December, there was an agreement between the PSA and I believe the CPO and others to make a partial payment of arrears in December.

Mr. Young SC: Okay. Right.

Mr. Tancoo: That was done.

Mr. Young SC: So, okay—

Mr. Tancoo: There is now a provisional Estimate for 2027—

Mr. Young SC: Correct, going forward for the—

Mr. Tancoo: Correct.

Mr. Young SC:—Estimates and you have to audit; there has to be an agreement. Now, that agreement between the CPO and the PSA for a part payment pending the outcome of—

Mr. Tancoo: Yes.

Mr. Young SC:—an agreement. That was subject to Cabinet, did Cabinet approve or ratify that?

Mr. Tancoo: All Expenditure is approved by Cabinet, yes.

Mr. Young SC: Okay. I am not asking about all Expenditure, I am asking about this particular one.

Mr. Tancoo: I responded already.

Mr. Young SC: Alright. Thank you. I have no further questions under 001.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, I am waiting on you to call 004.

Mr. Chairman: The proper grammar is "waiting for," not "waiting on." Item 004: Vertical Services. For the avoidance of doubt and for the assistance of the Member for Diego Martin North/East, page 192.

Mr. Imbert: For the avoidance of doubt, my hand is up.

Mr. Chairman: I am actually seeing someone else's hand up, but Member for Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: You could say that if you want, you know, but my hand is up.

10.30 a.m.

Mr. Imbert: So, Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. I noticed that under 004/01 there is a 26.2 per cent increase in Salaries and COLA. Could the Minister indicate, firstly—it is a two-part question, maybe three—for the benefit of the listening public and Members of this House, what exactly is Vertical Services? That is part one of the question.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Thank you. Thank you, Member. So, the Vertical Services are some of the services still administered by the Ministry of Health to deliver certain services to the country outside of the remit of the RHAs. So, for example, these would include—I can list them here for you: The Trinidad Public Health Laboratory; the Chemistry Food and Drugs Division, National Blood Transfusion Service, Hansen Disease Control Programme, Tuberculosis, Occupational Health Unit, the expanded programme on immunization, Health Education Division; the Nutrition and Metabolism Division; Tobacco Control, Population Control, and the latest addition to the Vertical Services would be the National Prosthetics Centre.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. So, under 004/01, I noticed there is a 26.2 per cent increase for Salaries and COLA; what category of employees would that be?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: So, just to be clear, Member, you are speaking about the increase between the 2026 Estimates and the Revised Estimates?

Mr. Imbert: Yes, definitely, between the 2026 original Estimates and the 2026 Revised Estimates, 004/01.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: And you are asking about the categories of employees?

Mr. Imbert: The category of employees.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: So, those would be permanent, temporary and acting employees.

Mr. Imbert: No, what type, monthly paid or daily paid?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: So, this would be monthly-paid officers for Vertical Services, Member.

Mr. Imbert: Am I correct to assume that the 26.2 per cent increase is because of the increase in salaries and a small payment of back pay in fiscal 2026?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: The answer to that I am informed is, yes.

Mr. Imbert: Fine. So, moving on now to 004/02: Wages and COLA. What category of workers is that? What type of worker is that?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Right. So, Member, this would be for the daily paid workers.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. So, 004/02 is for daily paid workers. Were daily paid workers—or let us put it another way, was a collective agreement signed with daily paid workers that work in your Ministry in Vertical Services during fiscal 2026?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: The answer to this is, yes, Member.

Mr. Imbert: What month?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: I can provide that to you.

Mr. Imbert: Well, I can tell you it is February. So, since I am aware that in

February of 2026 a collective agreement was signed with daily paid workers that work in Vertical Service in your Ministry, and that was for a 10 per cent increase and so on, and would of course lead to back pay, can you explain why there was a 20 per cent reduction in expenditure in this Sub-Item?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: The explanation for that Member, is that the Insect Vector Control Division, which was once the Vertical Service, has now been moved to the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government.

Mr. Imbert: So, the Insect Vector Control Division was for at least 20 per cent of your—contributed to at least 20 per cent of Vertical Services?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yes, correct, Member.

Mr. Imbert: Well, it has to be more because there was an increase, but okay, I will accept that explanation. Can I move on now to, again, Group Health Insurance for daily rated and monthly paid? Can you explain why—again I am comparing original and revised 2026 recurrent under this particular Sub-Item, 004. Can you explain why for both daily rated and monthly paid there was a significant reduction in what was actually paid for the Group Health Insurance, 20 per cent?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: So, we are speaking, Member, just to be clear on Items 20 and 27?

Mr. Imbert: 20 and 27, yes, 24.1 per cent reduction for daily rated and 21.7 per cent reduction for monthly paid. How come?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: So, Member, I am just clarifying that you are asking about the reduction from the 2026 Estimates as compared to the 2026 revised? Correct?

Mr. Imbert: Yes, I have been saying that from the beginning. Comparing original 2026 with revised 2026.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yes, yes, got you, Member. So, I am advised that this is really

based on the number of persons who are eligible. They have to be two years' continuous service; that number can vary.

Mr. Imbert: So, the original Estimate could have been an overestimate?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: It varies; we have to cater. We have to cater.

Mr. Imbert: All right. Can I move now to two items which are connected, 004/04 and 004/30? Could you explain for the benefit of those listening what these allowances are? Allowances - Monthly Paid Officers and Allowances – Daily-Rated Workers, what are they?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: So 04: Allowances - Monthly Paid Officers, Member, I can answer that first. So, this allocation covers allowances for monthly-paid officers and those who work in the departments like Veterinary Public Health, Nutrition and Metabolism, Public Health Inspectorate and so on. These would include professional health allowance, special incentive allowance and administrative health allowance. Those are the categories.

Mr. Imbert: Okay, so special health allowance, incentive allowance, et cetera. That is for monthly paid and daily rated? What are those allowances?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Those are for the monthly paid.

Mr. Imbert: I said, for daily paid, 30. What are those allowances? As I said, I am looking at 04 and 30?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: So, Member, this would be for the daily paid. This would include meal allowance, shift allowances and so on.

Mr. Imbert: Yes, okay. So, you have allowances for monthly paid, you have allowances for daily paid, and these are all very important allowances to incentivize workers and so on. Why then, was there a 25 per cent cut for monthly paid and a 27 cut for daily paid, when you look at the original 2026 and the revised

2026?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Again, Member, the explanation would reside in the reallocation of the IVCD to the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government.

Mr. Imbert: For monthly paid?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yes, Member, all of the employees were transferred to that—

Mr. Imbert: For monthly paid? "Yuh sure yuh know what yuh saying?"

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Correct.

Mr. Imbert: A 25 per cent reduction—"I wouldn't even bother tuh ask yuh how many monthly paid in insect vector, they're not very many." I am done with 004, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: 005: North West Regional Health Authority, page 192, Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, again, I am looking at Allowances 005/04: North West RHA, am I to assume the allowances are similar for the monthly paid officers? Professional health incentive, 005/04: Allowances.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: 04: Allowances, Member, those allowances—

Mr. Imbert: Am I to assume they are the same?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Now, I can tell you what they are for. So, these Allowances—if we are on 04: Allowances this would cover laundry and shoe allowances. And these are for the public officers who are working within the NWRHAs. As you would be familiar, there are still a number of public officers who work in the laundries.

10.40 a.m.

Mr. Imbert: Laundry? That is what you said? Laundry?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yes, laundry and shoes allowances.

Mr. Imbert: And shoes, okay. Why was there an 11 per cent reduction?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: The original was just an estimate, Member. The Revised was 2.6.

Mr. Imbert: Okay.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: These are very important workers. We have to keep back.

Mr. Imbert: I just realized all these Estimates are wrong. But it is okay, no problem.

Mr. Tancoo: Member, there is an Estimate, and there is a Revised Estimate.

Mr. Imbert: There is a bad estimate, and there is a good estimate.

Mr. Tancoo: There is an Estimate.

Mr. Imbert: These are all bad.

Mr. Tancoo: There is a difference between an Estimate and an Actual. It is amazing that, as a former Minister, you seem to mislead—but anyway. It is disappointing that, as a former Minister—maybe this is why your Permanent Secretary would have been a better Minister in truth.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, the comments from the Minister of Finance are wholly irrelevant and pejorative, and wrong, and immature.

Mr. Tancoo: And absolutely true.

Mr. Chairman: Well, if we are going to trade pejoratives—

Mr. Imbert: No, no, no, he started it. He started it.

Mr. Chairman: This is not a schoolyard as to who started it, you know. This is not a schoolyard.

Mr. Young SC: "Wah yuh mean? How yuh mean it doesn't matter who started it?"

Mr. Imbert: The Minister is just throwing out insults just so.

Mr. Young SC: So, we will just sit down here quietly and take insults to us?

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Tancoo: The Minister of Health—

Mr. Chairman: Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, let us—

Mr. Young SC: But—

Mr. Chairman: I understand you want to go to the rescue of your friend, you know.

Mr. Young SC: Let us move on with the people's work.

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: There is no need for that kind—

Mr. Imbert: "Rescue? He okay?"

Mr. Young SC: [*Inaudible*]—"behave myself here inno."

Mr. Chairman: Yes, perhaps—

Mr. Young SC: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Listen—

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: If I may? If I may just for—

Mr. Young SC: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Yes, let us move on to 006 at your leisure.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Mr. Chairman, before we move on, if I may—

Mr. Chairman: Minister, you want to answer?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: No, I just wanted to state categorically that the 124 eligible public officers would have received their laundry and shoe allowances.

Mr. Chairman: All right, we move now to 006, page 193.

Mr. Young SC: Yeah, correct—no, no, I just have one or two questions on 005—

Mr. Chairman: You see.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Which one are we on?

Mr. Young SC:—which is why I ensured to intervene.

Mr. Chairman: Then you turn around and blame me after the Member says "I wish to move to 006". What am I reasonably to assume there? I am going to allow you, you know.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you. But let me make it very, very clear, eh, the Minister said he was finished.

Mr. Chairman: No, the Member.

Mr. Young SC: The Member.

Mr. Chairman: You need to get accustomed, to stop using past nomenclature.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Former, former Minister.

Mr. Young SC: To what?

Mr. Chairman: That is a joke, come on. Let us move on.

Mr. Young SC: All right, so 005, I am still under North West Regional Health Authority, 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. My understanding, Minister, is that this is for the workers who did not transfer across to the RHA—

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: That is correct.

Mr. Young SC:—and they are still there under the umbrella of the Ministry of Health and accordingly being paid there. Has there been a reduction in the number of workers?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: The way this works Member, is that there would be, during the course of any financial year there will be a number of workers who would have reached retirement age and—

Mr. Young SC: So, attrition?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe:—attrition. So that would be the answer.

Mr. Young SC: These workers would not take instructions from the CEO of the NWRHA or the Board of the NWRHA?

Mr. Tancoo: How is that related to any line Item here?

Mr. Young SC: I am trying to get to the category of workers that are being paid by this?

Mr. Tancoo: No, you are not asking about the category. You are asking about the organizational structure.

Mr. Young SC: I am under Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. Okay, you want to go through it painfully slow? Would you please list all of the workers and the categories who are covered by 005/01?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yes, I can tell there are 124 public officers that—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Young SC: So, 124 public officers.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: And I can provide the finance—

Mr. Tancoo: Can you allow the Minister to answer, please?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: I can provide the listing for you, Member.

Mr. Young SC: Provide a list? All right, and those 124 workers take their directions from whom?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: So, Member, these persons are working at the RHAs, and therefore they would take the instructions from the management of the RHAs.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you. Are you aware that the management of the RHA, this one NWRHA, is threatening workers at the NWRHA—

Mr. Chairman: I do not think—

Mr. Tancoo: That is the point I am trying to make, right there.

Mr. Young SC:—as to what they can and cannot say and do.

Hon. Tancoo: That is not a sane question.

Mr. Chairman: Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: It is a question. Are you aware?

Mr. Tancoo: It is not an appropriate question.

Mr. Chairman: I do not think it arises under expenditure. I think you have a different recourse for that.

Mr. Young SC: It does arise.

Mr. Chairman: No, no.

Mr. Tancoo: That does not arise on this. It does not.

Mr. Young SC: Mr. Chairman, if I could be permitted. If you are fired, you no longer get your salary.

Mr. Tancoo: It does not arise under this.

Mr. Young SC: So therefore, these threats are being made to NWRHA workers.

Mr. Chairman: Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West. Port of Spain North/ St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: All right, no problem.

Mr. Chairman: All right, let us move on to another question.

Mr. Young SC: Let us move on then.

Mr. Chairman: I do not think that arises for this forum. You could raise it at another forum. This is strictly for expenditure.

Mr. Young SC: I am finished on 005. I am finished on 005 NWRHA. I want to make sure. I do not know if any colleagues have anything there.

Mr. Chairman: All right. 006: North Central Regional Health Authority, page 193. Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you, similar question. Why, under 006/04, has there been a 28 per cent reduction in Allowances - Monthly Paid Offices? Again, I am

comparing the original and Revised 2026.

Mr. Tancoo: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Imbert: Yeah, well, I want to know why. "You not spending, you not paying, you holding back. Ah want to know why."

Mr. Young SC: "Because Gopeesingh firing them."

Mr. Imbert: That is why? Can you explain, Sir?

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: So, Member, I can confirm that there were 55 eligible public officers who received those allowances, and the actual sum paid would have been a closer to the revised figure of $775,828. The Estimate—[*Minister confers with technocrat*]

Mr. Imbert: "He taking so long to answer a simple question, eh? Things bad over there, boy."

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: This would have been an estimate that would have been made prior to the collective bargaining agreement, Member.

Mr. Imbert: Minister, you are kind of talking a little soft.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: No, I said—[*Laughter*]—Member, I am advised that the Estimate was submitted prior to the collective bargaining process, and therefore we would have erred on the side of caution.

Mr. Imbert: The Estimate was done before the collective bargaining process? But the figure went down. It should have gone up. If what you are saying is accurate.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: I will stick with, it was under Estimate, Member.

Mr. Imbert: [*Laughter*] Mr. Chairman, the pattern in all the other RHAs is identical: A reduction in monthly paid group health insurance, reduction in

monthly paid allowances. So, unless my colleagues have questions on the other RHAs, I would like to go to 009.

Mr. Chairman: All right, so I take it that there being no indication that there are any questions, I can safely skip over 007, 008, 009?

Mr. Imbert: No, no, I want to speak about 009.

Mr. Chairman: 009.

Mr. Imbert: Okay, 009: National Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention is a very important department unit in the Ministry of Health. However, I see a reduction in Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, and so on. Why is that? Thirteen per cent reduction. Again, I am looking at the original and revised.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: I agree with you, Member, that it remains a very important department for the work of the Ministry of Health. The difference you are speaking to there, Member, would be the difference between $820,000 and $710,000. You are talking about the 2026 Estimate as opposed to the Revised.

Mr. Imbert: I just want to know why it went down.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yes, again, it would have been an estimate, but the actual amount paid would have been $714,344 as of September30, 2026.

10.50 a.m.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. But why did it go down?

Mr. Tancoo: Member, if I may again? As the Member is very well aware, and it is becoming very tedious—

Mr. Imbert: What you do and I is different, eh. I used to get it right.

Mr. Tancoo: Well then, you need to pay attention and allow me to finish. Can I please finish? I am trying to clear up a misconception that you have.

Mr. Imbert: It was saved under me.

Mr. Tancoo: It is a misconception that you have that you keep repeating as a fact, and it is a misconception that you have. Allow me, hopefully for the last time, to correct the Member. There is an Estimate in 2026. There is a Revised Estimate, which means that it is slightly better informed, but it is not an Actual. The Revised Estimate, which is $710,000, is significantly higher than $602,000 which was the Actual. But it still remains an Estimate.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, in response to the Minister, I would accept a 5 per cent variation. But when you have a 65 per cent variation, as I will indicate as we go forward, I cannot believe that that is the answer. It is just a bad estimate.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Imbert: But so are you. So, I am responding to you.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, pages 195 to 198inclusive. Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: 001, and we are now dealing with Goods and Services. Minister, would you like me to tell you the page? It is page 195.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Okay.

Mr. Imbert: I see that under 04, the Estimate for electricity payments was $3.1 million; the Revised, $2.1 million, a 32 per cent reduction. What is the reason for that reduction?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: The Actual expenditure would have been based on conservation measures at the Ministry of Health building. So, this is the Ministry of Health Corporate Headquarters that this bill speaking to.

Mr. Imbert: Yes, but did they use less electricity? You did not pay your bill? What happened?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: I can give you the assurance that all bills were paid and I can

update the Committee and the public that the Actual expenditure in fiscal 2026, as of September 30th, would have actually been $1.32 million, which would have been closer to the Estimate, Member. So that is the updated figure.

Mr. Imbert: $1.3 million? The Estimate is $3.1 million—

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: $1.32 million.

Mr. Imbert: No, but you just said that the Actual was $1.3 million, close to the Estimate. The Estimate was $3.1 million.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: They are not close. One is almost three times the other one.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Again, this would have been due to conservation measures implemented at the Ministry.

Mr. Imbert: They used less electricity?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Well, there are several ways to save—we could get into that discussion.

Mr. Imbert: No problem.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: There are several ways to save energy.

Mr. Imbert: It is okay, it is okay. I would like to move on to 06: Water and Sewerage Rates, a 65 per cent reduction between the original and the Revised. Is it that you used less water too and produced less sewerage?—a 65.7 per cent reduction.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Again, this is an Estimate, and you know—

Mr. Imbert: No problem.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Measures taken at the Ministry—

Mr. Imbert: No problem. Mr. Chairman, there are many of these types of huge variations. With your permission, can I—

[DR. ALI *in the Chair*]

—oh, Madam Chairman, I did not see you there. Can I bunch Sub-Items? In other words, rather than asking one by one, which will take a long time, can I ask on about three or four Sub-Items as a collective?

Madam Chairman: No.

Mr. Imbert: Pardon?

Madam Chairman: No.

Mr. Imbert: Okay, no problem.

Madam Chairman: Let us go on to Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Imbert: No, I am still on this, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman: Okay.

Mr. Imbert: I am still here.

Madam Chairman: Well, you just asked if you could—

Mr. Imbert: No, on this particular Sub-Item 02: Goods and Services; 001: General Administration, there are many sub, Sub-Items.

Madam Chairman: Okay, if that is what you are asking, then, yes.

Mr. Imbert: It is almost 100 of them.

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: I could bunch them together? The sub, Sub-Items?

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: No problem. So, I would like the Minister of Health, can you kindly explain why the Actual or the Revised Estimate for expenditure on Books and Periodicals was reduced by 66 per cent? Did you stop reading? And then, can you tell me why the Maintenance of Vehicles was reduced by 32 per cent?—that is 13. Did you stop maintaining vehicles? Repairs and Maintenance - Equipment

reduced by 35per cent. Did you stop maintaining equipment? Repairs and Maintenance - Building, reduced by $15 million, that is 21. Did you stop maintaining your buildings? I am glad to see you stopped travelling. Your overseas travel went down by 67 per cent.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yeah.

Mr. Imbert: Other Contracted Services, 28, reduced by 40 per cent; Janitorial Services reduced by 40 per cent. Did you stop cleaning the buildings?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Too many questions.

Mr. Imbert: So, those are the ones I would like answers to.

Madam Chairman: Member, these are way too many questions.

Mr. Imbert: It is too many?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: No, that is fine, that is fine. I have an excellent memory, Member, so I can treat with all of those. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman: No problem.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: So, let us deal with Books and Periodicals. Member, of course, this allocation would cover the purchasing of books, journals.

Mr. Imbert: They stopped reading?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: And as you would know, a lot of these are online now. So, there is no need for the actual purchase of physical books.

Mr. Imbert: You do not have to pay for them online?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yeah, we are rationalizing.

Mr. Imbert: Subscriptions and so on?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: We are rationalizing.

Mr. Imbert: I see.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: The Maintenance of Vehicles—

Mr. Imbert: You stopped maintaining vehicles?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Absolutely not. We have a fleet. It is an ageing fleet at the Ministry of Health but—

Mr. Imbert: It is ageing, but you reduced—

Madam Chairman: Diego Martin North/East, you asked all your questions in silence. If you would like the answers, please allow them to be answered by the Minister in silence.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: So, the ones that we are maintaining now are operational. We would have looked at disposal of some vehicles as well during that financial year. Repairs and Maintenance—the other issue you raised, Member, was Repairs and Maintenance - Buildings, and you are asking about the decrease between the 2026 Estimate and 2026 Revised, Member?

Mr. Imbert: "I afraid to talk, I might get a bouf by, Madam Chairman". But yes.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: So, I am advised that the figure for 2026 would have been—again, to bring the committee up to date here, Member, the Actual expenditure in fiscal 2026 would have been $32.1 million, which would have been closer to the original Estimate.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. Supplementary question then: If the original was $35million to repair buildings, maintain buildings, and the book says that the Revised was $20 million, why are you saying it is really $32 million and $20 million. That is a huge difference.

Mr. Tancoo: Member, if I may?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Go ahead, Minister.

Mr. Tancoo: Yesterday, I indicated, and I am repeating for today, the Estimates and the Revised Estimates, the information provided in this book would have been

sourced at around July. What the Minister is giving to the national committee is an updated figure as recent at the end of the fiscal. Correct?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: That is correct.

Mr. Tancoo: So, you have the benefit now of an updated figure. It is ironic that the Member is very concerned about the fact that it is very close to what the Estimate was. These are still—

Mr. Imbert: I am not concerned at all.

Mr. Tancoo: If I may be allowed to finish, please?

Mr. Imbert: You cannot say something—

Mr. Tancoo: If I may be allowed to finish, Member—again, I am trying to clarify your issues, your misconceptions.

Mr. Imbert: Proceed.

Mr. Tancoo: Again, if I may? There will still be bills coming in because that is how the process works. There will still be bills coming in. So, there is no Actual for 2026 as at today's date. That will come in next year's fiscal. Okay? So, there are Estimates and there are Revised Estimates, which is what the issue is that you are raising now. These are still not Actuals, and the Actuals will only come at the end of fiscal, next year.

11.00 a.m.

Mr. Imbert:

I would like to respond to that. That is not my experience. We did not use July's figures under my tenure. We used figures up to September.

Mr. Tancoo: That is impossible.

Mr. Imbert: And that is a 60 per cent—

Mr. Tancoo: That is impossible.

Mr. Imbert: I did not.

Mr. Tancoo: That is impossible.

Mr. Imbert: You told me not to interrupt you.

Dr. Moonilal: Madam Chair.

Mr. Tancoo: "Do so doh like so".

Dr. Moonilal: Madam Chair.

Mr. Tancoo: "Do so doh like so".

Mr. Imbert: You told me not to interrupt you.

Dr. Moonilal: Madam Chair, the Member is refusing to ask a question and is giving us his life experience.

Hon. Members: No.

Mr. Young SC: No. It cannot be that, Madam Chair, that people on that side say what they want—

Dr. Moonilal: His life experiences.

Mr. Young SC: —and there is no response to leave it on the record.

Dr. Moonilal: Please, could we invite the Member to ask a direct question?

Mr. Imbert: No.

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: But he cannot just say anything he wants.

Madam Chairman: The Member is answering your question.

Mr. Imbert: Okay well then I would like to ask, is the Minister saying—

Madam Chairman: And I want you to only ask questions, no comments—

Mr. Imbert: I am going to ask a question.

Madam Chairman: —no experiences.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, that is very unfair. They are making all kind of

comments. That cannot be right. Madam Chairman, is the Minister of Finance saying that the figures in this book are not accurate?

Mr. Tancoo: Is that the question that you asked?

Mr. Young SC: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: That is the first question.

Mr. Tancoo: As I indicated ad nauseam, and I will repeat again now, there are Estimates, which means they are provisional figures, and there are Revised Estimates, which are also provisional figures. This is not an Actual. The Actual will come next year, at the end of the fiscal. And as the former, former Minister of Finance well knows, that that is how Estimates and Revised Estimates are included in this book. To pretend otherwise is disappointing, Member. It says clearly at the top of the page, Estimates and Revised Estimates. I hope that clarifies your misconception.

Mr. Imbert: It does not. So, my next question is that under this particular Sub-Item, where the original Estimate is $35 million, the Revised Estimate for fiscal 2026 is $20 million, that is a 43 per cent difference, and now the Minister is claiming that the Actual is 32, that is a variation of 60 per cent. Is the Minister of Finance satisfied that a variation of 60 per cent is reasonable?

Mr. Tancoo: The Minister of Finance is very satisfied that you just received an updated figure which is close to the Estimate and to I hope that you are appreciative and I know that the national community is appreciative of the fact that an actual figure was provided this session, thank you.

Mr. Imbert: So, supplementary, is the Minister saying that the difference between the Revised Estimate and the claimed Actual of 60 per cent is reasonable for us in this Chamber to establish what happened in fiscal 2026? A 60 per cent difference

between what is in this book and what is allegedly in the Actual.

Mr. Tancoo: The use of terms "alleged", et cetera, et cetera, is very unfortunate again.

Mr. Imbert: It is alleged, it is not in any book.

Mr. Tancoo: May I again, again, may I be able to complete my statement, my explanation? I am very comforted that the hon. Minister of Health has provided a figure, which is considered to be close to the Actual figure for this line Item. Thank you, that is the purpose of this [*Inaudible*].

Mr. Imbert: Okay. Supplementary question. Since the Actual is $12 million more than the alleged revised, would that increase the deficit for fiscal 2026?

Mr. Tancoo: It probably will.

Mr. Imbert: Of course, it would.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Mr. Imbert: So the deficit is inaccurate too.

Mr. Tancoo: Can I please? There have been multiple instances when you go through these numbers where some of the Revised Estimates are higher and some are lower. The estimate deficit would therefore vary depending on the total figure here. Not because one figure is higher does it mean that the overall figure will be higher because there are thousands of figures here. The attempt by the former, former Minister to create the illusion that because one figure of 25—well the difference being $12 million in a budget of $65 million is different that your entire deficit would change is very unfortunate again. You are deliberately trying to misconstrue the information in front of you. That is very disappointing. You know better.

Mr. Imbert: The deficit doubled in 2026, it will probably double again.

Mr. Tancoo: You know better.

Mr. Imbert: Probably $14 million—

Mr. Tancoo: You know better.

Mr. Imbert: —when we see the numbers.

Mr. Tancoo: You know better.

Mr. Imbert: I do not know what you are doing. Because what you are doing makes no sense.

[MR. SINGH *in the Chair*]

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Mr. Chairman, if I may I still have one—

Mr. Tancoo: This is the same Member who took grave offence when I said this is the reason why he was replaced by a former Permanent Secretary.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Tancoo: He took grave offence, you know.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Tancoo: You cannot "play mas and fraid powder".

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, what is all this commentary?

Mr. Tancoo: You cannot "play mas and fraid powder".

Mr. Chairman: You see and that is the problem, right.

Mr. Imbert: What problem? The problem is you allowing him to say all kind of things.

Mr. Chairman: No, the problem is you are interjecting—

Mr. Imbert: Can I respond to him?

Mr. Chairman: What graver—

Mr. Imbert: Can I respond to him?

Mr. Chairman: —offence can be committed by telling a Minister of Finance he

does not know what he is doing?

Mr. Imbert: And what graver offence could be committed by what he just said?

Mr. Chairman: Well, in response to what you said. You see—and if we are—

Mr. Young SC: Minister.

Mr. Chairman: —going to engage in this clarified tit for tat, we will get nowhere.

Mr. Imbert: Glorified tit for tat? He started it.

Mr. Chairman: It is. It is a glorified tit for tat.

Mr. Imbert: Look, Mr. Chairman—

Mr. Chairman: It is too early for this hurly-burly. Let us get on with it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: It is not too early. Never too early. Never too early.

Mr. Chairman: Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you. Minister once you all have settled down.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Mr. Chairman. Sorry, Mr. Chairman, before Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, I just wanted to finish my answer to the Member for Diego Martin North/East with regards to Official Overseas Travel. I do not want to be accused of not answering his question. Mr. Chairman, I have the same dilemma here. He asked about the difference, and in fact, the Actual Expenditure, Minister of Finance, under that Overseas, Official Overseas Travel, was actually $171,535. So, two things I want to—$100,000 less. I want to compliment my staff, apparently the accounting staff at the Ministry of Health, very efficient. I want to take this opportunity to commend them—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: —for providing very up-to-date and accurate information for the

benefit of the public. And of course, [*Laughter*] yes, yes, of course, I want to say that—

Mr. Imbert: But I asked about another Sub-Item—

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: —unlike the previous Government, travel is very well planned and brings back benefits to the Ministry of Health and that country. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. We go to Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West now.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, I had asked about a number of Sub-Items, the Minister answered some of them, not all.

Mr. Chairman: All right, well.

Mr. Imbert: You were not here.

Mr. Chairman: Unless you have a question.

Mr. Imbert: I asked a question.

Mr. Chairman: Unless you have a question further to that, we are going to Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Imbert: "So I cah get my answer"?

Mr. Chairman: Well, the Minister has answered. Whatever you want—

Mr. Imbert: He did not answer specifically.

Mr. Chairman: Whatever you wish to make of the answer is a matter for you, unless you have a further question and not a comment on the adequacy or inadequacy of the answer which you have received. I propose to go to Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Imbert: And what about the questions he did not answer? What about those? I am not commenting on adequacy.

Mr. Chairman: Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I am going to ask questions on 02: Goods and Services, 001: General Administration, line Item 61: Insurance. But before I ask my question, a word of advice to the wise and Member for Fyzabad. Your term is not yet over, so when you get reshuffled, just understand.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: All right, Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: We are now under insurance.

Mr. Tancoo: Unlike you, I am comfortable wherever my Prime Minister puts me.

Mr. Chairman: That is inappropriate.

Mr. Young SC: I would not go anywhere your Prime Minister does. 61: Insurance, 2026 started off with an Estimate of $2 million. The Revised Estimate went up to 34—$3.4 million. How much was actually utilized out of that $3.4 million?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yes. So, Member the actual expenditure as at September 30th was $3.35 million.

Mr. Young SC: Okay. $3.35 million and this is insurance for what?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: This is the insurance for the Administrative Building at The Ministry of Health.

Mr. Young SC: All right. I thought so. Has there been a change in who is providing the insurance?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: That question would probably be better directed to UDeCOTT at some point in time.

Mr. Young SC: No, but you are paying the insurance. The Ministry of Health is paying the insurance. The taxpayers are paying the insurance.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: So, it is through the Ministry of Health, not the UDeCott.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: So, we do a reimbursement to UDeCOTT, Member.

Mr. Young SC: And did UDeCOTT tell you who is now doing the insurance?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: I can provide that in writing, Member.

Mr. Young SC: Please do. And I see now for this fiscal 2027, there has been a reduction of $900,000 to take it to $2.5 million. How is that going to cover the insurance for this fiscal? Because you have just told us that you spent $3.35 million in the last?

11.10 a.m.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: So, the payment for 2026, Member, would have included a balance from 2025.

Mr. Young SC: What was that, sorry?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: I said the payment for 2026 would have included a balance in the insurance from 2025. So, the $2.5 million—

Mr. Young SC: Should be sufficient?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yes. It is an accurate reflection of what the actual cost is.

Mr. Young SC: Okay. Thank you. And then just above that, a few line Items above, line 21: Repairs and Maintenance - Buildings. We started off with an Estimate of $35 million. Just before I move to that, when you are providing the information under line Item 61: Insurance, you said you would provide it in writing who is covering the insurance now?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: We can do that.

Mr. Young SC: In particular, we would like to know if it is Comprehensive Insurance Brokers.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Sure.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Now I move on to line Item 21: So, you started off with an Estimate of $35 million. You have a Revised Estimate of $20 million. How much of that was spent?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: I believe I answered that question already. But for the benefit of the Member, the Actual Expenditure was $32 million.

Mr. Young SC: 32, you said?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yes. $32.1 million.

Mr. Young SC: Okay. And that was why the whole debate came as to updated figures. And now you have gotten $16.5 million for the next fiscal. Where is it expected that this will be spent? What buildings? Because the Ministry of Health now has how many buildings?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: So, this will cover the Ministry of Health's corporate building.

Mr. Young SC: The corporate building is the admin. building around the Savannah? The Queen's Park Savannah, right?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: Yes, it also covers—so that is preventive and corrective maintenance there. It also covers two other facilities that are utilized by the Ministry of Health, storage facilities, Trade Zone and the JSAC building.

Mr. Young SC: Okay. And with respect to the maintenance of the administrative building, how much of this $16.5 million is expected to be for that building?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yes, so I can give you the figures for last year. [*Pause*] I can give you the figures for last year. I mean, of course —

Mr. Young SC: It will vary.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe:—this will be subject to variation and so on, depending on what

maintenance is required. But last year's figure was $6,070,000. That is for the administrative building.

Mr. Young SC: Right, and was that a reimbursement to UDeCOTT?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yes. The answer is yes.

Mr. Young SC: So, the Ministry of Health does not get involved in the procurement exercise as to who is doing the maintenance at the administrative building that is handled by UDeCOTT, and you just reimburse?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yes. Correct.

Mr. Young SC: Okay. Thank you.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: That is based on the BOLT arrangement. Yes.

Mr. Young SC: Correct. I have no further questions under this 02/001.

Mr. Chairman: Item 004: Vertical Services. Diego Martin North/East. Page 196.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, as I had asked the Deputy, I will ask you the same question. When I look at the Sub-Items under this Sub-Item, I see—When you go 03, 04, 05, 06, 08, 09—it is a general statement I am making—10, 12, 13, 15, 17, 28, 37, and 57. These are all Items like Electricity, Telephones, Water and Sewage Rates, rental, Materials and Supplies, Maintenance of Vehicles, et cetera. I see reductions varying from 20 per cent up to as far as a 76 per cent reduction between the original and Revised. What is the reason for that in this Vertical Services?

Mr. Chairman: Minister of Finance, I think because of the—

Mr. Imbert: No, no, no. No, Mr. Chairman. No, no, no. There is something going on in Vertical Services that may answer this.

Mr. Chairman: No, no, no. Hang on a second.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, you cannot answer the question for the Minister.

Mr. Chairman: I am not answering the question. When you were finished, if you would spend some time to pay attention to the Chamber, the Minister of Finance raised his hand. So, all I was doing was simply, at the intimation of the Minister of Finance, inviting him to answer. That is all I was doing. If you perhaps would take your eyes off the iPad a little bit and look across the corridor, you would have noticed that the Minister of Finance raised his hand immediately.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, you are taking up a lot of time saying the same thing over and over.

Mr. Tancoo: So, Member, on the last occasion you recited a list. May I suggest that you ask, because each one of these constitutes a different Head, and the explanation for each Head may be different.

Mr. Chairman: No problem.

Mr. Tancoo: It may be the same.

Mr. Imbert: I was trying to save time.

Mr. Tancoo: Can I—may I? It may be the same, or it may be different. But for the public record, I would suggest that you ask your question Sub-Item by Sub-Item so that the Minister will be able to provide a proper answer for you. Thank you.

Hon. Members:

Mr. Tancoo: That is fine.

Mr. Imbert: Sub-Item, 05: Telephones, reduction 65 per cent. Why?

Mr. Tancoo: And again, for the avoidance of doubt, you are referring to the Estimate as compared to the Revised Estimate.

