

**VERBATIM NOTES OF THE STANDING FINANCE COMMITTEE OF  
THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES HELD IN THE PARLIAMENT  
CHAMBER, LEVEL 2, TOWER D, THE PORT-OF-SPAIN  
INTERNATIONAL WATERFRONT CENTRE, #1A WRIGHTSON ROAD,  
PORT OF SPAIN, ON MONDAY, JANUARY 14, 2019 AT 1.30 P.M.**

**Madam Chairman:** I now call to order the Standing Finance Committee of Monday, January 14, 2019.

Hon. Members, in accordance with Standing Order 82(6) and 87, this meeting of the Standing Finance Committee was convened to consider proposals for the variation of appropriation for fiscal year 2018. Hon. Members, in accordance with Standing Order 45(1), the speaking time for Standing Finance Committee shall not exceed five minutes on each intervention. The proposals for variations which constitute decreases will be considered first, then proposals for variations which are increases. Thereafter, the proposals for write-off of losses for fiscal 2018 shall be considered.

The procedure shall be as follows: The Head and the amount to be varied will be announced. The Minister with responsibility will then be invited to explain the purpose for the variation. The Chair shall then propose the question that the Head be varied. Members may then seek clarification from the Minister. Once this is concluded, the Chairman will then put the question that the sum to be varied be approved. The procedure will be repeated for each Head. A similar procedure will be followed for the approval of the write-off of losses. This Committee is being asked to note that the Minister of Finance has approved the transfer of funds in the sum of \$1,457,501,437 between Sub-Heads under the same Head of Expenditure for fiscal year 2017, and transfer of funds in the sum \$1,183,532,006 between Sub-Heads under the same Head of Expenditure for fiscal year 2018. These transfers

do not require the approval of the Committee.

We shall now go to the variations. As we said, we would consider decreases. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Mr. Lee:** Thank you. Just for some clarification as we continue. When Members seek clarification on certain Heads and the response might not be readily available today, what sort of time frame?—because I know Friday we would be debating.

**Mr. Imbert:** I had hoped that we can have the answers by Wednesday. That is the plan. So, once the information is readily available, it will be provided to the Parliament by Wednesday.

**Mr. Lee:** Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. Hon. Members, we shall now consider the proposals for variation for fiscal year 2018. The proposals for decreases will be considered first, followed by the proposals for increases. Decreases. Hon. Members, we shall we shall now consider the proposals for decreases for fiscal year 2018. Head 22, Ministry of National Security.

*Head 22:* Ministry of National Security, a decrease of \$100,000,000.

**Madam Chairman:** I will now invite the Minister of National Security to make a brief opening statement for a maximum of five minutes. Minister.

**Mr. Young:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, the Ministry of National Security, as it is well known, is the Ministry with the responsibility for the safety and security of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, overseeing a number of arms of national security, including Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force, Probation Officers, Life Guards, the Prison Service, the Immigration, Fire Services; and whilst there is a constitutional independence to an extent with the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, they also operate under the Ministry of National Security. Those are the main Heads, Ma'am.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Oropouche East.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and Minister thank you for reminding us of the nature of the Ministry of National Security. But Minister, this seems to be a specific matter of the reduction of a \$100 million under the Sub-heading: Rent/Lease - Vehicles Equipment, but dealing specifically with the CCTV cameras. Just a few short questions that you could probably answer now. Are we interpreting this correctly that you are going to decrease by \$100 million for the provision of CCTV because a contract expired and was not renewed in time? One.

And secondly, I just wanted for you to give a brief—you can do that now or if you prefer in writing, as to the coverage of CCTV cameras throughout the country. I do not need details as to where cameras are, but to what extent? Like what percentage may be operational? What percentage you may have to repair? Because we have had this problem in the past where incidents take place—criminal incidents and others—and you look for the CCTV camera there, you have cameras in the vicinity, but we are told at times that they are not operational, or they are defective, they were not fixed or repaired and so on. So, just to give us an idea, either now or in writing, as to the percentage really. How much cameras are up? How much are operational? What percentage are not operational? Not where they are or anything like that, and whether action has been taken at the level of the Ministry of National Security in collaboration with the relevant law enforcement agency, to have some system for repair quickly. Basically that is the question.

**Madam Chairman:** Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, I would just like—sorry Minister of National Security. I would just like clarification. This particular Item, the explanation given in the notes that are before Members of Parliament is that the contract has expired and the Ministry is awaiting Cabinet's approval for a new contract.

Therefore, I am wondering about the relevance of the question asked by the Member for Oropouche—East? I cannot remember if it is East or West. Could I get a ruling from you on that? Is this the type of question that is applicable under the Standing Orders for this reduction which is based on Cabinet approval of a contract?

**Madam Chairman:** Okay, so as far as repairs, location, or numbers, amounts and so on, it is not a relevant question based on the Item and the nature of the variation. I had allowed it because it seems that the Minister was willing.

**Mr. Imbert:** He may not have known.

**Madam Chairman:** But, this is something, I guess, the Member can get by another form of interrogation. Okay?

**Mr. Young:** Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Naparima.

**Mr. Charles:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Given the critical nature of the challenges we face with national security, and given the importance of the CCTV coverage, the question is: Why it is that appropriate mechanisms were not put in place beforehand to ensure that the contract was renewed in time, to ensure continuous coverage of CCTV Trinidad and Tobago?

**Madam Chairman:** Minister of National Security.

**Mr. Young:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, when we came in as an administration we found that a contract had been entered into with TSTT that was not a contract that was favourable by any stretch of the imagination to taxpayers. In fact, when we did the mathematics and we worked out the cost per camera it was phenomenally more expensive than it should have been. So at the National Security Council, we took a decision not to renew the contract. We gave instructions that before the contract expired there should be a competitive RFP

process undertaken for the continuation and upgrade of CCTV cameras. Unfortunately, that was not done, and what we have done is we took steps to have the contract terminated, put on a month-to-month basis, and we have gone out for a RFP that is currently being evaluated for us to award a contract for the improvement of the CCTV camera system, the enhancement of the CCTV camera system, but more importantly, to ensure that taxpayers get value for money. The costing that had been entered into previous to us was working out in some instances to between 14 and \$11,000 a camera a month, whereas, there was another provider, Columbus Communications, that was doing a certain sector of cameras for \$3,000 a month. So just on that comparison alone, as the National Security Council, we decided not to renew the contract. So this sum of money is really a sum of credit whilst that is being worked out.

**Madam Chairman:** Supplemental, Member for Naparima.

**Mr. Charles:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Given the fact that when you came into power in September 2015 you identified that the arrangement was expensive, why in three years did you not have procedures and systems in place knowing full well that you were not going to renew the contract, so that we would not be in the position we are in today?

**Mr. Young:** Madam Chair, first of all it is not factually correct to say that we were aware of it when we came into office. Because, of course, when we came into office the CCTV camera system was continual and operating. It is when it came time close to renewal and we asked to look at it, and to do an assessment, and we asked for a report on it that this was discovered. As soon as that was found out we immediately put things in place, and I think to date we have actually saved a few hundred million dollars on the decisions that we took not to pursue the continuation of this particular arrangement.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you, Chair. I just want to ask, in light of all that the Minister has indicated, what is the current status of the approval for the CCTV coverage at the Cabinet's level? Is it that you plan to move on to another contract? Is there a procurement request in place? I do not know. Because at the end of the day we cannot have proper management of a security system without the CCTV in operation. So what is in fact happening right now?

