

SENATE

Wednesday, October 25, 2017

The Senate met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAYERS



[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2018) BILL, 2017

[Second Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [October 24, 2017]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

Madam President: Hon. Members, those who have spoken are as follows: Sen. The Hon. Allyson West, Minister in the Ministry of Finance and mover of the Motion; Sen. Wade Mark; Sen. Taurel Shrikissoo; Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat, Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries; Sen. Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir; Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan, Minister of Energy and Energy Industries; Sen. Anita Haynes; Sen. Stephen Creese; Sen. Nigel De Freitas; Sen. Paul Richards; Sen. Daniel Dookie; and Sen. Dr. Lester Henry. All Members wishing to join the debate may now do so.

Madam President: Sen. Hosein. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Saddam Hosein: Madam President, as I rise in this august Chamber to contribute to this debate on the Appropriation Bill, 2017, I wish to thank you for giving me this opportunity. Before I begin, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC, Leader of the Opposition for having the confidence in me to serve as a Senator in this Eleventh Republican Parliament.

Madam President, I listened attentively to the Opposition Leader's response

to this Bill and it was informative, it was comprehensive, and it displayed the innovation and creativity that is required to steer Trinidad and Tobago on the course of good governance again. [*Desk thumping*]

I would like to congratulate Sen. Mark and Sen. Haynes for their brilliant contributions yesterday. And as I sat here and I listened to the Minister in the Ministry of Finance for her presentation, I describe this budget as a taxing budget. Are they taxing their way out of a recession? Taxation will plunge us further into the depths of inflation, depression and frustration. The Minister is trying to defy the principles of economics; she is trying to grow the economy by taking away from the people.

Madam President, we often forget that a Government is of the people, for the people and by the people. The Ministers are the custodians of the assets therein. As such, the Government must be accountable, transparent, participative and responsible.

On the 16th of December, 2014, there was the historic passage of the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property Act. It is:

“An Act...”—that seeks—“...to provide for public procurement, and...the...disposal of public property, in accordance with the principles of good governance, namely accountability, transparency, integrity and value for money, the establishment of the Office of the Procurement Regulation...”

Disheartening, the People’s Partnership Government lost the reins of power to the Rowley PNM on September 07, 2015. They campaigned on a mantra of “Red and Ready”. The nation had an expectation that they were ready for governance, but after two years it seems that that mantra has changed from “Red and Ready” to

“red and unsteady”. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, this Government continues to disappoint the population with their broken promises. We were promised the appointment of a Procurement Regulator since the first budget in 2015. The Minister of Finance said that the Government would operationalize the new procurement agency in the shortest possible time.

In 2016, we were promised that the public procurement system would be fully operationalized in 2017 and the Regulator will be appointed by March 2017. March 2017 has long gone and no Procurement Regulator has been appointed.

In 2017, during the Minister’s mid-year review, he indicated that no regulator has been appointed, but the Ministry of Finance is in the process of shortlisting candidates.

Madam President, I must note that it was improper for the Ministry of Finance to interfere or participate in any process regarding the appointment of a regulator as it is an independent office. This concern caused the Leader of the Opposition to write to His Excellency on this matter and subsequently we saw that the position of Procurement Regulator has been advertised by the Office of the President. And then we hear in the Minister’s third budget presentation a few weeks ago he reported that no Procurement Regulator has been appointed. The disappointment of another broken promise by this PNM Government. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, how much longer are we going to come to this Parliament with excuses for the halt on the implementation of this legislation? I call upon the Government to implement and operationalize the public procurement Act now. [*Desk thumping*] This Act was designed for us to get value for money and it would

curtail the wanton wastage and corruption with the awards of contracts.

Madam President, millions of dollars are lost to corruption and overpricing of contracts. Those millions of dollars that are lost can go towards sectors in our society that desperately need the money, so that the education, agricultural and national security sectors would not have to be cut by millions of dollars; so that you would not have to cut GATE; so that you would not have to tax almost everything in this country; so that you can settle wage negotiations with public servants and other public sector employees, so that we can raise senior citizens' pensions; so that doctors can get jobs and not remain idle; so that drugs and medication can be made available for patients at our hospitals. [*Desk thumping*] The millions of dollars that are leaked and pilfered through corruption could have been channelled to those in society that need it. But in this country it seems that this Government is intent on making the rich richer and the poor poorer. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, the question to be asked is whether the implementation of the public procurement Act is being deliberately delayed by this Government? And I say this because I move to a saga in the series of corruption famously coined as the "scandal known as Sandals". The manner in which this deal is unfolding in itself sends a clarion call for the implementation of the procurement legislation.

I must remind this Senate that this is a billion-dollar project being undertaken without any procurement. The Government has no interest in inviting other brands to tender. Basically what is happening is that the Government said that they want Sandals so they are going to get Sandals. It seems as though that this Sandals deal was in the pipeline while the hon. Prime Minister was the Opposition Leader as he admitted that he began discussions with Butch Stewart,

Chairman of Sandals, since then. One wonders what special interest does the PNM have with Sandals? The Government seems to be expediting this project as they have already acquired the lands from CL Financial for the Sandals Resort at the Buccoo Golden Grove Estate to the tune of \$174 million in March 2017.

Madam President, a special purpose company, Golden Grove Buccoo Limited headed by Mr. Neil Wilson, was formed to negotiate with Sandals. When Mr. Wilson was asked about the acquisition of the land for Sandals, his response was and I quote from the *Newsday* 31 July, 2017:

I still need to speak with the Prime Minister. He would know more than I would because he would have an idea as to what the plans are in respect of the lands. I need to speak with him to find out where we are because I do not have a good grasp at this point.

Madam President, this is five months after Mr. Wilson had been appointed a director of the company. He does not know about the land deal? It is clear that the Prime Minister is the only one who seems to know what is happening. There is no transparency in this deal.

Madam President, it seems that this special purpose company is now obsolete as the Prime Minister has usurped its function. He is acting as the negotiator, the procurer, the real estate agent and the investor in this Sandals deal. [*Desk thumping*] It begs the question: Why does the Prime Minister have so much interest in this project? The deal reeks of dark corners and inconsistencies. It is a scandalous deal.

Madam President, the Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda, the hon. Gaston Browne, is reported to have said on the 28 July, 2017, and I quote from the *Antigua Observer*:

“About a month ago I got a call from Mr. Gordon Butch Stewart, the chairman of Sandals. He said to me, Prime Minister, I want us to meet. I want us to have lunch. Prior to that he was buttering me up. Christmas I got a bottle of Dom Perignon. On my birthday I got another bottle of Dom Perignon...”

Madam President, I had to google what this is. And I found that it is one of most expensive champagnes in the world at a price of over £1,000. Prime Minister Brown went on to say that Butch sent a private jet for him to fly to Grenada and then to Barbados to negotiate the expansion of their Sandals Resort in Antigua.

It leads one to wonder if any Member of this Government is receiving similar treatment. I am not casting any aspersions on anyone. I am merely asking, given in the national interest, are they receiving gifts or trips to negotiate certain deals? Madam President, what is—

Madam President: Sen. Hosein, just have a seat. I am very reluctant to interrupt you because it is your maiden contribution, but the Standing Orders still subsist during any maiden, any contribution. So I would ask you to not impute improper motives to Members of the Government. Okay? Thank you.

Sen. S. Hosein: I am guided. I am merely asking questions. Madam President—

Madam President: Sen. Hosein, please. I am going to give you as much leeway. It is your maiden contribution, but as I say, the Standing Orders have precedence over everything else in this Chamber. Okay?

Sen. S. Hosein: I do apologize, Madam President.

Madam President: Thank you.

Sen. S. Hosein: Madam President, what is interesting is that every time this Government reports on Sandals, their version of the story changes. We are now

hearing that the model for Sandals is one similar to that which was offered to Hyatt and Hilton. Now, we hear that taxpayers have to bear the burden of constructing a billion-dollar hotel in these harsh economic times.

An interesting chart was compiled by Mr. Afra Raymond which demonstrated the cost of the Trinidad Hilton, the Tobago Hilton and the Hyatt Regency in Port of Spain. Trinidad Hilton, size 418 rooms, cost \$634 million, cost per room, \$1.52 million; Tobago Hilton, size 198 rooms, cost \$388 million, cost per room, \$1.96 million; Hyatt Regency Port of Spain, 428 rooms, cost \$516million, cost per room, \$1.21 million.

Madam President, the proposal for Sandals is 750 rooms, the largest hotel in Trinidad and Tobago. Using Hilton and Hyatt as the cost comparator, it can easily be predicted that the construction of Sandals is a billion-dollar project. Can we bear this burden of constructing this hotel right now? Is this why the Minister continues to cut, cut, cut, and tax, tax, tax, so that the moneys can be allocated to this project?

Sandals has managed to extract concessions from various Caribbean Governments. In Barbados, Sandals is the beneficiary of tax concessions for 25 years. They waived all taxes, duties and other imports on all capital goods whether imported or locally sourced. All consumables for hotel operations, all food, alcohol and beverages, all VAT on services related to the construction of the hotel, income taxes, corporate taxes, duties, exemptions on vehicles.

In Grenada, Sandals is the beneficiary of waiver of payment for corporate taxes for 25 years; property tax 25 years; waived all import duties for 25 years; and waived VAT for 15 years on consumer goods.

In Antigua and Barbuda, according to Prime Minister Browne, Sandals shut

its doors for five months affecting over 700 employees. He described it as an act of hostility designed to extract more concessions from the Government of Antigua and Barbuda.

Madam President, are we going to give Sandals the same tax concessions? Is Sandals coming to our country to operate tax free for 20, 25 or even 30 years? Then I learnt through the budget debate in the other place that an MOU between Trinidad and Tobago and Sandals was taking place, discussions were taking place.

And if you would permit me to quote from the *Hansard*, the Prime Minister is reported to have said that they, meaning Sandals, came last Wednesday, which would have been the 12th of October, 2017, and he said:

“...we had some discussions, involving the Minister of Tourism, Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister, the Minister of Planning and Development, and we agreed on a memorandum of understanding, which is now being signed.”

Madam President, when I heard that I was unsure whether the MOU was signed. There has not been a single press release or statement on the signing of this MOU. It really begs the question whether this MOU was signed. I hope that the Minister in the Ministry of Finance can bring some clarity to this issue when she winds up the debate.

Madam President, transparency and accountability demand, once signed by the Government and Sandals, that this MOU must be made public. We, the UNC, demand that it be laid in this honourable House forthwith. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, it is noteworthy to mention the controversy involving Sandals in Turks and Caicos. In 2009 the Premier, Michael Misick, resigned following allegations of corruption for which he is on trial. In the opening address

of that trial which published, Andrew Mitchell QC outlined a land transaction that allegedly defrauded the Turks and Caicos Government of millions of dollars; on that same piece of land now stands a subsidiary of Sandals, Beaches. Between August 2005 and December 2010, millions was paid to a company in which Premier Misick held 20 per cent shareholding. Further, these allegations of political contributions to assist with the re-election campaign of the PNP government. Further, by agreement Beaches Resort got a tax concession for a 20-year period.

Sandals subsequently responded and indicated that the payments were made, but were unauthorized and were made by a senior executive member of Sandals. They then paid \$12million to the Government of TCI as a part of the corruption probe.

Madam President, we must notice that this trend has developed in other Caribbean states. We must notice the trends of the protracted tax concession periods. We must not allow Sandals to hold us as hostages as they do with other countries. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, I therefore call upon this Government to come clean on the deal that is being offered to Sandals. They must tell the nation the concessions and incentives that are being given to Sandals. A Government would allow a mega hotelier to escape the wrath of taxes, but continue to tax every cent that the poor man has. This budget will bankrupt the poor. There is much more to say, but time does not permit me.

And then I move on to the corruption that is being unveiled day by day at the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, it is unprecedented, it is an embarrassment to the nation. The Prime Minister described it as a den of conflict, corruption and

inequity. And we must remember that what is taking place currently at the port falls directly on the Prime Minister as he has accepted full responsibility for the fiasco.

Madam President, because of the failure of the Port Authority and the Ministry of Works and Transport they could not even extend the contract of the *Super Fast Galicia* until a new vessel is sourced. This caused the *Super Fast Galicia* to leave our shores super fast.

Madam President, there is a total failure and seemingly a breakdown of communication between the Government Minister and the port's board because they could not even properly extend the contract of the *Galicia* until the vessel was sourced.

Madam President: Sen. Hosein.

Sen. S. Hosein: Yes.

Madam President: What you are talking about, some of it is in the public domain. But I just want to caution you that there is a Joint Select Committee that has been mandated to look into all of this. So, I am listening carefully to what you are saying, and I am just cautioning you at this stage. Okay?

Sen. S. Hosein: Yes. I understand, Madam President. Madam President, when I listened to the JSC on the ferry issue what I understood from that was that the Tobago stakeholders and the port board, they themselves wanted and recommended that there be an 18-month contract to be provided for the *Galicia*. But we further understood is that the then Minister of Works and Transport at that time did not bring the Note to Cabinet so that this caused some issues with the owners of the *Galicia* which caused them to leave Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam President, when the *Galicia* left our shores on the 21st of April,

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2017, we were left without a vehicle to service the route. It caused suffering and hardship in Tobago, there was a shortage of food as the grocery shelves became empty. What took place was irresponsible and negligent. And even after the *Galicia* was no longer here I saw that an allocation was made in the sum of \$28 million for the Dredging of the Government Shipping Service Basin to accommodate the *Super Fast Galicia*; this was from the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme 2018* at page 124, Sub-Head 828.

Madam President, I am asking, why are they allocating so much money for the dredging of the port? And it gets worse after the departure of the *Super Fast Galicia*. Leases were issued for *Atlantic Provider* and the *Trinity Explorer*. The *Trinity Explorer* is being leased for \$8,000 per day and the *Atlantic Provider* is being leased for US \$14,500 per day.

Hon. Senator: US.

Sen. S. Hosein: US. A total of approximately \$18 million was spent in less than three months on these two ferries and not a single agreement was executed. These two vessels were chartered by just a letter of award and a letter of engagement. Nowhere in the world has this ever happened.

Then, Madam President, as I have been cautioned, Miss Charmaine Lewis, she made certain allegations regarding the procurement of—

Madam President: At this stage, Sen. Hosein, I am going to ask you to move on in your contribution because [*Crosstalk*] there is lot of—what you are saying—Members, please—what you are saying, there is a lot of overlap with an enquiry that is going on right now. So, I think you should just move on to your other points in your contribution.

Sen. S. Hosein: I am guided, please. Madam President, when we look at another

issue that was raised in the budget, it was one with the Maxi Taxi Association and the restrictions on the maxi-taxis. It caused some distress in the country. When the Minister in his budget presentation indicated, and it was the printed budget documents that we received, there was no mention of the word “maxi-taxis”.

The Minister of Finance indicated in his budget presentation that they are going to remove all the restrictions altogether. There will be no restrictions on the ownership of banded maxi-taxis. Persons will be able to buy and band their maxi-taxis and drive wherever they please without any restriction, this will open up in the public transportation system.

The Opposition leader in her response pointed out that such a policy was not found in the budget documents. Then on the online version of the budget statement that was uploaded on the Ministry of Finance’s website it indicated something else, which was the removal of all restrictions on banded maxi-taxis in order to open up the public transportation system.

Madam President, I reiterate this point because it shows a lack of planning on the part of the Ministers. It is clearly an afterthought in an attempt to find favour with the population, but it backfired. And while the Opposition Leader was responding to the budget, there were hundreds of maxi-taxis lining the shoulder of the highway making their way into Port of Spain onto Wrightson Road in a show of unity and force as protest action against the decision of the Minister.

Madam President, a similar attempt was made by then Minister Jack Warner to remove the restrictions on the registration of maxi-taxis, but this was shut down by the High Court. The court found that there was a lack of consultation with the stakeholders. And we see history repeating itself where the various maxi-taxi associations have called on the Minister to meet and speak with them. I do hope

that the Minister meets with them and does not form the view that their discussions are academic and puerile. [*Desk thumping*] Madam President, on a closer examination of this policy it gives enough room for monopolization.

Then, in the Minister's budget presentation they indicated that there will be the establishment of the ministerial oversight committees which are to be chaired by the Prime Minister to monitor and expedite the process of obtaining building approvals from all regulatory agencies.

The Minister also indicated a \$100,000 cash incentive per house will be given to the developers. Madam President, it begs the question whether this committee would now be able to relax regulations and procurement rules. Further, the Minister indicated that incentives would be granted to farmers in the sum of \$100,000 with a budgetary allocation of \$200million. While I am of the firm view that farmers should be supported, such funds must be dispersed equitably.

But similarly the increased incentives for hoteliers under the upgrade programme for hotels from 25 per cent to 50 per cent for the cost of work per room which would mean an increase in the maximum reimbursement limit from \$750,000 to \$1.5million. I ask that this deal also be done transparently, and this is a further call that the procurement legislation be implemented so that it can have oversight over this grant. [*Desk thumping*]

As such, Madam President, we need this legislation in order that we would not come here year after year, budget presentation after budget presentation to hear that we have to be in a deficit budget as Sen. Mahabir and Sen. Shrikissoon have indicated, that we have been in a deficit budget for over 10 years. Madam President, with a cut-down in the corruption, we can now save money, we can get the value for money that the Government is talking about. [*Desk thumping*] So that

we can save the money and we can allocate to the sectors in society that really need it. So that as my friend here, Sen. Haynes, would have said, that we would no longer have URP doctors, we would now have full-time doctors so that when we go to the hospitals and the health centres we can be serviced effectively and immediately. We would no longer have persons dying in these medical facilities because of a lack of medical treatment or drugs.

Madam President, we must be cognizant of the situation that Trinidad and Tobago is in, and we must curtail the corruption, we must save, we must get our value for money. [*Desk thumping*]

10.30 a.m.

In conclusion, Madam President, we have reached a time in our nation's history where there is a steady decline in the oil and gas revenue. The nation's vitals are low. There is a cure to clot the haemorrhage that our Treasury does not bleed out due to the injuries sustained by the chronic disease of corruption, and that cure is the implementation of the procurement legislation. [*Desk thumping*] And, Madam President, there is a changing of the paradigm, and that change will come soon, as the United National Congress return to Government [*Interruption*] to restore good governance and prosperity to Trinidad and Tobago.

I thank you, Madam President. [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Madam President: Hon. Senators, I wish to congratulate Sen. Hosein on his maiden contribution. [*Desk thumping*] Sen. Small. [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. David Small: Thank you very much, Madam President, for giving me the opportunity to join in in this debate. This wonderful day that we have here. I am always—Madam President, as I normally say here, I come here and I am privileged to be here, and I take the opportunity that I have to be here, that I am given, very

seriously. Trinidad and Tobago is in a place where we have real challenges, and I will likely fail like my other colleagues in covering all of the various issues, but I am going to try to hit the issues that are important to me.

Madam President, I just want to begin, because we have to understand the framework, and I always try to deal with issues from the perspective of the normal—because I am a normal regular person in Trinidad and Tobago. Outside of these Chambers I am just like every man. And I go back to an article written by Professor Tennyson Joseph of the *Barbados Nation* on March 2016, and I want to quote, and he said that there is:

“...empirical basis...being made for the prevalence of anti-incumbency as Caribbean governments make themselves agents of capitalist accumulation rather than agents of people advancement.”

What he is saying, Madam President, is that there is a process going through in the Caribbean region where governments are not being incumbent. At the next election they are being voted out, and it is part of his thesis that it is because rather than dealing with people advancement, they are dealing with wealth accumulation for a small sector of the society. And it is an interesting read. I recommend anybody to read it.

Madam President, I have looked at the budget. I think that the budget—I think the Government made an effort to spread the burden as would have been said, and I believe that while we will always have particular issues about the way in which things happen, I believe that they made a start, and if you do not like it, well tough. Come with some new ideas, and I have one or two suggestions, Madam President, if you would permit me?

Madam President: Yes.

Sen. D. Small: I am always concerned, Madam President, that we live in a society where there is a permanent waiting game for the Government to fix everything. I just do not get that. We all—I think that I am on record as saying that there are several so-called business people in this country, their whole business model is to sit and wait to get a Government contract. That is not a business model, and I am not saying that that is wrong. All I am saying is that if everybody wants to do that, then it places an undue burden on the Government. And these are things that we have to—we have to drive the entrepreneurial spirit, but there is a cost for it, while we are here.

Madam President, if you—forgive me, if someone were to have a baby and you continue feeding him or her with the spoon, and you never teach him or her to hold the spoon, he or she will probably grow up to be an adult and not know how to feed himself or herself. And it is not necessarily a fault of the parent, it is about our particular circumstances. So, Madam President, I believe there is no magic wand that the Government can wave to fix the problems that we have. I think that they have put a package of measures, some are palatable, some are less palatable. But if there are other solutions for how we can move forward, I think the Government would be receptive to at least hearing them.

I looked at several of the incentives, in particular the housing one is very interesting, but I note, and I note with interest that the hon. Prime Minister would be chairing it and putting a time frame on it, because I think that is how that has to work. That actually raises a sore point with many business people in this country, Madam President, what I would call the glacial pace of approvals. It moves at a glacial pace many times, and the tendency is that you are working in a system and every possible red herring that could come up in an approval system comes up, and

rather than something taking a finite period of time the time period gets expanded. And that is something that we have to work on, because it is a disincentive to investment. It is a disincentive to investment.

And, Madam President, we seem to be also, as a country, married to large projects. I like large projects. Everyone likes large projects. But small and medium projects have a role too, and while the large project proposals will always get the attention of the powers that be, the other small and medium struggle to get their attention. So that there has to be some way in which we try to facilitate all the people who want to do investment in Trinidad and Tobago. I would come to my point about the current level of—I am going to be—Madam President, you know I always say that I come and I try, and I deliberately try to not be difficult, and to try—but I believe that we have to look at the way in which public sector costs, and subsidies, and transfers, we have to hold on to that bear. We have to grab that by the horns, because it is already getting away from us, and I do not subscribe to the view that it is a sacred cow and it absolutely cannot be touched. There has to be a way to deal with it. Because all we are doing is continually feeding the beast, and the beast gets bigger and bigger and all we are doing is pushing out the action and making the action harder and more unpalatable. There has to be a strategy around it.

Aside from probably NGC, and sometimes Petrotrin, and probably Flour Mills, really few of these state enterprises bring anything back to the State. And, coming from me this next point is going to be interesting, because I am an advocate for the small person, but we have to be careful. I have listened to the argument well that has been made out by several parties, that we have to be careful about supporting a system where it is argued that you are transferring wealth from

the private and productive sector to the public sector, where efficiency and effective service delivery are not necessarily uniformed across the system, and in fact in many places service delivery is not what you want it to be.

The next section on my contribution, Madam President, that I am going to deal, it is what I call the hard truths. Accept the realities. Everyone in Trinidad and Tobago is wedded to maintaining the status quo, and I understand the hon. Minister of Finance, the hon. Minister in the Ministry of Finance, I understand about trying to keep the ship of state, and trying to keep—I understand that. The challenge we have is that we have a very weak manufacturing sector. I think the last time I spoke about this there was a nice ad by the TTMA saying Sen. Small does not know what he is talking about, and I would always refer them to an article written by Anthony Wilson, and I will quote from that article of February the 26th, 2015. It is recommended reading for anybody to understand why we have a challenge with the manufacturing sector in this country. And I quote, he says:

“The point is that in practice there are few local companies that are interested in becoming globally competitive because they are doing just fine being locally and regionally ‘competitive’.”

And he further expounds that the reasons for that include that they are domiciled in a country which offers them a lot of subsidies, a relatively low tax rates, and then critically they are “owners among T &T’s business elites which allows them privileged access to the political elite, and more importantly, corporate information”. It is not me saying it. I am just reading from a quote. It is recommended reading, because this is an analysis of what is going on in the manufacturing. And I am not saying it cannot be fixed, but we have—you know, Madam President, if you want to fix a problem we must acknowledge and first say

that there is a problem. If you go along with blinders that, “Oh, the manufacturing sector gets these incentives and it will be fixed.” No, there is a problem. There is a deep-rooted problem about lack of the ability to compete.

Madam President, regardless of what we try to do with the public sector and the State sector, improvements in productivity and efficiency have to be driven. We have get more value for money. We have to. Not necessarily more, we want fair value. Let me “doh” say more. We want people who come to work to give eight hours work and give the productivity that is required. We are not asking for anything more than that. [*Desk thumping*] I think that has to be driven through the system. Our entire system, the public service system probably has passed what is called its sell-by date. I think that I for one understand the reality of having an independent system to protect the civil servants from the buffer from the politicians. I have a good example, and I am glad the Minister in the Ministry of Finance is here. I was one of the good souls that went to the valuation office and dropped of my form. So, here is my experience: I have an acknowledgment from them that they received my documents. It is dated, on the document, 17th of July. It was dispatched on the 16th of August, and I received it yesterday. So, you work in a system where it takes three months to send something. The system is broken. It is broken. And we have to admit that the system is broken, and how it is currently set up is not going to continue to work. [*Desk thumping*]

We have to do something about it. We have to grab that there and say, “Listen, let’s get all the various parties who are the stakeholders, and let’s have a discussion about how we could fix this.” We cannot just say, well, it is entrenched in the Constitution, we cannot touch it, it is a sacred cow. I militate against that, and my civil service colleagues would know that I have been outspoken on this. If

is one thing people know me for in the civil service is delivery. I used to deliver. Whatever hours required and the best quality possible. I used to deliver. I have a good colleague next to me, he could vouch for me. When it came to—they say Mr. Small, we need so and so. I say, I am on it, you would get it. And it used to work both ways.

The energy market. Madam President, I listens attentively to the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries yesterday and he hit all of the issues that I was going to hit. So, I think that his projection by the Ministry of Finance—and I think this is something we need to understand. The projection for the oil price by the Ministry of Finance, there is a team at the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries who supports this calculation. I was part of that team. We would have conversations with our colleagues at OPEC, our colleagues at the GECF, or our colleagues at the GIA. I would pick up the phone, send emails. It is not a number plucked out of the air. The number that is generated, and produced, and given to the Ministry of Finance as the Ministry's recommendations for the oil price goes through a rigorous process. So that when I see the number, and I do my own checks, \$52 is okay. I have no problems with it, because it is in line with all the other major authorities who produce numbers. So that I wanted to deal with that. Because I do not want people to feel that it is the Minister of Finance plucking a number out of the air. There is a rigorous process that supports that.

I think also, Madam President, there was one statement in the budget that I said, listen, somewhere along there when the Minister was reading his budget he referred to very low energy prices. I just want us to be clear about what we are saying there. The hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries would recall we did something called the Caricom Oil Facility in 2004, where Trinidad and Tobago

agreed to help our colleagues in the Caribbean by creating this fund, and you know what the trigger price was for that fund to kick in? Thirty dollars a barrel. So, \$30 a barrel our brothers and sisters in the Caribbean were screaming that they were under pressure. Fifty-two dollars a barrel today—I just checked with Bloomberg before I started—is not a bad price. Is it probably not what we want, but in the context of where, if you look at the data, from the day that WTI started in 1946 to yesterday, well, not yesterday, to last Friday, forgive me, the long-term average, weighted average inflation adjusted price for WTI is \$44. So that, all that has happened is oil price has retreated—there are several reasons—closer back to its long-term average. So that perhaps—forgive me, Madam President, I am a student of the data. I always try to make sure that we understand the data and what we are talking about.

So, for the first time, Madam President, oil did not hit \$40 a barrel until 2005. We are operating—\$52 a barrel is not a low oil price. The first time in the history of oil prices that oil got to \$40 was in 2005. Okay? The first time oil—and it went on a progression thereafter. The first time it hit \$50 was 2006, and then 2007 it went to \$70, and there was this golden period between 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011 where it was in the \$90 range. That has never happened in the history of oil prices. It is the golden period in oil prices. Now that we are back to middling numbers, let us not call it a low oil price scenario. It is just what the price is now, and we went through a period where for several reasons the prices went up way out of their normal. So, I always have my data. So in case anybody ask, I have my data. I tend not to play with it.

So, Mr. Vice-President—Madam President, forgive me, I think that the outlook for oil prices is interesting, because there are several forces at work. If we

go back to when in 2014 when prices started to collapse, the gap between global oil consumption and global production was showing that consumption was exceeding production by about two million barrels per day. A little more than that. As of the last OPEC report, just about a week ago, that gap had narrowed to about 400,000 barrels a day. So that the overhang of extra supply in the market has been removed for a series of reasons, and that is in spite of the increase in shale oil production. So that all of the prognosticators are projecting a gentle increase in prices in the medium term. But I am not going to forecast anything, other than I will continue to look at the numbers.

I just want to talk quickly on one issue that came up. I attended the Hyatt function, and I think one of the presenters spoke about peak oil and peak demand, and I want us to get our minds clear on that. Peak oil was a phenomena at the time. A lot of people signed on to it. And it is the argument that oil production would begin a long-term decline and cause havoc in the world that was completely dependent on oil. So that everybody is dependent on oil, and then the oil would reach a peak in production and then it be declining forever, so that when it gets there it is going to be chaos around the world, because everybody would try to get more of a decreasing supply.

All of sudden shale came on and that was, as my colleague Sen. Henry would say, debunked. Peak oil has been thrown away and consigned to the dust keeper of economic theory and history. The new article of faith is something called peak demand, and peak demand is different. Peak demand is based on a fact that new technologies including electric cars will make oil obsolete. Not that there would not be oil around, but that new technologies and renewables would make oil obsolete. And that oil production is not going to decrease, but the world is going

greener, we are all environmentally sensitive, and all of these other wonderful things. But the challenge with that is, we are finding more and more oil around the world. And if oil remains at the kind of prices where it is now, oil will continue to be in demand. It does not mean that it will slow the pace of adoption of electrics and other things, but unless some radical changes happen there will always be a demand for oil and oil products, and given the current projections for the availability of oil products going forward for the next 100 years, oil will continue to rule the roost. And there is a cost factor also in terms of—electrics are wonderful. Electric vehicles are wonderful, but where is electricity being generated? Where does it come from? You know where it comes from. The hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries know where I am going, so I am going to stop there on that.

My next topic, Madam President, is what I call the haves and the have nots. Madam President, the gap between those who have and those who do not in this country is worrying. I would have recounted my experience of going to my local supermarket. My neighbour in front of me here would know where I would normally go, and it is something that I have seen more and more. You know, when you go to the supermarket and you stand in line and someone is ahead of you, and every item that is being cashed they ask the cashier for the total, because they have a finite sum of money to purchase, and they are buying the most basic goods, you know. They cash a big bottle of oil, and then they tell the little child, no, they tell the little girl to take it up, go and get a smaller—people are operating in finite amounts. That is something that we have to be sensitive to. There are a lot of people in this country who are operating on a finite or very low budgets, and that when we impose charges, additional things on them, it hurts them. It hurts them.

And I want to quote from the US economic weekly in an article published on October the 13th, and it states that:

Income rising unevenly has implications for growth, but there is a clear link that points that for every extra percentage point in total income that the top 10 per cent of earners take home real consumer spending growth decreases by a percentage. It has been observed that countries with the highest income inequality are countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. Advanced countries on the other hand display lower income inequality.

And this is where we have to be looking at the size of the middle class in Trinidad and Tobago. I leave the actual numbers to the brilliant economist you have who do that for a living. But my senses are, the middle strata of our society is shrinking, and there is starting to be a super-rich portion of the society, and then those at the bottom that number is getting bigger, and the middle is getting squeezed. It is getting squeezed. And we need to have somebody, and the CSO is not as functional as we would like it to be, because I could not get the data I wanted, but that demands someone to start to look at that, because things are happening in society and we do not understand why. It seems irrational some of the things that are happening, but we need to look at that.

Oil and gas revenues, Madam President, what I call a double edged sword. We have to admit that while we have oil and gas, it is a double edged sword, because it has placed—it has caused or relieved the pressure on manufacturing industries to be really competitive or innovative. There is enough research, Madam President, out there by the IMF and other parties showing that how the effect of subsidies mask the true profitability of businesses, and it sends fake or distorted signals to the economy. If you strip out the effect in these subsidies, that

is the only way you would get a truer picture of the performance of some so-called profitable companies. And there was a particular author Dr. Veronique De Ruyg, she did an excellent piece in the contribution to the US Congress on this whole issue of having subsidies in a system and the fact that having subsidies, companies are reporting profits, but those profits are not real. They are not real. They are not based on the performance of the company. If you only strip all the subsidies it shows that those companies are actually poor companies, and my concern with Trinidad and Tobago is, now that we are removing a lot of those subsidies, some of those so-called profitable entities would fail. They would fail. They would fail, and it is because they just do not know how to compete. They have been riding on the subsidies and none of them will probably admit it.

Madam President, Trinidad and Tobago still has one of the lowest electricity rates in the Western Hemisphere, save and except for Venezuela which is a special case. Corporation taxes have been very low. For those who get natural gas for their industry they get it at a peppercorn rate. It is virtually free, those who use natural gas in their processes. Water rate are still very low. Diesel transportation is starting to come to a real price. For a long time they have ridden on that. So, after all of this, Madam President, how come we do not have a competitive international export business in this country with all of these things in place? Madam President, I will share with you, the hon. Vice-President and I, and some other members of the Parliament, went to a parliamentary conference in Bahamas last year, and during the discourse with several of our colleagues from the Bahamas team, the host team, we were talking about the differences in the economies, and they were talking about a project being done in Bahamas called Bahama. It is a US \$3 billion hotel resort, and the particular Minister, I do not

recall his name, said something that stuck with me. He said tourism is our oil and gas, and it is something that—we have oil and gas. We may be looking at tourism, but when tourism is what feeds you, is what puts food on the table, is what you use to send your children to school, you approach it differently. [*Interruption*] Yeah. This is how my bread and butter. We are not there yet. We are far from there. So those are somethings that—and these are hard truths, we have to accept them, that we are not ready. We are not ready.

So, Madam President, given the fact that we have spent untold billions supporting the manufacturing industries over the past three decades. It should have been that in a time like now we should easily look to them and make a big effort to close the gap and support the sustainable growth of our economy. Instead, we have to try to support them again. We have to support them in the good times, we have to support them in the bad times. When can we rely on them to support us? So, I am sure I am going to get a news release that Sen. Small does not know what he is talking about, because he is just talking, he does not understand we employ thousands of people, “ra, ra, ra”. That is fine. They have their view, I am privileged to have mine.

Energy tax regime, my next item. Madam President, I have noted that the efforts by the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries stated by the Minister of Finance, I support the new royalty regime. I understand—and we have to stop getting politics into everything. A decision was taken at a particular point in time to remove or change the structure, and there were negative effects for it. Why can that not be admitted? You can say that those particular changes further investment. Okay. Fine! There is no argument with that from me. But there was also a negative effect to that. So that is all I am saying. I have tried to stay away from it

because I realized it is a political issue. You said you needed—there was no investment for a period, we gave the incentives, yes, there was investment. But in addition to the investment, there are carried forward losses that would take us for the next six to seven years. That is a fact. That is not something that someone is making up. So I am not saying good or bad, let us just accept what it is, and that in accepting what it is I think that we are trying to claw back some of that, and I am supportive of those measures. Yes, and that is all it is, from where I sit, Madam President.