Mr. Imbert: That is what I said.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Again, Member, this would be because of the reallocation of the—sorry, Member. Again, just to be clear, you are looking at the difference between the 2026 Estimates and the Revised Estimates, correct?

Mr. Imbert: Okay.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Again, I am happy to report that the Actual Expenditure in fiscal 2026 was actually $278,708. Again, this would be to—which would be equivalent to the Actual in 2025.

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yes, we are speaking about 05: Telephones, Member?

Mr. Imbert: Yeah.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yeah.

Mr. Imbert: So, your Estimate was $700,000.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yeah, so you are asking about the difference.

Mr. Imbert: Yeah.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: And I am saying that the Actual Expenditure was $278,708.

Mr. Imbert: That is not close to the original.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: So, this would be in keeping with cost-saving measures at the Ministry of Health.

Mr. Imbert: Minister, with due respect, you just said what your documents show, that the Actual at the end of the fiscal year was $278,000. Then you went on to say which would have been close to the original. The original was $700,000. It isnot close at all.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: No, close to the original in 2025, the Actual in 2025.

Mr. Imbert: I did not say that. I am talking about 2026. So, you are saying that the original Estimate of $700,000, you were able to reduce the use of telephones in

the Ministry by 60 per cent because of what? "Yuh stop answering de phone?"

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yes, Member. Sorry, I will give way to the Minister.

Mr. Imbert: You said yes? Okay, that is a good answer.

Mr. Tancoo: If I may again—

Mr. Chairman: Minister of Finance.

Mr. Tancoo: The 2025 Actual Figure was $214,000. There was a proposed increase that would have carried it to about $700,000. The Minister has just indicated the actual figure. When the figures were first initiated in around July when the circular went out, there would have been a figure and we would have projected to the end of the fiscal. The Minister just provided very clearly the Actual figures, which are relatively in line with what we would have expected last year. So, Member, I hope that clarifies it.

Mr. Imbert: It does not.

Mr. Tancoo: This drastic drop that you are talking about—

Mr. Imbert: It does not.

Mr. Tancoo: These again are Estimates and Revised Estimates. You just got the Actual.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, the Minister of Finance has clarified nothing. The original Estimate was $700,000. Why was there an Estimate of $700,000? Was that for arrears?

11.20 a.m.

Mr. Tancoo: Member, I think you have a very clear understanding—well, you should have—based on the answers provided by myself and the Minister of Health on this matter. Thank you.

Mr. Imbert: You have answered nothing. Okay, Mr. Chairman, the Minister of

Finance asked me to go on through things one by one. I did not want to, but in the interest of being cooperative with the Minister of Finance, I will now go to 004/12. The original provision for Materials and Supplies was $5 million. What was this for?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: So, Member, that allocation would cover, for example, in Chemistry, Food and Drugs: Chemicals and reagents, batteries, lab coats; and the Trinidad Public Health laboratory: Materials and lab consumables; in the National Blood Transfusion Service, it will cover laboratory chemicals, laboratory consumables, medical supplies; the Queen's Park—

Mr. Imbert: Okay.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe:—Counselling Centre, would cover kits and so on for testing for HIV, and so on.

Mr. Imbert: Okay.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: So, again, if I might put on the record, the Actual expenditure was $3.02 million. So that was the Actual expenditure, which is a little bit short of the Estimate for 2026 of $5 million, but again, the Estimate would have been based on the intention to provide adequate supplies for these divisions, Member. So, it was thought prudent to ask for a little bit more just in case, because one cannot predict the exact amount that will be utilized during the course of the year in these services, Member.

Mr. Imbert: I see. So, the original allocation was $5 million. It is not in any book, but I will take your word for it that the spend was $3 million.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Just to add to the record, Member, I am also advised that, at that time, when the request was made, the IVCD would have been under the Ministry of Health—

Mr. Imbert: Insect Vector?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Insect Vector.

Mr. Imbert: So that could count for the reduction as well?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: And therefore, that would have been catered for so.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. So, there is a $2 million reduction; a 40 per cent reduction, instead of a 73 per cent of—[*Inaudible*]

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Well, I would not say it is a reduction, Member. I would say it is a matter of caution, especially in these areas of laboratory supplies, and so on, and there are bills that will still come in, I am sure.

Mr. Imbert: That is fine. Three is less than five. So, there was a reduction. So, you are saying quite a bit of that would be because of the relocation of the Insect Vector Control, yeah?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: It is part of it, part of it.

Mr. Imbert: But that is a substantial part of it?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yeah, there are materials, like for spraying and so on—

Mr. Imbert: Okay.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe:—that are included in these supplies.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. Maintenance of Vehicles. According to the documents in front of this Parliament, it went down by 76 per cent, 13.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Again, the Actual expenditure, I will put on the record, for the Maintenance of Vehicles was $168,193. The bills are still coming in. The Estimate, again, would have been made in anticipation of maintaining the fleet in good working condition.

Mr. Imbert: Right. So, you spent less than half the allocation on maintenance of vehicles.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: So far, that is bills we have—

Mr. Imbert: But this is a moving thing. So Janitorial Services went 37; dropped from 415 to 139, a reduction of 66 per cent. What caused that?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Again, the Actual expenditure here would have been $34,937, and the—

Mr. Imbert: Did you say 34?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yes, but again, that will be a reflection. There are still bills that have to come in—

Mr. Imbert: On a 90 per cent reduction?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe:—but, again, when we look at the Actual for 2025, we see $50,000. So that is well within what we would have expected.

Mr. Imbert: Okay, so if the Actual for 2025 was 50, why did you request and receive an allocation of $415,000 for Janitorial Services?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Again, the original request would have included catering for the IVCD.

Mr. Imbert: Insect Vector?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Insect Vector Control Division.

Mr. Imbert: All right. So, my final question now, having established that a lot of these reductions are because Insect Vector was moved out from the Ministry of Health—has it gone to local government? Is that what went on there?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yeah, that is correct, Member.

Mr. Imbert: I see. So, can you then explain, since we have established, or at least you have told us, that a lot of these things were as a result of the movement of the Insect Vector Control Division, why under 004/03, Uniforms went up by 100 per cent? Everything else "gone" down. Who uses uniforms in the Ministry of Health,

not Insect Vector? How come "it gone up" by 100 per cent?

Mr. Stuart SC: Gone up by how much?

Mr. Imbert: 100 per cent. [*Laughter*] Uniforms "gone up" by 100 per cent—[*Inaudible*]

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: So, Member, this would have—the allocation for the uniform allowance for eligible officers such as inspectors, messengers, and drivers within the Ministry, and the vertical services.

Mr. Imbert: I got that, but since Insect Vector moved out from your Ministry, causing some of these huge reductions as high as 75 per cent in items, how come Uniforms went up 100 per cent? "Dey not related? So, de people in Insect Vector doh wear uniform?"

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Member, there are about 16 divisions; there are about 16 divisions in the vertical services. All of these facilities would have employees. So, these uniforms will not only apply to that category—

Mr. Imbert: And you expect me to believe that? Okay, thank you.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Of course, I expect you to believe that, because—

Mr. Imbert: "I doh believe dat. Dah one I doh believe."

Hon. Dr. Bodoe:—you know I am giving you the facts.

Mr. Imbert: "Doh believe dah one. No problem."

Mr. Tancoo: Mr. Chair, the information being asked is being presented. It is not, unfortunately, up to us to decide whether or not the Member believes or does not believe, but those kinds of statements cast aspersions against the integrity of the Minister, and it cast—

Mr. Imbert: Look. No, no, no. "You cyah say dat."

Mr. Tancoo: Can I? Can I?

Mr. Imbert: You cannot say that.

Mr. Tancoo:—it casts allegations against the integrity of the Minister and the public servants—

Mr. Imbert: Look, behave, "nah".

Mr. Tancoo:—who are providing the facts—

Mr. Imbert: Behave, behave.

Mr. Tancoo:—to the nation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: You see, I think there are two things wrong here.

Mr. Stuart SC: "Leh we move on, nah."

Mr. Imbert: "Let's move on, nah."

Mr. Chairman: Well, the problem with that is that you are the first to complain when Members respond to you in what you perceive to be a pejorative manner.

Mr. Imbert: Can we move on, Mr. Chairman?

Mr. Chairman: No, do not dictate—

Mr. Imbert: We have a lot of things to do.

Mr. Chairman: As the urban youths say, "Don't dictate my pace to me."

Mr. Imbert: We have a lot of things to do.

Mr. Chairman: Right? You see, you respond by the hurling of pejoratives across the Floor. When you are met with what you perceive to be a pejorative, you protest. And that is the problem.

Mr. Imbert: That is your version.

Mr. Chairman: No, no. That is the version that will bear out on the record.

Mr. Imbert: The video shows what is happening.

Mr. Chairman: Listen, I do not intend to engage in any protracted—

Mr. Imbert: So, let us move on—

Mr. Chairman:—disputatious—

Mr. Imbert: Let us move on.

Mr. Chairman:—discussion with you this morning.

Mr. Imbert: Let us move on.

Mr. Chairman:—right?

Mr. Stuart SC:—Disputed, what?

Mr. Chairman: Disputatious discussion.

Mr. Imbert: "He making up words. Let's move, nah."

Mr. Chairman: Right?

Mr. Imbert: Let us move on, please.

Mr. Chairman: So, if you would just take it down a notch, we will get along finely.

Mr. Imbert: I have *Development Programme* to do. I would like to move on, please. Can I move on?

Mr. Chairman: Diego Martin West, you had a question or you have forfeited it?

Mr. Des Vignes: Yes, I have a question, Chairman. It is not a disputatious question.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Des Vignes: So, to the Minister, I want to ask Item 39: Drugs and Other Related Materials and Supplies. Does this include—

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Drugs—

Mr. Des Vignes:—and Other Related Supplies.

Mr. Chairman: 39.

Mr. Des Vignes: 39, yes. Right? Does this include items like gloves, urine strips,

drugs for some of the RHAs, and so on?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: So, Member, this Item reflects the procurement of drugs and other related materials and supplies. So, it is typically pharmaceuticals and non-pharmaceuticals—

Mr. Des Vignes: Right.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe:—that are distributed to the RHAs.

Mr. Des Vignes: Right.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Additionally, RHAs, from their funding, can also purchase what we will call consumables, like gloves, and so on.

Mr. Des Vignes: Okay. So, given that there is a $2 million increase as we go into 2027, do you think this increase is sufficient, given that there have been reports of shortages of urine strips, shortages of gloves, and shortages of other critical drugs within health facilities? Do you think this $2 million is adequate enough to cover the shortage that is being reported right now?

11.30 a.m.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: The short answer is yes, but the longer answer here, if I may, Member, is that I have taken the opportunity of these shortages in the public domain, and we have looked at the RHAs, and the RHAs also have the ability to do what is called ad hoc purchasing—

Mr. Des Vignes: I understand.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe:—you know, on their own accord. So, this increase will be sufficient, and the RHAs do have the ability to complement and supplement where necessary.

Mr. Des Vignes: No problem, Minister. Thank you.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much. Minister, on that same line Item, this

would cover the procurement and obtaining of drugs on the CDAP list?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: It will. It will. In fact, it covers the CDAP list as well. I can indicate further to that question for the projected—coming year that the allocation to CDAP for the coming year would be somewhere close to about $33 million out of that allocation.

Mr. Young SC: Minister, $33 million for this fiscal is your projection to spend on CDAP drugs. How much did you spend for the last fiscal, the 2026 fiscal, on CDAP drugs?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Member, $29.9 million. So, there is a projected increase in expenditure this year.

Mr. Young SC: So, you spent $29 million and—

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: $29.9 million.

Mr. Young SC:—you are intending and projecting to spend $33 million.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Correct.

Mr. Young SC: And that would include, on the CDAP lists, the drugs for heart patients, cancer patients?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: It will, Member. And, Member, you will recall that one of the first actions of this Government would have been to review the CDAP lists and as a result, we would have included some new medication, some more advanced medications. So, this will include the provisions for providing those—

Mr. Young SC: So, it should ease up any shortage of CDAP drugs because you have now included more—

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: The allocation—

Mr. Young SC:—or a wider variety?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Well, no. We have replaced some of the older drugs with the

newer drugs.

Mr. Young SC: Okay.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yeah. There are still 52 line Items.

Mr. Young SC: Right. And out of those CDAP drugs and the review that you just told us you all were conducting initially, is that part of the reason for the shortages that are being faced now?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Well, I think it gives me an opportunity, Member, to explain—just to talk a little bit about the CDAP, if I may, Chairman. So, there are 52 essential items, you know, that service close to 300,000 citizens, 289 private pharmacies—

Mr. Young SC: 300,000 citizens?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: 300,000 citizens, yes. Of the 52 areas, I am advised—and this is a recent update—that there are three chronic disease states out of the 52. So, the good news out of this is that, you know, 49 out of those 52 items are actually available.

Mr. Young SC: Okay.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: And there are situations where you can have out of stock at particular pharmacies, and then arrangements and provisions are made that if a citizen cannot access at one pharmacy—

Mr. Young SC: They could go to another.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe:—they can call around, and they can go. In fact, as recently as last evening, I can tell you, someone reached out to me. It was not available at their closest pharmacy, and it was found at another pharmacy, and they were able to access it. So that arrangement is in place.

Mr. Young SC: Okay, thank you. And so, therefore, you are aware of the

shortage, and you all are working on it?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: We are working on it, yes.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you. I have no further questions.

Mr. Chairman: Barataria/San Juan, I see your hand is raised.

Mr. Hosein: Yes, Mr. Chair. I just want to add to some of the comments that the Minister made, that under this Government, we will have $80 million of expired drugs being wasted.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Hosein: And further, we will not have any Minister of Health directing which contractors or suppliers should be paid for pharmaceuticals.

Mr. Chairman: Oh, okay. Barataria/San Juan, let us—

Mr. Young SC: Well, I would like to add that when we came in 2015, we met $210 million of expired drugs under the UNC.

Mr. Hosein: Lies, lies, lies.

Mr. Chairman: You see what this causes? Let us move on.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: Let us move on. Let us move on.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: Let us move on. Let us move on. All right, I propose to move to Item 005.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Chairman, if I may? I just wanted to indicate to the public—and again, this is for the public. In the cases where there are perceived shortages, there are alternative drugs that are available. So, I think the public needs to be aware of that.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. So, I propose now to move to Item 005: North West

Regional Health Authority; 006: North Central Regional Health Authority.

Hon. Member: No questions.

Mr. Chairman: 007: Eastern Regional Health Authority.

Hon. Member: No questions.

Mr. Chairman: 008: South West Regional Health Authority; 009: National Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention.

Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, page 198; Item 001: General Administration; 004: Vertical Services. These are on 198.

We go now to pages 199 to 203. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; 001: Regional Bodies. Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: Sorry—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Okay. 003: United Nations Organisations; 005: Non-Profit Institutions. Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: Minister, under this 005: Non-Profit Institutions, it is an allocation of $18.3 million for 2026, revised to the same $18.3 million. How much was actually spent for 2026, or disbursed, I should say?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: So, Member, the actual disbursement would have been $17.2 million.

Mr. Young SC: Okay. And you are putting the same amount for the next fiscal, correct?—$18.3 million?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: Well, you have been allocated the same amount.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yes. Yes, Member, so these arrangements are based on a contractual arrangement—

Mr. Young SC: Correct.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe:—with these NGOs, and that is still enforced at this point in time.

Mr. Young SC: For all of the 20, right?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: All of the 18 organizations.

Mr. Young SC: Would you provide in writing a breakdown for the last fiscal of how much—

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: I can do that, or I can call them out now if you prefer.

Mr. Young SC: I will take it in writing.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Okay.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you. I have no further questions on this 005.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. 007: Households.

Mr. Young SC: Okay. Just quickly in 007: Households; 01: Medical Treatment of Nationals in Institutions, I see it is $35 million being allocated here. This is for oncology and—what treatment?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yeah. So, this, essentially, is an allocation to treat cancer patients who require radiation. So, it is essentially for radiation.

Mr. Young SC: Right. So, it is just the oncology services? The radiation?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: 009: Other Transfer; 010: Other Transfers Abroad.

Mr. Young SC: No, no, no. 009: Other Transfers; 01: Regional Health Authority.

Mr. Chairman: That is page 200?

Mr. Young SC: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Yeah, I actually did see your hand in the air—

Mr. Young SC: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman:—and I thought that you had put it down.

Mr. Young SC: Very, very quickly. Minister, there are block allocations here. So, the first is 02: NWRHA for $1.1 billion, yes?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Okay. So, are we on Item 02?

Mr. Young SC: 009/01—

Mr. Chairman: At page 200.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yes, correct, got you.

Mr. Young SC: So, $1.1 billion for the NWRHA?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: $1.145 billion, yes, that is correct.

Mr. Young SC: And this is going to be sufficient to ensure that they are properly staffed and have the drugs, the oncology centre in St. James is working?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yes. So, this allocation will cover personnel expenditure, goods and services, utilities, security, medical supplies and so on. The answer is yes.

Mr. Young SC: All right. And then we go down to 04: North Central Regional Health Authority.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Again, the answer—if you are asking if it will be sufficient, the answer is yes, Member.

Mr. Young SC: Right. And then this one now, 05: South West Regional Health Authority, this would have covered the 125 members of staff who have been terminated?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: This would cover personnel expenditure, including all employees, goods and services, minor equipment, and so on, Member.

Mr. Young SC: Okay. I have no further questions.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: And the members were not terminated. My understanding is that their contracts came to an end—

Mr. Young SC: Their contracts were not renewed.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe:—and—

Mr. Young SC: Well, that is a nice way of putting it. The Industrial Court sees it differently. We could move on.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you.

11.40 a.m.

Mr. Young SC: Sorry, I am now looking at it. It is actually carried forward on page201. I only have interest in one line Item. Line Item 19—this is payment of a UDeCOTT loan for the redevelopment of the Central Block in Port of Spain. Are you seeing it—line Item 19?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yes, yes, got you.

Mr. Young SC: You know my interest in the Central Block of Port of Spain and getting it operational.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: Is this going to cover getting it operational? Well, the money that was borrowed and stuff—I am only interested in getting it operational for the hundreds of thousands in Port of Spain and environs.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: This Member, as you would know, would be the loan that was taken to help the construction of the hospital.

Mr. Young SC: And those funds from the loan were sufficient to get it operational? Are we going to get it operational soon?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: The short answer is, yes, Member.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you. I have no further questions.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Item 010: Other Transfers Abroad; 001: Transfers to State Enterprises. Hon. Members, before proceeding, I wish to indicate that under the

Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure, Sub-Head 06: Current Transfers to Stat. Brds. and Similar Bodies; Item 004: Statutory Boards appear on page 204 of the *Draft Estimates*; however, the detailed examination of these allocations is contained in the *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*. We will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly* at page 241. Sub-Head 14: Princess Elizabeth Home for Handicapped Children; Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure; Item 001: General Administration; Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; 001: General Administration; 04: Current Transfers and subsidies; 008: Households. Hon. Members, we would now move to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme* at page77. Sub-Head 09: Development Programme, it is at page77; Item 004: Social Infrastructure, pages 78 to 79. Item 004 spans two pages; therefore, I will also announce the project groups. E: Special Education, page78. Diego Martin North/East.

I suppose there may be good reason for him to raise two hands.

Mr. Imbert: Yeah, because you "doh see" one. So let us go to 78, please.

Mr. Chairman: I tell you, it is difficult to see you sometimes, you know.

Mr. Imbert: **"**He doh see one".

Mr. Chairman: No, you—no.

Mr. Imbert: And he says one is a Nazi salute. He said that yesterday.

Mr. Chairman: Look, I will—

Mr. Imbert: You did not say that? Okay, page 78,09/004/04 E, could I ask the Minister who is the client in this project? E, 001: Princess Elizabeth Home for the Handicapped Children.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Princess Elizabeth Home.

Mr. Imbert: The project that is related to this allocation here is 2.19million. Who is the client?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: I will have to provide that to you, Member.

Mr. Imbert: No.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Sorry, you said the client, Member.

Mr. Imbert: Yes.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Well, the client would be the Princess Elizabeth Centre.

Mr. Imbert: So the Ministry of Health is not the client in this project.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: We provide the subvention to them, Member.

Mr. Imbert: So, they are doing this project.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Correct.

Mr. Imbert: What is the reason for the Revised Estimate of $750,000 compared to the original Estimate of almost $3million for this project at a very, very important institution that helps handicapped children?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: So the projection there—and I agree with you, it is a very important institute, Member. So the allocation here is for renovation of building C which is the Rotary building, bathroom upgrades, and the sealing of crawl spaces. And that is estimated to cost just around $750,000.

Mr. Imbert: Right. So what I am saying is that the original allocation was $2.9 million. The Revised shown here—which I have to assume is accurate unless you say otherwise—is $750,000. That is a reduction of 74 per cent. What caused that underperformance?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: No, sorry. Member, if I may—so we are speaking about the Revised for 2026. Correct?

Mr. Imbert: Original 2026 and Revised '26.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: All right, so the Actual expenditure, if I put that on the record, would have been $2.1 million, and—

Mr. Imbert: I see. So, this $750,000 is not correct. Okay.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: No. And actually, the project I need to—so the—

Mr. Imbert: All right, okay.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: It would have been for a different scope of works—

Mr. Imbert: It is okay.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: —covering of open concrete drains—

Mr. Imbert: It is okay. It is okay.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: —relocation of maintenance departments and so on.

Mr. Imbert: All right. Mr. Chairman, I have no further questions on Social Infrastructure, but I have on Health starting on page79.

Mr. Young SC: Mr. Chairman, I am on the same—actually, no, we can move on to 07 A.

Mr. Des Vignes: Mr. Chair, just to make a minor interjection—

Mr. Chairman: Yeah.

Mr. Des Vignes: Just to note that we went through this last year as well— the socially accepted and respected term is "differently-abled" —

Mr. Chairman: Yeah, well—

Mr. Des Vignes: So just going forward Minister of Finance—we mentioned it last year—

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yeah.

Mr. Des Vignes: —but just to note for future reference.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Chairman, I want to thank the Member for that intervention and

to say that at a visit that myself and the Minister did to the Elizabeth Home. I do not want to use the term again, Member. You are quite correct. At that visit, there is the intention to modify the name in keeping with the recognition. And as we speak, I am hoping that transition has been made. I am not sure if the sign has been changed, but I can check into that. So I thank you for bringing that to our attention.

Mr. Des Vignes: Highly respected, Minister. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: I think the reason why it is labelled like this is legal reasons, obviously, until it happens.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: That is the registered entity until the registration is amended. Okay, A: Hospitals—page 79. Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Minister, the original allocation for the Medical Equipment Upgrade Programme, which I assume is for all hospitals in the island of Trinidad, was $60million. The Revised figure is $8million; that is an 87 per cent reduction. Can you explain what happened there?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Sure. So, Member, thank you for that question.

Mr. Imbert: Again, original Revised 2026.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yeah, so, I just want to update that that Actual expenditure as at September30this actually $20.5million as opposed to the figure in the book of $8 million.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. Using the figure that you have just given me.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: And this would represent 47per cent of the allocation being utilized—40 projects completed; 17 projects ongoing and roll over. Just to state that these are projects for all of the RHAs. These projects are executed by each of the RHAs, for separate projects.

Mr. Imbert: Minister, did you just say that your figures show a spend of $20million?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Correct.

Mr. Imbert: And you went on to say that is 47 per cent of the original?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: All right, sorry. I have to add that the value of the rollover projects is 18 million, so that would of—

Mr. Imbert: What did you say?

Mr. Chairman: The value of the rollover projects is $18 million.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: It is $18.3 million.

Mr. Imbert: No, but that is not my question. You said, Minister, that the spend was 47 per cent of the original. The original is 60, and the spend is 20.

11.50 a.m.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: I want to correct that percentage, Member.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, when the Minister is finished, I have a supplementary question.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: So those two figures will give the 47 per cent, Member.

Mr. Imbert: Could you indicate what the expenditure was according to your numbers, not what is here, as of September 30th, 2026, Actual expenditure? Well, whatever number you.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: The actual figure is 20.5 million.

Mr. Imbert: Fine, so that is 33 per cent, one-third of the original. So it is underperformed by 67 per cent. Can you explain why there was a 67 per cent underperformance?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: So, Member, as I indicated, these projects would have been executed, and there would have been different projects at different RHAs. I can

just quote some examples, just so the public is enlightened, before I go into some of the reasons, and each RHA would have had a different reason. So, for example, at the NWRHA, they would have been looking to procure ambulance stretchers, surgical lights, a portable patient ventilator, 20 vital sign monitors. At the ERHA, it would have been different. They were looking to procure cardio topography machines. At Southwest, for example, it would have been medical equipment for the ICU, various machines, ultrasound machines, and so on.

At the NCRHA, it would have been even different four mobile digital X-ray units for radiology. The common factor in all of this, Member, from the feedback from the RHAs, would have been some issues in terms of global supply chain delays for some of these very specialized medical equipment, but there would have also been the issue with the procurement process. There would have been situations where bidders would have submitted incomplete documents, for example, which would have delayed evaluation. In some instances, RHAs would not have received any suitable bids. Some cases, some of these projects had to be retendered.

So, it would have been a combination of factors which would have led to less-than-ideal execution of these projects, Member.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you. Can I move on now to 004: Commissioning of Sangre Grande Hospital and new Port of Spain General Hospital Central Block. Original allocation $5.1 million. The book indicates that $1.48 million was spent, which is a reduction of 71.2 per cent. Can you explain what happened here, especially with respect to the Central Block? But I am also interested in Sangre Grande.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: So, again, to answer your question, the Actual expenditure would have been $1.4, which would be in keeping with the revised.

expenditure. The Estimate again, would have been based on the desire of the Government to ensure that enough funding was provided for this facility.

Mr. Imbert: Okay, the fact that only 29 per cent of the allocation was spent to commission Sangre Grande and this new Central Block is that the reason for the delay in opening these facilities because only 29 per cent was spent?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: It is certainly not the reason for the delay in opening the Central Block, Member. As you would be aware, there was a practical opening last April. But when we actually visited the hospital, myself and the Minister for UDeCOTT, Minister for Couva North, we would have found a facility that was really far from complete and not ready for opening. I am happy to say that we have come a long way since that time, and we are close to opening this facility.

One of the worrisome things we discovered, Member, is that despite this brand-new building, and we are very happy for it, I am sure the people of Trinidad and Tobago will be very happy for it, is that the connection between the current Accident and Emergency Department to this new building was insufficient, and therefore, there is a proper link walkway that has to be constructed. So, this was never developed, and this is posing a significant challenge to the transfer of patients who need to be warded in that new building. But we are working on that, and you know we want to give the population the assurance that, you know, we will fix that and we will have the Central Block open.

Mr. Imbert: Now that the Minister have said all of that, what was this $5.1 million in the original allocation of 2026 for the commissioning of Sangre Grande Hospital and the new Port of Spain Central Block for? What was it for? Because this is total UNC "eh". This is October '25 to September '26. This is not PNM. So what was that $5.1 million for?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Okay. So some of that allocation would have included the procurement of equipment—some of the equipment that we had to procure. This would have included pieces for neurology, orthopaedic equipment, pharmacy carts, and water, disinfection unit for Central Sterilization Department, and so on. So all of this would have been in support of the operationalization of the new Central Block.

Mr. Imbert: Was it adequate to open the Block in 2026?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Not enough, not quite enough. This is being done on a phased basis, in a certain manner.

Mr. Imbert: Alright. The allocation for 2027, is it sufficient to allow the opening of the Port of Spain Central Block in fiscal 2027?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Based on our plan for it, the answer is yes.

Mr. Imbert: So, $7 million, having only spent 1.4 out of $5 million for the Sangre Grande Hospital and the Central Block of Port of Spain Hospital, you only spent $1.4.7 million, is it sufficient to commission those two facilities?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: So just to clarify, Member, the $7 million projection would have included items—still have to procure items. When this facility was handed over, as is the norm in handing over facilities, surgical equipment and so on still has to be purchased. So, for example, this would have been required for the procurement of surgical instruments, $3.5 million. There would have been some rollover projects, $2.2 million. The procurement of a body scanner for enhanced security, implementation of a health information system. But to clarify, Member, keep in mind that the opening of this hospital means that certain services that are available at Port of Spain will now be moved across. So there will be staff and consumables and so on already catered for under the budget of the NWRHA.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you very much, Minister, for all of that. I see you have prepared notes, but the notes do not deal with my question. Is the $7 million in the 2027 Estimate of Expenditure on the Development Programme for the commissioning of the Sangre Grande Hospital and the new Central Block of Port of Spain General Hospital, is the $7 million adequate and will these facilities be opened in 2027?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Answer to both questions is yes, Member.

Mr. Imbert: Okay, fine, alright.

Mr. Chairman: Alright. Shall I move on?

Mr. Imbert: No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. 02/4 D. Other Services.

Mr. Chairman: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Imbert: I am on D, yes, you could go to D, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Well thank you very much for your graciousness.

Mr. Imbert: Welcome.

12.00 noon

Mr. Chairman: D. Other Services. Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services.

Mr. Imbert: No, Mr. Speaker, I said I wanted to talk about D., what is that? What is that?

Mr. Chairman: No, what you said is that you could go ahead to D. You never said you wanted to speak about D.

Mr. Imbert: Come on, I said I wanted to speak about D.

Mr. Chairman: Right. Then you raised your hand—well, we are on D., so I will accommodate you.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Just as how you graciously allowed me to move forward, I will

graciously allow you to speak.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you. So, can I go to the President's Emergency Programme for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR)? Now, we all know how terrible that disease is, AIDS, we know. Some people might be very worried about it, but, I mean, some people—

Mr. Chairman: What is the need for that sotto voce?

Mr. Imbert: I was not speaking softly at all. I said there may be some people might be very worried about contracting AIDS.

Mr. Chairman: You know, your penchant for schadenfreude is unbelievable.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, I have no idea what you are talking about.

Mr. Chairman: I know you do not know what it means.

Mr. Imbert: I simply said, some people might be very worried about contracting AIDS. That is all I said. A statement of fact. Therefore, when I see that the original allocation was $11.7 million, and what is in this book in terms of expenditure was $6 million, that is a 49 per cent reduction based on what I see here. What happened there?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Let me update the Committee and the population that the Actual expenditure would have been $10,412,020.

Mr. Imbert: Okay, fine.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: In fact, 88 per cent of the allocation.

Mr. Imbert: No problem. Can I move on now to National AIDS Coordinating Committee (NACC), 024? The original allocation was 6.39, what is shown in the book is zero.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: So what has happened here, Member, is that the National AIDS Coordinating Committee, when we inherited office, would have been under the

Office of the Prime Minister, that has now been assigned to the Ministry of Health where it rightfully belongs. So it is really a transition that is taking place. Based on recommendations from the CDC, the Ministry of Health plans to consolidate the operations of the HACU, which is the HIV committee at the Ministry of Health, and the NACC, to improve the national HIV and AIDS treatment, coordination and efficiency. In fact, there is a new organizational structure being reviewed, and therefore there was no need to make any allocation under this particular line Item.

Mr. Imbert: Yes, but the original allocation was $639,000, what happened? It was not spent?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: No, there was no expenditure on that Item.

Mr. Imbert: Okay, fine. Can I go now to—well, I wanted to go to another Item, Hospital Refurbishment Programme. I will wait on you, Mr. Speaker. This would be under 06 A.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: We are going forward, General Public Services?

Mr. Imbert: Yeah, 06 A. and C., Mr. Chairman, page 80.

Mr. Chairman: Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services.

Mr. Imbert: Yeah, 06, C.?

Mr. Chairman: Just hang on a second, we are going to get there. Hon. Members, Item 005 spans one page, therefore, I will also announce the project groups. A. Administrative Services, this is at page 80. Diego Martin West.

Mr. Des Vignes: Thank you very much, Chair. I am looking at C. Health Services Support Programme. This is under Foreign and Technical Assistance. We have $13 million allocated and spent in 2026, however—

Mr. Tancoo: Chair, I think Members opposite really need to pay attention to when the Chair makes an announcement. We are currently, from my knowledge,

at 06 A.

Mr. Des Vignes: So I can ask it under A., but it also relates to A. and C., but I will ask it under Disaster Preparedness Coordinating Unit. Given the recent announcement of the first human death from the human-contracted Shamonda virus, does the Minister think the disaster preparedness and the support is adequate to handle an emergency in terms of this recent detection of a virus, Shamonda virus? It is a new virus. We have our first human death in France. It happened earlier today. In light of what is happening in the world, internationally, do you think that we are ready in Trinidad and Tobago should it reach to our shores?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: So, Member, thank you for your question. The Disaster Preparedness Coordinating Unit of the Ministry of Health really speaks to natural disasters and preparation for natural disasters, and so on. In terms of communicable disease, that is dealt with, you know, under a different Vote, dealt with at the level of the Chief Medical Officer. But the answer is, yes, we will be prepared as required and if required.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: Are you quite through, Diego Martin West?

Mr. Des Vignes: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: We are going there. C. Foreign and Technical Assistance. Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: I noticed, Minister, under 234, C. Foreign and Technical Assistance, 234, original allocation, $35 million. What is shown in the book is Actual expenditure of $7 million, or only a 20 per cent performance, an 80 per cent underperformance. What are the facts?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Thank you, Member. Again, the Actual spend would have been $10.6 million as of September 30, 2026. We expect some more bills to come in so that figure may not be a true reflection, even at this time. Again, these would have been projects. The Hospital Refurbishment Programme speaks to projects that are executed across the four RHAs in Trinidad. Again, these would have been diverse projects. The NWRHA, for example, would have been looking at an electrical upgrade at Port of Spain in support of the new Central Block. That was one of the projects. A diesel generator for the St. Ann's Hospital. The ERHA would have had different projects; the installation of two high-security metal gates, roof repairs at one of the outreach centres. The SWRHA would have been renovating one of the buildings on the compound. NCRHA, control panels, and so on. Again, the challenges would have been similar to what would have occurred in terms of the procurement of medical equipment.

Mr. Imbert: Right. So you are saying that you procure—

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: In terms of procurement issues, and so on.

Mr. Imbert: Yeah. So you had procurement problems that caused you to only implement one-third of the hospital refurbishment in fiscal 2026?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yeah. There are also some ongoing rollover projects I should put on the record as well, Member.

Mr. Imbert: That is all right. But you told me that you spent $10 million, the allocation is $35 million, so you only did one-third, so there is a 65 per cent underperformance.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: There is about $14.2 million that will be required to complete the 15 rollover projects under this, so that will add another $25 million.

Mr. Imbert: I am only looking at 2026.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yes, 2026.

Mr. Imbert: Okay.

Mr. Chairman: F. Public Buildings; G. Equipment and Vehicles. Infrastructure Development Fund, page 247. Item 004: Social infrastructure. Page 248, Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Just let me get the page, 247.

Mr. Chairman: Page 248.

Mr. Imbert: Page 248.

Mr. Chairman: At page 247 it starts?

Mr. Imbert: Page 247, okay.

Mr. Chairman: Social Infrastructure.

Mr. Imbert: Social Infrastructure: Physical Investments (Hospitals, District Health Facilities, Health Centres). Mr. Speaker, overall, there was $143 million allocated, the Revised Estimate is only $39 million, that is one-third, but, specifically, with respect to Physical Investments (Hospitals, District Health Facilities, Health Centres), original allocation, $40 million, what is shown in the book is only $10 million, a quarter.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Again, just to update the Committee that the Actual spend would have been $14.4 million. There are still 14 rollover projects under this Item that will add another $17.3 million to that expenditure.