**Mr. Young:** Okay, thank you. As I had indicated, well first of all let me say that the CCTV camera system is operational and is currently in use and being utilized, and fully functional. When I say fully functional, there is a percentage of cameras that are continuously needing to be maintained that may not be working, et cetera. I think that is somewhere around the 15 per cent. What is happening is exactly what I just said. We went out for procurement, there were certain companies, I think about eight of them selected to put in competitive tenders. Those tenders are currently being evaluated for the improvement and enhancement of the CCTV camera system.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Chaguanas West.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, you indicated that the Cabinet was of the view that you were not getting value for money on the basis of this contract. Minister, are you aware that this contract was entered into by the previous PNM administration, and the People's Partnership, it was merely a continuum. So that therefore I just want to clarify that for purposes of the record.

**Mr. Young:** Actually, Ma'am, if I may.

**Mr. Singh:** Sure.

**Mr. Young:** CCTV camera systems in Trinidad and Tobago initially started under a PNM regime when there were those two conferences, the CHOGM conference as

well as the Summit of the Americas, and that is where it started from. So, he is right. The Member for Chaguanas West is right. It started under a PNM regime. But, having said that, the escalation in cost was under the UNC regime. There is no doubt about that. The UNC regime took a conscious decision to increase the cost per camera in an unjustifiable way in our opinion.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Chaguanas West, supplemental.

**Mr. Singh:** Yeah, yeah. Madam Chair, increased the cost or increased the coverage that increased the cost? [*Desk thumping*] But this was between one state enterprise and another state enterprise? Madam Speaker, I just want to—

**Mr. Young:** To answer that question, Madam Chair, he asked a question, to increase the cost, and as I just said, increasing the cost per camera, not by coverage, because the cost per camera agreed to under the UNC regime ranged from \$14,000 a camera to \$11,000 a camera, where there is a comparable cost by a similar service provider of \$3,000 a camera per month. [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Barataria/San Juan.

**Dr. Khan:** Just one question—well two questions. Number one, would there be one supplier for the total country or it will be regional suppliers? Two, the type of camera that is going to be used for \$3,000, is it equivalent to the camera that was in place for \$15,000 based on the HD significant finding—processes? And two—

**Madam Chairman:** And three.

**Dr. Khan:** Would private individuals be allowed to place cameras where they are not placed, and link it to the general system?

**Madam Chairman:** Okay, so I would allow the first two questions.

**Dr. Khan:** Okay.

**Madam Chairman:** Right. You counted them as two but there were three so I would allow the first two.

**Mr. Young:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, the evaluations and the tenders that have been put in—the tenders that have been put in are currently before an evaluation committee, so at our level we do not know what has been put in. What we did ask for in our RFP were best in class. What is state in the art, and as I say, an enhancement of what exists because a lot of the cameras that exist—well not a lot. Some of the cameras that existed are outdated technology. So we have asked for an update in technology, an enhancement of the system, and a wider coverage. But we left it open for persons to put in in their tenders how they would expect to cover it. I think that answers both one and two.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Oropouche East.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you Minister for this explanation. Just for absolute clarification, the current status—because you said the cameras are operational by and large, notwithstanding a 15 per cent more or less, that need repairing at all times. The current arrangement as I understand you to be saying, it is on a month-by-month basis, because you, having discovered that you were not getting value for money, took steps to have another provider that may be more efficient and less costly. That arrangement has been in place on a month-to-month basis, can I say from July 2017 to today? On that month-by-month arrangement, is that also with TSTT? And is that also at the same cost that was contractual before?

**Mr. Young:** The vast majority of camera systems on the national CCTV grid are provided by TSTT at this time. So yes, it is a continuation. One of the—I would not call it a dispute as yet, but one of the issues that is being raised with TSTT is that the payments on a month-to-month basis will not be at the prevailing rates that were the prevailing agreed contractual rates, but rather that would be on a value for money on a quantum merit basis. So that is one of the conversations currently



taking place with TSTT. So to answer you, no we have not accepted the continuum of cost at the previous contractual rates.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Sir, you are confirming that since July 01, 2017 to January 2019 the monthly cost has indeed reduced?

**Mr. Young:** The monthly cost is currently being negotiated.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Oh, it is being negotiated. It has not been reduced as yet?

**Mr. Young:** We have refused to pay the previous cost.

**Dr. Moonilal:** You have refused to pay TSTT?

**Mr. Young:** Yes.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Okay, thanks.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Tabaquite.

**Dr. Rambachan:** My colleague asked the question that I was about to ask. But what I am saying, then under law do you not have a legal obligation to pay the existing rates rather than what you refused to pay, or the known estimation?

**Mr. Young:** No. On a month-to-month basis you could argue this on a quantum merit.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Thank you for all the explanations you are giving. As of now, would you say that there are varied types of providers providing—there are various providers providing the CCTV coverage? With various providers are you able, from a national security stand point, to be able to coalesce all those providers' cameras to bring it under one mainstream?

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman.

**Mr. Young:** The answer is yes.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes, but Member for Caroni East and for the guidance of all of us, that sort of question is really outside the ambit of what our remit is here

today. Member for Chaguanas West.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, there has always been a challenge between the live analysis of the CCTV and the deployment on the ground. Have you put measures in place so as to further enhance that?

**Mr. Imbert:** That question also is out of order.

**Mr. Singh:** Fine. Fine. Fine.

**Madam Chairman:** Member, again. Member, and I uphold that is out of order.

**1.50 p.m.**

**Mr. Singh:** Okay, fine. I will go on to supplemental.

**Madam Chairman:** Do you have another question?

**Mr. Singh:** Yes. Minister, you indicated that you have gone out for an RFP, Request for Proposal, for the best in class outlining the specifications as to what is required for the CCTV, because of the considerable sum of \$100 million on an annual basis. Why you did not take that approach with respect to the acquisition of vessels for the coast guards?

**Mr. Imbert:** Chairman, out of order.

**Madam Chairman:** Again, [*Laughter*] all right, okay. Member for Oropouche East.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Madam Chair, just for the public record I wanted to ask the Minister, given this revelation that the Government believes that TSTT, in particular, had been providing a service and goods and services and it was over cost and you were not getting value for money, is the Government also contemplating suing TSTT as you did other contractors who provided service—

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, question out of order.

**Dr. Moonilal:**—that you believe were in excess of the cost. For example, road contractors.

**Mr. Imbert:** Out of order.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Oropouche East, again I cannot allow that question. Member for Naparima.

**Mr. Charles:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, you indicated in your response to an earlier question I had asked that you were not aware of the exorbitant prices until the contract came for renewal. The information we have is that it came for renewal—or the contract expired on July the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017. So between July the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017 to now, which is approximately 19 months, could you give us an idea of the timelines involved? For example, when you went for—you were aware that the contract had expired on July the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017. You were aware. You were aware that the price was exorbitant and you were going into a new arrangement. So at that point—on July the 1<sup>st</sup>, what is the timeline from then to now to give us a sense that you have acted expeditiously in the situation?

**Madam Chairman:** Again, again—

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, out of order.

**Madam Chairman:** Again, Member, I cannot allow that question under the remit of what we are doing. Member for Couva South.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, could you, based on this expiration of the contract and the relationship between the Ministry and TSTT, how much money is owed to TSTT at this point in time?

**Mr. Young:** That is in dispute.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Caroni Central.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Yes. Could I ask, Minister, will TSTT have an opportunity to apply under the RFP?

**Mr. Young:** Yes.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Okay.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 22 varied by a decrease in the sum of \$100,000,000.*

**Madam Chairman:** I wish to thank the Minister of National Security and his team.

*Head 28: Ministry of Health, a decrease of \$211,000,000.*

**Madam Chairman:** I will now invite the Minister of Health to make a brief opening statement for a maximum of five minutes.

