

SENATE*Monday, October 22, 2018*

The Senate met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAYERS[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]**JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE****(ESTABLISHMENT OF)**

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, having regard to the correspondence from the Speaker of the House in relation to the establishment of a Joint Select Committee to consider and report on the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control Bill, 2016 and that this Committee adopt the work of the Joint Select Committee appointed in the Third Session, Eleventh Parliament, and to report by December 31, 2018, I beg to move that the Senate concur with the House of Representatives in the establishment of the Committee and that the following six Senators be appointed to serve:

Ms. Allyson West

Mr. Robert Le Hunte

Mr. Foster Cummings

Mr. Wade Mark

Ms. Melissa Ramkissoon; and

Mr. Paul Richards.

*Question put and agreed to.***APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2019) BILL, 2018**

[Second Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [October 19, 2018]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

Question again proposed.

Sen. Khadijah Ameen: [*Desk thumping*] Madam President, it is really with a heavy heart and against my conscience, as a person and as a Member of this Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, that I rise to be a part—that I am a part of the convening of this Senate. In my humble view, given the disaster that we are facing in Trinidad and Tobago at this time, the Government, the Prime Minister should, today, have activated a national disaster response and declared today as a day for all citizens to join in cleaning up and rescuing Trinidad and Tobago, and citizens affected by it. [*Desk thumping*]

Over the past three days our country and our people have experienced a level of disaster that most have never ever experienced before, and it is truly heart-breaking and heart-wrenching when you see what has happened in some parts of our country. I was on the field; I was in boats; I was in trucks; I was in my boots. I met the Prime Minister and a couple Government Ministers and they were on the dry land, on the road. They were not in the floodwaters. And I feel that if they had done that, they would have better been able to know the extent of flooding facing Trinidad and Tobago, and they would have declared this disaster a national disaster and respond. [*Desk thumping*]

The flooding that has occurred was predicted more than a week ago. In fact, Madam President, the ODPM has indicated that the warning is in place until tomorrow, Tuesday, and we are sitting here, dry, in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago instead of being out there with the people, the citizens of this country— [*Desk thumping*] This Government, I know, will offer excuses. They will manufacture public relations, but at the end of the day the responsibility to have

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prepared our country and all the agencies to deal with what took place over the last three days, falls at the feet of the Government, and this Government has failed Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, this is not an earthquake that could not have been predicted. This is a situation that we had days of warning, and they took no steps to do anything. I do not know if they thought they could just ride it out and figure that it is a little rain that will fall, and only the people who “living in the lagoon would get flood”, as one of their Government Ministers said some time ago, but thousands—in fact, this morning the *Newsday* said over 100,000 persons are suffering and they are suffering because of the failure of this Government. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, this Government has, through its Ministers, made statements to try to convince the population that the catastrophic devastation that we have experienced over the last few days could not have been predicted. They will tell you that the rains were unexpected. But we know that is simply not the truth. This was predicted and they knew what we were about to face. If things had been different, the level of loss and devastation could have been prevented, for all we know, and what we do know now is that despite the warnings from the experts that the rains were coming, this Government did nothing to protect the citizens of the country. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, it is not only about the past week when the weather warnings came because, despite calls from regional corporations and local government councillors for drains and waterways to be cleared and cleaned over the past three years, for rivers to be dredged and to be cleared of debris, they did nothing. No one can predict the force of Mother Nature. But you see the rainfall we

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had over the last few days? There really was no cause for us to have the level of destruction that we experienced. What the last three days has shown is that this country, under this Government, led by this Prime Minister, will be completely destroyed, God forbid, if we experience this, or any kind of natural disaster. [*Desk thumping*]

The Government will not want to admit it, but what we have experienced over the last three days is the result of three years of neglect, three years of incompetence, three years of abandonment, three years of sleeping on the job by this Government. [*Desk thumping*] What we have seen is the result of three years of failure. And, unfortunately, they say you have to burn to learn, and over the past three days the people who have been flooded out have been flooded out to learn that it is not the Government who is burning; it is Trinidad and Tobago that is burning. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, unlike many of the Members opposite, I have been on the ground. I have been assisting in rescuing people, children, elderly, disabled persons, over the last three days. I have been on the trucks delivering relief supplies, in homes assisting with shovelling inches of slush, where people have to throw out every single belonging in their home. Many would have been in the comfort of their home, but they did not even see it fit to go in and join citizens to see the devastation first-hand.

Madam President, one little capsule I want to share with this Parliament. I went to Greenvale and I met the Prime Minister on the dry road in La Horquetta, looking on at the floods. I was out there earlier. When I met him it was when I came back from being out there with the coastguard in the floodwaters. I went with a family, knee-deep in water in their homes. Big people, “big man” crying long

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tears because they lost everything. And, Madam President, I feel that if you see that devastation first-hand, you will have a different impression than what this Government has been having—people who have lost all they had; people who work all their lives to build.

In Greenvale, in particular, where you have people who have new homes, many of their items are on hire purchase; their mortgages still have to be paid at the end of this month. Is HDC going to forgive their mortgage? Is HDC going to completely repair their homes and replace all the lost items? Pay off Courts for their furniture? Those who have had a comfortable home to rest their head from Friday night, woke up to the reality of not knowing where they would rest their head on Saturday, and the Prime Minister and this Government says it is business as usual, back to school, back to work, no sense of the reality that is facing us.
[Desk thumping]

I do not know if the hon. Prime Minister saw people on their rooftops who spent the night there, begging to be rescued, people with six and seven feet of water in their homes, all their belongings destroyed; children without food and water; families without a roof over their head; people weeping because of their loss. Business places and homes, Madam President, unfortunately that were evacuated, were being looted by bandits. And I want to thank the police officers who responded to those calls in Greenvale to secure people's homes. But when the response from the Government is so callous, we really have to wonder. Have you no compassion for the people of this nation?

Sen. S. Hosein: Uncaring.

Sen. K. Ameen: Are you only going to pretend to care in front of the cameras? I want to tell you that after the Prime Minister left Greenvale and with a couple

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Ministers, I heard that he was going to Oropune and I was very happy because I was there and I saw the devastation. But unfortunately, the Ministers did not go into Oropune in the flood-affected area. They stayed by the gas station in Piarco and spoke to the media, and then he left. They went to Sangre Grande. They went by the triangle by the police station and spoke to the media, and left. They stood on dry land and made decisions for people who were swamped in water—totally uncaring. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to tell you today that you cannot buy compassion. You cannot PR compassion. You cannot buy wanting to care for people. You cannot buy kindness. And that is the difference between you and us. [*Desk thumping*] Over the past three days, Madam President, I have been on the field together with my political leader. We have not had the aid of the security forces at our disposal, and we had to go out there and help those in need. We had a shining example to follow, and that is why over the past three days the United National Congress really proved to this country that when you needed us most we were there for you. [*Desk thumping*] Everything that we have done is with volunteers; it is with donations and private citizens assisting and us putting on our boots and having all hands on deck.

Ironically, the Government, the Prime Minister, could activate a national disaster response that would put the military in charge of certain operations so that the coordination of all the volunteers, all the regional corporations and all the government resources, could be better organized, and they have failed to do that. From Friday night, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar instructed every member of our party to join hands and go out there in the rains and the flood, to put God first and do what you could to help those in need. On Friday night while we were sitting here in Parliament, a plan was developed to go into every community and every

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home that was in danger and rescue those citizens in need. Our supporters were told to open their doors and homes to any and every one in need and truly prove that you are your brother's keeper. [*Desk thumping*] All of our supporters, all of our citizens, were mandated to come out and help and do all they could to bring relief to whoever was in need. And over the past few days, Madam President, above all the flood and above all the rain, we have witnessed the force of the rising sun, rise to the occasion when our country and our people needed us most. [*Desk thumping*]

Today, I want to thank everyone over the past few days who have risked life and limb in the devastating floods to help those in need. And to whoever is the Member on the other side who steups, that is your response to Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] That is how you feel about Trinidad and Tobago; total disrespect. You do not deserve to sit in this Parliament to represent Trinidad and Tobago because you steups at the devastation of the people of this country.

When your Prime Minister and your Government failed you, Trinidad and Tobago, our people, as citizens, came together to rescue you. We will continue to be out on the field in the floods and on the ground to make sure that we do all that is possible to help those who literally cannot help themselves at this time. Madam President, when you see the devastation, when you put yourself in the shoes of the affected, it is depressing—it is depressing. The outpouring of generosity and charity, not from the Government, from the people, has been overwhelming. And I want to encourage every citizen, every church, every NGO, corporate Trinidad and Tobago, to continue to join us to do the work that this Government has failed to do. [*Desk thumping*]

Yesterday I was in Oropune. On Saturday we were in Oropune. There were

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HDC water trucks driving around but they could not do anything. On Sunday, when I expected that the water trucks would help with the clean-up, they were nowhere around. The churches—

Sen. Ramdeen: They went Diego Martin. That is where it was.

Sen. K. Ameen:—came out. Faith Assembly in Five Rivers, the Pentecostal churches, the Seventh-Day Adventists, came out to give their labour, to get their hands and feet dirty, and they were there with shovels, shovelling mounds of slush from people's homes, helping people take out couch and mattresses, with brooms. And you know what?—unfortunately also, Madam President, because the WASA filtration system has been challenged by the dirty waters in the waterways, in many areas WASA had to cut the water supplies. So in Oropune and many other areas, they had no water in their pipes to help wash down.

Hon. Senator: Where is the Minister?

Sen. K. Ameen: We were there, Madam President, providing bleach and sanitation chemicals, mops and brooms, but there was no water. And, thankfully, there were contractors who came with water trucks to help, and HDC did come in the afternoon, after lunch, to start to wash down after quite a bit of the clean-up was done. But that is because the people of those communities banded together to make sure that the affected were cared for. Food, clothing, hampers, water, mattresses, essential supplies, have all been donated. And on behalf of those who do not have the ability that I do now to speak to Trinidad and Tobago through this Parliament, I want to say, Trinidad and Tobago, thank you.

[*Desk thumping*] Thank you to everyone who has given and continue to give. Please do not stop.

Every single UNC MP, Senator, councillor, have been over the past days on

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the ground helping. But what is noticeable is the absence of the Government Ministers and the Government agencies. Where were you? Do you all know and even have the ability to comprehend what has happened to our country over the past few days? And when I ask, where were you, I am not asking because I see you on TV having a press conference, yeah, but we are out there in the devastation and we are not meeting you on the ground. And the—he is the Minister of quite a few things, but one of his—

Madam President: Sen. Ameen, please—

Sen. K. Ameen: Sorry. I am trying to remember the portfolio, but one of it is Communications and public relations—

Hon. Senator: The helicopter Minister.

Sen. K. Ameen:—and he has been complaining of social media posts—

Madam President: Sen. Ameen, please, if you are making reference to a Minister, I ask you to do it in the manner that is in the Standing Orders, please.

Sen. K. Ameen: It is Communications—the Minister of Communications, Madam President, who is responsible for the public relations of the Government, has been complaining about social media and people posting on social media. And I want to thank God for the people of this country and social media that we know the reality of the situation. [*Desk thumping*] Up to this morning, Madam President, there was an imam's son from Point Fortin who contacted Sen. Taharqa Obika who wanted to send a truckload of relief supplies, but because of what is being put out by the Government and Ministers, and so on, they were under the impression that things are under control and they were not sure if to still send their supplies. And I want to say, Trinidad and Tobago, we are not out of danger yet. Please continue to send your relief items. [*Desk thumping*]

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Today, Madam President, in spite of what the hon. Prime Minister has declared, and this Government has declared, it is not business as usual. I want to say that many schools were open; business places were open, but people could not get to their schools and business places. Many children, many students, lost all their books, their uniform and shoes in the devastation. Even if their school was not flooded, they cannot go to school.

Madam President, I want to make an open call to the public today, to the Leader of Government Business, to shut down this debate for the next three days and let every Member of Parliament go out on the field and help the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] I want to urge you, the Members on the other side, to join us. Get on the ground to give a helping hand to the thousands of citizens that we all collectively represent, and to help them because they need our help. You are in Government, you have the resources, and our people need us now more than before.

The rains are predicted to come again and I do not want us to make the same mistake that you made last week. The adverse weather advisory from the ODPM indicates that it remains in effect until tomorrow, Tuesday. There are people in our country who do not have food, as we speak. They have no medication. In fact, some of our doctors, Dr. Rai Ragbir and other volunteers, medical personnel, nurses, have been out there. Pharmaceutical companies have been giving drugs and medical supplies for them to—as they volunteer at different shelters, to assist people in need of medical aid. People who have been injured in the flood, people who have had their feet damaged, people who are diabetic and hypertensive, and because of the trauma that they face, they need immediate medical attention and counselling as well.

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And I want to ask those who are in the medical field to continue to volunteer whatever time you can spare; even people who are in counselling, because I had the experience of taking a child out—she must have been about two or three—in Greenvale. And when you take a child out of that traumatic experience, they cannot speak. And people who have experience in counselling could help up to assist those children, and so on. So I want to urge to you to come to the shelters, come to the various affected areas so that we could help people to cope.

Madam President, I think, really, it is more important for us to be out there helping people and to be there. This Government, if you really do care—you have given yourself a tag of being a caring Government—today I urge you, let Trinidad and Tobago see how much you really care. Today, let us see if all the talk—or if it is all talk or if you are really ready to do something for the people of our country.

Today, Madam President, I make a call to the Government to join us out there with the people of our country. Every Member of the United National Congress will be on the field assisting those in need. [*Desk thumping*] You are invited to join us. The choice is yours. We will be on the ground. Let Trinidad and Tobago see where you are, where you will be, and if you are really ready to prove to this country that after three days of devastation and catastrophic disaster, the hardship and immeasurable suffering inflicted upon us, if it is really business as usual.

Madam President, I want to give way to the Leader of Government Business, if he could, at this time, indicate if he is willing for this Senate to make a decision to go out there and help Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Khan: The answer is that the Senate will continue to sit.

Hon. Senator: Oh my gosh! I cannot believe that.

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Sen. K. Ameen: Madam President, I thank the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, who was also a Minister of Local Government and Rural Development at one time, and I want to say to this House, Madam President, I respectfully cannot sit and continue to be part of this sitting. [*Desk thumping*] I cannot. I cannot, in good conscience, as a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, decide to participate in this exercise. Madam President, as a patriot and a national of Trinidad and Tobago, I will respectfully not be participating further in this debate, and I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Opposition Senators depart Chamber.

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat): [*Desk thumping*] Madam President, thank you very much for allowing me to enter into this debate at this time on a Bill to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending 30th day of September, 2019.

Madam President, I am in town long, not this morning. I just arrived in the city, but I am around a long time now. Yesterday I had the privilege of spending seven hours on a truck with three gentlemen who, I had to say—at the end of the seven hours—to them, that I have not worked with three Trinidadians as professional, as calm and as brilliant as they are. Their names, Madam President, are: Andrew Ramlogan, who drove the high-up truck; Mahindralal Gobin, a dispatcher; and Rasheed Mohammed, a lorry loader.

10.30 a.m.

They were driving a Princes Town Regional Corporation truck and they are employed by the Princes Town. They came to my part of the country, Madam President, Mayaro, to assist because we were under tremendous pressure, not for the first time. We have had since November 2015 five similar experiences, and one

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thing this country knows that when there is an issue in Mayaro I am there with the people of Mayaro, and wherever else in the country I have to be. [*Desk thumping*] And as this Senate—I am a Senator and a legislator, my responsibility to this Senate is as equal to my responsibility to anybody outside this Senate, and when we closed at 8.00 p.m., I had my people in Mayaro organized during the day. The technology allows us to do that, and a good leader has their hands on every angle of the job and the duty. And as I left this Senate on Friday, I changed my clothes, and I was on the streets in Mayaro, and I only left to return to this part of my duty which I treat as equally as all the other aspects.

And I will not stand—you could disrespect me and tell me I was home in the dry, that is no problem, but you see the three men from Princes Town, who left their families yesterday, do not disrespect them—Andrew Ramlogan, Mahindralal Gobin and Rasheed Mohammed—and as a proud southerner, those gentlemen from Princes Town, with resources attached to Princes Town, brought donations from Naparima College in San Fernando, from Naparima Old Boys in San Fernando and from citizens of San Fernando up to Mayo/Mayaro, and we were able to distribute it to everybody who needed it.

Madam Speaker, going into floodwaters with kayaks and pirogues is not for everybody. I have colleagues here that I do not want with me in flood, and I have colleagues here and outside of here who I want with me in flood, and in every team the responsibilities are different. I will go in the water but there are colleagues who I will not send in the water, but I will gladly make use of them because they have contacts in the business community, like my colleague, Paula Gopee-Scoon, who from Friday night was begging us to take mattresses and distribute them to the persons in the Government. [*Desk thumping*] I cannot—for seven hours yesterday

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my phone was off. I was nowhere near a charger or anything like that, but I had a colleague in the Government, getting on to ANSA McAL for a million-dollar donation. From early Saturday morning I had a colleague sitting on this Bench who got on to five energy companies who all made pledges, not to my community alone, but to this country.

I have a colleague sitting on this Bench, Madam President, who was able to tell me yesterday, when my phone was back on, that the Government of Guyana wants to get in contact with me to find out what we need in agriculture, what agricultural supplies are going to be short, and how that could be coordinated. And I heard this morning from that colleague on this Bench, Madam President, who is doing the people's work sitting right here, that Minister Joe Hammond from Guyana has been in touch with the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. Not everybody will go into a kayak with a parcel of goods for somebody. Somebody has to be talking to the donors for the goods, and somebody has to be coordinating the transport, and somebody has to be manning the phones so that the people out there—not for gallery. There are people here to do the people's work and there are people out there who we work with, and the work will continue while we do the work of the Senate. It is extremely disrespectful.

I, Madam President, I do not know about the others, I do not know where they were, but I worked with members of the defence force. From the time I left the Senate on Friday and I journeyed through the country to deal with farmers first, and I then got to my hometown, and I have not stopped seeing members of the defence force. I know because we fed them up to last night. I have not stopped seeing members of the coast guard. I have not stopped seeing them.

Madam President, I personally, personally, using our Ministry's resources,

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ferried emergency medical cases to the Mayaro Health Centre, and when the staff there had to leave to change their shift, ferried them out and picked up new people. The health system was working. [*Desk thumping*] And I cannot think—I was in Mayaro yesterday, standing next to Mr. Wint. I am a big critic of the ODPM and Mr. Wint, and I stood next to Mr. Wint on one side, Minister Young on this side, and Minister Kazim Hosein in front of me, all coordinating and getting the people's work done. [*Desk thumping*] And for Greenvale, there were Ministers, MPs, MP Ancil Antoine. There were local government councillors on all sides.

In my community there were UNC councillors, as there were PNM councillors. When you give a sick person some medication, Madam President, you do not say to them it is brought by, or on behalf of. [*Desk thumping*] You do the people's business and you gallery later down the road, but today is not the day for that sort of behaviour. [*Desk thumping*] Every finger that could be lifted in this country has been lifted in the last few days, and Trinidadians and Tobagonians, no matter the old talk, responded.

In fact, Madam President, the response sometimes was too excessive for me. I had to tell people, "Doh block the street, doh block the road; we have enough people helping". Yesterday we had too much food. We had to tell people save it for a day later on. We cannot, as a country, for the sake of some kind of political mileage on a Monday morning, diminish the sheer human response that took place, not only in this one but all the ones. I have been through it all, all that went before. We cannot diminish it because we have chosen to allow some of our colleagues who are in the other place to be outside there while we take the business of the budget forward. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, there are two Senators that I thought I should respond to.

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The first is Sen. Shrikissoon in a very balanced contribution that I really enjoyed and appreciate, and when Sen. Shrikissoon pointed to the fact that with all he believes had been happening in agriculture he had not seen this quantum leap, I turned to my colleague, Sen. Singh, and I said to him, “Remember to tell him how about the weather”. Because the fact is, Madam President, this Government came in 2015 and by 2016 we had to deal with the first set of terrible weather. November into December 2016, we had to deal with bad weather across the country particularly in the Matelot area, and Matelot and the people of Matelot have not recovered from that as yet. It was unprecedented wind and weather damage from which they have not recovered, and from what I have seen of what has happened in Matelot this time around it is a continuation of that, the ferocious water. The amount of water dumped in Matelot November 2016, December 2016 was unprecedented and the water cut its way through the mountains, and where you had water draining in little streams you had big rivers opening, bringing down large rocks and destroying farmers, farms and roadways.

In 2017, we came here in the mid-year review to ask the Parliament to authorize for the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries an increase, an increase that will allow us to fund the flood assistance to farmers and pay the subsidies and incentives and other forms of support that we had to pay which were unprecedented. Madam President, Bret was devastating across the country and the point is that what a lot of people—and I believe Sen. Shrikissoon should know, when this amount of rainfall gets into farmlands there is a multitude of consequences. As simple as that topsoil that farmers—and my colleague will bear me out—spend tremendous resources enriching, in the case of Orange Grove, in the case of all those former Caroni lands that are not by its nature fertile, farmers

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use limestone and other things to bring it up to a level of fertility, and when that level of water falls and moves, it moves topsoil, it moves limestone and it sets the farmer back tremendously.

I am have been in the midst of working with the Ministry to prepare a communication on the giant African snail. Last week I was out in a part of this city that I never thought would see giant African snails. A giant African snail is not just something that looks very repulsive, but it carries and it capable of carrying meningitis, and if handled with the bare hands there are severe consequences. Madam President, I want to tell this country that I am more concerned about the impact of giant African snails flowing with floodwaters throughout the country than I am concerned about roads and bridges and helicopters. That to me is one of the most severe consequences because the giant African snail was only in Diego Martin, and when we had the flood issue in Diego Martin it spread from the single resident straight through Diego Martin, and every time I go about— Madam President, this country knows that I go personally when there is a major issue, minor issue, an issue. Once I have the time I go and I see it for myself, and every time I go, as I went to urban Port of Spain I could not imagine, and the first question I ask, “Do you have a gardener?” The family said, “Yes”. “Did he bring soil?” “Yes.” And that is how it moves, by moving soil across the country.

So it moved from Diego Martin, to Orange Grove, to Santa Cruz, to central Trinidad, to Holy Faith Convent down by my colleague Foster Cummings, who called me to respond, to Holy Faith Convent in Couva, to Tarouba. But this floodwater that has hit Orange Grove, not just the losses relating to food, but the potential for a significant spread of the giant African snail; and none of my colleagues sitting on this Bench could help me deal with that. If they wanted to go

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out there with me, I would not carry not one of them. I will say stay right here and debate whole day. We have to deal with that. The spread of diseases, the spread of pests as soil moves, when you disrupt and when you move, the farmers will face a tremendous—and with Bret, I said it is not just the immediate loss of the crops it is the recovery time, and we are heading into the high season for the farmers.

Diwali is one of the most productive times with them, followed by Christmas, and what would happen while the people are asking me about the food prices right away, the bigger issue is our ability to provide as we go down through to the end of the year. And that is why the Government believed that the more important decision to make related to a conversation with Guyana, and then as the water runs off we understand what we have to do.

But, Madam President, this Government did not sit down. When I was before the standing committee, I made a point and this was the point. I said I am thankful for my colleagues in both Houses who approved the mid-year review, the mid-year supplement, because that allocation gave me the opportunity—and I think the staff at the Ministry has said to me, “Minister, it is unprecedented that we have been able to clear almost all our debts by midnight 30 September, 2018”. Because successful Agriculture Ministers have come in and have met, for example, flood assistance \$6/7 million in claims unpaid, and an allocation for the new fiscal of \$2 million. So you take your two and you pay last year’s six, and you owe last year’s six and you add this year’s seven, and it keeps adding up. And together with our Permanent Secretary Lydia Jacobs, we took the decision that we were going to manage this and we managed to clear \$53 million in debts for farmers. [*Desk thumping*]

In the standing committee, Madam President, I was asked—on the allocation

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for subsidies and incentives, I was asked, “Why is it lower? I saw last fiscal 34 million and this fiscal 24.” And I said, “That 34 includes the extraordinary supplementation that took place in the mid-year review, but if you look at what has been historically allocated you will see 12.” What the Government has done for this fiscal year under incentives and subsidies is to double it. So we have two positives under that one line Item. We have no debt that we are bringing. We have the 12 million that we are accustomed to and we have an additional 12 million for this fiscal year. I pointed to flood assistance and I said we are coming in with almost zero claims. Any claim that comes in now would have been some claim in some outlying office that did not reach. But unlike previous years when the allocation for flood assistance was \$2 million, we have been allocated this year \$9 million. If it is that this present issue causes us to pay out \$9 million that is what we have to do, and if we have to come back to the Parliament to vire through our own internal dealings in the Ministry, we will do what we have to do.

Madam President, I sent out information to the farmers since last week, as I have always done, advising about the three-day forecast for continuous rain. I also signalled to the farming community that, we as a Ministry, will put the resources in place to receive their claims for assistance from today. And last night I confirmed that a tent is being placed outside the Ministry headquarters office in Chaguanas for the purpose of putting in additional staff to receive these claims. So I do not know that I have to be out there now carrying water when I have done what I am supposed to do on the ground.

I have come here to account to the country, and I am here to tell the farmers and the food producers in this country that we stand behind you on the basis of the allocation. [*Desk thumping*] That is what I am here. Everybody, every farmer,

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every person that I represent will turn their televisions on at this time and say, “That is Clarence. He just leave Mayaro in a tall boots.” And when Sen. Taharqa Obika asked me if I changed meh colours today, I tell him I grabbed what I could get that was not wet because I have a job just like every man and woman sitting on this Bench and that Bench. We have our responsibility and we have the capacity to sit here, do the Senate’s job, do the Ministry’s job, and do the job of every community that one of us represents, and I do not see a problem in being able to do that.

So to Sen. Shrikissoon, I say that. The reality is that the changing weather patterns, the intensity of the rainfall, the frequency of the rainfall— In fact, this was one of the best years the farmers were having because through the dry season, which is always a cry for water, we had rain, sufficient rain. Not enough to cause damage but enough to keep water on the fields, and up until Friday we did not have a rainfall event to set them back in the manner, but we had dry periods through the rainy season and the production and farmers were saying to me they are doing well.

And when this act of God takes place, well we have to respond and we respond to budgetary allocations through the work of Ministers, Permanent Secretaries, staff, all Ministry have staff. Madam President, there is a tractor operator called David who—I hope he does not claim for all the hours, but there are parts of the country that only a tractor with a low trailer could move through to pick up people. You have somebody who is not well. We had to put somebody’s living room chair on the low trailer and put a pregnant lady to sit down on it to take to the hospital. You know, this is not fantasy land with air ambulance and water ambulance. This is reality and you “doh” need a cape or a UNC flag to rescue

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people or to help people. [*Desk thumping*]

I am amazed that anybody—I do not want to be recognized, everybody know. I do not want that, but do not—for nurses, for security guards, army, police, coast guard, who made it through the floods, abandoned their own needs; municipal corporations workers, truck drivers, loaders, ambulance drivers, telephone operators, supermarket workers, even the clergy—I went to church yesterday morning because I know when something is beyond me. I make sure that I went to church yesterday morning and my priest made it out of the flood to come and do what he has to do, and I am sure across the country—in fact, Madam President, you know what I said yesterday morning around 10 o'clock? If some of these churches cancel the service it “go” be better for us because the amount of people park up in vehicles at the edge of the flood wanting to cross to go to their church. But that is the country we have, everybody, and I will not as a legislator, as a Senator, as a Minister and a citizen, I will not let anybody diminish the work of the people of this country. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, the other Senator that I feel compelled to say something in response is Sen. Ramkissoon. I sat and I listened to her contribution and I understand her position. She did not disclose her position, but her entire contribution was couched in the context of being a Petrotrin employee. Sen. Ramkissoon talked about the best and the brightest, and all of this in the country, and people. Madam President, I do not know if I am mad. I do not know. I might be. But I was barely out of my 20s in an executive position in Caroni (1975) Limited that allowed me the use of a company house, a company vehicle with a driver, long-term pension plan, medical, access to clinic and free medication, salary, allowances, and when asked by the Panday administration to opine on the

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future of sugar industry, I gave the advice that I could give; and when asked by the Manning administration that followed I gave the advice that I could give and I ended up “VSEPPing” myself. I was no youth man walking around without a parrot on a stick. I had wife and children, lil’ ones, but I could not make a decision or give advice only considering my personal circumstances.