12.10 p.m.

Again, the challenges remain the same. Just to note that these projects are executed, again, by each of the RHAs. NWRHA would have had different projects. The NCRHA would have been looking at an upgrade of the roof at the Caura Hospital, for example; SWRHA, a kitchen upgrade; ERHA, procurement of air-

conditioning units and so on. So, different kinds of projects and again, we had the same challenges—

Mr. Imbert: Yes.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe:—in terms of incomplete documents delaying evaluation. Some of these projects, as you will know, are very technically complex and may require more than 12 months to complete, Member.

Mr. Imbert: With due respect, rollover projects into 2027 are irrelevant with respect to the performance in 2026. So, according to your numbers, you only did one-third of what you had planned to do and you are saying it is procurement challenges, and what else? Just procurement? I would like to hear you. "I cyah understand sign language".

Hon. Dr Bodoe: I think that is why the Government would have taken the opportunity to fix procurement legislation, Member.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]—could fix it.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: I think that—

Mr. Imbert: All right.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: We can see the evidence here. We can see why that was necessary and needed, Member.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. Can we go to—

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Long outstanding.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. Can we go to 010: Operationalization of the Couva Medical and Multi-Training Facility and the San Fernando General Hospital, original allocation, $100 million; actual spend, $800,000; a 99.02 per cent reduction. You only did less than 1 per cent of what is shown here for Couva and San Fernando

hospitals, unless these figures are wrong. "You ah magician. Yuh only spend 1 per cent. He is ah magician".

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Well, remember, as you may recall, or perhaps you may not be able to recall, the Couva Children's Hospital was a fully equipped hospital in—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: It was fully equipped when it was handed over to you in 2015. Therefore, it would have been fairly simple—relatively easy to start the recommissioning of this hospital. We have done this on a phased basis, Member.

Mr. Imbert: Yes. But you had an allocation of $100 million. You did not even spend $1million. So that is an implementation rate of less than 1 per cent. Why?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yes. So, what we would have done—the reason for that, Member, would have been a very innovative solution, but we also encountered a backlog of patients waiting for surgeries. What we would have been able to do was to have each RHA rotate and perform surgeries at the facility. That would have saved us some costs and so on.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: So, it was a well-thought-out plan, Member, you know, and as we go forward—

Mr. Imbert: "He confused". I just wanted to know why you did not spend $100million. You spent $1 million. That is all.

Mr. Young SC: "He get $100 million to spend and he spend $1 million"?

Mr. Imbert: "He spend $800,000".

Mr. Young SC: That was on Central Block?

Mr. Imbert: Couva hospital and San Fernando hospital. Okay, Mr. Chairman. Can I move on now to 00—well, on F. I am waiting on you. I would like to go to

F. Well, this is F: Upgrade of C40.

Hon. Members: [*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: Yeah. No problem. I am waiting.

Mr. Chairman: I do not think where you are going there is 005.

Mr. Imbert: Next one. Next page. Next page.

Mr. Chairman: So, I can skip over —I can just—F. Health Facilities.

Mr. Imbert: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: And skip—

Mr. Imbert: I would like to go to page 249, 005.

Mr. Chairman: No, not yet. We are not there yet.

Mr. Imbert: I know. I am telling you I would like to go. "Ah waiting".

Mr. Chairman: Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services; F. Public Building, page 249. Right. Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, 001: Upgrade of C40 Building at Chaguaramas. Now, the Minister will know how important C40 is because this is where the pharmaceuticals are stored for distribution to various health facilities. I see there is a $4.7 million allocation—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman—

Mr. Chairman: No, I am not intervening in that, you know.

Mr. Imbert: "Barataria/San Juan and dem"—

Mr. Chairman: No, no. I am not intervening in that because you are particularly guilty of that conduct. So, I am not intervening in that.

Mr. Imbert: I am?

Mr. Chairman: Ask your question.

Mr. Imbert: I am guilty?

Mr. Chairman: Particularly so.

Mr. Imbert: How could I be?

Mr. Chairman: Not simply guilty. Particularly so.

Mr. Imbert: I am asking questions. That is crosstalk.

Mr. Chairman: Which you engage in when other people are answering.

Mr. Imbert: Can we move on then?

Mr. Chairman: Yes, please.

Mr. Imbert: Upgrade of C40, original allocation, $4.7million; actual spend shown here, $892,000; underperformance by 80 per cent. Can you explain?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: So, Member, C40 remains, at this point in time, an important facility for the storage of pharmaceuticals. But as you will realize, Member, it is not the ideal storage facility. There would have been—when I spoke in the debate, I would have mentioned about the expired drugs and so on. Part of the reason is because of the limited space and storage, and so on, in addition to systems, and so on, that are being fixed. But the Actual expenditure would have been $2.1million, which would have looked at the installation of the racking shelving system, eight exhaust fans, replacement of the torch-applied waterproofing system and so on.

The issue there, Member—and again, this is important for the committee and the public to understand—is that this facility has outlived its usefulness. Therefore, it is the intention of the Government, going forward, to look at, you know, providing and building a modern facility to store pharmaceuticals in a more centralized area.

Member, you would recognize the fact that if something happens on the way to C40 in that peninsula, it becomes very difficult to access pharmaceuticals and

non-pharmaceuticals. So that is also a part of the reason why it is the intention of this Government to create a more centralized facility. The intention—

Dr. Seecheran: And modern.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: And modern facility. The intention really is to limit the expenditure at this old building, but enough to keep it going for what it is doing at this current time.

Mr. Imbert: I see. So, the policy changed during the year. All right. Can I go now to 003: Re-Development of Port of Spain General Hospital, original allocation, $26million; actual spend shown here, $6.3 million; reduction, $19.7million; a 76 per cent underperformance. Why?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: So, the $6.3 million would have been required for—the Actual expenditure—yes, correct. So that would have been for the project management fees, contingency fees and VAT.

Mr. Imbert: That is the answer, Minister? That is your answer? Okay. The original allocation—I do not think I communicated properly. I will try again. The original allocation was $26 million. The spend was $6.3 million. So, virtually, $20 million was not spent on the Port of Spain General Hospital, development work, upgrade works, et cetera. Why did you not spend that $20 million on the Port of Spain hospital?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yes. It is a work in progress, Member. Again, the original allocation was to cater, you know, for what would have been required. It would have been the intention of the Government, of course, to open this facility for the benefit of citizens. Therefore, the original request would have been in anticipation of what was required, Member. We would not have been certain of what was actually completed until UDeCOTT was able to do a proper assessment of that

structure, Member.

Mr. Imbert: So, you anticipated that far more work needed to be done than actually needed to be done?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Also, Member, keep in mind, as you will know, that there are different—you know, bills can come after completion and so on. So, it is an anticipation of paying our bills, and so on, ongoing forward.

12.20 p.m.

Mr. Imbert: Okay, fine. So I gather from what you are saying that you thought that the Port of Spain General Hospital was less complete than it actually was, it was far more complete than you thought.

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: I did not say that. I did not say that, Member.

Mr. Imbert: Okay, so what is the reason for the $26 million original allocation?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: We catered out of an abundance of caution.

Mr. Imbert: [*Laughter*]

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: [*Laughter*] No, I do not want to—[*Laughter*] I do not want to—knowing your history, knowing the history of your Government in—

Mr. Chairman: All right, asked and answered.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. Can you—

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: —in non-performance, Member.

Mr. Imbert: Wait. No, no, no, no, no, no, no. I am still on this Item.

Mr. Chairman: Well, ask away, but asked and answered in so far as that question is concerned.

Mr. Imbert: If you call that an answer, yes. How come you only have $1.8 million in 2027 for this project?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Sorry, Member, where are you at?

Mr. Imbert: Same Item. Re-Development of Port of Spain General Hospital. You had an original allocation of $26 million, you only spent 6 and you have less than $2 million now in 2027. How come?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yeah.

Mr. Imbert: What happened?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yeah.

Mr. Imbert: What happened?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: Yeah. So, Member, this facility would have only been handed over in July of 2026 to the Ministry of Health from UDeCOTT.

Mr. Imbert: Yes, but why only $1.8 million in 2027? "But "de ting finish. Yuh ready to open"?

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: As I [*Laughter*]

Mr. Imbert: Alright. It is okay; do not worry. I will leave you alone. I have endless more, but it is okay. We will go on to Works. We will go on to Works.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. I think the Member has abandoned his question.

Mr. Imbert: That is not so. I have decided to ease up the Minister of Health because he is struggling to answer my questions, so I am going to ease him up. "I eh abandon nothing".

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: No ease, no ease, no ease, no ease. The Minister needs no ease, Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: You know—

Hon. Dr. Bodoe: I do not need the kindness.

Mr. Chairman: Yes. Alright. Okay.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 28 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: We move now to Head 69, Ministry of Works and Infrastructure and I invite the Minister of Works and Infrastructure. Minister, are you ready? Shall I proceed?

Hon. John: Of course, yes. Please, let us proceed.

Mr. Chairman: If the Member for Diego Martin Central would take down his decibel level and allow me to proceed. Yeah. I shall be very grateful. Diego Martin Central.

Mr. Des Vignes: Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Take it down a little bit.

Head 69: Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, $2,454,332,500.

Mr. Chairman: I shall now invite the Minister of Works and Infrastructure to make a brief opening statement—

Hon. John: Brief.

Mr. Chairman:—not exceeding five minutes. Thank you.

Hon. John: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Minister.

Hon. John: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I thank the Members of the Standing Finance Committee and those of the viewing public. I thank you for the opportunity to present our 2027 Budget Estimates for the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure. As we present these Estimates, our guiding principle is clear, restoring and maintaining the assets we already have for the benefit of all. This strategic imperative recognises that the prudent stewardship of our existing roads, bridges, drainage systems and public buildings is as critical as the construction of new ones. It is about protecting the people's investment, ensuring public safety and

building a more resilient and sustainable national infrastructure which will last for generations to come. The past year has underscored the urgent need for this maintenance-first approach as we have all witnessed the devastating impact of flooding in our communities, the disruption caused by landslips and the daily challenges posed by the deterioration of our road network.

The Ministry of Works and Infrastructure is committed to moving from a reactive, crisis-driven model to a proactive, planned and systematic maintenance culture. For our national road and drainage assets, we have allocated significant resources to address the backlog of maintenance and to enhance their resilience. Mr. Chairman, allow me to thank the staff of the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure. I know sometimes I complain a lot, but this is a good team we have here today.

Hon. Members, the Estimates before you represent a deliberate and strategic investment in the long-term health and resilience of our nation's infrastructure. The Ministry of Works and Infrastructure team and I, are prepared to respond to reasonable questions from the Committee and provide any further clarification you may think required at this time. Thank you, Mr Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister.

Question proposed: That Head 69 stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: The said sum of $2,454,332,500 for Head 69: Ministry of Works and Infrastructure is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, the *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly* and the *Draft Estimates of the Development Programme*.

We shall now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. These Items, the relevant Items, are to be found at pages 354 to 358 of the relevant volume, Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure; 001: General Administration. Member for Laventille East/Morvant.

Mr. Birchwood: Thank you, Mr. Chair. To the goodly Minister, I observe a good increase under 01/001/01. Could you elucidate to the listening audience what this was for?

Hon. John: Okay. Member, in 2026, that increase in allocation was due to, one, the Comptroller of Accounts circular for salaries revised with effect from January 01, 2014 for monthly paid officers and implemented on January 01, 2026. And two, payment of outstanding acting allowances to officers due from October 01, 2025 to present based on acting approvals received from the Service Commission and due to the realignment of the Ministry.

Mr. Birchwood: Thank you, Minister. Follow-up question, how many personnel are currently onboarded?

Hon. John: Sorry, Sir?

Mr. Birchwood: How many personnel are currently onboarded?

Hon. John: What do you mean, overall in the Ministry?

Mr. Birchwood: Yes.

12.30 p.m.

Hon. John: Our headcount at this time is—number of persons currently employed—just now. Monthly paid establishment, 837. Total number of positions on daily paid establishment is 2,418. And then of course, we have the temporary casual workers from the National Recruitment Drive; we had approval for 1,805.

Mr. Birchwood: How much is that, sorry?

Hon. John: The National Recruitment Drive is 1,805 that was approved. Within the context of that, of course, you will have vacancies. So, if you look at filled positions—is what? 1,785 vacancies with bodies; 633, vacancies without bodies; 1,462, that is for daily paid. Monthly paid, total number of filled on the establishment is 444, vacancies in that cadre 379, without bodies 454, temporary positions 14, and then we have some contract positions.

Mr. Birchwood: How many contract positions?

Hon. John: Number of persons on fixed-term contracts, 109, number of contract positions with still some life in it, 210, and the short-term employment is 201.

Mr. Birchwood: And, Minister, this employment drive, were these positions advertised?

Hon. John: No—the National Recruitment Drive, yes, that was widely advertised.

Mr. Birchwood: Widely advertised. What platforms or forums—

Hon. John: Sir, you had to be in Lapeyrouse Cemetery not to know about that, to be quite honest.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Birchwood: Okay, so—

Hon. John: I mean you all complain about that all the time.

Mr. Birchwood: So, if we could get past the empty platitudes and the nonsensical statements Minister—

Hon. John: "It's not no platitude and no nonsense. De point is— Sir, let us not start. It too early for that."

Mr. Birchwood: I simply asked what platforms were they advertised on. "Is" either you want to answer the question or you want to be obnoxious.

Hon. John: But it is on the public record.

Mr. Birchwood: I asked a simple question, Minister. I find that it is a little too early out of the blocks to be acting like this. I calmly asked what platforms they were advertised on.

Ms. Mohit: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Birchwood: Chaguanas East, you could be quiet.

Ms. Mohit: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Birchwood: Nobody speaking to you. Minister, I kindly ask what platforms?

Hon. John: Radio, television, Internet, social media, walk-in, all over Trinidad and Tobago, you know, and word of mouth. This was a very popular recruitment drive.

Mr. Birchwood: Okay, Minister.

Hon. John: And we had the Ministry of Public Administration and Artificial Intelligence; they also had a database that they were working with.

Mr. Birchwood: Thank you very much, Minister.

Hon. John: We not doing this for us, you know.

Mr. Birchwood: Exactly, I need to ask because—

Mr. Chairman: All right. Laventille East, rather than engaging in a discussion, am I to take it you have no more questions?

Mr. Birchwood: Yes, Mr. Chairman. I am not sure if any of my other colleagues would have any—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: I am not seeing anyone raising their hands. Item 002: Highways.

Hon. John: What page is it?

Mr. Chairman: We are on page 354 to 355. Item 004: Central Planning Unit. Laventille East/Morvant, can I ask you to turn off your mic, please?

[*Member turns off mic*]

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Item 005: Drainage; 006: Mechanical Services. Laventille East/Morvant.

Mr. Birchwood: Thank you, Mr. Chair. To the Minister, could she explain to the public what this department specifically does? Could you explain to the listening audience what this department executes on a daily basis?

Hon. John: What they are there to do?

Mr. Birchwood: Yes.

Hon. John: Well, they were supposed to be there to manage, to restore, to maintain, the public service vehicles of the Ministry, but after 10 years of the PNM it hardly has anything there to manage and repair, you know.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. John: "So, they are there, dey have ah good gentleman there called Mr. Khan, but if he promises you ah truck today hope for it—add seven days to dat because dey always breaking down."

Mr. Birchwood: So, vehicle maintenance is what you are saying, Minister?

Hon. John: Well, that was the intention.

Mr. Birchwood: Vehicle maintenance, okay. I am asking because I saw a slight decrease in the allotment.

Hon. John: What is that decrease?

Mr. Birchwood: $71,000. It is Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance; any specific reasoning behind that?

Hon. John: Although a decrease in allocation is reflected, the amounts are catered for in the General Administration of Salaries. So, it does not mean—we have not sent home anybody. So, that is okay. My notes are telling me that this is made up

in the Salaries figures.

Mr. Birchwood: Okay. I am also seeing an increase in Wages and COLA of a little over $4.5 million.

Hon. John: Right, so that one, revised rate of payment, the revised rates for wages and COLA for 59 daily rated workers. These are the permanent cadre, the daily paid cadre. So, that is what that allocation is for.

Mr. Birchwood: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: 007: Maintenance. Laventille East/Morvant.

Mr. Birchwood: Through you Chair, to the goodly Ministry, once again, what does this department specifically execute?

Mr. Chairman: [*Inaudible*] line Item and ask a question.

Mr. Birchwood: 007/01.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. 007.

Hon. John: This is the—

Mr. Chairman: Minister, hang on. "Is" Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance.

Mr. Birchwood: Yes, yes.

Mr. Chairman: Okay.

Hon. John: Maintenance of the buildings, yes.

Mr. Birchwood: Buildings and maintenance, okay. Asking once again because I saw a slight dip there. And under 007/01/02, there was also an increase.

Hon. John: Again, the amounts are catered for in 001: General Administration; Salaries, right, because you had this revision and so on. So, it was taken up in the 001 budget. And then we have sent home no one, so

Mr. Birchwood: You have what?

Hon. John: At least not as far as I am—

Mr. Birchwood: What have you done?

Hon. John: The salary, the cadre remains stable, so there is no reason to have that decrease. What I am being told is, it is being taken up in the 001 numbers, General Administration: Salaries.

Mr. Birchwood: Okay.

Mr. Chairman: 008: Construction; 015: Maritime Services. Laventille East/Morvant.

Mr. Birchwood: Thank you, Chair, 015/01, same question to the Minister. I am seeing that decrease there again.

Hon. John: Again, it is the same answer. In fiscal 2027, although a decrease in allocation is reflected, the amounts are catered for under 001: General Administration: Salaries.

Mr. Birchwood: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 02, pages 358 to 366. Goods and Services; 001: General Administration Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. C. Imbert: I will defer to—

Mr. Young SC: No, but I—Mr. Chairman, I had put my hand up when you said 358, page 358. Just to deal with 015/01: Maritime Services, just the first line Item, Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. Well, no problem, you know, it is just one question.

Mr. Chairman: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Young SC: Thank you. Minister, under the Maritime Services Division, the Estimate was revised upwards from $2.8 million to $3.575 million for 2026. I assume that is similar to what we have heard before, that it is payment of increased levels of salary that were negotiated and agreed to. Mr. Chairman, $3.2 million for

2027, may I ask how many persons does the establishment provide for under Maritime Services?

12.40 p.m.

Hon. John: This is due to the realignment of—just now, I do not know—

Mr. Young SC: I think—

Hon. John: Just now, eh.

Mr. Young SC:—just put the Minister's mic up.

Hon. John: Sorry.

Mr. Young SC: Thanks.

Hon. John: Yeah. This was due—let me just read everything. We have some monthly paid officers—this is the same thing.

Mr. Young SC: Right.

Hon. John: But basically, in 2025, just now to present, based on acting approval received from the Service Commission, due to the realignment of the Ministry for 30 monthly paid positions.

Mr. Young SC: Thirty?

Hon. John: Thirty, yes. In fiscal 2027, that same decrease has been catered for under the 001.

Mr. Young SC: So, it is the same 30?

Hon. John: That same 30. But funding will be used—I am just giving you the opportunity—the kind of—the full note that I have here. Funding will be used for the payment of allowances to 17 officers: Director of Maritime Services, one; NavVid Maintenance Officers, three; Navigational Aids Assistant, one; Lighthouse Keepers, five; Deputy Director, one; Superintendent Mercantile Marine, one; Assistant Superintendent Mercantile, two; Launch Supervisor, one; Launch

Mechanic, one; and somebody called a Coxswain, one.

Mr. Young SC: Right. So, under any of those permanent members of staff in the Maritime Division, are there any who are performing the inspection for the Maritime Services? You know, going out there and ensuring that vessels are complying with the law, et cetera. An increasingly important area I am sure the Minister knows about.

Hon. John: You are very right. And yes, every Monday morning there is a meeting of the heads, and the Director of Maritime Services, he is always happy to report the number of letters he issued over the weekend—these party boats and thing—because that is a matter of grave concern that we are doing a 100 per cent inspection. It is not easy, but we try our best because we know people will try to "shmirk" the law, go against the law, and so on. So that is a very good question.

Mr. Young SC: And I am glad you brought up that point because I am sure by now, they would have presented you with the policy and stuff, looking at that to bring legislation to come up with the times to deal with the regularization, and not only inspection, but to put in place modern-day laws to deal with that particular issue that you have raised. Is this being conducted by this Maritime Services Division now?

Hon. John: That is part of it, yes. They are looking at that. We are also looking at the Pilotage Authority because they are really very involved. They are one of our very treasured operators, as it were. But even more than the legislation is the enforcement. So even with what we have, it is really treating with that enforcement. This is a very, very troubling set of activities, quite frankly.

Mr. Young SC: And based on that point, I was hoping to have seen here a line Item for use of contract officers, because knowing how long it takes for the Public

Service Commission to come up with new reclassifications, et cetera, perhaps that is an area that you all could look at for exactly that purpose. The enforcement and bringing in persons via contract.

Hon. John: Well, thank you, but I think right now what the Director is saying—I am not saying you are wrong, but what the Director has been telling us is that he more or less has 100 per cent coverage, that is what I am telling you, every single week. Even to the extent that they are looking at Carnival in Tobago this weekend, we have encouraged him to send out his flyers, use social media, and so on, to speak to the people from the Toco side because I think he has heard some whispers that people use some informal transportation to get to Tobago. So, we want to issue them from that.

Mr. Young SC: Okay, thank you, Minister.

Mr. Chairman: 001: General Administration. Diego Martin North/East. Page 358.

Mr. Imbert: Yeah, "you gone" to 02?

Mr. Chairman: Not yet.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. So, I was going to piggyback on what my colleague said.

Mr. Chairman: Shall I go to 02?

Mr. Imbert: No, no, no. I was going to piggyback on my colleague's query about Maritime Services. May I?

Mr. Chairman: Yes, under 02: Goods and Services; 001: General Administration.

Mr. Imbert: No. The Item when he was on, which is the tail end of 01. I am just asking—he asked about Maritime, and may I ask a question based on what he and the Minister said about that? I am just asking. You could say yes or no.

Mr. Chairman: No, no. I will permit you this once, but the problem is you allowed me to move forward—now, just once.

Mr. Imbert: But things come up. It is dynamic. It is not static. I would like to ask the Minister, do you think that the allocation for Salaries and Cost of Living, and Vacant Posts–Salaries & COLA, Gov't Contribution to Group Health Insurance - Monthly Paid Officers, et cetera, in Maritime, is sufficient for them to deal with all of the issues that the Maritime Services Division has to deal with—especially with the, I would have to say, the unregulated anchoring of vessels in the Chaguaramas area and so on, and vessels without navigation lights and things like that? Do you think you have enough staff? Is this allocation sufficient for you to have enough staff to deal with those hazards?

Hon. John: This particular—what do you call it? The Director of Maritime Services is a very experienced professional, quite frankly. We have been getting support also from the Pilotage Authority with respect to this anchoring, offshore anchoring. We have been talking about that. I think we have a note to go before the Cabinet with respect to that. Because all of that comes into a green or blue economy, et cetera.

Mr. Imbert: Minister, that is not what I am talking about.

Hon. John: Well, well, I am answering.

Mr. Imbert: I would not interrupt you. I would not interrupt you; go ahead.

Hon. John: Okay. I cannot say yes or no, because what comes to us every single Monday morning, this gentleman is in a meeting with me, and he has not expressed a fact that he is under any pressure, particular pressure, right? I mean, I can ask him and get back to you. But as it is now, we are working, he is working, number one, on these, as I said, the unregulated boats anchoring offshore, just anchoring

without proper inspection or proper authority because of those pipelines that lie underneath, expensive pipelines that we have beneath the ocean surface. In addition, right now we are working on wrecks, removal of wrecks. Now, you will ask me where that line Item is. But it is something that I think people have to pay. They are paying us to remove the wrecks. So, all of that we are working on right now, very actively. I think the tender is out even as we speak.

Mr. Imbert: Now let me just clarify. I am not talking about the Director. I mean, he is the harbour master as well, but he must have staff because there are many, many vessels, and not just the big ones, but medium-sized and small ones that are anchored off the Chaguaramas Peninsula, and many of them are anchored illegally, in my opinion, and many of them have no navigation lights, and they are hazards. I am just wondering if this allocation for salaries is sufficient for the necessary amount of staff to deal with that real problem.

Hon. John: Well, again, as I have said, I mean, he has not complained.

Mr. Imbert: Okay.

Hon. John: Right? So that is the best I can say. And he has ample opportunity to complain. Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. We are moving on.

Mr. Imbert: Right.

Mr. Chairman: 02: Goods and Services; 001: General Administration. Pages 358 to 359.

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]—That is 001: General Administration; Employee Assistance Programme. I am on page 359.

Mr. Young SC: Okay.

Mr. Imbert: Well, it is all the same thing, right?

Mr. Young SC: Yeah, yeah.

Mr. Imbert: I am on 99: Employee Assistance Programme. Could you explain what is involved in this Employee Assistance Programme?

Hon. John: I am not seeing that.

Mr. Chairman: 359.

Mr. Imbert: 02/001/99.

Mr. Chairman: 99.

Mr. Imbert: Page 359. Head 69.

Hon. John: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Imbert: Yeah, what is involved?

Hon. John: Well, that is to help to rehabilitate employees, those with challenges, et cetera. We try to intervene and assist them. Employees suffering stress and all of these things.

Mr. Imbert: And substance abuse and so on.

Hon. John: But all of those things certainly.

Mr. Imbert: Yeah. I notice you only spent $5,000 in 2026. So, what could have been done?

Hon. John: But remember, sometimes on hon. MP, these things are personal—it is an issue. If it is disruptive, it is affecting your work, obviously, well, you will go to the chain, and we have internal assistance, the internal EAP programme. But the money that has been allocated is in the event that one has to kind of seek external help.

Mr. Imbert: It is not the allocation I am talking about. I am talking about the spend that is shown here in 2026 on Employee Assistance Programme, just $5,000.

Hon. John: Well, that does not mean they did not get help. We have an internal

programme.

Mr. Imbert: I did not ask that.

Hon. John: You asked me about the spend on—

Mr. Imbert: I want to know what that programme was spent on. What was it spent on?

Hon. John: Oh, what was it spent on?

Mr. Imbert: Yeah, that is my question.

Hon. John: Oh, I see, sorry. Well, no, I cannot tell you specifically what it was spent on. My note has—expenses for work programme to rehabilitate officers. I do not have the specifics.

Mr. Imbert: All right, okay.

12.50 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Laventille East/Morvant.

Mr. Birchwood: Yes, thank you, Chair. I am looking at 02/001/01: Travelling Subsistence. I am seeing an increase there. Can the Minister explain where that figure came from?

Hon. John: Where the figure came from?

Mr. Birchwood: Yes. Why the addition?

Hon. John: Well, of course, it is for travelling officers. You want to know it—

[*Minister confers with technocrats*]

Mr. Birchwood: Yes. Why the increase? Because I am looking at the 2026 Revised Estimate and I am looking at 2027 here. So, why the increase?

Hon. John: All right. It is to treat with the additional work. So, there is a bigger demand for the workers because they are now—we are using more of the Ministry's staff to do work, to carry out work. We are not doing as many contract

work. So, the Ministry staff themselves, who are quite skilled—so they are being used across the network to carry out work. The HR manager is here, and she said it is just to reimburse them or to give them what their contractual arrangements allow. We have been asked to do a lot, eh. And really and truly, we are trying our best to come up to that challenge. So, basically, we are projecting that there will be more activity over this fiscal.

Mr. Birchwood: Okay, thank you. I go on to 02/001/16: Contract Employment. I notice a decrease here, $130,000. What does that reflect?

Hon. John: You called it a what? A decrease or is it an increase?

Mr. Birchwood: It is a decrease.

Hon. John: Allocation will be used for the payment of salaries and related cost in respect of the employment of officers on fixed-term contracts. There are various positions of approximately 40 worker:Senior highway engineers, bridge inspectors, asphalt plant operations. So, these are technical people. Some of them are already working as short-term employees, meaning six months and three months. So, one is trying to give them better terms, like a three-year term.

Mr. Birchwood: So, it not safe to assume that the 2026 Estimate here of $3 million was underbudgeted or underestimated, which would have given rise to this $5.6 million here? It is not that you brought on anybody, it is just that, that is what you required for 2026?

Hon. John: Just now.

Mr. Birchwood: Okay, I am looking at 2026, the initial Estimate of $3.63 million and then I am looking at the Revised Estimate of $5.63 million. Is it that you brought on someone or is it that you increased salaries somewhere along the lines? What is it?

Hon. John: No, we did not bring on anybody, but one had to pay gratuity.

Mr. Birchwood: Okay. I go on to line Item 02/001/22: Short-term Employment. There is a $2 million decrease here as well.

Hon. John: What page is that?

Mr. Chairman: 358.

Hon. John: 358.

Mr. Chairman: 358, 22.

Hon. John: All right. We are talking about—line Item 22 you are talking about, eh.

Mr. Birchwood: Yes, Short-term Employment.

Hon. John: So, in fiscal 2026, the increased allocation was just for payment of salaries and advances for the payment of 77 persons on short-term contracts, necessary for the continuity of work programmes in accounts—accounts was six; ICT was 20; internal audit, one; facility management, four; legal services, five; environmental health and safety, 12; project management evaluation unit, six; HR, 13; general admin, two; communication, one; office of the PS, two; National Recruitment Drive, four; and the Employee Assistance Programme, one. That decrease was due to 36 persons' transition to fixed-term contracts. So, they moved from the very short-term to fixed-term, long-term.

Mr. Birchwood: Thank you. I am also looking at line 02/001/43:Security Services, a slight increase there. Is it that you—

Hon. John: What page if you do not mind?

Mr. Chairman: 359, Minister.

Hon. John: 359. What services? Security?

Mr. Birchwood: Yes, Security Services.

Hon. John: Okay, fine, right. Okay, good. Last fiscal, total spending included annual billing cycle and payment of arrears from previous years due to the increase in the minimum wage for MTS workers. For fiscal '26/'27, a request was made for funding to incur expenditure for bills only. So, it means we did not have to incur this increase. So, the allocation received, however, was insufficient, and as such, additional funds, we probably would have to get that at mid-year, if indeed we need anything additional.

Mr. Chairman: Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much. Minister, on two of the line Items my colleague from Laventille East/Morvant was just asking you about, I heard you say under Short-term Employment, line Item 22, where there has been a decrease of $2 million for Short-term, I heard you say that previously you 77 persons employed under Short-term. Well, 36 have now been transferred to longer-term contracts. What was the phrase you used?

Hon. John: [*Inaudible*]—because the short is about—

Mr. Young SC: Three months, six months.

Hon. John: Three to six months, right.

Mr. Young SC: They have now moved to three-year contracts or around that, right.

Hon. John: Thereabouts, yes, fixed-term contracts.

Mr. Young SC: So, if that has happened, when I went to line Item 16, you had a Revised Estimate of $5.630 million for 2026, and now, for 2027, you have been given $5.5million. There is a slight decrease. So, the question that I have, if 36 have moved from Short-term now under that line Item of Contract, is this going to be sufficient, the Contract at 16? Because you now say you have 36 additional

people employed there.

Hon. John: I am being told, yes. What I have been told is that they are filling 124 aggregate, fixed-term contract officers, and previously, you are saying, what?—153 positions on contract.

Mr. Young SC: So, you are saying that that should be sufficient—

Hon. John: It should be sufficient. Yes, Member.

Mr. Young SC:—even though you are adding more than you had last year.

Hon. John: Yes. It should be sufficient.

Mr. Young SC: Okay. Let us go then to, if I may, to line Item 61, which is on the next page, 359, Insurance. What is this Insurance covering?

Hon. John: It is the annual premium on the Head Office building, London Street Project Company Limited.

Mr. Young SC: And would you tell us in writing who it is that is covering this Insurance, unless you have it there?

Hon. John: I do not have it here.

Mr. Young SC: It might be the fella sitting behind you. Who is it? What? Comprehensive? No, I would like to—

Hon. Member: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Young SC: Okay, well, the Minister is providing the information, or she can provide it in writing.

Hon. John: [*Inaudible*]—neither do it. So**,** we do not know. We can always—

Mr. Young SC: Okay, so you will provide it?

Hon. John: Yes, of course.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you. I have further questions under 001.

Mr. Chairman: Laventille East/Morvant, do you have further questions on this?

Go ahead.

Mr. Birchwood: Thank you, Chair. Under 02/001/96: Fuel and Lubricants, there is an increase of $100,000 there. I know the Minister expressed that there is a more robust system in the Ministry now, more movement, et cetera. So, I am asking, this fuel, right, and the lubricant, it is just the purchase, right? It is just the purchase of lubricants for vehicles and so on?

1.00 p.m.

Hon. John: Yes. Funding will be used for the purchase of bulk diesel for pumps, lubricants for the routine service of fleet cars in keeping with the amount spent in fiscal 2025. So, we have gone back to 2025.

Mr. Birchwood: Okay, and as you expressed before, these—these lubricants, they will be put in the vehicles and so on by the maintenance department.

Hon. John: That is right.

Mr. Birchwood: Because that is the department.

Hon. John: That is managed there, yes.

Mr. Birchwood: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: 002: Highways. Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, I am on page 360, 02: Goods and Services; 002: Highways, and Sub-Item 28: Other Contracted Services. I observed there was an original Estimate of $80 million for this Item in fiscal 2026. Could the Minister tell us what Other Contracted Services involves?

Hon. John: So, a total of 48 projects were undertaken at a cost of $44,389,614.23 for various road rehabilitation, landslip repairs, slope stabilization, drainage works, et cetera. And I think they are saying 18 projects are proposed at a total cost of 37—let me just now, just let me look at my notes, please, if you do not mind. The

reductions, really. I am not going to be able because the work is not contracted out—

Mr. Imbert: "Minister I eh reach there yet yuh know."

Hon. John: Orr. All right. Wait.

Mr. Imbert: All I wanted to know is what is the nature of the services that fall under this heading, Other Contracted Services. What are these—what are the type of services? I have not reached yet to the other parts of the line.

Hon. John: Hold on. Is that—is it core desilting and clearing operations?

Mr. Imbert: No. I am on Highways, not Drainage. I have not reached there yet. Just now.

Hon. John: We have landslip repairs, slope stabilization, drainage works, geotechnical investigation, culvert and cylinder crossing, reconstruction, traffic management and guardrail installation, as well as the supply of asphalt materials for road patching programmes.

Mr. Imbert: Right, so it is road patching.

Hon. John: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: Road paving, landslip repairs, et cetera. Okay. So, the original allocation for these very important things, patching of potholes, et cetera, was $80 million. The 2026 Revised Estimate is $46 million. That is a significant reduction in that Item. Could the Minister indicate what was the cause of that reduction? It is a huge reduction. What caused that?

Hon. John: A lot of it is because we are doing quite a lot of the work in-house. So, we do not have a markup. So, if you look down at Cocorite, for instance, we have the collapse, yeah, we have the collapse of, what you call it, it is a culvert, a crossing—just now. And the staff—usually the tender that came in was for over

$3 million, $3 million—of the Ministry did this piece of work splendidly. As a matter of fact, right now they are up at Las Lomas doing—and I wish everybody could go and see it—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. John:—a very technical piece of work. So, what we are doing, we are using the Ministry staff. "Dey eh park up, you know." These are highly skilled, highly trained people—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. John:—very enthusiastic people.