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, the Ministry of Health is responsible for the administration of approximately 10 hospitals of varying specialties across the country; approximately 110 health centres. Madam Chair, we estimate at the Ministry of Health that together, between the hospitals and the health centres, we conduct approximately 1.5 to 2 million patient interactions per year. That is not patient seen, because you have a population of 1.3. One patient may be seen several times per year. This is a phenomenal number between 1.5 to 2 million patient interactions and for that I want to sincerely thank all health care workers for the excellent work that they have been doing and I stand ready to answer any questions.

*Question proposed:* That Head 28 be varied by a decrease in the sum of \$211,000,000.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, there obviously is a rationalization of the drug issue. Could you indicate how this rationalization took place to bring it down from 730 to 580 in terms of—what were some of the main factors to determine that?

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** Sure. Thank you very much and that is an excellent question. One would admit that over the years the national drug formula re-galloped out of

control because there was no rationale put. What we have done, we have targeted the main areas of specialties. For instance, oncology, central nervous system, HIV/AIDS, which takes up the bulk of the formulary. We set up a team under the Chief Medical Officer in conjunction with specialists recommended by the Trinidad and Tobago Medical Association, plus the specialists at the RHAs to rationalize the drug supply system. It is because of that process which can stand scrutiny we have been able to whittle down, not whittle down, substantially decrease the formulary from approximately 730 to 580. May I also add 580 is still above WHO recommendations and we are moving slowly to WHO recommendations. But we are not going to do it cold turkey because the system will rebel; the system will collapse if we try to do it overnight.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Could I ask a follow-up on that?

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Minister, the CDAP drugs which you had spoken about in Parliament that you were going to rationalize, have you made changes to the type of drugs that are being dispensed now by CDAP as opposed to what was originally there?

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** You would remember hon. Member I spoke specifically about two drugs. One, to treat diabetes, one to treat hypertension. And I am happy to report that we took those off completely and substituted it with other drugs.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Other drugs of a better quality?

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** Better quality, yes. And the feedback we are getting so far is that patients are being better controlled.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, can you provide us, perhaps in writing, with the list of the 150 drugs that were removed from the formulary?

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** Of course. Yes, yes.

**Dr. Bodoë:** And the second question regards the purchasing facility through PAHO. Can you perhaps indicate what sort of percentage decrease in the prices you would have achieved for those drugs?

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** Sure. So I can assist you with that now. We are making use of the PAHO Strategic Fund much more in the past two years, especially in the area of HIV, anti-retroviral. Because we have done that, we have been able to accomplish two things. One, a significant increase in the amount of drugs as we seek to achieve our 90-90-90 targets by 2020; and two, we have been able to save this country in the area of HIV drugs alone, close to \$73 million by using the strategic fund and by passing the normal tender procedures.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Can you provide again, perhaps in writing, a list of what drugs might be available through that facility.

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** I will do that for you. Yes. Thank you very much.

**Dr. Bodoë:** And again, to come back to the percentage. I know you quoted a figure, but in terms of the percentage on a drug for drug basis can you perhaps indicate?

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** I will get that for you. Thank you.

**Dr. Khan:** Minister, just two questions. If there is an increase in the amount of HIV drugs that are being obtained from PAHO as you just said, is there an increase in the HIV people—amount of people with HIV in Trinidad and Tobago? That is one. If there is an increase in drugs being used? Is this correlated with an increase in HIV infections? And two, the rationalization of the formulary list, could you give us an indication what year did this begin?

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** Sure. So let us deal with the first question first. To achieve the 90-90-90 targets, we have significantly increased our testing because we estimate there are about 11,500 persons in Trinidad and Tobago with the virus. Of that we

currently have about close to 80 per cent of those who know their status. So as we take up the amount of people who know their status we have to provide more drugs. So that is part of the rationale for doing that. And the second part is—just remind me, please. The second part of your question.

**Dr. Khan:** The year the rationalization of the formulary began.

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** I do not know the exact year. What I can tell you, since becoming Minister of Health it was significantly accelerated. And what we did also, for the first time, we actually banned advocates for particular drugs from appearing before the committees. That was never done before. So decisions to put a drug on a formulary is objectively based.

**Dr. Khan:** Can I just get a supplemental?

**Madam Chairman:** I want to move on, I will bring you back, please.

**Dr. Khan:** It is on what the Minister just said.

**Madam Chairman:** All right. Go ahead Member for Barataria /San Juan.

**Dr. Khan:** The amount of HIV drugs that have been—as you say, increased, were there people then in this country that were not being treated and had HIV infestations?

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** No, what I said was there were people who were possibly HIV positive but did not know their status. When I came into office, and I have the figures, to achieve 90-90-90 targets we had to significantly ramp-up testing, and I will compliment you, you did that. But to achieve the 90-90-90 targets we have to significantly ramp-up testing again and encourage people to come and get tested. Because if we do not do that and we fail at getting 90 per cent of 11,500 who we believe have the virus but do not know their status, then we would not achieve our targets.

**Dr. Khan:** Thank you.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Thank you. Minister, in the rationalization of the formulary list from 730 to 580, yesterday there was a report in the newspaper of patients' families having to go to private drugstores to buy drugs for the treatment of H1N1 cases. Is this rationalization caused, or what is causing people to have to go and buy drugs privately to be used in the public hospitals?

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** The issue of H1N1 you can do this two ways. One, via vaccines which we have provided free of charge. If a patient has symptoms of headache and fever and they want to go and buy paracetamol privately, fine. So what we do at the health centres we will provide you with the vaccines absolutely free of charge. If there is a need to get antipyretics we would give you that. But if the patient goes to a private physician or prefers to go to a pharmacy we cannot stop that.

**Dr. Rambachan:** I am talking about the public hospital in yesterday's *Guardian*. There are three patients on one—

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, Madam Chairman—

**Dr. Rambachan:** From one family—

**Mr. Imbert:** Just a minute.

**Dr. Rambachan:** And they have been asked to go and buy drugs at \$44 per tablet.

**Madam Chairman:** One minute, Minister, one minute.

**Mr. Imbert:** This is the Standing Finance Committee. This is a finance matter, not an operational matter in the public health sector. Madam Chairman, could I get a ruling on that, please? That question is out of order.

**Madam Chairman:** Minister, just because it is something in the public domain, I would allow it. Member for Tabaquite.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Thank you, Madam Chairman, thank you. The reality is that it was reported in the newspaper. Three patients in the hospital, one who they said cannot even breathe and the families reported publicly that they were asked by the



hospital authorities to go and buy this drug at \$44 per tablet which is not available in the hospital. All I am asking, is this as a result of the way you have done the reformulation?

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** Absolutely not.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Well then why are there no drugs to treat patients?

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** Because the drug to treat that—a question was asked in Parliament on Friday on Tamiflu. The Member for Barataria/San Juan asked it. And I made it publicly known there is more than enough Tamiflu in the country. People have to go to the public facilities, they would be given a prescription for Tamiflu and it is available. If somebody decides to go privately that is their right or that is their concern.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Just a follow-up to—really and honestly just to ask the question. How will the decrease in the drugs, the 150 drugs that were ultimately removed; how will it impact upon the patients who depend on these drugs?