Domestic gas market, the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries spoke to a couple of the issues there. It is what it is. We have challenges where juniper, truck, other things coming on, we are hoping to get that going the way it was which. But I have a peeve, Madam President. In another hat in this building—because I am on the state enterprises committee dealing with state enterprises, and I will be careful, Madam President. The National Gas Company came before this entity last year, and the report is laid, so the recommendation of public information. One of the challenges with the industry now is transfer of information. One of the recommendations proposed by the Joint Select Committee was that the NGC do a frequent or a quarterly release on the status of the gas industry in Trinidad and Tobago. What is the status of supply and demand? That is a recommendation that is almost a year old, and so far has zero action. It flies in the face of trying to bring some order to the system. And this is the question that I always get. “So, Sen. Small, what is the point of having these entities come and all yuh make recommendations?” What? They are doing anything? This is why people ask me that.

So a year and something later the NGC has refused, or forgotten, or not seen

the recommendation of the Joint Select Committee, and those are the things that bug me. Because, otherwise, the effort in the Joint Select Committee to sit and do the enquiry, and to say, “listen, I don’t see what is the harm” The? NGC will put out a quarterly or a half-yearly status, this is what the status of the industry is, this is what we expect. This is the forecast. I do not see that being difficult or breaking any contract confidentiality. But they have steadfastly ignored our recommendations. And that brings me to my other issue, Madam President. I call it challenge of governance. “Ha ha ha.”

Madam President, we have—and I would be guided, and I want the hon. Minister in the Ministry of Finance to help me. We have state enterprises and we have directors on boards, and chairmen. My understanding having been in that portfolio myself, is that you are a non-executive director. Am I correct or am I incorrect?

Hon. Senator: Non-executive.

Sen. D. Small: They are non-executive directors. But, Madam President, given my experience in the state enterprises committee, you have a situation where you have non-executive directors and chairmen running roughshod over the management, and no one seems to want to be able to deal with it. And I am choosing my words—no one seems to want to be able to deal with it.

If you go to the—it is a real issue. You have chairmen and directors instructing the management. You have chairmen and directors inserting themselves into active negotiations. The hon. Minister in the Ministry of Finance understands governance, and that is a complete breach of all governance standards. You are a non-executive director. You take the report from the executive. You do not sit in the room and negotiate contracts. That is not supposed to happen. But

we see it happening all the time, and I am amazed that no one is talking about it, because it seems that it is not happening. But I am talking about it, because it is wrong. It is wrong! And if we go to the wonderful—we have the state enterprises manual. It states exactly the roles of the chairman, and there is nothing about being involved. In fact it states, you are not supposed to be in the day-to-day running of the business. You have chairmen and board of directors coming and sitting in the office from 8.00 to 4.00, Monday to Friday. That is not the intent, and no one seems to want to touch it. And someone earlier spoke about corruption, Madam President. There is no corruption in Trinidad and Tobago because nobody “ain’t” make a jail as yet. Until somebody makes a jail, there is no corruption. It does not exist.

Hon. Senator: NGC has not prosecuted yet.

Sen. D. Small: Oh, I am coming to that. And Raj Rajaratnam, I have a whole pile of things to say on that.

So, Madam President, I just want to read into the record, because, perhaps, so that the public knows. So, the people in the road and the streets, and whoever listening or watching, they have eight, and I want to quote from the Institute of Directors in the UK, a non-executive director is a company’s board of—a member of a company’s board of directors who is not part of the Executive team. A non-executive director does not engage in the day-to-day management of the organization. Okay.

11.00 a.m.

I want to read from the State Enterprises Performance Manual, the functions of a chairman. Perhaps some of them do not know about this, they need to be educated. I recall being a chairman, a member of a state board and this was the

Bible, the functions and the roles of the directors and chairmen. They are not to be involved in the day to day running of the business, but this seems to be the norm. [Crosstalk] Well it is absolutely wrong, but it is happening and I am seeing it happening. So, all I can say, Madam President, I am drawing it to the attention of the powers that be, we have a failing state sector and part of the reason is that governance has completely collapsed. Governance has collapsed. And if governance has collapsed you do not want to understand what is happening lower down in the system. If governance at the top has collapsed, lower down bad things are happening and that is the reality. So we need to fix the governance and say, chairmen and directors, your role is this, and it is well spelt out here.

Madam President, could you tell me how much time I have again? I run out of—

Madam President: Nine minutes.

Sen. D. Small: Nine minutes. I just want to touch on one quick issue, on the whole issue of transparency again. Madam President, we have an LNG industry in this country. The hon. Minister knows it is a peeve of mine, but we have to understand, I have always talked about—we have to understand the size of the pie. I went to a couple of websites. I went to the Australian—what is it called?—Petroleum—Department of the Environment and Energy. They can show you all the countries that their various LNG operators exported to and then the values. I go to Qatar, I go to Tasweeq website—in Tasweeq in Qatar they have an interesting model where while they have the LNG companies and they have the oil producing arm, they have a state arm called Tasweeq who does all the marketing. So your role is to produce oil; your role is to produce LNG, we market it and that is managed by the Minister of Finance. But you can go on their website and say this

is the product that was sold in this week, where it went to and the value generated. That should be public information. Somebody in the Ministry of Finance or in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries knows, but we do not understand what is happening in the industry. Why? Because we do not have the information available and I believe that should be available. So, I am doing good for time.

Madam President, the subsidy removal is something I have advocated for. I support the subsidy removal but I am not supportive of the way in which it was done. I have always argued against this back pocket approach. I prefer a structured approach. I have been on the record here. If you are going to change something that has always been in the system, let us set a target. We are going to reduce it by 90 per cent over three years or four years so that everybody knows, this next budget, this is what is going to happen. And I advocate that this is the approach we have to do when we are looking, looking at the whole public sector wage Bill. Let us get everybody in the room, agree on a number that we are going to reduce it by and organize a structure to get it done, rather than trying to do everything in one fell swoop or in disorganized bumps, because it causes people to have a lot of uncertainty and we are in a place now where we need certainty.

Revenue leakages. BIR has to step up its game. There is systematic, decades-old failure to collect taxes. How many of us have gone to doctors and dentist offices and there is a nice sign saying cash only. How difficult is it for the BIR or whoever to go and say, where are your records? I am talking not little small doctors, I am talking about doctors in nice big fancy buildings with big car parks and cash only. We have to fix those issues. The Minister of Finance could have been really difficult and told every maxi-taxi driver or driver on the bus route, if you want to get a bus route pass the next quarter bring your quarterly tax return

that you have filed. It could have been difficult. I am not advocating that he do that, [*Laughter*] but we have to get—understand that there are a pile of people in the system who are not contributing their share to the tax pile and we have to find a way to catch them. I think my colleague who is not here today suggested that, you know, if someone comes for a food badge ask them the same question and say, well that would cause problems.

I want to go to one of my final topics, Madam President, I call it daylight robbery. [*Laughter*] I call it daylight robbery. And I want to quote, Madam President, and this is a definition from a phrases organization and the quote is:

Daylight robbery. “This”—term is not—“used to describe actual robberies—whatever time of day”—it—“might take place. It is a figurative phrase that associates an instance of unfair trading with actual robbery. Not just any old robbery, but one so unashamed and”—so—“obvious that it is committed in broad daylight.”

Madam President, I was engaged in a nice discussion with someone yesterday who is suggesting to me that we have to be careful with demonizing—[*Interruption*]

Madam President: Sen. Small, you have five more minutes.

Sen. D. Small: Thank you very much, Madam President. That is enough time—that we should be careful about demonizing the banks.

Madam President, I listened, I like to listen, but I am not demonizing the banks. The banks are doing that for themselves by the way in which they interact, they are doing that by themselves. So I am not demonizing the banks. The banks are demonizing themselves, because they are probably demons. Because I know for sure they have a head schemer. They have a head schemer who is looking at the wonderful Government’s 5 per cent additional tax and finding a way to make

sure that regular bankers, regular persons pay for it. That is the reality.

So I am happy for the hon. Minister of Finance that he would get additional revenues, but here is what, we, all of us, pay for it and it is because the Central Bank, you have the things in there to go and have the conversations, but we are all twinkle-toes, afraid to touch the ranks because what? I have no idea. And there is a reason, Madam President, why banks are regulated, because banks do bad things. And that is not me saying that they are bad, you know, the record, the international record of banks and how they perform and how they take advantage of their customers is on the record. So I do not have to make it up. It is not Sen. Small saying that. That is a fact, an unarguable fact and that is the reason banks are regulated in the way they are regulated, to protect citizens.

So if I say that they are committing daylight robbery in Trinidad and Tobago, that is a fact. So while I would say that there is a logical explanation for why they have their various charges, where is my logical explanation for when I go to the bank? I had a good experience. I travelled to the UK a few weeks ago. I purchased a couple of hundred sterling in currency, I paid 9.4-something for that. I touchdown in London, I go around to the next side, I went to the ATM and I take some cash out of the ATM. I paid 8.6. You pay 9.3 in Trinidad for it, plus whatever and when I am in the UK—so the difference, they are killing us. They are killing us and nobody wants to talk about it, other than Sen. Small, he does not know what he is talking about.

Madam President, I just want to close with one last issue and it has to do with the issue of Petrotrin and their measurement issues and that is how I am going to treat with it. We have a situation where Petrotrin is a signatory or a charter member of something called the EITI. But EITI will tell you that they went and

they spoke to Petrotrin's contractors and several of them refused to submit information to the EITI. That is an abomination. If Petrotrin is the head holder of the licence and you are working for me, you cannot tell the EITI that you are refusing to submit information on your production and your revenues. That is something that is easily fixed by the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries.

I understand that the EITI is pushing for legislation. That is great. That could probably—but immediately, Petrotrin should be able to say, if you want to continue being a lease operator you should make sure you report to EITI. That should not be something—so that somebody—measurement issues that they are dealing with now, because I know it is playing out in the public and there are all sorts of things happening. I am not going to delve into it, but at least if we have EITI we will be able to go in there and verify what company issues they are producing and what revenue they say they are earning, then we may have some independent confirmation on what is going on. And that would be my recommendation, Madam President.

So, Madam President, in closing I would not talk about Raj Rajaratnam or the HCU fiasco or the FCB IPO, because nobody seems to want to deal with this thing because it “doh” exist. The FCB IPO never happened, nobody will ever be charged. When I applied for my 1,000 shares they say, Mr. Small you could only get 500, somebody will get half a million shares. That is wrong. But nobody cares. “Man make he money”, everybody else absconded and we forget about it and life goes on in wonderful Trinidad and Tobago. And that is what we are used to here. And nobody seems to want to touch it so I am starting to get tired of it, because obviously nobody is taking me on.

Madam President, as I close—

“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is Christ Jesus our Lord.”

That is Romans 8: 38-39.

Madam President, every day I wake up, I make my peace with the Father; I give thanks for the ability to do what I am able to do; I love Trinidad and Tobago. I want us to understand that this a place where we have the ability to turn things around but all of us have to contribute and contribute fully. And that is what I am trying to do, Madam President, in my own little way, I make my sacrifices and I try to stay on the narrow road.

So, Madam President, with those few words, I want to thank you for the opportunity to be able to contribute. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Trade and Industry (Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon):
Thank you, Madam President, and let me just start by thanking the Minister of Finance and the Minister in the Ministry of Finance, all of the public officials who have worked very hard in constructing the budget, which for the most part has been palatable and well accepted by the population. It is under this Government, led by the hon. Dr. Keith Rowley, it is left to us now to put this country on a sustainable part of growth and that in fact we will do. Just to reinforce and to respond to Sen. Hosein, we are red and we are in fact ready. [*Desk thumping*] I am yet to hear of an alternative budget prescriptions from the Opposition, Madam President, but I am still waiting. But I will respond to them during the course of my presentation.

The Ministry of Trade and Industry has been really concerned with four core

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areas: reforms, which so many of you have spoken about and which the public speaks about on a daily basis; diversification; trade and export; and investments. The cry of the business people and indeed anybody accessing services from the Government—the cry is always, it is too bureaucratic, it takes too long and hence the reason the area of focus on reforms in the Ministry of Trade and Industry.

I go on and I am very heartened by the results of the World Economic Forum's Global Competitive Index of 2017, where Trinidad and Tobago moved from 94th out of 138 countries in 2016 to 83rd in 2017. And this is the highest rank that this country has achieved since 2010. In fact, we are now where we were when the PNM left office. And this is, of course, due to improvements and strengthening of our institutions, our health and higher education, our goods and labour markets efficiency, our financial market development, technological readiness, market size and business sophistication. But I want to make reference, Madam President, to one particular area under the Global Competitive Index and that is the area of institutions. I will answer some of the questions posed by Sen. Hosein. And I look at the section called institutions and may I report on some of the rankings.

So from 2015 under diversion of public funds, we have gone from a low of 124 up to 102; under public trust in politicians, we have gone from 128 up to 111. We have gone under irregular payments and bribes, from 104 in 2015 up to 95; we have gone from favouritism in decisions of Government officials, from a low of 137 up to 120. Wastefulness of Government's spending, we have gone from 112 up to 91. And transparency of Government policy making, we have gone from 90 up to 72. [*Desk thumping*] And Sen. Hosein, I ask you, is this the good governance and transparency to which you were speaking? I do not think so.

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[*Crosstalk*] This is the Global Competitive Index—World Economic Forum 2017. And you can go back and examine those figures. Facts are facts. And this is why we are so focused on reforms, Madam President.

There are five areas of reforms in the Ministry of Trade and Industry that we are working on: the ease of doing business; the operationalization of a new investment facilitation framework; building on our single electronic window; implementing the WTO trade facilitation agreement; and generally improving the policy environment. And on improving the ease of doing business, there are several short term initiatives and I will go directly to them.

Trading across borders. And let me pinpoint that the fixed containers scanner at the Port of Port of Spain will finally be operationalized by this PNM Government before the end of calendar 2017. And this will immediately reduce the time and cost of importing and exporting goods and will also serve as a buffer against the movement of illegal and illicit goods.

Starting a business. This process to start a business will be reengineered and all of the manual applications will be phased out over 12 months. The current online system takes no more than three days but the manual system takes as long as 10 days. We are going to phase that manual system out.

Dealing with the construction permits. An automated system will be developed and when implemented will reduce the administrative burden for obtaining a construction permit. There will be a pilot project in the City of Port of Spain and by October 2018 we expect this to be in place in Port of Spain, after which the national rollout will commence in 2019. Resolving insolvency. An official supervisor of insolvency was permanently appointed in June 2017 and this will now allow the insolvency and bankruptcy legislation to be properly

implemented, under the medium term reforms under ease of doing business.

Electronic payments, which we spoke about this morning. The Ministry is working with the Ministry of Finance, the Treasury Division on developing an electronic funds transfer framework which will allow the Government to make and receive electronic payments and provide the public and the consumers with a more efficient and convenient and safer electronic funds transfer environment. And, Madam President, a technical consultant is expected to begin work with the Treasury Division in 2017 to implement all of these changes.

Madam President, there is another framework of reforms and this is the investment facilitation framework which Cabinet agreed to in April 2017. And the key objectives of that framework is to facilitate investors in need of regulatory compliance with national laws and regulations. This is going to simplify the entire process, the entire regulatory decision process and provide pre-approval services and facilitate post-approval services as well. And a key component of this frame, because the Cabinet appointed Inter Ministerial Committee to improve the processing times involved in approving and facilitating investments, particularly, in the non-energy sector. And I can tell you, that this is working well. The obvious objective is to improve the quality and speed and service delivery in the public sector.

There are some other main reforms under this area that is being done already. An implementation, as I said, has commenced and will be completed. We estimate by January 2019. I am giving this honourable Senate the commitments. By example, e-visas and visa waivers and visa exemptions, this system will be implemented by June 2018 and will reduce the service standard from the current two weeks to a one to three day period. The work permit module on TTBizLink.

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We expect to phase out all manual applications by March 2018. Another area of reform is building the national single electronic window for trade and business facilitation. And I am pleased to report that there are now 46 e-online services. There have been 1.1 million transactions with over 8,000 registered users from over 2,700 companies. And TTBizLink, I want to say, was the brainchild of the PNM in 2009. [*Desk thumping*]

So in 2017, we launched the E-Mobile Inspection and this involves a number of Government agencies: the TTPS, the Plant and Quarantine Services, Food and Drugs Inspectorate. Also, the E-Maritime Services Module was expanded in 2017 and this involves the Maritime Services Division, the coast guard, port administrations, allowing the shipping agents to submit vessels and pre-arrival and departure declarations to the Maritime Services Division. There was also the E-Utilities Module which was launched and this is to enhance and to include digital sampling.

TTBizLink as you know was given international recognition and they were awarded the excellence in electronic government, "ExcelGOV", in December 2016 by the network of e-Government Leaders of the Latin America and the Caribbean. This TTBizLink project is now being expanded. And coming out of this there will in fact be a more modern train and business legislative framework which allows for businesses to operate in a more efficient manner and this consultancy will commence in January 2018 and be completed in November 2018.

Also, Business Process Reengineering Services, we will reengineer and modernize the main import/export procedures administered by the Ministry, by the ports and regulated agencies, Chemistry, Food and Drugs, and Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards. This consultancy will commence in November 2017

and be completed in September 2018.

Also an interrogated risk management system to assist border agencies in conducting inspections more intelligently and efficiently whilst ensuring trade compliance. And this contract will be expected to be awarded in December 2017 and the project completed by December 2018. They are also considerable reforms under the trade facilitation agreement and these activities relate to the legislative, the procedural, the regulatory reforms, all geared towards the creation of a more reliable and efficient and cost effective trade environment.

There are other policy initiatives under the Ministry of Trade and Industry, including our national e-commerce strategy which we expect will be introduced in another month or so. And through this e-commerce strategy, Government will focus, again, on the implementation of an electronic funds transfer framework and by the way that electronic funds transfer framework will be accommodated under the expansion of the single electronic framework as well.

In keeping with ensuring that this e-commerce strategy is indeed a success, there will be a full proclamation of all of the necessary legislation, including, the Data Protection Act and the Electronic Transactions Regulation Act and also the enactment of the Cyber Crime legislation.

I want to go to diversification because this is very, very, important as we seek to transform our economy. And I note that there are some concerns raised by Sen. David Small about the manufacturing sector. It still remains a very, very, healthy sector, employing more than 50,000 persons. We are the largest manufacturers in the region and our products are being exported to more than 100 countries throughout the world, a variety of products. And we want to expand that from products to products and services as well. There is in fact a road map for

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diversification. But let me stick with the manufacturing for now. Sen. Small, perhaps what you are thinking of is the very narrow large manufacturers that are already well known to all of us. But we want to expand that to include small and medium size manufacturers as well and therefore the focus is there.

So in addition to those incentives which were given by the Minister of Finance, Cabinet has approved for the Ministry of Trade and Industry using funds from exporTT, funds held on account—no need to go back and dig into the Treasury. Funds held on account, we agreed that this grant fund facility and what they say is that it is a \$25million facility for strictly small and medium-sized businesses under a threshold of revenue of turnover. I will say, about \$18 million per annum. So you are talking, really, small and medium. And this fund really is to support these small and medium-sized export oriented entrepreneurs and import substitution geared businesses in manufacturing and in also agro-processing. And there are a number of areas within agro-processing and manufacturing that we will be focusing on. I can name some of them, but this project will be launched in the first week of November and all of the details will be available then. But under agro-processing we will be focusing on cocoa processing, vegetable and fruit processing, food packaging, agricultural equipment manufacturing, agricultural chemical manufacturing, oil extractions, dehydration, meat and fish processing, floriculture, sauces and canning to name some of them. And under manufacturing, food and drink processing, textile, garments, footwear and headwear, chemical products, including cleaning items, beauty and personal care, environmentally friendly packaging and, again, further details will be rolled out.

So these grants will cover up to 50 per cent of the cost of machinery and equipment with a cap of \$250,000 per firm in grant funding available through the

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Ministry of Trade and Industry and export. And as I said this facility will be launched in November 2017. And this is an addition to the \$50 million announced by the Minister of Finance for startups and small businesses.

In addition, for manufacturers, small, medium and large the Eximbank portfolio has now been increased by US \$55 million, for in the main trade, financing and discounting arrangements for our local export oriented manufacturers. And you would hear further details of that. In addition, in support of manufacturers, the Central Bank will license the Eximbank as a foreign exchange dealer for the benefit of eligible manufacturers and exporters and this facility will be capitalized at \$100 million.

Additionally, Cabinet has also approved a new and improved research and development facility under export. And this new facility will be revised to fund projects in three phases. Phase one, to determine the technical merit of the feasibility and the commercial potential and viability of the proposed project. Phase two, to continue the R&D efforts but more specifically to meet relevant cost related to product development, including the proto-type development and so on. And phase three, will help and assist with the commercialization objectives coming out from phase one and phase two. This new R&D facility, of course, is in keeping with the Government's efforts to attract high value, technology-oriented investments which is in line with our thrust as we enter the fourth industrial revolution.

And I know the hon. Leader of Opposition said that when they assume office, which might be in "quito-quito", that they will in fact bring on board everyone onto this—[Crosstalk] Fourth Industrial Revolution. [Crosstalk] And I can tell you that our manufacturers?—I am speaking about time, Sen. Mark, I am

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speaking about time, I am talking about perhaps in the year what, 3000 and so, I do not know. Not happening. But what I am saying to you about the Fourth Industrial Revolution is that our manufacturers are already involved in robotics. If you do not know—in robotics, an automation and there is much more involved and this is why we are doing the research and development project, to support manufacturers.

Again, Cabinet in August 2017 approved the issuance of a head Lease of 132 acres of state land at Phoenix Park, quite close to the existing Point Lisas Estate and that is for the purpose of developing a new industrial park for light and high value manufacturing. And this park will be completed by December 2019. Madam President, all of these new facilities, to facilitate new and existing manufacturers, large, small, medium manufacturers as well, from which I can tell you the country will benefit, these institutions will grow, there will be new employment opportunities, and there will be a boost to this country's economy.

I now look at the Maritime aspect of it for which the Ministry also has responsibility. And, of course, our geographic location puts us here in the Caribbean where there is a distinct advantage of being below the hurricane belt. And in addition to that, we in fact have a very educated and diverse workforce and we do have competitively priced utilities, all advantages which will help this particular industry to grow.

Madam President, work has been going on with the Standing Committee geared to develop the Maritime sector under the chairman, to my left, Sen. the Hon. Franklin Khan and we have focused on particular areas, the ship repair and dry docking which has significant potential. Right now there are three existing players and they do ship repairs to three different sizes of vessels. They employed

perhaps about 300 persons in their businesses and their revenues among the three of them are in fact in excess of \$100million. The potential of the industry is enormous and we are starting with these existing players. All of these persons have come up with expansion plans and we in the Ministry of Trade and Industry and in fact in the committee are ready to facilitate and support these investors to help their businesses to grow. Their major projects are valued—you would not believe, in the excess of \$500 million and these are expected to generate an annual revenue in the vicinity of more than \$60 million to \$80 million.

These projects will involve construction and upgrade works, new jetties of varying sizes, new dry docks and, again, we are seeing the potential for significant job appointments. Attached to this is an apprentice programme which the committee had asked for on which the YTEPP has acted and in December 2016 this Maritime Apprenticeship Programme was launched and what it entails is a full time, one year On-The-Job-Training in welding and ship hull fabricating. And as I said, this is between YTEPP and Caridoc. Elements of the programme will be tested and certified by Lloyds of London, with graduates receiving YTEPP certificates endorsed by both Caridoc and Lloyds of London and we expect the continuation of this kind of apprentice programme.

11.30 a.m.

We are building on the yachting industry and first, let me recognize the Ministry of Finance who facilitated the VAT exemption for services to foreign yachts as of February 01, 2017. Madam President, the Ministry of Trade and Industry has submitted to Cabinet and Cabinet has approved a yachting policy for the next five years, 2017—2021. And the main objectives are to improve and expand Trinidad and Tobago's yachting product and to reform and strengthen the

legal and regulatory framework and to improve the technical capacity in the yachting industry, and to improve the environmental social sustainability of the yachting industry.

So that coming out of this, the Ministry of Trade and Industry has come up with a comprehensive implementation plan and, in particular, some of the initiatives which we will pursue in 2018 would include the yachting legislation. The Ministry will spearhead the development of yachting-specific legislation, distinct from the current domestic, commercial maritime laws here and there. The single harmonized form will, in fact—which is expected to reduce the time taken to clear customs and immigration from two hours to as little as 15 minutes, we are pursuing this with the Ministry of the Attorney General and we expect it to be in place shortly.

A comprehensive yacht marketing and a promotional plan will be developed with a view to encouraging yacht arrivals to Trinidad and Tobago. With regard to marina development, the THA, along with the standing committee, is actively pursuing marina development for one in Trinidad and one in Tobago. The Trinidad and Tobago Yacht Club, I can tell you, one of the oldest and the more well-established marinas in the western peninsula, plans to undergo extensive expansion as well.

[MR. VICE-PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

Mr. Vice-President, financing has always been an issue for many of the persons involved in this industry, and what we have done is, we have brought together other institutions away from the traditional local ones. We have brought together other institutions with these stakeholders, for instance, the CAF, which is the Andean Development Bank, and also the IDB, Inter-American Development

Bank, to assist with the execution of these projects and we hope that these two entities, the banks and the stakeholders, in fact, get and they can see these projects come into fruition soon.

The area of trans-shipment and coal stacking is another area which we find to be lucrative and new guidelines for trans-shipment and coal stacking are being finalized at the Ministry of Works and Transport for Cabinet. As a matter of fact, there is in place already the contractual arrangement for the existing ships—eight of them—which are stacked in the Gulf, and I can tell you that this is quite lucrative again. The rate which has been approved is US \$750 per ship, per day for the first three years and US \$1,000 thereafter for the next five years.

With regard to trans-shipment, we are ideally positioned as a trans-shipment hub for the movement of metals and iron ore from the east coast of South America to the Asian destinations and as it is, 160 persons are employed in this trans-shipment industry and the contribution to GDP is probably about US \$47 million. So we expect that this is an area which can grow. The badly needed maritime spatial plan is being done by the Institute of Marine Affairs focusing on the internal waters of Trinidad and Tobago but more so on the gulf and the Galleons Passage. And, again, the objective is to have an integrated coastal zone management which is aimed at maintaining and, where necessary, enhancing the functional integrity of the coastal resource systems.

Let me speak to the creative industry. Again, in September 2015 when we came into office we met CreativeTT without a plan, and this was more of a donation agency. We see much value in this and I think the Opposition has agreed with me—much value in this trillion-dollar industry. So we are focusing on capacity-building and on structuring these entities under CreativeTT—music,

fashion and film—with very clear and well-formulated plans. Both music and fashion have already completed their strategic plans and the film plan will be completed by January 2018.

Under music: Elements of the strategic plan would be—in fact, elements of it would be exposed to the public during a national stakeholder engagement which is scheduled for October 2017 at the Queen's Hall. This is on the 30th of October, 2017 at Queen's Hall, where the public would be informed and particularly all of the stakeholders, all of the interested parties, about the key projects which are coming out of the strategic plan and which we will focus on in 2018, going forward.

And some of the projects, I will give you an idea of those that would be launched then. The Live Music District, much talked about. Of course, live music is a fundamental pillar of the global music industry. MusicTT has identified the city of Port of Spain for the pilot project of the live music agenda. And the four main areas within the city which we will target are Ariapita Avenue, Rust Street, the Savannah and NAPA. And why? Because these are high-traffic areas with already existing infrastructure, therefore making it cost-effective and suitable for live music events. This is going to be, without a doubt, a very exciting and vibrant occasion where our very diverse music will be exposed to all of Trinidad and Tobago and to the world at large.

When fully implemented, this project is expected to increase tourism, revenue, job opportunities. And we see all of these musicians across all of the different music genres having opportunities to commercialize their talent, bring it up to a standard where they can then export their music. It is not just only about soca, it is about all of the music genres as well. This is going to be a key offering

for Trinidad and Tobago's tourism strategies and packages. As I said before, this district will be launched on March 01, 2018. And the reason for the time lag is that to develop all of the plans that are necessary with all of the stakeholders: the strategy and implementation plan, the collaborative action plan that is necessary as well, the communications campaigns. And it will kick off right after Carnival and end just before the parang season.

There is also the Artiste Development Programme commencing in December 2017 and, of course, an Export Ready Academy, which is not a physical academy, but rather a direct training programme for the Artiste Portfolio Development Programme which is going to deal with every aspect of music export, and we are talking about performances and touring, stage presence and live vocal training, various types of deals, signings, collaborations, publishing, placements, development and monetization of an online presence, merchandizing, endorsements and intellectual property.

So when Sen. Haynes spoke yesterday about, "we are ready in the music industry", there is not. There is so much capacity-building to be done in all—it is just not about singing or so. There is so much more to be done, and that is where the focus will be, on capacity-building and ensuring that they are ready for exports. There will be a music tech platform as well, which is an upgrade of the MusicTT's website. So any enquiries with regard to music and all of the resources surrounding music, et cetera, that is where you are going to head to, that platform.

In the area of fashion, the Fashion Value Chain Investment Programme was launched in March 2017 by FashionTT with five designers benefiting: J. Angelique, Chanu Lochan Dass, Ecliff Elie, Milne House and from Tobago, Ted Archer, Leather Collections. This list has been completed and all of these

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businesses, most of them have added confirmed streams of new income and many of them are exporting to new markets: St. Lucia, Antigua, Barbados, and so on.

There is going to be this Bespoke Tailoring Programme which will commence on March 01, 2018. In collaboration with the Savile Row and MIC and with support from the Ministry of Trade and Industry, it is a one-year certificate programme in Bespoke Tailoring, pattern drafting, cutting and fitting facilitated by the famed Prof. Andrew Ramroop of the Savile Row Academy. And those participants in the programme will, in fact, at the end of the programme, have a certificate which is equivalent to the National Vocational Qualifications at level 4 of the United Kingdom.

This programme is integral to building export capacity and successfully positioning local tailor-made products in international markets. You talk about diversification? Here it is coming alive. An MOU will be signed in November 2017, as I said, the roll-out will be in March, 2018. That is also the establishment of the Local Garment Production Facility. There was a delay with UTT, but this facility would, in fact, be opened in March 2018.

Under film, the Government has approved the extension of the Production Expenditure Rebate Programme. We are confident that four international productions will, in fact, be shot in Trinidad and Tobago between November 2017 and February 2018. There are several leads, more than these four productions—several leads from all parts of the world. There is going to be a film production directory and the implementation of several projects under the strategic plan when we receive that in January of 2018. Also included will be several training and certification projects and production assistance and script development programmes as well.

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Just so that I can speak a little bit about support for the agricultural sector, Mr. Vice-President, in October 2016, you know, the Cabinet approved the development of the new Agro-processing and Light Industrial Park at Moruga. Again, we have received the master plan which provides a blueprint for the successful implementation of the park. And at the end of this, we are going to have a reduction in the food import bill and we are going to be able to provide export of our locally manufactured agricultural-based products.

Just to remind this honourable House as well, with regard to the divestment of the Carlsen Field Rice Mill, that it will soon be out with the old and in with the new, because the Carlsen Field divestment process is almost to completion [*Desk thumping*] and will be submitted Cabinet, and once done, the expectation is for a modern parboiled-rice-milling operation.

Just to speak a little bit about our trade and exports—how much more time do I have?

Mr. Vice-President: You finish at 11.50.

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: Sorry?

Mr. Vice-President: You finish at 11.50.

Hon. Senators: Nine minutes.

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: Fine. Just to speak a little bit about our trade and exports. Indeed, we looked at the balance of visible trade and, of course, noted the decline. Exports declined from \$40 billion to \$33 billion and we are very concerned about it. So I went, actually, to the figures. I asked the CSO to give me the statistics as to where the declines actually occurred. And, of course, when we speak of these exports, it is both energy and non-energy. So I looked at some of the elements where there was a fall in exports of some products, and really, it was

with regard to natural gas, fertilizers, chemical elements, iron and steel bar rods, and so on. Of course, you know, we had the departure of ArcelorMittal.

But then I looked at where the increases were and, Mr. Vice-President, happily they were in the non-energy commodities. Not significant, but this is why we are growing that sector, the manufacturing, the agro-processing and so on. So that in paper and paper boards there was a \$16 million increase; in chocolate and preparations, a \$15 million increase; in materials of rubber, a \$10 million increase; in flour, wheat, et cetera, and probably National Flour Mills, an increase of \$6 million; in fish—fresh, chilled and frozen—an increase of \$5 million as well; in rice—this is white rice—\$2 million, and so on. And there is overall flat performances, as I said, but we intend to grow this non-energy for exports in particular.

So we will continue in the Ministry of Trade and Industry with all of our market presence and other marketing initiatives and the focus will be—and we are particularly concerned. I mean, arising out of those two storms—catastrophic storms, Irma and Maria—you will be surprised, affecting Antigua, St. Kitts, Dominica, Anguilla, BVI and Puerto Rico—we have lost some key markets for about six months until they recover. And when calculated, you are talking about \$2.7 billion of exports we do to these countries. So the point about it is, no markets are really secure, so we have got to focus on expanding our markets into Latin America as well.

And you know the work that we are doing in Cuba. This will continue. We know the very successful mission which we have there. Many of these agencies, including PPGPL, National Petroleum, Trinidad Tissues, many orders have already been received and our Trade Facilitation Office set up by this PNM Government is

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working actively to assist. One of our largest conglomerates is already establishing some investments in Cuba's Mariel Economic Zone as well. There was a mission to the Dominican Republic recently by the TTMA and endorsed by the Ministry of Trade and Industry. This is an exciting market for us as well, especially for products like cereals, fertilizers, glass bottles, tissue paper, and so on. Republic Bank held a mission to Ghana and it was supported by the Ministry of Trade and Industry as well.

[Cell phone rings]

Mr. Vice-President: Would the Senator with the offending device please exit the Chamber?

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: I need some injury time, eh.

Mr. Vice-President: Senator, you could exit the Chamber and turn it off, please. Thank you. Continue, Minister.

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: As I said, the mission to Ghana—the exploratory mission to Ghana was a private sector initiative but supported by the Government. We are working on our Venezuela initiative to expand the range of products and also the volume of goods sent to Venezuela. We are also—as you know, we have embarked on discussions for a Partial Scope Agreement between Chile and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and that is continuing.

With regard to the Panama Partial Scope Agreement, we have recently approved by Cabinet a detailed implementation plan. This is an extensive market for us and we are going forward with this Panama market. A trade mission to Panama and Costa Rica will be led by the Ministry of Trade and Industry and it is expected to take place in March 2018, with Colombia in mid-2018. There are other supporting initiatives, including a National Export Strategy which we must get

completed in another three months, and, of course, the National Quality Policy which the consultants have submitted to us and within a month this will be taken to Cabinet. And, again, this National Quality Policy is expected to improve this country's competitiveness and prepare us for an expansion in the area of exports.

There are a number of success stories in terms of products, but time does not allow me to. But in particular, the Trinidad and Tobago Fine Cocoa, which the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries spoke of, which is now being sold as a joint product with Harrods and it is on the shelf in Harrods in London; [*Desk thumping*] also Twigs Naturals, which is our own Caribbean tea brand which also won several awards as well: the Global Tea Championship Award, for their Caribbean-grown mint and Caribbean Christmas tea. Time?