Mr. Imbert: I am waiting for you to finish Minister, go had.

Hon. John: Yes. Yes, Sir.

Mr. Imbert: I am waiting for you to finish.

Hon. John: So, a lot of this work, the intention is that we are going to do this work in-house, and Minister, even our harshest critic will say this is a very busy Ministry. We are out there, and when we are working very hard.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. John: You see us everywhere. All right. So.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. So, the reason for the almost 50 per cent cut in expenditure for the paving of roads and patching of potholes and repairs of landslips was that you are doing a lot of the work in-house—

Hon. John: That is correct.

Mr. Imbert: —so, you did not need the $80 million, you only needed 46. Can you explain, therefore—since $80 million was allocated for this very important work, the things that the public sees every single day, potholes, landslips, et cetera, and you say you did not need the $80 million because you are doing stuff in-house,

can you explain, therefore, why the allocation for material and supplies, which is what your in-house workers would use, was just about $1 million? $1 million? Can you explain? So, $36 million gone or $34 million gone and replaced $1 million in supplies?

Hon. John: No, further along you will see that material in another location. You did not look through the whole document.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Imbert: I most certainly did.

Hon. John: So, you see.

Mr. Imbert: You only have a $1 million for materials and supplies.

Hon. John: No. There is another $15 million.

Mr. Imbert: So, hold on.

Hon. J. John: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Imbert: [*Laughter*] So, you doing all these patching of potholes and repairs of landslips in-house? 50 per cent of your planned work programme is being done in-house when you have no allocation for materials and supplies? Your maintenance—

Hon. John: No. We have a 15million in there.

Mr. Imbert: I will try to and talk slowly.

Hon. John: Just now. I will tell you when you can do that.

Mr. Imbert: Sorry, Minister, I will try and talk slowly.

Hon. John: You can do that.

Mr. Imbert: Your maintenance of vehicles down. All that various elements of in-house that provide for in-house capacity, all of them down to minuscule amounts, and therefore, you are now doing things in-house with all these minuscule

amounts.

Hon. John: [*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: And I am at the second part of the question.

Hon. John: Uh-hmm.

Mr. Imbert: So, you do not need $80 million for Other Contracted Services to patch potholes, pave roads, fix landslips and so on. You do not need it?

Hon. John: I met every one of those vehicles down. As a matter of fact, this morning, in talking to the team of the Ministry, I think there is about $43 million or $48 million allocated for rental of vehicles, which I find is scandalous, quite frankly, and I told them so. All right. It is much too much. So, we are going to, we have to work on, we have to work to ensure that the capacity is really in-house in terms of the repairs because—and to ensure that we have, what you call it—the spare parts to bring these vehicles up to date.

Now, the other thing is, these vehicles are over 20 and 30 years old, you know. I am amazed when my honourable colleague was Minister of Finance, he did not see it fit to give us a new fleet. Because we are dealing with some very—he knows it is a very old fleet that you are dealing with. Right, so we are trying to, I think we have an allocation to purchase, thanks to the hon. Minister of Finance. We are going to be able to purchase.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. John: Not a whole new fleet, but some element of it.

Mr. Imbert: So, Minister—

Hon. John: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Imbert:—with your old broken-down fleet, your minuscule allocations for materials and supplies and all the other very small allocations to allow your in-

house cadre of workers to patch potholes, fix landslips, et cetera, you believe you can replace this $34 million that you were not given by the Minister of Finance? This is the second year, you had an $80 million allocation for Other Contracted Services, you only get 46. This is the second year the Minister of Finance has punished you in this area, and you think that is okay?

Hon. John: Last year we did over 48 projects with that $44 million.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. John: You understand, 44. And you know we were everywhere, and the fact that we did not flood this year did not mean rain did not fall, you know. It meant that—

Mr. Imbert: I am on highways. I am highways.

Hon. John: —we worked very, very hard. Well, why are you telling me how to answer?

Mr. Imbert: I still have a question on this one.

Hon. John: No, but we have been patching everywhere, you know. We are taking the edge out of that, and as the hon. Minister of Public Utilities said yesterday, we are working collaboratively and in great partnership with WASA because a lot of the most egregious, what, sinkholes, they come as a result of the 10 years of neglect. So, we have these very dramatic-looking holes that, hon. Member—

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. John: I have seen you have taken up a habit of going and stand up inside of these holes. Do not do that. All right. These are dangerous spaces. So, these are the more technical ones. It takes a lot of time, but WASA is very, very responsive, and together, you know, are getting these things under control, and I think you know that too as an engineer.

1.10 p.m.

Mr. Imbert: Okay, Minister, I do not think I communicated properly. You had an original allocation of $80 million for contracted services to repair landslips, patch roads, pave roads, all of the things that are important to the travel public and the population at large.

Dr. Moonilal: Member Chair, the Member is asking the same question five times.

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*] Member, you seem to be happy with that cut, that $34 million cut.

Madam Chairman: Minister, do you have a different answer?

Mr. Imbert: Are you happy with your 2026? [*Inaudible*] what your original 2026 allocation is. You only have $47 million in 2027, whereas $80 million in 2026. Are you happy with your reduced allocation?

Madam Chairman: Diego Matin North/East, I think you have asked this already.

Hon. John: Chair, last year we spent $44 million on 48 projects, and I can stand up here all day now, if you wish, and I can call out all of the projects. Critical repairs to the landslip of Cumaca Road, 1.5 metres; sectional road rehabilitation along Naparima/Mayaro Road; critical repairs to the landslip of Brasso/Tamana Road; emergency landslip repair along Churchill Roosevelt; urgent geotechnical investigation along Solomon Hochoy Highway; supply of 3,000 tonnes—and I can go on and on and on.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. John: Nobody can say we are missing in action. We have been doing a lot of work, you know, and that was with $44 million, and that is what, when you have oversight, you follow up, you know you encourage people, they are motivated to work, they work a full day's work. "It eh ha no part-time work, shift and tasks"—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. John:—and those kinds of ghost business by us.

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. John: Good, well, all of these things. Alright. So.

Madam Chairman: Laventille East/Morvant.

Mr. Birchwood: Thank you. I believe line Item 002/13: Maintenance of Vehicles. My colleague was simply mentioning the in-house work, and it kind of baffled me because I am seeing a line Item here once again for Maintenance of Vehicles, and the Minister earlier signified that they are doing the jobs in-house now through the department. So, I am a bit confused there. What is this allotment here for if it is you have just professed to actually executing the work in-house now?

Hon. John: What is that? What is it we are talking about?

Mr. Birchwood: Who executes this? This specific Maintenance of Vehicles, now?

Hon. John: 15?

Madam Chairman: Can you repeat the line Item?

Hon. John: Which line Item?

Mr. Birchwood: 002, under Highways, 013.

Hon. John: Maintenance of Vehicles. The division is responsible for the upkeep. Well, they "eh" maintaining it with stick and stone, you know, they have to buy parts. So, these vehicles and equipment are utilized, and "de da and de dat." It is 164 vehicles. And the key vehicles, equipment include dump trucks used to transport hot mix asphalt for daily patching and so on. So funding is required for 94 vehicles for upkeep, minor repairs, and ensuring the vehicles are fit for

inspection and the total is here. So, the funds necessary—we have 70 non-functional vehicles for repairs and inspection and so on. So that is what it is for. I do not know, one time you all are not happy and say—

Mr. Birchwood: To purchase—

Hon. John: "Oh, get people." Now we have people, we have people, you all are not happy.

Mr. Birchwood: To purchase parts then?

Hon. John: But when people are engaged, they are at work.

Mr. Birchwood: To purchase vehicular parts.

Hon. John: Are we on—

Mr. Birchwood: The same line Item, Maintenance of Vehicles.

Hon. John: Right.

Mr. Birchwood: You explained that, basically, through the ramble there, that this is utilized to purchase parts because apparently they are not fixing it with sticks and stones.

Hon. John: Right, definitely.

Mr. Birchwood: So this line Item is to purchase vehicle parts.

Hon. John: Yes, Sir, so what is wrong with that?

Mr. Birchwood: Thank you very much.

Hon. John: Yes.

Mr. Birchwood: Oh my God.

Madam Chairman: Port of Spain North/St Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much. Minister, looking at the total under this Highways, right, 002, the total amount that you have been allocated for 2027 is $62.7 million. I have listened very carefully to what you have been saying to my

two previous colleagues. Under Contracted Services, which is this one line Item in this whole category under Highways, it is $47 million. So let us start with this. Under Contracted Services, is that not the allocation, the line Item that is used to go outside of the department? It has to be because you have a line Item, 16, saying Contract Employment which would be the in-house contract employment. So what is Other Contracted Services for? It is to hire outside of the department, correct?

Hon. John: So what is this? Just now. I have said what it is for. For various road rehabilitation.

Mr. Young SC: I understand.

Hon. John: It depends.

Mr. Young SC: Correct. So, you are doing various road rehabilitation, landslides, et cetera, under that.

Hon. John: Listen, I did not say we are doing 100 per cent. of the work in-house.

Mr. Young SC: I know, Minister.

Hon. John: Okay, fine.

Mr. Young SC: But what I am saying is if your whole allocation under Highways is $62.7 million, and the allocation under Contract Services is $47 million, that only leaves in-house with $15.7 million for materials, for vehicles, for in-house workers, et cetera. So how is it plausible to say that all of the work is being done in-house when you have $15 million in-house and $47 million for Other Contracted Services? That is to retain contractors to do the work. Not so?

Hon. John: No. I am not in court, Sir.

Mr. Young SC: No, well, I am asking, sorry. That is how I ask questions. My apologies.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. John: I know you asked me a question.

Mr. Imbert: I know your friend from Oropouche East would like me to go to court in a short while to avoid questioning him.

Hon. John: Listen, we have a mix. We maximized the staff we have in-house and every parliamentarian should be happy to hear that.

Mr. Young SC: Absolutely.

Hon. John: Okay, that people are out there working hard.

Mr. Young SC: The more you can do in-house, the better.

Hon. John: Exactly.

Mr. Young SC: But the $47 million you have been allocated, is that not to retain contractors?

Hon. John: I cannot be very specific in terms of whether it is for this or that in this way, but certainly we do use contract work also.

Mr. Young SC: And the $47 million under line Item 28: Other Contracted Services is that not the line Item and the allocation to go and retain contractors to do the work you have described?

Madam Chairman: I believe that was asked and answered.

Mr. Young SC: No, she is now getting the answer, Madam Chairman. The Minister is now getting the answer, sorry.

Hon. John: I have been told by the Director of Drainage it is for contracted projects.

Mr. Young SC: Sorry, you have been told that?

Hon. John: By the Director of Drainage (Ag.) it is for contracted projects, thank you.

Mr. Young SC: Drainage or highways?

Hon. John: "No, well, right, well, is de man telling meh."

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Young SC: "He doing the both?"

Hon. John: Yes.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Young SC: The man in the back there?

Hon. John: No, the highway.

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

Mr. Young SC: Minister.

Hon. John: Not yet. The highway man "not" here. It is the drainage man that is talking.

Mr. Young SC: We are getting the people's business done with good camaraderie. Thank you. I have no further questions on this.

Madam Chairman: Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you very much, Minister. When I was making the point that it is impossible to do the amount of in-house work that would be equivalent to $34 million in Contracted Services, and I made the point that the allocation for Materials and Supplies in the Highways Division was minuscule. You said it is going to come later; well it does not. It came before. On page 359, 002: Highways, the Head you are on, Item 12: Materials and Supplies, for 2027, $1.5 million, and in 2026, only $2 million was spent on Materials and Supplies, which will be in-house. $2 million cannot possibly replace $34 million in Other Contracted Services.

Hon. John: You go down—

Mr. Imbert: So, I am asking you, are you expecting us to accept that a $2 million

allocation on Materials and Supplies in Highways could replace $34 million in contracted services for paving, patching of potholes, repair of landslips and so on.

Hon. John: This line item, which you will eventually find, is in the Consolidated Fund for $15 million.

In addition, the Agua Santa plant that was down for God knows how long, the hon. Minister of Finance allocated $3 million last year, and we got another allocation for this year. So that should be up and running, or is very close to being up and running. [*Confers with technocrat*] It is very close to being up and running. So that will help us to reduce expenditure. Listen, last year we had this same conversation, and we really did a lot of work, notwithstanding—Okay, so if—"I'm not de one tuh say, let us move on, but ah doh de think answer—"

1.20 p.m.

Mr. Imbert: "But yuh not answering meh question."

Hon. John: "De" answer will not change.

Mr. Imbert: "Look, yuh not answering. Yuh get ah million dollars for materials."

Hon. John: "De" answer will not change, okay? So—

Mr. Imbert: That is supposed to replace $40 million in Contracted Services? Well, all right. If that is what you say. No problem. Okay.

Madam Chairman: Line Item 004: Central Planning Unit. Laventille East/ Morvant.

Mr. Birchwood: Thank you, Madam Deputy Chair. Line Item 004/22: Short-term Employment. I see another decrease here. Does this also reflect a transition from short-term to long-term employment—

Hon. John: In payment of salaries—sorry, Sir. "Yuh" finished? "Yuh" finished?

Sorry. You asked the question—

Mr. Birchwood: No, I was asking under line Item 004/22: Short-term Employment, if this decrease of $39,000 also reflects another transition from short-term employment to contract employment?

Hon. John: That appears to be the case.

Mr. Birchwood: It appears to be the case?

Hon. John: In the fiscal '26, allocation was utilized in the payment of salaries of four positions on the short-term contract employment. Fiscal 2027, an allocation of 175—is that what we have here—thousand would be utilized for continued payment of the current four positions, as well as two additional forthcoming short-term positions.

Mr. Birchwood: Okay. So, how many people work in this Division, this Central Planning Unit?

Hon. John: The actual number of positions and establishments is—

[*Confers with technocrat*]

There are 13 monthly paid employees there.

Mr. Birchwood: 1-3?

Hon. John: 1-3, yes. [*Confers with technocrat*]. Member, 1-3, yes.

Mr. Birchwood: 1-3?

Hon. John: Yes.

Mr. Birchwood: 13?

Hon. John: 13, 1-3, yes, that is right, correct.

Mr. Birchwood: Okay, thank you.

Madam Deputy Chairman: Item 005: Drainage. Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. Minister, I am at 09:

Rent/Lease-Vehicles and Equipment. In 2026, you were allocated $50million, and the Revised Estimate for 2026 was $43 million; and, in 2027, $43 million. Minister, is that the extent of rental of vehicles and equipment that you have taking place at the Drainage Division? How many service providers do you have that are renting vehicles and equipment to the Drainage Division?

Hon. John: You want to know how many vehicles—

Mr. Gonzales: Those are vehicles and equipment being rented to the Drainage Division for its daily operations?

Hon. John: Well, so it seems. I mentioned that earlier. That I—

Mr. Gonzales: 43—so in your Revised Estimate, it was $43.6million in 2026, and you allocated $43million in 2027. All of that allocation, Minister, is for rental of vehicles and equipment in the Drainage Division in the Ministry of Works?

Hon. John: I am told it is for desilting and long-arm excavators and—320 desilting projects.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay. So, I am not talking about the projects. The line Item 09: Rent/Lease-Vehicles - Equipment. I have an idea what it is being used for.

Hon. John: Yes, for the desilting.

Mr. Gonzales: So, this line Item is for the rental of vehicles and equipment to the tune of $43million?

Hon. John: That is not really vehicles, eh. This is more amphibious excavators, long-arm excavators, and so on. These are major pieces of equipment you see floating in those rivers.

Mr. Gonzales: All right. It is $43million, and I am assuming, Minister, that you are engaging private contractors who have those equipment to provide the service of these equipment to the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure.

Hon. John: There are some specialist contractors, yes.

Mr. Gonzales: Specialist contractors?

Hon. John: "Mm-hmm."

Mr. Gonzales: Minister, if you look lower down at 12: Materials and Supplies. You are provided with $300,000. Then you look further at Repairs and Maintenance – Equipment. I am assuming this is for equipment owned by the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure. You are provided with $75,000. What can you do with $75,000? How many tyres and batteries you can buy with $75,000?

Hon. John: Well, this is more for the water pumps, eh, and we have quite a few that are now new. We were in a very aggressive programme of upgrades and maintenance during '26.

Mr. Gonzales: How many pumps you can repair with $75,000, Minister?

Hon. John: We are not doing a lot of repairs this time. This is more like the maintenance of these pumps. We have about—is it three or four brand new pumps? Three brand new pumps. So, as I said, they are still on warranty. So that maintenance is coming from the provider, and then those that we have, the older ones, we have had some very intense maintenance and upgrades this year. So, we expect the price will not be as high for '27.

Mr. Gonzales: So, you expect to do all of that with an allocation of $75,000 in fiscal 2027?

Hon. John: Yes, we did it in '26. You all argued last year—

Mr. Gonzales: How many pumps do you expect to repair with that allocation, Minister?

Hon. John: Now, there is another line Item further down for repair of minor equipment.

Mr. Gonzales: So, it is not necessarily this line Item where you have been given—

Hon. John: Well, part of it, you will use for that. But, certainly, we did not fall apart. We used what we have, and it is more than adequate.

Mr. Gonzales: Line Item 21, Minister: Repairs and Maintenance- Buildings. You are given $25,000. Give me the list of projects that you intend to complete for the repairs and maintenance of buildings for the $25,000 allocation? How much boxes of nails you intend to purchase?

Hon. John: [*Laughter*] "How you know we buying nail?"

Mr. Gonzales: And how many bags of cement you expect to get with that?

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. John: "Look, keep moving nah man. Listen, it is well past lunchtime, yuh know, and you all are joking, yuh know."

Mr. Gonzales: It is a whopping $25,000for a very important line Item: Repairs and Maintenance- Buildings.

Hon. John: And I can tell you we are very intense when it comes to maintenance.

Mr. Gonzales: So how many boxes of nails do you intend to get with that and cement with $25,000?

Hon. John: It will be sufficient. And sometimes, you know, there is provision in the Consolidated Fund, also, you know? Right? So, this is not all that we are looking at. So, we have, I think, about $3million allocation in the Consolidated Fund. When we go before the Ministry of Finance, we go with a full crew. We go with the full programme, and then the Minister of Finance, very generously, ensures that we are well resourced. So, this is enough.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Gonzales: So, my final question, Madam Chairman, to the hon. Minister: Minister—

Hon. John: Yes?

Mr. Gonzales: Can you provide us with a list of the service providers that would have been—

Hon. Member: "Wuh we on?"

Mr. Gonzales: I am sorry. I am going to it—09—

Hon. John: 09?

Mr. Gonzales: Yes. Rent/Lease- Vehicles and Equipment—a list of the contractors that would have been providing or are providing equipment and vehicles to the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, particularly the Drainage Division, under this Item with an expenditure and allocation of $43 million, can you provide that to us?

Hon. John: Well, I am sure the list will not surprise you, because the list is a bonded list. It is the list I met, and that is the list they use to go out for procurement with. Am I correct?

Mr. Gonzales: Very few things in politics surprise me, Minister. So, you can provide information.

Hon. John: No, no, no. No, no, no. It is the same list that you use, man.

Mr. Gonzales: The same list that who uses, Minister?

Hon. John: The previous government. We have not changed any list.

Mr. Gonzales: That is okay. Just provide it to us, all right? Thank you.

Hon. John: We will see, yeah.

Madam Deputy Chairman: Diego Martin North/East

1.30 p.m.

Mr. Imbert: 005, page 361, Drainage; Goods and Services; Item 12, I see an allocation for Materials and Supplies for the Drainage Division of $300,000. You are seeing it, Minister?

Hon. John: Yes, Sir. "Mm-hmm".

Mr. Imbert: What is the extent, nature and scope of materials that could be purchased for $300,000 for the Drainage Division in fiscal 2027?

Hon. John: You see, we are going to be buying shovels and forks and long-handled grabbers and wheelbarrows; hand tools.

Mr. Imbert: That is Materials and Supplies?

Hon. John: Pardon?

Mr. Imbert: Under Materials and Supplies?

Hon. John: Yeah, well, that is what you call it.

Mr. Imbert: No, I am just asking.

Hon. John: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: So, you say this is for shovels and things like that? Rakes and—

Hon. John: Yes, that is what it is for. Yes.

Mr. Imbert: Okay.

Hon. John: Yeah, yeah.

Mr. Imbert: All right. Item 13, you have an allocation of $100,000 for Maintenance of Vehicles. What is the size of the fleet—the Drainage Division fleet?

Hon. John: There are 30 vehicles in that fleet.

Mr. Imbert: 3-0?

Hon. John: Yes. "Mm-hmm".

Mr. Imbert: So, what maintenance can be done with an allocation of $100,000?

Hon. John: No, you are assuming that all will need maintenance. That does not mean—

Mr. Imbert: I have not finished my question. Minister?

Hon. John: Go ahead.

Mr. Imbert: Minister?

Hon. John: Yes?

Mr. Imbert: "You are not like dem other fellas gettin on bad and ting".

Hon. John: No, no, no.

Mr. Imbert: Just allow me to finish my question. All right? [*Laughter*]

Hon. John: I apologize. Yeah?

Mr. Imbert: Right.

Hon. John: I will sit back.

Mr. Imbert: Let me go back.

Hon. John: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: How many of these 30 vehicles are old, ageing, in need of maintenance?

Hon. John: That is the question?

Mr. Imbert: Yeah.

Hon. John: Well, I—

Mr. Imbert: That is the first question.

Hon. John: I know I have been doing a very good job of answering these questions, but I do not think I have that.

Mr. Imbert: So, you do not know?

Hon. John: I do not have the list of vehicles.

Mr. Imbert: All right. So, you have 30 vehicles. You are not sure how many of

them need maintenance. But what can be done with $100,000? That is one vehicle repair.

Hon. John: No, there is no labour cost, only parts that we are going to be treating with.

Mr. Imbert: All right. So, for 30 vehicles, you believe $100,000 is adequate?

Hon. John: No, that does not mean all. You asked me what the size of the fleet is, I said 30.

Mr. Imbert: Right.

Hon. John: It does not mean that all 30 will be in need of repairs.

Mr. Imbert: I know, I know.

Hon. John: Right.

Mr. Imbert: So, you are saying $100,000 is adequate for your 30 vehicles in the Drainage Division. Okay.

Hon. John: Yes, we will make it work.

Mr. Imbert: Can I go to 15 now?

Hon. John: Yes. Okay.

Mr. Imbert: Repairs and Maintenance - Equipment.

Hon. John: "Mm-hmm".

Mr. Imbert: You have an allocation of $75,000. What type of equipment is involved under this Sub-Item? What does this refer to? What kind of equipment?

Hon. John: Well, we are talking about repairs and service of portable water pumps, including the service and replacement of worn parts. So, this is more seals and holes and gaskets, to buy lubricants and oils and minor mechanical components.

Mr. Imbert: That is the equipment involved?

Hon. John: Yes, small things.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. Okay, good. So, would all of this be used for your in-house work?

Hon. John: Yes, we have got people. Why are you doubting? The Ministry has not changed since you have been there, you know, Sir? [*Laughter*]

Mr. Imbert: I am just asking a question. So, this—so, wait, wait, wait. The $300,000 for Materials and Supplies; the $100,000 for Maintenance of Vehicles, 30 of them; Repairs and Maintenance - Equipment, a whole set of pumps, and so on, you have here less than $500,000 for all of that. And I am simply asking if this is for your in-house work in the Drainage Division. Yes?

Hon. John: Yes, yes. It is.

Mr. Imbert: Good. So, let us now go to 28: Other Contracted Services. You had an allocation of $56 million. What—for the benefit of the listening public—type of work is involved, and what kind of service providers are involved in Other Contracted Services for the Drainage Division under 005/28? What kind of work?

Hon. John: Well, we—just now, hold on. What kind of work?

Mr. Imbert: Yeah, the nature.

Hon. John: The nature of the work.

Mr. Imbert: Yeah.

Hon. John: Rehabilitation works along Petit Valley Ravine in the vicinity of J&C Supermarket—

Mr. Imbert: No, not specifics, just general—

Hon. John: Well, you—but now I start to tell you—

Mr. Imbert:—categories.

Hon. John: You recognized the address.

Mr. Imbert: No, the categories, categories, categories.

Hon. John: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Imbert: That is not me. That is somebody else.

Hon. John: Yeah, yeah.

Mr. Imbert: Categories, categories.

Hon. John: No, we are being serious. That is the point, you know. You see—

Mr. Imbert: No, I do not mind if you—

Hon. John:—you thought I was going to say Penal.

Mr. Imbert: Minister—

Hon. John: Reinforced concrete wall, underpinning work, rubber masonry wall—just now what? Invert rehabilitation, underpinning wall, RC invert rehabilitation, construction of reinforced concrete wall, geotechnical stabilization—I am seeing the Diego Martin River here. Could I call that?

Mr. Imbert: No, that is—

Hon. John: RC invert rehabilitation and underpinning, Mendez drain. Where is Mendez drain in? In Laventille West, between Beetham Highway, Laventille and outfall—you see? This is the kind of work we are doing.

Mr. Imbert: That is not what I asked.

Hon. John: What did you ask? [*Laughter*]

Mr. Imbert: The categories—

Hon. John: No, well—[*Laughter*]

Mr. Imbert:—not the specifics.

Hon. John: No, but we are—

Mr. Imbert: Does this involve—

Hon. John: You see, I am averting the next question—

Mr. Imbert: Let me be more specific.

Hon. John:—because you will ask me, "Where you going and do that work?"

Mr. Imbert: No, I did not.

Hon. John: You want to say—

Hon. John: I did not ask you that.

Hon. John:—Couva North, but it is not. It is in Laventille.

Mr. Imbert: Minister, I did not ask you that. I just wanted the category.

Hon. John: And so, erosion control and riverbank rehabilitation.

Mr. Imbert: Right.

Hon. John: Construction of gabion baskets. We have to do some of that in Morvant, that Lady Young Road, quite frankly.

Mr. Imbert: No problem, no problem.

Hon. John: Construction of reinforced concrete, retaining wall; reinforced concrete wall; removal of some failed sections in some places; raising of western embankment, 700 metres long; construction of box drains; reconstruction of slope; stabilization of embankment—tell me when you want me to stop, please.

Mr. Imbert: [*Laughter*] Because you have not started.

Hon. John: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Imbert: What is the category?

Hon. John: Of what?

Mr. Imbert: Not the projects. I did not ask about the projects.

Hon. John: But it is infrastructure work. That is why I am being very detailed.

Mr. Imbert: So, hold on. Let me help.

Hon. John: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Imbert: Does it involve desilting and clearing of waterways and rivers?

Hon. John: But—I do not understand this thing. I started to say what the project name is—

Mr. Imbert: I did not ask about the projects.

Hon. John:—the constituency of the Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: I did not ask that either.

Hon. John: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Imbert: I did not ask that either.

Hon. John: And then now you are telling me—

Mr. Imbert: Does it involve desilting of rivers?

Hon. John: Yes, yes, definitely.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. Good, good, good.

Hon. John: Construction of retaining walls, repairs of failed section of the existing channel lining—

Mr. Imbert: I did not ask all of that.

Hon. John:—wall and paving of inverts, and so on. Yes, a lot of that.

Mr. Imbert: I did not ask all of that.

Hon. John: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: Would desilting of rivers be envisaged in this original allocation of $56 million as the major component? Would that be the major component of Other Contracted Services?

Hon. John: No, no. This is not desilting. This is structural work. Construction work.

Mr. Imbert: So—

Hon. John: Desilting is different.

Mr. Imbert:—Other Contracted Services does not involve desilting of rivers?

Hon. John: No.

Mr. Imbert: I see. That is interesting. Okay. So, you had an original allocation of $56 million. You are telling me it is only construction, retaining wall, river wall, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

Hon. John: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: But your Revised Estimate is $26 million, $30 million less, a reduction of over 50 per cent. Could you explain that?

Hon. John: Sir, you saw the kind of work we did in this fiscal just ending there?

Mr. Imbert: You are not answering my question.

Hon. John: Well, yes, it is enough.

Mr. Imbert: No, no, no, no. I did not ask you that.

Hon. John: What are you asking me?

Mr. Imbert: I am not going forward yet. You had $56 million for rivers—

Hon. John: Yes.

Mr. Imbert:—drains, waterways, et cetera, river walls and so on.

Hon. John: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: You only spent $26. You did not spend $30 million on retaining walls and river walls, riverbeds, et cetera. How come?

Hon. John: No, it is just that what happened is that we sent—[*Minister confers with technocrats*]. We are going to make what we have work.

Mr. Imbert: No, no, no. This is not forward-looking. This is past—going back. I am not going forward yet. I still—

Hon. John: You want to know why we did not—

Mr. Imbert: I am in fiscal 2026. Why did you not spend more than 50 per cent of your allocation for river walls, riverbeds and river construction work in fiscal

2026? You had an allocation of $56 million. You only spent $26 million. These are very important things, you know. Riverbanks collapse and so on. Why did you not spend $30 million there?

Hon. John: Well, we did not have any of that collapse because we were—

Mr. Imbert: [*Laughter*]

Hon. John: So, the work we did, it appears, was sufficient.

Mr. Imbert: So, you did not need the $56 million?

Hon. John: So, we aggregate against—the riverbank collapsing and so on.

Mr. Imbert: All the riverbanks fixed in Trinidad?

Hon. John: No, we did not have any riverbank collapsing.

Mr. Imbert: [*Laughter*] You understand what she is saying?

Hon. John: I do not know why he is badgering me.

Mr. Imbert: I am not badgering you. You are not answering.

Hon. John: [*Laughter*] The point is, whatever we spent, we did the work that was necessary.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: So, you did not need the $56 million?

Hon. John: No, we worked with what we have.

Mr. Imbert: All right, okay. Thank you.

Hon. John: What we spent was well spent.

Madam Chairman: Item 006: Mechanical Services. Laventille East/Morvant.

Mr. Birchwood: Thank you, Madam Chair. Maintenance of Vehicles, we are seeing an increase here of roughly—oh sorry, a decrease of $325,000. Could the Minister explain? She does not really require that allocation?

Hon. John: That is number what, 13?

Mr. Birchwood: 006/13: Maintenance of Vehicles.

Hon. John: Okay. Allocation used to maintain and service the fleet of heavy vehicles.

1.40 p.m.

Hon. John: The decrease is due to the backlog of repairs being addressed in the Financial Year 2026. In the Financial Year 2027, $1 million would be assigned for the working fleet.

Mr. Birchwood: How many vehicles are within the fleet?

Hon. John: I cannot tell you offhand.

Mr. Birchwood: Okay, so once again, we are assuming that the maintenance of these vehicles will be done in-house.

Hon. John: Well, by and large, as best as we can, yes. So, we are going to use some of the moneys for tyres, for batteries, preventative maintenance items—not the preventative maintenance because that would be done in-house—hydraulic hoses, service to injector pumps, purchases of components like windscreens, suspension and brake pads, et cetera—electrical and electrical items.

Mr. Birchwood: Okay. And this Mechanical Services department, what do they do?

Hon. John: They fix vehicles.

Mr. Birchwood: What type of equipment?

Hon. John: Class 4 and 5, and heavy equipment.

Mr. Birchwood: Heavy equipment.

Hon. John: "Umm hmm." Yes, Sir.

Mr. Birchwood: Also, 006/12: Materials and Supplies—we are seeing another deduction here—a decrease of $100,000. Minister, we are really and truly saying

that—006/12: Materials and Supplies—there is another decrease of $100,000. So we want to find out if the Minister is actually saying that this amount—this $200,000—will be sufficient for the fiscal year 2027?

Hon. John: Yes, it is sufficient.

Mr. Birchwood: It is sufficient.

Hon. John: Yes. We had this very same thing last year, you know. We can bring that back. The Ministry did not collapse in any other fact.

Madam Chairman: Item 007: Maintenance; Item 008: Construction; Item 009: Environmental Health and Safety Unit; Item 001: Programme Monitoring and Evaluation Unit.

Hon. Member: What page?

Madam Chairman: Page365. Item 015: Maritime Services. Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much. Minister, Maritime Services, line Item 22: Short-term Employment. I see here that the Short-term Employment was one and a half million originally for 2026. Fortunately, you got a Revised Estimate of $1.8 million. How much of the $1.8 million was spent? You see where I am—line Item 22?

Hon. John: [*Inaudible*] expenditure? That was actually spent. That was the Actual spend, it seems—$1.8 million.

Mr. Young SC: Yeah, I figured so, right. So you actually spent the $1.8-odd million—$1.9 million, but it has gone back down to one and a half million. So based on that historical spend, the one and a half million may not be sufficient for Maritime.

Hon. John: Well, we do not as yet.

Mr. Young SC: But no one has yet been fired.

Hon. John: No one has been fired—nobody.

Mr. Young SC: So therefore, it is safe to assume that it would not be sufficient.

Hon. John: No, I do not want to say that.

Mr. Young SC: I would imagine you would not want to say that to the Minister of Finance.

Hon. John: Well, that could be overtime, or what have you, you know.

Mr. Young SC: No, no, no, you have a different overtime that would be somewhere different.

Hon. John: This could be overtime, or it could be other Short-term Employment and so on. It could be anything.

Mr. Young SC: All right. Well, I am just red-flagging it for you.

Hon. John: Very well, thank you.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you.

Hon. John: Is that it?

Mr. Young SC: Because you see, when you—and it is the same Maritime Services we were discussing earlier. Alright, I have no further questions under this one—

Hon. John: Yes.

Mr. Young SC:—but I have under 016.

[MR. SINGH *in the Chair*]

Mr. Chairman: Laventille East/Morvant.

Mr. Birchwood: Thank you, Chair. Line Item 02/015/28: Other Contracted Services—what does this comprise, Minister?

Hon. John: Which one of them?

Mr. Birchwood: What services? Line Item 02/015/28—what services does this comprise?

Mr. Chairman: I think it is page366.

Mr. Birchwood: Page 366.

Hon. John: Page 366. Which number is it?

Mr. Chairman: Line Item 28, Minister. It is on page366. It is just three lines down from the top of the page.

Hon. John: I am seeing 22 in my notes.

Mr. Chairman: No, page366. It is line Item 28. It is three lines from the top.

Hon. John: Hold on, Chairman, I am not seeing that in my notes. What it has to treat with?

Mr. Birchwood: What services fall under Other Contracted Services under this Maritime Division?

Hon. John: It is like marine royalty surveyor—specialist services—people to inspect vessels and that kind of thing.

Mr. Birchwood: Outsourced services, okay.

Hon. John: Most likely, yeah.

Mr. Birchwood: I only asked because I am seeing that there was a reduction from $400,000 estimated in 2026. So once again, we are saying that this $335,000 allotment would be sufficient for the fiscal year 2027.

Hon. John: Well, if you see it there, it means that it is sufficient. It is the same as what we spent in 2026.

Mr. Birchwood: Okay.

Hon. John: The Actual in 2026.

Mr. Birchwood: Thank you.

Hon. John: Umm hmm.

Mr. Chairman: 016: Procurement Unit. Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much. Mr. Chair, welcome back.

Mr. Chairman: Page 366.

Mr. Young SC: Minister, Procurement Unit: The Procurement Unit at the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure would be handling potentially hundreds of millions of dollars in projects. Correct?