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** Sure. So the impact is going to be a positive impact. Let me tell you what used to happen to the formulary, as the three doctors across me will know. You would have a class of drugs, let us say Angiotensin II inhibitors to treat high blood pressure. What would happen is that each drug company will pay an advocate to get their particular drug on the formula. The Member for Caroni East is nodding his head. And then you have duplication, triplication, and you will have four and five drugs doing the same thing. So your money has to be spent to buy four or five brand names. What we have done—we said, no. We will put two or three drugs per category, therefore we can guarantee the supply of drugs per category and the Member for Caroni East knows exactly what I am speaking about. So that is part of the rationalization. So that, you can guarantee patients a consistent supply of cost effective pharmaceuticals throughout the year.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Could the Minister indicate as to a listing of the suppliers of pharmaceuticals to the Ministry?

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** That has already been provided through a previous Standing Finance Committee. So it is a matter of public record now.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Minister, this rationalization that is written about here, did it affect significantly the purchase and the inadequacy of some of the first line, chemotherapeutic, oncologic agents?

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** No, it did not.

**Madam Chairman:** I am not going to allow that.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** No, Madam, is it because the terminology is not in keeping—

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** “A-a.” [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Fyzabad. [*Laughter*]

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, if I could direct your attention to—[*Crosstalk*]

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** I do not think the Chairman understood the question.

**Hon. Member:** What?!

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, if I could direct your attention to the Item Regional Health Authority, \$26 million, and to ask you two questions. [*Crosstalk*] One, with regard to the recruitment and selection process for—

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** Sorry. There is too much of chatter around me.

**Dr. Bodoë:** We are on the same Item right? RHA 26 million.

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** If you can get your Members to settle down, I could hear.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Minister, so RHA, Regional Health Authority, 26 million. Two questions under that allocation. The process for doctors and nurses from Cuba—

the recruitment process—you had some delays. Can you indicate how many vacancies are affected or still to be filled by these delays? And the second question, with regard to the claims arising from legal matters that have not been finalized, can you indicate the number of legal matters that are outstanding?

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** That figure we will get for you in writing, and hopefully present it to you on Wednesday. But as far as the Cubans are concerned, some have already arrived. I think we got an initial batch of over 100.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Can you indicate then how many you were hoping to recruit? So how many outstanding?

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** The original Cabinet Note spoke about 200 plus. So we are about 50 per cent there or more by now.

**Madam Chairman:** It is Sub-Item 04?

**Dr. Bodoë:** 04, sorry, Ma'am.

**Madam Chairman:** 009, 04?

**Dr. Bodoë:** Yes, I am sorry, Ma'am. Are we going down in a particular order?

**Madam Chairman:** No, no, I just wanted to know where you reach.

**Mr. Imbert:** We just would not tack back, eh.

**Hon. Member:** Sorry. No, no, it is open.

**Madam Chairman:** No, no, we okay. [*Crosstalk*] It is all right. We said nothing about that in the procedure. Please go on, Member for Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodoë:** That is it for now, Madam.

**Mr. Padarath:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, just to go back to a comment that you made with respect to the increase in drugs for HIV. The question that I really had was—

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, this is why I made that comment.

**Mr. Padarath:**—under the Ministry of Health currently—

**Madam Chairman:** Minister of Finance, the point about it is, we are taking the questions as per the persons as recorded here. So that I have no way of knowing—it is not that we are dealing with Items as Heads as we do, or Sub-Heads as we do or Sub-Items. Okay? Member for Princes Town.

**Mr. Padarath:** Thank you, Ma'am. Minister, with respect to the comments you made with respect to the increase in drugs for HIV and the expenditure, the question that I really had under this particular Item was that I noticed that the Ministry of Health has started using the rapid HIV home testing kits but it is only available under the Ministry of Health. I was wondering what was the reason for it not being available throughout, only under the Ministry of Health, and whether or not this particular rapid HIV home testing contributed to the increase in terms of determining persons who were actually infected?

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** May I ask what other channel he would like to see it be distributed via?

**Mr. Padarath:** Through the pharmacies that are throughout the country. I was wondering what was preventing pharmacies in Trinidad and Tobago from having the test available.

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** Absolutely nothing. They are free. Private enterprise is free to sell HIV rapid testing kits.

**Mr. Padarath:** And you are confirming that it is utilized as per the website information?

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** In the public health care system.

**Mr. Padarath:** In the public health care system. Okay.

**Dr. Khan:** What heading are we on, Madam Chairman, could I ask? [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Chairman:** We are dealing with the variation under the Ministry of Health.

**Dr. Khan:** So we could do all questions under the Ministry of Health? I am just asking for clarification. Okay, on Sub-Heading 04, Item 009, Sub-Item 04, Regional Health Authority.

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** Yes.

**Dr. Khan:** You said that the \$26 million is saved because of the—is decreased because the vacancies are not finalized by the recruitment of the Cubans. Could the Minister indicate how many local doctors and nurses have not been recruited and what is the amount that have not been recruited at present?

**Madam Chairman:** I am not going to allow that.

**Mr. Imbert:** That point is out of order.

**Madam Chairman:** I am not going to allow that. Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** The medical treatment, Minister, of nationals in the institutions, there was an active programme for doing out-patient surgery in other institutions and, of course, you reduced that expenditure by \$20 million. Does it mean that fewer patients are having the elective surgical procedures which were done privately in institutions? Or does it really mean that more have been done within the hospital system?

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** It is the latter. Under my stewardship and this Government's stewardship at the Ministry of Health we have taken a conscious policy decision to return the public health centre to its glory days where it did its work in the public health centre. Our two major achievements have been not farming out cataract surgeries to the private health care sector. That is one of the reasons for significant savings as it says there. And also we are doing more and more elective procedures in-house, like hernias and so on, by having our operating theaters especially at North/Central/Mount Hope work on a Sunday. So it is a conscious decision by this administration to do more work in-house because doctors and nurses when I came

in they were clamouring for work and to stop the farming out to the private health care sector.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Madam Chair, can I ask one supplemental?

**Madam Chairman:** Yes, Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Hon. Minister, would you be kind enough to consider giving some information on the amount of cases done in-house, in the hospitals, versus outside in the private institutions for a comparable period.

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** Sure. Hon. Member, that can be provided. Thank you.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, 04, 009, 05, South-West Regional Health Authority, 5 million, that is the Item. And I refer you to the last line of the explanation. The use of overtime was also more efficiently managed. And my question there is, how has this affected the provision of medical services after hours, after 4.00 p.m. and on weekends especially in terms, for example, of SMO, Specialist Medical cover ward rounds and so on a weekend.

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** Absolutely not negatively. And the proof of this hon. Member, and I am glad you asked that. As a former chairman of South-West and a former Minister of Health there would always be a shortage of bed space after Christmas and New Year's when people go off their diets and do not take their medication after Christmas and New Year's. Every Minister of Health has been faced with that and it will make the papers. Do you realize this year, for the first time in maybe a decade you have not had a shortage of bed space post the New Year's/Christmas period. **Hon. Member:** Too much fruitcake.

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** It is because the same SMOs are working and discharging patients so we can create space. [*Laughter*] So it has not affected negatively at all.

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, although this involves one of my Members, this is not a debate. This is a Finance Committee. [*Laughter*]

**Dr. Bodoë:** Minister, I did not want to go down that road, but can you then provide an explanation as to why over the weekend there were 52 patients waiting for beds in the casualty? [*Laughter*]

**Mr. Imbert:** Chairman, you see the point I was making?

**Dr. Bodoë:** For more than 24 hours.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Fyzabad—

**Dr. Bodoë:** I am sorry. That does not qualify.

**Madam Chairman:** Right. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Line Item 09, 005, 060, 250. Can you advise or give an explanation as to what were the procurement challenges faced with this programme?

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** Which programme you are speaking to?

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** That is the Health Services Support Programme.