Mr. Vice-President: You have three more minutes.

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: Right. Investment performance: According to the 2017 World Investment Report, the global flows of FDIs have fallen by 2 per cent and for developing countries it has declined even more, by 14 per cent. But I can tell you, Mr. Vice-President, that this Government has worked very hard on building investor confidence and laying the foundation for further economic diversification, growth and sustainability, and it is our local manufacturers who, I am telling you, who are all expending large sums of money—\$50 million. And you can check and I will detail when I have more time—\$50 million here, \$60 million here, \$30 million there. All of our local manufacturers are investing in plant, machinery and equipment for the future.

And in addition to that, our local private sector is doing considerable local investments as well. So you can expect several initiatives to be unfolded by the private sector in the course of 2018 and even starting in 2017. So you can expect a

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new manufacturer of—an assembler of automotive batteries by January 2018; a new manufacturer of juice in 2018. One of our large manufacturers and exporters of confectionery and other products is doing a new factory [*Desk thumping*] and that is another \$250 million investment in Trinidad and Tobago.

We have a new manufacturer of pepper sauce and condiments; another one coming up in 2018; another one has just started operations, or about to start. That is Baron Foods from St. Lucia—about to start soon. Advance Foam will soon start—the manufacturer of foam, fibre pads and pillows for export as well. There is going to be a new state-of-the-art ice cream manufacturing plant which will come on stream in February of next year; a new state-of-the-art manufacturer of ice cream cones as well.

There is going to be a new facility of aluminium doors and windows as well, coming from Antigua; a new hatchery and animal pet food operation will start next year as well. Another new non-alcoholic beverage manufacturing distribution facility will commence as well in 2018. National Flour Mills will spend \$80 million in 2017, 2018 and 2019 to enhance their facility for production of pet food and warehouse expansion and dry mix operation.

So, when I add all of the private sector construction projects that are going on in this country that we are aware of, you are talking about more than \$3 billion worth of projects and employing, we anticipate, more than 2,000 persons as well. And those will be unveiled to the population as they come forward.

This Government is not in an enviable position, however we are working. There is a consistent level of transportation being done across all of our Ministries over 2017 which will continue into 2018. I can tell you that the prospect for economic growth is encouraging and that is because there is stable leadership

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under this Government and under the hon. Keith Christopher Rowley, our dear Prime Minister. The well-being of our citizens is in good hands where higher truth exists and where there is integrity and I want to say that the corrosive days of the UNC are long behind us. [*Desk thumping*] I thank you, Mr. Vice-President.

Hon. Senators: Well said, Paula, well said.

ELECTRONIC DEVICES

(Use of)

Mr. Vice-President: Before I invite the next speaker, I just wish to reiterate the sentiments of the President of the Senate regarding the devices. I think that we are all in here tech-savvy enough that I can ask you to take a few seconds now and turn your devices on silent and at least turn the volume down so that if a call comes in or anything happens, it does not disturb the person contributing. So everybody, take a few seconds, check your phones, check your devices, make sure it is on silent, turn the volume down before I invite the next speaker, who is the Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs. [*Desk thumping*]

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2018) BILL, 2017

The Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs and Minister in the Ministry of National Security (Sen. The Hon. Dennis Moses): Mr. Vice-President, it is an honour and privilege to be able to make a contribution to this debate on the Appropriation Bill of this year, 2017. I wish from the outset to congratulate the Minister of Finance and staff personnel at that Ministry, the Ministry of Finance, in a very special way for the work and dedication involved in producing such a quality, balanced proper budget to this honourable House. Truly, Mr. Vice-President, the detailed descriptions in meeting the current challenges of our country are highly commendable. I also wish to extend congratulations to the

Minister of Planning and Development, and indeed, staff of that Ministry, for their contribution to the budgetary exercise. Mr. Vice-President, I wholeheartedly support, of course, the Appropriation Bill, 2017.

I would like also to say that we are very fortunate in this country to have a leader of the calibre of our Prime Minister, Dr. the hon. Keith Rowley [*Desk thumping*] undertake the responsibilities of Prime Minister of our country. In this regard, respect for the rule of law, unswerving dedication to the equitable and sustainable development of our country, sharing the burden of adjustment, treating in a direct and resolute manner the scourge of corruption, sharing the burden, or rather the burden of adjustment, as I said, accountability across the board, a fair day's work for a fair day's pay, of course, living within our means. These are all traits that come to mind when we consider the action and deeds of our Prime Minister and, of course, our Government over the last two years.

Mr. Vice-President, continuing in that vein, I would like to mention that expediency and the recourse to dispensing our patrimony to shore up partisan positions do not find appeal within our Government. Ours is one that treats with the concerns of our citizens across the entire country. I also have had the good fortune of working with our Prime Minister at home and abroad and I can say offhand that his intellect, tenacity and experience on display continue to serve as an inspiration to contribute to the development of our country. [*Desk thumping*] Perhaps I should also add that this admiration and pride is shared among leaders of other countries beyond Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Vice-President, demonizing has given way somewhat to quibbling on the margins, grandstanding and theatrics. Needless to say, this does not banalize the usefulness of constructive contributions from stakeholders. Over the last two

years our sober and competent Prime Minister has been steadfast and resolute, in nudging us towards a pathway of sobriety, sustainability, equitability and common sense. Thankfully, citizens of our country as a whole are the arbiters and are very present in our space. It is within this framework that I, as Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs, and, indeed, the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs, taking the lead from a collective, that of the Cabinet. Mr. Vice-President, the annual budget allocation for the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs amounts to \$261 million for this year, 2017/2018. In the year 2015/2016—the figure was about 25 per cent less—meaning \$353 million.

Much of the Ministry's allocation is geared towards the payment of rents, leases on buildings, especially in regard to our missions abroad; subscription fees to international organizations and staff personnel expenditure. Over the past years, the Ministry, like so many others, of course—other Ministries, that is—would have been obliged to cut, reduce discretionary expenditure in order to stay within our allocation. Further, a number of our diplomatic missions abroad are not operating at optimal staffing levels and we, within such strictures, do what we can in order to maintain the high visibility and representation at international meetings and conferences abroad. I would, at this juncture, like to commend and congratulate and express my appreciation to members of staff of the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs for their ongoing perseverance and hard work in ensuring that within the restraints that we operate, we can still get the job done.

Mr. Vice-President, we continue to explore additional avenues to reduce expenditure and achieve savings and it is in this regard that we have established and consolidated a Voice over Internet Protocol system linking our missions and headquarters, and we have been able to secure substantial savings in this regard.

We, at the Ministry recognize that globalization has dramatically altered the nature of relationships between domestic and world economies, and Trinidad and Tobago continues to be impacted by these occurrences beyond our control. Therefore, we, at the level of the Ministry, continue to explore methods of revenue generation; and the budget for this fiscal year, as expressed and presented by the hon. Minister of Finance, amply treats with this issue.

[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

I would like now to go into some further detail as regards giving account for the Ministry's activities during this past year which clearly reflect how the Ministry has stewarded the allocated funds, successfully so, in maintaining and, as I just said, enhancing this country's regional and hemispheric footprint through the participation and the successful promotion of Trinidad and Tobago's interest around the world.

Protocol and consular services are an integral part of the Ministry's portfolio and in this regard we address the needs of nationals abroad, including, of course, the diaspora who may sometimes encounter challenges of unforeseen circumstances in a foreign country. We also provide information in security, immigration and deportation issues. We treat with issues of human trafficking and we provide general guidance in social and cultural initiatives. Further, we provide linkages to the trade and investment sectors within our country.

Of course, at our missions, a selected number of our missions, we have immigration services on offer and in that regard we process passport and visa applications and process any emergency travel documents that may be required. Over the past year, we would have fulfilled our mandate through assistance to nationals desirous of such assistance and those that are in distress.

Of course, recently, we would have had to assist in the repatriation of two persons, nationals of Trinidad and Tobago, who would have lost their lives in the unfortunate passage of the hurricane in the island of St. Martin.

12.00 noon

Madam President, I would like to also indicate that an integral part of the Ministry's role and function is to safeguard Trinidad and Tobago's interest and, thus, we would have launched recently, in June of this year, a registration system for nationals abroad—for both persons who reside abroad and those who are visiting. This allows nationals to register their stay details online so as to allow us to make easy contact and extend any assistance as may be required. As of September of this year, there would have been in excess of 1,600 registered nationals on the system. Needless to say, the recent events in our region—climatic events that is—demonstrate the need for such a facility in extending our reach beyond our shores in bringing assistance and help to our nationals.

Madam President, we also interact at the level of the Ministry with many foreign nationals resident here in Trinidad and Tobago. To this end, we would have facilitated the presentation of letters of credence of newly-appointed Heads of Missions including those from the Federal Republic of Germany, Costa Rica and Botswana. We, of course, at the level of the Government, continue to pursue this goal of deepening relations with other countries in furtherance of advancing our national interest. The Ministry also has placed special emphasis on energy-related matters in its engagement with foreign countries, and we work closely with the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries and, of course, other national stakeholders to project our interest in oil, natural gas and energy services.

Of note here would be the visit by the hon. Prime Minister to Venezuela

during this year, or rather last year, the 5th of December of last year. Energy security and trade initiatives were the focus of that visit and an agreement between the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela for the implementation of natural gas supply project from Venezuela to our country was signed. The meeting also yielded several other benefits including the expanded trade opportunities for manufactured goods from Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam President, looking forward, implementation of this agreement would remain a priority. We also would like, in addition, to advancing in negotiations to facilitate the exploitation of the cross-border gas fields, we would like to continue—or rather, we are committed to playing our part in further negotiations with Venezuela to achieve mutual beneficial outcomes. I also would like to mention the visit by the hon. Prime Minister to Chile earlier this year—in May of this year. I should mention as well that Trinidad and Tobago is the major supplier of liquid natural gas to Chile, amounting to over 90 per cent of the imports into Chile, and we also export to that country a major supply of methanol and ammonia to Chile. We, of course, during that visit, held discussions towards the consolidation of our place in the market and to ensure that other areas, inclusive of a partial scope agreement that would have been mentioned earlier, can be achieved.

I should also indicate the extent of the population, the number of consumers amounting to more than 17 million in Chile that could provide avenues for our products and our manufactures here in Trinidad and Tobago. This visit yielded several other outcomes of course. We would have signed a joint agreement in the area of intellectual property with the Chileans, and other mutual beneficial areas were treated such as the candidatures in international organizations, specifically the candidacy, or candidature rather of Chile within the folds of the Inter-American

Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA).

Madam President, we also facilitated a visit by Her Excellency Socorro Flores—she is the Undersecretary for Latin America and the Caribbean, of Mexico—and as per usual, we would have held discussions relating to energy, trade investment, agriculture, education and other issues of mutual benefit to both countries. We recognize, at the level of the Ministry, that trade can be an important driver of economic growth, poverty reduction and development. Thus, our country has focused our energies within our network of missions abroad, the 19 missions, in pursuing such possibilities.

Within our official policy framework at the level of the Government, the realization of building new and sustainable partnerships is there with countries, of course, around the world, and we have embarked on outreach programmes which will present new opportunities for certain sectors within our economy. We, Madam President, continue to focus on improving bilateral arrangements and, in that regard, we would have held discussions on certain partial scope agreements with a number of countries, as the Minister of Trade and Industry would have alluded to earlier by way of mentioning Panama and Colombia. In 2016, Trinidad and Tobago, the trade with Chile, just by way of an illustration, amounted to about \$2.7 billion, and therein lies the potential for making use of such a vast marketplace.

Madam President, bilateral diplomacy is essential to advancing our work here in Trinidad and Tobago and we effect this through representatives and delegations from foreign countries at various meetings, whether abroad in the margins of international conferences, or indeed here on visits to Trinidad and Tobago. With our foreign policy during the year under review, the Ministry

received foreign delegations from a host of countries inclusive of Singapore, Qatar, China, Japan and Vietnam, and as per usual mutual interest in certain areas attracted our attention.

I would now like to go to some initiatives that we have with the United States of America, just briefly. We would have signed a memorandum of understanding for the establishment of a state-of-the-art border control system, commonly known as PISCES, that would be central to the identification of a traveller's identity against databases internationally and locally, and that would contribute to the identification of individuals who might pose a threat to our national security. Further afield, we would have also posted stations and air military attachés at our embassy, or the Embassy of Mexico here in Port of Spain, and the intention is to strengthen ties of military cooperation so that best practices and information sharing between the law enforcement agencies of both countries can take place and redound to our benefit here locally.

Madam President, I am pleased to report to this eminent House, that in the first quarter of this year, the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs via our Permanent Mission in New York, obtained the approval from the UAE—that is, the United Arab Emirates—for the establishment of our embassy here, in that country rather, and we are currently addressing the administrative arrangements necessary for the establishment of that mission. Furthermore, we also would have gone somewhere ahead in the establishment of the High Commission in Barbados. We not only would have had the authorization from that country, but we would have also sent a two-team mission to undertake in an exploratory fashion the requirements, or to seek all the possibilities, the administrative arrangements necessary for the establishment of the mission there.

Madam President, I would just quickly move on to other areas of importance to the Ministry of National Security and indeed our country within the fold of Caricom and, in this regard, the CSME—the single market and the economy—and regional security come to mind. The hon. Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, within the Quasi-Cabinet Secretariat of the Caricom regional grouping, would have been the first signatory to the agreement that treats to incorporate the Council for National Security and Law Enforcement, otherwise known as CONSLE, as an organ of the community. I should perhaps mention that in an outreach fashion, the Ministry would have been involved in making presentations to the University of the West Indies and the Lok Jack Institute of Business on matters relating to CSME and other similar undertakings in an attempt to increase general awareness of issues within the remit of the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs.

Madam President, I now turn to relationships with other countries by way of the grouping of Caricom, and we would have interfaced as a region with Japan, with Canada. Indeed, we are currently doing so with Mexico and a host of issues of regional concern that would bring specific benefits to our country. I would like as well to mention that in the case of Korea, we attended a meeting earlier this year, February 2016, in Jamaica, and we facilitated the participation of eight Government officials at high-level meetings in South Korea and China, all within the framework of treating with areas of technical assistance and global issues of mutual concern, whether they be in the realm of climate change, development cooperation, or indeed with Caricom single ICT space.

Relative to the staffing of our missions, we would have during the reporting period posted two Heads of Missions, specifically the Ambassador to Costa Rica and the High Commissioner to the UK, London. They have settled in quite well

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and are making the contribution contemplated when they were sent. Ongoing efforts continue administratively at this point to allow other persons to assume such charges in the very near future in other missions that remain where the vacancy remains.

Madam President, we also would like to make mention of the development goals under the National Development Strategy 2016—2030 of our country, where the Ministry continues to advance the Government's objectives in the multilateral arena by supporting the work of various international organizations, whether they be the FAO, the WIPO—that is the World Intellectual Property Organization—WHO, or indeed the Commonwealth.

Recently, I would have had the privilege to participate as Head of Delegation to the United Nations General Assembly which was recently held last month in New York, and we would have extended our domestic policy positions as mirrored in the international arena to that body during the general debate. We would have highlighted sustainable development including actions that would be aimed at mitigating climate change, the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, as well as the importance of and sustainable use of ocean, seas and marine resources.

As an adjunct, I would like to add that habitually each year when we participate at the United Nations, we allow persons from within the fold of the Ministry to participate by way of a training exercise and exposure via in-house training exercises at the United Nations running perhaps a month or two months at a time, and we would have continued in that vein during this year's General Assembly sessions.

Madam Chair, I am coming to a close now, but I will just hurriedly like to

continue by highlighting areas of commonality between states that we have on a regular fashion joint meetings from the region perspective Caricom with those countries as I mentioned early, whether they be United Kingdom or Canada, or as recently was the case indeed with Romania who is seeking support for a candidate rather within the United Nations system. These meetings presented opportunities to highlight areas of commonality that exist within our states to identify new areas for engaging in other initiatives and, of course, to provide updates on the progress of ongoing arrangements and projects within the fold of such agreements

Madam President, we also have the responsibility and privilege to place nationals of our country within the folds of international organizations as employees and, in that regard, we were successful in placing one national at the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf for the period 2017—2021. This would have come at the expiration of the term of yet another national of Trinidad and Tobago on that body. This continued membership of the commission is critical, given that Trinidad and Tobago has made a submission to the commission to extend the Continental Shelf of our country by 200 nautical miles, and if successful this will bring significant long-term economic benefits to our country. The submission is expected to be considered in the upcoming months by the commission, and to this end the Ministry will continue lobbying in tandem with the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, of course, via our overseas mission.

I am just backtracking a bit and making reference to the visit of the hon. Prime Minister of Chile in the area of sport and culture. We acknowledged their critical contribution potential, that is, to enhancing and amplifying our regional and global reach and the need to treat with problems associated with youth in our countries, and a very successful programme within Chile, Fútbol Más, a

programme that was designed by the NGOs, non-governmental organizations within Chile. We hope to pattern a similar programme here in Trinidad and Tobago for poor and vulnerable populations and we hope to be in a position to sign a draft memorandum of understanding in this area. We also would like to mention with the other countries, Cuba in particular, a cultural agreement that we have in our bilateral relationship with Cuba and, in this regard, the successful visit by the Success Laventille Secondary School steel band is relevant here and this would have taken place earlier this year in March 2017.

Madam President, as I indicated in my address to this honourable House last year, the Ministry is also working towards greater value for money— securing rather, greater value for money in the provision of services and, in this regard, the savings that I mentioned earlier, I now have the figure before me. In terms of the cost and the savings, its costs amount to about TT \$700,000, and \$1.5 million is the expected return in savings per year. I wish to reiterate at this point that the Ministry is doing all it can to keep expenditure at a minimum, and this allows us to do more with much less as the allocation for this year would attest to.

I should also mention that some progress has been made over the last year in strengthening the Ministry institutionally by conducting a review of the international relations officer establishment and the recruitment of a monitoring and evaluation coordinator within the Policy and Planning Division. We also treat with elaborating a diaspora policy. I think I am about to come to a close, Madam Chair, but with your permission allow me to make mention of the housing of the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs. We have identified a property and we are continuing towards the finalization of preliminary documentation that would allow us to have building constructed towards that end.

Madam President, the range of activities undertaken during the period under review, that is for the past year, and those that are planned are linked directly to the fulfilment of Government's development thrust and seek to protect the interest of Trinidad and Tobago in the spheres of trade and investment, enhancing public outreach initiatives, the provision of services and broadening and deepening of relations with key partners regionally and internationally.

By way of conclusion, I wish to say that the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs continues to strategically direct its work in executing the foreign policy of Trinidad and Tobago. We will continue to do this by championing, advancing and furthering the Government's objectives through its diplomatic interactions with other sovereign states in the global arena, within the ambit of international law, as we continue to put people first in realizing Vision 2030.

Allow me, Madam President, to express my sincere appreciation for this opportunity. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*].

Madam President: Hon. Senators, at this stage, we will suspend and we will return at 1.30 p.m. All right? So, we are suspended. This sitting is suspended until 1.30 p.m.

12.22 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

1.30 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

[MR. VICE-PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Ramkissoon.

Sen. Melissa Ramkissoon: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President, for this opportunity to speak on this Budget 2018. As you all know, we, Senators, do not have a vote on the money Bill but we do have Senators who are in the Ministry of the Ministry of Finance. So I would like to take this opportunity and join with many others in

congratulating Sen. West, who is not in the Chamber at the moment, [*Desk thumping*] on delivering the budget with such finesse. I must say I did enjoy it and it was her maiden contribution and she did it quite well so that is outstanding.

Mr. Vice-President, I would like to say that my contribution today, I tried to centre it around hope. Hope is something that people can find comfort in, they can find peace, they can find success and they could even find happiness. So I have decided to break my contribution today into the following categories: education, energy sector, tourism versus crime within our sister isles, the Ministry of Finance's role as it relates to state enterprises, and how the Government can cut expenditure in the social services investment programmes by almost \$92 million. And, Mr. Vice-President, as always, I stand here, I always want to bring solutions or even recommendations where the different Ministers and Ministries can look at it. It is never to condemn or to put a thumb in but always to try to uplift or highlight issues that I may see as a red flag and I think more consideration should be given.

So, in my first point, I want to speak about the Government's expenditure versus its core revenues. In the budget, we saw that the Government's expenditure is at \$53.3 billion with core revenues remaining the same or predicted to be unchanged at \$33 billion, and we saw the eight measures which Sen. Shrikissoon had mentioned yesterday during his contribution, the eight measures to raise revenue with high taxing of the working class or citizens and with little or zero measures to reduce the expenditure of \$53.8 billion. And it is very unfortunate because sometimes the working class feels that they carry the burden of the country or the progress of the country because they may work eight-hour jobs and then persons who are not working have to enjoy benefits through these social

services programmes. We heard Sen. Mahabir speak about “we do not have much to give” and I heard another MP said, in the other place, “we are here to cut and contrive”. I agree with those things but when you look at these programmes and these systems and the expenditure of the Government or the estimated expenditure, this is not the message being sent to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

So with that, I just want to quote because—before we start the Senate today, Mr. Vice-President, we opened in a word of prayer. Before we do anything as a country, we always pray; before, as a people, we always ask God for wisdom, for understanding before we do anything. And this scripture came to me, Isaiah 10:

“Woe to those who make unjust laws,
 to those who issue oppressive decrees,
 to deprive the poor of their rights
 and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people,
 making widows their prey
 and robbing the fatherless.”

[*Desk thumping*] Mr. Vice-President, there are many programmes in our country or many systems we have— we have countless and I will be speaking about a few of them—that are here to prevent such, but what is the shortfall? What is the shortcoming? Is it leadership? Is it that we do not have the will as a people to progress?

I am going to look at some areas that I think are easy to change and does not need money. For example, we just need a minority to start and the majority will follow and that is why we have leaders. We have strong leaders within our country to allow such. For example, Sen. Rambharat, he is not in the Chamber at the moment, but he spoke about public servants and their timeliness. I want to

highlight another issue. The professionalism of these public servants who are demanding that you give them something extra when you need your land approved or when you need to get your building stamped. What is that? Those are some things the Ministry need to hold accountable. Why is it that I have to give you an extra something to get my Town and Country approval?

Another issue that I have seen recently. I have not seen this very much in the past and maybe because we did not have such big social media avenues where people comment on everything and anything, but I am looking at our public representatives eroding public office and this is something we have to look at because our ancestors fought very hard for our independence and for us to gain a republic status, and now to have Members criticize or condemn Members within—I understand that they say that politics have a role or a hat of itself, but I do not believe that that is what we need as a country. We are an island, 1.4 million people and they are looking for us for hope; they are looking for us to make a difference. They are asking us what you are doing differently.

We heard from the present administration what they are doing different from the last administration. Great. But the public also wants to know, can I trust you? I believe Sen. Dookie spoke about public institutions and the trust of the people, and he was speaking about their administration being trustworthy. Man, you need to walk the walk. So that is an area that can be improved amongst just within Ministries, not a different programme that will cost our public to improve that area.

I looked at also the Joint Select Committee had a public hearing with the security and private security firms and a member from one of these organizations bravely came up to the platform or pulpit or the microphone and said that these private security firms walk a thin line between serving you as in protecting you,

and being a criminal, as in meaning coming to rob you the next day. That is how brave our country has reached where we have members in high portfolios saying this about citizens.

Also, Mr. Vice-President, we could even look at the lower level, our institutions—and I will talk about education a little later on. But look at teachers asking primary school students to come to extra classes. These children are sitting in school for almost eight hours and then they are having two hours again to sit down in a class. When I heard my friend telling me that they have to drop their child, Standard 3, for extra classes because the teacher is victimizing their child if they do not send them. So they may not need the class but because the entire class is going, they have to send them.

That really hurt me because I felt they are now in the primary school, they still have secondary school and they have university. Poor children, and you know, then you are frustrating the children now. You are already limiting them, they have to behave. They have to sit in the classroom quietly, they cannot make noise. Now, you have extra lessons and then you expect our children of our future to be positive, to not be disgruntled, to not be sad and unhappy? You are robbing the children of their childhood. And teachers are doing this because they want money. They are saying that their salaries—well, “nobody feel that they get enough pay”—their salaries are not enough so because of that, they have extra classes and now victimizing the children who do not attend. And that is one issue.

Another one that we can look at is as legislators, the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, we have to tell them what speed to drive at. How is that? Humans know that they could never depend on a computer or a machine 100 per cent but yet these people automatically know how Melissa is going to respond when they cut in

front of me. I do not understand. That is a culture? A behaviour? We as citizens? I do not think we need a programme or you allocate money now to put up stop signs, money to do traffic lights, also pedestrian crossing. We spent about, I saw \$1.6 million in the public sector. When I was driving to Senate today, a man just crossing right in front of my vehicle, the pedestrian crossing two footsteps away. So we, the Government is being asked to spend countless dollars and the citizens are what? Not using them and then we are asking them to cut and contrive and then we are asking the taxpayers—something not adding up. Is it that we need the systems? Okay? Are we enforcing the use of the systems? No.

I agree with Sen. Gopee-Scoon on diversification. She spoke at length at the different areas, also the cybercrime legislation. All of these things are positive aspects to our country and I agree with diversification. There is one area that Sen. Khan had raised about is our state assets being aged and not enough is being done to save them and how we can appreciate. One thing I want to just say on that point is, it is good to diversify because we need to grow but we should not grow at the extent or the expense of our country's wealth and our power. Sale of state assets to foreign cultures, foreign procedures, behaviours, will now encroach on us and we will be forced to follow suit and that is something we need to be mindful of.

So, Mr. Vice-President, I would like to speak about education. In the social services programme, 2018 booklet, they gave some statistics on the number of students who wrote SEA and it was 18,180 students and from that, 2,236 students got below 30 per cent. Now this is under maths and English. Now, you have 2,236 students scoring below 30 per cent and now, remember, we fought for every child should pass SEA—well in my time, it was Common Entrance. But what are you telling these children? You are giving them a high school, you say, “Okay,

yuh pass for ah high school”, but “yuh putting them in ah system”, they cannot read or write properly, but “yuh giving them to sit down next to ah child who made 70 per cent”? How is that benefitting anyone?

So I read in the book that they are asking 803 students to repeat. Okay. That still leaves 1,433 students. I read also there is a Form 1 penmanship programme. Okay, no problem. So if you put 30 children in a class, you need about 48 classes which is about 16 schools. So do we have 16 schools designed for these students who are scoring below 30 per cent? I know Sen. Richards always speaks so passionately about education and our systems are not—it is not adaptive to the present day student. And my thing is, I do not support every child passing SEA to just send them into a Form 1 class that they cannot cope. That is why you will have the high rate of bullying, disruptive students, because they cannot do their homework, they do not understand what is being taught, they are just bored, they cannot relate and that is why you are seeing the increase.

Now, I was reading only today that Finland actually had a revamp of their education system where they are no longer teaching subjects but they are teaching programmes, like for example, the World War II. You will learn about the geography, the history; also, how would you relate if you are a waiter, what skills you have and I support that. For these students who are below 30 per cent, I support learning life skills. I actually can support one of our present initiatives which is education through sports and the booklet, the social services programme, spoke about the boxing fitness programme which had a positive impact in Sea Lots and Beetham and that is where this initiative was done, and I believe this is something that we can do for these students. Instead of sending them into a school system that they already could not understand for seven years, I find just pushing

them into is just showing that you do not care about these children and not only that, they cannot adapt.

So I will advise, I will recommend that do not let every child pass SEA just to say that you had 100 per cent pass rate but put them into programmes with sports so that they could learn teamwork, they could learn life skills. They could have that kind of dedication, they could become a part of something because most of the times, the family is very weak and sports is definitely something that we can push. I know the Ministry of Sports is doing a lot of different works with youths, this is definitely something, instead of sending them to school where they are not able to keep up with the curriculum.

Mr. Vice-President, there was also, on page 44, a comment about health lifestyle and in 2017, Trinidad and Tobago health rating deteriorated as a result of the increase in heart-related diseases. So in the report, it referenced suggestions that heart-related deaths were as a result of unhealthy lifestyles, poor diet and lack of exercise. This is in Trinidad and Tobago. Heart disease is the number one cause of death accounting for 35 per cent of all deaths annually; it followed by diabetes accounting for 14 per cent, cancer 13 per cent.

Mr. Vice-President, there was a reference also to efforts to inculcate healthy eating and nutrition are having higher taxes for foods with higher sugars, fried foods and unnatural flavouring. There are examples of initiatives in our region like Barbados, Dominica, Mexico, which have approved taxes on sugar sweetened beverages. I commend the Minister of Health for removing soft drinks from being sold at the schools and that is excellent. So we have Bolivia, Chile, Peru and Ecuador having implemented healthy food laws that regulate food advertising and labelling. I support these initiatives in Trinidad and Tobago. We should definitely

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have our famous KFC at a higher cost because—[*Crosstalk*] Yes. I am one who used to eat KFC every single day and—okay, that is branding, so fried foods. Sorry. Fried foods every day and the pizzas and all these cheese. But, Mr. Vice-President, with a death rate like this and also, it puts strain on the health sector at self and also on your body. So I would support the increase in taxes on these foods. [*Crosstalk*] That is okay, once the other foods go cheaper like our sweet potatoes should be cheaper and potatoes and whatever.

So, okay, so let us go with the energy sector. So Petrotrin has been said to have produced almost 60 per cent of our country's oil and does not pay taxes and royalties to the State and it owes the Government, by extension, the public, billions of dollars in unpaid taxes, and this was said by the Minister of Finance, and he said that Petrotrin only paid \$200 million in royalties and a shortfall of \$400 million is due, right, and he even went on to say that they are expecting this payment. But my only question is, this state enterprise Petrotrin that they are so talking about, is also, Sen. Khan said, in a \$13 billion debt. They owe the state \$400 million in royalties/taxes and they made a loss of \$821 million. So how do they intend to get that money? I would like to know that.

And we also know that Petrotrin is state owned and the board is appointed and there is a lot of political influence through the years. So if that does not change, what are they asking Petrotrin to do? So I await. I heard Sen. Khan speak about Petrotrin but he did not speak about how they intend to get this money because they are already in \$13 billion debt and they also have a loss. Right, so. But in another place, he said that Petrotrin is fixable and I strongly agree with that. I believe they have bad practices that have developed over the years but it can be corrected with will and strong leadership. It can be corrected.

Now the problems in the state sectors, it is not only isolated to Petrotrin, it is faced throughout and we know that this because Trinidad and Tobago has a very brilliant rank rating in the corruption index of 35. Now 35 sounds like a small number but we want to have 100; 100 means we are not corrupt. Maybe that is the ideal world because I have not met any country that has 100 but we would like to be in the 90s and 80s and we should be happy, but Trinidad and Tobago is 35th rank where zero is the most corrupt. But if we look at our history as a country, we would realize that we do not really go beyond 30 because from 2001, we have been 53 and then we continued to go down. We were below 50 in 2002; 2004, we were about 42; 2007, 2010, we have been 38, so we have not really been out of the 35 to 40 range. So I am not sure if every administration is accepting corruption as our norm and that is why we expect state enterprises to behave as such. I am not sure if that is what we blame it on because we have such a poor perception and it is just not changing over the years.

I even did some more research on this. On January 25, 2017, in the *Guardian*:

“Transparency bosses call for urgent action as...” Trinidad and Tobago slides down corruption index.

And the CEO:

“...called for good corporate governance in private companies and State enterprises, adding that this essentially protected the interests of a company’s owners, shareholders and was receptive to requests.”

So:

“Companies with poor corporate governance make decisions that adversely affect the interest of shareholders. Weak corporate governance structures

don't necessarily...”—provide bad—

Hear this “eh”:

“Weak corporate governance structures don't necessarily produce bad decision making.”—yuh know—“They merely allow it'...”

And this is the words of the CEO of the transparency institute. And he even went on to say management teams abuse their positions and they become very dictatorship like and greedy. So these things that we can take a strong handle on that do not cost but it definitely will cost will. You need to be able to make these difficult decisions.

I understand difficult decisions, the reaction sometimes is a little bit worrying because, for example, the taxes increased in the gaming industry. I have read the report laid in Parliament from the Joint Select Committee and there are many persons in that report that could handle the increase in taxes. So is it that these employers are now threatening the workers to make them strike to say they will have job losses? And maybe, this is why the Government is always reluctant to making changes. Change is inevitable. It will always impact a particular group. It is not for us to be inhumane about it but we need to understand it and hear all sides of the story. If certain companies are victimizing their employees for some reason, definitely we need to know why, and just say we would not change it because we do not want to have protesting. If you are protesting for a worthy cause, then we will hear your side, but just saying that you are having an unregulated industry, I do not agree with that.

It is the same thing with state enterprises and as I said, I will tell you how the Ministry of Finance plays a major role in this division and it will only change if you really make the strong decisions. You have to make decisions. As an

engineer, it is so difficult to get work done. I spoke one time about the procurement legislation, how long it will take if the roof in the Parliament was leaking, unfortunately, the next week, the roof was leaking and it took what? We saw a bucket there probably two weeks before it was fixed. So all these things add up. [*Interruption*] It was longer? Sorry. But anyway, I did not want to predict a hole so I would not go any further to predict anything.

But even in the social services booklet on page 34, it has a list of problematic factors of doing business and they actually listed Barbados, Dominica Republic, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, and ranked as number one in Trinidad and Tobago was poor work ethic in the national labour force; two, corruption; and three, inefficient government bureaucracy. So, Mr. Vice-President, we just cannot accept it and a programme is not going to help. We need to make some massive changes and it can be changed.

I want to talk quickly on the—I am trying to figure out how much time I have remaining. [*Crosstalk*] Thirteen minutes, okay. Sen. Khan spoke about the Permanent Secretary of the energy sector and I want to say something very briefly on that. There is a wide range where the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries is responsible for the management of the oil and gas and mineral sectors in Trinidad and Tobago. I cannot understand if you are accountable for commercial evaluation, contract management, LNG gas export, resource management, downstreaming and retail marketing, energy research and planning and mineral divisions, how can you sit on a state board? I do not believe any Permanent Secretary in any Ministry should sit on a state board because it seems, though, that you are asked to wear two hats and which hat would you wear today. So, I think something needs to be looked at again, because if you look at the roles, the policy

management and control of state-owned energy-based companies, all of this falls under the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, so we need to look at that.

The Ministry spoke about the waste to energy plant and they have spent point five million dollars in a consultancy fee to get this project started, that is waste to energy plant. Well, let me just remind us about the water waste management programme which cost us \$465 million and to date, it is not completed, because they spent 69 per cent of the total project—which is the Beetham waste water recycling project which was done by NGC, so the total project is \$1.4 billion. They spent almost \$1 billion and now the comment in the state enterprise booklet is:

“NGC is currently reassessing the...project.”

We do not want waste to energy becoming like the waste water project.

I said I would talk about the tourism versus crime. Tourism, we spent \$56.6 million in initiatives. One of the initiatives was creating business environments conducive to the entrepreneurship and then another one was making our tourism product attractive. I want to know how is it \$56.6 million to make an attractive project but our crime rate is 25.1 per 100,000 habitants? We are now—what?—97th out of 163 in the Global Peace Index. We have dropped 12 spots. How can we sell a product when it is not safe?