I had to consider the greater interest of this country and I stand behind my role on what ends up being the closure of the sugar industry in this country, and I do not know the goodness and greatness of any other citizen of this country. I have never been out of a day of income since that time. I have been able to work around the world. I was employed by two major multinationals including the largest bank in the world and when called upon again to play a role in this country’s development, I quit that job and I came back here. I went for 14 or 15 months without a salary because I wanted to serve this country in this Parliament as a member of the PNM. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, I listened to my colleague, Sen. Ramkissoon, and my colleague offered no recommendation to deal with the bullet payment that is due next year, close to \$5 billion. My colleague offered no recommendation to deal with the payment that follows. My colleague offered nothing except save the jobs in Petrotrin. If I had done that in Caroni—because, Madam President, when I finally adjusted my position out of the sugar industry, I was interviewed by the *Newsday* about my decision to move to something else. Not far from that. And I said, “As a CEO, I have grave difficulty in running a company like this”, and I said I have four hurdles that I will never get over. The first one—because my colleague went into some basic information about the sugar industry. Well I could give you the whole story. I said to the *Newsday* I cannot run a business where the raw

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material to produce my final product I have no control over the price or the quality. You with me Sen. Small? Because notwithstanding many years of Dr. Ranking studying this thing called payment by quality, where you pay cane farmers for their sugar cane based on the quality of their sucrose. We never implemented that. So we—and the people in the south know it better than the people in the north—were paying for truck engine, car parts, train line, stove.

Madam President, you see with this flood, cane farmers would have put all “dem” discarded stoves in the middle of the bundle of cane because you pay by weight. The cane is lifted by a crane, weighed, put onto the truck and you do not know if that is John cane, Jack cane or Jean cane, and you pay for that and what you get you get. You get a whole mora tree in there and you have to grind it and try to make sugar out of that. That is the first said, one. The second one was in the middle when the cane get there and you cut it up, you are using a 100-year-old factory ranked 126th in the world in terms of efficiency—and for once the higher the number it is not the better the score, eh—making Caroni (1975) Limited world’s No. 62 in efficiency as a sugar producer. In the middle there, notwithstanding the equipment—you could have the best equipment in there, you have in that factory five trade unions, each knocking on your door for an increase every three years and it has nothing to do with productivity, profitability, efficiency, world market prices, or the future prospects of the business.

So if “you buying stupidity, yuh making stupidity and yuh selling stupidity”, how could you continue? But every piper, everybody coming with their cap for you to pay and pay and pay and nobody wants to work and work and work, and improve and improve and improve. And then on the outside, you could produce the

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finest sugar, the best crystals, the world market was collapsing.

11.00 a.m.

From 1950, we had the Commonwealth Sugar Agreement that guaranteed us preferential prices but as Thailand, Australia and Brazil became big producers, because they were getting into the business. So the first thing Brazil did, the new factories were dual factories, making sugar when sugar prices were up, switching to ethanol when sugar prices were not attractive, and all the new factories that were commissioned. The fields that were planted were planted on flatlands for the purpose of mechanized harvesting. We introduced harvesters in Trinidad, but we could only mechanically harvest the fields in the north which were flat.

So when the Prime Minister “get blows” for saying that you need land for agriculture, that is what he meant; economies of scale. Economies of scale in these countries—there is an old joke from the US—in these countries, “they say ah farmer in the US could take a tractor and go down one line in his field and not stop until the day finish”. That is what the Prime Minister was talking about, economies of scale. And when you look at Brazil where a worker could work for 0.6 cents US a day, the equivalent, compared to Trinidad where you had to pay them and beg them to work.

Brazil, Thailand, went to the WTO and challenged the long-standing preferential prices for international sugar. Not only sugar, beet where Europe—major beet producer—had, like us, been subsidizing their farmers and paying preferential prices, and that was falling apart, and the economy in Trinidad and Tobago was doing well enough to support the most lucrative VSEP package given to any worker in the country until that time to now, and a big part of Caroni was the money that was spent, close to \$20 million in transitioning workers, retraining

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workers, thousands of workers.

You have people—Madam President, I did not read this, you know, I lived through this, all the way knowing that at a certain point in that programme, I was going to make myself unemployed. But I did, as a citizen of this country, what I felt as a professional, given my experience, my expertise and my knowledge of the international sugar and agriculture market on the whole, that I was best positioned to support the Government in what it wanted to do. [*Desk thumping*] “And when you come, come with your facts”. Coming to ask for facts without facts.

Petrotrin—I do not want to go into Petrotrin except to say that even at a cursory glance, a business like that is not sustainable. Even in good times, it is not sustainable.

Madam President: Minister, you have five more minutes.

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: Thank you, Madam President. I understand the emotions. I am not devoid, I am not distant from it, I understand it. As a matter of fact, I could tell you that the first vacancy that came up in our Ministry, there are certain positions, as you know, Madam President, which are personal to the Minister. There are five of those and one became available and I reached out to a Petrotrin worker who was going home and hired that young lady. She has a Master's degree in environment and I said to her, “Ah do not know what yuh will do with yuh degree but I have ah spot and I want you to come and take it so that you could transition yourself”.

And if every employer, if everybody do that, we will be able to assist and the Government is committed and the new companies would hire and so on. But when I feel—not everybody is the same—I feel that when we come into this House, we come to represent the national interest and not our personal interest. [*Desk*

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thumping]

Madam President, I just want to close by talking about land because as the flooding takes place, I always come back to land. The farmers who say to me all the time, “Minister, if we have long-term leases, we will be able to do more to deal with climate change in our land, our country”. And I have spoken about the paper and all of that. The Parliamentary Secretary has said that we have launched a land card that give farmers access to their electronic files and we are moving; we are doing 500 new files a month. And once we continue doing that, farmers would be able to come to the Ministry with their card, and have it read by a barcode reader and all their information would appear; and a lot of things go with that platform that I cannot talk about now.

But the fact is, Madam President, if there is a contribution I would like to make to this country and to the farming population, it would be in the area of securing their land tenure over the long term and I have the backing of my colleagues who are here, who are out on the field, to the Prime Minister who leads this team in a most inspirational and inspired way. All of us are confident that we have the support of our Prime Minister. I am proud to be in this Government. I signed up to serve in this Parliament. [*Desk thumping*]

I am here this morning to do the work of the Parliament and at the earliest opportunity, Madam President, my boots and tools are right outside. I will make the change and go and serve the people in a different way. I thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Paul Richards: Good morning, colleagues. Thank you, Madam President, for recognizing me and affording me an opportunity to contribute, on this morning, to the Bill: “An Act to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the

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financial year ending on the 30th day of September, 2019”. And I will admit, from the onset, it is a challenging morning to be here, like all of us I am presuming, and it is not only a challenging morning for us to be here but I guess for every citizen in Trinidad and Tobago who feels for their fellow nationals, who has empathy for their fellow nationals to go out and do their work in their various capacities throughout Trinidad and Tobago, and I respect everyone’s perspective.

The Opposition Senators, our colleagues, took a particular stance this morning and they have the right to their opinion. But I am of a different view and I think we all have to make contributions in a country like this, especially when natural disasters hit, when crises hit, in our various capacities, and we will all understand that our capacities are different because we do not only serve in one capacity, many of us serve in several capacities, you know.

I have colleagues in the media house, for which I am employed and work, who came out on Saturday and Sunday without hesitation because dissemination of information is important at a time like this and colleagues in other media houses came out, and people in other sectors came out, because while people and hands and feet are on the ground in the flood-hit areas, in the devastated areas, are very important in those areas, there are other areas that provide support to those areas. And everything and everyone cannot be in the same area doing the same thing because the machine of State does not work like that and we have to be cognizant of that.

So, while I respect our colleagues’ decision, I think because of the nature of this Bill, “to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago”, it may be even more critical for us to pass this for them, [*Desk thumping*] because without the funds that this Bill will generate or will authorize, I should say, and even more so now,

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because I guess, you know, one would have prepared, and I know I prepared a particular contribution but it has to be amended to deal with that situation because we cannot pretend that it did not happen and by sitting here or standing here and making a contribution and giving a perspective on this, it does not mean that I or any of us, I do not think, have abandoned our responsibility and we have individual responsibilities to those people, our brothers and sisters in Greenvale, in Oropune, in Caroni, in Kelly, now in Maraval and parts of Diego Martin, El Socorro. I think it is incumbent upon us to understand that we have multiple roles and this is one of them I think and I am very proud to be able to stand here and make a contribution about this.

Madam President, I will tell you, crises and challenges really show the mettle of a people and of a nation and I will tell you, I am extremely proud to be a national of this country, to be a Trinbagonian today, because of what I have seen over the last weekend. Our people have shown that they are compassionate, that they are willing to help at a moment's notice, are willing to give of themselves, to sacrifice what they have, when our brothers and sisters, our fellow nationals of Trinidad and Tobago, are in need, and I think the people of Trinidad and Tobago need to be commended at this time [*Desk thumping*] for what they showed over the last two, three days and no doubt will continue to show in the coming weeks because this is far from over. We have all seen the videos on traditional and social media of what has happened. I have, myself, never seen that kind of flooding and devastation. I have never seen houses and cars submerged on that scale, you know. I have seen flooding but not like this.

I want to say thank you, because, you know, in all of this, I have not heard of any loss of life and I think we need to be thankful for that because in other parts of

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the world, this kind of flooding, there would have been loss of life and I am really thankful that there was no loss of life. There were one or two injuries and there are grave threats that are posed to people at this time because of sanitation and hygiene issues but, you know, we have to give thanks for life.

And I want to also thank some sections of our society who have gone above and beyond: the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force, the Coast Guard, Prisons, the members of the ODPM, the regional corporations, the doctors, the nurses, the teachers, schools, mosques, mandirs, churches, colleagues in the media, colleagues in the business community, Members of the Government and Members of the Opposition. All need to be commended because everyone went out and continue to go out.

And you know, Madam President, through you, now is not a time for red or yellow [*Desk thumping*] or brown or white or green. Now is not a time for rich or poor or upscale or lower scale. This is a time for Trinidad and Tobago. This is a time for all of us to realize that this has and will affect all of us. I do not think there is anybody in this august House or in Trinidad and Tobago who is not directly or indirectly or has not been affected by this. We all have family, friends, colleagues who live in Greenvale, Oropune, Sangre Grande, Kelly Village, Caroni, some parts of south Trinidad, Maraval. We all know someone who has been affected so we all have to band together, heart, mind, soul and put country first at this time, and I really want us to keep that in mind moving forward, because this is far from over. It is far from over.

I do not know what the overall plan is because I really do not see how anyone can move back into those houses, particularly in Greenvale. So I know the State is going to have to make a decision where that is concerned, the Government.

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I know many people are in shelters at this time and being lodged at family and friends, but certainly, that situation is not going to come to resolution any time soon and that is a relatively new community. Not even the ones in Sangre Grande and parts of Kelly Village and central Trinidad that were affected that may not be as new as that. Those people need houses, those children need school books, they need supplies. They need everything. People have lost literally everything. So I am asking, I am begging Trinidad and Tobago to let us continue to show our generosity of spirit, and to me, this is what being a patriot is about.

The football matches and cricket matches are great and we could sell out the Brian Lara stadium, but this is what being a real Trinbagonian is about. And our brothers and sisters in Tobago also have been somewhat affected by this. So as I said, I will try very hard to stick to as much as I have prepared before but it is particularly difficult under the circumstances but I think it is also important to share perspectives on what has been presented in the other place by Minister Imbert and by our colleague, Minister West, on Friday.

So, with that said, there are several other issues that have come up as a result of what has happened that we really need to consider in Trinidad and Tobago moving forward. I mean, if anyone wants to stand up and pretend that climate change is not real, I think they have to be really living underground because we have not seen this kind of flooding. We have not seen this kind of instantaneous change in water flow and some are saying well it is a spring-tide situation that would have—a confluence of different circumstances, higher than normal tides, high tides and two days of rainfall.

But when we think about it, this is not a hurricane. This was not, as far as I know, a tropical storm. It was severe weather but what would happen if we were to

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really have a category 3 tropical hurricane or a severe storm hovering over Trinidad and Tobago for 10 hours? These are lessons, these are opportunities to learn and prepare. We have to look at environmental issues a lot more closely in Trinidad and Tobago. We have not been doing that.

We have to look at issues of structural integrity and building codes in Trinidad and Tobago and where we are building and where we have built for the last 40, 30 years and if it is still sustainable to keep some housing developments in some areas. Because if we do not have these considerations and conversations now, we will be forever coming behind the curve to try to mitigate what is no doubt going to come again. This is not going to be an isolated event, it is going to happen again. We can be sure of that.

We have to look at the issue of disaster relief, rescue relief and rebuilding and what we are allocating in budgets for that, because now, when we think about it, our colleague, Minister Kazim Hosein, because of what has happened here, his budget allocation that we are proposing here, we have been wiped out. The allocation in this Bill for housing and what it says is and I am quoting part of Minister Imbert's presentation:

“...we have to overcome the financial constraints to ensure we can improve the supply of housing to meet the extraordinary demand...”

And this is before this because I think there are about 400 or 500 units in Greenvale alone that have been devastated.

“Capacity building would deliver 6,000...”—housing—“units by 2020, and thereafter 3,000...per annum.”

But this now has to be amended because we have now, an even more urgent need for persons—and we all know of the backlog in HDC and the shortfalls in private

sector housing developments.

We have literally about 200 families now in need of basic housing at this stage. Not even people who are on a list, who are living somewhere, but on a list awaiting housing. So many of the provisions in this Bill have now to be given a second or third level of consideration because these situations are now urgent and what I would consider emergency circumstances. So I am hoping that, you know, we can have a meeting of the minds regarding conversations moving forward of what we need to put in place as a country especially to mitigate these kinds of circumstances.

And you know, it brings me to part of what I would have prepared. Last year's budget statement was titled: "Changing the Paradigm: Putting the Economy on a Sustainable Path" and this year, it is titled: "Turnaround". And I know there has been a lot of debate as to whether there is a turnaround or not, different perspectives on what a turnaround means. And even if we had a turnaround, because of situations as we witnessed in the last three days, we realize how easy it is for our projections to go awry, how easy it is for us to go behind the curve if are turning around, you know? And I would have been more cautious and conservative by nature and not entitle it "Turnaround", but "turning around", because if we get two, three more like this, God forbid, it could have significant impact on our fiscal measures and projections going forward because we would have to divert originally planned funds in some areas to others.

In any case, Madam President, I think what we all can agree on is that the economy has been stabilized because whether or not one wants to contend with whether it is 1.9 per cent or 1.2 per cent growth or 1 per cent growth, there is a level of stability in the economy and I think the Government must be commended

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for that. Because if the economy had continued the decline or crashed, we would have a totally different conversation in Trinidad and Tobago. And I think to start, let us give credit where credit is due. There has been some level of stabilization and whether one wants to contend as to whether it is 1.9 per cent growth or 0.8 per cent growth, there is growth, which means that there has been a shunting of the deceleration or decline in the economy from three years ago to where we are seeing a different trajectory now which is very commendable. And I think in light of what we are seeing in some parts of the world, that needs to be commended.

We, however, should not allow ourselves, Madam President, to be lulled into a false sense of security because although there have been gains made in the non-energy sector, we have realized how easy it is because of the volatility in the Middle East and energy prices, how easy it is—though it is around US \$68 a barrel per oil and the gas price has stabilized, with the shocks that can easily happen in the energy industry, we could fly back to \$30—although that is not the projection—a barrel. Because when we encountered in—I think it is 2013, 2014, those shocks—they were not predicted. And yes, we are monitoring the geopolitical situation in the Middle East that has direct impact on energy prices globally; this is a very volatile global space and we cannot be lulled into a false sense of security.

So I am hoping that we look at real measures to diversify out of the energy sector because even when we are accounting for growth in the non-energy sector, it is still predicated on low electricity prices, subsidies still at some level to diesel and premium gas and regular gas. So if we look at similar models existing in other jurisdictions, our business models may not be as sustainable as we think given the kind of subvention Government still gives even to the non-energy sector and that

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needs to be accounted.

Madam President, I am extremely happy in terms of the general allocation because what it sends as a philosophical message because education and training at \$7.392 billion has received the largest allocation in the budget, and I think that sends a message that the Government understands the importance of the most important type of development and that is human development in education and training. We have, for many years, in two or three administrations, put the national security pie bigger than that and I think we are finally starting to realize it is not necessarily more money going into national security, it is better arms of national security, better managed and more efficient and accountable national security mechanisms that will make the difference.

So National Security second with \$6.12 billion, Health at \$5.695 billion and I would suggest that, as I indicated before, because of what we have seen over the last couple of days and the impact and implications for the flooding and the possible health hazards moving forward because over the next couple of days, as the water recedes, hopefully we will get no more significant rainfall, there will be or there are imminent health issues looming because sewage has now been mixed with water supplies and people are going back into houses that have inundated with all sorts of bacteria.

Our colleague, Minister Rambharat, just indicated the issue related to the movement of soil from one area to the other with the African snail which is an extremely dangerous circumstance that we must consider. Because in other circumstances, touching a snail, the African snail, is one thing physically but when you have to wade through water where these snails have been moving around and the soil moves from one area to another, you do not necessarily have to directly

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touch the snail, you can be contaminated and get very, very ill in a moment's notice overnight, and these issues related to flooding now put additional burden on this \$5.695 billion that has been allocated to health care.

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

Works and Transport will be directly affected because that north-south highway, I do not know how much structural damage has taken place. When you have that much water on a highway and the soil levels have now been saturated and water moves above and below soil, we have to look at now checking the structural integrity of that extremely critical conduit between north and south Trinidad moving forward. And it may be that Works and Transport at \$3.546 billion may have to be expanded or some projects postponed to deal with this new imminent issue. All those areas: the Oropune, the Greenvale, Sangre Grande, et cetera, Maraval and parts of Diego Martin, I have seen roads significantly damaged. The river burst its banks, the Maraval River, in the area of Chaconia, bringing debris down and destroying people's foundations and parts of the bridges and roads. So I am not sure that those circumstances, Mr. Vice-President, have been considered.

Rural Development and Local Government, \$1.76 billion and given the ongoing effects we will see due to climate change, may I suggest that Rural Development and Local Government, there needs to possibly be a revision of this number because of what now is afoot in terms of understanding the importance of local government and regional corporations in disaster management intervention in these sorts of circumstances. I know Leader of Government Business in the Senate, Minister Khan, spoke in the last session about legislation coming in this session in terms of the local government bodies and what the Government intends to do with

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that. I think it is even more critical now in terms of understanding local government is not what it was 20 years ago. It does not fulfil the same functions as they were 20 years ago, 10 years ago. It must now be expanded to be more holistic in terms of taking into account the effects of climate change and understanding that this is the main mechanisms to which the Government offers assistance directly and coordinating efforts in terms of disaster relief in this country. Not to mention housing, as I said before, and agriculture at \$0.78 billion. And I really want to put on the record, I do not know how Minister Rambharat makes out. [*Crosstalk and laughter*] Yeah, it is prudent management and I commend you for that but you have—Minister Rambharat—I am sorry, Mr. Vice-President—has been able to have do quite a lot with very little.

But I do not really think and I want to reference and I really do not want, and I am hoping that I am not misquoting the hon. Prime Minister, because it was a news report and we know of sometimes—let me stress sometimes—news report can vary in terms of accuracy. But I think it was the hon. Prime Minister's voice I heard who said that we have to consider economies of scale and that we will never be able to grow the kind of food we need in Trinidad and Tobago. So agriculture if I am paraphrasing correctly, putting more money into agriculture, in my understanding of the hon. Prime Minister's statement, may not be as productive because of the economies of scale. And I think that is not a very productive message in my humble opinion to send because I know we had the same land mass 55 years ago, 30 years ago, 40 years ago, but we have seemed to produce more and everyone who understands modern agriculture and modern food production and modern fisheries knows that you do not need extremely large land spaces.

In addition to the specialized areas of agriculture that one can explore in the

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modern context, particularly with our history at the University of the West Indies and the exquisite and unique types of cocoa and other products that we have in Trinidad and Tobago, scorpion peppers, we can make special interventions into agriculture, food production and manufacturing that may not need large land spaces but I think we need to telegraph, as we would have decades ago, Mr. Vice-President, that every home garden, every community garden, every farming plot that can be maximized should, because food production and agriculture are very important in any country as a national philosophy. So thinking that we can continue to import and pay five-plus billion dollars in primarily stuff we do not need to keep a particular section wealthy, to me, is not a productive way to go.

We have to do better than that and we have to think that we can grow more and produce more food, and generate more farming income in Trinidad and Tobago.

11.30a.m.

Mr. Vice-President, let me go to the specific areas that I want to elucidate. Let me start with national security and the Minister of National Security—if I can ask, Mr. Vice-President, how much time do I have left?

Mr. Vice-President: You end at 11.47 a.m.

Sen. P. Richards: Okay, I have 17 minutes, I have a lot to get through. All right. The Minister of National Security spoke a lot, last week Friday, in his contribution about fire services, life guards, the interventions in the budget for the TT Police Service, CCTV cameras, which I cannot—the issue of the firearm users licences for prison officers in a keep-and-carry protocol and the changes being made in the TT Police Service, and fines and penalties for officers who are complicit in terms of legislation would face greater sanctions, and coast guard radar systems to improve protection of borders.

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However, Mr. Vice-President, you know, I had the honour, and I think the interim report has been laid to tour several of the Port of Port of Spain areas, and we—coast guards—strengthening of the border patrol is one thing. But a lot of the contraband that comes into the country does not need to go through the coast, you know. It is coming in right in Port of Spain right there. And until we deal with the corrupt officers who facilitate that, no matter how much coast guard strengthening or coastal strengthening we do, it is going to amount to naught because they are using so-called legitimate mechanisms to bring contraband into the country.

You know, let me put on record also, Mr. Vice-President, my congratulations to the Government on, to me, what is one of the most potent and significant moves to bolster national security in Trinidad and Tobago, and that is the appointment of Mr. Gary Griffith, and I think that move alone has already started to bear fruit and will be one of the most significant moves in terms of strengthening national security and fighting crime in Trinidad and Tobago. And we have seen the changes he is already making, we have seen him on the ground in the last couple days.

And one of the reasons why, Mr. Vice-President, I am happy that Mr. Griffith has been appointed Commissioner of Police is because he is not of the police service. It is because, I believe, the biggest challenge facing the police service is corrupt officers. And if, and until we strengthen the Police Complaints Authority and widen its legislative ambit to deal with those officers, as great as I think Mr. Griffith can perform, it will be thwarted by those corrupt elements of the police service, who quite frankly—in articulations through the Police Service Social and Welfare Association—articulated in the debate to confirm Mr. Griffith, their dissatisfaction, with the choice, because they wanted the status quo to remain.

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Because there is the blue wall of silence, and colleagues protect colleagues.

So, I am glad that Mr. Griffith is in place now, and I think one of his most urgent missions is really to clean up the police service because no matter how much progress you made, those officers have information and access to information that continues to damage the credibility of the TT Police Service. So, one of the allocations in the budget was to increase the allocation to Crime Stoppers, which I think quite frankly will not make a difference.

If Crime Stoppers was not working with a million dollars reward, it is not going to work with \$2.5 million reward because the issue is not the money, it is the credibility. So, you could \$5 million, if I do not feel safe that my information going to Crime Stoppers is not going to get me killed, or it is not going to end up in the hands of corrupt police officers who will warn the criminals. It is not going to make a difference. I think that money would have been better spent strengthening the investigative arms of the police service to ensure that the corrupt officers are weeded out.

And one of the issues that Mr. Griffith also has to work on, and I see he has already started to work on, is the issue of the abhorrent HR practices in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service that have been allowed to flounder for decades. And you see, he has already started to deal with the issue of promotions and rebuilding the self-esteem of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service; and you know what Mr. Griffith provides, more than anything else, and you know, let me thank Mr. Stephen Williams for his contribution. I know, he got a lot of licks, but at the end of the day, he sacrificed and he served this country to the best of his ability, but I put it on record plainly, I think Mr. Griffith is as they say, "Mr. Williams 5.0 upgrade", and Mr. Griffith provides leadership which was sadly

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lacking in the TT Police Service, visible leadership on the ground with his officers, anything he wants them to do he is willing to do it himself and I think that is very important.

One of the other areas, Mr. Vice-President, is I want to see dealt with in terms of national security, and we all know it has been a pet peeve of mine for several months now, is the issue of prisons, and if we think that corrupt police officers damage the national security grid, I dare suggest that police officers occasionally come into contact with hardened criminals. Prison officers by the nature of their jobs come into contact with hardened criminals on a daily basis. So, the possibility of them becoming corrupted is much higher. And until, and when we decide we are going to deal with corrupt prison officers we are going to be “spinning top in mud”.

You know, Mr. Vice-President, we have seen one of the issues the prison officers have had to deal with is the issue of their—over the last, I think it is 10 years, 18 or so prison officers have been killed. Tragically, two in the last month alone. The criminal element is showing us without fail that they do not care, that if officers challenge them in terms of contraband, particularly in the Port of Spain prison there will be significant repercussions including death. And one has to wonder how complicit are some corrupt officers in this trade of contraband that is putting their colleagues at risk. Because the telephones, the cell phones and the flat-screen TVs are not getting into the prisons just like that, they are not falling out of the sky.

So I think significant emphasis needs to be placed on also weeding out corrupt prison officers because they are an extreme danger, not only to their colleagues but to every citizen in Trinidad and Tobago. And one of the issues we

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face in the prisons is the fact that there is not real accountability. The 2015 prison break has not been brought to any level of resolution—when an officer died, Port of Spain was shut down, three inmates escaped, eventually killed, and to date no resolution. And might I suggest, Mr. Vice-President, that to deal with that, just like in the police service we look at the possibility of expanding the remit of the, and changing the remit of the Police Complaints Authority to a security complaints authority?

So that there is an independent body, and I do not see the need to duplicate a different agency, if the Police Complaints Authority is already in train in understanding what it takes to investigate allegations of corruption and its behaviour of police officers, it be widened to include prison officers because of the significant levels of possible corruption involved in the prison service. Because expecting prison officers to investigate themselves effectively is as foolhardy, Mr. Vice-President, as expecting police officers to investigate themselves.

And I took the opportunity and liberty to have a conversation with Mr. David West, the Director of the PCA about the possibility of this and he does not see it being a conflict in any way, once the legislation is amended to widen his remit, legislatively, to include the prisons. Because that prison situation needs to be dealt with and if we do not, we will sadly see more and more prison officers being killed in Trinidad and Tobago, gunned down in front of their homes. It is not going to end until we find the source of who is allowing the contraband into the prisons and who is compromising the national security grid in Trinidad and Tobago. Because as I said before, Mr. Vice-President, the prison officers come into daily contact with hardened criminals, increasing their likelihood of, in some instances, if they are so prone, to become corrupt, and we have to put different mechanisms

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in place to investigate corrupt—and identify and weed out corrupt prison officers.

Mr. Vice-President, I think I have 10, just under 10 minutes left and—

Hon. Senator: Eight minutes.

Sen. P. Richards: Eight minutes left. And there are two areas I want to get through; it would be remiss of me not to deal with the issue of education in Trinidad and Tobago, and I had quite a bit to say. But, needless to say, one of the issues that we really have to deal with—our non-performing or underperforming students at the primary school level, and we seem to think that just migrating them up to secondary school—and by the way our pass grade at the SEA level is 30 per cent, eh.

Thirty per cent pass grade means that you understand, generally, on a fundamental level 30 per cent of the course work, and if you migrate someone who has 30, 40, 50 per cent up from primary to secondary school you are transferring a challenge upward to teachers in the secondary school level who do not have the resources to deal with that. So, there are about 2,500 students who score under 30 per cent who are migrated up. And the secondary school system is so already overburdened that those teachers and counsellors at that level do not have the training in many instances or the resources to provide the interventions needed for those students. Not to mention about 800 students are missing or drop out between primary and secondary schools that we are not identifying where they have gone, and could be adding to a growing challenge in Trinidad and Tobago, where they become easy prey for gangs and other criminal elements in the country and that needs to be addressed.

We also have a situation, Mr. Vice-President, where again, and the Minister of Finance identified 1,424 or so, it is around that number, individuals receiving or

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registered to receive special-need intervention, and I commend the Government for the increase in disability grant which includes special needs, but when we think about in any jurisdiction, students or learners as they are called—

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

Sen. P. Richards: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President—who have these challenges are usually between 12 and 15 per cent of any population—special needs and/or disability. If we take it down to 10 per cent of our population, we generally have about 100,000 or a little over 100,000 students who have actually learning disabilities, special needs or disabilities.

So, if we have 1,400 or so, registered and receiving grants, we realize how inadequate the subvention for that is. And even if it is 2,500, if anyone understands special needs in Trinidad and Tobago, you will realize diagnostic tools, remediation, can cost anywhere in the vicinity from \$3,000 to \$7,000 per child, per learner, per month.

So that while admirable in terms of the increase is woefully inadequate, and our Education Act stipulates an education that increases the potential or develops the potential of every learner.

I had the honour of, again, attending the Down Syndrome Family Network Buddy Walk yesterday, between helping people get stuff for flooding victims and stuff and when you see—and several special-needs categories were represented as is the case every year. So, congratulations to Mr. Glen Niles for ensuring that it continues.

We realize how much of a neglected sector this is in Trinidad and Tobago. And it makes no sense spending the largest portion of the budget on education when such a large portion of the society, about 100,000, are not being met at their

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level, and being provided the kind of support they need, and it is extra support—there is a difference between equity and equality. So they need more support.