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** The Health Services Support Programme had to be front-loaded for year one with administrative staff. So as the note says, you had to get your administrative staff going. You had to do all terms of reference to comply with two sets of procurement rules. One, IDB rules in Washington and locally. So what is going to happen now is that after we have gotten over that hump in year one we are now ready to roll in year two with some significant projects. One, the diabetes in pregnancy project, where, for the first time in Trinidad and Tobago, all pregnant women in our public health care system will be tested for diabetes and treated for diabetes if they develop gestational diabetes. It was never done as a national project.

Two, the provision of exercise and gym equipment for our children, because we have a childhood obesity problem. We are going to be setting up once and for all a proper registry for NCDs, including cancers. So all these projects are ready to

go and that is why in the first year it was front-loaded administratively but now it will be done now with actually spending money on goods and projects.

**Dr. Khan:** Minister, I see that you have, there is something—you could not finalize a suitable supplier for the provision of a virtual library. The only thing about it, the Ministry of Health website, there is INFOMED which is a virtual library. Could you give me—what are you looking for as a supplier?

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** We had some IT challenges with that, Member. I am not fully cognizant of the details but I can get it for you. I do not want to speak out of turn.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Hon. Minister, let me direct you to line-Item 04, 009, 05, the issue of the—you eliminated cost inefficiencies in the acquisition of medical supplies. But there had been a clamour all along for the shortage of certain medical equipment for doing particular surgical procedures. Could you give us a little explanation about the shortage versus this what you—

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** Could you tell me exactly what shortage you are speaking about?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Well, some of them complained that they were not getting for the hip and the knee and so on, for the equipment—

**Madam Chairman:** Member.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** This is in keeping with this.

**Madam Chairman:** Which Item are we under?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** 04, 009, 05, South-West Regional Health Authority, 5 million. That is the line-Item.

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, may I make a point here, Madam Chairman? The explanation given for the saving is elimination of cost inefficiencies, not provision of or non-provision of equipment and supplies. It is elimination of cost inefficiencies.



**Dr. Gopeesingh:** It is in the acquisition of medical supplies I am speaking about, Minister.

**Mr. Imbert:** The question is out of order.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** If you read further on it is in the acquisition of medical supplies. So I am asking the question—

**Mr. Imbert:** The operative words are cost—

**Madam Chairman:** Just a minute.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:**—medical supplies. You are seeing part of the sentence. I am seeing the entire sentence.

**Madam Chairman:** Can we have some order please? [*Crosstalk*]

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Madam Chair, I am asking the question that the Minister which I am sure he is willing to explain—

**Madam Chairman:** Just ask the question. Let me hear the question, Member.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Because of the clamour that we have been hearing for the inability to have certain medical supplies at certain institutions, how has this affected that?

**Madam Chairman:** But what is said is here and we are at 04, 009, 05, okay?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Yes.

**Madam Chairman:** It is with a view to eliminate cost efficiencies in the acquisition of medical supplies, goods and services.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Was it through the detriment of the inability to secure or procure certain supplies as to not have certain patients get surgical procedures done. And I am sure you would answer that.

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** And the answer is, no. What we did with orthopedics—I made a statement in the Parliament during my budget speech of 2016—

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Yeah, I heard you mentioned that.

**Mr. Deyalsingh:**—about the cartel that operated with orthopedics. And we have now corrected that—

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** But there are many other issues, many other medical supplies which were needed and were not obtained.

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** Do you know one of reasons why some patients do not get their hip transplants or knee transplants—

**Mr. Imbert:** Chairman, as I indicated, this is not a debate.

**Madam Chairman:** Member. Minister of Health, I think your initial response would suffice for the purposes of this meeting. Member for Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, I just want to draw your attention. The waiting list for surgery, 7 million, 09, 004, 007, in reference to cardiac surgery. Can you give us the number of patients that were done in-house. I am talking at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex.

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** Sure, I would get that for you.

**Dr. Bodoë:** And secondly, a patient who is awaiting cardiac surgery normally comes through the Ministry of approval—

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** Correct.

**Dr. Bodoë:** How is the allocation done? So are you considering Eric Williams as a provider in a sense compared to the other providers that you use?

**2.20 p.m.**

**Madam Chairman:** I would not allow that under this Item. Member for Tabaquite.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, under the very Item, Waiting List for Surgery, I would like to know, despite what the Minister is saying that specific surgical procedures were increased due to in-house at the Eric

Williams, and so on—

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** All over.

**Dr. Rambachan:**—what is the waiting time now for cardiac surgery? What is the waiting time for a patient who comes to the hospital and it is determined that he has to get cardiac surgery? What is the waiting time?

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** The waiting time varies on a patient-by-patient basis. There is no blanket. It depends on the condition of the patient, as you know, whether he is ready for surgery, whether his diabetes is under control. So there are a lot of factors that determine how soon a patient can get their surgery, also the provision of certain details to the social worker. What we have found is that some patients are not always forthright with the information we ask for at the social worker level. So there is a variety of reasons.

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chair, this is in not a debate, I say again.

**Mr. Charles:** Tell St. Joseph.

**Mr. Imbert:** Yes, I know. It is my Member. I know that.

**Madam Chairman:** All right. So in terms of the Item and the explanation, what we are told is—and the Item is Waiting List, and we have been told the explanation with respect to the decrease. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

**Dr. Khan:** Minister, there is an increase in the amount of cardiac surgery in the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. So you had a savings of, I think it was, \$7 million—wait listed. Could you indicate how much of those cardiac surgery cases were done by the in-house team of cardiac surgery, not the Caribbean Heart Care?

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** I can get that for you.

**Dr. Khan:** Please do.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you, Madam. Minister, just to refer to 09/005/06, Hospital Refurbishment Programme, and just to ask when is the expected start and completion date for the roof repairs on the labour ward at the San Fernando hospital.

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** At the labour ward of San Fernando, I will get that for you, but it is ongoing.

**Dr. Bodoë:** So just the completion date.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Well, the Minister gave a part answer to the question, but the next one will be line Item 06/C/250 which is under that, which is the Health Services Support Programme of \$10 million, you reduced it. But you said that you were not able to spend this money because of project delays arising from procurement challenges, and so on. Could you give a slight explanation on that?

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** Sure—

**Madam Chairman:** But was that not given already?

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** I gave that already—

**Madam Chairman:** That was given already.

**Mr. Imbert:** That was asked and answered.

**Madam Chairman:** That was given already here.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** That is on the above one, the one above that, just a while ago.

**Madam Chairman:** No, no, no, no, no. That was given, I am almost certain, in response to a question by the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** In detail. In detail.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** All right. I will abide by that.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 28 varied by a decrease in the sum of \$211,000,000.*

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you to the Minister of Health and the members of his team.

*Head 31:* Ministry of Public Administration and Communications, a decrease of \$61,161,666.

**Madam Chairman:** I will now invite the Minister of Public Administration to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes.

**Ms. Mc Donald:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, the Ministry of Public Administration is charged with the responsibility for the development and modernization of the public sector. Additionally, the Ministry has responsibility for the national ICT plan for all Government Ministries. Madam Chair, the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications was realigned on June 07, 2018, to the Ministry of Public Administration, and the Ministry of Communications. Therefore, the allocation for the period, June 07, 2018 to September 30, 2018 has to be transferred to the Ministry of Communications. So in other words, Madam Chair, that \$61.1 million would represent the delinking of both Ministries, so we now have two Ministries standing apart from each other.

*Question proposed:* That Head 31 be varied by a decrease in the sum of \$61,161,666.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 31 varied by a decrease in the sum of \$61,161,666.*

**Madam Chairman:** I wish to thank the Minister of Public Administration and her

team.