2.00p.m.

What is the first thing you do as a tourist, when you are looking up a location, beaches? What do you look for? What is the crime rate? Is it safe? Will I come back home safely? How can you make an attractive project and you cannot get the crime rate down?

I want to talk about the sea transportation. In this booklet there was, in

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2017, \$24.6 million was spent. They said it was procurement of navigational aids which was about \$6.7 million. Then they also went on to say that they have paving, I guess infrastructural works at \$.6 million. The sum of \$6.7 million plus \$.6 million is how much? It is \$7.3 million, but they said they spent \$24.6 million. Where is the \$17.3 million? Maybe it is somewhere, but the Minister of Works and Transport could tell us about this sea transportation, because we allocated \$47 million to this programme for the improvement of infrastructural service, but yet they only spent about .6 on infrastructure last year. So I would like to know about that.

Also, I did not really hear much about the multi-purpose vessel for \$167million. You would like to share something about that, Mr. Vice President, about how the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard would be protecting our nation's borders with this multi-service vessel, which is costing us \$167 million?

There is a quick thing I want to ask, on page 85 of the public sector, that is SAPA. There is a project there, but I think it is a secret project, because it says that the audio department of SAPA was upgraded during 2017, with the purchasing of a mixing board for \$1million. The lighting at the facility was also improved in order to meet the demands of the stakeholders in San Fernando and environs, with expenditure of \$XXX million, and this is in our budget package.

I want to talk about community centres. Mr. Vice-President, we spent a total of \$19 million on the construction of new community centres and upgrades of existing centres in physical 2017 and they list it—

Hon. Senators: Fiscal.

Sen. M. Ramkissoon: Fiscal sorry. Thank you, Senator—in 2017. Now, I want to know, in order to rent those community centres, you have to rent it at a cost of

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\$3,500 per day. Is this a viable cost for community members who want to have a bazaar, or they want to have a programme, or they want to have a dance class for their members? Is \$3,500 rent an acceptable price for these community centres?

I want to talk about agriculture, and I am so saddened that the Minister is not here, in the Chamber, but the Permanent Secretary, Sen. Singh, will—

Sen. Singh: Parliamentary Secretary.

Sen. M. Ramkissoon: Parliamentary Secretary, my humblest apology, Sen. Singh. On the point about agriculture, the statement was made that many young people are not going into agriculture. I asked the Parliament Library to get some statistics on the graduates from the agriculture sector in the University of the West Indies, because I remember in my time that one of the issues with these graduates is they could not get jobs. Unfortunately, the university only responded with highlights on a report, “recent UWI first- degree experience beyond graduation” and they only had statistics for 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2013. And you know what is really surprising about the statistics, probably really saddening too?—low employment rates below is 80 agriculture, food production, agriculture livestock and agronomy.

Now, I thank God that I did engineering and I was really good at statistics because this was a high. In this statistics, high employment rate is 90 per cent and over. That went with medical sciences, education, engineering and humanities.

Now, agriculture. If you do not have jobs for people, would they go into the field? Obviously not. They would not. They said that a significant amount of employed graduates reported that they were employed in low-level jobs that require a minimum of secondary level education, particularly for the graduates in social sciences and agriculture and humanities. So, if the Minister wants to change

something, to change the outlook of young people going into agriculture, look at the graduates right now. The ones who are in it cannot find jobs. The ones who graduated with a degree in the sector of agriculture is found wanting then. Because this is the statistics here that I am showing. Now, I hope that really and truly—I wanted to get some more recent statistics in this field, which is very saddening that they do not have the statistics and it is very unfortunate.

But to say that the top tier of medium salaries reported have constantly been graduates from the Faculty of Medical—

Mr. Vice-President: Senator, you have five more minutes.

Sen. M. Ramkissoon: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President—in medical sciences and for in education and engineering, it really says that this would not be an area that people would want to graduate in, knowing that they have spent three years or maybe four years of their life studying and they just cannot. The statistics are very, very low in terms of agriculture and this report is online if the Senator would like to get the information.

Mr. Vice-President, with the last five minutes, I want to talk about this division which is, what is the role of the Ministry of Finance in the state enterprises, and there is an Investment Division in the Ministry of Finance which was established in January 1992. And they are responsible for conducting management or performance audits of state enterprises to ensure that they operate in an efficient and effective basis, and they discharge their obligations with respect to the public accountability. We have a division for this.

The last report given by the Investments Division was in 2011. And they are supposed to ensure consistency between the state enterprise performance and government macroeconomic policy objectives. They have the portfolio of 42

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owned companies, five major-owned companies and five minority companies. Mr. Vice-President, when you pull the Auditor General's Reports and you look at the—they said that by a memorandum dated the 20th of February 2017, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Finance was requested to furnish the information and the last audited financial statements of the state enterprises laid in Parliament.

Mr. Vice-President, all of these state enterprises like, for example, the National Commission for Self Help Limited, 2014; the CEPEP, 2014; Tourism Development Company, 2012; VMCOTT, 2013. These are the people to make sure that Petrotrin's debt is not \$13 billion. We have a division. This my recommendation, you know. I was hoping that we would have a division set up to ensure that state enterprises do not have a public debt of \$13 billion, do not have a debt to exceed us to put our country to—and we have a division established in 1992. So imagine my surprise when I saw this.

So my recommendation now is to ensure that this division is operationalized, that companies who do not submit their audited financial statements shall be fined, and persons who are in authority would be removed. That is all. You have to change it or it will not change. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, in my few minutes, I wanted to just touch on the duplication measure that Sen. West brought forward, that they said they are going to spend some money by the World Bank to conduct a study on waste and duplication and I find this is an unnecessary study. Because look at the Ministry of National Security, we have a \$7 billion allocation to them and we have multiple agencies and intelligence agencies: Special Anti-Crime Unit of Trinidad and Tobago, Defence Force Intelligence, Security Intelligence Agency, Special Branch, SSA, NSCS, Customs and Excise. All of these are waste, waste and duplication

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and you have to pay somebody to tell you that is a waste? No, no, no, no. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Mr. Vice-President, I think I have one minute and I just wanted to talk about the marine resources. They are kept in—I hope that these studies are kept in all the Ministries and not just one. As you said, silos. We are operating. We are spending \$2.8million here and then another Ministry doing the same thing for a next \$1 million. Mr. Vice-President, we cannot operate. You cannot be telling the taxpayers pay more taxes and we are wasting the money. [*Desk thumping*] No.

When I open my salary every month I am shocked by the amount of taxes I pay and it is saddening when I cannot drive through the Creek without flood. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Vice-President, it is very disheartening to have to go through that and I am just one of the many who go through this. And to say okay the Government makes it sounds so good. It sounds so good on paper. I read these booklets and I am happy to be a Trinbagonian and then I sit down and I look outside and this is not what I see. It is sad. I am very, very, very, hurt to have go through this.

I am telling you look at how many things I could point out. We have projects here. It is budgeted for \$6million but yet we spend \$13 million. And I do not understand how that is possible, because you look—I talked about this in the state enterprises booklet and they said it is not part of the Consolidated Fund. But if you just look at it, you will see that we are not, our estimated project cost is not costing.

So, Mr. Vice-President, I thank you, and thank you all for listening. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan): [*Desk*

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thumping] “Yuh sure yuh want tuh clap? I ain feel yuh go clap when ah finish yuh know. I ain think dey go clap when ah finish?”

Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. Mr. Vice-President, thank you for giving me the opportunity to contribute on a Bill to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending on the 30th day of September 2018.

Mr. Vice-President, let me do the normal protocol and go back to some of the contributions made as early as yesterday. Sen. Shrikissoon and other Members of the Independent Bench would have spoken about their concerns with the budget deficit over, I expect, the last couple of years, and Sen. Shrikissoon in particular was adamant that we should be speaking about balancing the budget, bringing the expenditure down.

As a responsible Government, one cannot just reduce expenditure in one financial year because the income would have dropped. If a government was to do that and reduce the expenditure by close to \$15 billion with one swipe, could you imagine what will happen in a country as ours? So, what the Government would have done is that over a period of time, we would have set out to reduce the deficit, and in my opinion, that is the course that the Government would have taken and I think it is a very responsible course.

Sen. Dhanayshar also had that concern. And, again, that would have been the explanation for the Government taking that. Sen. Dhanayshar also raised his concern about the licence office. Sen. Dhanayshar, as Minister of Works and Transport I do apologize for that experience you would have had. I did draw it to the attention of the Commissioner of the Licensing Office and also raised the concern about the payment and I have been given the assurance that they are in negotiations with FCB and before year's end you would be able to use your card at

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the licence office.

Sen. Dr. Mahabir: Would the Minister give way?

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Sure.

Sen. Dr. Mahabir: Is that an assurance, hon. Minister, that before the end of the year the electronic payment system will be in place at the licensing offices in Trinidad and Tobago?

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Mr. Vice-President, I have learnt one [*Laughter*] serious lesson in politics, do not give assurances when you are not in charge. [*Crosstalk*] Okay? I have told the hon. Senator and this honourable House that I have just spoken to the Permanent Secretary who indicated that the process has started with FCB and they are working towards a completion by year's end. Okay.

The new Senator, Sen. Haynes—and congratulations to all the new Senators. [*Desk thumping*] Sen. Haynes had a different opinion to the Independent Senators, because whereas the Independent Senators were saying we should be cutting and we should do everything, Sen. Haynes was of the opinion that we are cutting too much. All right. Again, as a Government it is never going to be a situation where we can please everybody. But we have a mandate from the population and in 2020, the population is going to judge us, based on our performance.

Sen. Ameen: It might be before that too.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: No, I think your judgment is next month. I do not know how many of you would be here after that.

Again, Sen. Haynes spoke about the Government spending money on a highway to Toco and things like that. I want to give you the assurance that this a Government for both Trinidad and Tobago and the port in Toco, basically, would be another link to Tobago. So we are very proud of that project.

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Sen. Saddam Hosein, I am so sorry that the President would have had to stop you there, but I guess as we go along you will learn that there are certain things we can say now and certain things we will have to wait until after the Joint Select Committee and we will say. But again, congratulations. You spoke about corruption. I think that was the theme of your contribution.

Sen. Hosein: Procurement.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Well, you did speak a lot about corruption. I think between 2010 and 2015, you might have been a student, based on your look. You may not have had the time to pay a lot of attention to what was happening in the country. If you did, you would realize that the party that gave you the position in the Senate has lost the authority to talk about corruption. [*Desk thumping*] However, you are a new Member of Parliament, a new member to the party and the trust falls on you and your team to try to wipe that image of corruption that would have swallowed your party, and I look forward to that because, put partisan aside, we all have to live here and when money is misappropriated by any party, it falls on us as citizens to pay for that.

You spoke also about the maxi-taxi issue and I give you the assurance that I met with the Maxi Taxi Association on two occasions so far. That is why there is no protest right now.

Okay, so having done the protocols, Mr. Vice-President, it gives me great pleasure to address this honourable House as I contribute to the critical debate of our national budget and report on some of the activities of the Ministry of Works and Transport over the last 12 months.

Mr. Vice-President, I must admit, it was challenging for me. Let me begin by offering congratulations to the hon. Colm Imbert, Minister of Finance and our

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own Sen. Allyson West, on delivering an outstanding presentation of the Budget Statement 2018, [*Desk thumping*] a well-planned financial guide with the fitting theme: Changing the Paradigm: Putting the Economy on a Sustainable Path. Mr. Vice-President, I would also like to congratulate Minister Camille Robinson-Regis and her staff for their input in the budget presentation.

Mr. Vice-President, the National Strategic Development Plan for Trinidad and Tobago, Vision 2030, states that there are times in the development path of a country when extraordinary challenges demand an equally compelling response. Mr. Vice-President, the 2018 budget presentation in the honourable House is a compelling response to the challenges faced. Indeed, 2018 budget thoughtfully encompassed the reality of our local and global economy and meshes these factors with this administration's vision to reclaim resources and channel them into areas that will best benefit Trinidad and Tobago.

I believe that the overarching intent of this year's presentation seeks to demonstrate to us all that we cannot go on with business as usual. When the PNM administration entered into Government, the hon. Prime Minister made it clear that there would be zero tolerance on corruption.

On assuming office in the Ministry of Works and Transport in November 2016, I knew then and as I know now that there would be pushbacks. This has shown itself in the many forms and various spurious allegations being levelled at me personally. I take it as a sign that I am doing the job that I was placed here to do.

Mr. Vice-President, on November 01, 2016, I was honoured to assume duty as the Minister of Works and Transport. In the past 11 months my focus has been and remains unwavering to provide relief to the people who suffered tremendous

inconvenience because of inadequate transport due to infrastructural, systemic or administrative inefficiencies.

Mr. Vice-President, the Ministry of Works and Transport is a large Ministry and its output affects the quality of life for every citizen in Trinidad and Tobago, even our interactions on the regional and international level.

With that in mind, in 2016, on entering the Ministry, I met a group of highly committed public officers who were willing to work to move this country forward. I also met a number of challenges of an administrative, financial and systematic nature. The approach has been to build on increased capacity via a number of new infrastructural projects, improve maintenance of existing stock of infrastructure, using information technology to the delivery of service, increase emphasis on road safety measures, move to an enhanced public transportation system, increase attention to the environment in particular as it relates to our coastal areas, and improvement in managing our nation's watercourses.

Mr. Vice-President, I will now provide this honourable House with the achievements of the past fiscal year and an insight on the way ahead for 2018, starting with our major infrastructural projects. Mr. Vice-President, a number of new roads announced in previous budgets, geared to opening up all the quadrants of our country providing ease of access to all citizens and the necessary foundation for economic growth.

Mr. Vice-President, I would like to start with the Solomon Hochoy Highway Extension to Point Fortin. In May 2017, after the OAS fiasco and the many hurdles encountered under the astute diligence of this Government, the Solomon Hochoy Highway Extension to Point Fortin was recommenced. In June 2017, NIDCO awarded three contracts for three packages in July and the anticipated

completion date for that is February 2018. In August 2017, tenders for four additional packages were invited and closed on the 8th of September. These packages are being evaluated as we speak.

Mr. Vice-President, by the end of November an additional five packages are expected to be invited and the anticipated commencement date should be by March next year. This will see the completion of that stretch of the highway all the way to Point Fortin.

Mr. Vice-President, I am happy to report that the approach of the Government, from the Government, for that highway would have been to break the highway up into smaller packages. What that did? It allowed the local contractors to participate, for the first time, in a major project like that. [*Desk thumping*] I can say, because of competitive bidding, the prices that we are seeing are significantly less than what happened between 2010 and 2015.

Mr. Vice-President, I want to use this opportunity to thank both the Attorney General and the Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister, Mr. Stuart Young for the brilliant job they did in recovering over \$1 billion from the former contractor. [*Desk thumping*] That money is what we are using now to complete the highway. [*Interruption*] I would deal with that one just now.

But before I go where the Senator wants to take me, Mr. Vice-President, I just want to draw some of the challenges we would have had and what we are faced now with the highway. Because we would like to go a lot faster than we are going. Mr. Vice-President, what is happening now, and I just want to draw attention to two parcels of land acquisition that we are faced with right now. In one case, Mr. Vice-President, there is a parcel of land that was valued by a private developer for \$7 million. The owner of the land then hired his own valuator.

NIDCO said, okay. That land price went from \$7million to close to \$67million. And somewhere along the line the person who valued that land for that developer ended up in the chair at the Valuation Department and approved it at \$79 million. Those are some of the stumbling blocks.

There is another case of a piece of land where the said valuator would have valued for another person. NIDCO objected to the claim. The valuator ended up at the Valuation Department. Now NIDCO is settled with a claim of \$92million.

Sen. Ameen: What about procurement?

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: And these are some of the challenges that we face. *[Interruption]* Well, I can tell you this Government is going to have none of that. None of that. NIDCO has been given a mandate that they are to continue with no payments for land on that highway until the Attorney General reviews every single outstanding matter, and that is the stand that this Government would have taken on that. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Vice-President, these are some of the—because every project there are challenges, but this Government will deal with every challenge in the only way we know how to deal with it, which is dealing with it in a lawful manner.

Mr. Vice-President, another major project at the Ministry of Works and Transport is the Valencia to Toco highway. In March of 2017, the route alignment and conceptual designs were undertaken for the construction of a first-class road from Valencia to Toco. At this time they are being reviewed and the best route will be presented to the infrastructure committee very shortly and that highway, that first-class road to Toco will be a reality. But Mr. Vice-President, there has been so much talk about why is the Government building a road like that in Toco? Well, the first thing I want to say, the people of Toco are part of Trinidad and

Tobago and it is time that part of the island gets its development.

However, having said that, what the Government plans for that area is a fast-ferry port in Toco. Mr. Vice-President, Toco is a village where you can find craft, tourism projects, a small folk museum and the Toco Composite School, good bathing, and it is a popular surfing spot between the months of October and April. However, Mr. Vice-President, the fast-ferry port in Toco is what will bring Trinidad and Tobago much closer than where it is now. [*Desk thumping*] The savings alone, with a port in Toco, in terms of energy, is significant. And what we see happening into Toco is the entire eastern seaboard of Trinidad will be opened up for serious commercial activities. [*Desk thumping*] So, when this Government decides to do a project, we “doh” just get up in the morning and say: Let us go and do this and let us go and do that. Everything has to do with commercial development. [*Interruption*] Yes, I think Mr. Watson Duke made a case for this port. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, I am happy to announce that in July 2017, a consultant was engaged for that port in Toco and very soon we will have the conceptual designs, the layout designs and the tender document for that port. Mr. Vice-President, another major project, and these are projects that we are working on in 2017.

2.30p.m.

A lot of work has been going on in the Ministry of Works and Transport. Mr. Vice-President, the construction of the Wallerfield to Manzanilla Highway. The total length of this highway is approximately 34 kilometres to be done in three phases: the Cumuto to Toco Main Road, the Toco Main Road to Manzanilla and the Cumuto Link Road to the Churchill Roosevelt Highway.

Mr. Vice-President, there has been a lot of talk in the public domain about the award of this contract, and I think NIDCO would have done a fantastic job in explaining the process used. I must say that I was very proud when NIDCO invited Transparency International, when there were some comments being made about the award of the contract. Sadly, Transparency International did not accept the invitation. However, what was signified is that NIDCO has nothing to hide. This Government has nothing to hide in the way we award contracts, because we know for a fact that once a contract is awarded it can stand scrutiny.

There was a significant reduction in the price. Again, the Government used the process where—and I want to just draw the attention to when I came into office in 2016—this project was one project the Government again decided that we must do all the projects where local contractors, would be awarded the opportunity to tender. This contract was a \$1.8billion contract, these phases. There are not many local contractors who could raise a bond for that amount of money, much less to do a project like that, and I think they got just one local contractor at the time. When we reviewed the process, I think it was six local contractors participated, and what was significant, the person who tendered—because at an earlier time turned out to be the highest bidder—there was a difference between the first bidder and the highest bidder, in this case, a foreign company of TT \$200million, just two packages. Once we invited the local companies, what we are seeing is a significant reduction in the price, because now they can afford to tender for the packages. And the Government is very proud to operate in a way where local contractors can now participate in major contracts.

I also want to draw the attention, Mr. Vice-President, of the House, there have been some concerns about the location of the highway passing through the

protected Aripo Savannah. This project is passing almost 150 metres away from the Aripo Savannah, so this is not interfering with the protected area of the Aripo Savannah. Mr. Vice-President, the Churchill Roosevelt Highway widening for those of you who traverse the East-West Corridor you will realize that the Ministry of Works and Transport through the PURE Unit, in house, has been widening the highway, adding an extra lane all the way up to Arima. This project has been completed again using 100 per cent local expertise, and it was handled in-house by the PURE Unit, and this project will continue as we go on. The idea is to have all the highways with three lanes in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Vice-President, the rehabilitation of the Moruga upgrade road, the Moruga Road Rehabilitation Project consists of six packages and extends from Petit Cafe in the north to Marac Village in Moruga in the south. This project is intended to upgrade and access—and give access to the fishing port, another major project that is Government has embarked on for the Grand Chemin, Moruga area in keeping with Government's Vision 2030. This project, Mr. Vice President, has been spoken about for decades. This Government is making it a reality, so for the people of Moruga you have a lot to look forward to over the next three years. And again, although this project is being done under the PURE Unit, it is being done under competitive tendering, that way the population gets value for money.

Mr. Vice-President, another project being undertaken now at the Ministry of Works and Transport is the Maracas Beach Facility Improvement Project. Mr. Vice-President, the responsibility for the Maracas Beach Facility Improvement Project was transferred from the Ministry of Tourism to the Ministry of Works and Transport in February of 2017. This project was reviewed by the Ministry and a development work package was done, basically in three phases. We have the

PURE Unit doing the infrastructure work; we have the vending booth, rest room and the commercial activities being done as one package; and the third package is the design and construction of a new water treatment plant. Mr. Vice-President, due to the weather conditions on that part of the island, early in the rainy season the project has been delayed by about a month. However, we expect the major infrastructure work to be finished by the end of November, and this project to be completed by the end of January 2018. So all the users of that facility, the sacrifice they would have made over the past couple of months is coming to an end very soon and there again we will be proud of our Maracas Beach facility.

Mr. Vice-President, another project was the construction of the Sea Lots walkover. In 2013, the Ministry of Works and Transport received a petition from the Sea Lots residents for a walkover to be built, across the Beetham Highway. This project commenced in 2017 and is expected to be completed in 2018. Mr. Vice-President, another major project that the Ministry of Works and Transport is working on at this time, is the Port of Spain to Chaguaramas roadway. In July 2017, a contract was awarded for the consultant by NIDCO for the period of approximately four months to prepare the primary road alignment drawings for this roadway. Mr. Vice-President, it is no secret the challenges that the people in the western peninsula would have in trying to get in and out of their homes, especially on weekends when we have all the activities taking place in that Chaguaramas area. Very soon we will have the conceptual drawings as to what is to take place at that end of the island. Mr. Vice-President, the Curepe interchange.

Sen. Ameen: By Kay Donna?

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Yes, Yes. [*Laughter*] Mr. Vice-President, this is a project that almost crumble the last government. This project had Ministers in the

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last government—

Sen. Khan: Not almost crumble, they crumble.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: They crumble—well, okay. [*Laughter*] There were Ministers in the last government arguing, “Who was supposed to get this contract, was it my person or your person”. The project was scrapped, the project was scrapped, because “everybody had their horse in the race”, as we say in the local parlance. This Government was able to go out for tender, for that overpass, a design-build contract and I am happy to say without any fanfare and without anybody having any horse in the race, a contract was awarded for close to \$100 million less. [*Desk thumping*] And we look forward—

Sen. Ameen: How much you valued Kay Donna at? How much are you paying yourself?

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Let me tell you—whatever they get, it does not matter to me, you see—[*Crosstalk*] You see, I will tell you something. Mr. Vice-President, could I just answer her, just—

Hon. Senator: Of course.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Let her know that—

Sen. Ameen: I want you to answer—

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: As a Hindu there is a saying, when you go you can ask your Leader "Jaaye bhi akela aaye bhi akela" means I come with nothing and I will go with nothing. [*Crosstalk*] All right. So, Mr. Vice-President, let me not get distracted because I think what we would have accomplished in one year, in five years they could not do it. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, I am looking at the time and I have a whole pile of papers here to go through projects, you know, there is always—Mr. Vice-

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President, we have things like the—let me speed up a little bit because there are certain things again that I want to get to. Replacement of the Pashley Street and Wharton culverts on the Beetham Highway, those were completed. Mr. Vice-President, another major project that is going to start in 2018. A contract has been awarded for the consultant's service for the preparation of the design-build tender documents for phase one of the Diego Martin Highway—the Western Main Road interchange, another interchange in the Diego Martin area. The contract for the design-build tender documents have already been awarded and we expect by February, tenders will be going out for construction of that overpass. Again, no fanfare, nobody with any horse in the race.

Mr. Vice-President, under Bridge Reconstruction Programme, in 2017. Five bridges were completed, an additional 12 bridges were approved by the Cabinet, and we expect construction on those 12 bridges to start within the next couple of months.

Mr. Vice-President, the maintenance of our roadways and our infrastructure is very important to the Ministry, and the Ministry would have launched in November of last year, a programme called “623-mend” where because of the shortage of funding and the amount of paving that has to be done. The Ministry had put 10 trucks out on the road just to do road patching. This project has been so successful that in 2018 we are going to add another 10 trucks to have 20 trucks just constantly doing repairs to potholes and so in road.

Mr. Vice-President, under road safety, the Traffic Management Branch, was successful in the award of 25 zebra crossings, throughout the island and the provision of 40 backup power supplies for traffic signals at intersections. We also commissioned, road studs on the highways and on some of the main roads. The

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Traffic Management Branch, was also in consultation with the disability organization which is the umbrella organization for Trinidad and Tobago, and I am happy to announce that most of our traffic signals—they will embark on a reduction on the height of the push buttons at these traffic signals and to increase pedestrian crossing in urbanized areas. The Ministry of Works and Transport is definitely looking at the—that community and to ensure that even our pavements will be accessible to them.

Mr. Vice-President, in addition Cabinet has already approved, the new speed limit, it was debated in the Parliament already, and very soon we will have an increase in the speed limit to 100 kilometres on most of our highways. [*Desk thumping*] However the Ministry is—very happy about that, and what we also did, is that we purchased nine new laser speed measuring devices. So for those of you who feel that 100, means 105 or 110. The Ministry is taking steps to ensure that 100 means no more than 100.

Mr. Vice-President, again, I spoke about the licensing office and I want to touch on the licensing office very briefly. We opened the Caroni licensing office in 2017.

Hon. Member: Built by the UNC.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: From all indications—yeah, the building was built by the UNC, so I give them credit for building the building. [*Desk thumping*] This government was able to open it. However, Mr. Vice-President, there was a project that started, a project where we brought in the Canadians and a sum of money was earmarked for that project. It was \$300-odd million that was supposed to give us, four or five sites completed. Brilliant work by the former government, the UNC, they built the building, but what they did is that they used up most of the money on

that one building.

When I came in I said, “Okay, money is almost finished, but a property was purchased in Arima for another site”. Mr. Vice-President, so I told the meeting, let us go and at least get that building going. Unfortunately, what I found again at the Ministry, is a building that was bought for \$27million. However, and there is a guy all over the place, running all over the place, saying he protesting about the Minister of Works and Transport, one of your former transport Ministers. I think it is Devant Maharaj, Minister Devant Maharaj. All over the place calling my name for what I do not know, I do not know what I do him.

Hon. Senator: The protest minister.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Yes, he is the protest minister and he likes to write the Integrity Commission. Well, I have a file here going to the Integrity Commission. Let him go. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President: Minister, you have five more minutes.

2.45 p.m.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Five more minutes, okay. What I found in that file, Mr. Vice-President—it is a building for \$27 million—a letter on the file stating the Government should not buy the building, the building is no good, it has to be demolished. A Cabinet Note went without including that into it. Subsequent to that, an inspection was made by the Ministry of Works and all the technical team after the building was purchased, that confirmed that the building needs to be demolished. So we brought a building for \$27 million, we cannot use it and the building is still there.

What is even more interesting, we did a valuation on the building at the time of purchase. The price on the valuation was \$18 million. What was even more

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fascinating is that we found on the file where the bank was going to sell the building for \$14 million. What was even more frightening, after they realized that they had to condemn the building, I am seeing a note where they are going to build a new building for \$109 million. So we move from buying a building for \$27 million that we have to condemn, so technically we bought land alone and then we decided that: “Look, we go build a building for \$109 million.” Mr. Vice-President, that file has gone to the Attorney General’s office and we will wait to see what is happening. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, I only have five minutes, so I would not—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Mark: No, you are down to three.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Three? Okay. [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Vice-President, I really want to go in to my closing remarks, so I would not want to damage the Opposition—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Ameen: I want to give you more time.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: No, you do not want to give me more time.[*Crosstalk*] Mr. Vice-President, I have just outlined some of the major accomplishments and the ongoing projects of the Ministry of Works and Transport. I have done so in my budget contribution. I wish to conclude by reminding all citizens that we have our work cut out for us. The economic times are hard, and we really have to dig deep as we put the economy on a stable path.

The paradigm will only change if we operate differently. It cannot be “same ole, same ole”. People cannot expect to reap the rewards if they are not prepared to sacrifice and work hard. All our ancestors recognized that they had to struggle in order for their descendants to have a better life. We all know what the meaning of that is. The “gimme, gimme” attitude must become a relic of the past.

This Government is not going to turn a blind eye to corruption or sweep dirty deals under the carpet. It is a time of full exposure and those with dirty hands and fingers in the cookie jar will be caught, whether these perpetrators belong to the PNM, the UNC, or any other political party. There is no hiding and all will be held to the same standard.

This Government is “Changing the Paradigm: Putting the Economy on a Sustainable Path”. Those who want to remain behind and feel that they could get away with sloppy work, low productivity and wasting time will do so at their own peril. Those who cheat and steal from the nation’s purse will feel the full force of the law. [*Desk thumping*] Gone are the days of covering up corruption.

Mr. Vice-President, as I said before, now is the time for full exposure. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Gerald Ramdeen: Good afternoon, Mr. Vice-President, and thank you for this opportunity to make my second budget debate contribution. Mr. Vice-President, I would like to start off my contribution by congratulating the Leader of the Opposition for her contribution in the other place. [*Desk thumping*] Notwithstanding what may be said here, Mr. Vice-President, the powerful contribution of the Leader of the Opposition in reply to the Minister of Finance caused the Government to pull out the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West—pull him out—to sing the mantra of the PNM in answer to the political leader. Such was the fear in the PNM with respect to the delivery of the Leader of the Opposition. [*Desk thumping*] The political acolyte, I call him, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, but I will get back to him.

I want to congratulate, Mr. Vice-President, all of the Members of the Opposition for their contribution in the other place. [*Desk thumping*] I would like

to also, before getting into the meat of my contribution, thank Sen. Sturge, Sen. Solomon and Sen. Samuel for their contribution and their public duty that they have done to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] I would also like to congratulate Sen. Haynes, Sen. Hosein and Sen. Obika for their appointments to the Senate and for the brilliant contributions that they have made thus far. [*Desk thumping*] They have justified the appointments and the decision of the political leader to have them here in this august Chamber. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Vice-President, through you, I would like to inform the Minister of Works and Transport and the Minister in the Ministry of National Security, that over the last week the people of Trinidad and Tobago have been suffering because of flooding that has taken place. I am saying that, I say that with a heavy heart, because today one would have expected that when the population woke up to the news that “Dave bails out”—the person who was appointed by the Prime Minister and the People’s National Movement to look after the people of Trinidad and Tobago in times of disaster has bailed out, one would have expected that a responsible and caring Government would have come today, and the Minister in the Ministry of National Security would have given the people of this country some kind of assurance that those who are suffering would get some kind of help from the Government. [*Desk thumping*]

You see, out of every disaster comes some good. Out of every single disaster comes some good, because over the last week the people of Trinidad and Tobago have seen the difference between an absentee Prime Minister and a real Prime Minister. [*Desk thumping*] It is not the first time. Because, you know, Mr. Vice-President, the great American author, Maya Angelou has a saying:

“When someone shows you who they are believe them”

And the hon. Prime Minister has shown us, over and over, who he is, and it is time after two years for us to believe him.

Can you imagine that over the past week there are people in this country who do not have water, they do not have food, they are stranded and their homes have been flooded out and not a word from the Minister in the Ministry of National Security. Do you know why? Because who wrote the speech did not put it in. That is why. That is exactly why. So today, I want to congratulate, again, with no reservation, the Leader of the Opposition for going out in every single flooded area—from Suchit Trace, Siparia, Penal, El Carmen and El Socorro—to give relief to those people. Do you know why? I have it written down here.

The last speaker, the Minister of Works and Transport, said that the people of Toco are also people of Trinidad and Tobago but, let me tell you: the people of Woodland are also people of Trinidad and Tobago; [*Desk thumping*] the people of El Carmen are also people of Trinidad and Tobago; and the people of Caparo are also people of Trinidad and Tobago. But, you see, this Government has a way, everything that goes south it does not belong to Trinidad and Tobago. That is how it is. Everything that is south, everything that goes south, do not worry about that. [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. Khan: The people of Mafeking, my hometown, are people too.

Sen. G. Ramdeen: Yes, the people of Mafeking. When the Prime Minister decided that he will leave the Diplomatic Centre and go up to Mafeking and Sangre Grande, the Member of Parliament for Toco/Sangre Grande could not even take the Prime Minister to where the flooding was. [*Desk thumping*] That is to tell you the kind of MP they have. She did not know. The Member for Parliament for Toco/Sangre Grande did not know that Vega de Oropouche is part of Sangre

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Grande. They are people too of Trinidad and Tobago. So when you want to be a Prime Minister you must be a Prime Minister of all of Trinidad and all of Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] That is what the people between 2010 and 2015 became accustomed to and that is what they will become accustomed to very soon yet again. [*Desk thumping*]

Can you imagine that there are people in this country today whose homes are flooded out—they do not have a fridge, they do not have a stove? And do you know what the PNM is posting today? That the PNM, not a Minister will go into one of those areas—[not one—[save and except the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government. Not one of them will go. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Senator: We will go south.

Sen. G. Ramdeen: I will tell you where you went. [*Laughter*] Not one of them will go, but do you know what they are concerned about and what the priority of the People's National Movement is? I would tell you what it is: Post-budget public meeting, Friday 27th October, San Fernando City Hall Auditorium, 7.30.

Where we are, the road ahead. The Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Rowley, Mr. Stuart Young and Mr. Edmund Dillon.

Edmund Dillon cannot go into a constituency and provide a bottle of water to somebody who does not have water and who has been flooded out. He does not know about Suchit Trace; he does not know about El Carmen and he does not know about El Socorro. But what he knows about? Organize meeting. This is the most uncaring and the worst Government that this country has ever seen. [*Desk thumping*] You cannot do that to the people of this country. You cannot do that. It is wrong. It is absolutely wrong.

Mr. Vice-President, \$50 billion we have come here to debate and there are

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over 50,000 people affected by flooding, and the Government of the day cannot help one of them. I put on the public record today without apology, that I congratulate Ian Alleyne. Ian Alleyne has single-handedly done more than the entire Government put together—[[*Desk thumping*]]—single-handedly. Three Ministers of National Security?

You appointed a man to the ODPM and because the Prime Minister says he must go he resigns now? That is an appointment made by the Prime Minister. He must take responsibility. It is time for people in this country to take responsibility for what they are responsible. Dave Williams was not appointed by the UNC.

Sen. Ameen: They fired Stephen Ramroop.

Sen. G. Ramdeen: Stephen Ramroop had the ODPM running like oil. Look at what we have come to today. Look at what we have come to today.

I want to go back to the contribution of the Member, my good friend, the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries told us yesterday in his contribution that when he passes down to Couva and he sees the circles, he gets upset. Do you know what I learnt from the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries' contribution? That he travels on the road left to go to Rio Claro and Mayaro. He turns off at Couva. Gran Couva Road, he takes that to reach Mayaro. Do you know why I know that? I would tell you why, Mr. Vice-President, because since it was so upsetting for him to hear about the \$29 million that was spent at the Couva Interchange, if he had gone a little more south, as he breaks the corner by Gasparillo and he looks on the right, do you know what he would have seen? He would have seen \$300 million standing up there—\$300 million stand, iron and steel, the headquarters for Petrotrin. Mr. Vice-President, \$300 million. Let them say the UNC spent that.