The other issue in my last two minutes, Mr. Vice-President, which I cannot get into, is the issue of elderly people, and commendations to the Government for increasing the NIS pensions. But, we are heading into a dead end where this is concerned. And I wish I had more time to elucidate on that. But, we really have to change mindset to what the Minister of Finance, in opening the NIB's offices around the Queen's Park Savannah, touched on the fact that the system which was created many, many years ago, is projected to not be able to deal with the load by the year 2030. And that is another, just like the Petrotrin issue, is coming and we want to get ahead of that.

Finally, I think I have two minutes left, Mr. Vice-President?

Hon. Senator: One.

Sen. P. Richards: One minute left. I am ambivalent on Petrotrin. Because I think, although it may have been necessary, I think it has been so badly managed in terms of information and communication that that has exacerbated the situation, and my only suggestion, whether it is the right move or the wrong move, is that we do not end up in a situation like we did 55 years ago this year, where we shut down the train system and are paying for it today.

I am not saying whether Petrotrin is right or wrong, but I certainly know that if we had the train system today we would not have the transportation issues and we would have saved billions of dollars' worth of fuel.

So, I hope this has been well thought out and in the future moving forward, when significant decisions like that have to be made in Trinidad and Tobago there must be a cogent, strategic communication mechanism devised and not

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misinformation, inconsistent information, information coming from one hand to the next hand, and certainly not someone who is absent of emotional intelligence, passing on information and denigrating the Industrial Court and/or the Industrial Relations Act in Trinidad and Tobago by saying unions and the Industrial Court are almost irrelevant. I think that is counterproductive and we need to have people who understand messaging and information to more effectively carry out those sorts of mandates.

Because I know that there are other state—because Petrotrin is a case model for other non-effective state enterprises in Trinidad and Tobago that must be addressed, before they get to the stage of Petrotrin and be such a drain on the economy that it ends up compromising the very economy of Trinidad and Tobago. So, I agree with the move to make efficient and clean up state enterprises, but it must come with a clear understanding, and a clear message to the population of what is to happen, why it is to happen, what is the way forward, what is to happen to those workers, and how will stakeholders be affected moving forward. And that has been terribly mismanaged in the case of Petrotrin, adding to the mistrust and in some cases exploitation by some forces in terms of continuing to add this ambiguity as to whether or not the Petrotrin issue is one that is worthy. Mr. Vice-President, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development (Sen. The Hon. Jennifer Baptiste-Primus): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. I feel honoured to be given the opportunity to this, the fourth debate on the annual budget.

Mr. Vice-President, I would first like to commend the hon. Minister of Finance, and the team at the Ministry of Finance, that team of hard-working public

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officers and also the Minister of Planning and Development and her team for a well- thought-out and expertly “sculpt” budget document. But, Mr. Vice-President, before I share information with regard to the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development that I have the honour to lead, I would want to respond to certain statements made by my fellow Senator, Khadijah Ameen, with regard to their planned walkout of this House.

Mr. Vice-President, the national disaster that has been declared in this country by our hon. Prime Minister speaks volumes to what is taking place right now, and has been over the past few days. None of us, Mr. Vice-President, in this House and outside of this House have escaped the pain and the trauma that this country and the citizens of this country have experienced. But you know, Mr. Vice-President, all of us have been on our phones keeping track of what has been taking place—the numerous videos that have been planted on Facebook and elsewhere. But, you know what we see coming through?—ordinary people, people helping people under adverse conditions—[*Desk thumping*]*—that is what we see. What we see is a people become unified. It did not matter whether you are UNC, PNM, whether you are African, whether you are Indian, whether you are a Hindu, a Muslim, a Christian, all people were interested in is in helping those in need.*

I read, Mr. Vice-President, I think it was in La Horquetta, this resident who is affected himself, admitted that he did not speak to his neighbour for eight years, eight years, Mr. Vice-President. But he set it aside, because everybody was in need. And he turned around and helped that same neighbour. I saw videos where ordinary people with their pirogues out there helping to rescue others.

Mr. Vice-President, that is not usual. We stay right here in our little square mile, our beloved country, and we see what is taking place internationally and we

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see civic-minded citizens helping each other. My friend, Sen. Ameen, if one was to have listened to her, apparently, she and the few of them there, the rest of the UNC, they alone responded and helped people. This is not about the politics, this is not about photo ops, jumping in a pirogue and holding a child and getting a photo op. [*Desk thumping*] This is not about that.

Mr. Vice-President, I mean—I am directly affected like anyone else here. My cousin, my very close first cousin and his family; they live in Oropune. Mr. Vice-President, none of us slept Friday night, none of us in the family slept. We were all concerned. His vehicle, when we saw the water covered his vehicle and then his phone died. So, could you imagine—we, I know what people are experiencing out there. You cannot sleep because you do not know what is happening. But in the final analysis, good people rallied around and helped.

And in that context, Mr. Vice-President, I would like to thank all the organizations, all the churches, all the village councils, all the NGOs, all the businessmen. I saw where a businessman bought hundreds of packaged food and distributed. We would like to thank all those private individuals who have given of their time, their money, their equipment. I mean the doubles man, Sauce, on his truck did a video and asking people to distribute it. He was out there distributing free doubles and something to drink, Mr. Vice-President. Everybody chipped in. This is not about who did what.

With regard to the Government, this Government has mobilized its forces on the ground, throughout the length and breadth. We have created a WhatsApp, just for this flood relief. I mean, at the level to the Party, our General Secretary—others have been mobilizing—I mean, I spent all weekend mobilizing, my own party group members into purchasing groceries, purchasing mops—I mean. We are all

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helping, Mr. Vice-President, and for the Opposition to come here this morning, Mr. Vice-President, in their very melodramatic fashion and demanding that we shut down this debate. It is the same Opposition, Mr. Vice-President, who is demanding that the Government set aside more than \$25million to help our citizens, as flood relief.

Mr. Vice-President, if we were to act so recklessly and close down this debate, where will we get the money from to assist the citizens of this country? This House here has a responsibility to pass this budget, so that funds could be identified to help those out there. [*Desk thumping*] That is reckless kind of politicking. And it falls on us as usual to engage in responsible activities, Mr. Vice-President.

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: They do not understand their role and function.

Sen. The. Hon. J. Baptiste-Primus: So that, Mr. Vice-President, we will sit here. We will continue this debate. All of us, our heart bleeds for our citizens out there, who—I mean, Mr. Vice-President, I do not know what it is to lose everything. I do not. But I have an idea what loss is, and my heart like everybody else's heart in this Chamber goes out to all those people. You know, could you imagine, they do not know, I was asking my husband, if we get flooded out, which room to start to clean? Which part of the house to start to clean? I mean, a simple decision like that brings on psychological trauma.

Mr. Vice-President, so instead of walking out I want to encourage all of us to continue to help and to continue to pray. Because, Mr. Vice-President, when everything else does not work, God is still in the miracle-making business, and we all have to praise and thank God that there has been no loss of life up to now. [*Desk thumping*] We praise and we glorify his Name and we ask him to continue to

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show his mercies upon this country.

Having said that, Mr. Vice-President, I want to respond to two issues my fellow Senator, Wade Mark, made in his contribution. I mean, we have all grown accustomed to Sen. Mark's sometimes outrageous statements that sometimes I wonder if those statements are made just to get mentioned in the newspapers. Sen. Mark made two outrageous, inaccurate, unsubstantiated statements in this House last week.

Firstly, Sen. Mark alleged that this PNM administration closed down ArcelorMittal. Now I mean, Mr. Vice-President, it is not only reckless, irresponsible, but patently untrue. And, you know, what is worrying?—Sen. Mark is aware that the entire country is aware of the ArcelorMittal situation, but he boldly gets up and places into this record a deliberate untruth, and therefore it is my responsibility as a Senator in this House, as a Government Minister, to correct that patently—well, let me not say what I am going to say—

Hon. Senator: False.

Sen. The Hon. J. Baptiste-Primus:—false statement. Mr. Vice-President, ArcelorMittal, responding to the collapse of steel prices on the international market, made a decision that they were not making money through their plant in Trinidad and Tobago and they took a business decision. And they decided to close up shop in this country. My concern, as a former trade union leader in this country, is that they left this country not paying the ArcelorMittal workers their separation, their retrenchment benefits. And therefore, Sen. Mark ought not to engage in such untruths in this Parliament. He is the Leader of the Opposition Bench in this Senate and therefore we expect a higher level of responsible action and statements from him.

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Mr. Vice-President, the second statement that Sen. Mark made: Sen. Mark alleged that it is the People's National Movement which is responsible for the increase in suicides in this country. You know, Mr. Vice-President this country, you know, Mr. Vice-President, this country comprises of intelligent persons, eh, and they look at the debates, they take in the debates; and I gather, one such viewer, writing, felt strongly enough and it is a view that I share, Mr. Vice-President, let me put it into the records, it is the *Newsday* newspaper of Sunday, October 21, 2018, page 14. It is a Letter to the Editor and the letter comes from one Lynette Joseph, and she made a very powerful statement, and instructive, Mr. Vice-President. I hope you will permit me to read into the records what she said. She said:

“The Editor: The idea to place political blame for any increase in suicide statistics in TT on the People's National Movement...is unpalatable, misguided and just plain sick. Senator Wade Mark is not just representing himself, he represents a political party that has many supporters of Indian origin.

In this little third world country where image is everything, Senator Mark can be alleged to be contributing to the idea that the UNC is bereft of sensitive, caring speakers.

Senator Mark asks that we go to the United Nations website for verification regarding his accusation.”

12.00 noon

Because, Mr. Vice-President, when I asked Sen. Mark, “Where did you get that information from?” he said, “Go to the United Nations website and you would see what I am talking about.” So, clearly, Ms. Lynette Joseph took his advice. And

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she continues:

“Senator Mark is allegedly just digging at racial worms because the United Nations has records that show people of Indian descent are prone to committing suicide.”

Are we next to ask Senator Mark how many people of which race in our multi-racial, multi-religious, multicultural society will allegedly, possibly commit suicide if they join the unemployment statistics? Is he allegedly talking about strength of character to survive hard times or just being silly?

We live in a democracy where, luckily, anybody can say anything, regardless of how disgusting. The sitting Opposition has an uphill task to win the 2020 elections that defy climbing Mount Everest. They do not need foot-in-mouth allegations from their leader in the Senate.

All is fair in love, war and politics. Senator Mark’s misguided allegation is yet another self-inflicted coffin nail/time bomb from the UNC for week ending October20, 2018.

History will record their pain in 2020.”

Mr. Vice-President, Ms. Lynette Joseph has said it all and I say no more on that.

Mr. Vice-President, I turn my attention to the budget of 2018/2019. Allow me to express my deepest gratitude and admiration for our esteemed Prime Minister, Dr. The Hon. Keith Christopher Rowley. Dr.Rowley has been the very definition of steadfastness as he has anchored this great nation through tides and currents that have threatened to overcome us. His commitment to the rule of law, value for money, dignity in public office and the growth of the nation, has been the foundation upon which this administration was ably and firmly built. In fact, Mr. Vice-President, Dr.Rowley’s strength and confidence has been a personal source of

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inspiration, allowing me to face challenges with grace and courage. For that, I am truly grateful and we are all grateful.

Mr. Vice-President, I turn my attention to a challenging labour market. I have sat here and I have listened to the contributions of my colleagues. I have also listened to those who allege that this Government is failing the people; that this Government has put persons on the breadline and that we do not care about workers and their families. But, Mr. Vice-President, I would like to state categorically that everything we have done has been for the well-being of the people of this great country called Trinidad and Tobago. I would dare say that this administration—we have refused to shy away from the difficult, the very, very difficult decisions that so many of the previous administrations, they choose to ignore, because they were simply afraid; they were simply thinking about winning elections and not acting in the best interest of the citizenry of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Vice-President, this administration has made the decision to put the needs of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and the future of our country above selfish politics and picong. We have displayed through our Prime Minister, strong and decisive leadership. He has lead us with his determination and “focusness”. We have had the fortitude to make necessary difficult decisions today in order to avoid being placed in a position where the decision is no longer ours to make. What I am simply saying, Mr. Vice-President, the decisions we are making is in order to avoid the International Monetary Fund from coming into this country and then dictating to us what we should do. And worse, if we do not take certain decisions, we would have failed to ensure the survivability of the next generation.

It cannot be denied, Mr. Vice-President, the labour market in Trinidad and Tobago has been significantly impacted by the economic realities facing our

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country. It is important to note, however, that although the unemployment rate has been showing increases, the overall rate is still very slow. Based on data from the Central Statistical Office, unemployment was reported at 5.1 per cent in the third quarter of 2017, up from 4.0 per cent in the third quarter of 2016.

[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

To put it in that context, Madam President, according to the International Labour Organization, in a press release dated December 18, 2017, the average rate of unemployment for Latin America and the Caribbean rose from 7.9 per cent in 2016 to 8.4 per cent at the end of 2017. The release also mentioned that unemployment in Latin America and the Caribbean increased for the third consecutive year, affecting more than 26 million people in 2017. Madam President, the challenging labour market is not confined to Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean region. The International Labour Organization, acronym ILO, in its World Employment and Social Outlook Report of 2018, estimates that the global unemployment rate will fall slightly to 5.5 per cent in 2018, that is, 5.6 per cent in 2017, marking the first turnaround after three years of rising unemployment rates.

Madam President, with the growing number of people entering the labour market seeking employment, the total number of unemployed is expected to remain stable in 2018 at about 192 million people. These are global statistics. In 2019, the global unemployment rate is expected to remain essentially unchanged, whereas the number of unemployed is projected to grow by 1.3 million. Madam President, what is occurring in Trinidad and Tobago is not an unusual phenomenon. We are part of a global family and whatever happens out there will impact on our small developing nation state. Madam President, these labour market conditions reach well beyond our shores and compound the already challenging

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21st Century workplace concerns, which include: rapidly advancing technologies; changes to the traditional profile of the workforce and the move to create a diverse economy where emphasis is placed on skills, knowledge, innovation, and the sustainability of enterprise.

Madam President, I want to take a little time to look at the question of minimum wage. On the topic of labour market conditions, I heard it mention as a criticism by those on the other side that this administration has not increased the national minimum wage during our term in office. It was mentioned as though it is a gift that you bestow on others. Madam President, the national minimum wage is not a political tool. It is not a sweetener to be used to win votes. I would like to stress, this Administration does not believe in government by “vaps” nor “voops”. We believe in proper analysis and comprehensive plans and data-driven policy formulation.

To this end, the Minimum Wages Board was reconstituted in 2017. This board, which is mandated—and that is a board that operates under the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development—this board is mandated to advise on all matters related to the fixing of minimum wages. They will be overseeing the conduct of a study in this fiscal year on the determination of the minimum wage in Trinidad and Tobago, including the development of an econometric model that would make the process of establishing the minimum wage more scientific and on par with labour market conditions, instead of a Minister of Labour—not me—getting up one morning and going to Cabinet and saying, “We have elections next month, yuh know. It go be ah good ting if we could raise the minimum wage.” No, Madam President.

There is a scientific way of addressing how the minimum wage is arrived at,

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and we look forward to the results of this study and subsequent proposals from the Minimum Wages Board based on proper process and without any political interference. I know that this approach sounds alien to those on the other side who are accustomed to making uninformed and highly emotional and populace decisions. However, I am assured that the end result would be to the benefit of those who need it most.

Madam President, the turnaround: Although in the past few years labour market conditions have been challenging, this year we are clearly seeing a turnaround. And as I say that, I am reminded of a quote by a woman for whom I have great admiration; other people may have problems with her. But as they say, “woman to woman”. And I am reminded of a quote by Mrs. Hillary Rodham-Clinton, a former Secretary of the State and former First Lady of the United States. And she said this, and I quote:

“It is often when night looks darkest, it is often before the fever breaks that no one senses the gathering momentum for change, when one feels that resurrection of hope in the midst of despair and apathy.”

Madam President, I feel that hope. We all feel that hope now. The turnaround is upon us and the fever is breaking. The change we are witnessing fills me with a certain level of pride because it is as a direct result of the strengths and that talents that we have all been able to find within ourselves in facing the challenges of the past few years.

Madam President, Strategic Plan, 2017/2020, Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development. As the saying goes, necessity is the mother of invention, and we at the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, we have found the capacity to invent. In January 2018, the Ministry officially launched its

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Cabinet-approved Strategic Plan 2017/2020. This home-grown plan represented the culmination of months of hard work by the diligent staff of the Ministry and it presents a road map which is guiding the transition of the Ministry to a more proactive customer-driven Ministry.

This Strategic Plan and its accompanying implementation Plan 2017—2020, which were developed in line with the United Nations Sustainable Goals, the National Development Strategy 2017—2030, or popularly known as *Vision 2030*, and the National Performance Framework 2017—2020, have guided the work of the Ministry over the past year and will continue to do so in the years to come. Madam President, this Strategic Plan is especially impressive for us at the Ministry because it was developed wholly by the staff of the Ministry. In its development, not only was there consultation with all members of staff, the teams comprising staff at various levels of the Ministry, they provided their input on different areas and a drafting team comprising Ministry staff was responsible for putting the final document together. While significant emphasis was placed on the needs of our internal stakeholders, the opinions, views and needs of our external stakeholders were also considered. And I feel a sense of pride that the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development did not have to go out on the external market and incur high levels of expenditure for a firm to come into the Ministry and to develop our Strategic Plan. Our plan was developed bottom-up and not top-down.

Madam President, what we have done is to create a road map for the achievement of the strategic goals of the Ministry up to the year 2020, and through the alignment of these goals with *Vision 2030* there is a tangible relationship between the work of the Ministry and the developmental goals of this country. Each of the areas that I will now touch on are all identified as strategic actions in

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our Strategic Plan.

And I turn my attention, Madam President, to labour legislation reform. One of the promises made to the people of this nation in the run-up to the national elections of September 2015 was the conduct of a comprehensive review of all existing labour legislation in an attempt to foster a higher level of industrial relation practices in this country. This administration has remained committed to the ambitious project of reviewing and modernizing the entire labour legislative framework, recognizing that it is the lynchpin of an effective industrial relations system. I have heard the criticisms. I know that there are those who would want to lead the people to believe that we are not keeping our promise. But it is important to remember that legislation takes time. The rule of law matters and each and every word that we present in proposed legislation becomes uniquely important in its potential to fundamentally affect the very daily lives of our citizens. And, therefore, we do not take that responsibility lightly.

A very critical part of the process, therefore, has been consultations with our partners, that is, Government, labour, business and other relevant stakeholders, including academia, international organizations and experts in their respective areas. Might I add, Madam President, this consultative approach which has defined our modus operandi, is diametrically opposed to that of the previous administration of no consultation. And we all remember, Madam President, the draft legislation that was placed before the Parliament in 2014 which evoked widespread protestation from those who belong to the trade union movement.

Madam President, we, at the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, have identified 22 pieces of labour legislation requiring review. We place 11 of these as these urgent legislative priorities for our current term and we

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have been working diligently through our legislative agenda. From 2016 to present, the Ministry conducted 18 “multi-partheid” stakeholder consultations on 10 pieces of labour legislation. And if you would permit me to put into the records, we began the consultative process mere months after this administration assumed office. So that in January 2016, our first consultation was on the Co-operative Societies Act, and those consultations were held on January 13 and 14, 2016 in Trinidad and January the 29th in Tobago, followed by the Industrial Relations Act on February 22 and 23 in 2017 in Trinidad, and April 08th in Tobago. Then the Retrenchment and Severance Benefits Act in May 2016; the Employment Standards Bill, that is legislation relating to certain basic terms and conditions, because we at the Ministry hold the view that the time is right to ensure that every single citizen who goes into the job market seeking a job must enjoy certain basic terms and conditions of employment, and that will come under the Employment Standards Bill.

Then the Friendly Societies Act in November 23, 2016 and January 24 and September 19, 2017. Next, there was the consultation on the review of the Cipriani College of Labour and Co-operative Studies Act. That was held January 25, 2017. Next we looked at the Occupational Safety and Health Act, March 21 and 22, 2017 in Trinidad and July 10th, 11th, in Tobago. And might I point out, Madam President, for every consultation we held in Trinidad, we held one in Tobago because we belong to a unitary State, Trinidad and Tobago.

We also held a consultation in the Workmen’s Compensation Act; the Private Security legislation, and we are still going. On July 27, 2018 we hosted a consultation on the Trade Union Act. We also conducted another round of consultation on the Employment Standards Bill, which looks at legislation dealing,

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as I said, with basic terms and conditions. In addition, on August 21st and 23rd, sectorial consultations on specific occupational safety and health policies and regulations took place.

Madam President, these are not all talk shops.

Madam President: Minister, you have five more minutes.

Sen. The Hon. J. Baptiste-Primus: These are serious issues. Out of the consultations and the engagement of a labour legislation reform, project tripartite working group, four draft policy position papers were developed and placed before Cabinet. Cabinet has since agreed to the adoption of the National Policy on Cooperatives and Cabinet further advised that the review of the Retrenchment and Severance Benefits Act and the Industrial Relations Act be referred to the National Tripartite Advisory Council for consideration, and I dare say the NTAC is close to closing off its discussion and submitting its views to Cabinet.

Madam President, in fiscal 2018/2019, we intend to push even harder on the legislative agenda. The Ministry will be placing focus on the Employment Exchange Act, the Recruiting of Workers Act and the Foreign Labour Contracts Act, as well as the Employment Standards Bill. So that, Madam President, we also looked at developing a draft policy on sexual harassment. Our 10-point plan—my colleague in the Lower House raised a question on the 10-point plan. It is in place. It is working, so that all those persons who, unfortunately, if they lose their jobs for one reason or another, they are invited to register with the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, at which time the 10-point plan would kick in. They would get counselling, financial advice, they register with our national employment service and we match their résumé with the needs of the employers who register with us, and we find alternative employment for them.

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So that, Madam President, in closing, I want to reiterate my wholehearted support for this Finance Bill before the House. I understand the constraints and the infinite needs which must be satisfied. So I am thankful for the generosity afforded to the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development this year. We have achieved so much with what we were given in the year gone. With the approval of this Bill we will keep doing more. We will continue to act with compassion, with grace, with courage, with fortitude and we will relentlessly pursue our vision of decent work, industrial peace and opportunity for all.

Finally, Madam President, the turnaround we have longed for in Trinidad and Tobago is here. I urge my colleagues to get on board. Support this plan. Support this Finance Bill that is before the House. More than that, I invite my colleagues, in particular those on the Opposition Benches who are calling for certain funds to be placed elsewhere, to support this Bill. Madam President, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Dr. Varma Deyalsingh: Thank you, Madam President, for giving me the opportunity to present on this debate here today. And I think with all this disaster we are seeing we have to realize we are still a very blessed nation. [*Desk thumping*] We have seen persons of all ethnicities, different religions, races, coming together to try to rescue our citizens, to try and see if, somehow, they can give some aid and assistance. Those are our unsung heroes. But we also have heroes existing from even before the flood. The flood was mentioned. We know the effects of the flood. But there are other heroes that we have in society, people who have been struggling to make ends meet; people who have been struggling to get to work, facing transport issues; people who have sexual harassment at work, and like the Minister said, it is a beautiful policy that is on board to help the sexual

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harassment.

So these are people who are out there struggling, a single parent who may have problems, you know, trying to manage food for her children. Again, we have the School Feeding Programme which we must continue to prop up. There are persons out there who cannot even afford to feed their children, and this is something I am saying that, all how, we should continue to make sure we have nutritious, you know, elements in our foods to help our population. So people are struggling but we also see there are things in place to help those persons struggling in their day-to-day living.

So it is really the day-to-day “beat up” that the citizenry will say. They may come to me, because 30 years as a family practitioner, also in the psychiatry, people will come and lay out their problems: family issues; relationship issues; job-related stress. There is workplace bullying now, called desk rage; road rage travelling to work. There is a whole host of problems—day-to-day living, and crime. And when these persons have to deal with these and then, now, you are dealing with natural disasters, earthquakes coming on, acts of God, then you have flooding coming on, it is a lot for people to bear. The psyche of the nation—I see people out there sometimes, you know, they come, they sit, they cry, they are exhausted. It is like they have to get it out of their chest, and they lay it out to me. And I am happy to be here in this Chamber to see how things run and work and see how the sides will try to help, and sometimes try to, you know, give suggestions, how we can help our nation.

Now, the persons who are struggling, what I call the heroes, those persons out there, the citizens crying out for help, I think while the Government has a duty to balance the budget, they also have a duty to ensure that the citizens are fed,

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clothed, you know, sheltered, safe, and I am happy to see the increase in the food card grant, increase in public assistance, increase in disability grant and even the increased capped to the senior citizens' pensions. These are much needed things and I am so grateful that those things are on board in this budget.

We have seen an economic growth of 1.9 per cent for the first time in the last five years. To me, this is again, an excellent—you know, something that I feel proud that, at least, a Trinidadian, we are in dire straits, we are worrying about the economy, but we are seeing some positive things. We are seeing here also that the fact that the expenditure, you know, to try to bring down the expenditure we see Government brought down the expenditure, but again they still have to catch up with their debts.

Something that worries me, though, is the Auditor General's Report about the overdraft. This, again, still will show there is cause for concern. We have normal citizens crying out to me, too. They are looking at the economy and saying, "Doc, you know, we cannot even get foreign exchange. We are struggling. You know, we want to purchase some things online. Why do we have to go out to banks, you know, treated—it is such a disrespect." Now, we understand in his wisdom, the Minister of Finance may have to put those restrictions in, but we have to appreciate that the poor man may get the perception that it is only big companies may be getting the foreign exchange and the little man, the little businessman, may be somehow being short-changed.

So this is something I am hoping that somehow the Minister of Finance could get this going to at least give some alleviation to the poor man who wants to order stuff; his goods.

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Talking about the impending closure, or the closure of Petrotrin now, what I realize now, the Government has to make certain harsh decisions. The decision has even affected my fellow Independent Sen. Ramkissoon, who I felt hurt for because here she is, she is going to lose her job. So she is here in the Senate, giving of her civic duty and she is going to lose her job. So I can empathize with her. When MITAL closed its doors we had workers who were depressed. We had also a worker who even killed himself, and I must say the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development was aware of the facts of the closure of MITAL because, thankfully, she had her PS meet with the PS in Health, and I was part of the discussions. How could we help those persons who suddenly are not employed anymore?

So suddenly MITAL has gone. What do we do with those persons? We had meetings and the suggestion I gave then was, let the unions continue tracking the workers because the workers will go out there and we have no way of capturing those workers to see who is going to get depressed. Also, if the company was still existing—but MITAL had gone—let their employee assistance programme continue tracking retrenched workers because those workers will be out there, lost to us, not coming to clinics in the psychiatric clinics, but out there causing problems at home, sometime go to alcohol, sometimes start to abuse their wives, because it is a fact that chronic unemployment leads to domestic violence, increases domestic violence.

So, the tracking of these persons out there was very important, and I was fortunate to be in the discussions that your Ministry had and I am hoping now that somehow those discussions could come into some sort of fruition, some sort of action plan. We have fancy books, we have fancy plans, but somehow we have to

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get those plans out there working for the people and I think this is the challenge we have. This is a great challenge we have because even all the plans the Minister mentioned about the sexual harassment, excellent policy, but we have to get it working in such a way that we will be able to now give some sort of ease to the women who have to go to work, mind their children and being sexually harassed.

So when MITAL closed its doors, we saw what had happened there to some of the workers. We have to appreciate that unemployment does lead to depression—unemployment. We looked at the suicide figures that hon. Sen. Mark suggested—he has some figures—but it is a fact that in Trinidad we have the third highest suicide rate in the Caribbean, and we rank 41 out of 170 countries per 100,000 worldwide. So suicide is a serious issue in Trinidad. Now, it is just not economic downturn will lead to that. It is not just job loss. It is you may have depression in your family, a genetic influence, you may also have—and we found also a lot of suicide is really linked to family issues, failed relationships. So a factor of unemployment is there, but it is a multifactorial cause of depression. So therefore, if we look at depression we have to realize any budget must take into account depression, suicide, the mental health of our persons.

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries alluded to the fact that he was wondering if he was mad. I think he made some statements about that, and then—[*Crosstalk*] Yes, he was making a statement on that. But studies show that one in four persons will suffer from mental illness. So if we count here and we count the adjunct staff [*Laughter*] and there are 48, 10 of us will be suffering from mental illness.

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: I think it might be concentrating.

Sen. V. Deyalsingh: Ah, you see. So you will look that way and they would look

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that way. Therefore, we have to appreciate mental health is very, very important to our nation, and in any budget we have to appreciate that. According to the EMBO Report, which actually shows that the economic cost of mental disorders—that is the title of their report—it states that mental disorders account for more economic cost than chronic somatic diseases such as cancers and diabetes.