*Head 39:* Ministry of Public Utilities, a decrease in the sum of \$62,000,000.

**Madam Chairman:** I will now invite the Minister of Public Utilities to make a brief opening statement for a maximum of five minutes.

**Mr. Le Hunte:** Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Public Utilities is responsible for the provision of quality utility services to the population of Trinidad and Tobago. The Ministry has been working with all the utility agencies to fulfil under its span of control, to fulfil that mandate and to improve the efficiency and customer service delivery, whilst dealing with legacy issues pertaining to the infrastructure. Our underlying principle, of course, is trying to do more with less. I would be happy to answer any questions that the committee may have on the decrease of the \$62 million to the Ministry.

*Question proposed:* That Head 39 be varied by a decrease in the sum of \$62,000,000.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, in the explanation for the reduction or decrease by \$62 million, you indicated here that there is the rationalization of its engagement of contractor labour. What is this rationalization of contractor labour?

**Mr. Le Hunte:** There has been a reduction and a rationalization of the number of external contractors. For example, we have reduced the number of contractors that we have that were conducting ground maintenance, by about 116. We have reduced the number of contractors doing pipeline maintenance by 124. We have reduced the rental fleets by 101, et cetera. So those were the types of reductions that we have put in place to try to do more with less.

**Madam Chairman:** Supplemental, Member for Chaguanas West?

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. The reduction of the ground maintenance, the pipeline contractors and the rentals, indicating 116, 124, 101, is there moneys owed to these contractors by the Water and Sewerage Authority?

**Mr. Le Hunte:** Well, there is an outstanding accounts payable. Those particular contractors, I cannot specifically say whether they are in those areas. But, of course, the Authority runs with an accounts payable position. But I cannot specifically say if those exact contractors, whether or not we have money outstanding to them or not.

**Mr. Singh:** Would you undertake, hon. Minister, with your leave, Madam Chair, to provide a listing of the contractors so removed from the system?

**Mr. Le Hunte:** Noted.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Mayaro.

**Mr. Paray:** Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. Minister, I take note of the \$62 million reduction, and when you look at that compared to the amount of outstanding repair works and even road resurfacing works that is there today even in several constituencies, is there a direct relation between that backlog and the fact that you have reduced this hundred-and-change contractors that could work towards reducing that backlog?

**Mr. Le Hunte:** No, I think the—remember that the objective of reducing those contractors is really about utilizing the workers that we have at WASA. So a lot of the ground maintenance, for example, that was being given out to external contractors, is now being undertaken by the staff that we have at WASA to do those types of work. The last repair work that we did in fixing leaks, and so forth,

is now utilizing the WASA in-house crew and putting and trying to get more efficiency out of the existing workforce.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Mayaro?

**Mr. Paray:** Thank you for that response, Minister, but I am looking at the delay and we are experiencing a lot of delays still, and one would think that, you know, the efficiency that you are asking for based on—by removing the contractors, is WASA realizing that efficiency at this time?

**Mr. Le Hunte:** Well, by virtue of the \$62 million, yes, we are realizing some of the efficiency. I would say so. But, again, it is very difficult to continue to—you have to pay staff; you have your salaries to pay and you have staff on board, and therefore the effort—this is within the context of allowing the existing staff that we have at WASA to get them to be more efficient and get out there and do the work that was previously being outsourced.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Thank you, Chair. Minister, you had earlier said that there are 2,000 workers in excess of the requirements of WASA, and now you are saying you are using in-house labour to do the repair works. This 2,000 persons that you deemed excess at WASA, are these the persons who are now being used to do this in-house work, to repair leaks and so on? And if so, how efficient are they? Where are these people? What skills do they have to do this work? Because the public is noting that there are more leaks; there are more unrepaired areas where you have done work and it is shoddy and more inefficient.

**Mr. Le Hunte:** Okay. To start with, my statement regarding the numbers of the 2,000 workers that were over, I always said—I also always preface that statement with two things: One, based on international standards and; two, I have also made



the point that in WASA's existing circumstances that you also need to bring that into context.

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, as I indicated with the Minister of Health, this is not a debate. The information given here is clear. I would like a ruling on that, please.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Why do they not want the public to know?

**Dr. Moonilal:** This is suppressing information.

**Mr. Imbert:** It is a procedure we follow.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Why are you denying the right for information—[*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, can we deal with the matter at hand, which is the Standing Finance Committee and the reduction in expenditure, please?

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. So, hon. Members, we have certain rules by which we are governed in this procedure, and the specific Items and the specific explanations given with respect to the Items are what are here under enquiry. So that going outside of that is really above and beyond the Committee's remit. So that while I will give some leeway, this is not a carte blanche enquiry process. It is very specific and very narrow. Okay? So Member for Tabaquite, if you wish an opportunity to ask another question within the ambit of what is here, I will allow it.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Sure. Mr. Minister, you said 124 contractors were relieved or demobilized with respect to the maintenance of grounds. You said 116 contractors were demobilized with respect to the maintenance of lines, and so on. What you have really then done is sent home a lot of workers indirectly, through these contractors. Now, the question I am going to ask you is this: Are you satisfied that this level of demobilization has resulted in efficiency or inefficiency?

**Madam Chairman:** Member, again, this is what it says. The statement says that it has allowed for more efficient processes.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Thank you, Ma'am.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Barataria/San Juan.

**Dr. Khan:** Could the Minister indicate if part of this savings that you got from WASA, it had the Nutrimix discount in it?

**Mr. Imbert:** What? Madam Chair, that question is completely out of order.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Barataria/San Juan, just like when you said you knew it was three questions and not two, I so rule. [*Laughter*] Member for Oropouche East.

**Mr. Moonilal:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I am about finance and figures. To the Minister of Public Utilities: Taking note of the decrease of \$62 million from the Ministry, and in the context where there are areas in my constituency like Debe, Diggity, Mohess Road, Kuchawan Trace, and so on, without water on a regular basis, could you not have used some of that to provide water for human beings?

**Mr. Le Hunte:** The reason why some of the areas in Trinidad and Tobago do not have a regular supply of water goes beyond—

**Dr. Moonilal:** Projects.

**Mr. Le Hunte:** It is about water production issues; it is about drilling wells issues. All right? There are a number of issues surrounding why people are not getting particular water. In this case, what we have been attempting to do in this savings that we are having—again, and I just mentioned two of the areas. I also mentioned the whole idea of reducing the fleet of vehicles, and so forth. We are attempting to

try to run WASA as efficiently as possible, that is where we recognize there was waste like, as I said, the rental of vehicles, even the cell phones, trying manage all those costs. And as a result of that, we have been able to realize some of these savings.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Madam Chair, could I have a follow-up?

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Oropouche East, a follow-up question?

**Dr. Moonilal:** Yes. Thank you so much, Minister, for your concern. But might I add that when we enquire of WASA as to the reasons why residents in certain communities are not provided with—at least, a weekly or fortnightly supply of water—we are told that there are projects that require enlarging the infrastructure, the pipelines and other old infrastructure. And while I appreciate the saving money on phone calls and so on, could you not have used this money for those types of projects? Because in times gone by, certain areas received at least a fortnightly supply of water, and that money could have been used for those types of projects.

**Mr. Le Hunte:** Again, the issues regarding water production and getting the increased levels of service to other particular areas, center around the executions of some of our plans in the PSIP, in those capital expenditure budgets and we are executing those particular plans. This savings relates to the use—the better, more efficient use of our labour that we presently have and other savings that we are seeing within the company, rationalizing and trying to do more with less by cutting certain areas. The situation again, there is a bigger discourse as to why each particular area has not gotten water and we inherited a situation whereby some of those areas we inherited getting water one day a week.