Hon. John: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: Right. And then I go down here now to—well, first of all, let me ask: How many members of staff are in this unit?

Hon. John: Five.

Mr. Young SC: Five?

Hon. John: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: And there would be five on contract?

Hon. John: Yes, they are.

Mr. Young SC: Right. And I see that they have reduced the amount. So you started off in 2026 with an allocation—I am a line Item 16—you started off with Contract Employment of $1.1 million. Your Revised Estimate—your spend—for 2026 was $214,000. Correct?

Hon. John: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: Is that for the full five? Because I see you also have underneath that, "Short-term".

Hon. John: We have one short-term, I am told, and nine on contract.

Mr. Young SC: So, five on short-term and nine on contract?

Hon. John: "Umm hmm."

Mr. Young SC: Because I see even with short-term now, you have only been allocated $500,000—a reduction of $446,000. So, that will continue to cover the five on short-term?

Hon. John: They are all there, and we have no intention of moving them.

Mr. Young SC: So, you have no intention of moving them?

Hon. John: No.

Mr. Young SC: So you may need a supplementation then, of Short-term?

1.50 p.m.

Hon. John: If it comes to that. They are all there. I met them there. I do not think there is anybody we have engaged. The same people we met is the PNM who put them there, you know.

Mr. Young SC: So, it is the same Procurement Unit as before?

Hon. John: Same procurement team, yes.

Mr. Young SC: Okay, thank you. No further questions from me.

Mr. Chairman: Alright. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, pages 367 to 370. 001: General Administration; 002: Highways; 004: Central Planning; 005: Drainage; 006: Mechanical Services; 007: Maintenance. Laventille East/Morvant.

Mr. Birchwood: Thank you, Chair. 007/01: Vehicles. Is this for a purchase?

Hon. John: Sorry, Sir.

Mr. Birchwood: 007/01, page 368.

Hon. John: Yes.

Mr. Birchwood: Seeing no allotment here for 2027.

Hon. John: Because there was the purchase of a Hiab. I think that is what that money was for.

Mr. Birchwood: Okay, thank you. Hiab bucket?

Hon. John: Yes.

Mr. Birchwood: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: 008: Construction; 009: Environmental Health and Safety Unit; 011: Programme Monitoring and Evaluation Unit; 015: Maritime Services; 016: Procurement Unit. Sub-Head 04, pages 370 to 373. 001: Regional Bodies; 003: United Nations Organizations; 007: Households. Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much. Minister, I see here under 007: Households, line Item 01, Severance Pay and Retirement Benefits.

Hon. John: [*Inaudible*] have come to the end of their career at the Ministry.

Mr. Young SC: Okay, but that will be the retirement benefits part?

Hon. John: The Retirement Benefits, that is correct.

Mr. Young SC: What is the Severance Pay about? You all have been retrenching workers?

Hon. John: [*Inaudible*] statement—it is retirement benefits.

Mr. Young SC: Okay, thank you. Then under line Item 40: Gratuities to Contract Officers. Would this be able to cover all of the gratuity payments expected for this fiscal $5 million?

Hon. John: That is correct.

Mr. Young SC: Because in 2026, I see originally, you got $10 million, but then the Revised Estimate was the $5.475 million.

Hon. John: It is in alignment with the people who are leaving. This one for sure we do not have to—

Mr. Young SC: Well, of course, these things are rolling, because people's contracts end at different periods of time and different amounts of gratuity. So, you think the $5 million should be sufficient for this fiscal?

Hon. John: I believe so.

Mr. Young SC: Okay. That is it for 007.

Mr. Chairman: 008: Subsidies. Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Gonzales: Thanks Chair. Minister, I observed under Sub-Item 01: Port Authority, Operations of Coastal Steamers, in fiscal 2026 your allocation is $189.9 million, and in 2027, your allocation is $175 million, a decrease by $14.9 million. How is that decrease going to impact on the service that you provide under this line Item?

Hon. John: No, there will be no impact. That is just—

Mr. Gonzales: No impact?

Hon. John: No, no, no, not for the Port. They have been doing some upgrade work and because of that, they are a little more efficient.

Mr. Gonzales: So, how much do you need on an average annual basis to fully operate this service?

Hon. John: We can send that back.

Mr. Gonzales: Say again.

Hon. John: I can send it to you.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay. Can you clarify, Minister, whether this allocation will be utilized for the payment of outstanding arrears to Port workers?

Hon. John: We have been paying the outstanding arrears to Port workers. There is an arrangement to pay them over five years, starting in last fiscal, and they got

that first payment—I went to the Cabinet immediately, and they got the first payment in June of '26.

Mr. Gonzales: So my question is that, in light of the significant decrease in the allocation for 2027, whether this would allow you to satisfy outstanding arrears?

Hon. John: No, we had already agreed. We have an agreement in place, you know. Well, right. So the agreement says they are paid over five years. The first payment has already been executed.

Mr. Gonzales: Yes.

Hon. John: So the other four is to come. One is next year, and so on. There has been no question about the Port workers' arrears. They have been getting it.

Mr. Gonzales: So having regard to a significant decrease in your allocation for 2027 of $14.9 million, is that allocation sufficient for you to continue settling these outstanding negotiations and arrears?

Hon. John: Yes, we have been— Member, I do not know how else to answer. The outstanding that was brought to the Ministry. I cannot tell you what was brought to the Ministry. They had an arrangement with the union in question—

Mr. Gonzales: Yes.

Hon. John:—for the settlement over five years.

Mr. Gonzales: Minister.

Hon. John: Yes.

Mr. Gonzales: Minister, with the leave of the Chair, can I—

Hon. John: [*Confers with technocrat*]

Mr. Gonzales: Oh, sorry.

Hon. John: Yes.

Mr. Gonzales: Could I ask you, is it that the Ministry, your Ministry, requested a reduced allocation under this line Item for 2027?

Hon. John: Yes. This is the operation of the Inter-island Ferry, you know.

Mr. Gonzales: I understand that.

Hon. John: Right. So, okay. So, based on what is happening, how they are operating, yes, we would have asked for—

Mr. Gonzales: So your Ministry would have asked for a reduced allocation by $14.9 million dollars?

Hon. John: This service is fully subsidized, you know. You know that?

Mr. Gonzales: I know that.

Hon. John: We cannot not subsidize it exactly. So we have no way around it. It is the law, the arrangement, or what have you, that this is a subsidized service. So there is no way around it. So whether we ask for that or we did not ask for that, this is a subsidized service, right? So we have to honour that, and this is based on the what the projection in terms of the people, the patronage, the occupancy of the service. You would have done a projection. You might project—we may have—we may cut it further, you could never tell, or it might be a little less. That is why we have a mid-year review, in the event—because with the Carnival now very popular, everyday somebody calling me—"nobody doh call meh in here tho"—about more seats and so on, right? So you can never tell. But as it is now, we are comfortable with where we are.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Imbert: That same line Item. Oh, sorry. Do you want to go ahead? You go ahead.

Mr. Chairman: Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: Minister, same line Item.

Hon. John: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: This, as I understand it, this is for the ferry service, the sea service, the Inter-island service between Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. John: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: And that service is provided or covers the cost, including of the foreign operators who run the vessels, et cetera, for us, correct?

Hon. John: Yes, that is correct.

Mr. Young SC: And it is supposed to be four ferries.

Hon. John: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: The *A.P.T. James*—

Hon. John: Um-hmm.

Mr. Young SC:—the *Buccoo Reef*, the *Spirit* and the *Galleons Passage*, correct?

Hon. John: That is correct, yes.

Mr. Young SC: Are all four working?

Hon. John: Yes, we have, I think it is *Buccoo Reef* that is supposed to go—

Mr. Young SC: Drydock or something?

Hon. John: They are all working.

Mr. Young SC: They are all working?

Hon. John: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: So has there been a reduction in the charges that we are being charged for the operations of those four vessels?

Hon. John: Yeah, there is no reduction per se.

Mr. Young SC: Right. Well, I think that is what we are trying to highlight here, because we know how tight the budget is for that—

Hon. John: Um-hmm.

Mr. Young SC:—and that there are contracts that are negotiated for a number of years, is not a contract negotiated on a year-by-year basis. So, if you were provided with $190 million last year, and now the Minister of Finance has dropped you by $15 million this year, the price of diesel has gone up globally. There is a shortage of diesel. The price of diesel has gone up, so operational costs would have gone up.

Hon. John: Um-hmm.

Mr. Young SC: The cost of operating these vessels will go up. As the vessels get older, there is more money to be spent on the vessels.

2.00 p.m.

So how is this $15 million going to affect, it is definitely going to affect your running, or, rather, the persons who are in charge of running the vessels, $15 million is over $1 million a month. How is it going to affect the running of those four ferries between Trinidad and Tobago? Because, as you have said, there is no reduction in the number of trips being made. In fact, you told us that persons harassing "yuh" or calling "yuh" every minute for more ferry runs.

Hon. John: It was just for the Carnival. Outside of that—

Mr. Young SC: Just for the Carnival?

Hon. John: Yes, just for the Carnival. Outside of the Carnival, it goes—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Young SC: Okay. Also on that, we know from experience, it is seasonal. You will get it for Carnival, Tobago. You will get it for Christmas. You will get it for New Year's. You will get it for Easter. You will get it for summer. But what we are concerned about, is you are being short-changed $15 million for the four

ferries. It is going to affect the service.

Hon. John: Well, thank you for that observation.

Mr. Young SC: It could also lead to breach of contract with some of these people, eh.

Hon. John: We do not have that. You know, in Trinidad and Tobago, as a government, we really do not—every government, as a matter of fact, in Trinidad and Tobago, we honour our financial commitment.

Mr. Young SC: Correct. But with some of them, if you do not make the payment on time, they will threaten to withdraw services. So how is this $15 million less going to affect our ferry service between Trinidad and Tobago?

Hon. John: All right. It has not so far.

Mr. Young SC: Well, not so far, but keep your eye on it. All right?

Hon. John: I am keeping my eye on it.

Mr. Young SC: And then I see here, 03: Caribbean Dockyard and Engineering Services Limited (CDESL). This is the CARIDOC facility, correct?

Hon. John: That is correct, yes.

Mr. Young SC: I see there was no estimate and provision for 2026, and now for 2027, there is $15 million, what is the $15 million for?

Hon. John: Fifteen million dollars will be for salaries and the upkeep of the CARIDOC, because that has been trending downwards, precipitously so, over the last few years, and, particularly, as they have lost their real source of income, the—

Mr. Young SC: The floating dry dock.

Hon. John: The floating dry dock. Well, the dry dock—

Mr. Young SC: Correct.

Hon. John:—that was not a floating dry dock, and now we have the *AMT Goliath*.

Mr. Young SC: So is that still in place?

Hon. John: The contract goes up to, I think, March of next year.

Mr. Young SC: And it is not a fixed platform, this is one of those submergible vessels?

Hon. John: Well, it is supposed to be, but it wiggles. It is not fixed.

Mr. Young SC: Anchored.

Hon. John: It is not anchored.

Mr. Young SC: Okay.

Hon. John: I mean, we asked for an additional expenditure to put in something that they call, "spot poles", and to do some de-silting—some dredging, actually, and so on. So that is a decision that will have to be taken over the next month or so.

Mr. Young SC: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Item 008: Subsidies; 009: Other Transfers. Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Page 371, 009: Other Transfers; 09: National Recruitment Drive Initiative. I would like the Minister—well, I noticed, first, there was no original provision for this recruitment drive in 2026, how come?

Hon. John: I think the programme started after the budget was—

Mr. Imbert: After the budget was read.

Hon. John: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. What exactly does this National Recruitment Drive Initiative entail? Is it only for the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure? Is it across other Ministries and departments?

Hon. John: We call it the National Recruitment Drive Initiatives, but these are the

folks that we would have employed during that period, a number of casual workers. These are specific to the Ministry.

Mr. Imbert: All right. So, although it is called by your government, the National Recruitment Drive Initiative, it is only for the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure?

Hon. John: I think it is called so because of the way in which they were recruited. It is through this National Recruitment Drive Initiative, so we just used that for the sake of—

Mr. Imbert: Let me see if I could rephrase my question. What is in this book, produced by your government, are the words, "National Recruitment Drive Initiative", are the people employed in this National Recruitment Drive Initiative only employed in your Ministry? That is one. And two, which I had asked before, what does this National Recruitment Drive Initiative involve? What is the purpose? What is the intent? What is the outcome?

Hon. John: The folks who were recruited in this manner can be hired by anybody because there is a database of persons. I am saying we call that database the National Recruitment Drive, so any Ministry could avail themselves, or even the private sector, or folks on this National Recruitment Drive.

Mr. Imbert: Right. With respect to this line Item in your Head of Expenditure, Head 69, what is on page 371 of the Estimates, is this only persons employed within the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure?

Hon. John: These folks, we call them "the people employed from the National Recruitment Drive", and that is how we just itemized it here. I am saying, the Ministry of Culture and Community Development could hire people through the National Recruitment Drive. The Ministry of Public Utilities can do the same.

This National Recruitment Drive really refers to a database of people.

Mr. Imbert: I know, Minister, I know, but you are not answering my question.

Hon. John: What is the question, Sir?

Mr. Imbert: This allocation here, in 2026, the Revised Estimate, $48,500,000, was that only for persons in your Ministry?

Hon. John: Oh, yes, within the Ministry, yes, that is what it was.

Mr. Imbert: We reached there, fine. What type of workers, categories—not in Diego Martin, eh, categories? [*Laughter*]

Hon. John: We have labourers, we have checkers, and a category they call "gangers". It is not a lovely name, but it is in the—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Imbert: What is the category?

Hon. John: They call it "gangers".

Mr. Imbert: Gangers?

Hon. John: They are supervisors. Yes, that is the name. It is in the collective agreement.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. No problem. Checkers, labourers and gangers.

Hon. John: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: Fine. What kind of work are they doing?

Hon. John: You are asking that, what kind of work?

Mr. Imbert: I must ask that, I am asking.

Hon. John: More vegetation work. They clean drains. They cut the bush. They pick up garbage for that matter. The reason the country is looking half-way clean now is because of these folks from the National Recruitment Drive Initiative. They clean the highways, and so on.

Mr. Imbert: So they do cleaning of verges, of main roads and highways—

Hon. John: Highways, yes.

Mr. Imbert:—and they clean drains—

Hon. John: Drains and rivers, and so on.

Mr. Imbert: Obviously, they "doh" cut any bush in Maraval, but that is a different matter. Last year I said it was taller than me, now it is twice as tall as me, but it is okay. How many people are employed?

Hon. John: As it is now, because we have attrition and then we have—the Cabinet approved for the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, 1,801. Because of attrition, but not only that, every six months we kind of break the service. So at the last fortnight, it was 1,144.

Mr. Imbert: And these are involved in, as you say, cutting of bush, cleaning of drains, et cetera.

Hon. John: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. Do they use materials and supplies?

Hon. John: Material?

Mr. Imbert: Do they use materials and supplies?

Hon. John: Yes, they do.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. I see. All right. Is the allocation for materials and supplies for these workers in this Sub-Item?

Hon. John: Yes, it is.

Mr. Imbert: So contained within the $48 million is the materials, the equipment, the supplies, et cetera, et cetera?

Hon. John: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: I see. I see you are moving to $69 million in 2027, how many people will be employed there?

Hon. John: Well, we are hoping to get right up to the maximum, 1,800 or more.

Mr. Imbert: Eighteen hundred?

Hon. John: Eighteen hundred, yes.

Mr. Imbert: I see. So $69 million will employ 1,800 people. I see. Wow.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Imbert: No, no, no, no, I have a question.

Hon. John: They attract the same salary as the daily-paid.

Mr. Imbert: I have a question. I am absorbing what the Minister is telling me, and that will lead to my next—I am processing. Are you satisfied that that is value for money, because CEPEP used to employ 11,000 people with just about three or four times this amount of money?

2.10 p.m.

Hon. John: Yeah. Because you all paid them under the normal rate. You know, you paid CEPEP half, 50 per cent of what we pay these people.

Mr. Imbert: So, you are satisfied that this is value for money; $69 million?

Hon. John: These people work very hard.

Mr. Imbert: They work very hard, but not anywhere I have seen.

Hon. John: But this is not only for salaries. This is salaries and materials.

Mr. Imbert: It is okay. It is okay.

Hon. John: That is what we said.

Mr. Imbert: It is okay.

Hon. John: It is not only salaries; salaries and material.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. "Ah done".

Hon. John: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: I have not seen a single one of these people working in my

constituency.

Hon. John: You have not.

Mr. Imbert: But it is all right.

Hon. John: No. That is not—

Mr. Imbert: It is okay.

Mr. Chairman: Okay.

Hon. John: Yes. Let us go on, please.

Mr Chairman: 011: Transfers to State Enterprises. Laventille East/Morvant. Page 372, Minister.

Hon. John: Page 372.

Mr. Chairman: Yes. Member, go ahead.

Mr. Birchwood: Thank you, Chair. To the Minister, 011/32.

Hon. John: Item 011/32.

Mr. Birchwood: Can the Minister confirm that the *Buccoo Reef* is operational?

Hon. John: Yes. The *Buccoo Reef* is operational.

Mr. Birchwood: Operational.

Hon. John: Yes.

Mr. Birchwood: Okay. Thank you.

Hon. John: Yes. Okay.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Okay, hon. Members, before proceeding, I wish to indicate that under the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure,* Sub-Head 06: Current Transfers to Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies; Item 004: Statutory Board appears on page 373 of the *Draft Estimates.* However, the detailed examination of these allocations is contained in the *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago*

House of Assembly. We will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*, page 493.

Hon. John: Yes, 493.

Mr. Chairman: Right. So, 50 - Port Authority Trinidad and Tobago, pages 493 to 494; Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure; 001: General Administration. Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much. Minister—

Hon. John: Yes.

Mr. Young SC:—the Port Authority is a statutory body, and commissioners—the Board is called the Commissioners of the Port of Trinidad and Tobago, correct?

Hon. John: That is correct.

Mr. Young SC: They are paid under line Item: 01/06.

Hon. John: Yes. Yes.

Mr. Young SC: Right. Is there a full board in place?

Hon. John: I think so, yes.

Mr. Young SC: There is—if you would give me one second—a Chairman in place?

Hon. John: That is correct.

Mr. Young SC: What is the name of the Chairman paid under this line Item?

Hon. John: The Chairman's name is Rodney Ramroop.

Mr. Young SC: Rodney Ramroop. Correct. Is the Board, under this line Item, paid to get involved in procurement issues?

Hon. John: Not that I know of.

Mr. Young SC: Very good. I would expect you not to encourage that. So, I am

glad you said that, Minister. Minister, I am told that Mr. Ramroop is approving contracts, single source, for Central Logistics Limited—

Hon. John: No, no, no, no.

Mr. Chairman: All right. Port of Spain North/ St. Ann's West—

Mr. Young SC:—and—[*Inaudible*]—Construction Limited.

Hon. John: No, I would not know anything about that.

Mr. Chairman:—I do not think that arises, I mean, unless there is a question that arises on a line Item. That might be for a different forum.

Mr. Young SC: I am getting to the question. Is the Minister aware of this?

Hon. John: No, I am not aware of that.

Mr. Young SC: Okay. I suggest you look into it. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: All right. Great. Let us move on.

Mr. Young SC: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. John: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Item 002: Engineering Division; 004: Marine Division; 005: Wharves Division; 006: Cruise-Ship Complex.

Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, pages 494 to 496; Item 001: General Administration; 002: Engineering Division; 004: Marine Division; 005: Wharves Division; 006: Cruise-Ship Complex.

Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, pages 496 to 497; 001: General Administration, 002: Engineering; 005: Wharves Division; 006: Cruise-Ship Complex.

Sub-Head 04, page 497, Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 007: Households; 009: Other Transfers.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development*

Programme, 166. Consolidated Fund, pages, 166 to 171; Item 001: Pre-Investment.

Hon. John: What page?

Mr. Chairman: Pages 166 to 171. Item 003: Economic Infrastructure. Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you, Chair. Minister—

Hon. John: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Gonzales:—I am at—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Marcelle: Mic.

Mr. Gonzales: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Your microphone.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay. Thank you. Minister, 020: Programme of Upgrade to Existing Drainage Pumps and Gate inventory. In 2026, you allocated $8million—a very important line Item—to ensure that your pumps are working efficiently, to control rising flood waters and to protect public safety. But then you received a Revised allocation of $5 million, reduced by $3 million. Then, in 2027, it went further down to $2 million. Is it that your Ministry has requested a reduced allocation to this amount, Minister, for this very important line Item?

Hon. John: No, it is that we have sent a realistic Estimate to the Ministry of Finance. Right. Because every single pump is accounted for. They are all working. We have put in a very robust system of maintenance and, you know, we make the money that we get work for us.

Mr. Gonzales: So, all pumps that are—

Hon. John: All the pumps are working, yes.

Mr. Gonzales:—installed around the country to manage flood waters are in a

working condition?

Hon. John: They are working. They are on plinths. "De roof cover". All that I—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Gonzales: The $2 million that is allocated to your Ministry is consistent with a request that your Ministry made to ensure that we have upgrades to existing drainage pumps and gateway inventory in this fiscal year?

Hon. John: That is correct, yes.

Mr. Gonzales: What then is your programme of works to be implemented or executed under this line Item for 2027?

Hon. John: In the north, Market Street, Port of Spain, one mobile diesel pump and one flag gate.

Mr. Gonzales: Let me hear. What is the first? Sorry, I—

Hon. John: Market Street, Port of Spain.

Mr. Gonzales: Market Street, Port of Spain.

Hon. John: Right. There is a diesel pump there.

Mr. Gonzales: What do you plan to do there?

Hon. John: Right. We are going to—just now. It is fenced watchmen and patrolmen on site, battery—that, that, that, that, that—we are just talking about—well, it really comments that it has—yeah. Because this pump is working. I made sure. When I went in, the pump was in mud, quite frankly.

Mr. Gonzales: [*Laughter*]

Hon. John: You see. "Yuh look for dat, eh".

Mr. Gonzales: Okay.

Hon. John: It was in mud. I put it on a plinth. You understand? I had to fight to get it on a plinth.

Mr. Young SC: Way down by the lighthouse?

Hon. John: By the marketplace. Exactly. Then there is one across the road, I think, that outfalls almost on the port there. All right? That also is working. Then, we have a pump house.

Mr. Gonzales: So, what I want, Minister—

Hon. John: Yes.

Mr. Gonzales:—in the interest of time, is to tell me what you are planned programme of works for this line Item. You have received $2 million. Based on what you are saying, this is what you requested. So, what does your Ministry plan to do with this $2 million allocation? It is as simple as that.

2.20 p.m.

Hon. John: Okay. So, we look after the pump on Market Street, the one by the lighthouse. The one in Bamboo No. 1, we have three diesel pumps there; Bamboo No. 2, Bamboo No. 3. All of these pumps; we have in Sadhu Trace, we have in William Trace, El Socorro. All of these, we have various projects going—more to do with batteries and fuels and so on and it is really to bring all of these projects to completion. We had a robust programme in 2026, so it is just to bring them to conclusion. But all the pumps are working.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay. If I point you to Sub-Item 022: Major River Clearing Programme, in fiscal 2026, $5 million.

Hon. John: Yes.

Mr. Gonzales: Your Revised Estimate or allocation was $5 million, zero in 2027. Is it that you have no river to clean in Trinidad and Tobago?

Hon. John: What? Of course, we are cleaning rivers, but we are doing it under—
[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Gonzales: But you have no allocation here, Minister. Is it that you did not request any money from the Ministry of Finance?

Hon. John: No, because you see, we have a CAF loan also that is kicking in.

Mr. Gonzales: What is that?

Hon. John: We have a CAF loan that is also kicking in to help with some of the desilting and so on.

Mr. Gonzales: And where is that? Where is that? It has to be appropriated. So even though it is a CAF or IDB, it has to be appropriated in your fiscal space.

Hon. John: Yeah, well, I am saying we are planning—we are almost at that point, we are now—

Mr. Gonzales: Or so, you are negotiating with CAF.

Hon. John: No, no. We have already negotiated. We are now recruiting.

Mr. Gonzales: So you have been provided with funds?

Mr. Imbert: It cannot be. It has to be appropriated.

Hon. John: I am told, well, the CAF loan was for a specific programme.

Mr. Gonzales: Right.

Hon. John: For drainage and [*Member confers with technocrat*] It was a specific programme. Alright, so that is going to take off some of the slack inside of here.

Mr. Gonzales: So you have no allocation—

Hon. John: No, because we have this—

Mr. Gonzales:—in 2027, for Major River Clearing in Trinidad and Tobago for 2027?

Hon. John: No, this came under another. [*Member confers with technocrat*]

Mr. Gonzales: Because this is a very serious matter, eh.

Hon. John: It is a serious matter.

Mr. Gonzales: Very serious. It is major river clearing.

Hon. John: But "doh look for no press", media group.

Mr. Gonzales: Diego Martin and Central Trinidad and you get a dash, and I am shocked if your Ministry would not have requested funding under this programme.

Hon. John: Can we go on to another question? We will come back to it just now.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay.

Hon. John: Good, because my head of drainage is not here.

Mr. Gonzales: So, I will defer to my colleagues, Mr. Chair.

Hon. John: Yes, please.

Mr. Chairman: Diego Martin Central.

Mr. de Nobriga: Well, Mr. Chairman, quite frankly, my question was on that as well, given the Minister's response. I just want to make sure that we will be allowed to come back.

Mr. Chairman: No, but can I suggest that we do this in writing?

Hon. John: Yes, of course. The head of drainage is here, but he was not feeling so well. So he is coming back.

Mr. Chairman: Can I—

Hon. John: No, no, no. There is an allocation, obviously.

Mr. Chairman: In the interest of time, can I respectfully suggest that we take the answer in writing?

Mr. de Nobriga: I am not asking. I believe you—speak to the Chief Whip.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Arouca/Lopinot, can I suggest, in the interest of moving forward, because the staff member—can I suggest the Minister—

Hon. John: Alright, you will take it in writing?

Mr. Chairman: You will take it in writing?

Hon. John: You will get a better answer.

Mr. Gonzales: No problem.

Hon. John: Alright. Okay, fine.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. Member for Laventille East/Morvant.

Mr. Birchwood: Thank you, Chair. I am on line Item A/020: Programme of Upgrade of Existing Drainage Pumps and Gate Inventory. Could the Minister explain what type of pumps exist in these locations? If they are all the same, what type of pumps?

Hon. J. John: Which number is he talking about?

Mr. Chairman: 020.

Hon. John: Or, 020.

Mr. Chairman: The Drainage Pumps—

Hon. John: When you say what kind of pumps, what do you mean, what kind of pumps?

Mr. Birchwood: Type of pumps, sump pumps, ground pumps. What type of pumps are there?

Hon. John: Sump pumps? I am told they are high-volume pumps. The engineer, head at the drainage is not well, but he is returning. Maybe it is the amount of questions you all are asking.

Mr. Birchwood: Minister, what is that?

Hon. John: Sorry, not you, Sir.

Mr. Birchwood: Okay.

Hon. John: This is not for you. No, they said it is high-volume pumps, but this is a different engineer.

Mr. Birchwood: Well.

Hon. John: High-capacity pumps.

Mr. Birchwood: Well, technically speaking, Minister, all pumps could be high-volume pumps.

Hon. John: Well, that is the point I told you the engineer is—

Mr. Birchwood: The type of pump is what we—

Hon. John:—he just stepped out. He is coming now. Yes, so he will tell me what kind of pumps.

Hon. Member: "He is de pump man"?

Mr. Birchwood: [*Laughter*]

Hon. John: The pumps are electrical, high-volume. But the engineer on the other bench said that could be any pump.

Mr. Birchwood: Well, I can move on to another question, Minister, in the interest of time.

Hon. John: What is the other question?

Mr. Birchwood: Is there redundancy with this system? Because I am looking at the—

Hon. John: Yes, we have redundancy in the system.

Mr. Birchwood: Yes, I am looking at the allocation, and to me, $2 million, it quite frankly cannot service—

Hon. John: Yes, there is redundancy, because we do not only have fixed pumps, you know, we have pumps that are mobile pumps. [*Member confers with technocrat*]. Right, so we have about three pumps that are mobile pumps, and they are saying it is 36,000 gallons, you know. So, and that is the redundancy, because they can be moved from place to place. So, besides the fixed pumps—

Mr. Birchwood: Okay, so the fixed pumps, those systems do not have

redundancy?

Hon. John: No, they do. But I am saying, in addition to the fixed pumps, we also have the mobile pumps. So, in the event that we need something in a particular location—to have the additional power, then we bring in those pumps.

Mr. Birchwood: Okay, so you have mobile pumps.

Hon. John: And those are new pumps, yes.

Mr. Birchwood: So, the mobile pumps act as your redundancy.

Hon. John: Well, part of it. Yes.

Mr. Birchwood: But the fixed pumps themselves, there is no redundancy system there. Okay.

Hon. John: "Oh God, yes, it has". But I am saying, in addition to.

Mr. Birchwood: Okay, thank you. Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. John: Yes, I do not even understand that. Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Malabar/Mausica.

Mr. Romain: Thank you, Chair. Line Item 22. Madam Minister, can you indicate if the entire $5 million was expended in 2026?

Hon. John: You want to do what?

Mr. Chairman: Whether the entire $5 million was expended in 2026.

Hon. John: It was, yes.

Mr. Romain: Follow-up question. Minister, can you indicate if any work was done on the Mausica River?

Hon. John: So, we would not have done it under 22. We would have done it under the desilting programme. So, work was done, every river in this country was touched, Sir.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. John: But walk your constituency.

Mr. Romain: 024: Infrastructure Rehabilitation and Flood Mitigation Programme. I see there is a reduction for 2027, Minister. Can you speak to that?

Hon. John: What was done in 2026? So, we did some concrete retaining walls. What we propose to do—the question is?

Mr. Romain: I note that there is a reduction in the figure for 2027.

Hon. John: Therefore?

Mr. Romain: Yes, so could you speak to what is the reason for the reduction?

Hon. John: We have completed the large structural works and it is only the closeout surveys and so on that has to be done still.

Mr. Romain: Okay. So, Madam Minister, there is a section of the Mausica River in Samaroo Village. Can you indicate if any work was done on that?

Hon. John: Mausica River?

Ms. John: Yes, in the area of Samaroo Village. There was an ongoing project under the last administration that was stalled. Can you indicate if any work was done on that?

Hon. John: That work will commence in two weeks' time.

Mr. Romain: Thank you, Minister. And, final question on that same line Item. Is there a specific list of projects for this allocation, or is it something that is open should situations arise?

Hon. John: The 1.92?

Mr. Romain: Yeah.

Hon. John: No, it is a fixed programme.

Mr. Romain: Fixed?

Ms. John: Yes. Okay, thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Laventille East/Morvant.

Mr. Birchwood: Thank you, Chair. Line Item A/024: Infrastructure Rehabilitation and Flood Mitigation Programme. I am asking if the Minister, with this allocation here, if the dredging of the river—

Hon. John: Which river, please.

Mr. Birchwood: —the Malick River next to Fatman Lane.

Hon. John: Which river?

Mr. Birchwood: The dredging of the river next to Fatman Lane on Lady Young Road, if that is included in the allocation. Because I could tell you for certain, it has not been dredged since you all took office.

Hon. John: So we did the Malick River, which is the primary one, we did the Barataria outfall, and you said the Fatman—?

Mr. Birchwood: Fatman Lane.

Hon. John: We will look into it and see, we are not sure.

Mr. Birchwood: Thank you very much, Minister.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, let us move on, 11: Other Economic Services, page 167, A: Drainage and Irrigation; B: Coastal Protection. Member for Laventille East/Morvant, could you turn off your mic? It is misleading, that is all. 15: Transport and Communication; D: Roads and Bridges. Member for Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Chair.

2.30 p.m.

Mr. Gonzales: Minister, I am at D.: Roads and Bridges; Sub-Item 060: Improvement to Maraval access Saddle Road from Rapsey Street to Valeton

Avenue. In 2026, you received an allocation of $5 million and a revised allocation of $5.9 million. In 2027, that has been reduced to $2 million. Is it that your Ministry is looking to abandon the third phase of this project?

Hon. John: No, the third phase of the project is some kind of acquisition, am I correct? And it is very expensive real estate. So, we have to pace ourselves. What we did with the allocation we got was to dispense of some of the outstanding that we had that was there as you see. DW Property Holdings Limited and Royal Bank, so now, one has to kind of look at it. I see the traffic, I know the traffic is there, it is bottlenecked. So, one has to look at it because, as I said, the acquisition is very expensive real estate.

Mr. Gonzales: So, what do you plan to do? Because the third phase would include expansion of that roadway from Royal Bank to Rapsey Street.

Hon. John: Right. "Mm-hmm."

Mr. Gonzales: And of course, yes, there are some properties to be acquired for that expansion.

Hon. John: You have some acquisition, exactly, so that is why you have to consider what you are doing.

Mr. Gonzales: The $2 million allocation, what your Ministry plan to do with this allocation of $2 million for fiscal 2027?

Hon. John: Well, it is to continue to settle land acquisition. We still have, I think, the Royal Bank; we still have something outstanding for them.

Mr. Gonzales: Well, Royal Bank within the second phase. So, that is an outstanding land acquisition claim, I guess, that you are settling.

Hon. John: That is correct, yes.

Mr. Gonzales: So, that $2 million is not going to be spent on the continuation of

the project?

Hon. John: No, you have to settle what was outstanding, and that is what I am saying. That is what we did.

Mr. Gonzales: Well, in land acquisition, yes, it takes time sometimes depending on negotiations, and settlement of submission of documents to settle some of these claims. So, your outstanding obligation on land acquisition for the second phase obviously will have no impact really on the continuation of the third phase. So, my question therefore to you is whether or not your Ministry plans to do any work on the third phase of that very important traffic alleviation project within the fiscal year 2027?

Hon. John: Well, not at this time because the land acquisition is very costly.

Mr. Gonzales: Yes.

Hon. John: So, that is one of the main considerations. We are trying to settle what we met.

Mr. Gonzales: Right.

Hon. John: Right, and as a matter of fact, we are still awaiting the final value from the Commissioner of Valuation. Even when—receive this money we still have to wait for the final value. So, once we get that, we look at it again and really see if there is any alternative and I do not know if that is because there is very tight space to work with.

Mr. Gonzales: Yes, so, the thousands of people who are living in that Maraval catchment area, who live in Santa Cruz, who utilize that major road artery on a daily basis, they are not expected to see any work whosoever being done on the third phase of that project in 2027?

Hon. John: I cannot speak to all of fiscal 2027. As it is now we are settling

previous debts. That is what we are doing with the money, which is quite significant. So, let us settle that before we move on.

Mr. Gonzales: So, the $2 million allocation is to settle an outstanding land acquisition matter in the second phase of this project?

Hon. John: Member, you "doh" think we should settle debts?

Mr. Gonzales: No, I am not saying that.

Hon. John: Well, right, so we have to pay people. We took the land from them, we acquired the land, the people using the road, it is nice and wide and so on. So, you know—

Mr. Gonzales: I get that point, Minister —

Hon. John: Right.

Mr. Gonzales: But I am saying that that has no bearing whatsoever on the continuation of that third phase of the project. This is any final question to you—

Hon. John: Yes.

Mr. Gonzales:—I think I have asked it already, that it is not expected, that any work whatsoever will take place in the continuation of that project in the third phase?