So if we are discussing the budget, we have to realize if we have a depressed society and they are continue going into depression, it will be a great economic burden to our society in terms of lack and working hours, in terms of not be able to care for a family, in terms of the cost, because some of those medications for depression are very expensive. Thankfully, we have it available at our health centres, our physiatrist health centres now—expensive medication. So thank God it is there. So there is the cause of disability, of depression we have to take into account. And young people—this year we had the World Health Organization, they had October 10, 2018. World Health Organization celebrated it and other organizations. But that was always earmarked as the World Mental Health Day. This year the theme was “Young People and Mental Health in a Changing World”, and I was again fortunate to work with the Ministry of Health.

We had some exhibitions at Brian Lara Promenade and the message is to go out there and tell people depression is real. You have to capture the people who are depressed and bring them in for treatment because a challenge is we are not getting persons who are depressed to come to us. Sixty per cent of persons who suffer from depression will never seek health. So there is a whole host of persons out there, our citizens, our relatives, our neighbours, depression, and they are not coming. The stigma of mental health prevents them from coming to us. And what WHO recognized this year, having the theme for young persons, is half of all

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mental illness begins by the age of 14, and suicide is the second leading cause of death among 15 to 29 year olds.

Now think about it. If you have a son, a daughter, a nephew, a niece, this figure is startling. Fifteen to 29 year olds, suicide is the second highest cause of death amongst that population. So therefore, we have to be aware. One of our nieces or nephew, or sons and daughters, may not be with us to adulthood, and this is a fact that globally the World Health Organization has realized that. So therefore, the millennial generation, we thought we spoiled them and they did not know how to fit into the real world. Now we are faced with an iGen, which is the younger generation, very good at multitasking in their phones, their computers, television, everything they can do at once, but they lack their social skills, they lack the ability to handle stress. And that generation is the generation I am worried about, and that generation worldwide psychiatrists and mental health caregivers are worried about and so should we.

We should be now factoring in place what is going to happen to that generation if they fail an exam or a relationship goes bad, second option is kill myself. There is no plan B and C and D. Plan B is kill myself and this is what we have to look out, the issue of children. And so, I would now like to carry this debate into children. What I would like to look at is the educational system and the children. So we are looking at the educational system and the children where, what I think is—when you look at the education of children I get complaints every year. SEA exams, the stress of SEA exams; mothers are anxious, children may be vomiting before the exams; then we have the CXC exams, children have to go and take extra lessons. So what we have here is a situation whereby we know what is stressing out our children. Now, if a child is stressed out because the home

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situation is such, the social worker could capture that. If a child is stressed out because their own genetics makes them predisposed to depression, again we will have to catch that. But if the educational system is further abusing our children, this is what we will now have to change.

Now, we may have to say we grow up like this, but, no, the world is changing. I never knew people kill themselves in my time as a student. Now children are killing themselves. So we have to see what we could change. We can change the educational system that may be abusing our children. And it goes right up because two medical students kill themselves within the last two years. So it goes from childhood right up. So we have to appreciate this and we have to put things in place because we will be losing our individuals. So we looked at childhood and the system, and we looked at even trying to identify these children. So part of my suggestion in this budget is that the moneys spent to education should help in a way identify trouble children. So how do we identify trouble children? Children may come in school, I say give them one, two to three terms to settle in. If they are not settled in, we have to see what is wrong with that child. Does that child have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder?

Six point five million in the States, children have this disorder. Does the child have dyslexia where you are teaching a child a, b, c and there is nothing in that child's mind it will registered as a, b, c? It will register differently. So it cannot register in that child's mind as what a teacher will be trying to say. So children who have these developmental disorders they may disrupt the class, they may be labelled as violent, but they just cannot learn. So we have to now identify these children from early, see how we can deal with them, and I am calling for the reintroduction of the special ed teachers. We need that. It was a brilliant thing that

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it would actually give the teachers a little free up. It will help the parents to know that their child could still fit in in the mainstream schools and will be able to have that understanding from the other members there, that, hey, there are people who are differently abled also. So the special ed teachers are something that I am hoping could be factored back into the budget. So special ed teachers like that.

I have to commend the Government for giving the grants for the special children. This is something that is needed, but it is much more. As my colleagues here were saying, the cost to carry those children to learn is humungous. It is difficult for a single working mother to carry a child to learn little skills for autistic child, for a cerebral palsy child. So we need to somehow give those grants a bigger grant to that. Again, we look at children. So if we are looking at children in school, we have to learn how we could identify a troubled child. First term let a child settle in, second term let a child settle in. By the third term—because children learn to socialize with one another. So they are learning socialization skills. By the third term if they are not settled in we have to have little red flags up. We have to have the students support services come in now and see how we could assess that child. Is it something going on in the child's home? Social workers will have to go after that. Is it something with the child that a developmental disorder which is an engrail thing that you know needs more challenging to fix? The special ed teachers will be able to help that along with the support of the student support services. So the student support services in this country need to be increased in funding, staff. It definitely it needs that. So this is something we have no choice because we know children are going to be depressed, and we have to increase funding along that line.

I would also suggest that we now try to introduce—since we know children are going to be depressed and suicidal, in a big way, let us now introduce

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something in the schools called “depression rating scales”. We can have scales where we can monitor children as they get older, and those scales actually have questions that you could know if a child has anxiety or depressive illness and we can now factor how we could help that child.

Now a lot of these children we found that—Daphne Phillips, who graced this Chamber sometime in the past, she did a study where they looked at violent children, children who are violent in the schools, and when they actually did study the stress level of those kids, 40 per cent said they were sexually abused, 30 per cent poverty, 15 per cent physical abuse, 10 per cent neglect, 5 per cent verbal abuse. So if you are cursing your child and telling your child “you are ignorant”, that child will obviously have some level of stress, and, thankfully, the Ministry of Social Development has parenting classes and they are developing a policy. So things are being developed, so we have to be thankful about that. So Daphne Phillips’ study showed us that if we see a violent child in school we cannot judge that child. That child might be a child crying out for help. That child might be sexual abused at home. So I thank God that we have the Children’s Authority on board, and I also have to thank the Government for giving us an increase in penalties under the Children Act because we are seeing children being abused, we are seeing—our children are suffering.

So we need again to fund the Children’s Authority better. We need to have homes that we could rescue children, put them in safe places of love where we can rescue them and carry them there away from homes. If we cannot fix those homes, we can have homes developed where we can have hire retired principals, retired teachers, retired mental officers. Show those children love, give them attention, and those children, even if they are abused they can blossom out into the most

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productive individuals. I tell my children, look at Oprah Winfrey. At the age of 15 she was pregnant, raped by her uncle and she is one of the most successful women in America.

Hon. Senator: The richest.

Sen. Dr. V. Deyalsingh: Yes. And the thing is because her father took her and gave her that support after when she was pregnant. She got raped by her uncle. It is a horrendous story if you read her lifestyle. So children can be rescued. It is our duty to rescue them.

Even, I always say there was an ex-DPP, Aldric Benjamin, he was from St. Mary's Children Home. So you have success stories even within Trinidad that we could look at, but some of those homes are—we had some bad reports from some of these homes before. So whatever we are putting into place we have to monitor carefully: the right staff, no sort of paedophiles are there, because statistics show these people may gravitate to these homes. But we have to have homes where—I have plenty retired people, nurses, teachers, who said they are willing just for a stipend, just provide transport. They are willing to come on board to give of their love, to give of their teachings because they are bored home, and if we could have that system in place where we could take them to interact with these children in the homes, we will be doing a service both ways, for those retirees and also for the children.

Again, children need playtime and my suggestion has always been the last hour of school just put it at playtime. Let the children run, scream, whatever, let them just play, but under guidance. Let us hire some OJT personnel. The OJT personnel will want jobs, so hire them. The teachers could be in their staff room, but the OJT personnel are looking at these kids playing, how they interact, how

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they socialize, and if you see somebody withdrawn or somebody normally aggressive, student support services can come on. So we can now capture our children who may be adults, who will be dysfunctional, who may be children who really need help from what is going on at the home. And so, screening scales and suggestions like this I think we can help there.

But you see it hurt me to say we have such an education system, but it really hurt me to see the scenario recently in the University of the West Indies where there was the raucous with the police and the students. You know, I was so proud just recently when the University of the West Indies was ranked in the top 5 per cent universities in the world. This is something that made me proud as a Trinidadian, and for those who went to the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, I am sure you are proud, but I am three times as proud because I went to Cave Hill in Barbados for a year and then I studied medicine four years in Mona, and then in St. Augustine for a year. So I was actually fortunate to see the best of the whole Caribbean and the best of the University of the West Indies, and I am thinking—while I still—I have a colleague right now, he is so proud. He says, “I went to Oxford”. I can tell him now, “Hey, I went to the University of the West Indies” because we are among the top 5 per cent in the world.

What we need to do though is we need to look at this to see if we can now capture a market out there to come for educational tourism, because if we are among the top 5 per cent somehow we have to tap into that market now. We have to say, “Come here and study at the University of the West Indies. We are among the top 5 per cent. You will feel good after you come from this university.” So we have to capture into that market, educational tourism. Medical students have come to our medical shores, so we now have to go widespread with that, but you see

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what may prevent people from coming here is crime. We have to appreciate that, what may prevent.

And touching on education or educational tourism, we also have to look at the fact that the Brian Lara Stadium was fixed recently and we had the games there, the 2020 games, but then again—you know I met a British national recently and he said if Trinidad was safer he would have allowed children to come—he is a schoolteacher—from Britain to Trinidad to learn under the master. So we have sports tourism waiting here.

When it is winter in England and it is cold and they want to get away from that, come to sunny Trinidad, learn after the master. Brian Lara's name in London invokes such emotion to people. When you see that you will realize they would come here if we give them an opportunity to say we giving you a safe environment, a sporting academy, you learn under the master. Dwight Yorke, when you hear his name sometimes among the persons in Europe who love football, these are people who are respected outside and we have to utilize that in sports tourism. Keshorn should be teaching people how to throw the javelin here. So 20/20 matches, again, could be a fixture to our shores, could give us that level, but I think we can go more and we have to market our sporting heroes and market it in such a way that people will want to come down here.

Now, again tourism. We have to stimulate the economy in such a way because with the hard times—but I always wonder why tourism failed, because Trinidad had—Tobago especially was such a beautiful destination, but now we find people rather go to Grenada, they rather go to St. Lucia. So we have to get back the persons to come to Tobago. I do not know if Sandals is the answer because the Magdalena Grand was there. We saw it was brought over from Hilton,

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and the money pumped into it, with all the same talk that, hey, we are putting money into this hotel and it is going to boost tourism, it never materialized. So, are we going to see the same thing with Sandals? I do not know, but I guess Sandals may stimulate the Tobago economy by providing jobs. So I am seeing an effect there, but again, will it in the long run bring tourists to our nation? I am not too sure.

We have in Trinidad so many festivities: Divali, Phagwa. We have Emancipation Day where you can get the African diaspora, their wear, their eats, their meals, everything there. We have to market Trinidad as a nation of festivals where you can come in, but again, crime is the issue. So let us see if crime is the issue, how are we going to help the situation with crime? And this I think is a challenge facing all of us; a major challenge facing all of us. My colleague mentioned the appointment of the Commissioner of Police (COP), which is, to me, a brilliant thing that was done by your Government, because for years we were wondering why persons could not just appoint a Commissioner of Police. That gives us a level that things are being done, that gives us a level that there is somebody new on the block, somebody who is not a police officer also. So I think—somehow that gives a positive vibes; what was done. And people missed out that we also got a Rear Admiral, Hayden Pritchard. We have a Rear Admiral. We did not have one for years. Kelshall was the last one. So our borders—by choosing people and putting people in positions, what you all have been showing people, probably our borders may be now on the way of locking down. So again, two appointments, I think, were very important.

Listening to the Minister of National Security, we heard the talk about upgrading the fire services, and we saw for the flood that “we really need” an

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upgrade for the fire services. The fact that good things happen—because we saw the automated immigration machines at the airport. So we are now looking First World. When you come in there and you can go to those automated machines it is something that can help you get through customs quicker, especially if you have little children. So those things are happening and those things we should be proud of.

The prison officers: I think the greatest threat to prison officers is a fellow prison officer. We know that. So that prison officer, a situation there, it is regrettable that you know you are putting your own colleague at risk, but you are willing to do these things. Now, I have always said there has to be raids in the prison. But how are you going to do these raids? You have to have persons from the Inter-Agency Task Force just come in there, wear a mask, go in there and raid the prison. Spot raids. So you are not even telling the prison officers. You just go in there and make raids. And somehow when you get those prison officers who are on duty, who somehow—you see things are getting in there, you take full brunt of the law, take full action on these persons.

So you have the point of CCTV cameras and this is something that I think I was always disappointed about. We have these cameras all over Trinidad, yet still we see crimes are committed and we are not able to track the criminals, and not able to apprehend the criminals. People's cars are getting stolen in Trincity Mall; the cars on the highway. They are calling—how could we track that? I think this is a challenge that we need to try to see how we could work with the Government, the population, civic society, to see how we could get those cameras going, plus how we could get the cameras in such a way without the privacy issue being affected. If a crime is committed I should be able to get access to that camera. Those crimes,

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or whoever criminals going on the highway, driving in any area, shots of those could be on all the billboards that we see there, the electronic billboards, all in our WhatsApp groups. So there is an easy way to get those CCTV cameras working and to let it help the population.

We say we are in the jaws of the Chinese in terms of debt and all the money they have. They are coming in here. They are going to look at the harbour, they are going to do some things, and I am thinking we could probably ask China also to help us set up the camera system because they have something called a camera system there, similar to the one that exist in London, but their own is far superior. Every street—they can track someone. They can see somebody in a crowd and they can have a tracking of that individual and know who that individual is. So people may look at privacy issues, people may look at the issues of it being in the hands of people who could track certain individuals, but I am saying if we are dealing with criminals now we have to put things in place where we can have things there, we can apprehend these criminals.

I welcome the national fusion centre that the Minister spoke about and I also hope that we get some sort of relief with this. And again something I want to commend the Government on, the fact that they want to bring the Tasers, pepper spray, rubber bullets. When they killed two mentally ill patients within the last five years I was asked to comment on it, and I am saying to apprehend a mentally ill patient police officers may not know how to do it. They may have to have a team involved with mental health officers. Mental health illness is going to get worse, so this problem is going to increase where police officers will be having to interact with mentally ill persons. So therefore, the Tasers, pepper spray, rubber bullets could help save the lives. So that is an excellent suggestion.

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Now, we have to fix crime. If the Commissioner of Police said that a cartel exists in the police service, then for me to see something being done about crime I would like to see that the police services are cleaned up a bit. I would like to see something is being done there. We always knew that the police service had rotten eggs. The late Prime Minister Patrick Manning brought in the Scotland Yard, then we had the ex-Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar try with the Canadian police, and you know we have now a situation where if there is a cartel existing my suggestion here is bring in the DEA. Ask the DEA to come and assist us, because you see if we continue like this I do not know where the relief will be for citizens. I also suggest that police officers and prison officers declare their assets to the Integrity Commission, because the uncertain—we have to look at the laws for that. How could they declare their assets to the Integrity Commission? Because we know there may be corrupt officers out there and we have to have some way of trying to clue in on them.

So again, the fact of drugs in the country, and I am suggesting the DEA because you see it is frustrating to doctors in St. Ann's Hospital, and other hospitals, to bring in people who are on the streets, the "sprangers" that you call them, the drug addicts. Bring them into St. Ann's, you detoxify them, get the drugs out of the system. They do not want to go to the free Government service that is offered. Caura is a free rehab centre, and the majority of those people we treat for drugs they do not want to go. It is a voluntary system, so how could we now solve this? We call it a revolving door admission because we know we are going to see the same chap come three months down the line. But society is fed up of these "sprangers" jumping on their walls, stealing their hoses, interfering, digging up in the garbage.

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We have to produce something to help, be it a law where we could now have the legal service create a law where we can take somebody with drugs, put them in a rehab forcefully and say you have to stay there for a year. It will give some sort of social ease to the population outside who are fed up with them, and even the families who cannot force them into treatment. So we have to get that law where we could take them into some sort of rehab, planning, yoga, but whatever we do we will be giving some level of ease to the population who have to deal with those people outside. Plus we will be drying up the market for those persons who sell these drugs.

Looking at the agriculture sector, I was pleased when I heard your contribution, Mr. Singh, and again we realized that—

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

1.00 p.m.

Sen. Dr. V. Deyalsingh: Okay, sure—15 per cent, last year, you know, we saw that those mega farms, in the past, what happened to them We had grandiose plans, good news about the subsidies but we need, again, to encouraging the grow box and the aqua-farming to ordinary persons who can do it. We need to encourage that to a greater extent. We also have to factor in the damage to the environment caused by Gramoxone. Being in the medical profession, I had called for the Gramoxone ban years ago because this, when it is used for suicide, it is fatal. So somehow we have to look at safer measures. We have to look at some good things that are being done in agriculture. Again, the farmers' market and even, you know, there are the farmers' courses that are being done.

Looking at the Ministry of Health, we are still challenged with staff shortages, infrastructure that needs fixing. Again, with this current flood, we lack

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something called psychological first aid where we should have had persons at each shelter dealing with that because we are going to have a fallout from this flood. We are going to have post-traumatic stress, I could foresee it. Good news, we are opening health centres for 24 hours. Great news, the HPV vaccine is offered from the Government free of charge and this vaccine could potentially get rid of cancer of the cervix in the next 30 years if we aggressively pursue this vaccine.

Alcohol is something—I think we have to look at alcohol because the WHO report 2018, September 21st, states that 3 million people die from harmful alcohol use; and we are ranked as one of the five countries with the highest rate of harmful alcohol consumption in the Americas. [*Interruption*] Yeah. So therefore, I think we need to realize we should raise the purchase age of alcohol to 21. America has it. Their voting age is 18 but purchase age is 21. We may have to look at that somehow and consider this. But the Ministry of Health is now—they have an alcohol policy so we have to look at that policy.

Gambling is something I think is an ill but, you know, because we are losing—there are gambling machines in all the rum shops now, there are gambling machines in restaurants, any little parlours but there is the gambling Act coming up soon.

Ministry of Health has helped with communicable diseases. Maternal mortality, we are conquering that. Hardly any maternal deaths are occurring so that is “ah big up” for that. The fact that soft drinks in schools is a no-no—again, beautiful things are happening there.

Sen. Le Hunte mentioned about the fact that the lines, the water lines need repairing, but put into place something for the citizens where I can call and get truck-borne water. Put into place something for the citizens where you can give me

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a tank. Give me a tank; that should be a drive, you know. Give tanks to people who cannot even afford but have a good truck-borne water supply system to give some relief.

Life expectancy is increasing. We have 17.5 per cent of population will be over 60 years soon, so therefore we are an ageing population. So we have took into account that, “hey, you politicians, this is ah voting block”. You know, “if is ah voting block fuh you”, that may motivate politicians to do something for this elderly population. Because we have old ladies at home, husbands have died and their children have moved on, emptiness syndrome, they are depressed. We have to have policies in place and there is a great policy directive from the Director of Ageing in the Social Development. We need to prop up Dr. Jennifer Rouse with her policies and we need to get things for our ageing population.

So as I end, I want to say that this flood, I saw citizens banding together and I felt proud that in times of crisis, they can come together. In 1952, there was an experiment, a psychological experiment called Robbers Cave experiment where Dr. Muzafer Sherif got groups of children together in a camp and he actually caused them to have conflict. But afterwards, when he put them to do a common goal like a fallen tree in blocking the entrance or to push a lorry, those children who had that conflict and that disparity and that disagreement, the 12-year-old kids, 11 here and 11 there, were able to work together and that experiment showed—it is called the Realistic Conflict Theory. But what it showed is that at times of crisis, people can work together. So therefore, that experiment, I think, you know, in conclusion, that we have a lot of the unsung heroes that we saw coming out and crying, and I think—okay. A lot of unsung heroes coming out and assisting. People of all—

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Madam President: I apologize but your time is up. Hon. Senators, permit me on your behalf and on my behalf to commend Sen. Deyalsingh on his maiden contribution. [*Desk thumping*] Hon. Senators, at this juncture, we will suspend for lunch and we will return at five minutes past two.

1.05 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

2.05 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

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

Mr. Vice-President: The Minister of Education.

The Minister of Education (Hon. Anthony Garcia): Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. I must express my thanks to all those who have made it possible for me to address this honourable Chamber today on this very important occasion. I want, first of all, to thank the Minister of Finance for the time that he took in ensuring that we had a budget that was first class. [*Desk thumping*] I wish to thank our Prime Minister and our Minister of Planning and Development for assisting in the preparation of the budget and all the inputs that all the Ministers and all the Senators have put into a first-class budget; I want to thank you very much.

Mr. Vice-President, this morning I sat in this Chamber for a few minutes and I was amazed by the remarks that were made by the good Sen. Khadijah Ameen. However, Sen. Rambharat, in my view, dealt with her very well and, therefore, it does not give me any opportunity or any cause to respond to most of the things that she said.

That being so, I want to take the opportunity to thank all those teachers and all those principals, all those parents and all those students who form part of the education system for the support that they have given in this time of need. In particular, Mr. Vice-President, there are schools that were used as emergency

shelters and I want to thank the school authorities for allowing those schools and for opening those schools to those persons who have been dispossessed.

In addition, I want to thank the parents for their patience in ensuring that in spite of the fact that their children might not be able to have attended school today, and perhaps tomorrow, that they have been patient and they have been very supportive where this is concerned. And therefore, Mr. Vice-President, as we move forward, I am pleased to deliver on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, this contribution as it relates to education.

As we know, the Ministry of Education is, indeed, a mega Ministry; it is the amalgamation of two Ministries: the former Ministry of Tertiary Education and the Ministry of Education, and with that comes a number of challenges. But I am pleased to say that, by and large, we at the Ministry of Education have been able to overcome most of those challenges. In fact, when we look at our achievements over the last year and perhaps over the last three years, we can see quite clearly that we have been able to achieve tremendous gains.

Before I go into this, I would like to say that over the last year in particular, our focus at the Ministry of Education was in three major areas and in other areas that supported that focus. That focus really paid attention to access, ensuring that our students have access to an education. The other focus was in the area of equity where every child of school age will have an equal opportunity of being educated. Again, later on in my contribution, I will go into this in a little more detail.

And thirdly, in the area of quality education. We, at the Ministry of Education, have a mandate to ensure that in our school system, throughout the system—at the early childhood level, at the primary level, at the secondary level and at the tertiary level, we provide a quality education that is second to none. I am

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sure persons will agree with me when I say that over the last year and perhaps, as I said before, over the last three years, we have succeeded to a large extent in meeting these goals.

When we look at our sectors, for example, in 2017/2018, fiscal 2017/2018, the education sector in Trinidad and Tobago produced the best academic performance over the past 10 years. Let me repeat this, we were able to produce the best academic performance by our students over the last 10 years. [*Desk thumping*] When we looked at the SEA exam, one student achieved a perfect score. In every subject he wrote, he achieved a perfect score. That is a tribute to the work that the parents have put in, and more so the work that the teachers have put in from level one, Infants, right on to Standard 5 and most of our students in those schools have been able to do exceedingly well. Although we are still concerned over the fact that too many of our students scored less than 30 per cent, but we are going to correct this. In fact, we have put things in place to correct this, and again, I will deal with this later on.

At the CSEC level, Mr. Vice-President, over 60 per cent of our students attained five or more subject passes and that is tremendous. Over 60 per cent of students who wrote the CSEC examination, in 2018, were able to succeed in gaining five or more passes. That has never happened in Trinidad and Tobago before this. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, at the level of CAPE, where our sixth-form students write the exams, 95.1 per cent of our students who wrote the exams achieved passing grades; 95.1 per cent, almost all those students who presented themselves for that exam were able to achieve a passing grade. As we break it down to Grades 1, 2 and 3, 73.86 per cent of our students were high performers, achieving passing

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grades at Levels I, II and III. That, indeed, is commendable and that is an indication of the tremendous work that is being done in our schools, by our teachers, having the support of our parents. And in spite of the fact that there are so many persons who would jump at every opportunity to point fingers and criticize our education system, I stand here very proud to say that our education system in Trinidad and Tobago is producing fruit, good fruits. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, over the last year, the Ministry of Education was involved in a number of initiatives to ensure that there was good governance and value for money. We must all recognize that our country was experiencing some financial challenges and every Ministry, every Government Department had a responsibility to ensure that whatever money that is expended, that there is value for that money. In the education sector, we were adamant that every cent that is spent in every area of our operations, that money must be well spent and there must be value for that money.

Let us look at the School Feeding Programme. It is referred to as the National School Dietary Services Limited. In this programme, the Ministry of Education, through the School Feeding Programme, provides approximately 52 breakfast meals daily and approximately 83 lunches daily. But we had some concerns and those concerns were brought to our attention not only by our teachers, by our supervisors, by our parents, but even by the caterers themselves. Because it was found too often a large number of those meals were wasted, they were not consumed; and in fact, some of the caterers were telling us that they were catering for a number of meals that were not used.

The Ministry of Education appointed a committee to look at the School Feeding Programme and to see what can be done to ensure that the wastage is

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curtailed and also to ensure that the meals that are provided to our children on a daily basis are of high quality. That committee had, as its representatives, persons from all our stakeholders: the Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers Association, the National Parent Teacher Association, the Ministry of Education personnel and others. And what we have found, exactly what we were told, that on a daily basis more than 6,000 meals were wasted and, therefore, we had to streamline the operations of the School Feeding Programme. This has resulted in cost savings of \$5 million.

There was also some controversy with respect to the school transport service that was provided by our maxi-taxi drivers and of course, the population is aware of some of the protest action that was embarked upon by the maxi-taxi drivers because they were saying that they were not paid on time. I had the opportunity to make the point that I agree that if somebody does a job, that person has a responsibility to do the job well but also that that person has an expectation to be paid. But the reason why there was that delay, it was simply because we needed to look at school transport system carefully.

Again, we formed another committee because we did not want to take any action. We did not want to do things without the necessary consultation and what we have found was that there was an excessive amount of money that was being paid for this service. I am not saying at this point there was any fraudulent activity. What I am saying is that the checks and balances were not done. Therefore, what we are able to achieve, again, was tremendous savings because we were able to streamline the operations of the school maxi-taxi operations. And as a result, our students are now being transported to schools without any hassle. We have found that the system is working well and therefore everyone is benefiting without any

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great deal of controversy again.

Mr. Vice-President, we looked, again, once more at the different sectors in our education. Let me spend some time to look at the different sectors in our education system. As we are all aware, we have the early childhood system; we have our primary system; we have our secondary system; and we have our tertiary education system. In the early childhood system, Mr. Vice-President, we want to ensure that all our children, between the ages of three and five, have access to ECCE training. We have to ensure that once they have that access, that the centres themselves are adequately staffed and training is done by persons who are appropriately qualified and experienced.

In this regard, the Ministry of Education has decided that all our teachers and our providers at the ECCE centres are professionally and adequately trained. And towards this end, we have succeeded in upgrading a large number of our teachers to make sure that our centres are adequately staffed. In these schools or in the centres, we want to ensure that our staff, as a result of their training, are able to identify developmental milestones and also to identify delays in children's development and once these have been identified, then those children can be referred for alternative treatment once it is needed. Our teachers, therefore, are carefully observing the progress of our children so that they will be able to develop to their full potential.

Let me spend just a few minutes on our primary schools. One of the concerns that I had when I assumed the position as the Minister of Education was the fact that a child having spent seven years in the primary school from Infant 1 right down to Standard 5 could not read, could not write, could not deal competently with numbers. I just could not understand why it is after seven years

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that some of our children were performing so badly. In fact, when I looked at some of the reports that I received, written by children, in many cases, some of those children could not even string two words together to form a proper sentence and that was of great concern to me.

At the level of the Ministry of Education, therefore, we decided that something had to be done about this; that there must be some value that our students would be able to achieve after spending seven years in a primary school, but we recognized that in order for our children to benefit, we must have all components put together. One of those components was the training of our teachers. We wanted to make sure that our teachers are adequately trained and as a result, we were able over the last year to train 839 teachers of Standard 5 and 985 teachers of Standard 4. We were able to train 241 teachers of Form I—those students who would leave Standard 5 and go to Form 1 of the secondary schools—to deal with literacy assessments and we were able to identify 1,517 students who were diagnosed for intervention strategies to improve their performance in literacy.

In the area of numeracy, we are ensuring that our curriculum officers would visit the schools on a regular basis so that they can provide the training and the support and guidance to our teachers so that our teachers themselves will be able to impart the necessary knowledge to our children.

One of the things that I am very happy about is the fact that we have been able to achieve tremendous improvement in the handwriting of our children. Of course, we are in the digital age. Every child now, regardless of whether he is four or five or six, seems to be competent in the use of the computer. Every child now wants to communicate with each other through Facebook or through text messages or through WhatsApp messages. And because of this, we found that handwriting in

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our schools was something that was not being taught and was not being taught adequately. We decided that we were going to embark on a project that involved all our primary school children from Infants right on to Standard 5 where we are going to ensure that the proper handwriting skills are taught, and the programme that we embarked on was called “Write From The Start”, W-R-I-T-E From The Start.