If he had looked a little bit beyond that, do you know what he would have seen? He would have seen WGTL—\$3 billion, not \$300 million, \$3 billion. So, I have it here. Do you know what he said? He said 236—he could have gotten 236 kilometres of road with the \$109 million he has to pay back. I want you to check how much road you could get with the \$300 million that was spent on Petrotrin, because do you know why? The PNM has a habit of coming to this Parliament and telling us, we must understand how we reach here, and I agree. But we did not reach here from 2010 to 2015. You know Trinidad existed before that, and the PNM existed before 2010.

So when he comes to talk about the \$29 million that was spent at Preysal in Couva, let him go a little bit south, and as you pass Gasparillo and you are going down, on the left-hand side, you will see the \$1 billion that was spent on the Brian Lara Stadium, the \$1 billion in overruns. Tell me how a project could move from \$200 million to \$1.2 billion under the PNM? But that is PNM. That is delivery PNM style. I wonder how many roads could have been paved with the \$1 billion that was spent on cost overruns on the Brian Lara Stadium—\$1 billion, \$300 million, \$3 billion on GTL? When you go back—you know, the Minister in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries spent about five minutes on Petrotrin, and it is absolutely amazing that we sit here and listen that Petrotrin has a \$800 million bullet payment to be made in 2019. How did that happen? Under the UNC?

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: Lindsay Gillette.

Sen. G. Ramdeen: Yeah, it happened under Lindsay Gillette. That is how much they know about what happened at Petrotrin.

[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

That is why you could say that, and that is why the population of Trinidad and Tobago must know that in the crosstalk the Minister of Trade and Industry said that the Children's Hospital is just a building. That is what it is for the PNM. It is just a building. But, you see, to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, the Children's Hospital is a facility where poor people could go and get delivery of health care that they cannot get anywhere else. [*Desk thumping*] To the PNM, it is a building and it will remain a building. [*Desk thumping*] But the United National Congress will open it. They built it and they will open it. [*Desk thumping*]

I must say, Madam President, I was a little bit disappointed with the contribution of my friend, the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, because as many of the Members on that side, I respect his intelligence. He always has an intelligent contribution to make. I was a little bit disappointed because he went back to the mantra of the political acolyte about this company called NGC, so I want to deal with NGC. I want to deal with what happened at NGC because the PNM has said over and over—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Khan: Are you sure you want to deal with that?

Sen. G. Ramdeen: Yeah, I want to deal with it. I want to deal with it. I want to deal with it because I have the facts. The National Gas Company is one of the jewels of Trinidad and Tobago—it is one—and the PNM has carried this mantra from before 2015 that the United National Congress, between 2010 and 2015, took out \$16 billion from the NGC. Well, before I get to how much was taken out, Madam President, I do not apologize for the money that was spent between 2010 and 2015 that was taken from the National Gas Company.

I want to remind the Members on that side that when that money was taken out of the National Gas Company that money was used on the people of Trinidad

and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] It did not escape like the other PNM projects. That money was the same money that was used to build a health centre in Diego Martin West, in the constituency of the Prime Minister that the people of Diego Martin was suffering for, for years. That is the same money that was used by the People's Partnership to build two schools in Diego Martin West that was not built by the PNM in 39 years. [*Desk thumping*] That was the same money that was used to fund the GATE programme because the People's Partnership understood the investment. I am surprised that the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries would have criticized the fact that the People's Partnership spent money on the children of this country—on the children of this country?

Madam President, I am surprised to say the least about this issue about the NGC and I would tell you why. Let me start off by saying that the myth that the People's Partnership took out \$16 billion from the NGC is exactly that—it is a myth. It is propaganda by the PNM and fuelled by the PNM, because we took out \$12.7 billion from the NGC in five years. [*Crosstalk*] But I want them to stay quiet and listen because in four months the PNM took out \$3.6 billion from the NGC. [*Desk thumping*] What they took? In four months the PNM took out \$3.6 billion from the NGC. [*Crosstalk*] Let me tell you how they took it out, because they like propaganda. Listen.

On the 16th of September, 2015, they took out \$493 million; on the 29th of October, 2015, they got the proceeds of the IPO that was \$1.514 billion; on the 25th of November, they took out \$175 million; on the 27th of November, two days later, they took out \$500 million; on the 11th of December, they took out \$501 million and on the 29th of December 2015, they took out \$501 million—\$3.684 billion in four months. You want to talk about the People's Partnership talking out \$12

billion in five years. You took out \$3.84 billion in four months.

Let me tell you how the PNM is, Madam President. Hear how the PNM is. The Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister and Minister in the Office of the Attorney General will stand in Parliament and will tell this country that \$16 billion was taken out and he did not understand that the People's Partnership was not in power after September 2015. A Minister who is holding ministerial portfolio in the Office of the Prime Minister, the Minister who is holding ministerial portfolio in the office of the Attorney General cannot read a financial statement! That is what you offer us as change? That is what you offer us? That is what you will tell the people of this country? But, you see, the PNM know how to run propaganda. I would tell you why. They are quick to talk about NGC and the money that was taken out of NGC.

There is another jewel of Trinidad and Tobago that belongs to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, it is called TGU, but you would not hear the PNM talk about TGU. Do you know why, Madam President? There are two issues about TGU. TGU was conceptualized under the late former Prime Minister Patrick Manning. It was completed under the People's Partnership and opened in 2013. TGU is the most or one of the most efficient electricity generation companies in the Western Hemisphere. When it was completed by Man Ferrostaal, the Germans told the people of Trinidad and Tobago, they could not run TGU they needed a foreign firm to run it. Today, TGU is run totally by citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Today, as we speak, they are quick to talk about NGC and how much money was taken out of NGC. Madam President, let me tell you what this PNM Government has done to TGU, a jewel that belongs to the people of Trinidad and

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Tobago. Let me tell you what they have done, Madam President. In September of 2015, the PNM Government took out US \$222 million from TGU. In December of 2015, they took out US \$55 million out of TGU. In the same month of December 2015, the PNM Government made TGU take a loan, a bond, for US \$600 million to pay back the Government and in June of 2017, they took US \$20 million from TGU. In two years, the PNM has taken \$6.1 billion from TGU and they want to talk about NGC.

Sen. Khan: That is the Government's money. The Government invested that money in TGU.

Sen. G. Ramdeen: The NGC money was the Government own too, that is why we was using it. So do not complain about NGC and then come and sing a story about TGU. NGC belongs to the people of Trinidad and Tobago; TGU belongs to the people of Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] but the problem with that statement by the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries is a very simple one. Yes, it is the Government's money. The company is the people of Trinidad and Tobago; it belongs to us. So do not be making any backdoor deal, do not be making any deal to sell it, because, Madam President, in 2016/2017, the Minister of Finance announced in his budget presentation 2016/2017 and I quote:

“The sale of 20 percent of Trinidad Generation Unlimited (TGU) to institutional investors, such as the National Insurance Board (NIB) and the Trinidad and Tobago Unit Trust Corporation.

This measure is expected to generate \$600 million.”

That was in 2016/2017.

In the midterm review, six months later, that went up:

We propose that a new shareholder will hold up to 40 per cent of the

shareholding in the company with another 10 per cent offer to public and/or institutional investors.

But the \$600 million that was for 20 per cent has now grown to \$3 billion for 40 per cent. But, you see, the plot thickens with this TGU, because while the Minister in the midterm review was telling the country that the Cabinet was going to sell 40 per cent of the TGU, on the 25th of May, 2017, on the 25th—it is very important, the dates—of May 2017, this Cabinet led by this Prime Minister made a decision that the Ministry of Finance and the Union Estate Electricity Generation Limited with appropriate consultants manage the sale of Trinidad Generation Unlimited, the plant to Ferrostaal, 40 per of TGU with another 10 per cent offer to the public and private institutional investors. That was on the 25th of May, Cabinet decided to sell 40 per cent to Ferrostaal.

All relevant consultancies being engaged by the Union Estate Generation Company Limited on behalf of the Ministry of Finance with cost to be on a reimbursable basis.

Madam President, I want to ask the question: How is it that the Cabinet, by Cabinet Minute No. 922 of May 25, 2017, could decide to sell 40 per cent of TGU to Ferrostaal the company that built it? In May the Cabinet decided that, but on the 9th of June—on the 25th of May Cabinet decided to sell it—the Prime Minister was asked:

Would the Prime Minister say whether Government has reached an agreement to divest 40 per cent of Trinidad Generation Unlimited to a private sector investment?

More than a week later after the Cabinet decision, do you know what the response of the Prime Minister was, Madam President? Hear what the response of the Prime

Minister was after Cabinet already agreed to sell.

Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance in his capacity as Corporation Sole is currently exploring the divestment of 40 per cent of TGU and there is no agreement at this time. The process is the widest process having indicated in the national budget a public expression that we are interested in receiving from interested parties and we are prepared to divest.

We are considering offers. We are inviting persons who may be interested, international companies that are working in Trinidad and Tobago in the area. We are looking at the broadest spectrum and the Cabinet will determine based on the offers what is the best option for the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

This is the reason why people do not trust the Government and the Prime Minister, because when questions are asked and the answers are given and the facts are revealed, you realize why you cannot trust this Government.

3.15 p.m.

That sale of TGU, if it goes through, will be challenged at every single stage. I put the Government on notice. [*Desk thumping*] This Government will not be allowed to sell out the assets of this country like this. [*Desk thumping*] Those assets, Madam President, they do not belong to the PNM, they belong to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, [*Desk thumping*] and when they are lost they are lost forever. And I say that, Madam President, with a heavy heart. You know why? Because one of the other jewels of Trinidad and Tobago was MHTL. MHTL that was created by Dr. Kirsten Coombs was one of the jewels of this country, and you know why this country does not have it today, you know why, because one of the advisors to the Government today was the Governor of the Central Bank, and they

allowed CL Financial to play with it like a toy and, today, the people of Trinidad and Tobago have lost MHTL. It was one of the greatest energy investments; MHTL, Atlantic LNG, Point Lisas and TGU. Those were the jewels of our country, and that advisor that you have today is responsible for it. And they would not release the report. They would not release the report and let the people of this country see what was going on and what the Central Bank was doing while CL Financial was playing with the people's money that belonged to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam President, I want to move on to the Ministry of the Attorney General, and I want to refer to the contribution, and I will explain to you, Madam President, why this country finds itself in the position that it finds itself in today. We warned this country in 2015 that if you elect the PNM you will elect a Government that is incompetent and incapable of running this country, and in the past two years we have seen that unfold before the eyes, and that is why the people of this country are suffering today. The Attorney General, Madam President—the Attorney General is constitutionally mandated to be the legal advisor to the Cabinet and to the Government of this country. I would not have enough time today to outline all of the missteps that we have had between 2015 and now by the Attorney General. But I want to highlight one in particular, and you know why I highlight it, Madam President? I highlight it because it was a law student—a law student picked it up, and I will tell you why it is embarrassing to this country, why it is embarrassing to the Government. When the Member of Parliament for St. Augustine was making his contribution in the other place, one of the things that he pointed out was that it is wrong for the Government to bring legislation to the Parliament that requires a special majority and take out the special majority

requirement, [*Desk thumping*] and it is something that the Opposition has complained about.

The Member for St. Augustine was making a very valid point, Madam President. It is inexplicable and unbelievable that in the Attorney General's contribution to the Appropriation Bill in the other place—I want to tell you and read out to you, Madam President, exactly what the Attorney General said, because I want to demonstrate to the people of Trinidad and Tobago the kind of people that hold public office in this Government. This is the Attorney General on the 12th of October, 2017:

“The Member for St. Augustine yesterday spoke about the Attorney General being tactical and bringing bad law and saying that three-fifth majorities were required on Bills. And I asked, in crosstalk yesterday to my learned colleague, well if you have a complaint of that nature, why do you not go to court? And his response was, it is too expensive to go to court.”

And listen to what the Attorney General said, Madam President:

“I would like to inform the hon. Member that in matters of a constitutional nature where you can go and there is no prescriptive amount, that the maximum exposure in cost that you are facing is TT \$14,000. That is certainly not a far stretch, Madam Speaker.”

Madam President, I cannot stand here and allow an Attorney General to make that kind of statement on the *Hansard*, tell the people of this country that. The Attorney General, Madam President, is responsible for all of the litigation that is brought against the State of Trinidad and Tobago—all. The civil litigation has brought in his nomine under the State Liability and Proceedings Act, and you are telling me that an Attorney General will tell the country this, knowing fully well

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that when you file a constitutional motion or you file a judicial review that the costs that you are liable for are hundreds of thousands of dollars. That is what you will do? I would put on the *Hansard* to correct the Attorney General, because you know what it shows, you have an Attorney General who does not know what the law is. That is what it is, and I make no apology for saying that. [*Interruption*]

Madam President: Sen. Ramdeen, please, take your seat. I just want to remind you about the Standing Orders about Members of Parliament, fellow Members, okay, and how you approach what you are saying. Okay?

Sen. G. Ramdeen: Madam President, the Attorney General said in his contribution that the exposure in costs to someone who brings a judicial review or a constitutional motion is \$14,000; that was the Attorney General. The Court of Appeal of Trinidad and Tobago, which is the highest court of the Supreme Court in Trinidad and Tobago, in Civil Appeal, No. 75 of 2013, a quorum of Mendonca, Jamadar and Bereaux, Justices of Appeal, have said otherwise. So let me read into the *Hansard* what they have said:

“In this context common sense dictates that the stated approach to costs should be so. Indeed, it is also eminently rational. Constitutional and judicial review actions are unique, not only in nature but also because in terms of the quantification of costs it is virtually impossible to apply standardized criteria based on the ‘value’ of the claim. What is the ‘value’ of a breach of a fundamental right? What ‘value’ does one place on striking down legislation as not reasonably justifiable in a democratic society?”

And this is it, Madam President:

“Fixed or prescribed costs are simply not apt. The very nature of these kinds of actions, which can include significant public interest litigation, including

challenges to legislation and executive action and redress for human rights infractions, justly demand case by case customized costs assessments.”

So I have read what the Court of Appeal has said, and I make no apology for saying that what the Attorney General said in this contribution was wrong and was incorrect, and does not accord with what the law of Trinidad and Tobago is. [*Desk thumping*]

But it goes a little further than that, Madam President, and that is why it bothers me, because I was looking at the parliamentary channel when the hon. Attorney General was making his contribution, and while it may be forgivable that not everybody will read every judgment and know what the law is, what is unforgivable, Madam President, is that you will quote things that you know are incorrect. And why I say that, Madam President—[*Interruption*]

Madam President: Sen. Ramdeen, have a seat, please. You remember what I just told you, so whatever you are presenting you should know by this stage how to present it, okay.

Sen. G. Ramdeen: Thank you, Madam President. The Attorney General told the Parliament that the Attorney General and the Ministry of Legal Affairs budget under this was—I will tell you what he said, I will quote it:

“The appropriation now before us for the two Ministries, Attorney General and Legal Affairs, is \$263 million.”

Let me tell you what the documents that were presented to us by the Ministry of Finance which was approved by the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance before it came here in Cabinet said. The Attorney General said the budget was \$263 million; the 2018 Estimate shows that the budget of the Attorney General was \$286 million. That is a mere \$23 million more. It might not be much for them but

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it is a lot for us. In two years the Ministry of the Attorney General has spent \$341 million, actual expenditure in 2017; \$302 million, and they are coming to spend \$286 million. What value have the people of Trinidad and Tobago gotten for over \$1 billion outside—sorry, not \$1 billion—three and three, six—800, over \$800 million spent on the Office of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs.

And, you know, they have an obsession with figures, because the Attorney General said:

“We saw in the last Government that there was \$444 million in legal fees spent in the Attorney General’s office.”

Listen to this; this is the *Hansard* you know:

“In fact, I am able to report today that we have spent \$10 million on...local attorneys and we have cleared...\$38 million to the DPP’s office”

That is the Attorney General. So, since the Attorney General has said that let me quote the figures from the documents that were approved by the Cabinet led by the Prime Minister of which the Attorney General is a member, the second highest member that approved these figures, \$10 million on local attorneys; \$38 million on the DPP’s office. The 2016 figures show—[*Interruption*]

Madam President: Sen. Ramdeen, you have five more minutes.

Sen. G. Ramdeen: I am obliged. The 2016 figures show that the Ministry of the Attorney General spent \$86 million—\$86 million. You are telling the Parliament you spent 10 and 38, you spent \$86 million; \$50 million in 2016. And you know what is disturbing about it, is that in the paragraph later on he tells the country that we as a Government have spent 8 per cent of what my predecessor spent. Can you believe this? Can you believe this? This is on the *Hansard*. This is the respect

that you have for the people? Have some more respect for the intelligence of the people of this country.

Madam President, before I close there is one issue I want to deal with. Today on the *Express* newspaper—it hard—the child who has won the President's Gold Medal in this country last year who topped the Caribbean in every subject that she wrote, who lives in Ramgoolie Trace in Cunupia, whose house was flooded out, who went to study at the University of Toronto, not law or medicine, she went to study forensic science because she understood the need that our country has for those people; today, Priya Maraj has to sue the State to pay, you know what, her tuition, her clothes, her warm clothing allowance—her warm clothing allowance, her book allowance. After \$50 billion you spent last year, a child who topped this country has to tell the Government that, I will sue you, to get what she is entitled to, the President's Gold Medal winner. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, there is nothing else that needs to be said about this Government, nothing. You see, Madam President, we want to change the paradigm too. We really want to change the paradigm. And you know why we want to change the paradigm, Madam President, we want to change the paradigm, and we will change the paradigm, I will tell you why. We want to change from a Prime Minister that disrespects our women to one that sees our mothers, grandmothers, daughters and sisters as the matriarchs of our country; that is what they are. [*Desk thumping*] We want to change from a Government that promises performance to a Government that delivers on its promises. [*Desk thumping*] We want to change from a Government of anger, insults and arrogance to a Government that listens, cares and comforts the people. [*Desk thumping*] We want to change from a Government that is incompetent, visionless, and leaderless

to a Government that provides a path so that all Trinidadians and Tobagonians will understand that they have a future in Trinidad and Tobago, and we can take Trinidad and Tobago back to the paradise that we know it to be. And it is very easy to accomplish all of those things, Madam President, all we have to do is put those here and we will go there and that is how it would be accomplished. I thank you, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President: Sen. Chote. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Sophia Chote SC: Thank you, Madam President. I just have a few comments to make on the budget presentation because this is not really my area of expertise, but there are some common sense questions that I have with respect to some of the information provided. I started by having a look at the document which deals with the *Social Sector Investment Programme*, and I realize that some of the data in there probably has to be updated, because I heard the hon. Minister in the Ministry of Finance speak about our ranking on the Global Competitive Index as being 83, but when I looked at the document I saw that we had actually dropped from 89 down to 94. So if it is that we are now at 83 then we have jumped 13 points. I am not sure if my maths are correct, but we have jumped quite a bit on the Global Competitive Index. Now, that would be wonderful but it is not making sense when I look at the other figures. Now, it could be that I simply, I am not good at statistics and I am reading this all wrong; that is entirely possible. And if that is so then I would be grateful for this to be clarified, because anyone reading these documents may form the same erroneous impression as I do.

When I looked at some of the things that they take into account, I looked at the Global Gender Index which basically talks about, or it deals with the disparity in earning power of men as opposed to women. And I see that in that index, and

that is to found at page 35 of the document to which I referred, I see that we dropped 10 spots in educational attainment. Now, how can we be rising in the Global Competitive Index if we are falling in educational attainment? And more deeply, I think the deeper question is, how do we accomplish a paradigm shift unless we place more emphasis on education?—because we are not automatons. We are people. We are sentient beings. We are thinking people. You want to change people's minds and the only way, with all due respect, that we can do that is through educating them. So it becomes a little disturbing when I see that we have dropped 10 points on this particular index.

Now, the document in question also says or records that there were declines in economic activity in both the energy and non-energy sectors. Well, we are in a recession so that is hardly surprising, but I think that what the Government is trying to say in changing the paradigm is that we have to push to enhance the renewable energy systems. But I think the difficulty we are having is: how do we do that when we know that we have substances that we can extract and sell: And I think there is a sort of pulling and tugging in our policymakers as to which way should we go; should we let go of the extractive industry base of our economy with which we have become comfortable, or should we push for the renewable energy systems. And I am not really sure that I was able to discern from these documents how that is going to be done.

First, I was not clear whether there is a definite choice and, second of all, I was not seeing a path as to how it could be done. I am seeing individual projects, like when I read the fine print I see that tyres are in fact being used to make bitumen and bitumen is being used, I think by NIDCO, to patch holes, and so on. So there are individual projects of this kind, but whether there is general oversight

of these individual projects in such a way that they may be pushed as an alternative energy form and as a profitable energy form, I am not entirely sure that I am seeing that. I would hate to think that so late in the day that we are still looking at these options as simply projects. We should be way ahead of the game when it comes to these things.

I also noted in that document that there is a suggestion that there would be seed funding of \$100,000 for small projects. Now, this reminds me a little bit of the project which had existed for people to set up preschools, and I remember grants were being given for young women, in particular, to set up pre-schools around the country, and I had young women coming to me at my office not having a clue. It was a wonderful idea. They wanted to get involved in it, but they did not know what was required to set up a pre-school. So even though they were able to get the grant, you really wondered how they were going to manage this tiny business without the necessary training to accomplish what we are hoping that they would have done; that is to say, become small business people. And that, of course, that project, went the way of all flesh.

Now, I think perhaps what we ought to spend a lot of time focusing on, it is just my point of view, it does not have to be that of the Government; at the end of the day the Government has the duty and the responsibility to provide a budget for good governance, so my comments are simply comments on the documents provided. I think what we need to look at before we talk about, you know, the world of innovation, and so on, I am not downgrading innovation, but I think we must absolutely focus on processes which enhance our efficiencies. And if you look at any Government Ministry, or any state enterprise, the first thing that will come to you when you look at the structure of the organizations, the number of

employees, the number of units, and the tasks that they are given to do, you would see that many of these Ministries and statutory authorities, first of all, they replicate the efforts of units within themselves.

So let us take the Ministry of National Security and the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, because they are, for some reason, always the best example. And you have all these units within these institutions collecting data, recording data, fighting one particular kind of crime here, fighting another kind of crime there, and it seems as though no unit, or there is no overarching authority which allows these units to interact with each other and share their information. So it sounds nice, you are fighting crime because you have 20 units and the acronyms get longer and more unusual, but there are 20 units when you could have 10 working effectively, or more effectively, because they are regulated, you cut down the numbers so the responsibility of the individual takes priority, and it is not lost in a group. It is not lost in the question of, who could make a cell phone call to a friend before a raid is carried out; it makes your law enforcement tighter and more efficient. And I am respectfully thinking that perhaps that is the best example that I can offer in terms of energy—I beg your pardon, efficiency enhancement.

Forensic Science Centre, now I will talk about these things because I am a lawyer, so obviously they mean a lot to me. Forensic Science Centre, well, we had that terrible situation where there were more dead bodies than pathologists, forensic pathologists, because you do not require a simple pathologist to do a post-mortem, you need to have a forensic pathologist. It is true that in the world market there are not that many of them, but you would tell me that after all these years we can only afford to have one at a time. The man was working beyond his capacity. When someone is placed in a situation like that, you undermine the ability of the

person to work at his best. So, I mean, it is not at all unusual to discover that he decided he had effort and he was gone. So where are we left?

The Forensic Science Centre also analyses narcotics and firearms; well, so do they at what we used to call SAUTT. I forget now what the agency is, but it is at the Police Training College. And if you go to a courtroom and somebody is held with, what appears to be narcotics or firearms, before its goes to the Forensic Science Centre it goes to the examiners at Police Training College, and then it goes to the Forensic Science Centre. So how is efficiency assisted by that? How is the efficiency in crime detection and the justice system affected by that? The only way it is affected is negatively, because it means now you have to wait for two sets of examinations to take place, one which cannot be referred to in court because the law is not really open to that, and the other one who will have to look at the outcomes or the examinations, after the exhibit has been dealt with by this middleman, as it were. So you are taking longer to have exhibits examined and analysed. You are duplicating the cost. When you take longer you slow down the justice system and that in itself creates a cost. So, I think we need to look very carefully at things we can do to enhance our efficiencies.

And this takes me to something that I thought about when one of my colleagues was speaking and was suggesting that the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government had a very significant portfolio in the light of all that has been happening with the flooding, and so on, and I thought to myself, I am almost concerned that if we were to look at the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries and the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, and perhaps the Ministry of Works and Transport as well, we may find overlapping of duties when it comes to dealing with natural disasters. I could not understand in

the structure where the ODPM fit in in all of this. So we have floods and people respond. We see a truck with soldiers running off the road in the water. We see Ministers walking in the floods trying to assist people. We also see average citizens doing the same thing, but where do we get the sense, as citizens of this country, that there is an efficient coordinated response to something which happens practically every year?

We get flooding every year, and it is not only those, as one person on social media put it, it is no stupid people who living on river banks. Unfortunately, there are people who are poor and do not have running water and they build their little shacks on river banks, and are affected by floods, but those are not the people I am talking about. I am talking about the people in communities all over this country who have suffered from floods. We suffer from floods in Port of Spain. If you work in Port of Spain you would know that there are days when you cannot cross the road. So flooding is an issue for the country as a whole. And if I could just make a suggestion that perhaps—maybe personnel from each of these Ministries with oversight from an interministerial committee, including these Ministers, could address and use their expertise and their resources to deal with natural disasters such as flooding.

3.45p.m.

It would mean that instead of having an ad hoc response, as sometimes you see—and I totally get the fact that, you know, what is placed in the media is not always an accurate reflection of what takes place. But I am like any other citizen, I will just look at the newspaper and say, “Oh my gosh, this is what happened?” And what the newspapers sometimes show is an incompetent approach by the authorities providing assistance in situations such as these. So it is my very

respectful and humble suggestion that maybe that is something that could be looked at.

I also do think that we cannot be talking about the expansion of renewable energy proposals and projects without a department, at least, of the environment. We used to have a Ministry of the Environment, but we no longer do, but it seems as though if we have to deal with environmental issues and to push environmental projects as an income-earning means, then what we need to do is to have it focused in the institutions that govern. So I am just suggesting that. I do not know whether it is good idea, bad idea but, from my point of view, I think it may be worth looking at.

That has an impact on one of the things which the Government has said in this Appropriation Bill that it wants to focus on, which is to say, the expansion of the yachting industry. Well, I think that is not going to be easy to accomplish, if we cannot show people that when they come into our waters they are not going to encounter oil spills, and we need to be able to show that if there are such disasters that we have a quick and efficient method to deal with emergencies like that, and we need to show that the people who are sharing these waters with them are licensed boat pilots. So I think that will increase, as I respectfully suggest, or enhance our efficiency when it comes to those things, perhaps in small ways but, who knows, we may benefit in the long-term, which takes me to persons with disabilities, and perhaps this is something that needs to be cleared up.

In 2015, the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago ratified a convention and created a policy brief, and started drafting legislation to address matters pertaining to persons with disabilities. So I was a little disappointed when I saw at page 43 of this document that we were returning to policy considerations,

because it seems to me as though we have spent a lot of time and energy, and we made a commitment by acceding to the convention and saying that we are going to have legislation brought in Parliament. Well, let us just do it. Why are we returning to revised policy when we have gone through that process? I think we are doing a great disservice to persons with disabilities who are part of our community and national life, when we do not focus on matters such as these.

Sometimes I am accused of being a little paranoid. I suppose that comes with being a criminal lawyer. So when the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries started to talk about Petrotrin and started to say, “Well, you know, it is sort of worn down. The asset is really not what it was and that kind of thing, and it has to be restructured”, I thought to myself, well this is like the opening salvo to say, “Okay, we are going to say we are restructuring, but really what we are going to do is sell.” If that is one of the assets that is going to be sold, say so, so that there would not be a big to-do afterwards about, “You said you were going to restructure, what that meant, shutting down the hospital on the premises, improving the plant and equipment?” What did that mean? And now you are saying you are going to sell. If you are selling, say so and say what you are likely to get for it. But, certainly, I would think, do not say in front of possible purchasers, “What I want to sell really is run down and is not worth too much”, because that does not sound like a good sale for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. But it may be that the Government does not intend to sell. It may be that I am just being paranoid.

It seems though that if Petrotrin is refining and Guyana is extracting, and we are the closest physically to Guyana—their relations with Venezuela not being that great—then certainly perhaps we ought to look at holding on. But I am not

somebody with any deep knowledge of the oil industry, as I say, I am just speaking as an onlooker, and these are just some common sense questions which arise. I am sure they could be answered and my fears put to rest but, certainly, I think that if I am thinking these things, maybe there are others who are also equally concerned.

It is no secret that valuations are being conducted at ETeck. So it seems to me as though it is possible that that may be another asset that is going to be sold off; I do not know. But certainly the people who are there and who are operating their businesses there ought to have an idea if there is such a plan, and if that plan is going to affect the businesses that they run and they rely on for a living. Again, I could be completely wrong, I am just asking.

I know yesterday evening—I must apologize to Sen. Dr. Henry, because perhaps it was because it was late in the day and so on, but it seems as though he got quite a bit of pounding in this House, but he actually made a very novel point which nobody had picked up on. And that is to say, in the context of foreign policy, who is going to be our controller, if I have to put it like that, in the next few years, is something that we have to take into account. He did not put it quite so specifically, but in reference to what had been happening in China and in reference to the fact that we have managed to keep excellent relations with China and with the US and with the United Kingdom, we are certainly going to have to ideologically come to a position.

If hostilities increase—who knows, I cannot see into the future—amongst the big guys, what are we going to do? The first thing we need to know is we need to be able to feed ourselves. These are practical matters that we need to address and put in place, because that is a disaster like any other disaster that we, as a country, would have to deal with. So ideologically, we would need to know where

we stand, or if we are able to continue to straddle both sides but, in any event, we need to be able to sort of batten down the hatches and say listen: “We have put things in place so our people would be fed, clothed, housed.” I am grateful to him for his allusion, because it is something that I think we talk about kind of jokingly, but I think it is a very real possibility in the world in which we live.

Sea bridge—now, I am not going to say too much on this, but I did see that the port here is going to be dredged, and I think it is long overdue. I believe it had not been done for something like 30 years, so it means that larger vessels can dock without disturbing the Hyatt.

The largest amount I believe in this budget is, once again, going to the Ministry of National Security, and I think I repeat myself when I said it last year, that this is making no sense, because the Ministry of National Security, over the years, have got everything that they have asked for. And then I hear during the course of the year that one of the biggest bills that they have to face is feeding prisoners. So I will share with you an experience that I had just two weeks ago.

I went to the Port of Spain prison, which, incidentally, should be shut down and should have been shut down years ago, and I sat there waiting to be taken inside to see the client I had gone to see. The men who were being released on that day were brought to the front to sit and wait by the gate, and I saw a Latino looking man sort of half carrying an older man to have him sit on one of the chairs.

So after observing for a while and noticing that the families of the other men had happily come and collected them and had gone off, and this old man was still sitting there, I started to look at him more closely and realized that he could not use his hands and he could not use his feet. He could not walk and he could not hold. So I started speaking with him to discover that he had been imprisoned for six

months. He claimed it was a set-up. He was set up with weed because he used bad language to the police; I do not know. Anyway, he was sent to jail for six months. Two weeks before his release, because of malnutrition, the man lost the use of his hands and his legs. So I said, "Well, Sir, what did they tell you?" He was taken to the infirmary, he was told it was because of malnutrition and he was told he needed vitamins.

He is a citizen of this country, just as we are, and God forbid that any of us here should have to enter into a prison for six months and leave without the use of your hands and your legs because of malnutrition. So where is all this money being spent? Or is it that people working within the prisons are doing their groceries at work? There seems to be no proper auditing or no controls over supplies and products being given to agencies like that. If we have to enhance efficiencies, that is one bullet that you have to bite. I find it grossly unfair that we should take for granted that this is a high cost and we have to deal with it. And you know what? "It is all de prisoners' fault; they are eating too much inside there you see." This is how heartless and uninformed some of us have become in this country. Instead, hon. Minister, I ask you to consider putting proper financial controls and supervisory systems in agencies like these, and I am sure that efficiencies will improve.

I am not quite sure how much more time I have, but there are two issues that I wish to address before I close. One is the forex issue. I remember earlier in the year the hon. Minister of Finance had been asked whether he was aware of an underground economy in this country, and he said no he was not aware. But, you know, fabric stores in Port of Spain have signs up offering to buy foreign currency? And it is not only in Port of Spain, I would imagine if you walk in any

sort of town centre or city centre in this country you would find that out. So it means that the underground economy is working, and there is no way that law enforcement can now go and pick and choose and say, okay, we are grabbing this one and we are leaving that one. It is a problem that is real, and how it is to be addressed I really cannot say because that is not my area of expertise.

I do know, unfortunately, when you have an underground economy, because it deals mainly in cash, it finds itself for use in other things which undermine the integrity of your ability to govern. It finds itself being used to bribe public officers. It finds itself being used as payoffs in the narcotic and the arms trade and the trade in human beings, because cash is hard to trace. So I think we need to address that.

When we talk about wanting to make sure that we focus on local products, then why is it this huge amount of foreign currency is being given to chains of businesses which provide foreign products? It does not seem to be consistent. It seems as though we are trying to walk two ways at the same time. So these are just concerns that I have with respect to this. [*Interruption*]

Madam President: Sen. Chote SC, you have five more minutes.

Sen. S. Chote SC: Thank you, Madam President. I also discovered to my shock and surprise that there are certain banks whose clerks sell the foreign currency in the car park. Surely, we could deal with issues like that, create sanctions, make sure the banks do the right thing. They are responsible. They have cameras all over, they must know if an employee walks out and goes outside to sell foreign currency which should be sold over the counter in the bank.

Now, with respect to the gambling industry, I realize that what Government intends to do is to legalize gambling. That is an intention, and I have a little

concern about that because I know it is part of the tourism thrust, but I think what we need to ask ourselves is what kind of tourists do we really want to attract here? Addiction to gambling is worse than addiction to cocaine. As an attorney, I have dealt with many people who have gone under literally, lost their families, lost everything—professional people, clerks, taxi drivers, they have lost everything because of this, and we have to make a moral decision. How far do we want to push this? And I am respectfully asking that perhaps this should be reconsidered, whether gambling should be legal at all.

I know the problem arises with the roulette wheels and so on, but that is connected to the underground economy because they bring in those roulette wheels and they take them out together with the money that they make. So if laws are enforced with respect to those things, then we ought not to have a problem.

So these are my few comments, Madam President. I hope that some of them may be considered and, hopefully, taken on board with respect to the financial future of this country.

Thank you, Madam President.

The Attorney General (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): Thank you, Madam President. How good it is to be back in the Senate and to see a warm smile from my friend, Sen. Gerald Ramdeen, who I had the pleasure of listening to whilst I was juggling a meeting at the AG's office having just come from San Fernando. So provocative was his contribution and so good his skills of advocacy that I was compelled to come and offer a few words of caution, lest one be taken away by the strength and power of his properly persuasive arguments at times, as Sen. Ramdeen is no slouch to a good argument. He is a good debater indeed.