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, again, can I ask for your ruling? This is not a debate. We are dealing with, simply, the use of contract labour as opposed to in-house labour.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Chaguanas West.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, in the explanation for the decrease by \$62 million—well, basically the suppression—you indicated that there are more efficient processes in the procurement of goods and services. Now, it has been brought to my attention that the basic valves and plugs, and so on, for leak repair are not available and the last set was done under the previous People's Partnership Government. When that was exhausted, there was no existing supply. Could this money not have been utilized for that purpose?

**Mr. Le Hunte:** Well, Member Ganga Singh, the information that I have—again, I know you are always privy to information from WASA, but the information that I have does not substantiate what you are actually saying. And, therefore, WASA does have the necessary tools and the necessary equipment to execute the repairs that they are required to execute.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Princes Town.

**Mr. Padarath:** Thank you, Madam, to the hon. Minister. Hon. Minister, I have taken note that WASA has engaged in a new social media campaign. Can the Minister indicate whether, as part of the savings reflected here, whether a contract to an alleged bigot and racist associated with the PNM—

**Madam Chairman:** Member! Member! Member for Princes Town—

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, he is out of order.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Princes Town, I am not going to allow that

question. Okay? And Member for Princes Town, I will just caution you, certain words I am not going to allow. Okay? Member for Chaguanas East.

**Mr. Karim:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, in talking about savings, one of the reasons you gave there was—*[Crosstalk]*

**Madam Chairman:** Can I hear the Member for Chaguanas East, please? *[Crosstalk]* Member for Princes Town—*[Crosstalk]* Member—

**Mr. Padarath:** The Member for San Fernando West is being utterly ridiculous. *[Crosstalk]*

**Mr. Imbert:** Could we get some order, please, Madam?

**Mr. Padarath:** The question was whether or not they awarded a contract to a— racist.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Princes Town! Member for Princes Town, if you are finding difficulty in maintaining yourself, I have always advised a little walk helps. All right? *[Crosstalk]* Please restrain yourself. And Member for Couva—*[Crosstalk]* Member for Couva—

**Mr. Indarsingh:** It is the disparaging language from Members of the Government that I have to voice my objection.

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, what is going on here? We need order in here.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** They are conducting themselves and I have a right to speak out.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Couva South—

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Yes?

**Madam Chairman:** Anything that you find is not acceptable, your process is to raise it with the Chair, not to speak out—

**Mr. Indarsingh:** I hope the Chair is listening too.

**Madam Chairman:**—not to speak out as if we are in the market.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** I hope the Chair is listening.

**Madam Chairman:** And Member for Couva South, when I hear, I speak. I have heard you and I am saying it is not at all to be tolerated. Member for Couva South, you either have my ear now or you do not have my ear. Do you have a question to ask?

**Mr. Indarsingh:** I am concerned, Madam Chair—

**Madam Chairman:** Do you have a question to ask?

**Mr. Indarsingh:**—about the disparaging language.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 39 varied by a decrease in the sum of \$62,000,000.*

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you, Minister of Public Utilities and your team.

*Head 40: Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries—[Interruption]*

**Mr. Padarath:** A complete—

*[Mr Padarath and Mr. Indarsingh walk out of meeting]*

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Princes Town, when you leave, you leave here with a certain decorum, or you will be assisted in leaving.

*Head 40: Ministry of Energy Industries, a decrease of \$100,000,000.*

**Madam Chairman:** I will now invite the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries to make a brief opening statement of a maximum of five minutes.

**Mr. Khan:** Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. As is publicly known, the Ministry of Energy in conjunction with the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago, is responsible for the formulation of energy policy for the island. We are also, under the Petroleum Act and regulations, the regulator of the industry. Basically, the

Ministry is a collector of revenue in the form of some taxes and royalties. Most goes to the Consolidated Fund through the Ministry of Finance. Our budget, based on what we do in this country, is very small, both on the operating side and on the capital side. We have a decrease listed here, of \$100 million, and I am willing to entertain any questions regarding that decrease.

*Question proposed:* That Head 40 be varied by a decrease in the sum of \$100,000,000.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Naparima.

**Mr. Charles:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, the budget was premised on an oil price of \$65 per barrel.

**Mr. Khan:** The budget was premised on an oil price of \$52 a barrel.

**Mr. Charles:** It is \$52?

**Mr. Khan:** That is last year's budget.

**Mr. Charles:** 2019 budget?

**Mr. Khan:** This is '18 budget.

**Mr. Charles:** All right. Well, 2018 budget was \$52 per barrel, but the price of oil, a WTI price is 50—has been somewhat less. It has been somewhat less. Should this reduction in oil price which should be reflected in the price at the pump, be not given to the customers—

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, questions about the current financial year are out of order. This is a reconciliation, closing of the accounts for fiscal 2018 which ended on the 30<sup>th</sup> of September, 2018. It is irrelevant what is happening in January 2019.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Naparima, could you ask another question?

**Mr. Charles:** Minister, in 2019, any—

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, he is out of order. The year 2019 is out of order.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Naparima, we are dealing with a shortfall in subsidy of \$100 million for fiscal year 2018 which ran from the 1<sup>st</sup> of October, 2017 to the 30<sup>th</sup> of September, 2018. Please confine your question.

**Mr. Charles:** All right. Could the Minister give us an idea of the extent of the subsidies that were budgeted and how much was actually provided?

**Mr. Khan:** Well, actually, the original budget had zero allocation for subsidies. In the midyear review, \$100 million was allocated. By the end of the year there was some subsidy exposure, but at the end of the year we had deferred spending that for the completion of a reconciliation exercise, and it will be picked up in this year some time.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Minister, this \$100 million non-payment is in the context of what sort of payment you made for petroleum products for 2018? What was the total amount of subsidies you paid versus \$100 million that you—

**Mr. Khan:** Well, we are doing a reconciliation—

**Madam Chairman:** But the question that—

**Mr. Khan:** It was answered for the reconciliation.

**Madam Chairman:** I am sure it was asked in a different way, but I am sure the answer the Minister just gave covers what was being asked.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** No. I asked for the value of the amount of money that was paid for petroleum product subsidies.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for—



**Dr. Gopeesingh:**—of \$100 million. Madam Chair, I am just asking—

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Caroni East, I am not going to allow the question. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

**Dr. Khan:** Minister, could you tell me exactly to whom were these subsidy payments owed?

**Mr. Khan:** The subsidy ends up being paid to Petrotrin. It is paid through NP and Unipet for onward transmission into Petrotrin.

**Dr. Khan:** To Petrotrin? So Petrotrin did not get the money then, the \$100 million?

**Mr. Khan:** The \$100 million, I said there is a reconciliation exercise going on.

**Dr. Khan:** No, will it was supposed to be paid to Petrotrin.

**Mr. Khan:** Yes.

**Dr. Khan:** And they have not gotten that money.

**Mr. Khan:** A reconciliation exercise is being—

**Dr. Khan:** So now that you wind up Petrotrin, how are you going to get the money?

**Mr. Khan:** Well, there is still a Petrotrin in law, you know.

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, that is out of order and Petrotrin is still in existence. [*Crosstalk*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 40 varied by a decrease in the sum of \$100,000,000.*

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you, Minister. Thank you to the members of your team.

**2.50 p.m.**

*Head 42:* Ministry of the Rural Development and Local Government, a decrease of \$8,000,000.