Hon. John: "I doh know if we can." Sorry, Member, sorry for cutting you. "I doh know that we are definitive, but I'm saying that people calling down meh phone so we want to settle the bills that we met, okay."

Mr. Chairman: Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: So, the people that have been calling you Minister—

Hon. John: "To pay dem de money dat you left outstanding."

Mr. Imbert:—are settlement of debts?

Hon. John: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: "Nobody calling yuh phone about de traffic?"

Hon. John: [*Laughter*]

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. John: Listen, we are all about easing this thing, you know.

Mr. Imbert: Just asking a question.

Hon. John: I live in St. Ann's so we do not have a lot of traffic there. But, notwithstanding that you have empathy, I know, I live next door. So, certainly, I did not say it is "off the table", but certainly, what came before you want to settle it. And given that you must commend the Ministry for opening the road and so on.

Mr. Imbert: "Alright, Minister, try yuh best. Between Rapsey Street and Royal Bank is one of the most congested areas in the country, try yuh best to get that widening going."

Mr. Chairman: Let us move on.

Hon. John: Yes, move on, yeah. "Mm-hmm."

Mr. Chairman: Shall we? H. You all have more questions on this? I saw no one waving their hand. Who wants to go first? Take your pick?

Mr. Marcelle: Line Item 15/D./064: The National Rehabilitation and Restoration of Roads Programme. I am seeing that it is a new project for 2027, and an allocation of $15 million. Can the hon. Minister indicate what this new programme would treat with, and who would be the administration that would treat with it? I know, for example, PURE would have dealt with a lot of these programmes, but I am seeing this as a new project?

Hon. John: The Ministry, Highways, will be treating with this, and it is really to procure the necessary materials including aggregates and hot mix asphalt, and to lease equipment to undertake patching, spot paving and sectional rehabilitation of

critical roadways. "You want de money to stretch so you doh want too much contractors inside ah dis."

Mr. Marcelle: Yeah, thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Malabar/Mausica.

Mr. Romain: Thank you, Chair. Minister, same line Item. Can you indicate if Tumpuna Road is on that list of projects?

Hon. John: "Once it has some pothole it will be on de list. We doh discriminate. Okay. Tumpuna Road is on de list? Yeah it's on de list."

Mr. Romain: Thank you.

Hon. John: I have a very detailed list, yes.

Mr. Romain: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Diego Martin Central.

Mr. de Nobriga: Thank you, Chair. Minister, on the same line Item, I just wanted to clarify—

Hon. John: "Dat you on de list?"

Mr. de Nobriga: "Yuh know dais de second question right." That this line Item will only be used for roads under the responsibility of the Ministry or secondary roads as well?

Hon. John: We also work with the local government. We have a good partnership with local government. "Nobody ha' to go and stand up in no leopard print in no pothole and ting." Right.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. John: We work with local government. Yes, Sir.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. de Nobriga: "So, the Member for Moruga/Tableland doh have to bun any

tyre and ting anymore? De roads getting sorted out?"

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

Ms. Benjamin: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. John: She has a good Minister. That is the point. She has a good Minister.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. de Nobriga: Thank you, Minister. And well, Minister you preempted my second question —

Hon. John: What is the second one? Yes, Sir.

Mr. de Nobriga: Just to ensure that Morne Coco Road—

Hon. John: "Dat yuh inside?"

Mr. de Nobriga:—that Morne Coco Road is inside?

Hon. John: Yes, yes, of course.

Hon. Member: And St. Lucian Road.

Mr. de Nobriga: And St. Lucian Road, very correct. Thank you.

Hon. John: I am being assured, yes. All right, and we are going to move very quickly.

Mr. Chairman: Minister, I am going to Malabar/Mausica.

Hon. John: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Romain: Thank you again, Chair. Minister does not relationship also extended to the LSA?

Hon. John: Who is LLC?

Hon. Member: LSA.

Hon. John: Oh lord.

Mr. Chairman: That does not arise.

Mr. Romain: No, Mr. Chair, is because the Minister said that "the Ministry has a

relationship with local government to deal with minor roads" but there are minor roads in my constituency that fall under LSA.

Hon. John: "Listen—sorry, Sir. Listen doh say local government and just point at Minister Ameen, yuh know, ask the Mayor of Port of Spain. I work with him, yuh understand. It does not matter."

Mr. Romain: So, Minister, there are some minor roads in my constituency that we are told falls under the LSA, so I am just asking if that could pay.

Hon. John: "I doh know if I could stretch it so far but you know we will try our best. Once Minister Ameen say so, is so." We will try, okay?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Romain: Okay, thank you.

2.40 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Gonzales: Minister, may I point you to Sub-Item 064: National Rehabilitation and Restoration of Roads Programme. I observe it is a new project and you are allocating the sum of $15 million. Is that programme—this new programme sounds familiar to me—is that the programme that is earmarked to replace PURE?

Hon. John: No, PURE used to build big highways and all kinds of things. It is really to put an Item for pothole patching. That is all.

Mr. Gonzales: So, they are doing pothole patching?

Hon. John: Yes, and sectional is more than potholes. You have some sectional.

Mr. Gonzales: So, you are not replacing PURE with this new programme? This National Rehabilitation and Restoration of Roads Programme?

Hon. John: No, when we replaced PURE—PURE is really about the work that is

done by the division.

Mr. Gonzales: Because I observe—I know we have not reached there as yet, but just to be contextual. You have not had any allocation for PURE? I am seeing this massive allocation for this new programme that you have put within your *Development Programme*. So, the question is whether this NRRP—is this the programme that will replace the PURE Programme?

Hon. John: No, no, you have first to see what PURE had evolved into. PURE had evolved into big highways and those kinds of things, am I correct? I do not think they were doing patching. I am not sure. It probably was the Highway Divisions.

Mr. Gonzales: PURE is to help the local government. Almost everything PURE was doing.

Hon. John: Well, okay, fine, so. Listen, all we are trying to do is to get the work done. We have potholes. We are getting them under control, so we have just found a line Item to put it under because I do not think—

Mr. Gonzales: This is a new project, eh, Minister. So, I want to know what you plan to achieve in this fiscal year under this allocation?

Hon. John: You want me to read another list? We will be here until tomorrow.

Mr. Gonzales: Can you provide it for us? So, you have a planned work programme to be implemented in this fiscal year with this allocation of $15 million?

Hon. John: Yes.

Mr. Gonzales: If you do, can you provide it to us in writing because I assume it might be exhaustive, unless I am wrong.

Hon. John: Spot patching: Audrey Jeffers Highway, Beetham Highway,

Churchill-Roosevelt Highway, Diego Martin Highway, Lady Young Road, Priority Bus Route, Point Fortin Highway, Sir Solomon Hochoy Highway, Uriah "Buzz" Butler Highway, Arima/Blanchisseuse Road.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay.

Hon. John: And on and on.

Mr. Gonzales: You plan to do all of that with your $15 million allocation?

Hon. John: All of that. All of that. We did a lot.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Chairman: Okay.

Hon. John: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: I propose to move on.

Hon. John: Move on, please.

Mr. Chairman: H. Sea Transport. Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: H. Sea Transport, 088: Acquisition of Specified Equipment for the Port of Port of Spain. Original allocation in 2026: $20 million. What was that for?

Hon. John: [*Minister confers with technocrat*] They did the refurbishment in the sum of $5.3 million—

Mr. Imbert: No, 088.

Hon. John: Yes, exactly as I said.

Mr. Imbert: It says Acquisition of Specified Equipment for the Port of Port of Spain.

Hon. John: I am getting to that. I am telling you what they did. So, they did some virement to Vote 090, the CARICOM Wharf—

Mr. Imbert: No, ma'am.

Hon. John: Well, you ask me about the $20 million.

Mr. Imbert: 088: Acquisition of Specified Equipment for the Port of Port of Spain.

Hon. John: I do not even understand what you are asking me. The point is I am reading out what has happened with the money.

Mr. Imbert: No.

Hon. John: What are you asking me then?

Mr. Imbert: Start again.

Hon. John: You are saying the money—

Mr. Imbert: The Item is defined as follows: Acquisition, that means acquiring something, buying something. Acquisition of Specified Equipment for the Port of Port of Spain, and you had an original allocation of $20 million. What was intended to be done with respect to the Acquisition of Specified Equipment for the Port of Port of Spain with that original allocation of $20 million?

Hon. John: I am saying—well—all right—I think what was done. They said some kind of phase three 200—what they did is that they did some work on the CARICOM Wharf for the money.

Mr. Imbert: It has nothing to do with CARICOM Wharf. That is the next Item.

Hon. John: Well, I am telling you what happened. Yes, well, they did not do it. They did this and now in this.

Mr. Imbert: No, I asked you what was planned. Not what was done. What was intended.

Hon. John: I will write you and tell you what was intended.

Mr. Imbert: Okay, no problem. Did it involve the procurement of another ship-to-shore container crane for the Port of Port of Spain?

Hon. John: What was done in fiscal—

Mr. Imbert: "Gone back to what was done." Was it intended to purchase a ship-to-shore crane for the Port of Port of Spain?

Hon. John: I do not want to say what they intended.

Mr. Imbert: "Lord have mercy."

Hon. John: I have some notes here, but I do not want to say it, and then it is the wrong thing, whether it is some rubber-tyred gantry crane—

Mr. Imbert: That is it. Yes, yes.

Hon. John: Well, right, so okay, fine. I have to verify that this was indeed procured.

Mr. Imbert: The Revised Estimate indicates that it was not.

Hon. John: They received a commission to empty container handlers, they acquired some kind of Konecranes lift trucks and so on, but I am not sure in terms what was the full amount. So, I cannot answer.

Mr. Imbert: Okay, no problem. The next one: CARICOM Wharf Quay Refurbishment. The allocation was $5 million, and only $1 million is shown as being spent. What is the reason for that underperformance?

Hon. John: What was your question, Sir? Why was the money not spent? What is your question, please?

Mr. Imbert: The original allocation to refurbish the CARICOM Wharf was $5 million; only $1 million is being shown as being spent. So, there is a significant underperformance in terms of execution. How come?

Hon. John: No, I do not know if that—the total Expenditure I have here is $7.4 million.

Mr. Imbert: $7 million?

Hon. John: $7.4 million.

Mr. Imbert: On this item 090?

Hon. John: $7,477,154.

Mr. Imbert: On 090?

Hon. John: Yes, yes, that is correct.

Mr. Imbert: So, this $1 million is misleading then? Okay, all right. I give up on that Item.

Mr. Chairman: Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: 086: Acquisition of Two Multi-purpose Vessels went from $100,000 in 2026 to $1 million. What are those two vessels?

Hon. John: Those are the vessels for the Maritime people to use to manage the buoys in the water.

Mr. Young SC: Two vessels for Maritime to manage the buoys.

Hon. John: Well, amongst other things—

Mr. Young SC: I know, but what type of vessels?

Hon. John: They are now scoping the vessels.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. I. Administration. Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: 104, has the PURE Unit been shut down?

Hon. John: It is in the process of being shut down.

Mr. Imbert: Okay, I see that there is a zero allocation for 2026.

Hon. John: But the staff from the PURE Unit is being reallocated throughout the Ministry.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. Any members of staff in the PURE Unit being retrenched in 2027?

Hon. John: No.

Mr. Imbert: So, you are keeping everybody that was in the PURE Unit?

Hon. John: Based on their contract. Well, not everybody. We have about three people who were sent home.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. How many people were there in the PURE Unit in the 2026 fiscal year?

Hon. John: About 67.

Mr. Imbert: Sixty-seven?

Hon. John: Let me ask HR. [*Minister confers with technocrat*]—I am correct: 67.

Mr. Imbert: How many of those 67 people will be employed in 2027 in the Ministry?

Hon. John: About 64.

Mr. Imbert: So, you are only retrenching three?

Hon. John: All right, so 65.

Mr. Imbert: Okay, all right.

Mr. Chairman: Laventille East/Morvant.

Mr. Birchwood: Thank you, Chair. I. 102: Procurement of Critical Heavy Equipment for Emergency Response and Flood Relief.

Hon. John: What page is that?

Mr. Chairman: That is page 168, two Items from the bottom.

Mr. Birchwood: Can the Minister explain what specific heavy equipment is being procured?

2.50 p.m.

Hon. John: What is the question?

Mr. Birchwood: What heavy equipment is being procured under that—

Hon. John: One hired truck, 15 to 18 tonnes

Mr. Birchwood: A hired truck. Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: 005: Multi-Sectorial and Other Services, page 170, for the avoidance of doubt; 03: Development Institutions; National Quarries Company Limited; Lake Asphalt of Trinidad and Tobago. 06: General Public Services; A. Administrative Services; F. Public Buildings.

Hon .Members, we will now move on to the Infrastructure Development Fund, Item 001: Pre-Investment, page 286. The Infrastructure Development Fund is to be found on pages 286 to 288inclusive of the relevant volume. 001: Pre-Investment; 11: Other Economic Services; A. Drainage and Irrigation. Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: I thought you were genuflecting.

Hon. John: Page what?

Mr. Imbert: 003/11/007, The original allocation for Flood Mitigation - Erosion Control was $30 million, the Actual spend was $15 million, only 50 per cent of the money allocated for Flood Mitigation - Erosion Control in 2026 was spent. How come?

Hon. John: Right. So, we had a number of projects in progress. So, they were just being worked through this system.

Mr. Imbert: Yes, Minister. But the implementation was only 50 per cent of what was expected. Why? Is it a procurement problem? Worker problem? What is it?

Hon. John: Part of it is a procurement problem. You cannot buy a dinner mint unless you "eh" take one here to go through the process.

Mr. Imbert: I see.

Hon. John: Next question, please.

Mr. Imbert: I am waiting for another Item.

Mr. Chairman: You jumped ahead.

Mr. Imbert: For D.—I am waiting for D. on page 288.

Mr. Chairman: No, you jumped ahead.

Mr. Imbert: No, I am waiting.

Hon. John: Waiting for what?

Mr. Chairman: All right. So, H. Sea Transport.

Mr. Imbert: I am on D., Sir, Transport and Communication.

Mr. Chairman: You had a question on—

Mr. Imbert: D., yes. That is what I said.

Mr. Chairman: On A.?

Mr. Imbert: On D. You reached quite H. You skipped.

Mr. Chairman: No, no. We are still at A. Laventille East/Morvant, you had a question there?

Mr. Birchwood: Yes, I do. I am seeing new projects here. A/015: Implementation of the Strategic Drainage Action Plan, I am seeing $6.5 million under this new line Item. Could the Minister explain what these new projects will be?

Mr. Chairman: Minister, hang on a second. Member, hold on. I think there might be some cross purposes here. We have not gotten there yet. You all are on 003, and we are still on 11. All right, we will get there now. H. Sea Transport—

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: No, we are getting there to where you want to go. Yes. Thank you very much. What a refreshing thing, an apology from you. 003: Economic

Infrastructure, pages 287 to 288; 11: Other Economic Services; A. Drainage and Irrigation, page 287. Laventille East/Morvant, there you are.

Mr. Birchwood: Thank you, Chair. A./015: Implementation of the Strategic Drainage Action Plan, there is $6,500,000 allotted here, under "New Project". Could the Minister explain what new projects this entails?

Hon. John: All right. Well, it is a prioritized programme of projects that will operate concurrently with and complement the same CAF loan funded programme that I had spoken about for fiscal '27. To be specific, rehabilitation works along Malick River at 154 B, Second Street, Barataria, and that is to reinforce concrete, repair of rubble, masonry, et cetera, hydrometeorological modelling and mapping to improve rainfall and river data, flood models and river mouth maintenance.

These projects include upgrading, gauge networks and developing models for Caroni, Maraval, Couva, Claxton Bay and Sangre Grande; priority surveys and detailed designs to tender for works in the South Oropouche River Basin, the New Cut Channel River and river widening; and the Caroni River Basin embarkment, strengthening and hydraulics in St. Augustine, Spring Village and Caroni; and operational pilot project to improve the collection of floating waste in waterways. That is being specific.

Mr. Birchwood: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. Diego Martin North/ East, you had a question on this?

Mr. Imbert: What happened is I asked and got an answer on a question in this section already.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, great. So, we can move on.

Mr. Imbert: Yeah, yeah, sure.

Mr. Chairman: P. Coastal Protection; D. Roads and Bridges. Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Minister, I noticed on page 288, under Roads and Bridges, Transport and Communication, Sub-Item 260: P.O.S - East/West Corridor Transportation Project, there was an original allocation of $20 million. Now, I have a number of parts to this question. First part, what was the $20million allocation for the East/West Corridor Transportation Project? What was the original allocation intended for? Two, how come the Actual spend was zero on the East/West Corridor Transportation Project in 2026? Three, how come the allocation in 2027 is zero? Four, has the Port of Spain East/West Corridor Transportation Project therefore being abandoned?

Hon. John: Well, hon.Member, we do not like spend what we do not have.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. John: I mean, these are beautiful things to have, eh, and we would probably need them. But you all left billions of dollars' worth of outstanding bills, and $16 million of that was vired to pay for the Solomon Hochoy Highway Extension to Point Fortin. The Ministry of Works and Infrastructure—I think you all ask for another $8.8 millionto undertake some kind of design for one of those interchanges along the East-West Corridor.

Mr. Imbert: Yeah, but Minister, you have not answered question one. What was the $20 million for?

Hon. John: You asked me what the money was spent on.

Mr. Imbert: No. That is questions two, three and four. Question one was, what was the $20 million for?

Hon. John: For design studies for the East/West Corridor Transportation Project.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. So, to continue to design overpasses, interchanges going up towards Macoya, Trincity, Piarco, et cetera. Is that what the $20 million was for?

Hon. John: Yes. But then Government's priorities changed because we realized we had billions of debts on our hands.

Mr. Imbert: And my last question you have not answered. Have you abandoned the East/West Corridor Transportation Project?

Hon. John: I did not say that. I said—

Mr. Imbert: It is zero.

Hon. John: Zero does not mean abandoned. Zero must be just mean delayed.

Mr. Imbert: [*Laughter*] Okay, Mr. Chairman. I have one last thing in this D.—just that and that is it, and no more on Works.

Hon. John: Thank you.

Mr. Imbert: 297—now, Minister, please listen to me carefully. I would try and speak slowly and succinctly. The name of this Item on page 288, under D. Roads and Bridges, Item 297, very interesting name, Pothole Patching, Spot Paving and Sectional Rehabilitation of Critical Roadway Programme. You had $51 million allocated for this, Pothole Patching, Spot Paving and Sectional Rehabilitation of Critical Roadway, you only spent $10 million. That means you did not spend 80 per cent of your allocation for patching potholes. And I now see, in 2027, a zero allocation. Can you explain why you did not spend $41 million on patching potholes and why is there a zero in 2027?

3.00 p.m.

Hon. John: Again, we did not spend the money on contractors, we did it internally.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. John: So it came through. We would have spent on the material, and we use our own staff. Prior to this, you would have had contractors building bigger houses, but what we did is to—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: Houses? Houses? Minister—

Hon. John: But we spent it internally.

Mr. Imbert: Supplementary, Mr. Chairman.

Hon. John: We got our staff to work, and they have been doing very well. Yeah. Yeah.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: Supplementary. Mr. Chairman.

Hon. John: And pothole patching is a one-day job. You buy the material, and now that we have Agua Santa up and running, even that cost will come down.

Mr. Imbert: Supplementary. I heard a reference to houses. I do not know why. This has nothing to do with housing. There was $51 million allocated for patching of potholes, spot paving and sectional rehabilitation, and only $10 million was spent. Was this a deliberate act on the part of the Ministry?

Hon. John: No. Because—

Mr. Imbert: Not to spend this money?

Hon. John: No, what I am saying is we had considerable savings because we did not tender it out. We did this work internally all over the country.

Mr. Chairman: All right I think that is.

Mr. Imbert: The last question—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. John: People—the pothole patching all of the place.

Mr. Imbert: The last question. The last question.

Mr. Chairman: I think ask and answered.

Hon. John: You understand. We bought.

Mr. Imbert: Last question—

Hon. John: The money was used to buy materials.

Mr. Imbert: No problem. Last question. Since the allocation for materials for pothole patching, spot paving and sectional rehabilitation is $1.5 million, how could that replace $41 million in paving and so?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. John: No. Because—

Mr. Imbert: The last one.

Hon. John: You are being facetious, MP. You are being facetious. You know that there is an allocation of $50 million, and we went over that already.

Mr. Imbert: I give up. I give up.

Mr. Chairman: All right, let us move on.

Mr. Imbert: I give up.

Hon. John: "Yuh could Mickey Mouse de thing but you know $50 million has been allocated for that".

Mr. Chairman: G: Road systems Operations and Services. C: Transport.

Hon. John: Yes. That is it.

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Hon. John: Thank you.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 69 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Minister, thank you very much, and thank you very much to your

staff. All right, and we now take an hour's break. Welcome back at 4.00 o'clock. We will suspend, and we will come back at 4.00. Thank you very much.

3.02 p.m.: *Standing Finance Committee suspended*.

4.00p.m.: *Standing Finance Committee resumed*.

[CHAIRMAN: MR. SINGH]

Head 40: Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, $945,801,000

Mr. Chairman: Welcome back. I will now invite the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries to make a brief opening statement, and I need hardly remind him it is confined to five minutes.

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: Thank you, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, it is indeed an honour today to engage with the Standing Finance Committee regarding the budget allocation for the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries for the fiscal year 2026/2027.

This Ministry, Mr. Chairman, has overall responsibility for the management of oil, gas and the mineral sectors in Trinidad and Tobago. These sectors play an important role in the economic growth and development of our country. Today, I am honoured to have on my right the very distinguished Minister in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, the Member for Point Fortin, a man with enormous practical and working experience in this sector, the hon. Ernesto Kesar, and our Permanent Secretary, Mrs. Ava Mahabir-Dass, and our technical support staff. I just want to acknowledge them very early and welcome them and thank them for their involvement.

Mr. Chairman, as the leaders of this sector, our Ministry is steadfast in our commitment to regulate and oversee the sector to ensure that each citizen benefits from the development of the country's resources. The Government, in its

macroeconomic strategy, has identified the energy sector as one of the major pillars in advancing the sustained economic development of our country. The revitalization of this sector has resulted from the adoption of strategic energy policies designed to optimize the development of our mineral resources and our hydrocarbon resources onshore, in shallow water, in deep water, and to provide incentives so that no resources remain stranded.

It is our intention to continue in fiscal 2027, Mr. Chairman. We intend to optimize value from every molecule of gas and barrel of oil. Exploration and development activity has been at its highest in years. Mr. Chairman, this is as a result of investor confidence in this administration. In the coming months, a number of major oil and gas fields from producers including BPTT, EOG and Shell will be coming on stream with peak gas production of approximately 1.2 million cubic feet per day. This does not include the Manatee, which is due to come on stream in late 2027 with a production of 604 scuffs per day. Oil will also receive a major incentive from activities of E.O.G and Heritage, both onshore and in the marine areas.

Last but not least, our engagement with our regional partners, including Barbados, Grenada, Guyana, Suriname and indeed Venezuela, that engagement continues and will lead to potential developments both in Trinidad and Tobago and across our region.

Mr. Chairman, on this note, it is important to note that the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, as we like to say, we are the Ministry that earns money, we do not spend money. So, it is not my intention to detain hon. Members for too long on this wonderful afternoon.

Mr. Young: Hint. Hint.

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: So, Mr. Chairman, may I also indicate that as we go along, depending on the questions and so on, I am most prepared to answer my colleagues, generally opposite. So, I will leave it at that and thank you for your patience.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, hon. Minister.

Question proposed: Head 40: Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, $945,801,000, stands part of the Schedule.

The said sum for Head 40: Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*.

We shall now proceed to consider *the Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. This is to be found, for all Members at page 257. Sub Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, Item 001: General Expenditure. Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

4.05 p.m.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much, Chair. Minister, line Item 01/001/14: Remuneration to Members of Cabinet-Appointed Committees. There was, in 2025, an Actual of $1million, just over a million, $1,050,100, an Estimate of 1.376 in 2026 and 1.040 Revised. How much was spent?

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: One second.

Mr. Young SC: No problem. You are seeing where I am, right? Line Item 14.

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: Yes, of course. Just before I get the number for you, exactly, just to remind the former Prime Minister and Minister that this allocation is to cater for payments, monthly fees and travel allowances to the chairpersons and members

of the following Cabinet-appointed committees. the Minerals Advisory Committee, the Permanent Local Content Committee, and I think the Trinidad and Tobago transparency steering committee as well.

Mr. Young SC: The Transparency Committee or the TTEITI.

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: Extractive.

Mr. Young SC: Extractive, okay.

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: Could I indicate that you had asked specifically how much was spent?

Mr. Young SC: Correct. I asked for 2026.

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: We are informed that it was $996,750.

Mr. Young SC: And the Ministry continues to carry the cost of the Extractive Industries Transparency?

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: Yes, we do.

Mr. Young SC: Okay, that is it under 001.

Mr. Chairman: 002: Goods and Services. 001: General Administration. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much. Minister, under line Item 16, 02/001: Contract Employment at line 16. You had an Estimate of $13.5 million for 2026. I am seeing here a Revised Estimate of $8 million—well let us say $8.9 million. How much was spent for 2026?

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: We have the figure for you here. $8,677,271.

Mr. Young SC: Right, how many vacant contract positions do you currently have?

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: 88 vacant positions.

Mr. Young SC: And in 2027, there is an increase of $1.1million, up to

$10million. Is there an intention to fill those vacancies?

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: Yeah.

Mr. Young SC: Are you intending to advertise the vacancies?

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: And underneath, at line Item 22: Short-term Employment. I see it has been significantly increased. Almost 10 ½ million additional dollars put for Short-term Employment. Why is that? It is the largest Short-term increase in all of the budget.

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: Yes, former Minister. I recognize that as well. It is a significant Short-term increase. I am informed, Minister—you may have more knowledge of this than I do actually—that for years the Ministry of Energy had been engaging persons on service provider arrangements with some persons having service for 10 years and over as service providers. This was raised on many occasions, as you may be aware, by the Auditor General as a case of misappropriation of funds.

Under our leadership, we have corrected this misstep and have transformed these persons into short-term arrangements, hence the increase in the Short-term Vote. Correspondingly, the Other Contracted Services Vote will not be used to pay persons functioning as regular staff. The Ministry is working on ensuring that contract positions are filled, and we are working with the Service Commission to fill establishment positions. So, this will greatly reduce the number of persons that are required in short-term engagements.

Mr. Young SC: So you are saying that because there was a use of service providers previously, because in 2025 under Short-term Employment, which, as you would now be aware, if you were not already, is a very different contractual

arrangement to a service provider. In 2025, it was only $3.2 million. You are now going to spend $14 million, which is a significant increase up from $3 million under Short-term employment. Short-term employment is, of course, less than six months, correct?

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: Finish the question.

Mr. Young SC: That is the question. Let us start with that. Short-term is less than six months, correct?

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: Yes, it is.

Mr. Young SC: And you are saying that, in order to correct an issue that was raised by the Auditor General rather than increase the Contract Employment Vote, you are putting 10 and a half additional million dollars into Short-term?

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: We are advised that this is the proper way to deal with that problem that the Auditor General has flagged—

Mr. Young SC: Advised by whom?

Hon. Dr. Moonilal:—that occurred before April 2025. We also intend to fill the vacant position, 88 I believe they are, of contract positions as well. So that will also take some of the resources.

Mr. Young SC: So, who is it that advised that it is better to have short-term employment?

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: We are being advised on this matter by the leadership in the Ministry, the administrative leadership by the Permanent Secretaries and of course in collaboration with the rules and regulations governing these areas.

Mr. Young SC: Right, and then you said, I think you were referring to line Item 28: Other Contracted Services, correct, when you said that previously there were a number of service providers hired under the Other Contracted Services? Line Item

28.

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: Yeah, I am there now.

Mr. Imbert: So, $150 million was put there by your administration in 2026; $130 million is the Revised Estimate. Can you please tell us who was retained under your administration for $150 million and now revised at $130 million under this Other Contracted Services? What was this used for?

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: I can certainly undertake to give you some more information on that—

Mr. Young SC: In writing.

Hon. Dr. Moonilal:—in the future in writing. But just to indicate that it would have been a lot in the last year or so. Since May 2025 to this date, for better or for worse, we have only employed 17 new workers.

Mr. Young SC: Okay, but Other Contracted Services is not used just for the employment of persons. So, what did you spend $130 million on? "It cah just be the seven or so people you spoke about".

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: You will get the answer.

Mr. Young SC: I will get the answer?

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: That is what you are promising in future in writing?

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: I will commit to looking at the question, discussing it with the staff and replying to you.

Mr. Young SC: But you understand the question?

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: You have spent $130 million under Other Contracted Services, so it is really a particularization of what it was spent on. No further question under

02.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 03—

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: Chairman, please, just to put it in perspective, Other Contracted Services for fiscal '25/2026 the total was $17 million. For fiscal 2026/'27 the new total is 71.

Mr. Young SC: Sorry, for '25 it was how much, 17 or 70?

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: 17, 1-7.

Mr. Young SC: Right.

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: "Yuh there?"

Mr. Young SC: Yeah.

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: It had to do with reimbursement to Heritage Petroleum Company, operational responses on the Tobago oil spill—

Mr. Young SC: Correct.

Hon. Dr. Moonilal:—and so on and re-abandonment works on particular areas in South Trinidad. But the total was $17 million for '25/'26. It is now projected to be $71.6million '26/'27. It has to do with payments—a significant payment on behalf of Petrotrin, which is a part of the legacy items we deal with on an ongoing basis. And it has to do with clean up as well, a smaller sum for clean up. I can, of course, provide that detail—

Hon. Young SC: The breakdown.

Hon. Dr. Moonilal:—if you want.

4.15 pm

Mr. Young SC: So, you are saying that the Ministry is paying $71million this year, with a significant sum towards Petrotrin?

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: Payment on behalf of Petrotrin in some of the loan

arrangements.

Mr. Young SC: Okay. I am finished with 02.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 03; line Item 001: General administration. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 004: International Bodies; 007: Households. Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you. Minister, 007: Households; 01: Shortfall in Subsidy re: Sale of Petroleum Products. I believe this is the line Item that is used to pay the national fuel subsidy, correct?

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: Yes, it is.

Mr. Young SC: And there are payments made by the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries to both NP and UNIPET, reimbursements, because they carry the burden, correct?

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: Correct.

Mr. Young SC: In 2026, I see, originally, it was an Estimate of $300 million. That was revised to $750 million. Out of that $750 million for this fuel subsidy, how much has actually been paid?

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: Minister, as you will be aware, the payments in fiscal 2026, including subsidy payments, generously left by yourself from April2024 to March 2026, those payments, incidentally, amounted to $971 million.

Mr. Young SC: Correct.

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: Correct.

Mr. Young SC: So, there was a $971 million payment—

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: Minister, is there a particular reason you left that payment, if I may ask?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Young SC: Well, because we left office—I see your colleagues banging on the desk, but the point is we left office in April 2025, and that is prior to the end of the fiscal year.

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: But for April 2024, you did not pay, from April 2024.

Mr. Young SC: There were payments being made, but anyway, let us press on. So, you said—

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: Okay—

Mr. Young SC: No. No.

Hon. Dr. Moonilal:—I thank you for taking my questions.

Mr. Young SC: Okay, well, no. Let us do the math then, seeing that you want to open this up. So, you inherited, according to you, in 2024, $971 million, correct? That is what you just told us. The UNC came into Government in May 2025, had a budget in September 2025, and only provided $300 million, when you knew you had an outstanding debt to start within $971 million, and then you want to tell us now, or avoid telling us, rather, how much has been paid for 2026.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Young SC: So, my question is, how much have you paid for 2026?

Mr. Chairman: I think—

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Chairman, it was not my intention to ask the Minister to raise his voice and shout at this time. I thought we were doing fine.

Mr. Young SC: I thought so as well, but when you provoke, you will get the necessary response.

Mr. Chairman: All right.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Young SC: And the question is—because you seem to be struggling to

answer—but the question is, in 2026, how much money has been paid towards the fuel subsidy? Simple.

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: "Mr. Chairman, de Member will do well just tuh cool it. We have de answer. Yuh doh have tuh badger. You doh have tuh be loud. Yuh doh have tuh shout and scream." We have made two payments for April and September 2026: One payment to NP of $544 million, another payment to UNIPET of $206 million, so that is 644, 744 a year, and it is from recurrent, of course. So, we have been paying to NP and UNIPET two payments for April and September2026. So, we have made the payments from the petroleum levy fund and from the recurrent.

Mr. Young SC: And $545million and $206million?

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: Correct—544, sorry.

Mr. Young SC: 544?

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: Yeah.

Mr. Young SC: So that is $740 million that has been paid for fiscal 2026?

Mr. Chairman: 750: 544 and 206.

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: Use the calculator.

Mr. Young SC: 750. So, 750 has been paid. So, you have used the whole amount, correct?

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: Because you were allocated 750.

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: Yes.

Mr. Young SC: How much do you currently owe to NP and how much do you currently owe to UNIPET?

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: I will be happy to look at that for you and get back to you.

Mr. Young SC: Do you know the amounts?

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: I will get the accurate answer for you. "I doh want tuh guess."

Mr. Young SC: I am sure you will. But you must come here; the Ministry must come here knowing, every year we know, how much is the current amount owing. So how much is owing to NP?

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: We will get the figure for you, Member, in due course.

Mr. Young SC: So, is it that the Ministry of Energy has come here not knowing how much is owed to NP and how much is owed to UNIPET?

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: Minister, we will get the figure for you.

Mr. Young SC: So, you do not want the population to know?

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: I will get the figure for you, and we will ensure it is accurate. We will ensure it is accurate and precise; I think your question deserves a proper answer.

Mr. Young SC: Correct. Thank you. When will you get the figure to us?

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: In due course.

Mr. Young SC: You see, there is now a decrease in the amount provided for next year from $750 million to $700 million. So, it is a decrease of $50,000,000.

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: And your questions would be?

Mr. Young SC: I am not finished. Right now, there is a global shortage of diesel. Right now, the prices of these fuels have gone up, and you are telling the country that $700 million is going to be sufficient for the next fiscal when you are owing as well now? So, you are doing the same thing. You are carrying forward debt?

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Chair, please, I am inviting the Member to relax, and I will get the answer for him. In this business, as you are aware, you carry a certain

amount over from one fiscal to another.

Mr. Young SC: "Ohhh, okayy, ahhh." Now, the truth comes out. I am glad.

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: But not $971 million, but I assure you—

Mr. Young SC: Minister, let me ask you this question, under line Item 007/01—

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: Households?

Mr. Young SC: Shortfall in Subsidy re: Sale of Petroleum Products. Is the subsidy that has been provided by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago towards fuels for fiscal 2026 over $1 billion?

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: We will verify that and get back to you.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you very much, Minister.

Mr. Chairman: Item 009: Other Transfers; 001: Transfers to State Enterprises, page 260. Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*, page 110, Consolidated Fund. Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services, page 110; 06: General Public Services; A. Administrative Services; G. Equipment and Vehicles.

Mr. Young SC: No, I had my hand up. I had my hand up.

Mr. Chairman: You were up for?

Mr. Young SC: For A.