Before I do that, I would wish to congratulate Sen. Haynes and Sen. Hosein

on their maiden contributions. I also had the pleasure of listening to bits of those contributions and, as two young Senators, I welcome them to the work of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. They gave a good outing certainly on their maiden contributions.

Madam President, permit me to start by saying that this budget, in my view, has provided a soft landing for Trinidad and Tobago. This budget produced by the Government of the people of Trinidad and Tobago has taken into account issues which have laid without address for a very long time. The issue of spending on subsidies below the line support versus above the line support in the fuel arena, in health care services, in education, that has been a debate in our economy for quite some time.

Our foreign exchange position, as Sen. Chote SC has just raised it, is indeed a very real situation for us right now, and has been certainly for the last four years. The situation of accounts and whether they have been produced, audited accounts, Auditor General's reports at the THA, as Sen. Shrikissoon referred to them yesterday, have been issues dealt with. The pace of the criminal justice reform, the condition of prisoners and what we have to support by way of contribution to the upkeep of our criminal justice system, as reflected upon by Sen. Chote SC, all real. But I am very much reminded of the very powerful Jamaican Prime Minister who said it takes cash to care.

I want to put onto the record in a very succinct way a few of the issues that we are wrestling with as a country, no doubt already raised by my colleagues, but I want to be very sharp in this. When we look to the taxes on income and profits and we see where we are as a country, we have gone from a figure of \$25 billion in taxation from oil and gas companies without royalties in 2008. We are this year

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down to \$472 million. Let me repeat that: 2008—and I will come to the royalties in a second—\$25 billion, this year \$472 million. That is from the massive important oil and gas economy upon which we are built.

Trinidad and Tobago has for years sat on its laurels and said we have oil, we have gas, we are earning money. This year we suffered close to 93 per cent reduction in revenue. Madam President, I say that on the back of the percentages. Oil and gas revenue as a share of total revenue, in 2011, our oil and gas revenue— [oil revenue in particular—[was 33.7 per cent of our total revenue. This year it is 1.2 per cent; 2015 was 18.4 per cent; 2016 was 2.3 per cent. So in answer to Sen. Obika, it was declining but it has now reached to 1.2 per cent.

I will tell you why I have reflected upon these figures. Personnel expenditure up 2010, \$6.7 billion; 2016, the last year of figures, \$9.6 billion. I have reflected upon these figures, Madam President, because I heard Sen. Ramdeen say a little while ago, “We make no apology for spending the \$16 billion taken by way of dividends drawn out of the NGC because we spent it”—
[*Interruption*]

Sen. Obika: No, he said 12.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: He said 12? The figure is actually 16. Madam President, \$16 billion is the correct figure, Sen. Ramdeen as I heard him, and now corrected, is \$12 billion. But the point is the statement was made coming from the Opposition Bench that, “We make no apology for spending that money, because we spent it on the people.” That was, in essence, the statement.

Madam President, there was also a further statement on dividends, and the statement on dividends, as I heard it—and I am open to correction if anyone opposite wishes me to have a seat so that they can clarify, certainly—I heard that

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\$2.1 billion and \$1.6billion was taken from TGU and UEESL. I want to correct both of these statements now, and I will start with the latter. In dealing with the dividend position, the fact is the figures are not \$2.1 billion and \$1.6billion. In fact, the combined figure for 2016 and 2017 is TT \$500 million. That is the fact. It was \$330 million in 2016 and it was \$170 million in 2017, which was an interim dividend—\$500 million.

Further, US \$500 million was, in fact, received but was not under the categorization of dividends; \$500 million was received from these companies by way of the debt repayment by TGU to the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] It was debt repayment similar to the Clico bailout. It is irresponsible; it is an indictment to confuse the categorization of dividends versus debt repayment. But it came so smoothly across under the banner.

I said that, Madam President, because I heard the hon. Member, Sen. Ramdeen, reflect upon Minister Young's contribution in the House. Minister Young's contribution in the House, the hon. Member reflected upon it as how could the Member who is the Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister and Minister in the Office of the Attorney General read a balance sheet or a financial statement wrong. If that logic is to prevail, if the indictment and condemnation is to prevail, then I ask the question now: How does a seasoned, good advocate, good debater, stand and tell this honourable House that \$2.1 billion and \$1.6billion was taken by way of dividends when that is, in fact, not the truth? [*Interruption*] You see, it is important that we get the arguments right.

Madam President: Sen. Obika, you will have your opportunity to speak.

Sen. Obika: My apologies, Madam President.

Madam President: Continue, Attorney General.

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Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Madam President. I will come to the first limb. The first limb that Sen. Ramdeen reflected upon was making no apology for the expense, as he put it, of the UNC Government of \$12 billion, which in fact the documents of Trinidad and Tobago can demonstrate is in fact \$16 million. So there is a variance between the two positions; the books of Trinidad and Tobago will speak to that.

4.15 p.m.

But, Madam President, it is not really that you are spending the money you know, it is how you spend the money. And when one reflects that that NGC money was spent on a Beetham Wastewater Plant to the tune of \$1 billion on a plant that now stands without usage where the Government [*Desk thumping*] is finding it difficult to put it to use. I ask the question, how does one accept the condemnation levelled in respect of the Brian Lara stadium, levelled in respect by the World GTL Plant?—which by the way, is well on its way to utilization now, the same way the Brian Lara stadium was put into use by actually not leaving it as a white elephant, but giving the people of Trinidad and Tobago, at least, the venue to use notwithstanding the expenditure. But I cannot say the same for the Beetham Wastewater Plant. One billion dollars to SIS as we know [*Desk thumping*] in part of the construction aspects; \$1 billion dollars spent on a plant that we cannot use.

Madam President, we went to court, we went and we dealt with the matter. We froze \$180 million of equipment and assets by SIS, who, once referred to liberally and generously by the UNC as “Mammou”, is now in Panama, not to be found, fitting within the description of an absconding debtor, somebody who is being looked for and searched for. But I could tell you that that billion dollars spent at the Beetham Wastewater Plant for which the UNC makes no apology for

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the spending of \$12 billion as they put it, \$16 billion as we say from the NGC, that is certainly not something to be proud of.

Madam President, it gets better. Look at the issue of the T&TEC. We just shut down the PowerGen station. The UNC agreed that the PowerGen station at Wrightson Road should be shut down. No negotiation of how that is to be dismantled. The shareholder who has been paid by way of dividends and profits over the years walks away clean, saddles Trinidad and Tobago with the bill, exonerated from liability, clean. We have a problem with that.

Look at the EMBD, I am not going to go into the litigation, \$400 million being challenged in court right now, I will say no more. Look at the NGC, the recreation ground, again, another SIS project. People drive down the highway, we were talking about driving past the World GTL Plant, people drive down the highway and wonder what on God's earth from space even is that structure as you are headed down the highway or up the highway by the Couva Interchange. What use is that put forward for?

Madam President, what about Ebeam? Another matter in court?—\$34million. What steps were taken then after Life Sport? Three years, four years not a step taken, coming from the \$12 billion as they put, \$16 billion as we put it. What about Life Sport itself? Half a billion spent with murder, with mayhem with antagonism to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Money going to Rajae Ali. Again, a matter in court. I will not go down into there. Madam President, then there is Eden Gardens valued for \$175 million.

Sen. Ramdeen: That matter is before the court.

Madam President: Attorney General—

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Yes, Ma'am.

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Madam President: Please. Yeah. You know how we deal with these matters.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Sure.

Madam President: A reference, you can just make the reference, but I do not want you going into the meat of the matter.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Madam President, I will repeat my words, what about Eden Gardens, \$175 million? Five words is not going into the matter, but it is sensitive for my colleagues opposite because they know what is involved. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Ramdeen: Strike it out.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: So, Madam President, I am talking to the contribution by my learned colleague, very good contribution, sounds persuasive; let us start picking it apart, it is full of holes. You see, Madam President, we get down to another representation by my learned colleague, Sen. Ramdeen.

The Attorney General came and said that they spent \$50million when the appropriation says \$75 million. True. The appropriation is \$75 million, but not true to say that we really spent \$75 million by way of implication. We only spent \$50,781,736. [*Desk thumping*] That is what we spent. Because when you break the country by “bussing the bank” and I am putting it in simple terms as the UNC did, the notional money at \$75 million for legal fees could not be spent because the \$25million to get to 75 from 50 just did not exist.

And it is a fact that the Attorney General’s contribution in the other House was that we spent \$50 million, and that distribution is \$38,123,678.73 or 78.44 per cent for the office of the DPP; \$10,476,039.03, 26 per cent of the \$50 million for the domestic fees, of which we also paid inherited fees from the last Government, Madam President. So the contribution was true, not as put by my learned colleague, Sen. Ramdeen. And that is why one must not go necessarily with form

or substance.

Madam President, Sen. Ramdeen referred to a law student having to point out something to him about cost. The Nizam Mohammed judgment does speak to costs being treated as of 2013 in a particular way, but there is a reason why we do not quote from one House to the other because the debate in that House and as the Member for St. Augustine and I were in exchange, we were talking about the erstwhile position and I would refer to the crosstalk when the figure was, in fact, \$15,000 on the prescribed cost basis that there was the budgeted cost arrangement and the assessed cost arrangement. But there is a danger in lifting from one House to the other.

And then to put it down, this is the Attorney General's statement—he should be so and so and he should be so and so. It is the same way we heard the contributions from the Leader of the Opposition in another debate going on and on about how the Attorney General was wrong in a debate in supporting legislation which the entire Senate, including the UNC bench, supported, and the leader then stood up as the Member for St. Augustine with a case which had been overturned years in advance, a first instance case.

So, Madam President, there is a reason why we do not cross the two Houses, that is why I have come here to answer what I heard. I was astonished to hear what I was hearing, and it leads people in this country to the wrong conclusions.

I want to address the point as to why we are now at 1.3 per cent, Madam President. Why are we down from \$25 billion to \$472 million? Do you know why, Madam President? Because by way of attraction of foreign direct investment into the upstream industry, the last Government made a good decision to give incentives, but then they forgot put the lid on the equation, and they forgot

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“woops” to put a cap on the write-off of profits by way of carry-forward losses.

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: Economic treason.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: This is the ABCs of economics. Yes. It is a good investment, but what am I getting for it? Okay. As we heard the past Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, Kevin Ramnarine, step out and say, “Oh, it is due to expire in two months’ time, they are talking nonsense.” Not true. The figures demonstrated by bp to us, to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, is that revenue from oil and gas does not change from the current figures that I have just described until the year 2025. Because the UNC built a house with no walls to protect the country and gifted away the commercial sensibilities of our country.

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: Economic treason.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: And that is why it is important as to how the 16 or \$12billion, whichever version you accept, from the NGC was spent. It is as easy to get it wrong as my learned colleague Sen. Shrikissoon did when he asked the question: How can THA be borrowing money and have independent credit ratings when they have not produced their accounts? They have, they are all up to date, they are all up to date. [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. Mark: To the auditors?

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: They have been submitted to the Auditor General. It has been the subject of accounts and statements to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and we have said it in the Parliament. [*Crosstalk*]

Now you see, whilst my friends on the Opposition bench get a little bit jumpy, I am making the point that unless we drill down to the positional facts, the statement in relation to the THA and the clarification that I have just rendered allows for the THA to fit into the context of that which was promised by the UNC.

You remember, Madam President, when Tobago elections was hot and sweaty and pumpkin patch and peas was the talk, Tobago Bill came to Parliament, I remember Mr. Jack coming to this Parliament in a bright yellow shirt smiling, grinning. Tobago autonomy was hot on the table, Terrence Baynes from Tobago was in the Senate, Christlyn Moore from Tobago was in the Senate, Tobago was all and encompassing in the focus and gaze of the UNC. But right after the 12-nil victory, forget with Tobago. You see, a Bill is coming to this Parliament to deal with the autonomy of Tobago, and it is important that Trinidad and Tobago continue along the aspirations of both of our ends of the equation.

[Sen. Ameen exiting the Chamber]

Madam President: Sen. Ameen, just hold on. I am hearing you. I am hearing you, and what you are doing there, that is not parliamentary. All right.

Sen. Ameen: I am leaving the Chamber.

Madam President: Have a seat, please. All right. I just want to caution you, you can leave the Parliament, but do it in a quiet manner, please. Continue, Attorney General.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Madam President. I heard my colleague Sen. Chote make some significant contribution and reflection upon the state of our prison system, and I would like to say, I agree wholeheartedly with the position that we need to have reform in the prison system. I am very pleased to say that the Government of Canada together with the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has made significant advancement in relation to the prison condition and reform.

In fact, the architectural repurposing; the case management structures; the rationalization of resources; the completion of the video conferencing facility at the Remand Yard; the installation of toilets for the first time in the Remand Yard; the

installation of security systems. These are projects which are far advanced having been left in abysmal decay for the last umpteen years. And, Madam President, that is to be looked forward to in terms of a delivery by the evidence of what we have done.

What have we done? We have, in fact, caused the build out of the child rehabilitation centre end of the prison system, replacing the need for the St. Michael's Home; we, in fact, built out 36 dormitories there, arranged the structures for the whopping sum of TT \$1 million. We were able to build all of those in the couple of months that it took replacing an unconstitutional position brought to reality by none other than one Anand Ramlogan, Attorney General for the United National Congress whose Government proclaimed the operationalization of the child rehabilitative centres effectively, and then Mr. Ramlogan went to court—matter is now finished—and sued the Government of which he was a part, for not having child rehabilitation centres. And the bill to house one person only has come in at \$1.5 million. You see, Madam President, how do you take the contributions of the UNC seriously when you hear the reflective context argument that we are having now?

Madam President, Sen. Chote made reference to the laws that we ought to have in the treatment of our disabled and differently abled if they are put properly, and I am very pleased to say that the Attorney General's Office is in tight coordination with the United Nations to continue and complete the draft legislation to be brought to Parliament. But that is being worked out and walked through at the same time that we operationalize the local government reform, because what is the sense of having laws on the books if you do not have them in operation?

Madam President, the reference made up to the gaming sector, I wish to put

this, as I hope to conclude at the 4.30 marker. Madam President, we in the Government firmly believe that it is important to legislate for the gaming sector. It is multi-billion sector [*Desk thumping*] and as it is currently constructed, it is unregulated and dangerous. We require the support of the Opposition because it is three-fifths majority legislation, and for that purpose Trinidad and Tobago will wait to see what the outcome of the Joint Select Committee work is.

But, Madam President, I wish urge the members clubs in particular to have their operators and their owners come to the forefront [*Desk thumping*] and do not hide behind their employees, because I can tell you as I declare openly, I have worked for many a person in the gaming sector whilst in private practice. It is a massively profitable enterprise, and they have more than enough money to pay their workers and they should stop terrorizing them, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*] Madam President, I thank you for opportunity to contribute. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President: Hon. Senators, at this stage we will suspend the sitting. The sitting will be suspended until 5.00 p.m.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Madam President: Sen. Baksh. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Allyson Baksh: Madam President, thank you once again for the opportunity to speak. It is with a sense of pride and gratitude to the Almighty, to the political party to which I represent and to the hon. Prime Minister that I stand here today to make my contribution in this honourable House to the national budget 2018.

Madam President, mindful of my responsibilities as a Member of this honourable House, and mindful of the serious economic challenges that we are

facing in this country, I intend to spend some time looking at the circumstances which we face as a people and also the specific budgetary measures which the Minister, the hon. Colm Imbert, has proposed in order to address these challenges. I will also spend some time looking at some of the changes to be implemented at the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications in support of the theme of the budget, as well as some of the achievements of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services in the fiscal year 2017.

My first comment with respect to the national Budget Statement 2018, is that the theme of the budget that is “Changing the Paradigm” is quite appropriate given the urgent requirement for a fundamental change in our modus operandi if Trinidad and Tobago as a nation is to deal with the serious economic challenges with which we are faced.

Madam President, whether we believe it or not, whether we accept it or not, whether we like it or not, the data points to the fact that this nation for many years has been living above its means. We had developed certain economic patterns and behaviour that are no longer sustainable given the drastic changes in the macroeconomic environment. It is therefore, incumbent on us as the Government, and might I add the opposite benches as well, to make the required adjustments to begin the process of restoring economic stability and good order to our nation.

Madam President, the Minister of Finance in presenting the budget statement referred to the fact that many economists believe in the existence of what is called the “Dutch disease” in Trinidad and Tobago, that is to say, a paradoxical situation where seriously good news turns out in the long run to have a negative impact on a country’s broader economy.

Madam President, I now propose to expand on the indicators of the old

paradigm, and at the same time explain in some detail some of the proposed solutions in the national budget aimed at ensuring that the paradigm shift takes place and that Trinidad and Tobago returns to prosperity and economic growth. [*Desk thumping*] This is reflected in the local private sectors investment in non-tradable such as retail outlets and finished goods rather than in manufacturing and in export. It also manifests itself in the decline in agriculture and the dependence on imports including imported foods.

Madam President, I would now like to look at the indicators of the old paradigm in some detail. The failure to develop an efficient tax administration is the first indicator of the old paradigm identified by the hon. Minister. This itself was often overlooked in the past because in the past we could depend on sizable energy taxes.

An efficient tax administration system is essential to a proper functioning modern day democracy. Our failure to develop an efficient tax administrative system in this country has been spoken about for many years by economists, tax accountants and experts. This Government has now put the words into action, and as indicated by hon. Minister, legislation for the implementation of this important issue will soon be brought to the Parliament. We are therefore, well on the way to addressing these issues and specifically this defect.

Madam President, please allow me now to look at a proliferation of poorly targeted subsidies on fuel which are currently being addressed, but as well on electricity, water, transportation, education and housing. The citizens of this country have been the beneficiaries of a wide range of subsidies over time. This might have been possible when our revenue from oil and gas was buoyant. It is not, however, possible in the current environment and we must now move to adjust the

portfolio of subsidies as the Minister of Trade and Industry would have alluded earlier in her speech.

Madam President, notwithstanding the above the Government is not absentminded of the plight of the citizens. For example, even with the adjustment proposed to the prices of motor vehicle fuels the market price itself for these commodities is still lower, below the market prices at most pumps in other countries. We must admit too that some of the subsidies encourage wastefulness and poor economic decision-making by many of our fellow citizens. To that extent, the adjustment to the subsidies cannot be viewed as a bad move for our economy.

Madam President, I propose to deal in some level of detail with the public sector and public administration later on in my contribution, but for the meanwhile I just want to look at one of the old indicators of the old paradigm, a highly staffed public sector in terms of numbers coexisting with the staff shortages in key departments.

I wish to concur with the hon. Minister that a highly trained public sector in terms of numbers coexisting in key departments—this is one of the areas that is in urgent need of attention. And this Government proposes to provide the changes required to modernize the public sector and to convert it into a lean, mean fighting machine capable of the needs of 21st Century and beyond.

Madam President, the inefficient capital expenditure management characterized by inordinate delays and cost overruns in project execution was often overlooked in the past since funding was not an issue. This is another feature of the old paradigm which the Government intends to address with the introduction of systems aimed at ensuring effective and efficient capital expenditure management

and procurement management in the execution of public projects.

I would now look at a tendency for wage increases to outpace productivity. This in itself has characterized our labour market for many years, but it cannot continue especially in light of our economic misfortunes. This Government, while embracing the tripartite approach to labour relations, will strive to introduce policies to ensure that labour productivity is commensurate with wage increases.

This Government, as we have shown since being elected into office, intends to change the outdated and ineffective institutions such as our procurement system. It is our hope that we will be able to solicit the support of our friends on the opposite side, but in the absence of such support we still intend to stay the course with our objectives to improve this country and to shift the paradigm as indicated by the hon. Minister of Finance.

I strongly agree with Sen. Mahabir, who is not in the Chamber right now, but in his contribution yesterday he said there is a need for a change in the attitude and behaviours in the public sector as they deal with members of the public.

Madam President, a fundamental component of the paradigm shift is a requirement for a change in position, behaviour, adjustment and culture, leading to an efficiently run and managed public service sector.

It is against this backdrop that the Government focuses on the modernization and transformation of the public service through the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications. As such, priority emphasis would be placed in the following key areas: human resources and manpower requirement. We must have a highly trained public—having a highly trained public sector is an essential. Additionally, the key sectors and divisions must be adequately staffed eliminating staff shortages. There would be a robust retraining programme and

agenda that would redeploy staff from areas and special purpose state enterprises where redundancy exists.

Institution of an effective performance management system will also be a priority activity. Emphasis will be towards having highly trained human resource professionals, and fundamental to all of these changes is having the right accountability lines. Such, Madam President, will speak to the checks and balances to be instituted including the appropriate audit process led by suitably trained personnel which are key to the success of state enterprises—of state sector.

Madam President, emphasis will also be placed on the establishment of our compensation framework for public sector administration and management. Given the current trends over the last decade, our wages and salaries are unrealistic and unmanageable for the simple fact that the supporting demand for productivity remains horribly low. In short, we are highly unproductive as a society. From a cost benefit and productivity analysis standpoint, we are uncompetitive on a global scale with respect to our wages.

In the context of our future economy in terms of manpower audit and skills availability, there is a requirement for renegotiation of the entire process by which public officers are engaged, compensated and also promoted.

Salaries and compensation should be tied in to the future economy and productivity based on a performance management system that is merit driven. Madam President, this, in turn, will be the fundamental solution to public service delivery within the future economy.

5.15 p.m.

Madam President, reinventing Government and the removal of bureaucracy are key enablers of growth and transformation of the public sector. The

requirement to have smart systems in place that are compliant with respect to transparency and accountability is a nexus that must be achieved. Institutional strengthening through the introduction of modern technology across the public sector to support efficiency and delivery of services to citizens are also essential. If we are to diversify the economy in order to promote growth of new industries, such a shift must first occur at the level of the public sector.

Central to the paradigm shift is having the right systems of Government. A great part of our challenge is that we do not have the relevant structure for a modern democratic society, especially a merit and productivity driven public sector. In short, the belief is that the entire framework of Government must be driven by a Governance model that will promote a new culture. Such a model will influence the way we work, the values we perpetuate as a people, and specifically for the public sector personnel in understanding their roles, purpose and responsibilities. We will also position the economy and its players to deliver on the premise of a robust project management stakeholder based progression of engagement and participation to achieve the development goals.

Madam President, I now turn to effective communication, stakeholder engagement and management for public sector change. The development of a resilient stakeholder relations plan is fundamental to any institution in the process of developing appropriate management strategies to effectively engage stakeholders throughout the life cycle of a project. A communications plan is of paramount importance as we must rethink on the communications process and channels to communicate, and enlist participation and engagement through modern and cost effective strategies. There must be an effective read strategy to engage cross sector interests, and engage key proponents in a participatory process of

perception and direction. Process: There must be a process for input and feedback and a dispute resolution framework.

Lastly, in this vein, Government must seek to promote corporate social responsibility as an essential policy across the state sector including the private sector. Such policy will seek to establish the rules of engagement, social investment culture and local context laws. Madam President, I anticipate that future governments should consider a Ministry of Corporate Social Responsibility. It is our firm belief as a Government that transformation of these broad areas will support the most disturbing and challenging issues that confront our nation today. We are aware of them in their entirety as they are like repetitious contradictions in our daily conversations for over three decades or more.

Another key objective is to reduce expenditure, cut waste and eliminate corruption within the procurement process. Consequently, revamping the system of procurement dispassionately is essential. What this means is that the Central Tenders Board and the ad interim framework set up across sectors must be replaced. I am confident that this PNM Government will set the record straight in this respect. Inefficient and ineffective project management practices, or the absence of such that inordinately contribute to wastage, delay costs, cost overruns and time lapse must be addressed and be a thing of the past. In terms of reducing manpower planning costs, and increasing the overall effectiveness of the public sector system, we must ensure that the right people with the right skills are hired for the right positions. Time is money. So, to support the elimination of waste, adequate deployment of technological resources across the state sector is required. This also assists in facilitating economic stability and transformation.

Madam President, a technology paradigm shift can serve as the number one

driver in the efficient taxation collection process, thus reducing seepage and fraud. Also, it will ensure that compliance is achieved, therefore each pays their fair share, leading to taxes being reduced in the longer term. Surely, technology and automation can be a disruptive factor that may potentially displace jobs. This Government, mindful of such, will consider how best its manpower can be retooled and redeployed to critical sectors of the economy, ensuring an overall seamless integration of technology and human resources.

Madam President, every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago should now be fully aware of the economic challenges facing this country, and the urgent need for economic adjustment, diversification of our economy, and the assurance of value for money in all our undertakings. A tremendous amount of strategic operational and tactical planning is ongoing at the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications focused on significantly improving the way the public service innovates and delivers its service to its citizens.

Madam President, this Government gives the assurance in improving the quality of service to all citizens of this country and enhance the way in which work is done in the public service, so that we can bring Government services closer to our citizens.

Madam President, I would now like to reflect on the social net that exists to support citizens that are most vulnerable. In this respect, I will examine the mainstay of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services for the fiscal year 2017. Madam President, from 2002 to 2010, the most comprehensive social support framework was established by the PNM in key areas most critical in the alleviation of poverty and reduction of the problems of at-risk issues in this country.

This Government is at a place where de-monitoring and evaluation of social initiatives, and programmes are being strengthened and deepened to ensure that those most needed are the beneficiaries. It is against this background that the Government programme is based on two of Vision 2030 goals, namely: one, people first, nurturing our greatest asset; and, two, good governance and service excellence. I am proud to support the conversation that, to date, the following can be reported. Initiatives to support poor and vulnerable groups; the development of a national social mitigation plan; transition of food support to social welfare; food support to 27,435 persons; provision of seed grants to 19 participants; provision of public assistance grants to 25,738 persons; expansion of the general assistance grant supporting an additional 622 new recipients; rental assistance to 21 persons in critical and vulnerable circumstances; provision of the education grant to 309 beneficiaries; 143 persons in receipt of the dietary grant; assistance to 42 of our nation's special achievers; disaster relief to 1,958 persons affected by tropical storm Bret.

Madam President, through the National Social Development Programme, there has been support to 180 households with jobs; approval of 71 jobs to assist in sanitary plumbing; assistance to 126 households for the first time, house rewiring services; 1,112 NEC Level I graduates from the Adult Education Programme, improving their opportunities for employment. Madam President, there has been a continued commitment to public/private partnerships through support evidenced by subventions to 24 NGOs, including three statutory boards; provision of one-off grants over 10,000 to 20 NGOs; and provision of one-off grants under 10,000 to 110 organizations.

Madam President, I will now look at some of the initiatives to support

persons with disabilities. These include the support to 23,625 persons with disabilities via the Disability Grant. Funding for the special child grant from which 51 new recipients are included, 10,200 clients served by ELDAMO; the provisions of prosthetics to 44 persons; provision of wheelchairs to 97 persons and other items such as canes, crutches and walkers to 21 persons; three nationwide consultations on the national policy for persons with disabilities.

Madam President, some of the initiatives to support the socially displaced include the collaborative effort with key stakeholders towards the development of an action plan for treating with street dwelling; provision of referrals, counselling, shelter and rehabilitation services to 67 street dwellers; provision of psychological support to 26 persons housed at the New Horizon Centre. At the Centre for the socially disabled persons, drug rehabilitative services and self-esteem workshops provided to 126 socially displaced persons.

I will now look at some of the initiatives to support the elderly. These include the provision of senior citizens pension to 92,800 senior citizens; support to 17 facilities in the care of 55 patients through the community care programme; support to homes for the aged. I want to look at some of the initiatives to support the family. They are as follows: 184 persons to complete the community parenting workshop, there is also the airing of a radio programme "It's Family time: Let's talk" on I95.5 FM; continued workshop for lay responders in highlighting issues pertaining to domestic violence; services such as counselling, advocacy, and referrals to 6,970 clients to the national family services division.

I would now look at some of the initiatives to improve the efficiency and the effectiveness of social service delivery systems here in Trinidad. There have been preliminary discussions with the Central Statistical Office to collaborate in the

development of a socio-economic indicator database. Other of the initiatives include the conduct of 35 public information education and sensitization sessions across the country; revised approach to the means testing through the standardized means test.

Madam President, under the Vision 2030 goal, Good Governance and Service Excellence, the following initiatives were undertaken in 2017: In terms of improving efficiency of the public institutions, there has been a review of the recruitment process and the implementation of human resource recruitment plan; the redesign of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services website was another initiative that was undertaken by the Ministry. There has been improvement, as well, in the office accommodation at the district offices to facilitate the integration of the food support initiatives for social welfare. The total value—the approximate value spent by the PNM Government for these various initiatives under the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services is \$101 billion. That, Madam President, is testimony of a caring PNM Government and a rich legacy of PNM policy of caring for the less vulnerable in society.

Madam President, it is imperative as a Government that the Government works closely with the poor among us and works to lift citizens out of their hardship to see a better tomorrow. Warren Buffett said, and I quote:

“The rich are always going to say that, you know, just give us more money and we’ll go out and spend more and then it will all trickle down to the rest of you. But that has not worked the last 10 years, and I hope the American public is catching on.”

Madam President, I want to say, in like fashion like Warren Buffett, that for Trinidad and Tobago, that is probably the story for the last 20 years, and I hope

that the Trinidad and Tobago population is catching on. It is why this paradigm shift is needed, and it must take place in order to usher in a new era in Trinidad and Tobago. In short, we have to grow up as a people and mature as a people. The theme of the budget is “Changing the Paradigm”, and in this context I have spent my time in my contribution looking at the indicators of the old paradigm as advanced by the hon. Minister of Finance. As the Government and other stakeholders continue to communicate and share perspectives on the economic repositioning of Trinidad and Tobago, it is my abiding faith that all citizens will appreciate the requirement for the new direction that our nation must take in order to succeed.

To shift the paradigm denotes a fundamental cultural change in the way we think, socialize and reconstruct the economic nitty-gritties of company Trinidad and Tobago. Surely at the level of the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications, and all Ministries and other agencies alike, critical system re-engineering is required to support the paradigm shift. The Public Administration Ministry remains the most central driver of the transformational process. Madam President, we can all appreciate that the deep changes that are required shall not be an easy task but one that is justifiably needed—as such, we implore all stakeholders to work together to move our country into the modern ages.

Madam President, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Taharqa Obika: Madam President, I thank you for recognizing me as I stand to make my maiden contribution to the budget debate for fiscal 2018, the national budget of Trinidad and Tobago. I begin my contribution today by congratulating—

Sen. Khan: The Leader of the Opposition. [*Laughter*]

Sen. T. Obika:—the Member of Parliament for Siparia and Leader of the Opposition—

Sen. Khan: I could have seen that coming. [*Laughter*]

Sen. T. Obika:—for her critical and in-depth analysis of the budget. I see that the Leader of Government Business also congratulates the Leader of the Opposition. [*Laughter and desk thumping*] I also applaud the sterling contribution of our Members of the other place. I recognize and applaud the contribution of leader Mark on the Opposition Bench of the Senate, Sen. Ameen, Sen. Haynes, Sen. Hosein and Sen. Ramdeen. These contributions would redound to the benefit of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, should the Minister of Finance, the hon. Minister take note.

Madam President, if I may, it grieves me to state that I fear the Minister of Finance may not be one to heed wise counsel. I make this assertion given that throughout the budget document there was no mention made of the economic development advisory board, and no mention was made of the word “innovate” nor “innovation”. So, I need to take some time to respond to the contributions of the hon. Members opposite. I begin with the hon. Sen. Baksh. The Senator said that the subsidy on fuel is poorly targeted. However, I must say, a subsidy that keeps distribution lower in the distribution sector, in the food and beverage sector, in the fast moving consumer goods sector, and hence food prices lower, being diesel, is well-placed. [*Laughter and desk thumping*]

The hon. Minister of Works and Transport—I see he is not with us at the moment—but he made much of new future works about sod turning ceremonies, but did not address the Tobago sea bridge debacle. The state of the existing roads. I mean, for example, to get from Point Fortin to here I had to dodge many, not

potholes anymore, we are calling them manholes. [*Laughter and desk thumping*]
You could literally sleep in one of them. So, the current service delivery in his Ministry needs to be addressed, and it is very poor. I recognize the contribution of the hon. Attorney General. It was a very vibrant one, we must say. It energized the House. However, you know sometimes in haste, you need to be checked in terms of to ensure that what you say is accurate. All right. We know he is well-intentioned. Okay?

However, the public needs to have faith in his approach. So, where the information presented is not accurate, you must understand that the AG took a note from Sen. Ramdeen's contribution, speaking about the funds extracted from TGU, and he seemed to confuse the bond payment with the dividend, or he thought that Sen. Ramdeen confused the two. But Sen. Ramdeen was clear, the bond repayment was not deemed to be a dividend payment, but what he was driving to was the total funds allocated to support expenditure of the Government. All right. [*Desk thumping*]

In the *Trinidad Guardian* of the 13th of January 2017, it was reported that TGU has repaid the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago US \$554 million, or TT 3.8 billion. When you add that to the 3.68 billion from NGC, you understand that we know of so far, because, of course, financial statements may take some time to reach us in this august House—august Chamber. We understand that already you are crossing 7.5 billion, and they are talking about 16, which is actually an incorrect figure, again, when you go in haste.

Sometimes they say “hurry bird doh build good nest” in this country, Trinidad and Tobago. So, you already crossed the 50 per cent of what you claimed we spent but, really and truly, it was 12.6 billion. So again, we are pleased to

ensure the public of Trinidad and Tobago that we are making the Government account. We are keeping them on their toes. [*Desk thumping*] So that is that part there.

Also, the Attorney General says the budget provides a soft landing for T&T. But I want to assure him that the people have fallen on hard times [*Desk thumping*] by the harsh measures of the budget. Okay? Also, if you allow me, I am a person who, I revel in the culture of this country, and the hon. Minister of Finance, in the other place, mentioned a song from Stalin. And, Madam President, if you allow me? He quoted our national calypso icon Dr. Leroy Calliste, the Black Stalin. But the people of the country are feeling the squeal of this big people Government, so they are singing the other, more damning first line of the chorus. “For the country facing its darkest hour.” [*Desk thumping*] But to the people of Trinbago, have no fear, for this country will eventually have a change in Government—

Hon. Senator: Soon, soon, soon.

Sen. T. Obika:—so you could sing the next Stalin song, “Better days are coming.” [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*] And to the former, now resigned deputy CEO of the ODPM, “dat eh no small thing, dat is ah big thing”. [*Desk thumping*] All right. Okay, so—[*Crosstalk*] I see we have another fan of Dr. Leroy Calliste. [*Laughter*] The hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, I see you like that song. [*Laughter*]

So, the Minister of Trade and Industry, in response to the hon. Minister of Trade, I tend to have followed because she was once the Member of Parliament for my area, Point Fortin [*Crosstalk*] so I take a liking to her contributions. I listened attentively to the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry, and I cannot help but wonder whether the foreign direct investment—what are the diversification and the

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DI goals for the economy? Because no data was given. Rather an attempt was made to put together a hodgepodge of investments for some projects, and the figure of \$3 billion was arrived at. I hope it was not on the hoof. I only hope.
[Laughter]

I heard no mention made of the Economic Development Advisory Board, Madam Minister. After all, having overseen the Government's diversification plans, so I move to the Economic Development Advisory Board. Now, only when you refer to the PSIP for Trinidad in 2018 on page 95, so deep down in the end, almost, you see the advisory board appear, and you discover that they have been granted 18 million taxpayers' dollars to conduct studies, not more than the number of fingers on my hand, compared to the paltry sums given to some sectors such as agriculture,—in the PSIP, that is—maritime and the creative industry. Oh, our singers will be weeping and mourning in Kaiso Fiesta in Skinner Park next year. So, where the money should really be spent?