I am pleased to say that in most, if not all of our primary schools, a greater attention is being paid to handwriting skills, to penmanship, and a Teacher’s Guide was prepared and is currently being used in all schools. So that our students would be able to form and formulate the letters and be able to write in such a way that people can understand. I am sure there are lots of us who, on reading or on attempting to read, the writing of some people cannot decipher what is being written. We want to ensure that all our students, when they graduate from primary school and they move on to secondary school, that they have those basic handwriting skills.

In an effort to improve on the general performance of our students at the primary level, we have embarked, again, on a system that we refer to as the Student Monitoring System where we monitor the performance of our students, again, from level one right on to level five. In an effort for this to be done adequately, we have engaged the active support of school supervisors who will be meeting regularly with our school principals and providing the principals with the necessary support. In addition to this, we have engaged the performance or the assistance of our curriculum officers who would go into the schools and assist the teachers in the implementation of the curriculum. And as I have said on many occasions, this is not meant to be punitive, it is simply developmental.

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It is an avenue where our teachers can get the assistance of persons who are qualified in this area. Again, our curriculum officers, through this method of training and assisting our teachers, have been able to achieve quite a lot, so that the performance of our students is being improved day by day.

In the area of the secondary schools, we have recognized that there are a large number of our children who graduate from primary schools and enter into secondary schools without the necessary skills to cope with the secondary school curriculum. You know, some people would argue that not all children are suited for secondary education, but there are so many different views where this is concerned. Because it is a generally held view, that the movement from primary to secondary school is almost like a rite of passage, a puberty rite. But we want to make sure that those children, although many of them would be leaving our primary schools and not being fully equipped to deal with the curriculum offerings at the secondary level, that they are given the necessary support. And as a result, we have, in many instances, adapted the curriculum in the secondary schools at the Form 1 level, to suit the needs of those students. I can tell you, Mr. Vice-President, that that is working well. In fact, many principals have been speaking to me about it, and how happy they are that we have put this in place, because they are seeing the performance, the increase in the performance of their students, and that is something that we are very happy about.

Again, the system of clinical supervision that we have started in the primary school is extended to the secondary school, where our curriculum officers are offering a helping hand to our teachers in the secondary school, and again, as in the primary school, this is paying tremendous dividends.

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But as we come to terms with our offerings in the secondary sector, I want to let the population know of some of the innovations and some of the new subjects that we are offering at the level of CAPE. When those students enter Sixth Form to study for the CAPE exam, we want to ensure that the curriculum that is being offered is in keeping with our developmental needs. And as a result, we have offered, and we continue to offer in our secondary schools, some new subjects that our students are now being exposed to; subjects like: Logistics and the Supply Chain Management, Green Engineering, Entrepreneurship, Digital Media, Animation and Gaming Design, Agriculture and Tourism, and that is working very well in our secondary schools. Our children are adapting to this new curriculum and they are doing well in these subject areas. In fact, Mr. Vice-President, I wish to state that very soon national scholarship winners will be announced and I am sure the entire population is looking forward to this.

We have introduced a system that is a pilot project and it involves both our primary and our secondary schools in one specific area, and that is in the Laventille/Morvant area. It is referred to as the Laventille/Morvant Initiative, and this initiative is based on four major pillars. We have decided to use this as a pilot project in an area that seems to be deprived, so that we can give them, the children, an opportunity, every opportunity, to perform to the best of their ability so that they will not be left behind. The four major pillars upon which this project is based would be infrastructure and aesthetics; literacy and numeracy, we cannot forget that; parenting in education; and promoting discipline.

Mr. Vice-President, let me take one minute to focus on parenting and the support that we are having from our parents. This is an initiative that I am very proud of, because I am seeing the success almost on a daily basis. We have gauged

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the success of our students, through the performance and the support of our parents. The parents are holding hands with our students. They are helping our students. They are doing everything that they could to ensure that their students benefit from the type of education that we have to offer, and one of the results of this, Mr. Vice-President, is that in the Laventille/Morvant area, among the schools, there is a drastic decrease in violence and indiscipline in that area in the schools.

[Desk thumping]

As Minister of Education, Mr. Vice-President, when a principal wants to suspend a child, that principal has the facility of suspending the child for a maximum of seven days. That is in accordance with the law, the Education Act. But if, because of the severe nature of the infraction of the rules of the school and that principal wants to extend the suspension, the principal has to follow the procedure and he or she has to apply to the Minister of Education for an extension.

There was a time, when I first came into office, that the applications that came before me for extended suspension were very many. Today, we have had a dramatic reduction in the applications for extended suspension. But more than that, so far this term, I have seen just about two applications for extended suspensions coming from schools in the Laventille/Morvant area and that tells me of the success that we have been having in one of these components that is, promoting discipline. It is a project that a number of persons have been asking to be allowed in other schools or in other areas. In fact, in the other place, during the contribution of one of the Opposition Members, he was asking for this project to be implemented in schools in his area, just to show the success of this initiative.

Mr. Vice-President, I move on to the tertiary education sector. The changes made to GATE have been seamlessly implemented, and those who need funding,

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now have access to funding, and all the talk that we have had, all the negative talk that we have had about GATE, all those things have been buried in the past because our students are being allowed to get the type of education they want, and they are allowed the funding, once they qualify. Because of this, the Government has been able to save at least \$10.8 million through the means testing, because as you know before, there was a lot of wastage in that programme. And now that we have been able to streamline the programme, we have been able to achieve tremendous successes and tremendous savings.

You know, it is said in other quarters that because of GATE we have seen a decline in students' enrolment at the tertiary education institutions. At the level of the University of the West Indies, and the level of the University of Trinidad and Tobago, the principal and the president have told me that there has not been any reduction in the enrolment of our students. That just tells all of us that GATE is something that was long overdue but was needed. The streamlining of GATE was needed.

There are quite a number of tertiary education providers, and I just want to highlight some of the things that we have been doing in the tertiary education sector. For example at MIC, IT, we have had a number of initiatives that have been put in place that have resulted in tremendous successes. For example, we found that there were many pieces of school furniture strewn all over the schools, in some cases, it was called 'the Grave Yard' in some of our schools. We have engaged MIC in a school repair project, a school furniture repair project, that has been a tremendous success. In fact, MIC has been able to refurbish 3,579 pieces of furniture.

MIC has also engaged in a Master Craftsman programme and the Master

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Craftsman programme adopts a twin model approach in training. One aspect of it is being done in Trinidad and the other aspect of it is being done in Germany. Again, this provides tremendous success and tremendous opportunities for our students.

Trinidad and Tobago is the land of the steel band. It is here that our steel band was born and we have to make sure that we keep it alive, and as such, beginning in 2017, we had the reintroduction of the Pan Manufacturing Programme. The Pan Manufacturing Programme deals with the manufacturing of the pan and also the tuning of the steelpan. It is something that MIC is doing and is doing well. One student from MIC won the President's Medal for technical students or students who are engaged in tech-voc education, and his name is Kiellon Samsundar, and I wish to take the opportunity of congratulating him.

[Desk thumping]

Let us look at the National Training Agency. The National Training Agency has as one of its mandates, the promulgation of standards for technical and vocational educational and training.

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

Hon. A. Garcia: Thank you very much. It has been developing occupational standards and instructions and assessment materials that will facilitate the TVET programmes.

We have a number of our tertiary education institutions like COSTAATT and UTT, time just does not allow me to continue with it. But I can tell you our tertiary education providers are doing well. One of the things that we want to ensure is there is a streamlining of tech-voc offerings and the NTA is busily engaged in ensuring that our tech-voc offerings are streamlined.

Mr. Vice-President, it will be remiss of me not to spend just a few moments on

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what is being done in my constituency that I represent. It is because of the Arima constituency that I can stand before you today and, therefore, I cannot neglect what is being done. As representatives of constituencies, we have a right to interface and interact with our communities. I have been doing that. I have been meeting with our constituents. Every Wednesday after lunch, without fail, I meet with my constituents and sometimes I meet with 40 and 50 constituents on an evening, listening to their problems, providing advice, and seeing what I can do to make their lot even better.

I have also been engaged in a number of walks throughout the constituency and because of this I have been able to make representation to other Ministries to ensure that some of the facilities that are required are presented to them. The Arima constituency comprises of a number of other communities and there are some rural areas in the Arima constituency that we must pay attention to, for example: Blanchisseuse, La Fillette, Morne La Croix, Brasso Seco, Paria, Aripo, just to name a few. And I have been spending a lot of time in these areas and we have been seeing some fruits to our labour. In fact, the La Fillette bridge is now being constructed by the Ministry of Works and Transport and that will provide tremendous relief for our people and our commuters. The Blanchisseuse Community Centre has been completely refurbished, so too the La Fillette Community Centre. In Aripo, we are soon to rehabilitate the road, the access road from the Eastern Main Road right onto Aripo, so that our residents there, particularly the farmers in that area, it would be much easier for them to move to and fro.

Mr. Vice-President, I want to thank my constituents for their support and all that they have done to ensure that they are able to benefit from what this Government

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has to offer. I want to thank the officers in the Ministry of Education. I want to particularly thank our Chief Education Officer who has stood by me side by side in everything that we plan in Education. I want to thank our Permanent Secretary. And there is one group of officers in the Ministry of Education that I would want to point out and that is our communications department. I meet with them every day and they provide me with guidance, and I want to—everyday at 8.00 a.m. every day, and they provide me with guidance—say thanks to all of you. [*Desk thumping*] I want to thank you for giving me this opportunity of addressing you today. Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Foster Cummings: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President, for the opportunity to make a short contribution to this budget debate for fiscal 2019. I wish to add and join with my colleagues in commending the Minister of Finance for what has been described by most as a “people’s budget”. I must also commend the hon. Prime Minister for his leadership in steering Trinidad and Tobago through turbulent times. He leads a team of Cabinet Ministers in managing our economy and our scarce resources during these difficult times, and is doing so in a manner that is focused on ensuring that all citizens are able to enjoy the best possible standard of living, given our circumstances.

Mr. Vice-President, I see we have some empty chairs opposite [*Crosstalk*] in the Opposition Benches. I miss my colleagues on the opposite side, because I had so much to tell them and so much to remind them about today. But alas they choose to play politics instead of attending to the business of the people. So much to remind them about how the Government that they belonged to during 2010—2015, mismanaged and messed up our economy, by wastage, mismanagement, overspending and what I refer to as the “box drain syndrome” of syphoning funds

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from the Treasury through the pretext and pretense of building box drains, some of which, if they were properly constructed, we may not have seen some of the disaster that fell over the last week.

I wanted to remind them of how they busted the overdraft although they had the largest budgets ever in Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Vice-President. I did plan to remind my colleagues who have exited the Chamber, “duck and run”, in the face of the people’s business being at hand to attend to.

I had planned to remind them, Mr. Vice-President, about the \$1 billion wastage at the Beetham, through the company called SIS, and how they awarded the contract for over \$400 million more than the lowest bidder.

I had planned to remind my friends opposite who are now absent, that they moved the cost of an HDC house from \$350,000 to approximately \$1 million, outside of the reach of the average citizen who is supposed to benefit from low cost housing; and how they paid 200, almost \$200 million for a parcel of land that was really worth about \$5 million in Calcutta, Eden Gardens, although that area is surrounded, Mr. Vice-President, by vast amounts of lands owned by Caroni (1975) Limited, and which is available for housing. Why did they buy that piece of land for such an exaggerated sum? I had planned to ask my colleagues in the Opposition today. But alas, they have run out of the Chamber, unable to stand and do the people’s business.

So Mr. Vice-President, I think maybe, just as employers deduct from the wages of their employees when they do not show up to work, or when they absent themselves from work, if we have persons in this country who refuse to do their job, then maybe it is time in this Chamber that we cut the pay of those who do not appear to do the people’s business. [*Desk thumping*] Cut their time, is what I say,

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Mr. Vice-President. They are not on the job, you cannot get paid for not working. If you want a holiday, do not hide behind what has clearly been a catastrophe for a lot of citizens of this country. Do not hide behind that, so that you could break l'ecole biche from the job that you are supposed to be doing. That is what we did at school "long time". When you wanted a day from school, you ran away and made an excuse for your parents, and that is what I heard from Sen. Ameen earlier on in her contribution. "We will not stay and do the people's business." They will go and prefer to take part in a photo opportunity, because really, this Government and this party has been at work. [*Desk thumping*]

Over the weekend, massive mobilization by the Government. The Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts; the Minister of Works and Transport; the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government; the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries; the Minister of National Security; the Minister of Public Utilities; the Minister of Trade and Industry; the Minister of Housing and Urban Development; the Minister of Planning and Development; the Minister of Health; almost every single Member of the Keith Rowley administration was out there and working with those affected by the floods. [*Desk thumping*] MP Ancil Antoine, out in Caparo; MP for Sangre Grande, Glenda Jennings-Smith, out there on the field; in St. Helena, Sen. Avinash Singh, and Members of Parliament and Members of the Government out there treating with the persons affected by the floods.

And yet, in an effort to score cheap political points, my colleague, Sen. Ameen, will come into the Senate and avoid treating with the people's business as though—I mean, if you want a day off, there is a procedure for that. You approach the President of the Senate and you say I am ill or I have to be out of the country,

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or for some reason I am unable to fulfill my responsibilities according to my oath of office, and you get an excuse, and then something else is put in place. But you do not run away in an effort to grab a headline. I know what the intention is. The intention is to grab a headline, "Opposition walks out on debate to go and see about flood victims". But I want to tell the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, do not fall for that. The PNM cares about you. [*Desk thumping*].

Over the weekend, in addition to what the Members of the Government took part in, in assisting victims, the PNM party itself, organized an arrangement whereby, headed by our Public Relations Officer, Laurel Lezama and our Welfare Officer, Joycelyn Bodden; massive mobilization. Several of our volunteers coming out in the various communities, using our constituency offices as a hub for collecting from those businesses and individuals who wanted to donate items to the individuals who needed it most, going into the communities. It was not necessary to have a camera to go and boast about what we did and what we did not do. You did what you had to do. And it is not necessary, when you help someone who is under that kind of difficulty, to broadcast it and post it on Facebook. [*Desk thumping*]

[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

Madam President, when the country is under pressure and you have to manage an economy that requires some sacrifice and adjustments, and you know, if it was as a result of just other circumstances around the globe, one could understand that. But we are where we are today, because in 2010, a group of individuals were elected to Government and they just were not prepared for the job, just as they are not prepared for the job of Opposition right now. Incompetent in Government, incompetent in Opposition. [*Desk thumping*] That is what is the UNC today; just

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an incompetent group of individuals. No matter where you place them, they are unable to properly contribute to the development of Trinidad and Tobago. They either mismanage in government or they are obstructionists when they are in Opposition.

And so, the PNM has had to take the country as a child neglected and abused, and place this country on a footing of development and progress. The PNM cares about you. The PNM has always sought to ensure, Madam President, that we take care of our citizens and they are afforded the best standard of life possible.

In the budget presentation, which not a single Member on the other side—and I mean Members of the Opposition, took time to go into the provisions of the budget. They spoke about every possible thing, but they did not take time to pay attention to what provisions there were in this budget. And I pay attention to the *Express* newspaper, Thursday, October the 4th, I think it was, an Article by Dr. Winford James, and if you would allow me, Madam President, I would just read a few lines. He starts by saying:

“The Rowley Administration has managed to compose one of the more positive budgets I have seen in some time...”

[*Desk thumping*] And that is what this Government is about. We went through some hard times and now we are at a point of turnaround. The PNM therefore, has always looked after the elderly in our society. We wish that the elderly in our society live with a level of dignity, Madam President. It is reflected in the budget as we seek to deal with a situation where, upon retirement many of our public officers had to wait for long periods for the final computation of their benefits.

And to deal with this, Madam President, understanding the hardship and those retired officers would face, the Government has decided, upon retirement, to pay to

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these officers, a sum of \$3,500 monthly, until their pension issues are settled and ready for payment. This measure will take effect from January 2019, Madam President. And while that is taking place, the Government will work towards improving the efficiency of the current pension system. That is a Government that cares about the people Trinidad and Tobago, Madam President.

3.00p.m.

The cap on the Senior Citizens' Pension will be increased to \$6,000, thereby allowing persons who receive a pension from NIS and who are in receipt of the Senior Citizens' Grant, to now have additional income available to them, up to the cap of \$6,000, and this measure will take effect also from January 2019.

Then we have the question of rural communities and health care, and this caring PNM Government has decided that as an initial measure, the health centres of Grande Riviere, Blanchisseuse and Cedros will remain open on a 24-hour basis, seven days a week, to facilitate health care to the rural communities and to those in need of health care in those districts. That is a government that cares about the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, we move to the issue of the food card. This budget proposes an increase in the value of the existing food cards, effective January 2019 as follows: households with one to three persons, from \$410 per month to \$510 per month; households with four to five persons, from \$550 per month to \$650 per month, and households with six or more persons, from \$700 per month to \$800 per month.

You would be alarmed to note that this programme of the food card had within its process some 18,000 recipients who, after advertising and asking these individuals to come in and to take part in a process of evaluation, that after that

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evaluation exercise, 18,000 ineligible individuals had to be removed from the programme. What does that mean? It means that during the period 2010—2015, a number of citizens ranging in the thousands were benefiting from this food card programme when they did not qualify to benefit from it. Wanton abuse, and waste and mismanagement, UNC style.

This very programme I recall, during two elections, one in Tobago and one in St. Joseph, where food cards were just distributed without any process, out of the car trunks of politicians. I saw it myself in Tobago. When there was an election in Tobago, which I am usually involved in, and persons from the Opposition coming into Tobago to campaign, and the food cards were just distributed as though it was available to everybody. We have now restructured that and tightened up that loophole.

Madam President, the Disability Grant—the age of eligibility for the Disability Grant will be removed so as to allow disabled children under the age of 18 to access the grant. Payments under the Special Child Grant and the Public Assistance Grant will cease, and recipients will be able to access an increased monthly grant of \$1,500 under the Disability Grant. There will also be an increase in the Disability Grant for those 18 years and older, from \$1,800 to \$2,000. This measure will also take effect from the 1st of January, 2019. That is a government that cares for the people.

It is proposed that the Public Assistance Grant be increased by \$150, effective the 1st of January, 2019, as follows: one person, from \$1,150 to \$1,300; two persons, from \$1,400 to \$1,550; three persons, from \$1,600 to \$1,750, and four persons or more, from \$1,750 to \$1,900. That is the caring PNM Government at work, and nothing the UNC says is going to change that. The PNM is the only

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Government, while running this country, has the poor people at heart. We are not concerned about siphoning money out of the Treasury to enrich our friends. We are concerned about ensuring that the funds that are earned by this country from the natural resources that we are blessed with, find its way down to those that are most in need of it. That is government PNM style; service delivery.

Madam President, it is well known that the housing programme in this country is spearheaded, formerly by the NHA and now the HDC, and that most of the developments in this country organized through this mechanism, were built by the People's National Movement. What happened, as I mentioned earlier, during the tenure of the UNC? What was supposed to be low-cost housing, designed to treat with persons who are vulnerable and unable to go on the open market to purchase a first-time home, moved, as I said earlier, from a high of \$350,000—the very same structure, three bedroom units, from 350,000, when the inputs into the construction, the price did not go up.

As a matter of fact, the price of steel and the price of cement decreased. The price of aggregate decreased, and in the face of that, the price of labour remained flat. So no increase in labour, no increase in material, but yet the cost of a unit, moving almost triple times what it cost to build under the People's National Movement. What can account for that? There can only be one thing that would account for that, and it is the big “C” corruption—corruption.

The very house, in the face of now the steel price higher than it was then, in the face of aggregate prices now higher; cement price has dropped a bit, labour prices have gone up a bit—the very house, the price has now been halved. So the house that the UNC was constructing for \$1 million, the current Government is constructing the same unit at \$500,000 per unit. That is the PNM at work. [*Desk*

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thumping] That is what we need to pay attention to, not to run out of the Chamber every opportunity you get.

I mean, Oppositions across the world may use a walkout, and you know, I must advise my friends that whoever is giving political advice to them, they probably need to fire them. Because a walkout of Parliament is something rare. It is a rare opportunity; it is a rare mechanism that you would use to draw attention to a particular matter if you feel the Government is really badly performing. But if you do it every Monday morning just to grab a headline, it loses its steam. The public will see you for what you really are, abandoning the people's business. Madam President, it takes love to care and the PNM is a party full of love and caring, and that is why, when we are in Government, the people know that their business is in safe and capable hands.

And so, Madam President, in moving the programme of housing back to where it should be, persons who are most in need of these houses can now afford a mortgage payment, whereas when it moved to \$1million, immediately disqualified the most vulnerable in society.

Madam President, as the Government seeks to stabilize the country, as the Government seeks to move towards the turnaround of the economy required for the benefit of all our citizens, planting the necessary policies in place to make sure that Trinidad and Tobago moves towards developed status by 2030, we expect the very unpatriotic behaviour of the UNC to continue. But in spite of that, this Government, led by the hon. Prime Minister, Keith Christopher Rowley and his hardworking Cabinet, his very dedicated Minister of Finance and the Minister in the Ministry of Finance, have put together a budget that has been described, as I said, as the people's budget, that has been described by one spokesman as a "wow"

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budget, and I ask the citizens of this country to observe action instead of empty words from the Opposition, give the Government the support required to continue to develop this country to the benefit of each and every one of us, and I thank you for this opportunity to make this very short contribution to the budget. [*Desk thumping*]

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

Sen. Jennifer Raffoul: Thank you, Madam President, for the opportunity to speak. Colleagues, as always, it is an absolute honour and a privilege to be here on behalf of the population and I really cherish this opportunity and I thank you all for your attention. This is my fourth budget contribution now, so before this one I really thought, what do I want to say that I have not said in the past, because if I repeated what I said in the past I would bore myself to death and I think it would be disrespectful to you and to the country—and to not bring something new.

So what I wanted to do is just very briefly touch on some of the recommendations I made in the past, for the reason being that some of them are still quite relevant, given that the macro-fundamentals have not changed significantly, as well as to identify some issues that came about in this budget that I see as being possible risks to the population. As always, I try to be here in service and to keep my feedback technical and objective and to make sure it is depersonalized. So, if I do not like a particular policy or a suggestion, it is not about condemning a person or a party, but it is just about sticking to the facts and the data, and the objectivity.

My first budget contribution was 12 minutes. I am going to try and keep my contribution today in that, also to be respectful of everyone's time. What I wanted to start with is talking about three really progressive trends in the international

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economics field that I think are extremely promising and are opportunities for us in Trinidad and Tobago. So often we can repeat the same model and strategy over and over again and not see any change, but looking at some of the international trends, I think there are opportunities that are quite relevant to us. After that, I am going to, just quickly, look at some of the diagnostics, the Trinidad and Tobago economy, pinpoint some areas of concern and then my recommendations after that.

So starting with the international trends, there are three in this category. The first is international attention on climate change and how we need to adopt domestic policies internationally towards facilitating and preventing further climate change. The World Economic Forum Global Risks Report 2016, identified climate change as the number one global risk, ahead of other ones, including weapons of mass destruction, which came second; water crises, which was third; large-scale involuntary migration, which was fourth; and severe energy price shocks, which was fifth. Also, recently, the head of Goldman Sachs said that climate change is the largest threat to the global economy. How this could impact us here, is increased hurricane risk, increased forest fires. Water temperature can change which can also impact our coral reefs and our tourism potential in the very near future, and it also affects our soil temperature and soil conditions which affects our agriculture and our food sustainability.

Recently, California, which is, to my surprise I learned recently that it is the fifth—if it was a country and not a State, it would be the fifth largest economy in the entire world—California. They recently passed legislation to have all of their energy provided by renewable sources in the near future. And I identify this as an opportunity for Trinidad because we are currently experiencing a systemic risk whereby a large proportion of our economy is dependent on natural resource

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extraction, whereas the rest of the world is looking at adopting renewables. So the opportunity for us would be to look at fiscal incentives and tax incentives to stimulate a manufacturing sector here for renewable energy, specifically wind and solar. We do have in Trinidad and Tobago a lot of natural comparative advantages: our location and our history of industrialization and manufacturing. And there are opportunities, if we identify the right sectors and collaborate, this can be an opportunity for us.

The second global trend that I wanted to point to in economics is focusing on a broader range of statistical indicators other than GDP, so quality of life indicators. GDP is particularly problematic in energy-rich economies like ours because GDP can swing wildly, and that does not necessarily translate into revenue for us as a country. So, for example, if our debt was hypothetically \$80 billion and our GDP was \$80 billion, then we would have 100 per cent debt-to-GDP ratio. If GDP swings in the next year to \$100 billion just because of energy prices, and that does not necessarily translate to revenue for us, then our debt-to-GDP ratio would go to 80 per cent, from \$80 billion in debt to—my apologies. So in the first-case scenario, \$80 billion in debt compared to \$80 billion in GDP would be 100 per cent debt-to-GDP ratio. In the second scenario, you would have an 80 per cent debt-to-GDP ratio if the GDP increased to \$100 billion.

So in that sense, when we, as a country, frame our budget speech in such a way where we put this predominance on GDP, it is not particularly relevant to us to understand what is the impact on us for our country; what is the impact on quality of life and how do we go from there. A lot of the statistics that are presented, as well as in the IMF Reports, not just the Trinidad and Tobago budget, but a lot of the international statistics, use GDP as the denominator. So using

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statistics that are not particularly intuitive or relevant is not going to help us as a society when it comes to our diagnostics. [*Desk thumping*]

Thank you. So what other statistics are—so when it comes to macro-fundamentals, looking at revenue and expenditure and debt, are the pretty basic important ones. When it comes to quality of life, we actually did a really pioneering thing with *Vision 2020*, in 2002, and I did not realize that until doing my research for this contribution. Because in the past when I looked at *Vision 2020* and *Vision 2030*, it was a little bit convoluted, in my opinion. But in doing my research, I realized that we came up with *Vision 2020*, in 2002, which is right around the time the Millennium Development Goals were coming to fruition in 2000. So we were actually very much on par with identifying what is important to us as a society and what is our vision going forward. And I think that is actually very commendable.

I do think that some of the way that it is written, the draft *Vision 2030*, is a bit muddled, in the sense that it confuses goals with strategies. So knowing what we want to be as a society is different from how do we get there, and it also confuses inputs and outputs, and outcomes. So an outcome might be saying something like we have high literacy rates, whereas an input might be saying we spend \$200 million a year on literacy programmes. So an input is different from an output, and I did find, when reading it, that it was a little bit muddled.

But there was a great section in the *Vision 2030* where it compares our goals in that document to the Sustainable Development Goals, which is the [*Interruption*] international benchmark—exactly. And what I would recommend is that we use a mix of both documents: we use draft *Vision 2030* because it is something we can be proud of, but also we really focus on the goals and the

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indicators that are in the Sustainable Development Goals because they are so much easier to measure. The way *Vision 2030* is, it just makes it difficult and being a development practitioner I have spent many, many hours in meetings where we discussed the methodology and the statistics and not even the programmes. So we spend a lot of time identifying the methodology and not what to do with it or where to go from here. So having attention as a society and as a Parliament on our development indicators and not focusing on GDP, I think, is a global opportunity for us and making sure that we have a stronger attention towards the development indicators that are relevant to our well-being and not just GDP.

The third opportunity that I would like to point to, is a global attention towards innovating and adopting innovative financial instruments. So this, to me, is the most progressive and promising thing as an economist, and particularly as a Trinbagonian economist. I love my country with all of my heart, but I feel like our model for development has not taken us very far. It might have worked in past decades, but over the last 15 years or so, we have had economic stagnation, massive increase in deficits and debt and we have had social indicators, like a high crime and violence rate, and every time you turn on the TV you just see this outpouring of pain from our population. And we are addressing the macroeconomic fundamentals but our model of development is not really adequately addressing our social conditions, and other things like environmental conditions.

The innovative financial instruments are things like public-private partnerships and results-based financing. So results-based financing is a broad category of development for results, and social impact bonds are a subcategory of results-based financing. Results-based financing expanded to account for over

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\$20billion of international development financing in 2016. And according to Instiglio, which is an organization that pioneered results-based financing, the \$20billion is reflected in quite a few global programmes, like the World Bank's Programme for Results, which uses \$15billion worth of RBF funding to support over \$70billion of government programmes, and the United Kingdom's Girls' Education Challenge Fund has used results-based financing in 25 of its 37 education programmes that are, in total, worth £300 million. Also DFID, the Department for International Development, has announced that up to 30 per cent of its core funding to the UN Humanitarian and Development Agencies, will be disbursed to agencies that use targets similar to results-based financing.