Mr. Chairman: For A.? Okay.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you. Minister, the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Initiatives, it went up from $590,000—in 2025 that was the Actual—to $5.3 million in 2026, and the Revised stayed the same. How much was spent under this?

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Chairman, may I just indicate, just for the record, the matter of Renewable Energy has now been transferred to the Ministry of Public

Utilities, and I am sure the relevant Minister will entertain those questions.

Mr. Young SC: But I am asking about 2026, you know, not what was transferred for 20—2027, there is nothing there because it has been transferred. The Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries was responsible for the spend in 2026, as indicated by this book in front of us. So, what was it spent on?

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Chairman, we will undertake to give the Member a response in writing.

Mr. Young SC: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Trincity/Maloney.

4.25 p.m.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, under that same heading G./001: Acquisition of Synthetic Aperture Radar for the Detection of Oil Spills.

Mr. Chairman: We are not on page 110 yet.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Oh, that is the next one?

Mr. Chairman: Yes, it is the next one.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: So, is it okay to go on to that?

Mr. Chairman: Well, once—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: You are going to call it?

Mr. Chairman: I am going to call it now.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Sure.

Mr. Chairman: G. Equipment and Vehicles. Trincity/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. G./001: Acquisition of Synthetic Aperture Radar for the Detection of Oil Spills. I see that there is no allocation there. Has this also been moved to another Ministry?

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: Yeah, Member, it has been moved to the *Recurrent Expenditure*.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: So, it is no longer a project as such?

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: No longer a PSI.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: All right. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Infrastructure Development Fund, page 258. Item 003: Economic Infrastructure; D. Industry. Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: Minister, line Item 11: Dredging of Sea Lots Main Channel and Turning Basin, this was quite an expansive project, and this, of course, is to bring in the fuel to NP in Sea Lots, and it is a very tight turning point. I see there is nothing being provided for 2027. Is there an intention to do any further dredging or any continuation of dredging in 2027, in this particular channel and turning point?

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: Member, I am informed that the project has been completed—

Mr. Young SC: Correct.

Hon. Dr. Moonilal:—and there will be no need at this stage to budget for any further works. But if any occasion arises that we need funding, I am sure the distinguished Minister of Finance will lend us a good ear.

Mr. Young SC: Okay. Minister, might I ask that you maybe have the necessary conversation with the Member for Couva North. I am told that because of the location and the amount of silt that has already come down in this area, they have lost literally a couple of inches that is now preventing the larger tankers from being able to come into the channel and do the turnings, and that increases the cost because, of course, now you are using the smaller vessels for more delivery as

opposed to the larger vessels that could. So, it is just to take a look at that and be aware.

Mr. Chairman: Member, are you through?

Mr. Young SC: Thank you. Yeah.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 40 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Minister, thank you very much, and thank you very much to your hard-working staff.

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Chairman.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. Moonilal: And thank you very much, colleagues.

Mr. Chairman: Whilst we await the Minister, we go into Head 77: Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries.[DR. ALI *in the Chair*]

Head 77: Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries $764,605,700.

Madam Chairman: I now invite the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes.

Hon. Ratiram: Thank you most kindly, Madam Chairman. Madam Chairman, I want to thank you and express a special appreciation to the hon. Prime Minister for affording me this opportunity to serve in the capacity as Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries. Madam Chairman, I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the staff, technical and administrative team of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and all the farmers, fisherfolk, agro-processors and all persons who have contributed to our nation's food security.

Madam Chair, agriculture and fisheries are essential to Trinidad and

Tobago's food security. They diversify our economy, sustain our livelihoods and protect us against shocks from outside. Our task is not simply to produce more food. It is to build a sector that is productive, competitive, technologically advanced and commercially sustainable. Put plainly, our job is to lower the food import bill, raise agriculture's contribution to GDP and grow our export earnings. And as such, Madam Chair, the results are beginning to show that the renewed attention to domestic production is paying off.

In fact, in the first quarter of 2026, real economic activity in agriculture, forestry and fishing grew by 7.8 per cent on a year on year. That reverses the contraction recorded in the preceding quarter and in the corresponding quarter of 2025. Between October 2025 and March 2026, root crop production rose by 22.2 per cent from approximately 3.82 million kilogrammes to 4.67 million kilogrammes.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Ratiram: I can comfortably mention as well that one of the main contributors to this was sweet potato, where we saw an increase from 696,000 kilogrammes to over 2.4 million kilogrammes, an almost 300 per cent increase. Rice production also rose by 34.9 per cent over the comparative period, from 788,000 kilogrammes to over 1.064 million kilogrammes.

Farmers produced those crops, and I thank them most kindly. The Ministry has supported them with high-yielding rice seed through our collaboration with the Guyana Rice Development Board and with drainage and irrigation improvement, mechanization and extension support.

4.35 p.m.

Madam Chair, more production alone is not the goal. A surplus with no

buyer will definitely hurt our farmers. So, increased production must translate into commercial activities for the farming community. That is why value addition and export development are integral to our strategy. I can proudly say that in May 2026, with the support of the hon. Prime Minister and my Cabinet colleagues, we were able to work as a team to inaugurate the Brechin Castle Agro-Processing Facility.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Ratiram: A facility that was abandoned for 10 years. This was a very important milestone in expanding the domestic processing capacity. It gives the surplus produced somewhere to go. In April 2026, another facility, a 300–litre milk pasteurization plant at the Sugarcane Feed Centre, which was also abandoned for 10 years, it became operational with the support of the hon. Prime Minister and her team.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Ratiram: We are also opening new markets for local foods. For the first time, Trinidad and Tobago is exporting table eggs to Barbados. Since October2025, local producers have completed 14 shipments, totalling 8,000,817 cases. That is more than 3million eggs. It followed the Ministry's direct investment to rehabilitate and strengthen our poultry sector.

Madam Chair, in concluding, we remain committed to responsible financial management, operational efficiency and measurable results. Our objective is clear: to grow more of what we eat, strengthen the livelihood of our farmers and fishers, expand value-added production, develop export opportunities and build a more resilient national food system. Production is the farmer's achievement, but turning it into income is this Government's job—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Ratiram:—and we take it seriously. Once again, Madam Chair, thank you very much for this opportunity and thanks again to all the staff at the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Question proposed: That Head 77 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of $764,605,700 for Head 77: Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Head and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of the Recurrent Expenditure*, the *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly* and the *Draft Estimates of the Development Programme*. We shall now consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. Sub-Head 016: Personnel Expenditure, pages 390 to 391; Item 001: General Administration. Member for Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. Hon. Minister, 001/01, there is an increase of some $66million, and your allocation there is just over $113 million. Could you tell us if any portion of that is allocated toward arrears?

Hon. Ratiram: Thank you most kindly, Member, for asking that question and allowing me the opportunity to bring some clarity to this line Item, 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance for the period in question. I must say, Madam Chair, that this line Item is one of the most important line Items in all of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries. It speaks to the most valuable resource, the human resource of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Ratiram: What I want to say about this line Item, Madam Chairman, is that it is so sad that coming into office as the Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries, when we were presented with a ministerial brief, what we met was really a decade of destruction—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Ratiram:—that was peddled on the Agriculture Ministry by the previous administration, where close to 60 per cent vacancies existed throughout that Ministry. What I am—

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Minister, are you going to answer the question or are you giving a speech?

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk.*]

Hon. Ratiram:—if I may bring some light and some context into what is being asked, I will provide you with a full and complete explanation to this line Item, Member.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Ratiram: So, what I want to say about this line Item, is this line Item accounts for 497 positions under General Administration within the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries. Out of that, 264 are filled, and 233 are vacant. I will repeat that, 233 are vacant out of the 497. This is what we would have inherited. There are 99 positions with bodies and 134 without bodies in that vacant pool, and a total of 47 new promotion appointments across the clerical, manipulative and technical stream. So, I want to say a special thank you to the Minister of Public Administration and Artificial Intelligence and the team in the DPA office, in terms of the recruitment in the civil service side of Government, for those 47 new hires. Based on that, the account for the increase will be for the new hires plus the

increases in salaries that our public officers would have received from January 2026.

This Item, also, is something very important, as well because these increases go way back from 2014 to 2019. It accounts for a period from 2014 to 2019, which those on the other side failed to address. What they offered was zero, zero, zero. From my understanding, that is what was being offered during that period of time. However, I am happy to say that the increase will meet the increases in the salaries for the staff at the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Ratiram: Madam Chair, I want to thank the hon. Member for Arima, most kindly, for that question.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Minister, could you say what portion of that money goes toward the increase and whether the entire arrears would be addressed?

Hon. Ratiram: So, thank you once again, most kindly, hon. Member for Arima. I want to say that if we look at the line Item, we will see here that the Actual expenditure for 2025, which is an Actual. It is not an estimated figure. But in 2025, the Actual expenditure would have been $41,175,232. I do not have the cents. But that is the figure.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: "I hear yuh". You should not repeat that, eh, that you do not have the cents. "Doh repeat dat".

Hon. Ratiram: You want me to repeat the figure, hon. Member?

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: No. I said do not repeat that you do not have the cents.

Hon. Ratiram: Yeah. So, we have the exact figure for 2025. What we have here for the increase—it will be—the total Estimate for 2027, which is $113,453,600. So, that is an increase in the allocation here of $66,353,600. I want to say a special

thank you to the hon. Minister of Finance and the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Ratiram:—for providing this increase to the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: So, are you—all I was asking you is what portion of that figure goes toward the arrears? That is all I asked.

Hon. Ratiram: The increase?

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yes.

Hon. Ratiram: In the increase, it will cater for the hire of the 47 new persons that would have been brought on staff and the difference—

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Which amounts to what figure?

Hon. Ratiram:—do you want me to give you a call out of the 47 new hires?

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: No. I did not ask—

Hon. Ratiram: I have that for you. I could provide you with the names—

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson:—I asked what portion of—

Hon. Ratiram:—well, the positions.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson:—all I am asking you is the figure. Why is that so hard?

Hon. Ratiram: So, it will involve a little mathematical calculation here, hon. Member. That all we have to do is deduct the salaries that will be paid for the new hires.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: I know you will have to do it.

Hon. Ratiram: The balances would go towards payment for the increases.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Minister, all I am asking you, do you have a—I understand all what is involved. Do you have a figure? What is the figure?

Hon. Ratiram: Of course, hon. Member.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Well, could you give it to me?

Hon. Ratiram: The figure is in front of you, and the figure is in front of me. If it is that you can do the maths—

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: You said a portion of that goes to the arrears.

Hon. Ratiram:—you will see for yourself what we have here in front of us.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: "Allyuh pound de desk and he eh answer de question".

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Pound it. Pound it harder.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Minister, could you indicate, of the 233 vacant, how many of those would be public service positions? How many are contract? How many are public service?

Hon. Ratiram: Madam Chair, I have to pause for a moment here because I really expected the hon. Member, who also serves in the position as Leader of the Opposition, to know better with respect to with this line Item.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Could you answer the question and stop making and talking a lot of foolishness?

Mr. Marcelle: "You feel you in La La Land, awah"?

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: All I am asking you, you said there are—

Hon. Ratiram: May I finish?

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson:—233 vacant positions. Of those 233, how much are from the public service?

Hon. Ratiram: Oh my gosh.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: "Why da' is so hard"?

Hon. Ratiram: Oh my gosh. Madam Chair—

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: You gave a whole breakdown.

Hon. Ratiram:—may I answer the question?

Mr. Imbert: Yes.

Mr. Marcelle: "Yeah. Yuh could answer de question, hopefully".

Hon. Ratiram: Thank you most kindly, Ma'am for asking me such questions, so I can shed some light and maybe edify you a little in terms of—

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: "Edify yuhself".

Hon. Ratiram:—this line Item.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: This is about asking questions.

Hon. Ratiram: This line Item for Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance is for the monthly-paid staff that are under the Service Commission. So, to answer your question, all, all, all of these 233 vacant positions will all be under the Service Commission.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay. Can you tell—

Hon. Ratiram: I expect that the hon. Member will know that, having served as a previous Minister and who would have also been responsible for treating and dealing with the line Item—

Mr. Marcelle: "Nobody come here for yuh lecture, Ravi".

Hon. Ratiram:—01/001/01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. I expect after having to answer to these questions—

Mr. Marcelle: "Nobody come here for yuh lecture".

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Doh worry. "I have de whole"—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Ratiram:—for more than—

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson:—I have until eight o'clock, you know. I have until eight o'clock. So you continue.

Mr. Gonzales: Answer the question.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: No. But I expect better than that from you. You continue talking rubbish.

Hon. Member: It is a simple thing.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Minister, could you provide us with the list of the 233 outstanding positions in writing? I do not need that today. "But de way yuh talking, yuh might be able to read that off now".

Hon. Ratiram: Yes. We have the information.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yes.

Hon. Ratiram: We can call them out for you.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: I do not want you to call out 233 positions. I simply want you to provide it.

Mr. Gonzales: "Yuh could do it in Spanish".

Hon. Ratiram: That is fine. We can provide that for you, hon. Member.

Mr. Gonzales: Can you do it in Spanish?

Hon. Ratiram: You can get it in French, in Latin, in any language you want it, Member for Arouca/Lopinot.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk and laughter*]

Madam Chairman: Diego Martin West, was your hand up or? Okay. Item: 002 Agriculture, Item 003: Animal Production and Health.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Ma'am, my hand was up.

Madam Chairman: My apologies. Item 002 or—?

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yes. Item 002, there is an increase of some $29 million. Could the hon. Minister indicate exactly what would that be for? I see it is COLA and—

Hon. Ratiram: The line Item, please.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson:—yeah. Item 002.

Hon. Ratiram: No. There is no line Item 002.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yeah.

Hon. Ratiram: That is the Sub-Head.

Mr. Marcelle: Can you wait?

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Wages and COLA—we are under 01/001/02: Wages and COLA (Including Leave Pay). What accounts for the increase of Wages and COLA?

Hon. Ratiram: Thank you, once again, most kindly, hon. Member for that question and allowing me the opportunity to shed some information in the public space of the wonderful work that the Ministry of Finance and the team have been doing to help our workers, who would have been abandoned by the last side for the last 10 years, exposed to the decade of destruction to the agriculture sector.

What we see happening under 02: Wages and Cost of Living Allowance (Including Leave Pay), we see an increase in this line Item of $25,016,800. This line Item under Wages and Cost of Living: General Administration, it accounts for the human resource on the daily-rated staff. In the Ministry of Agriculture and

Fisheries, again, under ASD, Agricultural Services Division that deals with regional—that would be regional administration north, south, the extension officers who go out and meet the farmers. It deals with the research section, and so on. We have 1,114 permanent daily-rated positions there.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Ratiram: That is the position. However, the sad spectacle that we faced is that, in terms of positions being filled, we had only 682 positions that were filled. Out of those positions that existed, 432 were vacant. That is very unfortunate. So, what I can tell the hon. Member is that the increase that we have here will account for the increase as a result of the collective agreement between the NUGFW and the Government, for the period of 2014 to 2019. So, there will be increases in wages and cost of living allowances for those 682—

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Minister, could you—

Hon. Ratiram:—filled positions.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson:—okay.

Hon. Ratiram: That is what that increase will account for.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: All right. Could you tell us what portion would be for COLA and what would be for wages and salaries, please?

Hon. Ratiram: Just one moment. Let me see if it is that the technical team has information at hand.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Oh. I thought you had everything.

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

Hon. Ratiram: I do not have the specific calculation for that.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: "De way yuh getting on, you ha' everything".

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

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: "All of ah sudden. All of ah sudden. Yuh answering what ah did not ask yuh".

Hon. Ratiram: [*Confers with technocrat*]

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: "All dat time"? [*Vocalizes Jeopardy theme music*]

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: "Pack ah stupidness".

Hon. Ratiram: [*Continues to confer with technocrat*] Unfortunately, Member, the information is not broken down—

Hon. Members: "Awwwwww".

Hon. Ratiram:—and it is not available at this point in time. However, I will tell you—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Gonzales: Incompetent!

Hon. Ratiram:—I will tell you that while you celebrate, the percentage will be the same as what it would have been.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: I mean—

Hon. Ratiram: It would have been the same—

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson:—Minister, could we move on?

Hon. Ratiram:—and it can be provided for you in writing.

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

Hon. Ratiram: It is not a new formula.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: "Lord, boy. Geez".

Mr. Gonzales: Say it in Spanish.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Hon. Ratiram: It is not a new formula.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Chairman: Item 003: Animal Production and Health. Member for Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Madam Chair, I would like to—the next Item would be 05, which is Government's Contribution to NIS. Madam Chairman, I could proceed?

Madam Chairman: Yeah.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you. Minister, could you tell us whether this allocation incorporated the anticipated increase in NIS contribution for 2027?

Hon. Ratiram: Yes.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yes?

Hon. Ratiram: I am happy to report, Member, that our very responsible Minister of Finance and the team at the Ministry of Finance did, in fact, take those things into consideration.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Your technical people just told you that. "Yuh did not know before".

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk and laughter*]

Madam Chairman: Item 004: Horticulture. Member for Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Madam Chairman, I will be under 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. Next Item.

Madam Chairman: Horticulture, 04/01.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yes. Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance; increase $472 million.

Madam Chairman: Member, we are on page 392.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Madam Chairman, I was under—we are still under Item of Personnel Expenditure? Are we finished with all of that?

Madam Chairman: No. We are on item 004: Horticulture.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay, fine. That is fine.

5.05 p.m.

Mr. Young SC: Well, I am seeing the short-term. So out of 80 that were originally on contract, you now have 71. You say, out of those nine that did not continue, some transferred to the TTPS, and you are saying some went to short-term?

Hon. Ratiram: That is correct.

Mr. Young SC: How many went to short-term?

Hon. Ratiram: [*Minister confers with technocrat*] So the information being presented by the technical team is that the figure at the beginning was not 80, I stand corrected, it is 90. So from 90, what happened out of that 90, 16 would have transitioned into short-term, and when you work the math, we have 71 on contract, which would mean approximately three may have transitioned to the TTPS.

Mr. Young SC: Okay. So we started off with 71, we then had a correction to 80. When we started to do the math, we were told some transitioned to the TTPS and some did not make it. We now gone to 90, are you sure it was 90?

Hon. Ratiram: That is the information that has just been presented to me by the technical officer.

Mr. Young SC: So 90, so we had 90 SRPs in the Praedial Larceny Squad, we now have 71; 16 have gone to short-term, why would you move TTPS SRP officers who were previously on contract to short-term contract?

Hon. Ratiram: That would be if it is the life of the contract would have expired. So you cannot issue a new contract, but you want to keep the officers to keep the squad operational, we afford them—we utilize another Vote to utilize short-term

employment, until we take the Note to Cabinet and get the Cabinet approval for the life of the contract to be extended.

Mr. Young SC: And you say three officers were not renewed?

Hon. Ratiram: No, three officers may have transitioned to the TTPS.

Mr. Young SC: So it is now, "may have transitioned to the TTPS". You see, because my information is that specific instructions were given not to renew the contract of certain officers. Do you know anything about that?

Hon. Ratiram: Well, if you want to elaborate a little more on the information you have.

Mr. Young SC: No, I am asking if you know anything about instructions being given not to renew the contracts of specific officers.

Hon. Ratiram: That instruction would have been given by whom?

Mr. Young SC: I am asking if you know. It is either, yes, you know or, no, you do not know.

Hon. Ratiram: Well, what I know is the information that would have been presented in terms of the number of persons that would have been hired, the number that was retained, and we have three officers that may have transitioned to the TTPS.

Mr. Young SC: Did you give any instructions to the PS not to renew contracts?

Hon. Ratiram: The Minister does not get involved in these types of matters.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Young SC: "You gone" to the third person, I am asking if you gave instructions.

Hon. Ratiram: Sorry?

Mr. Young SC: You have gone to a third person, I do not know who the third

person is; I am asking if you gave instructions not to renew contracts.

Hon. Ratiram: So, Minister, you would have served in the capacity as a Minister and you will know—well, I will expect that you will know the do's and don'ts, and I do not know if you used to give instructions along those lines, but what I can tell you is that in terms of this Minister—

Mr. Young SC: What I can tell Trinidad and Tobago is I am very different to you.

Madam Chairman: Member, do you have a question?

Mr. Young SC: So how you would operate in office, you would never operate as cleanly as I do.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Ratiram: Thank you—

Madam Chairman: Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, do you have a question?

Hon. Ratiram: Thank you for that, Minister. I am very happy to endorse what you have just said there, that you are very different to me—

Mr. Young SC: I would imagine so, because I never gave any instructions where you gave instructions to—[*Inaudible*]

Hon. Ratiram:—because what I can tell you is that under your watch, where praedial larceny was one the number one issue affecting farmers—

Mr. Young SC: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Chairman: Member for Laventille West.

Hon. Ratiram: Madam Chair, I would like to—

Madam Chairman: Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, would you allow your colleague to ask a question or do you wish to continue?

Hon. Member: The Minister is still speaking.

Madam Chairman: Member for Laventille West.

Hon. Ratiram: Madam Chair, I would like to—

Mr. Marcelle: Thank you very kindly, Madam Chair. Line Item 011/05/22: Short-term Employment, you indicated, hon. Minister, that there were some transfers of the officers who were on contract to short-term. I am seeing an original allocation in terms of short-term employment Actual spend in 2025 to be $748,000. That was later reduced in 2026 to an Estimate of $670,000. However, there was a further reduction in terms of the Revised Estimate to $380,000. So the first thing I want to ask is, in 2026, what was the Actual spend from those Revised Estimates in 2026 under the short-term Vote?

Hon. Ratiram: Thank you, most kindly, Member, for asking that question and for allowing us to shed a little more light on what has happened under the Praedial Larceny Unit. I want to firstly take this opportunity, Madam Chair, to congratulate and to thank the praedial larceny officers—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Ratiram:—for the work that they have been doing, not just to the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, but, more so, for re-establishing confidence in the squad and for supporting our farmers. Madam Chair, with the strategy that has been deployed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, we have seen a significant reduction in praedial larceny occurrences. When we came in, as a matter of fact, we had a Praedial Larceny Squad that was operating with one vehicle. One vehicle for all of Trinidad and Tobago, one patrol vehicle, and we have been able to get the vehicles in the Praedial Larceny Squad up. Along with the support—

Mr. Marcelle: Madam Chair—

Hon. Ratiram:—of the Minister of Finance, these officers, whether they are on

short-term or whether they are on contract, they were just static. They were assigned patrol duties but they were not given the resources. When we got the support from the Minister of Finance to get these vehicles repaired and also to purchase two new vehicles, we moved the fleet from one to nine vehicles now for the Praedial Larceny Squad.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Ratiram: I am happy to report, in terms of farm visits, the Praedial Larceny Squad—

Mr. Marcelle: Madam Chairman, with all due respect—

Hon. Ratiram:—farm visits have doubled from—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Marcelle:—with all due respect—

Madam Chairman: Let us allow the Member to finish his answer.

Mr. Marcelle: Madam Chair, if I may just on a point of—

Madam Chairman: Allow the Minister to answer his question, please.

Mr. Marcelle: On a point of—

Madam Chairman: Member, allow the Minister to answer the question, thereafter, you may ask any other questions that you have. Minister.

Hon. Ratiram: Yes. So, what I was saying before I was interrupted by the Member, who asked the question before I could give him a full answer to the question, you know, they on that side, they do not want to hear of the decade of destruction that the PNM put the agricultural sector.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Ratiram: But our function here is to account to the population, and to share with the population how it is agriculture was neglected by the PNM.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Ratiram: So I am happy for the question, and I am happy to share the information with the public, because, you see, we cannot expect to run a Praedial Larceny Squad with only one patrol vehicle. That is why we could boast that we have now nine patrol vehicles.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Ratiram: We could boast the amount of farm visits to over 62,000 farm visits in this year, providing resources to our Praedial Larceny Squad. Resources bring results, Madam Chair, and we are happy that we have been able to. But I will just go back to line Item 22: Short-term Employment, to let the hon. Member know that the Actual spend for this line Item, for this fiscal term, is $659,127, very close to what the Estimate would have been in 2026.

Mr. Marcelle: Same line Item, how many employees were employed under this short-term Vote in terms of the 659,000 that was spent in 2026?

5.15 p.m.

Hon. Ratiram: So, thank you most kindly once again, Member, for that question. It allows me the opportunity to repeat what has already been said. Perhaps maybe you were not paying attention. But if you do pay attention, you would recognize that this question was asked previously, and I did in fact share with the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West that under this line Item, 16 officers are currently under Short-term Employment. So that $659,000 would account for those officers there.

Mr. Marcelle: Madam Deputy Chair, my colleague asked on line Item 16, in relation to how many officers were transferred and kept there. So, I am just clarifying—

Hon. Ratiram: We were dealing with both.

Mr. Marcelle: If I may, hon. Minister? I am just asking, in light of on the 16 transferred short-term employees, whether that is all of the short-term employees that were transferred and being paid from that Vote.

Hon. Ratiram: Yes, it remained at 16. It remained at 16.

Mr. Marcelle: All right. I am seeing a 2027 Estimate going down—since you spent $659,000 in 2026, in this fiscal year, you have been allocated $200,000, more than $459,000 less in this fiscal year. Can you indicate how this will affect your short-term employees in fiscal year 2027?

Hon. Ratiram: Of course. What it would in fact do, based on this allocation—"short-term employees" means "supposed to be for a short term". It should not be for a long term. It should be for a short term. We are moving towards getting the life of the contract extended, so that once there is life in the contract provided and approved by the Cabinet, we can then move away from short-term into long-term contracts for the employees. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Trincity/Maloney.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. I just wanted to find out from the Minister, seeing that he gave us this information, how many arrests have been made by the Predial Larceny Squad?

Hon. Ratiram: Thank you most kindly once again, Member, for asking that question to allow me the opportunity to share with the public the kind of work that the Predial Larceny Squad has been doing. And I see the Member for Arima smiling and shaking her head because she agrees that the Predial Larceny Squad has been outside—as they say, "We outside," well, the Predial Larceny Squad officers are outside.

And out of the 60,000 farm visits, I can comfortably tell you that we have

had 21 arrests during the period. We have had some convictions as well. I think it might be in the vicinity of around six convictions out of that. So, persons who would have been involved in foolishness outside there are to take note that the Predial Larceny Squad no longer has one vehicle, they have nine vehicles. They are no longer sitting down in the station without the ability to patrol, they are outside patrolling the areas. And we also have the support of the Minister of Finance and the Cabinet, so that we will soon be introducing drone surveillance and an air support unit to support the Predial Larceny Squad—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Ratiram:—where we will be using the technology to enhance the agricultural sector. And that is also going to assist and support our Predial Larceny Squad in improving the efficiency of operations. Thank you most kindly, Chair.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Minister, I am happy to hear of the successes of the Predial Larceny Squad in making all of these arrests. My question—this is a follow-up to my colleague from Trincity/Maloney—is whether or not some of those arrests that have been made by the Predial Larceny Squad involved unregistered migrants who may have invaded people's farms and fields, and stolen their vegetables and crops?

Hon. Ratiram: Which line Item are you basing your question on?

Mr. Gonzales: The same line Item.

Hon. Ratiram: Which line Item, Member?

Mr. Gonzales: The same line Item.

Hon. Ratiram: Can you say which line Item?

Mr. Gonzales: It is a follow-up question from my colleague.

Madam Chairman: Member, Member, for clarification—

Mr. Gonzales: It is a follow-up question from my colleague Trincity/Maloney.

Madam Chairman: For clarification, Member for Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Gonzales: Short-term Employment.

Madam Chairman:—please identify the line Item.

Mr. Gonzales: It is Short-term Employment.

Madam Chairman: Which line Item, Member? We all have books in front of us. Please identify the line Item.

Mr. Gonzales: Madam Chair, I said, I want to ask a supplemental question from my colleague—

Madam Chairman: Okay. In order to ask a supplemental, you must know what line Item you are on.

Mr. Gonzales: Line Item 22: Short-term Employment. Thank you. How many relate to unregistered migrants? Because we have a problem with unregistered migrants who are invading and harassing our farmers.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Gonzales: How many of them?

Hon. Ratiram: Well, maybe Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West did not complete his task that you all would have assigned to him with respect to the registration.

Mr. Gonzales: Should I ask the question to the Member for Tunapuna?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Ratiram: However, to answer your question, Member, the answer is yes. The answer is yes.

Mr. Gonzales: Okay, thank you. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 012: Occupational Health and Safety. Member for Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Under Item 13, would you say that the allocation of $50,000 is sufficient for the maintenance of the nine vehicles?

Hon. Ratiram: Member, if you were paying attention, you would recognize that we have moved on to Occupational Health and Safety, 012.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: How many vehicles do you have?

Hon. Ratiram: So, it is not—so, I think the nine vehicles will be related to Predial Larceny.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay. So how many vehicles do you have under Occupational Health and Safety?

Hon. Ratiram: That is much better, Member.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Do you have any?

Mr. Imbert: What kind of thing is that? She is asking you about vehicles—

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: I am not going to go down the road you are going, you know. You can continue if you want to go down that road.

Hon. Ratiram: So, in answering your question, Member, the Occupational Health and Safety unit does not have any specifically assigned vehicle to the unit. They work under the general administration—they are supported by the general administration of the Head Office—Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries—and if at any point in time, they require vehicles to go to any out stations, they receive the support from the general administration unit.

Mr. Imbert: Same line Item 13.

Madam Chairman: Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you. same line Item 13. So, the Minister is telling us that this

unit or division does not have any vehicles. If that is true, then why is there an Item 13 for Maintenance of Vehicles under this unit or division?

Hon. Ratiram: Because this is what we inherited.

Mr. Imbert: What?

Hon. Ratiram: This is what we inherited from the previous administration, a unit without any vehicles. But we do not intend to leave it like that. You see, we are here to fix it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Ratiram: While the former, former Minister of Finance would have had the OSH unit at the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries without vehicles, in going forward, we are looking forward, in fiscal year 2027, that reassignment resources can be executed, so that the OSH unit will in fact have vehicles assigned in moving forward. And as of such, we have to put preventative maintenance programmes in place. We cannot allow the vehicles to rot and turn into a graveyard like what the previous administration would have also created. So, as of such, this year will take into account the plans for 2027.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you very much. Supplementary question: Since the Minister said that there were no vehicles here, what was the allocation of $91,000 in fiscal 2026? For imaginary vehicles? You have an allocation of $91,000 to maintain vehicles, but you said that there were none.

Hon. Ratiram: Sorry. Can you repeat the question?

Mr. Imbert: There is an allocation under Sub-Item 13 for the Maintenance of Vehicles in the Occupational Health and Safety unit or department, as the case may be, of $91,000. The Minister said that there were no vehicles. Were you maintaining imaginary vehicles with this $91,000?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Ratiram: So, thank you once again for affording me the opportunity to share some more information to your good self and the viewing public. What I can tell you is that in 2026, we had an Estimate of $92,000.

Mr. Imbert: Yes.

Hon. Ratiram: You will see the Revised Estimate is zero.

Mr. Imbert: Yes.

Hon. Ratiram: And that is because the $92,000 was transferred to another line Item.

Mr. Imbert: "I did not ask yuh dat. I eh reach there yet". That is the next column. I am simply on the $91,000 or $92,000. Was that for the maintenance of imaginary vehicles? Because you said that there were not any.

Madam Chairman: The Member is providing the answer. Please allow him to do so.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, I will on the next column—[*Inaudible*]

Madam Chairman: Okay, but allow the Minister to answer what you have asked.

Mr. Imbert: But he is answering a question—

5.25 p.m.

Hon. Ratiram: Member, if when you were Minister of Finance, you used to maintain imaginary vehicles, we do not do that anymore.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: So, no. Hold on, hold on. That is not an answer to my question. The question is, there is an allocation for Maintenance of Vehicles, you said there were no vehicles, so was that for imaginary vehicles?

Hon. Ratiram: Member, the allocation for last fiscal was transferred to another

line Item.

Mr. Imbert: I got that. I got that.

Hon. Ratiram: You will see in 2027, there is a reduction in the allocation from 2026, from $92,000 down to $50,000.

Mr. Imbert: Okay.

Hon. Ratiram: This $50,000—

Mr. Imbert: Okay. No problem.

Hon. Ratiram:—as I indicated earlier, it will be utilized for the Maintenance of Vehicles once the asset has been transferred from other parts of the Ministry to the Occupational Health and Safety Unit.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: Alright. So that is not an imaginary vehicle, like the ones in '26?

Hon. Ratiram: No, it has no imaginary vehicles—

Madam Chairman: Member for Arima.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. No problem.

Hon. Ratiram:—like what you used to maintain.

Mr. Imbert: Okay, okay, fine. Thank you.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yes, Minister, under line Item 16: Contract Employment. Again, can you indicate how many positions currently exist? How many have been filled? And how many are expected to be filled in 2027, number 16.

Hon. Ratiram: Line Item16.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yes, please.

Hon. Ratiram: So, what I can tell you for the Occupational Health and Safety Unit, is that the unit would comprise of the following positions, one director, one

senior officer, four OSH officers, four OSH assistants and one Business Operations Assistant.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: All those positions have bodies? Are there any positions to be filled, or is that the extent of the unit?

Hon. Ratiram: So, at this time the—[*Member confers with technocrat*] they are all on short-term at this time.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay, so all—

Hon. Ratiram: This is to be executed for 2027.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: 2027.

Hon. Ratiram: Yes.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay, so those are all vacant positions, then? You said, to be executed.

Hon. Ratiram: At this time, the contracts are vacant.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: So those positions are to be advertised?

Hon. Ratiram: Of course, of course.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: And that would be both newspapers and your website in the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries?

Hon. Ratiram: Well, it would be advertised to the public.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: And you do not have an idea where? EmployTT, what would you be using to do the advertisement?

Hon. Ratiram: So I would not be putting out the advertisement, it would be the Ministry. The recruitment exercise, the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry will execute accordingly. There is a standard procedure for filling contract employment across all Ministries and I believe that our Permanent Secretary will observe the recruitment process that is required.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Well, Minister, if you say there is a standard procedure, then I would expect that you will be able to share with us the standard procedure, that is all I was asking.

Hon. Ratiram: It is the same while you have been in office, there have not been any changes.

Madam Chairman: [*Inaudible*]

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: I am under the same Head.

Madam Chairman: My apologies. Member Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Could the Minister indicate at 28, what is Other Contracted Services?

Hon. Ratiram: Thank you. Thank you most kindly, Madam Member, for that question. Under this line Item: Other Contracted Services, it would include air quality testing, servicing and maintenance of fire extinguishers and fire alarm system, occupational health surveillance monitoring, and other technical services required to identify and control workplace hazards and promote compliance with the occupational safety and health requirements across the entire Ministry.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, pages 403 to 405; Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Agriculture; Item 003: Animal Production and Health; Item 004: Horticulture; Item 006: Surveys & Mappings, transferred to Ministry of Land and Legal Affairs, Item 008: Fisheries; Item 010: Forestry; Item 011: Praedial Larceny Squad; Item 012: Occupational Health and Safety.

Moving on to Sub-Head 04: Current transfers and Subsidies, pages 406 to 409; Item 002: Commonwealth Bodies; Item 003: United Nations Organisations;

Item 005: Non-Profit Institutions; Item 007: Households; Item 008: Subsidies. Member for Arima, which Item, Households or Subsidies?

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Subsidies.