Madam President, after being ignored for two years, the Economic Development Advisory Board is now getting more money, when we know the Finance Minister does not listen to them. [Desk thumping] [Laughter] The board was established, and I quote, with your permission, Madam President? On its website it is:

“...focused on Economic Development through the development and advocacy of policies, programmes and projects which bear on Trinidad and Tobago's long term development and transformation, and specifically, with those that promote the diversification of the economy.”

They go on to state, diversification is defined—so they qualified what diversification is for this current, Dr. Rowley led PNM Government—by the

advisory board in terms of the promotion of economic activities which earn foreign exchange.

So therefore, I was expecting, if this is the mandate of the advisory board, that anything with diversification they would explain to us what the quantum of foreign exchange that will be derived from such a measure in the short-term or medium-term is. [*Desk thumping*] Nothing was given. Only one figure was mentioned, some \$47 billion, I think, Madam Minister, in your contribution regarding some maritime activity. But, I do not blame the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry, it rests with the Minister of Finance, because I know she has Trinidad and Tobago at heart. [*Laughter*] This begs the question, which activities have been laid out to generate foreign exchange in a manner that holds the current depletion of our foreign reserves.

The IMF in their recently concluded Article IV mission to Trinidad and Tobago stated that regarding the depletion of foreign reserves in Trinidad and Tobago, there are needs to ensure there are reforms to enhance the country's foreign exchange earnings capacity. So they are saying the same thing that the website of the advisory board say. The website. [*Laughter*] Because the board does not enter the budget document. So, foreign exchange does not simply appear on our shores by chance. It is not manna falling from heaven. It comes from exports, and export is a function of vibrant industry, and a diversified economy that can respond positively to negative shocks in the energy sector, which we are experiencing now, should be the focus. So, when the oil money done, we should have something to rely on.

5.45 p.m.

Sadly, this Government has lost its way in the presentation of a budget that

was full on rhetoric, but empty on solutions. [*Desk thumping*] There was no information presented that could be used to adequately measure, over the course of the fiscal 2018, the success or failure of each measure. A budget devoid of data. There is a saying, “if it cannot be measured it cannot be managed”—[*Laughter*]—a saying, I am sure which at least two hon. Senators across the floor would understand, given that they have finance backgrounds. Hon. Minister? Therefore, by this vacuous budget presentation, the Minister of Finance, and I dare say the Government, is setting up the country for failure. So somebody might be looking after his work just now; somebody might be looking after his work because we have two finance persons opposite.

So the overall budget. Madam President, I now turn my attention to the overall outline of the budget and the expectations for revenue debt taxation and its impact on the economy and the population, that is the working class, the middle class, the poor, the marginalized and disadvantaged citizens of the economy. Madam President, the harsh measures of increased taxation, planned increases in utilities for water and electricity—“oh gosh man,” they cut lights too—will hit these categories of persons the hardest and they need to be protected.

Madam President, I am a proud citizen of this nation and my heart goes out to people who are crying and in response to their cries, the now former Deputy CEO of the ODPM said, “it is a small thing”. But if you are flood out, “oh gosh”, have mercy, have mercy. If you are flood out that is not a small thing, that is a big thing, but I see he has resigned. We only hope that the man who replaces him is more responsive or actually should be in Penal by now, hopefully. The State should be the poor people’s protector.

The budget was based on oil price of \$52 a barrel and a gas price of US

\$2.75 MMBtu. The forecast in contention is the oil price, hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries. The Minister of Finance referenced the IMF in his oil price forecast, so I shall do same. But if it would concern you, Madam President, to know that only Tuesday 10th October, two weeks ago, the IMF in its World Economic Outlook, which I happen to have with me here, revised lower its oil price forecast for 2017/2018 to around \$50.3 per barrel. And they said:

“After averaging \$43 a barrel in 2016, oil prices are expected to average”—
US—“\$50.3 a barrel 2017 (down from \$55.2 a barrel in the April 2017”—
World Economic Outlook),—“and stay at about that level in 2018.”

Now, I know this may be new information to the Minister of Finance, but what it means is, the work of the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry needs to be centre stage and the Economic Development Advisory Board who he does not listen to, well, you know what happens there.

So the price of \$50 a barrel is the threshold for the supplemental petroleum tax. Furthermore, the plant—which I am sure Sen. Small, if he was here, would echo in unison with me—furthermore the plant will levy a royalty of 12 per cent of all volume has to be first legislated—not so, Sen. Ramdeen? Right. So therefore, the revenue from taxation of income and profits from oil companies estimated to be TT \$2.1 billion for fiscal 2018 is at risk. This in my estimation will increase the size of the deficit.

I turn to tax overestimation. I see there are persons who may be looking for a portfolio in finance after the impending reshuffle, so I critically analyze the tax overestimation of the Minister of Finance. [*Laughter*] So this does not fall in your garden hon. deputy Minister or Minister in the Ministry of Finance. The Minister of Finance continues to amaze with this overestimation of tax revenue, the hon.

Minister that is. The danger with this is, it has the effect of projecting a narrower budget deficit. So it will give our hon. Ministers on the other side comfort to spend, thinking that they have funds. Therefore, the \$4.76 billion deficit could easily double if revenue projections based solely on tax estimates do not materialize.

Now, let us tell you a story. Recall that for 2017 fiscal, the estimated fiscal deficit was eventually \$12.643 billion. But the Minister of Finance had expected a deficit of \$6 billion despite the hon. Opposition Leader warning him in the response that it will not be, it would rather be \$12 billion. To establish a trend we go to the first budget of the finance Minister. From the *Draft Estimates of Revenue*, in 2016 the Finance Minister estimated total revenue to be \$40.798 billion. However, revenue collected was actually 29 per cent less, \$28.99 billion. This represented a decline of \$11.807 billion. Where did this overestimation take place?

The Minister of Finance always likes to blame the energy sector for failing tax revenue. However, for fiscal 2016 he had budgeted it to generate \$3.24 billion in taxes on income and profits from oil companies of which \$1.04 billion was collected, a shortfall of only \$2.3 billion, a paltry 18.6 per cent of the shortfall of actual from estimated revenue. In other words, his constant blaming of energy for his woes in 2016, less than one-fifth of the shortfall was directly as a result of lower taxes on income and profits from energy companies.

Miscalculation of VAT: So, most of the shortfall came from the gross overestimation of value added tax. VAT estimated to be collected in fiscal 2016 was placed at \$12.364 billion, but only \$7 billion was collected, a shortfall of \$5.5 billion or 43 per cent less. We see the trend continuing, a disturbing trend, with

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this overestimation of VAT in that the revised estimates for VAT collection is 18 per cent less than the figure quoted in the estimates for 2017. Therefore, as we examine this budget for fiscal 2018 where tax revenue Heads are increasing, including taxes on income and profits on property, despite not having mechanisms in place to implement the property tax, taxes on income and profits of individuals were also projected to increase from the revised estimate of \$6.4 billion to \$6.9 billion, an increase of 8.7 per cent.

So, this is taxes on income and profits from individuals. All in an environment where the total number employed is on a downward trend, from \$621,600 in quarter four 2015, when the current regime came into office, to \$608,400 in quarter four 2016. Statistics, I am sure the hon. Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development would be familiar with, a decline of 13,200 persons lost jobs, Madam President. From the Central Bank *Economic Bulletin*, that is the source, September 2017, just before the budget.

So presented is a budget for fiscal 2018 where taxation is carded to be over 14 per cent higher than the revised estimates for tax revenue 2017. Where is the basis for this? So after dealing with the question of whether or not the finance Minister is fit to continue overseeing our administration of our country's finances, I turn to debt to GDP.

Madam President, I now seek to analyze in detail the crisis that we are facing. From the Central Bank *Economic Bulletin* for September 2017, we observed that T&T was at dangerous point. At the end of June 2017, total public sector debt, net of sterilized securities, as our hon. Members from the banking sector will be familiar with, amounted to \$91.6 billion, 59.3 per cent of GDP. We now know it is in excess of 62 per cent and racing upwards. When compared to

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June 2015, public sector debts stood at only 39.9 per cent of GDP.

Now, Madam President, the Bourse Report in the *Express* newspaper of Monday 09 October, 2017, on new government borrowing, stated:

“...additional debt burden could increase Net Public Sector Debt...to GDP...to...65.6 per cent (holding 2017 GDP constant).”

That is if the economy does not decline further. So by a simple decline in the economy, without necessarily changing the total debt profile, which means they may just add some debt based on the repayment, we will experience an increase in debt to GDP. That is worrying. And further:

“If the Government has to provide a guarantee for the Petrotrin 2019 bond”—which the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries referred to—“...debt to GDP ratio could reach 69.5 per cent...”

This is a very dangerous level.

However, should we witness a repeat of the underestimated deficit of fiscal 2017, this year, we could see the deficit rising in excess, in my opinion, of 70 per cent of GDP. When you take into consideration Sandals, where are they going to get the funds from? If the funds are going to come from debt, because we are not sure, there is no information coming to us, it paints a very troubling picture. This means that future generations will be burdened with the responsibility of repayment. I suspect this is the burden the Minister of Finance speaks of.

So what are we waiting on? Are we waiting on oil the saviour? It seems the current administration's plan is to finance expenditure through borrowing, raising new taxes that erode the level of domestic economic enthusiasm and tapping the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. Simply hoping to be bailed from a rise in the oil price is not a strategy. It is not. Furthermore, with prices hovering around US \$50

a barrel, the tax threshold for the next fiscal and the source of oil revenues is uncertain at best. Unless, of course, that 12 per cent royalty is legislated in time.

In addition to the level of debt to GDP, an important statistic to watch is the level of debt service to GDP, how much you pay on a regular basis, not the quantum, but the amount you are required to pay off. As the debt service payments approach the equivalent size of the fiscal deficit then, in essence, as a nation we would not be borrowing to meet developmental or growth objectives but in effect borrowing to pay loans. I crave your indulgence, as I continue, the size of the annual debts service obligations has already approached \$6 billion from the provisional figures presented by the Ministry of Finance's latest *Review of the Economy*.

So my conclusion and cursory recommendation with regard to the debt to GDP is the current mode of selling and closure of state enterprises—with this current mode of selling and closure of state enterprises, the future cash flows of state enterprises need to be checked. This approach of not trying to fix the bad or struggling state enterprises and trying to sell the good ones, begs the question, what about the next generation? Given the current scenario facing the country with no real revenue-generating programmes being put in place—again, we look at the operating in silos with the EADB advisory board, the Ministry of Trade and Industry, our hon. Minister here and the Ministry of Finance, we could be heading toward debt default. I say this with a heavy heart because really and truly this is my nation.

The raiding of the—I should not say “raiding”—the tapping of the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund will leave the Government with depleted national savings and due to the significant fiscal deficit it may not necessarily mean achievement of

the developmental agenda. So you take funds to develop, but in effect, you are basically taking funds to pay debt. The measure will in effect be just kicking the can down the road but the core fundamentals of the economy would have to be dealt with eventually. Fix the economy, stop passing the buck, a real focus on diversification and not lip service and in the use of advisory board for window dressing is needed. So I turn to Trinidad and Tobago's credit rating.

Now, Standard & Poor's credit rating for Trinidad and Tobago stands at BBB+ with stable outlook. So the Minister of Finance appeared, from my estimation, to misinterpret this to mean that under the current regime the credit rating has improved. However, the Minister of Finance did not seem to understand that the rating is a lower grade than under the Partnership. I would like to remind the Government that A is higher than B. Therefore, the current administration has realized a lower credit rating for Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] It would also be wise of the hon. Minister of Finance to note that Standard & Poor's cites the increased debt burden as one factor in the lowering of the country's long-term credit rating. This is actually from our Government's website.

So, I now turn to the benefits from the hard work of the People's Partnership that this Government is benefiting from. Madam President, it is common knowledge that the planning arising for the upstream energy sector exceeds the time the current Government has been in office. It is more than 24 months or 26 months, therefore there have been some improvements in the energy sector and the outlook is improving based on the Central Bank in the *Economic Bulletin* for September, where the bank stated positively:

“...exploration activity has been growing”—as rig days and depth drilled grew—“by 18.4 per cent and 28.7 per cent...respectively...”

—sentiments echoed by our hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries in this Chamber.

The upstream activity was on account of the developmental work by upstream companies. Madam President, this Government is benefiting from the prior work of the People's Partnership—[*Desk thumping*—as I heard the Minister mention yesterday, TROC, Juniper and Angelin.

Madam President, I now turn to the troubling question of housing delivery under this regime. The Minister of Finance noted that the HDC can construct at most 2,000 new houses per year—2,000—which we are not seeing being reflected in this budget presentation. This Government has turned their back on service delivery in housing. The Minister of Finance is reported to have stated rental income is a fraction of the income from sales and the HDC cannot finance a major housing construction programme based primarily on rental income. Significant government subsidy is thus essential for the provision of rental units.

So there it is, in one breath the Minister of Finance stating that the housing programme cannot support a focus by the HDC on rental units, it cannot. However, the Finance Minister goes on in another breath to state that Government intends to place emphasis on rental accommodation. This Government has decided to wean itself off the population, wean itself off the taxpayers, wean itself off the small man, wean itself off the poor, the disadvantaged and the marginalized in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

I feel it for the hon. Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development. The masses are now being forced to look at renting, which people consider, dead money, as their Government's solution to their basic need of shelter. In its place the Government is saying that the private sector will build your homes under their

housing construction incentive programme. The hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Development stated that the current regime distributed 1,258 keys in 2016. The Minister of Housing and Urban Development spoke more of the keys distributed than of houses. So it was unclear if it was the keys that would provide shelter.

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development was also hopeful to distribute an additional 500 to 700 units by December 2017; he neglected to say, Madam President, how far along they were. Therefore, they are woefully behind on housing delivery, especially when you consider under the Partnership we were distributing over 100 houses per week in 2015. One hundred houses per week in 2015. [*Desk thumping*] Not keys, Madam President.

Furthermore, with the current shift to the private sector, we do not anticipate realization of the housing dreams of the populace. The housing Minister spoke of a—and I could not believe it, but believe it or not he said it—a roof-over-your-head housing policy. But on this side we advocate a home-owning democracy. [*Desk thumping*] And that was the response of the hon. Leader of Opposition. So I am not sure what, you know—therefore, under this current Government, it is the roof over your head you must be content with, not with ownership of the house and land as we dream for in this nation.

So, the decision to give the grant of \$100,000 to developers upon completion is not necessarily going to catch on for small developers. This is because the missing link here was financing. And you have a former CEO of a bank who could advise him but he does not—“I doh know, I doh know”. [*Interruption*] The State already has the land. You cannot create what is already there, that is the extractive industries. [*Interruption*] No, no. I want the Minister to be educated, I am an

educator as well, you know.

Access to lines of credit is central to the property development industry, access to lines of credit. However, Central Bank in their latest *Economic Bulletin* of September 2017, like they wanted the population to know so they made sure and prepared this bulletin in time for the budget.

“Credit to businesses was restrained by the fall-off in loans to the Construction sector”—by—“(32.6 per cent)”—a whopping decline of one-third.

One-third, Madam President.

Therefore, in this unfavourable climate in new small-scale developers, one finds it difficult for this measure to take root. They cannot build houses without finance. No money, “no wok”. Furthermore, when you consider the level of indebtedness of the Government to local developers how do you expect small and medium-sized developers to engage in a construction programme when they are being owed moneys by the State. The Minister of Housing and Urban Development in his now familiar style of “say much, give little data” did not disclose the level of indebtedness to housing contractors and did not say when such payment would be effected. The plan for private developers to be registered by a committee to be chaired by the Prime Minister is troubling—is troubling.

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development could not show how this would not promote political interference—note the word, “interference”; and further, how will it be monitored? The Minister of Housing and Urban Development stated the PP spent \$4.4 billion over five years—I thought he was campaigning for us at that time—in housing. Thanks for that acknowledgement, to the hon. Minister, wherever you are, but he also said the current Government spent

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only \$165 million and \$231 million in housing in 2016 and 2017. I am surprised he would have served those two things so close. He was not afraid of how it looks. Therefore, in 2017 they spent less than the money spent on the purchase of Massy Communications.

Hon. Senator: Correct. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. T. Obika: It is therefore clear that handing over our taxpayers' dollars to their super elite friends is more important than the desire for housing of the people, "Oh! What a tangled web we weave..." I would not say the rest of that part. Where is housing now? This Government has shifted to a housing programme that is going to be run by a committee chaired by the Prime Minister.

Secondly, we are in an environment where the level of credit to developers is declining. Therefore, small and medium scale developers will face an unfavourable market when attempting to source funds for home construction. [*Desk thumping*] Thirdly, due to the debt that the State owes to contractors with no set programme for repayment based on the Minister of Housing and Urban Development's contribution, only the financially endowed large-scale developers, mainly the super elite will stand ready to benefit from the current shift in government policy.

Fourthly, the roof-over-your-head housing policy means citizens can look forward to realizing the dream of home ownership—they cannot look forward to that. Last but not least, we will see a shrinking of the work of the HDC. This is like a eulogy you know; a eulogy for the housing sector which is best equipped to deliver housing to our nationals and they have not built a single house. [*Desk thumping*] [*Member sings*]—"Come, leh we go to Tobago". [*Laughter*]

The recent absence of the majority members of the THA, when a committee

of Parliament went to the sister isle, brings into focus the THA's non-submission of financials to account to taxpayers of the nation. If you check in the library since 2007—I mean, we are in 2017, 20 years, two decades, I mean, “oh gosh”. So to put that on the record, the THA needs to account to the population. So we are being told that despite this, the Tobago House of Assembly will be allowed to incur their own debt which must be for—well, it must be for capital purposes.

However, are we saying that the allocation given to the THA in the budget is inadequate? Further, when the THA borrows, this will increase total debt to GDP of the nation. The Sandals debacle comes into view and begs the question, is it that the Government plans to finance the Sandals Resort via THA borrowings? Published on Thursday 28 September, 2017, just last month, in a Trinidad and Tobago *Guardian* newspaper in an article by Shaliza Hassanali, the Prime Minister is quoted as saying:

“I want to make it abundantly clear that the Sandals project we have on the drawing board is not giving Sandals anything.”

I thought hon. Senators opposite would thump the desk for that. But then in the same breath saying:

“...the same model that the Government used with state-owned Hilton Trinidad and Hyatt Regency Hotels, they will adapt for Sandals.”

So how can you say you are not giving Sandals anything when you are planning to commit, what could be billions, could be, billions of our taxpayers' dollars to build the resort. The question therefore is, how much are they spending on Sandals? Where is the feasibility study?

Hon. Senator: None. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. T. Obika: Our finance professionals opposite would be very familiar with

that question. Where are the controls that would protect Tobago's indigenous culture of harvest and fisherman fetes? I see the hon. Sen. De Freitas was proud in extolling the benefits of the harvest. I mean, I have served as a teacher in Tobago in 2002 and as a junior economist in 2007 at the Division of Finance of the THA and I feel for the people of Tobago who must strive despite no consultation. I feel for you, hon. Senator. [*Crosstalk*] Madam President, THA is controlled by the PNM.

Hon. Senator: "Ha." "Take dat." [*Desk thumping*] "Take dat."

Sen. T. Obika: So the question, why the financials were not done, you have to ask your Chief Secretary. Madam President—[*Crosstalk*]—ask yourself. Madam President, in the absence of any details from the regime, it is my considered estimation that the Tobago Sandals model may involve in the vicinity—in my estimation, since we have no information to go by—\$4 billion to \$5 billion of taxpayers' dollars. Where would all this money come from? Are they planning to borrow again to construct? Then, is the plan to carry our debt to GDP even further?

Furthermore, what are the extra project infrastructural costs for airport expansion, road networks, and will this money come from THA's allocation? This attempt at a sole sourcing of Sandals which was hatched by a private meeting of the Opposition Leader, the details of which is not part of official government records, is deeply troubling. Where is the feasibility study? [*Desk thumping*] Why were other resort chains not invited to tender for the resort in Tobago? We know that a competitive bid—yeah, you might want Sandals, but a competitive bid may reap better returns to the taxpayer. I see the hon. Minister is smiling because she is in step with this message, but it is okay. [*Laughter*] So a lopsided deal is

struck with Sandals and the population must be left to deal with it.

Diversification. Madam President, I would now commit the remainder of my time to dealing with the absence of a diversification plan by the current regime. The Minister may have won, but, you know, you have to go through the Votes to get funds and that kind of thing. The Finance Minister is reported to have stated that the small business and agricultural programmes which can lead to political interference—

Madam President: Sen. Obika, you have five more minutes.

Sen. T. Obika: Oh yes, my time confirms that—which can lead to political interference were innovative. I am sure that the members of the Economic Development Advisory Board hung their collective heads in shame as the Minister of Finance tried to equate this plan, which may lead to political interference, with innovation. The Economic Development Advisory Board, as I stated at the beginning of my contribution, does not seem to have the ear of the Minister of Finance, as nowhere in his budget document was any mention made of them. Furthermore, they have reserved \$18million under the PSIP for completion of studies. This money is greater than the total sum of moneys given to the maritime industry, \$2 million under the PSIP. Fashion, film, music industry, the Minister is crying for funds, \$4 million in Trinidad and \$2million for culture under Tobago PSIP 2018.

Madam President, it is disturbing that these key sectors, which have been identified by the Minister of Finance to lead the diversification thrust, have not been able to attract the same PSIP, \$18 million as the board itself. So the candle is more than the funeral in this case. What is even more alarming is that the body established to advise could only see it fit to advise themselves into \$18 million.

When you delve into the plans to diversify the sector, you wonder if the only function of the advisory board is to advise on how much money they need to give advice. Okay? So to show this Government's regard for agriculture—the high regard they have for agriculture and diversification—in April, in the *Guardian*, they reported the shut-down of Caroni Green with workers getting severance letters in April of this year.

In the same quarter the advisory board was known to be collaborating with agencies on a diversification plan. The advisory board must publicly distance themselves from the closure of Caroni Green, publicly. A company that was growing and exporting peppers and by the sale on the local market Caroni Green would have been contributing to reducing the food import bill which I am sure would have helped our hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. But if the advisory board was doing their job the Government would have created similar models to Caroni Green across the agricultural sector, the length and breadth of it. [*Crosstalk*] Yes, that sounding like Stalin.

So what was comical was the statement by the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, comical—that approximately \$116 million, one-third of the \$350 million allocated to CEPEP is captured under agriculture. It is common knowledge that CEPEP competes with the agricultural sector for workers, diversification and the non-energy sector. I did not hear the hon. Minister speak of a “farmpep”. So once more, no plan. A cornerstone into this Government's diversification plans is the tourism sector. And they can only lay claim to a bump in this year's tourism season at the expense of our local neighbours due to the storm conditions.

Now, when you look at the small business programme, the agriculture programme, there is another undependable measure for agriculture, the grant of

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\$100,000 which could also lead to political interference or political handouts with no real impact on agricultural sector output. And the sting in the tail is that what they said afterwards, where the Minister of Finance hinted at the policy that aims to provide greater space for large farms by removing the restriction of 100 acres of land to receive exemptions from tax and income from approved agriculture holdings. The big boys win. They are going to give away big lands to this country. The solution, take the financial sector and provide real support to farmers. One hundred thousand dollars is chicken change. If you have to bring down a plane of cows that is \$1 million—not a plane of cows, a plane of goat or sheep. So the small business development, the same problem. Under the Vision 2030 of the Government, building globally competitive businesses, they declare they would develop sound financial system, but again, once more, they are in trouble.

So the way forward, the Government must arrest the decline of the debt to GDP, it is projected to be 70 to 77 per cent by the end of fiscal 2018. Get serious on diversification, implement concrete plans to generate foreign exchange in the non-energy sector. Proper business plans with medium project horizons need to be formulated now. The housing proposals are poor and they need to bring relief to the citizens. Put the people at the centre of decision making. The economic advisory board needs to distance themselves from this shameless diversification plan which has no focus on solutions and cancel immediately the plan for agriculture and entrepreneurship with these shameless \$100,000 grants and give real support, through NEDCO, the banks and the ADB. Thank you very much. Madam President, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President: Allow me to congratulate Sen. Obika on his maiden

contribution. [*Desk thumping*] Sen. Cummings.

6.15p.m.

Sen. Foster Cummings: Very entertaining. [*Desk thumping*] Madam President, I want to express my gratitude for the opportunity to contribute to this debate and to join in congratulating Sen. Obika on his maiden contribution in the Senate. [*Desk thumping*] Sen. Obika reminded me earlier this week that we share a common history in terms of previous employment and therefore some of his enthusiasm I would attribute to his training at that institution where we worked some years ago. And while quite entertaining, I would want to bring us back to reality at this point in time. [*Desk thumping*]

And what is the reality, Madam President? That the UNC government, masquerading as the People's Partnership because they could not come back to the people of Trinidad and Tobago after the UNC administration, led by the hon. Basdeo Panday—they could not face the population as the UNC so they hid behind something called the People's Partnership, the PP.

Hon. Senator: PP.

Sen. F. Cummings: The PP. And the people of Trinidad and Tobago made the mistake of electing the PP to govern Trinidad and Tobago, and from 2010 to 2015 it was havoc in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Recklessness! And so when the citizens of this country sit back and look at the Opposition performing today, they could only laugh. They could only say, "Yuh tink we forget, but we ent forget what the UNC is about".

When we speak about housing and the UNC housing programme at a cost of \$5.4 billion, I want to share with my new Senatorial colleagues, \$5.4 billion to construct 3,900 houses, an average cost of \$1.4 million per house to the taxpayers

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of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Senator: “Oh goooooo!”

Sen. F. Cummings: That is UNC government for your money. That is UNC housing policy, Madam President, an approximate of \$1,100 per square foot for low-cost housing, and to build it for 1.4 and sell it for 750. I mean, that is UNC economics and UNC accounting. Only the UNC can do that.

And so the PNM is here to bring us back to reality. So that under the PNM, under the Keith Rowley-led administration, during the period 2016 to 2017, the cost per square foot for the very same houses, \$550, [*Desk thumping*] half the cost. Half the cost! The UNC—and somebody raised the question earlier about buying certain land. I do not want to go into that matter, but when the UNC goes into a housing development, the State owns so much land in Central and South Trinidad from the former Caroni (1975) Limited, but yet the UNC would pay three times the cost of certain lands to construct low-cost housing. That is UNC policy. [*Desk thumping*]

And they come here and sit and want to talk to us about value for money. It was recklessness, a bunch of Ministers who the Prime Minister at the time clearly had no control over whatsoever. In every Ministry it was a spending spree. In the Ministry of Local Government, in the Ministry of Works and Transport, in the Ministry of Housing, every Minister wanted to be a contract Minister awarding contracts left, right and centre. Box drains a la carte. [*Laughter and desk thumping*] And then I saw one down at Carli Bay in Couva. From the time the box drain was built, to date, it is like a swimming pool. “The water not flowing left, right”; it just a swimming pool.

Hon. Senator: “Ratchiffee. Ratchiffee.”

Sen. F. Cummings: And if you check the cost of those box drains, every box drain built by the UNC cost over \$1 million, everywhere, and now we have the problem of flooding and they want to ride the back of the people who are suffering from the flooding, and say that the UNC cares about them, and “dey in all kyn— dey in boat and canoe with talk-show host— [*Interruption*] They in boat and canoe with talk-show host”—[*Crosstalk*]

Madam President, I beg your protection from these people on the other side. They do not like to hear the truth. When the truth comes they run from the truth. But “they in little canoe down in South” with talk-show host, talking about bringing—[*Interruption*] Madam President, he had his turn. I did not interfere with him. Could he allow me, please? “They in canoe” with talk show-host. I want to warn him, that talk-show host might be coming to take his seat soon. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, it is indeed a very proud moment when any one of our students excel, and we all feel proud. I am from central Trinidad and I want to congratulate Priya Maraj for her achievement and being awarded the President’s Medal. Let me share the facts in this matter. By Cabinet Note dated October 13, 2016, Miss Priya Maraj was awarded the President’s Medal by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. By agreement dated the 10th of August, the Government granted a scholarship to enable the scholar to pursue a Bachelor of Science in Biochemistry at the University of Toronto for a period of four years commencing September 2017.

The Government’s position is that the circumstances of the execution of the scholar signing could not allow for the timely manner expected by the scholar, the specific circumstances being the relatively late date of signing the agreement,

coupled with the Ministry's accounting processes. There was some delay in the signing of the agreement due to pre-contractual negotiations which ensued after the scholar was sent a draft of the agreement for review by email dated the 13th of June, 2017, Madam President. The agreement was reviewed by the attorney for the scholar. By letter dated the 4th of July, 2017, he requested certain amendments and sought the clarification of certain clauses. By letter dated July 21st, the Ministry of Education responded, outlining its position on the requested amendments and clarification sought. By email dated the 7th of August, 2017, the attorney stated that his client had accepted the Ministry's response and was ready to sign.

The Ministry's process for the payment of money involved certain steps and is affected by the closing off of accounts at the end of the financial year, which is the 30th of September. This means that payments cannot be processed after accounts are closed at the end of the financial year and will only be processed in the new financial year when releases are given. Madam President, the attorney on record for this client is none other than Mr. Gerald Ramdeen—

Hon. Senator: “Ooh good.”

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: His own client's business here?

Sen. F. Cummings:—and therefore—

Hon. Senator: He did not declare his interest. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam President: Members, Members. Minister, please. And Sen. Cummings, is it that you are referring to a matter that is currently before the court? Is it before the court? Is the matter before the—

Sen. F. Cummings: No, it is not.

Madam President: It is not. All right, okay.

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Sen. F. Cummings: Madam President, it is not a matter before the court and the matter was raised by Sen. Ramdeen in his contribution. I am merely responding to—

Hon. Senator: Without declaring his interest.

Sen. F. Cummings:—the Senator who did not declare his interest in this matter.

Hon. Senator: Shameful.

Sen. F. Cummings: So that the UNC, in its normal style, looking for opportunities to cause political mischief— [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Obika: Are you proud of what you just said?

Sen. F. Cummings:—using a situation where someone signed an agreement late to come to suggest to Trinidad and Tobago that the PNM is not meeting its obligation for a scholar. Very, very irresponsible, if I should say so myself. Very irresponsible.

Hon. Senator: The PNM did not do that—the Scholarship Fund.

Sen. F. Cummings: Madam President, you know—[*Interruption*]

Madam President: Sen. Ameen, I have spoken to you already on this issue. Please try and control what you are doing. Okay? Sen. Cummings, continue.

Sen. F. Cummings: Thank you, Madam President. When they do not disturb, they post all sorts of things on Facebook. Madam President, the UNC just cannot behave itself and I am pleased to see that they have recruited some young, bright individuals in the Senate. I congratulate them all on their appointments, albeit that you will be in opposition for a very, very long time. [*Desk thumping*] I must tell you that.

Hon. Senator: Wrong party.

Sen. F. Cummings: Wrong party. If you wanted to be in real politics, you are on

the very, very wrong side. And what of the UNC government that Trinidad and Tobago should not forget? I listened to Sen. Ramdeen, and you see, because I am from Indian Trail in Couva, I have a little more information than a lot of people. I feel how it is to be governed close to the UNC. You know, their office was at Rienzi Complex, not too far from where—I am not sure where their office is now because they were kicked out of Rienzi Complex. But the UNC's heartland was Couva, and so I felt when the UNC came into office in 2010, how the UNC governs.

In the first two or three months after the UNC came into office, they fired every CEPEP contractor. They have criticized the CEPEP programme throughout their stint in Opposition, but immediately coming into Government they, one, fired all the contractors and, two, doubled the programme; doubled the number of contractors and the original programme that was supposed to be an incubator for entrepreneurs became a feeding frenzy for their friends, for millionaires and for certain functionaries within the UNC. It is rumoured that some representatives held two and three contracts in the CEPEP programme, and now they want to look at us and talk about things that they should know better about.

We witnessed the URP programme—that is an Unemployment Relief Programme—being turned into a contract mill under the UNC; contracts left, right and centre, forgetting that the URP was designed to provide unemployment relief to the small man that Sen. Obika spoke about earlier. It turned into a contract mill. Everywhere you turn there was a sign, the URP building something, contracts awarded left, right and centre to the tune of tens of millions of dollars. And we do not know what sort of process, what common process was followed to award these contracts.

Madam President, almost every agency, while the UNC was in government, got involved in some sort of contract award across Trinidad and Tobago. And so when we speak about the NGC, Trinidad and Tobago needs to remember what happened to the NGC under the UNC. It was a case of himself to himself, where there was an arrangement, an unholy alliance, between executives at WASA and executives at NGC, and that is why the result of that is the Beetham Wastewater Treatment Plant, \$1billion of taxpayers' money and we can do absolutely nothing with it.

Hon. Senator: Just Beetham waste.

Sen. F. Cummings: I “doh know if because” the dump is in Beetham, they felt that they could dump anything there and find a way to syphon money out of the Treasury. That is UNC government. That is government UNC style. And we will not forget it.

I remember in the first six months moving to the first two years of the UNC in government, over 10,000 workers in the government service—contract workers, workers downstream—lost their jobs. There was noise and clamour across the country. They would not renew contracts for persons who were qualified and trained, just because they got their job under a PNM government. And there was so much pain and anguish in the society, and then came section 34. Do you think that we will forget about that? Do you think that Trinidad and Tobago will forget about section 34, where it was clear that there was an orchestrated effort to create a situation where financiers of the UNC would escape their day in court? We will not forget you.

And just when you felt it was over, came the LifeSport Programme. We will not forget LifeSport. We will not forget the Curepe Interchange contract bid. We

will not forget the Point Fortin Highway and the amount of corruption that is unfolding even today in the land acquisition for that highway that the Minister spoke about today, and then in true UNC style, the abandonment of projects throughout the country in areas that were represented in the Parliament by a PNM MP.

Look at it. Madam President, you drive down the highway. Somebody spoke about driving down the highway. Well, I am from central and I drive down the highway quite often, and every time you drive to San Fernando—I do not know what they have with Brian Lara—you look at a facility almost, nearing completion; you come into government; you leave it there to rot, and the PNM comes in—it took the PNM to come back after five years to complete it, and then “yuh” hiding with sun glasses to go and look at the CPL because “yuh” criticize it so much; [*Desk thumping*] looking down there and noticing one or two of them, Madam President, ducking and hiding every time the camera passing, because they “doh” want to end up on the papers looking at the CPL at Brian Lara. It is a nice facility. Feel proud. I saw somebody looking like Sen. Ameen, but probably it was not her, but there was somebody there—

Sen. Ameen: “Doh call my name in yuh bacchanal, please.”

Sen. F. Cummings: There was somebody there closely resembling her.