So social impact bonds, green bonds, development impact bonds, they are referred to as innovative financial instruments because they are models for development that are innovative and they have effective contracting systems. So they are similar to PPPs, which is public-private partnerships, but in the environmental field or the social impact field; social development work. In that light, social impact bonds and other results-based funding mechanisms are risk-sharing agreements between public sector and private sector and they help transfer the risk from public sector to private sector. They utilize private sector funding which is extremely innovative and useful for us in a deficit situation, and the payment is conditional upon results. So there has to be an independent third party organization doing the impact analysis.

As I said, as an economist, I find this a fantastic opportunity for us as a country and as a region. There have not been any RBF deals yet in the Caribbean, but internationally, over \$20 billion as I said, has been directed through results-based financing agreements. An example for Trinidad and Tobago and how

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we could use these types of agreements is, they are particularly relevant in fields where we have a high expenditure but little output. So Trinidad and Tobago, we spend over four times the global average on crime and violence reduction programmes and we have not seen a lot of impact. That might have been fine when we were in a fiscal surplus situation, from the standpoint of just looking at fiscal sustainability, but when it comes to looking at the quality of life for our population and being in a deficit situation, it is really something for us to consider.

Madam President, can I ask you how much time I have left?

Madam President: You have until nine minutes to four.

Sen. J. Raffoul: Okay, thank you. So I wanted to be brief but I am spending more time than I expected to be, so I am going to try to summarize the rest of my contribution a bit more succinctly.

So in terms of the diagnostics for our economy—when I say, diagnostics, I mean what is the analysis; what are the numbers showing—we have had a deficit for nine years, from 2009 to the present, and a recession from 2015—2018. The terms are used interchangeably. A deficit refers to the revenue being less than the expenditure. So, 2009 was the first year that we had expenditure exceeding revenue. However, from 2009—2015, we had positive growth in revenues in every single one of those years. So, 2015 was when our recession started. So the recession is defined as a decline in growth. So, from 2015—2018 we had a decline; 2019, we are projected to have growth. The estimates vary from 1.8 per cent to 1.0 per cent, but either way it is still positive, and that is a positive sign for our economy.

The previous budget statements and this one have referred to the reason for the decline being because of trade shocks, meaning a decline of energy prices. But

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as an economist I do find that I have—I disagree with that diagnostic. The definition of a trade shock is an unexpected change in prices. So a shock is unexpected by definition. But we knew that prices were going to decline for quite some time. In 2008, we had the global financial crisis and in 2009, we had our first deficit. So in 2008, we had a massive windfall of \$56 billion in revenue and then 2009, we went back to the 2007 levels, around \$40 billion. But energy prices were predicted to continue to decrease, and yet, we were quite lucky in the sense that from 2009—2015, we still had positive growth year upon year, and energy prices recovered.

So if the issue is, we had a decline in energy prices and we had surpluses despite that, and we still went into deficit and we still went into debt, and we are still having a country that is experiencing so much pain and so much violence and so much loss and so much instability; what is the problem? As an economist, I think the problem is that our model for development has not changed. We keep trying to micromanage and we have a small country and a small public sector.

We have weak economic fundamentals and those cannot change overnight, so what do we do?

3.30 p.m.

We have done deficit financing to stabilize the economy, and I do think that that has actually been a very strong move. A lot of instability was expected over the last few years, and very little was felt. I think that is a commendable move, in the sense of having economic stability and making sure that unemployment remained quite high. We have only had very small numbers of unemployment, so I think that is a very commendable strategy. And as a citizen, I appreciate the

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stability we have had from the economic perspective.

The increases in crime and violence really alarm me and increases in pollution and other health indicators. I really strongly believe that having a stronger partnership with private sector, and with NGOs can improve the impact of public expenditure overall.

I have some brief indicators on public expenditure which I would like to relay. So, in 2005 and 2014, we had surveys of living conditions. The 2014 data was not published at length, parts of it were highlighted in the newspapers, but at length, it is not available. Other countries have surveys of living conditions every year. Trinidad, we have them on average once a decade, so it is not great for policymaking to be able to not have solid quality of live data that is reliable.

So the 2014 data on quality of life showed that we had a 16.6 per cent poverty rate. The 2014 data showed a 24.2 per cent poverty rate, that is a 50 per cent increase in poverty, but we had a massive increase in expenditure over that time, from \$37 billion in 2005 to \$61 billion in 2014. So, we had this massive increase in expenditure but still a large increase in property. But employment did not go down, according to the Central Bank, there were 47,000 new jobs created in that time. And we also have a high expenditure per capita on social services compared to global average, compared to the UN.

Back to that data also, the transfers and subsidies did not go down, they actually increased by \$7 billion over that time. So where did all that expenditure go in 2005 to 2014? The data seems to indicate that when money is not effectively spent it goes into imports. So rather than going into fuelling productive expenditure, it goes into imports. So, we do not have a reduction in poverty as we would expect to. [*Desk thumping*]

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According to the IMF, T&T has a very low fiscal multiplier, the value is 0.32. To translate what that means, the fiscal multiplier is a measure of how much money is circulated in the domestic economy when it is spent by the Government. And according to the IMF, only 32 per cent of Government's expenditure goes into nominal GDP in the following year, i.e. remains in the country and is recirculated back.

A United Nations study by UNEP (United Nations Environmental Programme), showed that we have 80 to 90 per cent leakage, meaning, 80 to 90 per cent of our fiscal expenditure goes into imports. The last study that I will refer to on this is the 2012 study by Dabla-Norris and others, and they said that 72.5 per cent of expenditure in Trinidad is not productive. So only 27.5 per cent of public expenditure is efficient, meaning that it leads to generating growth.

We also have a high debt-to-GDP ratio. As I said, I am not a huge fan of using GDP as the denominator for everything. That said, in this case, it is useful because there are some international standards when it comes to debt-to-GDP ratio, so our debt-to-GDP ratio is a bit arguable. The Ministry of Finance said it is around 63 per cent, if I remember correctly?

Hon. Senator: Sixty-one.

Sen. J. Raffoul: Sixty-one?

Hon. Senator: Yeah.

Sen. J. Raffoul: Okay, so 61 per cent. The studies show that over 56 per cent of the debt-to-GDP ratio, then there is a decline in productivity after that. So every additional dollar of debt has a negative effect on GDP because interest payments take up a considerable proportion of expenditure.

There was a study done by a Keyra Primus at the Central Bank, and she is

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now at the IMF, and the study was on the HSF, the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, and she found that about 80 per cent of our energy revenues are volatile and can swing from year to year. So she recommended that we save 80 per cent of our energy revenues in the HSF every year for the sake of stability and reducing that volatility.

Incidentally, 80 per cent was the decline in energy revenues that we experienced last year in terms of our budget now deficit, 80 per cent. And in her studies she also found that in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund only \$2.6 billion was actually saved, and the rest of the value in the fund was earned by the fund manager.

Some of the indicators that are relevant are on countercyclical financing. Trinidad and Tobago has had procyclical financing. I am going to just briefly explain why this is a problem and then come up with some recommendations for us as a country, because I do not want to just talk about problems. That would not be very productive. So the problems of pro-cyclical financing, what that means is, procyclical meaning, if we have a budget surplus we spend more. If we have a budget deficit, we spend less. It is intuitive to do such, but that leads to problems when it comes to economic management. So countercyclical financing is the opposite. Countercyclical means if we earn more we should save more, and if we earn less we should be spending more to stimulate the economy, so that would be countercyclical.

So, the problems with the procyclical policy fiscal policy is it amplifies the effect of oil price volatility on the economy. So it causes higher wages, inflation, a real appreciation of the exchange rates and it undermines competitiveness. It reduces long-term growth. It is negatively related to income levels. It crowds out

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private sector spending and investment, it leads to a decline in private sector output and employment. And recent World Bank study found that procyclicality is a major driver of volatility and vulnerability specific to the Caribbean region.

So the recommendation I have for that is that we legislate fiscal rules. Fiscal rules are rules that we as a Parliament agree to, that the objective is to have economic efficiency going forward and impact and value for money; fiscal rules, specifically including countercyclical financing.

Another recommendation due to this is on the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, and the recommendations is that we deposit, 80 per cent of our energy revenues into the HSF, and that we limit access to the HSF until fiscal rules are legislated and implemented. I think in a country like Trinidad and Tobago, which is so politically polarized, what we see year upon year is the two parties bashing each other and no efforts are made to actually improve an anti-corruption environment or an efficiency-for-money environment. [*Desk thumping*] So, if we want to stop doing that and stop boring the population from just hearing insults back and forth constantly across the two parties [*Desk thumping*] then let us start legislating fiscal rules. Fiscal rules are all about protecting the citizens and having value for money in our legislation.

So, I will wrap up quickly by talking about the other recommendations that I had. A diagnostic, I forgot to mention, is the major tax leakage. A recommendation ensuing from that is strengthening tax collection which is exactly what the Government is doing and I commend the Government for strengthening the transition from the Board of Inland Revenue to the Revenue Authority.

The values that have been mentioned range from \$12 billion to \$15 billion which was noted in last year's budget speech. This year it was \$10 billion. Other

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estimates are as high as \$25 billion. So, I think by strengthening that it can single-handedly address our deficit situation, as well as ensuring that there is equity in our society to make sure that we do not have the burden of the taxes falling upon the emolument income earners, that is, the salaried employees and allowing persons outside of that bracket to not pay. So, I think that is extremely commendable and as a citizen and a taxpayer I appreciate that very much.

Another short term—well an opportunity we have in the short term to cover the fiscal deficit is through looking at where we are sourcing our financing from. There is the NIF, which we are doing currently which is I might speak on it, depending on my time. I do not want to be disrespectful to everyone's time but I have some very strong opinions on the NIF.

But another opportunity we have is through the multilateral development banks, specifically the IDB and CAF. Having worked at the IDB before, I loved it, I was always really impressed that we had this opportunity that came from our Caribbean neighbours and our Latin American neighbours. It works like a cooperative for development, not like a traditional private sector entity, and any interest that is gained from partner countries goes back into revolving funds. The rates are extremely beneficial, like 2.9 per cent from CAF that we had discussed the last time. IDB, I think, might even be lower like 1 per cent to 2 per cent for specific instruments, not for all the instruments. This is for the policy-based loans, called PBLs for short. PBLs are usually budget support, meaning it is not for a specific project, but it is for funding the overall economic situation. So it is not project-related like a highway or a school, but it is to fund the overall budget.

The Latin American Development Bank can fund up to US \$300 million a year which is \$2 billion a year. The IDB had funds up to US \$1 billion in total

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available to us as a country US which is about TT \$7 billion, which is significant.

I have heard some criticisms towards the institutions saying that they have high consultancy fees for their consultants. Having worked there, I know that usually the consultant fees come from grants from the organization, not even from the loan resources to be paid back by the country. So, they are not even affecting us as a country, those consultancy fees, and they are competitive and quite reasonable, I think, and still bring down the cost of the overall project.

I would like to echo the recommendations made on strengthening the police service as an economic issue. I do not have any data on the impact of this, just anecdotal. I mean, I guess to a certain extent you can see that the global competitiveness rankings is data because the number one impediment to doing business in Trinidad, according to the perception of business done locally is crime and violence. Reasons numbered two through to five have to do deal with white collar crime and corruption. But the number one reason, impediments to doing business in Trinidad and Tobago identified by business persons here is crime and violence.

But in terms of anecdotal stories, the recent murder of the news-broadcaster last week in his front yard. Other persons would have told stories about not feeling a safety or protection when it comes to seeking that from the police service; not feeling guaranteed of that.

So many people have said in the last few months, that they always thought they would stay here and work here and serve their country and now they are so afraid for their lives and their safety that they are seriously contemplating migrating, if they have not already. I feel like every day I hear of another friend or family member that is migrating or seriously considering it. And I have to say, as a

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young person I do contemplate it myself, which is really a shame because to have one of the highest positions in the country and to still feel unsafe or to still think that I could actually have a better life outside, when I love my country, that is such a shame and I think that alone speak volumes.

Regarding the National Investment Fund, it is one of the concerns I have on our economy. We are increasing systemic risks to our economy by undergoing this debt issuance in this way. We are calling it a non-debt issuance but it is debt, and we are increasing the risk to our economy because now we have to pay back interest and it is comparably high interest at 4 per cent and up; that is pretty high.

Madam President: Sen. Raffoul, you have 5 more minutes.

Sen. J. Raffoul: Thank you. For me, my biggest concern with the NIF is not actually the numbers, but what it indicates; that we are not stepping away from micromanaging and we are not strengthening the private sector, we are controlling everything by the State. We only had one day notice when we had the debate on the NIF bonds, one day. And what came out in that debate and afterwards, because a lot did not even come out in the debate, what came out during the debate was that the NIF, the directors on the NIF institution are senior public servants in the Ministry of Finance. So where is the separation of powers? That does not make any sense to me.

Madam President: Sen. Raffoul, I reluctantly just want to point out to you that we had a full debate on this issue already. So even—you are making commentary, it is the budget, but just be reminded of that, that we are not going to reintroduce it as if we are debating it all over again. Okay?

Sen. J. Raffoul: Thank you, Madam President. I am guided. So, to wrap up that point, my issue is the fact that we are micromanaging and we are not selling the

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assets to empower the private sector, we are retaining those assets by the State. One comment was made during the debate which I would not go into.

Another concern I have as a citizen is the fact that we—in the budget document, we have six pillars that we are told to be proud of as a society: the economic transformation pillars. One of those is the energy deal with Venezuela, which has been accused of major humanitarian crimes against its population. As a citizen I feel quite concerned about that.

Us in Trinidad, we have been so lucky to have been welcomed by Trinidad. None of us have a right to be here, none of us were Arawak or Carib, none of us are indigenous. We all came here by some stroke of luck and we are embraced and welcomed and we had equal opportunity.

So for us to send Venezuelan asylum seekers back to Venezuela for sake of us doing an energy deal with their Government, that just makes me feel concerned that we do not have values as a nation, and that we are willing to compromise human rights of others, especially asylum seekers and to not have a justification for doing that, other than an energy deal and being able to gain from their gas resources. To me, we need to really reassess what are our ideals as a country, and what do we stand for when it comes to protection of international human rights.

I had a similar concern about China. The organization that we are building the port with has had multiple accusations of not doing business in a progressive, wholesome manner, and I think that is something we really need to reconsider.

I was told by someone in the private sector in shipping that private sector persons would have been happy to have done the deal, but they were never approached or they never had that level of discussion and dialogue with Government, and this person also said that they have never considered migrating

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before, but if this deal goes through they will migrate because of the various implications that could happen to our economy and potential instability.

So, I guess I ended on a really negative note, my apologies. I always try to be much more constructive, but I do feel as a citizen it is my duty to be objective and to be very straightforward with what I think are inherent risks to our economy. I do think we have opportunities and that is why started off with those opportunities first.

The main concern to me is the fact that we are not changing our model and our paradigm for development. And I think through continuation of what we are doing now, which I call survival mode, combined with taking a medium-term look at how to introduce innovative financial instruments like PPPs, like social impact bonds, like impact investing instruments, like fiscal incentives for social entrepreneurs, we can transform our economy. And I think the main thing to note is that I do feel a sense of hope, I do genuinely feel that we are all in this for the right reasons, we are all here to serve our country.

Madam President: Sen. Raffoul, your time is up.

Sen. J. Raffoul: Thank you all for your time.

The Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs and Minister in the Ministry of National Security (Sen. The Hon. Dennis Moses): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Madam President. I wish to add my voice to those of my colleagues on this side of the House in regard to the flooding, the expressions of empathy, detailing the commitment and the willingness of the Government to treat with the effects of the flooding.

Madam President, it is indeed with an enormous sense of the pride and satisfaction that I make this contribution to the debate on the national budget for

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the fiscal year 2018/2019. As the Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs, I make this rendition on behalf of the industrious staff members of the Ministry. Madam President, I thank them for their contribution.

My thanks and appreciation also go out to our Minister of Finance for both his masterly performance, his presentation of the budget and most importantly the content of the budget. The balanced approach and detailed prescriptions proposed to enhance and expedite our economic recovery from the recent financial travails faced by our country are sound and represent prudent fiscal governance.

Madam President, a properly targeted sensitive to the needs of our population, caring, realistic, analytical and visionary with a hold on the facts, our Minister of Finance has continued in the best tradition of outstanding leadership by the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*] A leadership that has served our beloved country well and moved us to a situation where a much appreciated quality of life is available.

Allow me, Madam President, to convey my thanks to the staff of the Ministry of Finance, the Minister of Planning and Development, as well as members of staff of that Ministry and others who would have contributed to the preparation of the budget, we really do owe them a debt of gratitude.

Madam President, our esteemed Prime Minister should be treasured, respected and supported in his earnest efforts to bring back sanity, propriety and sobriety to public life. [*Desk thumping*] The paradigm shift in governance and enormous benefits already in evidence are direct results of the work, the efforts of our Prime Minister. Always doggedly pursuing avenues to improve the welfare of citizens and the residents of our country. The Prime Minister is always on the job, even when he is not on the job. Abroad at international meetings at the highest

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levels, the surefootedness of our Prime Minister, his intellect, knowledge and eking out what is best for our country, continue to inspire me as I endeavour to make my contribution to the development of our country.

Needless to say, the Prime Minister's unmatched leadership is on display here at home. Let us be thankful that we have a Prime Minister in the person and calibre of Dr. Keith Rowley, at this time in the life of our [*Desk thumping*] republic to rescue our nation, its institutions, its Treasury and indeed its soul.

Madam President, I wish to publicly thank the Prime Minister for the opportunity to serve our country as the Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs and the Minister in the Ministry of National Security. Madam President, sometimes the wisdom in one's actions is not obvious or clear to all upfront. However, even at this stage, the improvements in the fundamentals of the economy in a relatively short period of time, three years, the disposition and will to take hard decisions for the good of the country by the Government, the multitude of well-thought out measures instituted and the resulting gains in the face of non-forfeiture and subterfuge by others, the policies elaborated to date and the concrete achievements to date do not seem to have dampened the rapacious quest of others, blockage and obstruction at all cost; but redemption is within reach. After all, right-thinking citizens and residents are in the majority in our country.

Madam President, national elections were held in our country about three years ago, the population decided to put the Opposition to work as the Opposition for five years in the first instance. The population is yet to have their trust justified. It is clear that the Opposition is not doing a good job at being the Opposition in Parliament. They have betrayed the trust vested in them, ignoring their role as the Opposition for five years, they keep calling for fresh national elections. They

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simply want to go against the wishes of the people expressed at the last general elections and with haste dive into the national Treasury once again. The Opposition does not, in the least, care for the population.

Madam President, the catastrophic consequences of the actions of the last Government continues to bedevil our efforts to improve the well-being of our people, the numbers and wastage remain fresh in our minds.

Madam President, my stewardship and the Ministry's stewardship, relative to the utilization of resources allocated to it is one that represents full value for money. Much of the allocation in favour of the Ministry for fiscal 2018/2019 amounting to \$260 million is consumed by personnel costs, mandatory contributions to regional and international organizations and costs related to rental and upkeep of buildings.

Madam President, protocol and consular services are an integral part of the Ministry's remit. Through the provision of such services, the Ministry addresses the needs of nationals, including Trinidad and Tobago diaspora who may encounter challenges of unforeseen circumstances in a foreign country.

As the host country, the 33 diplomatic missions, resident here in Port of Spain and 28 international organizations represented in our country here in Port of Spain as well, Trinidad and Tobago has certain obligations under the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. As such, the Ministry most recently held a meeting with diplomatic missions and international organizations based in Port of Spain on security matters. I wish to publicly thank the hon. Minister of National Security and the Commissioner of Police for their inputs and presence in ensuring the felt success as expressed by the targeted stakeholders.

The Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs also provides information on

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security, immigration and deportation issues. It treats with the victims of human trafficking, provides general guidance and social and cultural initiatives, and provides linkages to trade and investment sectors in our country and abroad. At its missions the Ministry continues to treat with applications for births, marriage, deaths and adoption certificates. Additionally, via the immigration services at our missions, passport and visa applications continue to be processed and emergency travel documents returned.

It would be recalled that in June 2017, the Ministry launched a promotion campaign for the registration system for nationals abroad. This system allows nationals who are abroad or who are going abroad to register details of their stay online. The Ministry can therefore thereafter, use this information to contract or provide assistance to nationals. I am therefore pleased to report, Madam President, that as of July of this year, 2018, there were 2,092 registered nationals, an increase over the figure I reported last year, when 1,669 persons were registered.

As an indication of the services provided to nationals and non-nationals of Trinidad and Tobago during the period January of this year to present, the Ministry authenticated 1,617 documents.

4.00 p.m.

Madam President, allow me to treat with the Caricom Single Market and Economy. We have a unit at the Ministry which processes applications for the certificate of recognition of Caribbean Community Skills and for the Right of Establishment for service providers. During the fiscal year under review, 142 skill certificates were issued to Caricom nationals; 240 certificates were issued to nationals of our country; 25 applications approved for the issuance of work permit exemptions under the Right of Establishment, and a further 26 applications for

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managerial, supervisory and technical staff under the Right of Establishment.

Madam President, the Ministry also interacts with and assists a number of foreign nationals resident here in our country and has responsibility for facilitating the appointment of Heads of Missions accredited to Trinidad and Tobago. To this end, the Ministry facilitated the presentation of letters of credence by newly appointed Heads of Missions of 17 countries, during the period under review. Confirmation, indeed, that the Government continues to relentlessly pursue its goal to deepen, strengthen and expand our relations with other countries.

Madam President, given our country's historic interest in oil, gas and related downstream industries, the Ministry has placed special emphasis on energy related matters in its engagement with foreign states in an effort to support local private sector and state enterprises. Consequently, our Ministry, that is, of Foreign and Caricom Affairs, collaborated with the Ministry of Energy and other national stakeholders to protect and safeguard our country's interest in oil. The Ministry was also very supportive in facilitating the official visit by our Prime Minister to Caracas, Venezuela in August of this year. The main purpose of that visit was the signing of the terms and conditions for an agreement in respect of the Dragon Gas Field project. [*Desk thumping*]

The Government of our country always recognizes that trade has been and continues to be an important driver of economic growth, poverty reduction and development, especially for our small island developing state. Accordingly, the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs has focused the energies of its missions, 18 of them, to capitalize on strategic locations and local partnerships to pursue trade and investment opportunities as Government's official policy framework realizes the importance of building and sustaining such partnerships.

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I would also like to mention that the broad catchment area and spheres of economic activity, and opportunity across cities to which they are accredited, our missions have embarked on various outreach programmes in different fields, whether cultural, business or agricultural. Thus, I am pleased to advise that an Inspector of Missions has recently been retained whose remit it will be to ensure optimal communication and policy coherence between our headquarters and our missions. The Ministry received foreign delegations from a number of countries to discuss bilateral matters and future collaborations between our country and those countries.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs collaborates with other Ministries of course and Government agencies in key areas. Among them are the Ministry of Education where we collaborated to facilitate a Spanish programme as a foreign language course offered by the Government of Colombia through its cooperation strategy with the Caribbean Basin. I am pleased to report that a total of 61 participants from different Ministries participated, who were beneficiaries of such a programme. I would also like to mention that the Government of Venezuela has offered such services and we are very appreciative of that gesture as well. Among those are facilitated through request for technical information or assistance from relevant line Ministries relative to participation in US-hosted seminars and conferences such as the International Law Enforcement Academy: Executive Policy and Development Symposium and Human Trafficking. That was held in Mexico in February of this year.

Madam President, we also, at the level of the Ministry, were supportive of the efforts of the Ministry of Trade in its missions, trade missions that is, to Costa Rica, Panama and Colombia, and needless to say, these efforts were targeted at

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exploring opportunities for greater trade and investment possibilities, of course in furtherance of facilitating local manufacturers entering into such markets. We are also, at the level of the Ministry, facilitated technical cooperation initiatives to other hemispheric partners such as Mexico and Argentina, and such efforts will have resulted in the participation of a number of nationals in our countries in events hosted in such countries.

Further in this year, 2017/2018 rather, a number of training programmes were offered by the Government of Chile through its Chilean International Corporation Agency for Development and likewise, Trinidad and Tobago would have benefited in a number of areas, primarily in the focus on human rights, seismology—given that countries experience such—disaster risk management, methodology and the linguistic field, teaching Spanish and public management.

With respect to bilateral initiatives further afield, we supported the visit of the hon. Prime Minister to another locale. This time to Beijing, People's Republic of China and that was a very successful five-day official visit. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed between both countries and the Government and the People's Republic of China on cooperation within the framework of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road initiative. Discussions were held on a number of key initiatives and a number of agreements were signed, one being in the economic and trade cooperation area, the other is human resources development cooperation and yet another, on strengthening cooperation field on medicine and health. Madam President, I shall also add that additional exchanges focused on the aviation industry, air transport rather, between Caribbean Airlines and Hainan Airlines for coaching arrangements; leasing of aircraft for renewal of the Caribbean Airlines fleet, and the expansion of logistical arrangements in

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Trinidad and Tobago.

With respect to trade and the business sector, Trinidad and Tobago and the People's Republic of China reached an agreement for Chinese firms to invest, equity that is, and actively participating commercially-evolved projects in Trinidad and Tobago. We also held discussions on Chinese banks establishing operations here in our country, as well as have been referred to earlier on, the dry docking facility in La Brea, a new terminal at the ANR Robinson International Airport in Tobago, and construction of a new central block at the hospital in Port of Spain. Madam President, I would like to add further that military assistance has been granted gratis by the Government of China, the People's Republic of China to Trinidad and Tobago.

In terms of multilateral engagements with China, as the Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs, I represented Trinidad and Tobago at the second meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs from the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, CELAC. That meeting was held in Santiago, Chile, earlier this year, in January 2018, under the theme "Working for more development, innovation and cooperation for our peoples". That resulted, that meeting that is, in the adoption of a special declaration on the said Belt initiative, which I would have referred to earlier.

Madam President, as we work to ensure that this country is optimally positioned, the Ministry has expanded its outreach to Asia, Africa and the Pacific region. A key highlight of which was the working visit of the hon. Prime Minister to the Commonwealth of Australia from May 20th to 26th of 2018. During that visit, the Prime Minister engaged with his Australian counterpart as well as the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Australia. Critically, Trinidad and Tobago was able to gain

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valuable insight into Australia's approach to dealing with national security matters, especially in the area of terrorism. The hon. Prime Minister also met with representatives of Austal and Incat, two world renowned centres, companies that treat with shipbuilding, especially the catamaran variety.

Madam President, the hon. Prime Minister also met with representatives of BHP Billiton and the company's exploration plants here in Trinidad and Tobago, including the milling and drilling of wells in the LeClerc field and Government's plans to commensurate new commercial terms. Madam President, as evidence of the immediate gains that have accrued to this country as a consequence of the hon. Prime Minister's visit, we have a number—I will just cite three. That of the announcement by the hon. Prime Minister that two Cape-class patrol boats with an estimated delivery date of mid-2020 would be purchased, and that a separate maintenance and support contract would be pursued.

The second area I would like to mention is the announcement of the intention of Austal, the company that is, to establish a service centre in Trinidad and Tobago to support the new vessels, and on any other vessels that require maintenance. The third area is the decision, the authorization by Cabinet for the purchase of two purpose-built fast ferries to serve the Trinidad and Tobago sea bridge. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, in addition to our engagement with China and Australia, this Government, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago that is, continues to strengthen this country's historic ties to other countries in the region. Evidence of this may be found in the invitation extended by the hon. Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago to the Prime Minister of India to visit our country. [*Desk thumping*]
Trinidad and Tobago and India both have a long, productive and collaborative

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bilateral relationship, and the proposed visit is timely as Trinidad and Tobago seeks to expedite the diversification of its economy and to improve the livelihood of its citizens. India as one of the largest markets in Asia possesses resources and capacity in several sectors which could be useful to this country and bilateral visit will therefore include discussions on existing and potential areas of cooperation.

Madam President, I can add further that our Ministry, that is of Foreign and Caricom Affairs, received a number of visits by foreign delegations that is, inclusive of China, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, Bangladesh, a number, a host of others as we strive to broaden and strengthen and deepen our links and nurture relationships with other countries, and international communities in general as we try to contribute towards the improvement in the well-being of citizens and the residents of our country. Madam President, with respect to technical cooperation partners in this region, we at the Ministry, received over 100 offers of training courses from a broad section of countries: China, Singapore, Israel, United Arab Emirates, amongst others.

On elaborating on our Government's intention to broaden our footprint internationally, you may recall in last year's budget debate on the Bill, the Appropriation Bill, I reminded this House of the intention of the Government to increase its representation overseas, specifically by establishing two missions. We have not yet done so, nonetheless, the Ministry continues to persevere to treat with some difficulties and work assiduously to address some administrative arrangements that are necessary for the establishment of the said missions. These new missions, Madam President, will contribute to the promotion of our national economic plan for growth and jobs by supporting Trinidad and Tobago businesses in expanding their commercial opportunities in various sectors.