Madam Chairman: Sure.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: 01: Agricultural Incentive Programme, $13 million. Can the hon. Minister indicate how many individuals were in receipt of the Agricultural Incentives for 2026 and can I receive a written breakdown with the categories of incentives and the amounts distributed? Can the hon. Minister indicate what the value of the application for the Incentive 2026 was? How many persons are anticipated to receive incentives in 2027? And is the Minister of the view that it is sufficient to cover the cost of all applications? Thank you.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: "Nah." The Minister—

Hon. Ratiram: Thank you.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: I am sure the Minister knows, it is not anything complicated but—

Hon. Ratiram: So, Madam Chair, this line Item 01: Agricultural Incentive Programme. It is the programme where the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries provides support to members of our farming and fishing community. [*Member confers with technocrat*] For the benefit of the viewing population, I will use this opportunity to share with the country some of the benefits that this line Item facilitates.

The incentives for vehicles: new wheel tractor, 20 per cent of the cost of the wheel tractor up to a maximum of $50,000 is made available to the farmer. For used, refurbished wheel tractors, 20 per cent of the cost up to a maximum of

$25,000 is available to the farmer. For new four-wheel drive pickup, light goods vehicles, or panel vans, 20 per cent of the cost of the vehicle up to a maximum of $40,000 is available for the farmer. For used four-wheel drive pickup, light goods vehicles, or panel vans, 20 per cent of the cost up to a maximum of $30,000 is made available to the farmer. For new two-wheel drive pickup or light goods vehicles or panel van, 20 per cent of the cost of the vehicle up to a maximum of $25,000 is made available to the farmer. And for used two-wheel drive pickup or light goods and panel van, 20 per cent of the cost up to a maximum of $20,000.

The incentives for water for agriculture, the cost of building ponds. The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries provides a rebate for our farmers to the tune of 75 per cent of the cost of the civil works, the infrastructural works, for the building of the pond, up to a maximum of $24,000. The cost for establishing ponds, wells and dams, 25 per cent of the cost, up to a maximum of $30,000.

It is a lot, hon. Member, so I can provide this to you in writing and this information, I will comfortably say that it will be posted on our Facebook page, so that all farmers, all members of the viewing audience can go and see exactly how much incentives, how much support—that the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries is working with our farmers. It treated areas like land preparation, machinery and equipment, agricultural limestone per hectare based on the acidity of the soil. We have to introduce limestone to help our farmers. We have a lot of acidic soil across the country. For soil conservation, contour drains and so forth, storm drains, contour banking, we provide support for those things. Also in terms of crops—

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Minister, is that—that is what you are going to—

Hon. Ratiram: It is all related to this programme—

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: I know, but that is what you are going to be submitting?

Hon. Ratiram:—and this line Item.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: You said you are going to submit it.

5.35 p.m.

Hon. Ratiram: I am going to publish it on our social media platforms.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: No, that is fine. I am fine with that.

Hon. Ratiram: So, the details will be there. I am just sharing with you some of the other areas as well in terms of integrated pest management, post-harvest and marketing, for packaging of materials, security in terms of investment into praedial larceny initiative by the farmer himself/herself, for security systems. We provide 50 per cent of the cost to a maximum of 30,000 and for like fencing of the farmland and pastures, et cetera, we provide support there.

I am very happy to say that for the fiscal period of 2026, the Actual expenditure was $19,608,280 made available to farmers across Trinidad and Tobago. This was paid out to 2,985 farmers, 1,961 from the regional administrative north district, and 1,024 from the regional administration south. So, I would also say, in terms of going forward, we have an average of over 22,000 farmers in the north who are registered, and approximately 10,000 who are registered in the south. As for unregistered farmers, we also have about one-third of that being unregistered, and the support will continue to exist in fiscal 2027, so that our farmers can benefit from the programme that we have in place to provide support for them.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Right, so, Minister, I had asked earlier if you could provide the list and it can be sent in writing.

Hon. Ratiram: That can be provided, Member.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: And the other thing is that, are there any new incentives that you are providing this year?

Hon. Ratiram: In terms of new incentives, hold one moment please, let me just speak to the technical officer. So, there are some proposed compassionate grants that we are considering at this point in time, however, we will require the support of the Cabinet, so, I will not make any further announcement, but to answer your question, the intention of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries is definitely to expand this, but we will require the additional support.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Sure. But in terms of what you have existing and what you had last year, for now it is the same and you are looking to see if you can add anything. That is what you are saying, basically?

Hon. Ratiram: We are looking to add more to it.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Sure.

Madam Chairman: Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: That same Item, Subsidies, how does one qualify for these subsidies and how does one apply? What are the criteria?

Hon. Ratiram: So, this incentive, as I indicated, would be for all our registered farmers out there. They can apply for this through their county office by submitting their bills to the county office, and it is verified at the county office level, and it is processed then submitted to the Ministry, where the Ministry itself will prepare the necessary cheques.

Mr. Imbert: Every farmer is eligible?

Hon. Ratiram: Every registered farmer is eligible, yes.

Mr. Imbert: "Yuh doh need ah UNC party card? Yuh doh need tuh have ah UNC party card?"

Madam Chairman: No need for that comment.

Hon. Ratiram: They do not need a party card anymore. If they needed a party card under the previous administration they do not need party cards anymore, it is for all the farmers.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Chairman: Member for Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you kindly. Hon. Minister, there is an Incentive Programme, 02, can you indicate what is the difference between the Incentive Programme and the Agricultural Incentive Programme, please?

Hon. Ratiram: Sure. This Incentive Programme 02, hon. Member provides support for members of the fishing community.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Fishing community. Thank you. And, in relation to the Forestry Incentive Programme, which is 03, is that just for Forestry as well?

Hon. Ratiram: Again, yes, this is related to forestry.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay, fine.

Hon. Ratiram: And for fiscal 2026 the Actual expenditure for that line Item would be $135,109.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you kindly. Minister, under 04, which was Relief of Flood Damage, could the hon. Minister provide us with the list of persons who received grants under this programme? How many were disbursed in the 2026, and an idea, of course, of the anticipated amount for 2027? Bearing in mind of course that we are in the El Niño period. Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Ratiram: Member, I want say, thank you very much for asking on line Item

04: Relief of Flood Damage to afford me the opportunity to say a special thank you to the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government and also Minister of Works and Infrastructure.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Ratiram: Under this line Item the Actual expenditure for 2025 would have been $2.7 million and before that it was in the vicinity of millions. You know why? Because farmers were being flooded out across the entire—

Ms. Beckles-Robinson: Minister, could you just answer the question?

Hon. Ratiram: Can I finish please?

Ms. Beckles-Robinson: I am not asking you all of those things.

Hon. Ratiram: May I finish, please? May I finish, please? You may not want to hear this, but I think the public needs to hear—

Ms. Beckles-Robinson: "Is not a question what I want to hear."

Hon. Ratiram: Member, may I finish please?

Ms. Beckles-Robinson: I hope you have the list to provide.

Hon. Ratiram: So, while you may not want to hear this, it is important for the public to understand the decade of destruction that the agriculture sector faced—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Ratiram:—under your administration, because millions had to be paid out for flood relief. In 2025, it is in front of us here that $2.7 million was paid out, and that is because these agriculture watercourses, these channels, they were abandoned by the PNM, they were not being cleaned. And I am so happy that the Minister of Works and Infrastructure, Minister of Rural and Development and Local Government, and the engineering team, and the technical team in the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries have been working hand in hand to reduce

the flooding that farmers would have incurred.

Ms. Beckles-Robinson: So, why is the figure less? Why is the figure less?

Hon. Ratiram: So, what I can tell you is that the Actual expenditure for fiscal 2026 is $649,322, yes, it is a lot less because less farmers would have experienced flood damages.

Ms. Beckles-Robinson: I hope the farmers are listening.

Hon. Ratiram: And I hope so too, for farmers to be listening to the decades of destruction that they would have faced under the previous administration, and that is why we are working hand in hand with our farmers. Our equipment from the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries is right now down in Cunjal, completing works, and cleaning water courses. They would have completed Aranguez, we have worked with the Orange Grove farmers; we have worked with Plum Mitan farmers, we have worked with the Jerningham Junction farmers; and we have been working in collaboration with the Farming Association.

Across the country, we are talking about close to 60/65 farming associations that continue to collaborate with the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries identifying these watercourses that were abandoned by your administration—

Ms. Beckles-Robinson: Are you going to provide the list? Are you going to provide the list?

Hon. Ratiram:—to ensure that it is now being cleaned.

Ms. Beckles-Robinson: You are saying a lot of things.

Hon. Ratiram: And to answer your question, yes, we have the list—

Ms. Beckles-Robinson: And when would you be providing the list?

Hon. Ratiram:—a complete breakdown here, I can call out all the names of all the farmers who received—

Ms. Beckles-Robinson: "You would call out the 2,000. You would be here by yuhself. You would be here by yuhself if you want tuh call out 2,000 names. I asked for it to be in writing."

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Ms. Beckles-Robinson: Of course, 2,000 names.

Ms. Ameen: "Yuh ask fuh it."

Ms. Beckles-Robinson: "Wuh yuh mean I asked for it. I asked for it in writing; you all just being ridiculous." I asked for the names to be provided in writing. Thank you.

Hon. Ratiram: We will provide the Member with that.

Madam Chairman: Laventille West.

Mr. Marcelle: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Chairman: Okay. Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Mr. Young SC: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Chairman: No problem. Item 009: Other Transfers. Member for Arima.

Ms. Beckles-Robinson: The Agricultural Internship Programme: 07, could the Minister provide us with the—could you tell us exactly what that programme is? And, could you indicate how many persons participated in it last year?

Hon. Ratiram: Sure, Member. Member, we have 30 persons who were enrolled in that programme; at present we have 21. Out of the 30, nine would have migrated into positions within the Service Commission in the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and in other places. Would you like me to provide you with the names of the persons as well?

Ms. Beckles-Robinson: I will be grateful. Thank you.

Hon. Ratiram: We will.

5.45 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Item 010: Other Transfers Abroad. Member.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Madam Chairman, there is item 09: Fiscal Farmers Incentive Programme. Could the hon. Minister indicate what exactly that is, and how many persons participated, please? That is the last Item under 09: Other Transfers.

Hon. Ratiram: Yes, yes. And once again, I thank the Member for asking a question on this line Item to afford me the opportunity to share with the public and to share with our farmers out there, the decade of destruction that the agriculture sector saw under the previous administration. The anti-rabies unit was nonfunctional. When we came in as a government—we are talking about—the bat population was continuously increasing under the PNM. There were more bats under the PNM.

We have been able to utilize the support provided by the hon. Minister of Finance to get our anti-rabies unit back up and operational, and we have started the night bat trapping exercise—and this Vote provides support for that programme along with the national animal identification programme that is for the animal tagging aspect of it and the notifiable diseases rabies and tuberculosis. So, this programme continues to provide support I am happy to say that as the end of the September we would over 2,664 bats were captured.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Ratiram: And 105 of those bats, the samples were submitted for disease surveillance in an effort to reduce the spread of rabies.

Madam Chairman: Item 010: Other Transfers Abroad. Member for Arima.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Under 17: National

Reforestation Programme, there is a decrease of $20 million. An Estimate of $2 0million. Could the Minister indicate what would be the reason for decrease as well as what is expected to be spent from the $20 million.

Hon. Ratiram: What line Item are we at?

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: 17.

Hon. Ratiram: Madam Chairman, can you call out the Sub-Head and the Items.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Sorry. Okay. 011, transfers and state enterprises.

Madam Chairman: No, it is Item 010: Other Transfers Abroad.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Not 011.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Okay, moving on. Item 011: Transfers to State Enterprises.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Thank you. Sorry about that. Can Minister, under 17, there is an Estimate of $20 million. There is a decrease of $20 million for the National Reforestation Programme. Could you tell us the status of that and what is expected to be done with the $20 million?

Hon. Ratiram: Madam Chair, I want to thank the Member for asking about this line Item, because it affords me the opportunity to share with the viewing population—it affords me the opportunity to share with the hon. Member, as well, of what was taking place under this line Item.

I am not sure if the Member is fully aware, but under this National Reforestation Programme, it would have involved—

Mr. de Nobriga: [*Interruption*]

Madam Chairman: Allow the Minister to answer. Thank you.

Hon. Ratiram: I want to thank Diego Martin Central for sharing his

communication skills from the last two years in ensuring that when we provide a response, the public understands the full picture. Because, you see, under this line Item, Madam Chair, it would have had significant criminality, criminal behaviour, criminal activities that were being supported under the National Reforestation and Watershed Rehabilitation Programme—

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: Madam Deputy Chairman, that is not something—[*Inaudible*]

Hon. Ratiram: I will share with you now.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Okay Member.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly:—and we are not accepting that at all. That is imputing improper motives.

Madam Chairman: Member, if you do not have a question—

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: No, man.

Mr. de Nobriga: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Chairman: Member for Diego Martin Central, have some behaviour, please.

Hon. Ratiram: Have some behaviour, "nah," man.

Mr. de Nobriga: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Chairman: Okay, you do not shout at me. You do not shout across the Chamber.

Hon. Ratiram: I want to say that under this line Item—

Mr. de Nobriga: [*Inaudible*]

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: The Chairman is speaking.

Madam Chairman: Member for Diego Martin Central, Sir, please withdraw from the Chamber for 10 minutes.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Chairman: Minister, you may complete your answer.

Hon. Ratiram: I see another Member wants to interrupt.

Mr. Des Vignes: So, I want to ask on the same Item, if there was—

Madam Chairman: Member, we are not finished answering the question that the Member for Arima posed.

Mr. Des Vignes: No, the Minister—sorry, go ahead.

Madam Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Ratiram: Thank you most kindly, Madam Chair.

Madam Chair, under this line Item, National Reforestation Programme, we had something called the National Reforestation and Watershed Rehabilitation Programme that this line Item was used by the previous administration to finance. The original intention of that National Reforestation and Watershed Rehabilitation Programme, it had a good intention in the beginning when the programme was created. I believe somewhere way back in 2003, that would have been under the former Prime Minister Patrick Manning. Very different from then to what we saw when we came into office that was being executed by the revised version of the Mr. Manning administration into the new version that we saw.

What happened with that programme, it really had lost its mandate and went ahead in activities that I will tell you, urban maintenance. From the audit report, a total of 27 groups were involved in urban maintenance activities. Nine were long-term groups, and 18 were short-term groups. These groups were assigned to conduct maintenance work within urban centres and boroughs such as Arima—such as Arima, these groups were assigned to conduct activities.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: It is taking long if they were assigned to Arima.

Hon. Ratiram: And the report says here, Arima and HDC housing complex in

San Fernando. It should be noted that urban maintenance activities do not fall within the original mandate of the NRWRP, which is focused on reforestation and rehabilitation.

In addition to that, we have parks and trails maintenance. And according to the report, the 14 groups that were involved in parks and trails maintenance activities, it is noted that it is important to highlight that this activity does not fall within the original scope or mandate of the NRWRP, which was designed to focus on reforestation and watershed rehabilitation.

Madam Chair, the officials within the Forestry Division would have conducted an exercise where site visits were planned to go out and audit the groups and the work that the groups were doing. What is here in this report is that of the 125 planned site visits, 105 groups were successfully reached. However, 14 groups were not visited based on advice from the NRWRP officers, as the areas were deemed high risk due to criminal activities. There is an appendix that is attached that shows where these activities—and where these areas were recommended not to go, not to visit, because of criminal activities in those areas.

This programme had a lot of ghosts. There were a lot of ghosts in this programme that could not have been accounted for. But I am very happy to report that now we have revised this programme with the support of the GIS unit. We have returned to the original mandate of the reforestation exercise of preparing seedlings, building out the nurseries, clearing the sites, and planting those seedlings and saplings in the area to be reforested. This programme will be working hand in hand with the GIS unit, where every single tree that is planted will be uploaded to an app by our GIS unit. So, at the end of the exercise, we can see exactly how many trees were planted, where these trees are being planted, and we

can bring about a high level of transparency.

But the important thing to note is that the workers and the officers who will be responsible for this programme are going to be workers within the Forestry Division of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, and there will no longer be any sort of ghost employees operating in this programme.

Madam Chairman: Diego Martin West?

Mr. Des Vignes: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Chairman: Okay, Arouca/Lopinot.

5.55 p.m.

Mr. Gonzales: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, how many employees do you have employed in this programme at this point in time?

Hon. Ratiram: So, continuing from where I paused, this programme, as we rolled out in fiscal 2026, and as we continue into 2027, we are looking, at this point in time, to do a rehabilitation exercise of 102 hectares.

Mr. Gonzales: No, no. I am asking how many employees—

Hon. Ratiram: One hundred—if you may allow me to finish, please.

Mr. Gonzales: No, I am asking you how many employees do you have in this programme employed at this point in time?

Mr. Tancoo: Madam Chair, if I may?

Madam Chairman: Sure.

Mr. Tancoo: I would really appreciate if colleagues opposite, when they ask questions, allow the Minister the opportunity to respond. And then, of course, you have the opportunity to ask—

Mr. Gonzales: But he is not answering the question.

Mr. Tancoo: Again, you are interrupting even me.

Mr. Gonzales: With the greatest of respect, he is not answering the question.

Mr. Tancoo: Madam Chair, can I have a ruling, please?

Mr. Gonzales: And, Minister, the purpose is for the Opposition to ask questions. It is not for the Minister to provide responses that he wants.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Gonzales: My question is very simple.

Mr. Tancoo: You are absolutely wrong.

Mr. Gonzales: How many—

Mr. Tancoo: You are wrong.

Mr. Gonzales:—persons are employed in this programme?

Mr. Tancoo: You are wrong. The purpose of this committee is for the Opposition to ask questions and for the Government to provide answers.

Mr. Gonzales: To the questions. To the questions.

Mr. Tancoo: The Government is providing answers. You may not like the answer, but the Minister has the opportunity to present an answer.

Mr. Gonzales: It is not that I do not like, but my question is very simple.

Mr. Tancoo: Can you allow the Minister to respond?

Madam Chairman: Just as Members on the Opposition Bench would ask a question with some run-up, obviously, the Minister has to respond, and he cannot respond in one sentence or less. Let us allow the Minister to answer the question.

Hon. Ratiram: Madam Chair, thank you. Thank you once again, Madam Chair.

Mrs. Beckles-Robinson: Chair, I have no more questions because this is not making any sense. No more questions.

Madam Chairman: The Minister is responding to Arouca/Lopinot.

Mr. Gonzales: No more questions for this Minister—[Inaudible]

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Chairman: Okay, Minister, you may complete the answer to this question.

Hon. Ratiram: Thank you most kindly, Chair, for allowing me the opportunity to complete the answer to the question by the hon. Member for Arouca/Lopinot. And I want to thank the hon. Member for the opportunity to continue with explaining the reforestation exercise that is happening.

Mr. Gonzales: You could take the next boat to Venezuela now.

Hon. Ratiram: Now, I know the Member for Arouca/Lopinot may not like the answers that I am providing, but this exercise is an exercise where we must be able to provide—

Mr. Gonzales: *Gracias, señor*.

Hon. Ratiram:—accountability to the population.

Mr. Gonzales: *Adiós, amigo*.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Chairman: Arouca/Lopinot, please allow the Member to finish his answer.

Hon. Ratiram: There must be transparency in our activities and the work that we are doing. So, I was sharing with you, for this programme, fiscal 2026, fiscal 2027, we are looking—

Mr. Gonzales: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Chairman: Arouca/Lopinot, please stop interrupting the Member. Allow—

Mr. Gonzales: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Chairman: Yes, the Member is being interrupted. I am hearing him, he

is in crosstalk, not asking any questions, just speaking unnecessarily. Allow the Minister to answer the question. Allow the Minister to answer the question in silence.

Hon. Ratiram: Thank you.

Mr. Gonzales: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Chairman: I know you have no more questions, but the Minister has to answer the question that you have already asked.

Mr. Des Vignes: Madam Chair, I just want to raise something.

Madam Chairman: No, let the Minister answer this.

Hon. Ratiram: May I finish, please?

Mr. Des Vignes: The question is—

Madam Chairman: I have given my ruling, Member. The Minister is going to answer the question that was posed to him. I am not asking for a response.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Ratiram: So, I want to thank the Member once more. The Member knows that we supposed to have a five-minute opportunity to respond and to edify the Opposition and to account.

So, what I will tell the Member is that we intend to utilize this to do the rehabilitation of 102 hectares of planting. The target is 236,000 trees within the period, utilizing 158 employees. They will work hand-in-hand with the Forestry Division who—at this point in time, we have 252 officers in the Forestry Division that supplement the national reforestation programme to go about returning the reforestation programme to its original mandate. It will no longer be about using this money for coastal protection in areas where there is no coast, for doing activities that is not related towards reforestation. Reforestation funding,

reforestation allocation should be used for reforestation activities, and that is what this line Item is going to achieve.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Chairman: Diego Martin West, do you have a question?

Mr. Des Vignes: I refuse to ask this Minister any questions. Thank you, Chair.

Madam Chairman: That is not what I asked.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, before proceeding, I wish to indicate that under the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, Sub-Head 06: Current Transfers to Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies—

Mr. Birchwood: [*Inaudible*]—disgusting—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Elder: Madam Chairman, the Member for Laventille East/Morvant has been shouting, "disgusting, disgusting", at the Minister and that is—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Ratiram: No, come on, "nah".

Mr. Elder: That is certainly unparliamentary.

Madam Chairman: Laventille East/Morvant—

Hon. Members: [*Continuous crosstalk*]

Hon. Ratiram: No, come on, "nah". Come on. "Leh we doh do dat nah". Respect—have respect. Respect. Love, love. Respect. "Leh we go on nah. Come nah." Love, love, love, love, love.

Mr. Birchwood: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Chairman: Laventille East/Morvant, please withdraw from this Chamber for 10 minutes.

Hon. Member: Why?

Madam Chairman: Why? I have given my ruling, and he has been using unparliamentary language and he said it.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Chairman: I heard him loud and clear. You do not question the ruling of the Chair. Hon. Members, before proceeding, I wish to indicate that under the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, Sub-Head 06: Current Transfers to Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies; Item 004: Statutory Boards appears on page 409 of the Draft Estimates. However, the detailed examination of these allocations is contained in *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly.*

We will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*, page 533. *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*; 08- Agricultural Society of Trinidad and Tobago. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, page 533; Item 001: General Administration.

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Chairman: This is not a moment for any comments. This is not a moment for statements or comments, it is a moment for silence and for me to continue with the procedure.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chair—

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: General Administration.

Mr. Imbert: May I be allowed to speak?

Madam Chairman: Do you have a question on a line Item, Member for Diego

Martin North/East?

Mr. Imbert: We have said no more questions.

Madam Chairman: I am asking if you have—

Mr. Imbert: Yes—

Madam Chairman:—on a question on a line Item.

Mr. Imbert:—I do. We have said no more questions.

Madam Chairman: Can you specify the line Item?

Mr. Imbert: 001/01.

Madam Chairman: Ask the question.

Mr. Imbert: We have said that we have no more questions for this Minister. Why is he still here?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Chairman: Diego Martin North/East, now is not the time for childish behaviour. You have been doing so all day and it is not appreciative. You may find it humorous, but no one else does.

Dr. Gadsby-Dolly: It is very humorous.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; Item 001: General Administration.

Mr. Tancoo: Serious business of the House.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 007: Households. 09- National Agricultural Marketing and Development Corporation. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, page 539, Item 001; General Administration.

Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; Item 001: General Administration.

Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 004: Households; Item 009: Other Transfers.

11- Zoological Society of Trinidad and Tobago. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, page 547; Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 02; Goods and Services; Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 007: Households.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. Consolidated Fund, page 180; Item 002: Productive Sectors; I. Production and Marketing.

Hon. Members, Item 003: Economic Infrastructure spans four pages. Therefore, I will also announce the project groups. Item 003: Economic Infrastructure, pages 181 to 184. D. Fishing; E. Forestry; F. Land Management Services; H. Research and Development; I. Production and Marketing; J. Other Services; K. Drainage and Irrigation. Item 004: Social Infrastructure; B. Recreation. Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services; A. Administrative Services; F. Public Buildings; G. Equipment and Vehicles; K. Land and Surveys.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the Infrastructure Development Fund.

6.05 p.m.

Item 003: Economic Infrastructure, pages 181 to 184. D. Fishing; E. Forestry; F. Land Management Services; H. Research and Development; I. Production and Marketing; J. Other Services; K. Drainage and Irrigation; Item 004: Social Infrastructure; B. Recreation; Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services; A.

Administrative Services; F. Public Buildings; G. Equipment and Vehicles; K. Lands and Surveys.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the Infrastructure Development Fund. Item 003: Economic Infrastructure, page 290; D. Fishing; J. Other Services; Item 004: Social Infrastructure; B. Recreation; Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services; F. Public Buildings.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 77 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Ratiram: Thank you most kindly, Madam Chair, and I want to thank all the Members on the opposite side for asking the questions and allowing me the opportunity to share with the public. I want to say a special thank you to the Ministry of Finance and the Minister for this opportunity. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Young SC: "Statements? Wah statements. Yuh is not even a Member of this House. You have no time for statement."

Madam Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Ratiram: And once more, a special thank you to the staff at the Ministry.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Chair: Thank you to the staff of the Ministry. *Head 37:* Integrity Commission, $8,421,900.

[Mr. Singh *in the Chair*]

Mr. Chairman: I will now invite the Minister of Finance, who assures me he has a very brief opening statement to make.

Hon. Tancoo: Thank you very much, Chair. Chair, the Integrity Commission is a constitutional body created by section 138 of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and established by section 4 of the Integrity in Public Life Act, Chap. 22:01. The Commission was mandated to regulate the conduct of persons in public life and persons exercising public functions by providing for public disclosure and to preserve and promote the integrity of public officials and institutions, as well as provisions for the prevention of corruption in Trinidad and Tobago, as described in the IPLE. I am joined here by the Registrar of the Integrity Commission, and we hold ourselves available for any questions that may be required for us to respond to.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister, and just to satisfy the public record, can I just say that there has been an assurance from the Opposition that there are no questions to be asked to the Minister regarding the various Heads of Expenditure for the Integrity Commission, and in the circumstances, I am going to do some procedural improvisation. I do not intend to slavishly follow a cumbersome, archaic procedure. I intend to put the question for expenditure because I have been assured that there are no questions. So, I do not intend to slavishly read out the Heads.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 37 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: We move now to Head—Madam Registrar, thank you very much. I am sorry if we inconvenienced you in any way.

Head 75: Equal Opportunity Tribunal, $3,208,530.

Mr. Chairman: I will now invite the Ministry of Justice and the Minister in the Office of the Attorney General to make the usual brief opening statement.

Hon. Maharaj: The Equal Opportunity Tribunal is a specialized independent court headed by a judge who is also the Chairman and has the same status of a High Court judge. The Tribunal was established under the Equal Opportunity Act, 22:03, to determine complaints regarding discrimination based on status, such as sex, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, marital status or disability, discrimination by victimization and offensive behaviour.

As the Superior Court of Record, the Tribunal exercises jurisdiction in respect of one, hearing and determining complaints of discrimination referred by the Commission; two, granting binding interim and permanent injunctions; three, ordering financial compensation, special and general damages or appropriate remedies; four, making binding cost orders.

6.15 p.m.

Hon. Maharaj: To effectively meet the changing demands of its statutory mandate and operational necessities, the tribunal in 2024 produced Project Green Gavel, a comprehensive transformation initiative designed to reform its judicial and administrative infrastructure into the fully functional E-court. With the majority of its transitional limbs approaching completion, the project successfully incorporates virtual hearings, including the taking of evidence, electronic filing, and the digital dissemination of Orders and judgments, supported by new protocols and proposals for a reformed legislative landscape. The Tribunal also supports its extensive public engagement efforts by utilizing a space in the metaverse for office administration and social media interaction via *Facebook* and *LinkedIn*, with impending plans to reintroduce live-stream hearings.

The financial allocation for fiscal '26/'27 budget provision of $6,371,400 would be utilized to strengthen the Tribunal's operational capacity. In particular,

these funds will facilitate the proposed relocation and upgrading of the Tribunal's fiscal infrastructure, support interim arrangements for hybrid remote on-site operations and enable the expansion of the Tribunal's dedicated workforce.

Mr. Chairman, I submit these Estimates for the approval of this honourable committee and pledge our continued support for the Tribunal's enduring mission.

Question proposed: That Head 75 stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of $3,399,950 for Head 75: Equal Opportunity Tribunal is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Head and Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and the *Draft Estimates of the Development Programme*. We should now consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. This is at page 386, Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, Item 001: General Administration. Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: I need some clarification. I just want some clarification first, and then I will go into my questions. I notice a statement here about Direct Charges. If one looks at 001—

Mr. Chairman: '23 and 24?

Mr. Imbert: Yes, go down, you will see, yes, 23 and 24. There is a statement here about Direct Charges. Now, Direct Charges are not normally appropriated and do not require the approval of Parliament.

Mr. Chairman: That is what I was checking with the Clerk, because I noticed it myself.

Mr. Imbert: Right.

Mr. Chairman: So, all of this is— I understand that, and perhaps the Minister of Finance should get some clarification on it because—

Mr. Imbert: It is not normally—

Mr. Chairman: Yeah. I checked it myself—

Mr. Imbert: Judges of the High Court and so on are not appropriated. The President and so on is not appropriated.

Mr. Chairman: I checked it myself because I marked it here.

Mr. Imbert: All right.

Mr. Chairman: And I saw it.

Mr. Imbert: I am just raising it.

Mr. Chairman: Because I was anticipating where you were going with this.

Mr. Imbert: You were anticipating me?

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: Wow. [*Laughter*] Anyway, we do not need to detain ourselves with that now. We could just let the—I am just drawing it to the Minister's attention—

Mr. Chairman: Right.

Mr. Imbert:—that Direct Charges are not—

Mr. Chairman: So, in the circumstances then, you have no questions?

Mr. Imbert: No, I have plenty.

Mr. Chairman: But you assured me you had one.

Mr. Imbert: I decided because of the—I did not realize that Minister Devesh Maharaj—

Mr. Chairman: No, no, no, no. I am holding you to your undertaking. You undertook to me that you have one question.

Mr. Imbert: It is a three-part question.

Hon. Members: [*Laughter*]

Mr. Imbert: This is part A.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: Having dealt with the whole question of Direct Charges.

Mr. Chairman: Alright, can we have the first question?

Mr. Imbert: Can I go to part B?

Mr. Chairman: Once it is permissible.

Mr. Imbert: But it is—23 and 24 Direct Charges, what category of person is paid for under those Items? Direct Charges.

Mr. Chairman: No, hold on. I think the Minister wishes to advise the Minister, and I think the problem with that, having accepted that Direct Charges are usually not appropriated here, no question would arise. That is the problem, and I think you accept that.

Hon. Maharaj: The answer to that question would be the Chairman, the two Lay Assessors, and the Registrar.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. All right, part C. Could you tell me what investigations have been completed in fiscal 2026?

Mr. Chairman: I do not think that arises, Minister. That is not a permissible question. Which line Item does that refer to?

Mr. Imbert: No, we were dealing with the Equal Opportunities Commission.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, I know. But it might be appropriate for another forum, not this one.

Hon. Maharaj: Excuse, Mr. Chairman, this is the Equal Opportunities Tribunal, not the Commission.

Mr. Imbert: Yes. Tribunal, Tribunal, yes.

Mr. Chairman: Yes

Hon. Maharaj: So, it does not conduct investigations. It hears matters that come

from the Commission, which was the investigation.

Mr. Imbert: Fine. What hearings were concluded in 2026?

Mr. Chairman: That does not apply to our line Item. Minister, that does not apply to a line Item.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, I am trying to get at something.

Mr. Chairman: Well, I think there is another forum for you to get at that.

Mr. Imbert: No, no, this is public expenditure. We are entitled to ask what this money is being spent on.

Mr. Chairman: No, you are not entitled to ask how many matters were heard by the Tribunal.

Mr. Imbert: Clearly, I would like to know if we are getting value for money, but obviously I cannot ask that.

Mr. Chairman: Well, yes, so there are judges who have been de-rostered to write their judgments, who are not sitting in the fourth court. Are you going to ask about them too? Come on.

Mr. Imbert: No, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: You know that is an impermissible question. You know that is an impermissible question.

Mr. Imbert: I do not, and I am getting at something.

Mr. Chairman: I know what you are getting at, but it is not permissible to do it in this forum.

Mr. Chairman: You know what I am getting at?

Mr. Chairman: You can do it in a—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, you have no idea what I am getting at.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, trust me, I do.

Mr. Imbert: All I want to know is that these—

Mr. Chairman: Come on, no line Item. Let us move on.

Mr. Imbert: I am still on this.

Mr. Chairman: Diego Martin North/East, no, no, come on. Let us move on.

Mr. Imbert: You are not allowing me to ask my question?

Mr. Chairman: I am, but you assured me you had one question, which was three parts.

Mr. Imbert: I said three parts.

Mr. Chairman: And the three parts are exhausted.

Mr. Imbert: Well, because you would not allow me to ask that. I have the next one.

Mr. Chairman: No, no, no. Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Imbert: All I want to know—

Mr. Chairman: You are asking an inadmissible question.

Mr. Imbert: All I want to know, under 01, will these people be paid to look at geographic discrimination?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: That is my question.

Mr. Chairman: All right. Minister.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: Minister. All right, you see.

Mr. Imbert: That was my question.

Mr. Chairman: You see.

Mr. Imbert: It is public funds. These people are being paid for something.

Mr. Chairman: All day I have been warning you about engaging in

"hurly-burly". You come back at the close of the session to engage in hurly-burly. Unnecessary hurly-burly.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: All right, let us move on. I have been assured.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: I have been assured by the Members who are entitled to ask questions that they have no further questions. So, in the circumstances, I do not—I propose to put the question for the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 75 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Minister, thank you very much. And thank you very much for your staff. We apologize if we inconvenienced you in any way whatsoever.

Head 09: Tax Appeal Board,$7,365,100

Mr. Chairman: Minister, might I invite you to make your short opening statement?

Hon. Maharaj: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The Tax Appeal Board of Trinidad and Tobago is the superior court of record. It was established in 1996 by an Act of Parliament, Chap. 4:50 of the Laws of Trinidad and Tobago. As the superior court of record, it determines the procedure to be followed in an appeal and issues practice directions from time to time.

The court deals with a wide variety of issues on appeal from various administrative bodies, in respect of both direct and indirect taxes, as well as anti-dumping appeals, and other related matters, such as petroleum taxes, and appeals pursuant to various pieces of legislation, including the Financial

Institutions Act and Tourism Development Act. In relation to both direct taxes, such as income and corporate tax, and indirect taxes, such as value added tax or Customs and Excise Duties, the quantum involved routinely concerns appeals from assessment, involving millions of dollars, and also, because of the nature of its jurisdiction, frequently involves multinational corporations seeking to offset head office expenses among members of the group or debt write-off. Mr. Chairman, we stand to take any question with regard to this allocation.

Question proposed: That Head 09 stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Being assured, once again, that there are no questions under any of the line Items for this Head, I propose to put the question to a vote of the House, rather than consume time going through all the various Heads and Sub-Heads.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 09 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Members, thank you all very much. We have made very good time today, 6.26 pm. We now suspend. The meeting will resume tomorrow morning at the usual 10.00a.m. Good night, everyone.

6.26 p.m.: *Standing Finance Committee suspended.*