Madam President: Sen. Ameen. [*Interruption*] Stop it, please, Members. Sen. Ameen, this is the third time—

Sen. Ameen: I would like to leave the Chamber.

Madam President: And I would like you to as well, and you can return at 7.00 p.m. for the earliest. Continue, Sen. Cummings.

Sen. F. Cummings: Thank you so much, Madam President. The CPL was a very

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nice event and attended by citizens of Trinidad and Tobago in a world class facility named after a son of the soil, world renowned. Whenever I travel—

Hon. Senator: A legend.

Sen. F. Cummings: A legend in his own right. When you travel to various parts of the world and you say you are from Trinidad and Tobago, they say, “Brian Lara”? We are proud to be from the country [*Desk thumping*] that produced Brian Lara.

I want to take this opportunity, Madam President, to congratulate and to thank all those citizens of Trinidad and Tobago who are patriotic and who understand what the red, white and black means to those of us born in this land of Trinidad and Tobago. And allow me to congratulate the Minister in the Ministry of Finance for her maiden contribution. I think she did an excellent job; [*Desk thumping*] to thank the Minister of Finance and the workers at the Ministry of Finance who continue to take their job very seriously, [*Desk thumping*] understanding that we are required to navigate Trinidad and Tobago through a period of reduced revenues, and that we have challenges.

And when I listened to the UNC, they speak about all sorts of problems and you cannot get from them one suggestion, not one single suggestion, as to how we can work together to get this country to where we want it go. As we seek to work to maintain the standard of living that our citizens have become accustomed to, it is all hands on deck. It is not only about scoring cheap political points, but for every issue that arises in this country, the UNC, anxious to get back their hands on the Treasury, seeks to score political points at every turn, and I wait to see the day when they will display some level of patriotism.

Even programmes that they introduced, would you believe—citizens are

observing. Even Bills in Parliament introduced word for word by the former UNC government, comes to Parliament today, and they are the most strenuous objectors to those Bills. [*Desk thumping*] Would you believe that? But I am not surprised, because that is UNC style. I am not surprised at all.

As a nation, we thank God that we have at the helm of our country right now, a person who has experience in government, who served us well as Leader of the Opposition when the UNC was in government and who today is the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, a strong leader, [*Desk thumping*] a statesman, a man who is not afraid to take tough decisions when tough decisions are required. But, you see, the UNC likes to take popular decisions, and in taking popular decisions they put the country at risk, they put the future of our children at risk, and when it is required to show statesmanship and leadership, they run and they hide.

Everybody knows the problems that we have in Trinidad and Tobago, and when you call on the UNC to sit and discuss how they can support the development thrust in this country, it is always a distraction. They would come with something else to distract you from what is really the matter at hand. I want to say to Trinidad and Tobago, your fears are in capable hands. If there is any party or government who knows how to run Trinidad and Tobago, it is the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, they held on to office for five years and three months. I think if there was any further room to wiggle to get another month or two, they would have done that as well. But the writing was on the wall. They knew that the country had turned on them. They knew that the country was anxious for Election Day. And then after they lose, they want to blame it on the rain and extension of

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time. You know, sour losers. We understand that. What I want to assure the UNC, is that you are totally ineffective at government; you try a little in opposition, but we will give you the space that you are most comfortable in. You will stay in opposition for the rest of your days. [*Desk thumping*] Stay in your corner! You love opposition because you oppose everything. So why would we want to make you uncomfortable to bring you on this side? [*Laughter and desk thumping*] We are quite happy to be in government. So you stay across there. We are proud leaders of this country.

Madam President, you know, some contractors complain that while the UNC was in government that they were required to pay kickbacks to the tune of 15 and 20 per cent; that in order to receive their cheques, they had to visit the office of certain Ministers to collect it.

Hon. Senator: “Nah, man, dah is not true.”

Sen. F. Cummings: Contractors complaining about that.

Hon. Senator: “Dah is not true.”

Sen. F. Cummings: Contractors complaining that in order to collect their payments for services rendered to the State they had to visit certain then Ministers of the UNC Government to collect their payments. And I would not talk about cardboard boxes with hundred-dollar bills and so. I do not have any evidence of that. You know? But I want to know why do people have to visit when the UNC is in government, Ministers' offices, to collect their cheque? Under the PNM, you go to the cashier's cage and you sign for your cheque. Once you complete work for the Government and it is certified and you need to be paid, you get paid around the correct procedure. That is the way that the PNM Government governs. No minister paying any contractor.

I listened to Sen. Haynes, Madam President. I want to commend her as well. I like her style. You know? I like her style. I want to commend her. I think a lot of people listening to her will warm up to that style.

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: Wade Mark better look out.

Sen. F. Cummings: On the wrong bench, but, you know, she made some good points. But I want to say to Sen. Haynes that, you know, the PNM has a vision for Trinidad and Tobago, and I will share with you a copy of the Vision 2030 document.

Sen. Haynes: I have it.

Sen. F. Cummings: I will give you another copy and I will put an optional membership form in it for you. [*Laughter*] But when we speak about education in Trinidad and Tobago—I know Sen. Haynes mentioned that she studied abroad in many different countries, so maybe she did not spend much time here. But when you speak about education in Trinidad and Tobago, it is PNM policy. [*Desk thumping*] From kindergarten, primary school, secondary school, tertiary education, the foundation was laid by PNM over successive governments. [*Desk thumping*] As a matter of fact, many of the speakers on the other side who sound so eloquent and are sometimes convincing even with half-truths, got their education under the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*]

And so, anybody who knows much about PNM history would understand that prior to the PNM coming into office in Trinidad and Tobago, educational opportunities were available only for a few. It is the PNM, under Dr. Eric Williams, the founding father of this nation, that made education available to the masses throughout Trinidad and Tobago. That is the history of our country. We cannot run from that.

And when you speak about industrialization, Sen. Ramdeen praised Point Lisas. He praised the LNG plants. He praised the TGU and he said that these things—

Hon. Senator: The jewels.

Sen. F. Cummings:—were the jewels—that is the word I was looking for—the jewels of Trinidad and Tobago. I want to say to Trinidad and Tobago and to Sen. Ramdeen and all the people on the UNC side, all the industrialization and the development of our industrial sector in Trinidad and Tobago is PNM policy. [*Desk thumping*] So, in fact, I am pleased to hear Sen. Ramdeen commend the PNM and the efforts of the PNM as the jewels of Trinidad and Tobago. PNM policy, Sen. Haynes.

What I consider, as I picked up from a discussion from some young professionals recently, is that, in fact, we lost five years and three months during 2010 and 2015. The PNM had the country on a growth path. There were some ripples. Some people got fooled with what was called the PP, and we just stopped in time and in some areas we have lost more than five years—in some areas.

6.45 p.m.

It is now up to the PNM, and this PNM Government, to bring the country back on track, and we have less resources to do it. Although Sen. Small said that \$52 is still a good oil price, the oil price is significantly less than what was enjoyed under the UNC. And so, we have less resources to do it. We have increased debt to service. We have a lot of incomplete projects that were left abandoned by the UNC. Could you imagine Government by bad mind, Madam President? You came into office and the PNM now has to come five years, six years, seven years after, to complete projects abandoned completely by the UNC. It was not only the

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Brian Lara stadium. The Government Campus Plaza in the capital city abandoned by the UNC, the Ministry of Education towers, the Ministry of Legal Affairs tower, the Carenage Fishing facility, several community centres, police stations, fire stations, houses.

You travel down to Point Fortin, where Sen. Obika is from, and there is a housing development that was started by the PNM that Senator knows about, and when the UNC came into office they abandoned the project. Did not complete it, left the houses half-finished, some to be vandalized an, thank God, the people of Trinidad and Tobago know that when you want to fix Trinidad and Tobago, call on the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*] How can you explain in the face of high rental cost for commercial space, that the Government of the PNM, under the leadership of Patrick Manning, started the construction of these buildings in Port of Spain to accommodate public servants and our Ministries, and you come into Government and the capital city you leave it to ruins and you want to put yourself back in Government to Trinidad and Tobago again? Well, the electorate is waiting on you. No matter what clothes you put on, no matter how you camouflage yourself, no matter what bright minds you attract to come to fool the people of Trinidad and Tobago, the UNC will not be returned to Government.

Madam President, under the PNM, the UDeCOTT has successfully started a programme to complete all the projects where taxpayers' moneys stood in air for five years and three months, and the UDeCOTT has been at work. The Besson Street Police Station has been completed, the St. Joseph Police Station has been completed, several Community centres at Mount Hope, at Ackbar Trace and in Blanchisseuse have all been completed, and the PNM does not discriminate. The PNM is the Government for all of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] So we

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do not complete a community centre in Mount Hope and because Ackbar Trace is in Penal we leave it undone. That community centre was also completed. That is PNM Government at work.

The Carenage Fishing Facility I mentioned earlier, another project abandoned by the UNC. Work has started and is now scheduled for completion by December of 2017. I am sure the people of Carenage are very happy to have that facility. Work is ongoing on the Point Fortin and the Arima hospitals. For 2018, the completion of the Diego Martin sporting complex is scheduled, the start of the construction of the Moruga sporting complex, completion of the Roxborough Fire Station, Old Grange Police Station—somebody said they worked Tobago—Roxborough Police Station, Penal Fire Station. Trinidad and Tobago, I do not know what—every time the UNC gets up to talk—*[Interruption]*

Madam President: Sen. Cummings, you have five more minutes.

Sen. Cummings: Oh my, Madam President, I am just warming up. *[Laughter]* Every time the UNC starts to talk, they bad talk Tobago. I want to tell the UNC, although you cannot contest any elections in Tobago, you have not fought a seat there in the whole of your existence, it is the unitary state of Trinidad and Tobago *[Desk thumping]* and the citizens of Tobago are citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and deserve every cent allocated to them in the budget. You may not like it, but there is not very much you can do about it. Learn to get accustomed. This is the unitary State.

In 2018, projects started, scheduled to commence: San Fernando Fire Station, Point Fortin Fire Station, Woodbrook Fire Station, restoration of President's House, restoration of the White Hall, restoration of the Red House, completion of Diego Martin regional complex—that is the PNM at work—and in

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terms of housing, the PNM has been at work. I heard one speaker saying before about the PNM not delivering.

Hon. Senator: I said that.

Sen. Cummings: I mean, the newspapers are available at small cost. Everybody knows. I will send some free newspapers for the UNC. I do not know where their headquarters is, but I will send some when I find out. Malabar Site 3, Arima, 90 units under construction, close to completion; Phase 3 Cashew Gardens, 484 units; View Fort, St. James, 137; Real Spring, Valsayn, 408; Bon Air North, Arouca, 398; Lake View, Point Fortin where we had to come back to complete it, 135; a total of 1,652 units. [*Desk thumping*] For 2018, there is more planned. In Corinth, San Fernando, 120 units; Site B, 88 units; Malabar Site 1, 52 units; Carlton Lane, San Fernando, 96; Lady Hailes Avenue, 80; North Grove, 300; Moruga, 83; Roystonia, 1,000; Cunupia, 1000; a total of 2,800 planned for 2018. That is PNM housing policy at work. [*Desk thumping*]

So if you do not understand how to govern, sit, get your pencil, get your notebook and take notes, but you will have to really band your belly for a while because we are here to take Trinidad and Tobago to developed status by 2030, and you have a very long wait to ever get back on this side.

I thank you, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Avinash Singh: Thank you very much, Madam President, for the opportunity to contribute in this, my fourth budget contribution. Let me start by responding to the last contributor, and only to say that is PNM policy, that is PNM style in true PNM quality in the last speaker.

Let me also take this opportunity to congratulate and recognize the work done by our hon. Minister of Finance, and Minister in the Ministry of Finance,

hon. Colm Imbert and Sen. Allyson West, and let me also congratulate and indicate our heartfelt support to the Minister of Planning and Development, hon. Camille Robinson-Regis, and their staff for putting together a well presented presentation in the form of this fiscal package, the Bill, an Act to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending on the 30th day of September, 2018.

I am going to be focusing my attention on Head 77 where I am employed, that is the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, to continue where my colleague, Sen. the Hon. Clarence Rambharat, Minister, would have left off on the last occasion. But before I do that, Madam President, I want to also join the Government in congratulating and welcoming the new Senators to this august Chamber because I know how it felt. On that day, December 10th, 2013, was my first day here and I am sure my senatorial colleagues, Sen. Haynes, Sen. Hosein, Sen. Obika, feel that level of joy and to be proud to represent at this level in the participation of making law and representing your political party. So congratulation, Senators, and we look forward to your contributions here in this Chamber.

Madam President, let me also indicate that it is with the astute leadership of our Prime Minister—who recently celebrated his birthday—Dr. Keith Rowley, that we are proud to be a Government for all, serving all and, by extension, bringing back some level of prosperity to all the citizens of this country under the circumstances that we are faced with and we are challenged by this economic situation where we have lost a lot of our revenue to do the things that we would have liked to do.

Let me indicate and respond to my senatorial colleague, Sen. Ramkissoon—

sorry she is not here, but I know she may be paying attention—who spoke to young people not getting involved in agriculture. This touches my position, my heart very, very close because, unlike Senators, I will declare my position because prior to me coming here I was a farmer. My parents remain farmers and my entire family comes from generations of farmers. So, if I speak in the interest of the farmers of this country is because I have just declared my interest in agriculture.

Madam President, Sen. Ramkissoon should note that even if I were to ask that question in this august Chamber to all the Members present: how many of you all in this Chamber would direct your children, or guide your children or loved ones to become farmers in this country or, as a matter of fact, to get into the agricultural sector? I see Sen. Haynes raising the hand, Sen. Shrikissoon. In fact, the *Hansard* would record that and I would look forward to those interventions because many places, many public forums, I asked the question to those in attendance and, Madam President, it is no secret that not many people, especially the young people, want to get into this business called agriculture.

Fortunately for me—and I want to tap into what Sen. Cummings would have said, had it not been for PNM policy and GATE, I probably would not have been standing here holding a double major from the University of the West Indies because my parents could not afford it [*Desk thumping*—my parents, Madam President, simply could not afford to send me to university—and upon attaining my degree, I chose agriculture as a profession. Not many people out there would beat their chest with pride and say, “Well, I am a farmer by profession”, and I chose that as a profession because I understand clearly the importance that that profession has in the economic situation. I have seen First World countries respect their farmers and respect those in the agricultural sector, and it is sad that in a

country like ours, that this respect is not passed down to our farmers, fisherfolks, hunters and state land users. Under the last administration, Madam President, I could tell you, it was the worst season for farmers.

Under this situation, these economic times, it is not the best, but I could guarantee you they are getting the leadership from the hon. Minister and the team at the Ministry to weather the storm and continue production in the way and manner that they would like to, and I will go into some of the details as to what we have done with the allocation. I want to also indicate and stress that my Minister always makes the statement, it is not how much you get, but it is how well you put it to use [*Desk thumping*] and that is what this Government has been doing since 2015, taking the little that we have, stretching it and making the most of it under the leadership of our Prime Minister.

Madam President, hon. Sen. Ramkisson also touched on the issues that affect young people upon coming from schools, tertiary education facilities and so on, finding challenges in getting employment, and I want to also support her in that regard and indicate that Minister Rambharat would have indicated that in this Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, there is 20 per cent vacancy existing. Although 17 per cent of the wages and salaries of the entire budget for recurrent goes into wages and salaries, we still have 20 per cent vacancy. I could tell you it has been extremely challenging for any graduate from UWI, or ECIAF, to come into the Ministry, and I want to encourage and I want to plead to these institutions, to look at how they are offering their degrees.

Consult with the Public Service Commission and try to fix that problem in the system because it is a problem that not only affects this Government, it will affect all Governments to come, and it has certainly affected those in the past

because—and I always say agriculture should not, or certainly has no political agenda because agriculture needs to be continuous. The policies that a Ministry has in moving forward, there must be continuity and I always use the example of an avocado tree. I mean, when you plant an avocado tree, Madam President, you will know it takes three or four years to bear. So, if the policy of one Government is we are going to promote avocados, and you plant this tree, and you take care of it and it grows, and time to bear governments change and the next government's policy is coconut, then you end up in problem.

Madam President, let me put some global context to the agricultural sector of any nation. The global agricultural sector is changing dramatically because of the global forces such as population growth, high incomes, global warming, and the decline in the amount of land and water available for agriculture. The cumulative effect of these international forces are that food supplies are becoming more uncertain, prices have increased dramatically, and food security for many countries is under severe threat. The prevailing international context for agriculture also affects Trinidad and Tobago and it sometimes manifests itself through the market distortions arising from subsidized competition from developed countries and from market access barriers, including stringent sanitary and phytosanitary requirements to this country's agricultural exports. Additionally, given the current global trends of food price increase and the need to address emergent challenges of climate change, adaptation and water scarcity, there is an urgent need for increased investment in the agricultural sector to ensure its positive performance in the local economy.

Madam President, I would now turn to accounting to the taxpayers of this country of what the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, what we have

been doing over the last year, and what we intend to do with respect to this new budgetary allocation. I am happy that Minister Rambharat would have cleared up the misconception and the miscommunication being put out there that the Ministry would have only received a mere \$500 million. As we know, with all the IDF, the PSIP, and all from the different agencies, we are up to approximately \$1.1 billion, and I will now turn to some of the sectors and what we have done so far. So let me turn to the Ministry itself and why we need a Ministry. What is the use of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries in this modern time?

We see our role as enabling the environment to enable farmers, hunters, fishermen, state land users, and the general public to interact with the Ministry, to grow their ideas, their plans and programmes. It is the responsibility of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries to also offer goods and services to all of these I have just identified. And, Madam President, in the context of the legislation that goes with this Ministry, I am happy to report that the Ministry recognizes the need to provide that enabling environment to stimulate further growth in the agricultural sector and, in this regard, the Ministry, through its legal unit, is presently engaged in the revision of a package of legislation which will provide appropriate support for the sector and some of these include the Land Adjudication Act, 1994, the Plant Protection Act, 1975, the Fisheries Management Bill, the trawling Act; just to name a few.

Madam President, the following would also be under consideration for legislative review—and I have mentioned the Fisheries Management Bill: Caribbean Fisheries Training and Development Institute Act. And while I am on this point, trawling is an issue in this country that Minister Rambharat would have made public and mentioned already that he intends to deal with, because for too

long we have only been talking about regulating and dealing with this sector of trawling and, like Sen. Cummings, I am from Felicity and I could tell you there is no more UNC territory in central than where I hail from. In fact, the Chaguanas West by-election, Madam President, as you will know, one of my opponents now sits across me, Sen. Ameen, and I could tell you fishing is the way of life, it is the economic activity, and although, as we all know, agriculture contributes to just about .5 per cent of national GDP, these communities rely almost 60/70 per cent on agricultural activity, whether it be vegetable production, livestock, or even fishing. And the Gulf of Paria, trawlers are really going out of turf and it is a problem that we have to deal with, and I assure the national public that Minister Rambharat, and myself, and the Ministry, will be dealing with that programme and putting the regulations and enforcement in place in the coming months to make sure that that problem does not continue.

Madam President, I want to turn now to the rice sector, and in recent times—and I will get to the flooding because I see Sen. Ramdeen is looking at me. I mean, I will get to the flooding issues. It goes hand in hand with the rice production because, Madam President, as you know, rice requires water to grow and, strange enough, in this country over the years the rice farmers have always been clamouring with problems and challenges—in the crop time they have no water, in the rainy season they have too much water. So the Ministry is going to be investing in flood mitigation and water management systems, but I will get to that shortly.

Coming back to the rice sector, I am sure nobody knows in this country that the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, we pay the National Flour Mills a management fee of \$400,000 monthly to facilitate the purchase of rice from

farmers in this country, and these farmers, I am saying, are not like a sweet potato farmer like me back in the times, you know, when I had to go to the market three o'clock in the morning and beg somebody to buy my sweet potato.

Under the laws of this country, the rice farmers are guaranteed this market and guaranteed a price which the taxpayers of this country fit, and I want to put it in perspective because there is a lot of talk and a lot of action in the public domain that rice farmers are not getting money and all of that and some of it may be true, because of the timely releases and the untimely releases in the Ministry's allocation and so on. But I want to indicate that rice production in this country increased by 29.4 per cent from the last fiscal 2016/2017, from just around 1.2 million kilograms—that is 2015 to 2017—to 1.6 million kilograms in 2016/2017, and I say that to say the farmers of this country, we have the potential. The farmers certainly have the potential, and with that drive they will certainly increase their production and so on.

Madam President, I mention the fixed rate and the pricing of rice and so on, and the Ministry is not stopping there alone. The Ministry, in collaboration with the Ministry of Trade and Industry, we are charting that course, and the divestment of the rice mill in Carlsen Field that is ongoing. Conversations are continuing at the Cabinet level and that is something we need in this country at this point in time because almost every citizen has that appetite for parboiled rice, and I think we should really assist and contribute to our farmers adding value to their own local production and heading in that direction. So that is on the tables. We are very much aware of the problems faced in the rice sector and we are certainly working with these farmers to continue their production. And, as I indicated, the fixed guaranteed price to rice farmers is around TT \$3.00 per kilogram for the grade one

and, as I said, it is a guaranteed market for these farmers.

Madam President, let me turn to cocoa, and every time I speak to cocoa it hurts me to know that in 2013 I sat across on the Opposition Bench and I saw the same Minister, or former Minister, as some may call him the “protest Minister” now, my good friend, Mr. Devant Maharaj, came to this House and in two lines destroyed the entire cocoa sector, destroyed the cocoa and coffee sector; in two lines shut down the entire arrangement in place where the State facilitated cocoa and coffee in this country with no plan in place. I want to stand in solidarity and congratulate the cocoa farmers and, by extension, all those who have contributed in getting the world recognition for Trinidad cocoa, notwithstanding those evil deeds by the last administration to shut down the Cocoa and Coffee Industry Board. I want to also commend the cocoa development company under this Government who certainly has turned around the whole cocoa sector and producing many success stories, and I will even go as far as saying many more success stories to come in the coming months and years.

Madam President, let me turn to the root crop sector and to indicate that production over the last year would have fallen due to some problems we have identified—I certainly identified in my last budget contribution—and that is to say, if anybody wants to know how serious it is, the sweet potato weevil or the *cylas formicarius* weevil, just Google it up and you will see that it is the world’s most destructive pest when it comes to sweet potato and we have it here in Trinidad and Tobago. It has affected the root crop production in central and south Trinidad, and I want to indicate that the Ministry has been working hand in hand, holding the hands of these root crop farmers in assisting and getting them back on their feet in terms of production. So we expect the productions to come back up.

Madam President, there is a project that the Ministry is also working on which is executed by the Food and Agriculture Organization, and that is the Cassava Industry-Market Assessment and Technology Validation and Dissemination, and basically the proposed project will assist selected countries in this region to conduct applied research in cassava production using improved varieties. And every time I speak, Madam President, you will hear me talk about varieties and the genetic material that we have in this country is depleted and we must do better. I am telling you, Madam President, that this Government knows first-hand and we are certainly dealing with that issue where genetic material, and improving the genetic stock of this country in getting high yielding varieties and so on. The project would also demonstrate improved crop management practices that increase cassava yield as mentioned; it is also to disseminate new cassava production technologies using farmer participation, extension and methodologies; it is to strengthen the capacity to conduct farmer participation research; access to market potential for cassava and its by-products.

Madam President, I want to stick a little pin here and indicate that we are seeing so many success stories in recent times where the value added is concerned, and that is where I was leading to because Minister Rambharat would have spoken to the grant and how he intends to put that grant to use.

7.15 p.m.

And in also getting the young people involved in agriculture, young people, “leh we face reality”, you know, we distance ourselves from the hard work/hot sun mentality. But when you talk about the value added, when you talk about agro-processing, the entrepreneurs that goes with that, you get a lot of hands raising for persons who want to participate, and I want to congratulate the Minister of

Agriculture, Land and Fisheries for seeing that and putting in place this additional grant in this Ministry. I want to also congratulate the Minister of Trade and Industry who has similar arrangements in place for getting young people or as a matter of fact anybody who wants to demonstrate that level of responsibility in assisting this country, at this point in time, in getting a product out there.

And I could tell you, one comes to my mind and I have seen—I would not venture into calling any names and so on, but I saw one gentleman recently who has tapped into the grants offered by the Ministry of Trade and Industry. He would have used that grant to go to CARIRI and get product development and testing, and Madam President, I saw on Facebook, just a few posts ago, he is packaging his first international shipment of locally-produced pasta made from 100 per cent cassava, [*Desk thumping*] locally-produced pasta made from 100 per cent sweet potato, and locally-produced mashed potato and cassava in a mashed provision mix. And, Madam President, these are the persons that these grants are targeted towards to helping them to create more market opportunities, because I am told that opportunity has magnificent potential in bringing in foreign exchange to this country. I want to put on record, these are the types of initiatives that when these young people and when these people on the whole come to us, we want to support.

Madam President, I want to turn to the coconut industry. The coconut industry, over the last five years, was left to rot. When you drive through Cedros, when you drive through Mayaro, Manzanilla, nothing happened in the coconut sector and the coconut industry over the last administration. I want to place on record that the Minister, since attaining office and coming in the Ministry, and I joined him in—“ah want to use ah local word—nagging” the Ministry’s leadership to get the coconut industry back on track. And by saying that, Madam President, I

“doh expect ah 100-year-old coconut plant to produce ah bunch ah nuts as ah five-year-old coconut plant”. So the issues are: rehabilitation of coconut estates and in some cases of establishing coconut estates. The Ministry has granted funding also for persons venturing into the coconut establishment and rehabilitation, but not only that.

Minister Rambharat, I think might be the only Minister in quite a number of years to get the Ministry to try and bring in coconut plant material from international sources, of course, managed and monitored by our Plant Quarantine Division to ensure that it comes in safe and we are looking at tissue culture. [*Desk thumping*] We are using the technologies available. All right, Madam President. We are using what is available in the international market and we are bringing that, new varieties, we are bringing new planting material in the shortest order, and all the regulations, all the groundwork has already been done and that is something, I am sure, a lot of farmers would be happy to note and looking forward to.

Madam President, when I speak to coconut, we are also speaking about pests and diseases, because being in the agricultural sector, I can tell you it is extremely challenging to grow any kind of food in the soils, the conditions and in the environment that we are in and we are certainly looking towards helping the farmers get on their feet and continue production where pests and diseases are concerned.

Madam President, we look to fruits and, you know, I was very happy, on some occasions, to go upstairs teatime, lunchtime and find cocorite as a fruit upstairs or maybe a nut, whichever category it may fall, and things like “padou”, things likes sapodilla, soursop, guava. Fruits on the whole, I am told that it is so easy to go and get the imported fruit now on the shelves and you cannot get—I

know Leader of the Government Bench here, he loves “pomsitay”. It is so difficult to go and get these types of fruits on the market.

And, Madam President, we are certainly taking all steps necessary to bring in good genetic material to Trinidad and Tobago because we are working directly with the Office of the Prime Minister through the advisor to the Prime Minister on agriculture, who works both in Trinidad and Tobago, bridging the gap. So as I said, and Sen. Cummings would say, “yuh know”, the other side may not like Tobago, but I can tell you, when we develop these technologies, when we bring forward genetic material, it is not just for Trinidad, it is for Trinidad and Tobago. So I want to indicate that the pineapple production in this country has increased by 57.7 per cent. [*Desk thumping*]

While that is so, Madam President, I want to also indicate that in the coming months and the conversations at the leadership with the Ministry of Agriculture is certainly there. Because when you look at our pineapple production, when you look at that production, the market opportunity in Trinidad, it is two for 25 at the side of the highway or come to the farmers’ market and you would get it for \$10 and \$15 for one, right, five and six pounds. So I am taking the opportunity to advertise our NAMDEVCO farmers’ market in the process. But that is the level in which our farmers are limited in selling their pineapple. Of course, pineapple has a shelf life of, probably, about a week. And I am saying we need to take stock. When you look at what Dole has done to pineapple, we, in Trinidad and Tobago, have the potential, we have that potential, we have the capacity to start putting our fruits in value added and that is where the grants will be focused again, that is where we want our farmers to go. Get value for money and certainly expand their operations in all the fruits. Pawpaw, again, production increased by 43 per cent

from last year to this year. Madam President, so while some may say that the agricultural sector, it is not doing well, the statistics and the facts as provided by the NAMDEVCO markets and certainly, we are very happy to note that the farmers are definitely doing what they have to do and we know we would have to give that additional support.

Citrus, Madam President, just around May 2017, we got the news that in Trinidad and Tobago, we have this disease now has put the entire citrus productive capacity of Trinidad and Tobago in jeopardy and that is the Huanglongbing disease or the citrus greening disease. Unfortunately, the Ministry has had to take action against our own citrus planting material and we will certainly be continuing our work in terms of sensitizing the public, managing the disease and trying to offer safe propagation or planting material in the coming months because we know a lot of farmers would have been hard hit in this exercise. In fact, I will go as far as saying, Madam President, this disease wiped out the entire citrus production in places like Florida, so we are not shielded from that problem. And, Madam President, a lot of these citrus estate holders, they have also articulated that seeing that the citrus production is now under seige, they would be venturing into offering alternative fruits and that is where some of the other types of plant material, we will be bringing in to supply them to send and boost the production of fruits in this country.

Let me turn to the vegetable sector, Madam President. The vegetable production of this country shown some mixed performance over the period October 2015 to March 2016 when compared to the corresponding period in 2016/2017, and there were production increases for cucumber, we had increases by 36 per cent; melongene increased by 27 per cent; bodi increased by 11 per cent;

“pak choy” increased by 10 per cent; cauliflower production increased by 27.5 per cent; hot pepper production increased by 25 per cent; dasheen bush production increased by 12 per cent; green corn production in this country increased by 50 per cent. And there were also some decreases, Madam President, which I will also look to identify: the production of tomato, cabbage, ochro, lettuce, just around 13 to 40 per cent in some of these areas and these were mainly due to incidents of pests and diseases, as I indicated earlier, and that is namely the diamondback moth, bacteria leaf spots and the reduced output in sweet pepper, tomatoes, christophene was due to mainly the unfavourable weather conditions.

Madam President, I want to turn to the fisheries sector now and I want to indicate that the Ministry of Agriculture, Lands and Fisheries would have continued its mandate to develop the sector and to meet both international and national standards in accordance with the practice of responsible fishing and I would just name these few facilities that we would have upgraded in the last fiscal. The Las Cuevas fishing facility was upgraded, Blanchisseuse fishing facility, Cocorite fishing facility, Ortoire fishing facility, Balandra, Salybia, Otaheite, Cumana, Matelot and Carenage fishing facilities, all of which were done within budget or in fact, they came in under budget and all of them were successfully resourced. Also to indicate NAMDEVCO would have initiated some renovation activity at the Orange Valley fishing facility.

And while I am saying this, I want to put the country on notice. In fact, the taxpayers of this country are called, year after year, to foot millions of dollars in repairs for fishing facilities and facilities owned by the state. I want to tell the fishermen to please take personal responsibility because you are the users of these facilities. That is your bread and butter. Stamp out the illegal activities from your

facilities. Report the illicit trade of all these imported and all these banned substances in your facilities.

I want to indicate, Madam President, because I have heard some cries from the fishing population, the fishermen asking to meet with the Minister and the Ministry, and I want to let the population know something here. When you look at the fishing structure and the incentives and subsidies offered by this Ministry, I want Members to understand something. Madam President, fishermen in this country are allowed VAT exemptions on boats, engines, marine parts and accessories, they are offered an aqua-culture subsidy, a vessel subsidy, a vehicle subsidy. I have the values here—[*Interruption*]

Madam President: Sen. Singh, you have five more minutes.

Sen. A. Singh: Thank you, Madam President. I want to also indicate, Madam President, most of the fishermen in this country—and I could tell you because I have relatives that are fishermen—use regular gasoline and I could tell you regular gasoline, the price has not been increased for the last five to 10 years, if you want to check. It has remained at \$2.60 per litre. Madam President, the trawlers use diesel and as I indicated, we will be looking to regularize and regulate that industry.

But not only that. Madam President, in the structure of the Ministry, we have a rebate system. Fishermen are allowed to claim back 10 cents per litre for diesel and 12 cents per litre in gas. So to say that the Ministry is not doing anything about the fishermen in this country, it is wrong. And I want to urge all fishermen to find out from their fishing officers, the guidelines, the procedures and the relevant documentation and claim their rebates. Because many times, you would hear a person say “Well I eh gonna claim becau’ it taking too long” and “all

ah that”, “yuh hata write and”—Madam President, the facility is there. The Government has made the facility available, I ask fishermen to please use it.

Madam President, we also—when I say “we”, the taxpayers of this country, in assisting fishermen. I could tell you earlier this year, the Government would have intervened and rendered over \$800,000 in relief to fishermen because this is a class. We understand the investment in fishing and certainly, we are saddened and we know the losses incurred, especially when natural disasters happen, the Ministry has been called upon, the taxpayers, again, over \$800,000 earlier this year, for damage to fishing gear, nets and boats and so on. Also, note in that, I want to urge fishermen to please pay attention to the warnings of the Met Office, look at your weather bulletins, because sometimes you can avoid being hard hit, you can avoid being, you know, the ones on the end of the boat, to lose your boat, to lose your engine, if you only take heed.

Madam President, let me quickly turn to the infrastructural development of the Ministry and in that, I am seeing the access road programme. Rehabilitation to access roads is continuously in progress at the Ministry and we would have done a total of 16 kilometres of access road at the cost of \$6.3 million and additionally seven kilometres of road was undertaken by the Forestry Division of \$2 million.

Madam President, when you look to the Water Management and Flood Control, infrastructural work under the water management and flood control project during the period 2016 to 2017 costing \$2.2 million. We would have undertaken some construction of sluice gates, culverts, flashboard control at the Orange Grove production area; construction of working platforms, safety rails drive-in access to three existing sluice gates at the Orange Grove Estate as well; rehabilitation of access roads to the pump house at the Plum Mitan rice project,

that was done; rehabilitation to the access road in Caroni and the access road to Guayamare, that was also undertaken.

Sen. Obika would have mentioned the issues about funding and all of that. Madam President, we have in place in this country something called the Agricultural Development Bank. The achievements of the Agricultural Development Bank is highlighted, in this year, in fiscal 2016, for the period 2016 to 2017, loan approvals to amount of \$105 million was made available to farmers. [*Desk thumping*] So to say that we do not have anything in place is untrue and I want to urge farmers to go to their respective banks and seek those funding. Also, \$50 million was added to the ADB via transfers.

Madam President, we will be rolling out a lot of issues, a lot of problems, in terms of dealing with the challenge in flooding and all of that that is taking place. But I want to say, Madam President, whatever happens, the persons, the people, the farmers are resilient and we will stand readily available to support them in their time of need, and I want to congratulate the Minister of Finance in putting together this package that I as a farmer, prior to me coming here, my family, my friends, everybody, we are not complaining, we are not throwing up our hands in the air, we are satisfied with this budget.

Madam President, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): Madam President, I now beg to move that this Senate do now adjourn to Thursday 26 October, 2017, that is tomorrow, at 1.30 p.m.

Question put and agreed to.
Senate adjourned accordingly
Adjourned at 7.33 p.m.