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Madam President, during the year under review, Trinidad and Tobago maintained its leadership role in Caricom. Accordingly, the Ministry facilitated the participation of two Caricom election observation missions in keeping with our commitment to sound democratic principles. The Registration Supervisor of the Elections and Boundaries Commission of Trinidad and Tobago served on the Caricom election observation mission for the general elections in Antigua and Barbuda, which was held in March of this year, while the acting supervisor, electoral, of our Commission here, electoral commission that is, served on the mission for Grenada's general elections which was held in March of this year.

Madam President, the Ministry also contributed to the celebration of the 55th Anniversary of the establishment of the diplomatic relations between Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica which was organized by the High Commission for Jamaica in Port of Spain and we also engaged in public information shared relative to CSME during the period October of last year to September of this year, delivering presentations at the Cipriani Labour College.

Madam President, our hon. Prime Minister also recently visited Guyana, September of this year and the highlight of that visit was a signing of a memorandum of understanding on the energy sector between those two countries.
[Desk thumping]

With respect to representation functions, three new Heads of Mission of our country we appointed during the last fiscal year. One was the permanent representative to the United Nations in Geneva. The other one, that person, that Head of Mission, Her Excellency was appointed in December of last year, the Ambassador to the People's Republic of China in May of this year and the High Commission to Nigeria in April which precedes May, of course, of this year. These

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individuals bring to their new positions a wealth of experience in the service of Trinidad and Tobago which will advance the interest of this country as they are properly ceased of Government's economic and social objectives and have a sound understanding of the country's needs.

Madam President, in keeping with the country's developing goals under *Vision 2030*, the Ministry continues to support the work of various multilateral organizations including the United Nations, various UN specialized agencies such as the Food and Agriculture Organization, WHO, the World Health Organization, as well. Accordingly, a Trinidad and Tobago delegation, led by the Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs, participated and just concluded—or rather the on-going 73rd session of the high level and General Debates of the UN, United Nations. The theme of this year's dialogue was “Dialogue and the Strengthening of Multilateralism as a Catalyst for the well-being of all Persons and a Sustainable Planet”. At the said 73rd session, Madam President, we also participated in the first ever high-level plenary meeting on global peace in honour of the centenary of Nelson Mandela, the birth that is, known as the Nelson Mandela Peace Summit which was held on the 24th of September of this year.

Madam President, over the past fiscal year, the Ministry has also facilitated participation of important regular meetings to safeguard Trinidad and Tobago's interest such as the normal inter-sessional, regular sessions of the Heads of Government of Caricom. The various meetings of ACP, African Caribbean and Pacific Group of States and the 25th Commonwealth Heads of Government which was held in April in London of this year. The hon. Prime Minister, as you would recall, participated in that session of the CHOGM, the Heads of Government of the Commonwealth group. Madam President, in Trinidad and Tobago, we are

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preparing for Caricom Heads of Government meeting scheduled for the beginning of December which would specifically treat with matters of the CSME.

I am coming to a close so probably I could allow myself a little bit of liberty here. Madam President, how much time do I have?

Madam President: You have until 4.31.

Sen. The Hon. D. Moses: Thank you. Trinidad and Tobago also participated in the Eighth Summit of the Americas which was held in Lima, Peru in April of this year. I headed that delegation, the delegation of Trinidad and Tobago. As a result of that Summit, the meeting—a commitment called the “Lima Commitment - Democratic Governance against Corruption” which had been negotiated over a period of months by member States was adopted. The Lima Commitment consists of a series of concrete commitments adopted by Heads of State and Governments in the area such as democratic values, anti-corruption mechanisms, money laundering, campaign financing and whistle-blower protection.

Madam President, the Ministry also has a responsibility for the placement of Trinidad and Tobago nationals in various important international bodies. I am, therefore, pleased to inform this House that as a result of the unrelenting effort of the Ministry’s staff, Prof. Rhoda Reddock was elected to the Committee on the Elimination and Discrimination against Women in June of this year for the period 2019 to 2022.

Madam President, I also seize the opportunity to remind Members of this honourable House that Government’s official policy framework emphasized the priority afforded to the Trinidad and Tobago Diaspora. While a draft engagement policy existed, the need to capture the views of stakeholder organizations was critical. Unfortunately, due to financing challenges towards the end of fiscal 2017,

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the Ministry was unable to engage a consultant to undertake the stakeholder engagement input. I am pleased to advise, however, that circumstances now facilitate the commencement of that work and as a result, it will result in the finalization of the National Diaspora Policy.

I am also heartened to advise, Madam President, that the construction of the headquarters for the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs is receiving due attention. This project is being spearheaded by the Urban Development Company of Trinidad and Tobago on the Ministry's behalf. Madam President, the range of activities undertaken during the period under review and those that have been 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 the broadening and deepening of relations with key partners regionally, hemispherically and internationally.

Madam President, I wish to reaffirm the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs commitment to advancing and championing the Government's development objective through our diplomatic interactions with other sovereign States in the global arena. In seeking out and building relations and nurturing linkages, we position our country to better pursue and serve Trinidad and Tobago foreign policies. We will discharge our mandates authored by the pillars of good governance and international law to which this country has also been steadfastly committed as we continue to put people first in achieving the objectives of *Vision 2030*.

Madam President, I wholeheartedly support the 2018-2019 Appropriation Bill and I thank you, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, before I start my response in contribution to the core budget, let me begin by thanking the agencies of the State as to how they handled the flooding matter that continues to be with us, starting with the ODPM, the Ministry of National Security, the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, and in particular the first responders, which is the Disaster Management Unit of the 14 Regional Corporations; [*Desk thumping*] the Ministry of Works and Transport, which is responsible for the infrastructure of Trinidad and Tobago; the Ministry of Social Development; the Ministry of Health, as it will be coming out now to make sure that public health matters are adequately addressed. They are paid officers of the State, but what was most enlightening about this weekend was the level of volunteerism that has swept this country [*Desk thumping*] from north, south, east and west. A lot of people were affected and effected, it is not an easy task.

I personally know flooding, you know. I was born and raised in Mafeking Village in Mayaro, the most flooded area in Trinidad. I grew up right on the banks of the Ortoire River. Mafeking Village is on a meander in the final stages of the Ortoire River. It floods every time the Ortoire River overflows its banks and we know the pain it has for flooding. So today, I want to empathize with those who have lost their belongings. The State will try its best to see what comfort it can bring and I want this country to bind together and feel proud of itself as to how it continues to handle this matter. [*Desk thumping*] It is in this context, I put the charade of the United National Congress. The only reason I would not belabour the point, today, is because this is not a time for politics and they have demonstrated that they cannot rise to the occasion. [*Desk thumping*] And for that behaviour, I

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will say no more because by the very condemning of them, I am putting them into the limelight so I will just leave them side.

Secondly, Madam President, I want to congratulate the Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance, the Minister in the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Planning and Development and all their staff for presenting what I think was the most well-received budget in Trinidad and Tobago for several years. [*Desk thumping*] Well received by the invested interest, and really and truly, well received by John Public himself. There has been no uproar, there has been largely positive comments. There are people who—an interest who will highlight certain areas that they felt was not the best. We did not seek their interest but all that is the purpose of this debate as we bring this debate to a conclusion.

My contribution obviously is on energy and I want to deal with the energy sectors in two areas. One, Petrotrin, and the other, the gas sector and how the gas sector is rebounding and it is trying to put the economy on a path of sustainable growth. There is a lot of good news to speak about gas and where we have come from but let me start with Petrotrin. I want to build my thesis in the context of the contribution of Sen. Ramkissoon because for once she missed the boat and that is being very kind. I see myself here as a senior Member of the Government, as a fairly experienced parliamentarian, so I see myself as a mentor to young Independent Senators in particular, because Sen. Obika and Sen. Hosein, they have their own thing to deal with. But when a young Senator comes and, justifiably lets emotion get the better of her, and I understand it, I empathize with her. So while I will have to do a critical analysis of her contribution in the context of putting the Petrotrin template to the population, I will give her as soft a landing as possible.

Her contribution, Madam President, defied logic, defied independent proper

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analysis and it lacked science, and the goodly Senator is a scientist, and it is in that context, I want to draw your attention to the final aspect of her contribution. She was so annoyed with Petrotrin and she linked Petrotrin to Caroni. I will deal with that shortly. But she concluded with the most illogical remarks which is the dealing of the Chinese investment in Trinidad and Tobago. Phoenix Park Industrial Estate, funded by Beijing through a Government to Government soft loan, the commitment of bringing 10 key high-tech Chinese businesses into Trinidad generating foreign exchange for the country, foreign investment for the country. The La Brea dry dock, everybody in this world speaks about it. Post-Panamax vessels. I am involved in the LNG trade, there are now two energy tankers a day crossing the Panama Canal. When I say two tankers, two mega tankers that is trading to China, to Asia, to the Pacific. China is the second largest economy in the world but the US economy, a lot of it is based on high-tech.

4.30p.m.

Who are the largest companies in America? Amazon, Google, Apple, Facebook, Microsoft. The first trillion dollar company in the world is Amazon. China does not have that size. They have Alibaba and a couple other companies. But China, in the trading of goods and services, the physical movement of goods, they are by far the largest. So if you have the Chinese investing in the dry dock with a 30 per cent equity—. When the Prime Minister went to China, he got the Chinese to change their policy position, you know. It is the first time the Chinese are actually investing equity in any part of the world. And that is the context in which the making China investment is making place.

And let me just put on the records, the last remark about if we want Chinese investment, ask them to build a bridge from Toco to Tobago. Now if that was not

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laughable, I would not have smiled; and it is hard for me not to smile. Madam, Sen. Ramkissoon, through you Madam President, the reason that that project is a non-starter from the beginning, is the 34-mile bridge the Chinese built for \$20 billion is over a shallow sea. The reason it is called the “Galleons Passage”—it is because it is an international shipping channel, and it is an international shipping channel because a deep oceanic trench occurs between Toco and Tobago. And to support these long bridges you need support from the seabed in columns through shallow water. You cannot get a column to go down to the depth of the trench. It will be astronomically expensive, if at all “engineeringly” possible. So, this bridge to Tobago, let it die its natural death.

The second point, Madam President, is linking the Petrotrin issue to Caroni; it is a fundamental difference. With the closure of Caroni, as the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries vividly explained this morning, we were getting out of the sugar industry. There is no cultivation of sugar anymore in Trinidad, bar a few farmers down in Barrackpore. There is no processing of raw nor refined sugar in Trinidad. We are out of the sugar business, because of low may, because of et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

We are not getting out of the oil and gas business, you know. We have restructured, and we are transforming Petrotrin. Put another way, we are saving Petrotrin from itself and this is what I want to talk about now. The new structure of Petrotrin—I have said it in a post-Cabinet press conference, but I will go through it in some more detail this afternoon.

Petrotrin is an integrated oil company. It has exploration and production, it has refining and marketing, and well most integrated oil companies reach the pump. But the state sector is integrated because NP is the marketing arm of the

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state entity. We have explained ad nauseam why Petrotrin in its current form could not continue as a viable entity. Every time I spoke, the Prime Minister spoke, the Minister of Finance spoke, the Minister in the Ministry of Finance spoke, the Minister of Public Utilities speaks sometime, all the Cabinet Members that have spoken to this, have explained clearly to the population, why it could not continue as it has.

So what is the solution? The refinery is the albatross, and the refinery is the albatross because we have to import 100,000 barrels of crude. But I will deal with that shortly. So we formed a holding company called Trinidad Petroleum Holding Limited, which all the shares of the assets would be vested in this company. This company would have overarching governance for a group of subsidiaries. As we speak, we are preparing a vesting order to vest the assets of former Petrotrin into the various subsidies.

Subsidiary 1 is Petrotrin itself, which will basically be a shell company to handle legacy matters. The one they like to talk about is A&V. I explained in the House, the A&V litigation and arbitration matter would be handled by Petrotrin, okay? And it is before arbitrators now, and they will handle it. What the arbitrators determine will be the full and final settlement in law. You can appeal if you want and let due process take its place.

Subsidiary 2 is called Heritage Petroleum Company Limited and that is where the business will focus. Sen. Small said it will be a cash cow. "I hope his mouth take us". But as I have explained before, there is a fundamental difference between refining and marketing and exploration and production. Exploration and production is subject to windfall. Especially if "oil prices high", the shock, Sen. Raffoul spoke about, if the shock is on the positive side. So if you are producing

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oil from wells at \$35 a barrel operating costs, and oil price is \$50 a barrel, you are making \$15 on every barrel you produce. What happens if oil price reaches to 80?

So your business can survive when oil prices do not drop below 30/35. But what companies do is that when oil prices are high, they use the profits as reserves, cash reserves in the company so that when oil prices drop below your operating cost, you can survive for a year or so without having to raise any red flags. So the profit is subject to windfall. It is a business that is oil-price based, operating cost based.

Refinery, however, is a margins business, which means it is a processing plant. Your feed stock costs you X dollars per barrel and your refined products you sell at X plus \$2 per barrel. If that is the case, your \$2 is an operating profit. If the price of crude increases, the price of product increases commensurate to the price of crude. So by and large your margin still remains the same. So that business has no windfall, and if you cannot get your operating costs from the purchase of crude to X plus 2, you are hopelessly out of the business. That is what has happened to the Pointe-a-Pierre refinery.

So, on the E&P side we will remodel the business. We will focus on investment in exploration and production. We will transfer all the land assets of Petrotrin into the E&P company, all the E&P assets: Trinmar, land, some minority non-operating interests off the east coast, the Teak, Samaan and Poui field that was to be owned by bp; that is now run by Perenco. Petrotrin has a 15 per cent equity in that, you know. So, all those assets will be put into the exploration and production company. And it will be staffed with high quality staff, professional staff and state-of-the-art staff—the same UWI graduates, Sen. Ramkissoon boasted about. I am a UWI graduate, proud of it. I am glad we are in the top 5 per cent now.

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But we need new work systems, we need young bright minds, we need technology. Technology is transforming the world. There is something now called “ocean bottom node seismic”. It is like imaging the earth to show you where the oil is. They use it in medicine. Long ago a doctor had to take a torchlight and put it in your eye to see some capillary there to determine whether you have a tumour. Now there is MRI and CT scan. “It have doctors now who cannot diagnose without an MRI or a CT scan, you know”. Then you ask what they used to do before MRI and CT scan was invented? It is called “imaging”. And just how imaging has transformed medicine, imaging is transforming the exploration and production business.

This company will have an aggressive drilling and workover programme. It will have a strong subsurface team that is the core skill set of an exploration and production company. Subsurface—I am a subsurface expert—geologists, geophysicists, reservoir engineers, petroleum engineers, drilling engineers. You look at the subsurface, you plan your wells, your produce. “It have” strong project management skills, strong supply chain management, because you are procuring in a modern system. And once you have strong leadership—we have the talent here. We are not harnessing it, and there is something called system. Because, it is the same locals who run bp, you know. It is the same locals you run Shell, you know. The percentage of expatriates in bp and Shell are miniscule. They must have their CEO, because you are in charge for the shareholder, but most, if not all of the technocrats in all these subsurface and engineering teams are Trinidadians.

But it is policy decisions; but it means that they have to be in an operating system that brings out the best in you. That is why you have to remodel the company. That is why you have to change the culture of the company. Petrotrin in

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its current form was beyond repair. That is why I said we are saving Petrotrin from itself. And this is the Government's vision. There is nothing sinister about it. It is the very Trinidadians that will populate it, with probably a few expatriates.

Then we move on to Paria Fuel Trading Company. Fuel trading is big business. I had to intervene when Sen. Creese was speaking on Friday. The value chain is changing. I brought it to his attention. You "cyar" speak 1970s economics now, you know. About you must manufacture and you must this, you must that and the other. What does Amazon manufacture? And Amazon just has a distribution system and a computer system platform that is second to none. They do not make anything—

Hon. Senator: Ideas.

Hon. Senator: But money.

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: So you are trading. The biggest value in the LNG is not the production of natural gas, you know. It is not in the processing plant at Atlantic, you know. It is in the trading, where you buy and sell. So Fuel Trading Company, do not blink your eye at it. Because it matters not to the trader from whence the product comes, or where it goes. It is the markup and the margins as you play the market to bring value to the organization. What is so wrong with that? What is sinister about that? Nothing.

And then we come to the final subsidiary, Guaracara Refining Limited, which I announced last week. No matter what we say there is a refinery; a refinery that is valued at some significant amount of money; a refinery that, while it has been an albatross around the neck of Trinidad and Tobago in its current form, may be of value to another third party. There are fairly new plants. There are operating system there that could be salvaged. So we plan to take this refinery, vest it into

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Guaracara Refining Company Limited for opportunity attention. That is the exact phrase the Prime Minister used since he made the address to the nation, you know.

Somebody may say, “I have a source of crude. I need a refinery to process it.” We do not have to put out the US and the foreign exchange to buy that crude and lose \$2 on it every time. That person may have a source of crude. He wants a processing plant. He could come to the State and do a deal to lease, to operate at a fee, to outright purchase. He could come with a new business model, a new operating model. They could come and invest now and upgrade certain parts of it.

The market is open and we will be vesting the assets there and very shortly because we will be saving the refinery and the longer it is idle it is the worse it is. So in the shortest possible time we hope to get an investor, in what form or fashion I do not know. As we speak I can say this without fear of contradiction, the Government has no buyer in line. [*Desk thumping*] No “1 percenter”, no Texan, no Northern American, no European, no Arab—

Hon. Senator: Exactly.

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan:—we have no buyer in mind. And this will be through a transparent process, through an RFP. We have a team of technocrats doing the evaluation and will advise the Government through the board of Petrotrin what is the best option for the refinery.

So there you have it. What more can I say?

Sen. Richards: Is there going to be or has there been, or is there in train, a valuation for the refinery assets as they stand, given that quite a number of components, as I understand them, are new components, upgraded components, although there are some that need to be upgraded, is there a process in train for that, of those assets? Thank you.

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Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: There is a value. But there is something called an “actual value” and a “utility value”. So, you may say, the cost of procuring the plant, installing the plant is \$1billion, but is what utility value it has? Its utility value in the model may be 1.3billion, but it could also be 600million. So we wait to see how these specifics unfold.

Sen. Richards: Thank you.

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: But there is an asset that we can leverage and the State can benefit. How much—when do I finish?

Madam President: You have until 2 minutes past 5. Fourteen minutes.

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: Nearly finish. Just to set the record straight. Madam President, through you, these are the final figures, because “I fed-up hear” 8,000, 6,000, 3,000, 4,000. Everybody have a different amount of thousands to speak about Petrotrin. The total number of permanent employees that will be terminated is 3,341; 3,341. Two thousand, four hundred and eighty-nine have already collected their letters and the rest have been sent by registered mail to the various people.

There are 1,229 non-permanent employees who qualify for an ex gratia payment. Now, not everybody who worked a 10 days or a month in Petrotrin will qualify. The actual list—the total list of everybody is 2,230 but only 1,229 people will qualify for an ex gratia payment. And this is the criteria in which you qualify. Those who qualify will have a minimum of 750 days cumulative, during the course of the past 5 years. So if “you work” 15 years ago and have not worked for the last five to seven years, you are not entitled to anything, okay, because you were not in a permanent job. So the people who will qualify are the people who have 750 days or more cumulative during the course of the past five years and that number

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summed to 1,229.

Minister Imbert, the Minister of Finance, indicated in his budget, what is the approximate cost of these packages. Please.

Sen. Ramkissoon: Minister, thank you. For persons who are on the casual listing for 15 years, would they be considered for 15 years or just five years?

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: My information it is five years. Okay. So, how many minutes past five?

Madam President: Two minutes past five.

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: I have approximately 10 minutes to tell you about gas. I need 10 days. Madam President, all the reports indicate that the 1.9 per cent growth and the positive growth in the economy can be attributed, in part, to the natural gas sector. We have turned around the natural gas sector in a big way. [*Desk thumping*] I just want to go on record and give you some of the figures. In 2015, “gas production drop” to 3.5 BCF per day. In 2016 and 2017 it was around 3.3 billion cubic feet per day. As we speak, 2018 is expected to average at 3.8 billion cubic feet per day; 2019, 3.94 billion cubic feet per day; 2020, 4.05 billion cubic feet per day; 2021, 4.1 billion cubic feet per day and 2022; 4.09 billion cubic feet per day.

So we are on a good trajectory. Everybody speaks about Juniper, UNC like to say it is their project. It is not their project; it is bp’s project. Juniper is a bp project. “I never see” a UNC sign on the platform, and it is a project under the jurisdiction of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. But it is a bp project. So is Angelin, which is carded to come on production in the first quarter of 2019, for 350 million cubic feet per day.

Shell Colibri in 2021, 300 million cubic feet per day; BHP Ruby Delaware, 80 million standard cubic feet per day and, of course, I do not have the time today

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but I have dealt extensively, and the Prime Minister, and Minister Moses hinted to it a while ago, the Dragon deal.

Do not underestimate Dragon, because this dragon will dance. Venezuela has the largest oil reserves in the world. When I say largest, it is larger than Saudi Arabia, larger than any country in the Middle East; it is larger than Russia. Venezuela has the sixth largest gas reserves in the world. A lot of that gas is located in eastern Venezuela. But the challenge they have in Eastern Venezuela is Eastern Venezuela is the undeveloped part of Venezuela. West Venezuela, Caracas, Maracaibo, is where all the infrastructure reside. The infrastructure that Trinidad can provide to Eastern Venezuelan gas is cheaper for them, more economic for them, so both sides could live in a symbiotic relationship. That is what we are exploring now in Dragon, but as a long term strategic relationship. We have one of the world's most modern gas infrastructure right here; Atlantic, Point Lisas.

Sen. Small: Minister, would you give—could you give me an update on what is happening with Loran-Manatee?

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: Loran-Manatee is a unit and unitization operating agreement that has to be signed. Without spilling too much, the challenge is the Trump sanctions on the Venezuelan side, because the ownership on the Venezuelan side involve Chevron, and Chevron is an American company. I say no more. So, Venezuela is looking good.

Madam President, I want to share with this nation another piece of positive news. Everybody who follows the energy sector knows about Ryder Scott Report. You always hear that, now you are hearing Poten & Partners Report, but every year the Parliament talk and debate the Ryder Scott Report. Ryder Scott is a

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company that audits our national reserves and from since 2004, every year the country reserves have declined. Listen to me well, since 2004 every year the country's reserves have declined. So, if you produce 3.8 billion cubic feet per day, what you do is per annum, you produce approximately 1.3 trillion cubic feet of gas. Listen to the math.

Madam President: Minister, you have five more minutes.

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: 1.3 trillion cubic feet of gas comes out of the ground it is what I call, walking up the down escalator. So, if you do not find and replace 1.3 trillion cubic feet every year your reserves will drop. What we have been doing year on year is finding less than we produce. So year on year from 2004 to 2016 our reserves have fallen.

2017 audit, which I just received a month ago, for the first time, the reserves are on an upward trend. We found 154 per cent of the reserves we produced. That is the most phenomenal news this country has had in years. [*Desk thumping*] And it is all because of initiatives that have been championed by our Prime Minister. He has gone to Houston, he has brokered the gas sales agreement through the NGC, with bp and EOG because companies need a long-term supply agreement to invest. It is not \$1 to drill an offshore well, you know. Some of those wells cost US \$50 million; US \$400,000 per day to rent. There is a rig called the *Invictus*, a deep water rig here now. That is virtually US \$1 million per day. It is a drill ship drilling in the deep waters for BHP. And incidentally, Madam President, BHP has been finding gas in the deep water, very little unannounced, because they are still to quantify the volumes. But upstream is looking good.

The challenge we face is on, finally before I close, is on what has been bandied about as transfer pricing where on the sale of LNG, we are losing value

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and too much value is being lost through the off-takers of the LNG as they swap and go to destinations that they are not designed to go to. The contracts to some extent are weak and that is the basis of our negotiations when the Prime Minister went to London and met with the head of bp and Shell. I now lead a team of local negotiators with Minister Young and a group of technocrats that is currently discussing those matters and we hope to find an amicable solution in the interest of people of Trinidad and Tobago.

5.00p.m.

So, Madam President, 40 minutes is a short time to cover a major sector like this but I think, for the records I want to say that we are in a good place. We could get better. It calls for innovative leadership. It calls for prudent management. It calls for strong negotiation because, at the end of the day, these companies seek the interest of their shareholders, and as the Prime Minister told bp in Houston, and I quote him: “You have shareholders, but I have shareholders too.” And this Government, this administration, under Dr. Rowley, will continue to seek the interest of the shareholders of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you.

[Desk thumping]

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan): *[Desk thumping]* Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, I was really looking forward to this debate, especially as I had prepared for the Lower House where I had the opportunity to present. Unfortunately, we all understand what the country has been experiencing over the past couple of days and that has changed my whole approach to this debate, meaning, I have spent the last couple of days on the field in not-too-comfortable conditions. As I stand here now I can tell you—

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Hon. Senator: “Dais a tall boots?”

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: I am in a tall boots that is soaking wet—

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: Please do not take it off here.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: No, I would not. If I take this off, I might have more vacancies both on this side and that side.

Hon. Senator: “God,t datis what smelling so?” [*Laughter*]

Hon. Senator: “Nah Rohan, no way.”

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Madam President, however, despite what this country would have gone through, there were some bright moments. Unfortunately, as a Senator, as a Minister and as a citizen of this country, this morning that was shattered. That was shattered because I left home at about five o’clock, went to the office and visited a couple sites and on the way to the St. Helena area with my entire staff—entire directors—I heard the contribution of Sen. Ameen and I tell you if the water did not break my spirit, that contribution broke my spirit.

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: “Don’t”.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: It did not only break my spirit but my staff was also listening in the vehicle and I can tell you, for the first time I saw their faces drop. Because I do not think many of us understand when we refer to the Government—the Government—a lot of public servants are government officers, [*Desk thumping*] and what her contribution would have done is damage all the public servants, all the different arms of law enforcement who would have been doing yeoman service since Friday, some of them who did not even go home. And I can tell you I have staff who have spent day and night working. I have worked with the coast guard for the last couple of days, some of them, houses were flooded out and they did not leave their posts. I have seen several people there, and that

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contribution damaged the spirit of a lot of patriotic people in Trinidad and Tobago.

[*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, I could have come here and talk about the wonderful projects at the Ministry of Works and Transport that we are doing; the Churchill Roosevelt Highway extension, where we are actually opening up the entire eastern seaboard; the Toco Ferry Port; the Valencia Highway, and all the advantages that these things are going to bring; the Curepe Interchange where we have saved over a quarter billion dollars on one project. And I can go on and on: Solomon Hochoy Highway where local contractors are benefiting from all the packages so far. I can talk about our drainage programme where we desilted 230 of our watercourses over the last period, [*Desk thumping*] and I can tell you that did help significantly. It would not have saved us from flooding but it could have been a lot worse; the PURE Programme which I have done close to 200 projects throughout Trinidad and Tobago, all within budget. And I can go on and on.

However, Madam President, that contribution this morning, I have to focus a little bit on that contribution because Ms. Ameen spoke about—

Madam President: Sen. Ameen.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Sorry. Sen. Ameen spoke about the Prime Minister—“the Prime Minister came and stood on dry land and then he left”. What Sen. Ameen did not know is that I was there from Friday night. When I left this Senate I went home because although I was in the Senate I was outside most of the time on my phone with the team. I left here twice on Friday and came back, and I was up there from about 11 o'clock on Friday night. I did not get home until about 10 o'clock the next night. I do not know where Sen. Ameen was.

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: In her dry bed.

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Hon. Senator: “Doh guess.”

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: I spoke to the Prime Minister about five o'clock in the morning and he told me he was on the way; he was coming up. What Sen. Ameen did not know is that when she saw the Prime Minister, that was his second visit to the area. [*Desk thumping*]. What Sen. Ameen did not know is that the Prime Minister was there very early in the morning. He visited the shelters, then he came down to Greenvale where he met us. He met the coast guard. You do not expect a Prime Minister to be going into the water where we have trained coast guards doing their job. That is their job. Our job is to make sure we have the logistics in place, and everything for them.

The Prime Minister left. We went to Kelly. We were blocked because of the height of the water. And you know what is strange? The Prime Minister, when I spoke to him about five o'clock, he said he does not want any media. That is a far cry from how Sen. Ameen and her team operate. He said he does not want any media, he is coming up. We went to Kelly. We could not get in. He said, “Okay, let us go now to Sangre Grande.” We left and we went up to Sangre Grande. We spoke to the chairman. We spoke to the MP, made sure they had things in place. He spoke to the police. He went to the police station. He met with the police and thanked the police because the police did yeoman service in Sangre Grande because there were some miscreants who were trying to get in to—

Hon. Senator: Looting.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:—do some things that were not really in keeping with good patriotic citizens. And then we went back into the La Horquetta/Greenvale area. That is where we met Ms. Ameen. Ms. Ameen, in my opinion—because I spent over 12 hours inside there—we probably saw her for five minutes.

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Madam Speaker, it was very disheartening to see the *Express* front page, Ms. Ameen on a dinghy—

Madam President: Senator.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Sen. Ameen on a dinghy. What Sen. Ameen did not realize is that it was a nice photo shoot, photo op, because you go for 10 minutes and you get a photo op and “bam”, click, “yuh gone”. That dinghy was supposed to be bringing out people, not carrying people for a ride and bringing them back out on a ride. That is why the coast guards will go in; they are trained to go in. They will rescue the people and they will bring them out. This is not for Senators and Ministers and MPs to be riding with the coast guard to go in and bring people out. That was not the—I was there. I wanted to go in the water. I walked into the water holding a rope with the coast guard and when I realized, that look, I was keeping them back from doing their job, I stopped and allowed them to go. Because they are trained to do that. I am not trained to do that. When I see water started to reach here, [*Demonstrates with hand*] I say, “leh me leggo this rope”. Because I was keeping them back.

If you want to be of assistance, there are things that you have to do. “Doh jes jump in de dinghy tuh get a photo op, and as yuh get de photo op, yuh gone.” That is not what this is all about. This is about letting the trained people go and do what they have to do. And this is why in Greenvale we had the coast guard, we had the air guard, we had the army, we had everybody. The Prime Minister does not have to go in there so that they now have to concentrate on him and forgot about the people. What the Prime Minister has to do is to make sure they have all the resources.

But Sen. Ameen feels that, no, no, no, this is about going and hugging

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babies and kissing and giving hampers. All that will come. All that is happening. Every MP was on the ground doing what they have to do, and the impression Sen. Ameen gives is that this Government has not been doing anything for the last few days. What Ms. Ameen and her team did was unforgiveable. They broke the spirit of the patriots in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] In Trinidad and Tobago, I can tell you, anywhere you go people were coming out: corporate Trinidad; contractors; ordinary citizens. Up to today, they are coming out and they are doing everything that they can do.

Last night, I left Port of Spain about 12 o'clock going to the areas that were damaged. On my way home I got a call from a corporate citizen in Valsayn. He said he just cooked 100 boxes of food, hot, if I know anybody who want it. I said, "You have it ready?" He said, yes. "Ah say, okay, ah coming fuh it." I took it up at that hour, went up to the St. Augustine development—one of the—

Hon. Senator: Oropune.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Oropune—found 100 people, gave it to them. They were happy for it. That is what we have to do, not go out there and try to say who doing what and jumping in dinghy to get a photo op and then you go—

Hon. Senator: In ankle-high water.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Well, the thing about it, the photo shows ankle-height water. The last photo I saw with her leader, with Mr. Ian Alleyne in a pirogue, was ankle-height water being pulled for another photo op. I do not know if you all could remember that photo. So this is really "nutten" new, but I can tell you, in this development people's lives were at risk. When I reached there 11/12 o'clock even the army trucks were stalling to go in. I got scared, as a Minister. I was there alone, no driver. At that hour my staff—no staff was there. I decided, look, I am going up

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there, and it was very scary until the army had to tell me, “You cah go een inside there.” So we stayed outside and as they were bringing out people then you are taking them to the shelter. And then we left that side and we went on the other side and that is where the morning “ketch” us. I do not know where Sen. Ameen and “dem was” all that time.

I heard on the radio Sen. Ramdeen, banging the desk, talking, and yes, yes, giving Sen. Ameen, “Go on”. Sen. Ramdeen called me Saturday evening about somebody in Bamboo 2, or Bamboo 3, about they are going to breach and he wants an excavator, and this. I said, “Sen. Ramdeen, wait, if you are going to interfere with a bank, I need to get the technical people. I cannot give you an all-clear to go and get a contractor. Right?” Put him on to the director. The director spoke to them. The person in charge went down. Okay, we gave them—sent an excavator immediately. You know, surprisingly, yesterday “I gone there”, the people in the area telling me, “What yuh come here for? Sen. Ramdeen come and he bring ah excavator here and he sorting this thing out.” I say, “What?” I had to explain to the residents, Sen. Ramdeen “didn bring nothing” there. It is the Ministry of Works and Transport sent an excavator. They said they did not know that.

Hon. Senator: “Yuh ha tuh waste time tuh deal” with—

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: “But after yuh get, yuh would go and tell de residents that the Government eh doing nutting fuh yuh. I bring dis excavator.” And that is what unpatriotism means. I would think that everybody is out there doing what they were supposed to do and we need to work together.

I have had calls from several MPs. Up to today, the hon. Dr. Tim Gopeesingh calling me. He wants pumps. I put him on to the directors. Friday night, MP Indarsingh, MP Ganga Singh, calling me, one, two, in the morning. No

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problem. I calling them back five o'clock. "Everything is okay? Yuh get de pumps; yuh get dis?" "Yes, yes, yes." Because I would think at a time like this you put politics aside [*Desk thumping*] and we work together. This whole walkout—I have probably slept about two or three hours for the last three or four days. The House has to go on. Because if we do not pass the money here—

Hon. Senator: Exactly.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:—how am I going to get money to fix outside?

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: Exactly. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Some of us could be here, some of us could be outside and everything could be done. I understand they went up in Greenvale a little while ago and the people there "run dem". [*Laughter*]

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: They must "run them".

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: They "run dem"! I got that call just—because people recognize you do not play politics when you have a national disaster.

Hon. Senator: "Coming tuh pose".

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: "Yuh doh play politics when yuh have a national disaster. I was quite surprised at Sen. Ramdeen, after what I did he called me—to go and tell the people the Government "eh doing nuttin, is I bring this excavator here"? The hon. Basdeo Panday "wudda call dat nemacaramism".

Madam President: Senator, withdraw.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Yes. I withdraw that, Madam President. But I was really disappointed because these are people who I went out of the way for. I went yesterday and when I was hearing the villagers saying, "Dey tell us de Government eh doing nutten for us. Dey bring this here." I was like, what? I had to actually call the director to explain to the village, he approved that and he is paying for it. It is

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not free. The Government is paying for that, not Sen. Ramdeen.

And these are some of the things that you are going to—I must say some of the other MPs were very thankful and I have not heard anything negative from them. They thanked me. Dr. Gopeesingh—I was just in Kelly/Warren. Right now “my boots wet”. Dr. Gopeesingh was so thankful. We went out. We did everything. But there are some times, Madam Speaker, and I hope—

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: Madam President.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Madam President, I am sorry. But I grew up in Sangre Grande and we had a saying in Sangre Grande that “you could take de horse outta de gutter buh yuh cyar take de gutter outta de horse.” And today, this morning, I felt that way. Because you try your best, you bring everybody, and the country is really working. I am surprised to see the level of patriotism outside there—everybody. I mean, it is not only corporate Trinidad. People just doing and they are sending, and everything happening.

But politicians have to spoil it. When I saw this article, Sen. Ameen being pulled by a dinghy, it was the coast guard pulling her out. This was not UNC Members put a dinghy and they are pulling her out, [*Desk thumping*] this was the coast guard. Who is the coast guard? This is the protective service sent by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. This is not the UNC pulling her out. When the army trucks and so—those are the first responders in emergency. That is the Government policy at work. When Ministers outside there doing everything, that is the Government doing what they have to do.

Madam President, I could continue to speak about Moruga Fishing Port, Diego Martin Interchange, La Brea Dry Docking, San Fernando Waterfront, bridge programme, coastal protection, traffic management, maritime division, all the work

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we do in licensing office. I wanted to spend 15/20 minutes on the great job the licensing office is doing and where we expect licence office to go within the next six months in terms of crime fighting and all of the advantages of where we are going. PTSC: what PTSC doing; 300 new buses and how they are going to improve the whole public transportation system; the port, the scanners on the port. Finally, after seven years the port scanners working. I wanted to go into that and show all the advantages of that; VMCOTT; Tobago, Madam President; the advantages of the ferry port in Tobago; the marina in Tobago; the new PTSC terminal in Tobago. But, Madam President, today is a day where I really want to talk about what the Ministry of Works and Transport has been doing for last four days and to give an update as to what is the situation in the country right now in terms of the infrastructure.

Madam President, as we speak now, I can tell you that most of the water that would have been there for the last four days has subsided significantly. The Uriah Butler Highway is now passable. Both the northbound and the southbound lane are being used. Most of the other areas, the water has subsided. However, we did have some torrential showers a little while ago and there are some challenges now on the bus route and the East-West Corridor. We do not expect that to stay and to last for any length of time because in that area we do have some quick run-off. However, we have to monitor the weather forecast and we know that things could change.

What we were faced with, Madam President, is almost 30 per cent more rainfall than the average monthly rainfall, in just over two days. So in just over two days we got 30 per cent more than the monthly average. Not the monthly average, eh, about 30 per cent more than the monthly average. There is no way you could

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engineer for that sort of water. And it comes at a time when the ground is already saturated. The dams are already filled, and then when you consider we sit on an island where every six hours you have a high tide or a low tide, that just compounds the situation for us. But as citizens we rallied. So far we have no reported deaths and I think that is something that we have to be thankful for. [*Desk thumping*]

I can tell you, on Friday night about two o'clock I was telling some of my colleagues I am worried about Greenvale, because we did not know what was happening in there. Even the army could not go in because the trucks could not go in. We had to wait for the boats, and at that hour you cannot see anything. So you cannot even get into the houses. Some of them told me they were listening for screams. So you did not know when you get into the house what you were going to meet. People were telling you that they had to cut the galvanize to go up on the roof. There were people sitting on the water tanks for more than 24 hours.

This was something out of a movie, and everybody stuck together and we actually accomplished a fantastic job. It is unfortunate that Sen. Ameen, Sen. Ramdeen, Sen. Mark, the UNC team, will behave like that and have a walkout and try to give the impression that nothing is being done. It is unfortunate. It has damaged the morale of a lot of people outside there [*Desk thumping*] because everybody is doing their part.

Madam President, I would have loved to speak about the sea bridge that finally the Government has sorted out. We have ferries running up and down to Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Give and take, there will be some challenges on days, but it will only get better. Madam President, I really wanted to spend some time on the Joint Select Report and I wanted Sen. Mark to be in the House when I spoke

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about that joint select, because I stood through a joint select—the Prime Minister stood. I was grilled by Sen. Mark—and he is doing his job—and I was so happy that when the report was laid, that all the accusations against the Minister, all the allegations they were making and they were putting into the public domain: both politicians, unions, some people who had an interest—nothing in the report pointed that the Minister did anything wrong—nothing.

I wanted to spend some time on that. Unfortunately, I could not do it. I wanted to speak about national helicopters and why this country is faced with a \$27 million lawsuit right now. Because they keep talking about the *Galleons Passage* and the Government spent US \$17 million and we have—and they bought a boat. Well, the boat now is transporting close to 700 people and the boat is here. I wanted to find out more about where the helicopter is—US \$27 million, “can’t transport nobody”.

Madam President, I will not go into that. We will have more time for that. What we will be doing at the Ministry of Works and Transport and what we have been doing, we have been ensuring that the infrastructure remains intact. So far, we have had minor infringements. We are doing a thorough inspection. Until the water reaches to the level where we can do an in-depth investigation, we are not able to conclude that all the infrastructure have remained intact. But we have people on the ground and so far we have not seen anything that is of any major concern.

As we speak, the Manzanilla/Mayaro Road is under heavy water. We are suspecting that there are some infringements up there but, again, we cannot confirm it. When I leave here, I think a team of us might be going up to Manzanilla to do some more inspection of that roadway. Because if it is that there is damage then we would have to permanently close the roadway even after the water goes

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down to any level.

There is some damage I saw on social media in the Balmain area. The team is down there and they are quite convinced that they can have that rectified. So, so far again, as a country, we do not have any major breaches based on the volume of water that we had and that intense rain over a three-day period. Unfortunately, the greatest damage that we face is that damage done by Sen. Khadijah Ameen and her team this morning. What it did was that it broke the moral back of us as politicians who, after this country united to take us to a different level, we have to come today when the clean-up start—because what we are doing out there now is clean-up. We are cleaning up now, assisting people. And people are going—I mean, if you go into some of these areas today and you see the amount of volunteers bringing out cleaning material and foodstuff and everything, but then you hear politicians saying “de next side, de next side eh doing nutting”, that is unforgivable.

Madam President, I would like to go back out on the fields. I will stop my contribution here, but just to give Trinidad and Tobago the assurance that the Government is doing all within its power to ensure that normalcy comes back soon. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Allyson West): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, as I rise to speak, I would also like to extend, one, my condolences to the people who have been affected by these difficult couple of days that we have had and to give them the assurance that the Government is with them and is in support of them. I would also like to extend my thanks to every single Trinidad and Tobago citizen who has gone out and made every effort to assist and to soften the blow that these people have gone through. It really warmed my heart to see the reaction of the people of

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Trinidad and Tobago and the response that we got and it gives me hope for Trinidad and Tobago. Despite the few negatives, I think that that is the one real positive that came out of this weekend and I hope that we can build and grow on that strength which I think is a real strength.

As my colleagues have indicated, all Ministers, all Ministries, have been working and contributing to the relief effort. I would particularly like to mention, too, Sen. Deyalsingh through you, Madam President, that he should be heartened to know that the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services are, in fact, providing counselling services as well as actual physical support because we recognize that this is an event that can traumatize people who have been affected, so we have been offering that support.

In respect of the Ministry of Finance, in particular, which is the Ministry that I came from, Ministry of Finance too has been working in respect to providing relief and I would just like to advise the national public of the following: In 2007, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago at that time agreed that Trinidad and Tobago should participate in a Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility and we have been participating in that facility since then. In 2017, the Government had the foresight to extend that coverage to include damage suffered as a result of excessive rainfall, and we were fortunate, in 2017, to benefit from that insurance because we had a particularly difficult period in 2017. We made a claim and we benefited from that. We expect to do the same again.

So what the Ministry of Finance has been doing, in addition to the work of the MP, and so on, in respect of the flooding, was communicated to the public in a media release that was published today, which says as follows:

“The Minister of Finance wishes to advise that on Saturday October

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20th, 2018, contact was made with...the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility. The Ministry of Finance has a”—risk—“insurance policy with CCRIF, to cater for damage to physical infrastructure, the cost of clean-up and rescue operations, and funding for disaster relief for citizens and residents of Trinidad and Tobago.”

5.30 p.m.

CCRIF is a regional catastrophe fund for Caribbean Governments, designed primarily to limit the financial impact of devastating hurricanes and earthquakes by quickly providing financial support when a policy is triggered. However, in fiscal 2017, the Ministry of Finance paid an additional premium to include coverage for damage caused by excessive rainfall for 2017 to 2018. The excessive rainfall policy was renewed a month ago for the 2018/2019 period.

CCRIF was advised on Saturday that Trinidad and Tobago was experiencing unusually heavy rainfall and suffering from severe flooding. Urgent disbursement of funds was requested for this country’s excessive rainfall insurance policy with CCRIF.

In the interim, with the Ministry’s excessive rainfall claim with CCRIF, while the Ministry’s claim is being processed, the Ministry of Finance is making internal arrangements to ensure that regional corporations, the defence force, the protective services, the relevant ministries with responsibility for disaster management, social services, health care, inter alia, ODPM and other relief agencies are suitably funded as a priority so citizens directly affected will receive the help they so urgently need. So that, Madam President, is just an indication of the work of one Ministry, the Ministry of Finance, in respect to providing relief for the people affected by this disaster that we have faced over the past couple of days.

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Madam President, a lot has been said by various persons about Petrotrin. I think my colleague, Leader of Government Business in the Senate, has adequately covered a lot of the issues. I just want to make a comment, again, from the perspective of finance. Now, a lot of people have been saying that, well, I should not say “a lot”, some people have been saying that we have manufactured the problem at Petrotrin to close down the refinery for the purpose of weakening or severely damaging the trade union, and that it is not a real issue, and that we are making all of this up. So from a finance perspective, Madam President, let me indicate what the possible implication for the country is, if we do not deal with Petrotrin.

Standard & Poor’s in April 2017/2018 issued a report that says as follows.

We believe that the Government faces moderate contingent risks from its non-financial public enterprises including the Petroleum Company of Trinidad and Tobago. Petrotrin has two large upcoming debt maturities that are guaranteed by the Government. One for US \$850 million due in 2019 and one for US \$750 million due in 2022.

This is Standard & Poor’s saying “we consider this debt in our assessment of the Government’s contingent liabilities”.

Similar comments would have been made by Moody’s in its report of May 05, 2018, and also in the IMF report issued in 2018. This substantiates, Madam President, that the rating agencies are looking at the Petrotrin issue, are looking at how we deal with the Petrotrin issue, and that this is something that will impact, that has impacted our rating; the country’s rating. And what that means is that if we do not fix the problem, we can face a downgrade. What a downgrade means is that our borrowing costs become higher. We already have to syphon off of the top

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of our national budget the cost of bearing the servicing of the debt that we already have.

If we do not fix the rating problem, we are faced with downgrade, we are faced with increased interest costs, we are faced with not being able to borrow, and certainly not being able to borrow at reasonable rates. The country cannot afford that. So while the Government of Trinidad and Tobago would have been happy if we could have saved the jobs of all the people impacted by the closure of the Petrotrin refinery rather than Petrotrin, it was a choice of the lesser of two evils. Do we compromise the economic stability of the country and the cost that we bear in terms of our financing or do we deal more frontally and decisively with the Petrotrin issue that has been going on for a while; these are the choices that we faced.

The decision that we were forced to make because of the economics was that we had to sacrifice the few for the benefit of the many. We could have taken the decision and decide well okay, let us leave it alone, like everybody else has been leaving it alone, but that would have been putting political expediency above the needs of the country, and we were not prepared to do that.

Very recently in a discussion I had with a Nigerian individual who is currently working in the energy sector in Trinidad, he said to me that he was looking with interest at what we would do with respect to Petrotrin because Nigeria is faced with the same problem. They have four refineries. They produce a million barrels of oil a day, but still they have to import significant amounts of oil at a great loss to keep those refineries going. And what he said to me that I will never forget is that the difference between what is happening in Nigeria and what is happening in Port of Spain is courage. We have to recognize the courage and

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fortitude of the person who leads this Government, Dr. Keith Rowley, [*Desk thumping*] in taking the decision to look at Petrotrin closely, to do the investigation, to determine what was the right course of action and having determine that, to move forward with fortitude to address it.

I know Sen. Richards says that we had challenges with communication, that we should look at it going forward and we will take that into account. But let me remind Sen. Richards and the rest of the nation that we started publicly communicating the issues of Petrotrin through the Prime Minister's address to the nation in January of 2017, and every time we got to a milestone, we came back to the public and let them know where we were. We could not give them the entire picture because the picture developed and evolved over time, so as we came to a point, we went back to the public. It may be that we did not speak loudly enough, it may be that we spoke loudly but we did not get the kind of coverage we needed, but we made every effort, not only to keep the country involved, but to get the stakeholders who were directly impacted to engage in the discussion and resolution and coming up with a solution. So that is my contribution on Petrotrin.

Sen. Richards also raised the issue of the NIB problem and he asked us to not let that be another Petrotrin. We do recognize NIB's ability to deal with—continue with provision of pensions is a difficult area that has to be addressed, but—and as the Minister of Finance would have indicated in the other place when he was making his wind-up, the NIB did come to him and say, let us look at another rate increase so we can bridge the gap.

The response of the Government to that is, it is not a simple matter, we need to look at it holistically, so we were not prepared to just say, let us just put another increase. So, the pension issue is not just a NIB issue. There is an NIB issue and

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there is a State issue in terms of the pension to public servants and in terms of the pensions to old age pensioners. That has to be looked at holistically and that is the plan for 2019, to come up with a solution that the country can afford and that is sustainable. So that is the plan.

With respect to the NIF, a couple of comments were raised on that. Sen. Shrikissoon asked us not to dilute the buffer that is created for the current investors by the very sizeable backing that they have to the bond, and that is not the intention Sen. Shrikissoon, through you, Madam President.

The assets that are currently in the NIF are held in trust for the bondholders and will continue to be held in trust until they are paid off. Any future bond issues will be supported by separate assets, and this is legally established to work like that. So there is no intention of Government to offer you something that is an asset that is backed and very strong and justifies the rating that we got and the price that we sold it at. We are not going to compromise that by diluting the basis of your investment. That is not the intention.

Sen. Raffoul asked the question on: “Why is it not debt”? The Government’s position on this, Sen. Raffoul, is because the bond issue has been fully securitized and, in effect, is securitized almost on a two to one basis that is not an obligation that falls on the Government. So it is not that we do not know that a bond is a debt instrument, it is that the Government is not seen to bear the burden of that investment because it is so fully and well secured.

Sen. Richards raised the issue of security for our borders, and the fact that a lot of the contraband that comes in, actually comes in through the legal ports. We are aware of that, Sen. Richards, through you, Madam President, and Sen. Sinanan would have indicated that one of the measures that we were targeting to address

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that, is the introduction of the scanners which are finally up and running after having been in the country for two years, and I would not go into why it took so long to get them up and running but they finally are.

The other measure—the other significant measure that we need to put in place to deal with that in my view, and I know I keep harping on it because it is close to my heart, introduction of the Revenue Authority, because we do have to clean up what is happening at the port. We need to fix the processes down there. We need to ensure that there is accountability. We need to ensure that there is oversight and proper management. And we think that it would be a difficult task to address that through the current system.

So, we are hoping to do it with the introduction of the Revenue Authority and as we get to that debate, we will offer more information and our plans on that. But as you are aware it does require, based on the current drafting of the Bill, it does require the support of a special majority, and so we are hoping that good sense will prevail when we come to that point, so that we can move the country forward, because as you quite correctly said, this does not only impact the revenue of the country which is a significant issue in and of itself, but it significantly impacts border control, and that has a direct link to the level of crime that we have, that we are facing, that we have to deal with.

Through you, Madam President to Sen. Deyalsingh, you focused a bit on the fact that we are spending a lot of money in areas like social development and education, and not necessarily getting the required return, and we agree completely. So what we have done is we have had a study conducted by one of our international support groups, looking at the effectiveness of the spend in three key areas of government, social development and education being among those.

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We have a report from them, and what we are seeking to do is address how we deal with it so that we get more effective impact from every dollar that we spend. So that either we could reduce the spend in some of the areas or we can get a bigger impact for what we do spend. So the focus is in all areas, value for money; getting more with less. So that is a focus. Hopefully we will try to introduce some changes and see some impact during this financial year that is coming. But we are aware of the fact that it is not where it should be and we are working on it.

Sen. Deyalsingh, again, talked sports tourism being an area that we should look at as an area of diversification and the Government agrees completely. And in fact, I can say that we have had sports tourism and we are looking to generate more. So let me let you in on some areas where we have seen some traction in this area.

We have had Canadian and US schools coming to use the Couva facilities for training during the winter period. Can we do more of that? Yes, we certainly can and we will look to do so. And I have no doubt that improving the crime situation will allow us to do more of that, and we are working, the Minister of National Security and his team, with the assistance of the new Commissioner of Police, is making every effort to make a difference in this area. As he indicated, the focus will be on more effective policing using more electronic platforms so that we could get some traction and see some improvement.

Other areas of sports tourism. You had the International Tennis Federation having a programme here. We had sample regional competitions. We had the CAC swim meets; we had the West Indies women against South Africa. We are looking in the not too distant future to host the Pan AM Dragon boat next March in Tobago. We are pursuing opportunities in terms of further sports tourism. The

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Commonwealth Youth Games we are pursuing. The regional rifle shooting competition, we are pursuing that, so this is something that is actively engaging the attention of the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs.

I noted your suggestion that marketing our sportsmen, our renowned sportsmen and using them can further promote, and we agree with that completely, and it is something we can pay more attention to going forward; but sports tourism is an area where we do have our focus.

Now, although we have the facilities in Couva which are conducive to that, we do not yet have a hotel in the area to house the people, and so that is something that the Government is giving consideration to, and we certainly have to address it if we are to successfully bid for the Commonwealth Youth Games. So, it is on the agenda, Senator.

Madam President, I have listened to the contributions of the various Members and what I took away is that a lot of the Members who are Independent made very balanced contributions. Sen. Shrikissoon, with his normal manner, gave us all the kudos for the good things that we did and I am very thankful that the list was longer this year than it has been previously. I recognize that, and I really appreciate the balanced perspective that we got from you, Sen. Shrikissoon, and others, through you, Madam President.

I took note of the negatives and either we try to respond where we thought that there was misinformation or an incorrect conclusion or we will take note of it in terms of how we treat with things going forward. But my bottom-line takeaway, both from the debate in this House and from the comments on the outside, is that people see this year's budget as a decent budget. [*Desk thumping*]

And I really would like to add my commendation, I was remiss in my earlier

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presentation. I would like to add my commendation to the Minister of Finance and the team at the Ministry of Finance, to the Minister of Planning and the team at her Ministry under the leadership of the Prime Minister in getting us to a place where we can present a budget that essentially, but for the impact of the super gasoline change in price, that essentially says to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, one, we are heading in the right direction. Two, we remember the most vulnerable and continue to try our best to support them.

In my view, one of the reasons why that must have triggered the walk out this morning, was that the Opposition really did not have a lot of negative things to say on the budget [*Desk thumping*] and so they decided to let us take advantage.

So, what does the budget say to us? The budget says that the deficit that we have been living on since 2008, because that was our last non-deficit budget, our deficit is down, and it has continued to head in the right direction. Yes, to Sen. Shrikissoon, Madam President, through you, the objective is to get to a balanced budget and we are working our way towards that, but taking Sen. Deyalsingh's comment in mind, we cannot do that at the expense of supporting the vulnerable. So, while we made, again, in respect of the reduction in the subsidy, we gave some of that back by increasing contributions to the most vulnerable and we have to arrive at that balance.

And the way to address reducing the deficit further, to eradicate this completely, is to collect the taxes that are out there to be collected. And again, I am promoting the introduction of the Revenue Authority, which I think is the answer to get us there, so we can both balance the budget and protect our most vulnerable. That is the objective.

The budget indicates that spending is being controlled. We started in 2015 to

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control the spending because it had gotten way out of control, and we continue to do that. And, Madam President, through you, to Sen. Richards, we are not going to go crazy going forward. We are not going to let go the reins, “Okay, money has started coming in from the oil companies, let us go on a spending spree again”. We recognize the importance of prudence in our approach to spending, and we are going to continue to do that.

Sen. Sinanan, for example, mentioned that he has been successful all on his own in his Ministry to significantly save on the projects that he has been introducing. Because the Government’s approach is “getting more with less”, we have been pushing back against the contractors. We have been sending out bids. When we do not think it is reasonable, we go back out and we want to get value for money for the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago and that will not change. It is not because we have billions of dollars flowing in that we should be just throwing away these billions of dollars. That is the approach, and that will continue to be the approach under this Government. [*Desk thumping*]

We have kept the tax regimes stable despite the utterances of some. We have not gone crazy in imposing taxes. We are seeking to reintroduce a tax that was there for decades, not decades, for over a century, the property tax, and we are working our way towards getting that done. And separate and apart from that, we have only imposed taxes in areas on people who we think could bear a little more to contribute to the good of all in this difficult circumstance, and in this year in particular we did not raise any taxes. The plan is to keep the tax system stable and to collect what is out there to be collected; that is the plan.

What else have we done in the budget? We have, as I said, we have increased the support to the vulnerable, and we have made an additional effort to

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try to regularize the position with respect to the subsidies in the reduction of the subsidy to super. We stayed away from a move on the price of diesel because we wanted to ensure that there was not a significant impact on transportation cost, on goods cost, so that was the approach that was taken.

So, we are heading towards a balanced budget. We are continuing to remain responsible. In terms of the balance, I would refer you to Moody's report of May 2018, where it recognized that we moved in 2018 from a deficit of 8.5 per cent of GDP, which is where it was in 2017, to where the Ministry estimates it is going to be 3.1 per cent, but Moody says it may be more in line of 3.5, but nonetheless, a significant reduction.

Madam President, I think having regard to the circumstances that we are in, where we have come from, what we have been doing, that this budget represents— makes a fair representation of the successes we have made. The figures that we have provided are genuine, real figures, notwithstanding the naysayers who are saying we are misreading the statistics, or we are misrepresenting the statistics, even worse. And we have gave Trinidad and Tobago hope in that this Government is properly managing its affairs, we are seeing the successes. I know it is going to take a while to trickle down to the man in the street. Hopefully the adjustments we have made to the social welfare programmes will get them to get more of a benefit quickly, but we are heading in the right direction. We are on the right path, we will continue to be responsible, and I recommend in the circumstances support for the budget. Madam President, I thank you, and I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

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The Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Allyson West):
Madam President, in accordance with Standing Order 57(2), I beg to move that the Bill not be committed to a committee of the whole Senate.

Question put and agreed to.

Question put and agreed to: That the Bill be read a third time.

Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, I beg to move that this Senate do now adjourn to a date to be fixed.

Madam President: Hon. Senators, before I put the question on the adjournment, I just ask that as we leave, that we continue to hold in our thoughts and prayers all of those citizens who have been suffering losses as a result of the floods, and all of those who are out there trying to help them. Let us keep them in our thoughts and prayers.

Question put and agreed to.

Senate adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 5.59 p.m.