**Madam Chairman:** I will now invite the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government to make a brief opening statement for a maximum of five minutes. Minister.

**Mr. Hosein:** Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. I am here to discuss the decrease in the appropriation for the Rural Development Ministry as it relates to the Item of ttconnect which is no longer under the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government and has been transferred to the Ministry of Public Administration. This allocation was \$8 million, and for the financial year 2017 to 2018 the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government made all the necessary payments for ttconnect. Thank you very much.

*Question proposed:* That Head 42 be varied by a decrease in the sum of \$8,000,000.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 42 varied by a decrease in the sum of \$8,000,000.*

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you, hon. Minister and the members of your team.

*Head 43:* Ministry of the Works and Transport, a decrease of \$44,000,000.

**Madam Chairman:** I will now invite the Minister of Works and Transport to make a brief opening statement for a maximum of five minutes. Minister.

**Mr. Sinanan:** Thank you, Madam Chair. The Ministry of Works and Transport is responsible for providing public infrastructure and transportation for the social and economic development of Trinidad and Tobago. We see ourselves as responding to the basic needs of the population. The Ministry of Works and Transport, in keeping with Government National Development Strategy 2016—2030, Vision

2030, under the Theme III: Improving Productivity through Quality Infrastructure and Transportation, continues to focus its efforts on road construction, traffic management, and restoration and maintenance of Government buildings and facilities.

The Ministry intends to provide safe and efficient transportation and infrastructure which we have considered to be the backbone of any economic and the key driver for social and economic development. Madam Chairman, I stand ready to answer any questions.

*Question proposed:* That Head 43 be varied by a decrease in the sum of \$44,000,000.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Hon. Minister, as explained here, funding was allocated in fiscal 2018 to enable the *T&T Spirit* to undergo two routine dry docking services, however, the vessel was only placed once on dry dock and this resulted in a saving of 15 million. Could you explain why this happened, only one dry docking situation took place rather than two for the *T&T Spirit*?

**Mr. Sinanan:** Through you, Madam Chair, there was a little typo there. There were two dry docking scheduled, one for the *T&T Spirit* and one for the *Express*. The *T&T Spirit* went under the dry docking. However, a Cabinet decision was taken to sell the *T&T Express* as and where is. So no dry docking was scheduled for the *T&T Express*.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Oropouche East.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Thank you, Madam Chair, just to follow up on that. Could you indicate when the Cabinet decision was taken to sell the *T&T Express* and the arrangements in place for the sale of that particular vessel; and secondly, if I could just ask two questions one time so that you can respond? Minister, again, my

position holds that this approach of saving money by doing nothing, for example, in your Ministry, could you not have used this money to pave or clean watercourses to prevent flooding, for example, since the moneys are already approved by Parliament for the use by your Ministry? Clearly flooding is a priority, prevention of flooding and so on. Could this have been used to do critical infrastructure work to at least alleviate flooding?—in the Debe area, for example, where a river needs paving just a few hundred yards, and this kind of money that was already allocated to your Ministry could have been used for that rather than this approach of saving money by doing nothing.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. So I will allow the question on the date of the decision. I am not allowing the question about the arrangements for the sale for the purposes of this meeting.

**Mr. Sinanan:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, a Cabinet decision was taken sometime last year for the sale of the *Express*. I do not have the exact date. However, it was to be sold by the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago where the Port Authority would have worked with the Central Tenders Board to put an ad in the newspaper for a public advertisement for the sale of the *T&T Express*. It was done in collaboration with the Central Tenders Board. Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** You have another question, Member?

**Dr. Moonilal:** No.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. Member for Chaguanas West.

**Mr. Singh:** Thank you. Just similar to the question asked by the Member for Oropouche East, Madam Chair. Having regard to the nature of the flooding and having regard to what we experienced last year, in that could not that money have been utilized, for example, on the Caroni River to do dredging, and desilting, or embankments?

**Mr. Sinanan:** Madam Chair, the long and short of answer to it is that 15 million is what we are speaking about. The cost of the dry docking and the amount that we got was significantly more than 15 million. A lot of it was utilized in other areas. However, there is a process to move money, and there is a limited time, but a significant amount was moved and used in some of those exact areas that you are speaking about. But unfortunately because of the process to move money, it is not just that the Minister could say, "I am taking this from here and spend it here." We have to go back to Finance, we have to get money, we have to apply to have the money moved in different areas. So yes, some of it was used. Unfortunately, because of the process there was hindrance in utilizing all.

**Mr. Singh:** Just for my purposes of clarity, Madam Chair, could you provide a listing of the moneys that were used—

**Mr. Sinanan:** Sure.

**Mr. Singh:**—in particular with respect the flooding issue?

**Mr. Sinanan:** Well again, it would have been used in different areas. I am not saying it would have been used—

**Mr. Singh:** Okay, well provide a listing of the different areas.

**Madam Chairman:** And, Member, really for the purposes of this process, the Minister has given an answer. I do not know that is this is something that is relevant for the process, the providing of the listing. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

**Dr. Khan:** Minister, I just want—the Prime Minister is on record saying that the *Galleons Passage* would be used for the Toco to Tobago port because it cannot run the sea as it is at present. Why not keep also the *T&T Express* for that same run?

**Madam Chairman:** The question is: Why not keep the *T&T Express* for the Toco run?

**Dr. Khan:** Also as they keeping the *Galleons Passage*.

**Madam Chairman:** Well, we are not talking about the *Galleons Passage*. So you want to know why not keep the *T&T Express*?

**Dr. Khan:** Both of them.

**Mr. Sinanan:** Madam Chair, the long and short answer for keeping the *T&T Express*, between 2010 and 2015 the maintenance on that vessel was so bad that to repair that vessel now will be a significant cost to the taxpayers, and because of the age of the vessel there is no guarantee that after you spend all that money that the vessel will give you any more lifespan.

**Dr. Khan:** Could I get a supplemental?

**Mr. Sinanan:** Sure.

**Madam Chairman:** Once it is not *Galleons Passage*.

**Dr. Khan:** No, no, no, it is not. Is the *T&T Spirit* being used now for the Tobago run?

**Mr. Sinanan:** Yes, it is.

**Dr. Khan:** Therefore, there is nothing wrong with it?

**Mr. Sinanan:** You are talking about?—the *Express* is the one—

**Dr. Khan:** Sorry, it is the *Express*. Is it the *Express*, sorry?

**Mr. Sinanan:** No, it is not.

**Dr. Khan:** It is not being—okay, thanks.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Chaguanas East.

**Mr. Karim:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, with respect to the 35 new buses that you acquired, what will that take your complement of buses up to, and will you still have a deficit, and by how much?

**Mr. Sinanan:** Yes. Madam Chair, the full complement to give PTSC all the routes that is required is close to 500 buses. What PTSC has at this point in time

operating is just about 260 buses. So the 25 buses, yes, it will help the fleet, but it will no way bring it anywhere close and that is why Cabinet would have taken a decision to go out there to get a government-to-government agreement for an additional 300 buses because you recognize that most of our buses have way passed their lifespan.

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, this is not a debate on the Ministry of Works and Transport. It is on the dry docking of the *T&T Spirit*.

**Madam Chairman:** Minister of Finance, if I could assist you? There is also on the Public Transport Service Corporation and particularly on buses.

**Mr. Imbert:** I am just trying something.

**Madam Chairman:** No, no, no, no, no.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Madam Chair, the Minister is misleading the Committee.

**Madam Chairman:** While I do not mind Members trying something on each other, I really do not think a Member should say they are trying something on the Chair.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Even if you trying something, “doh” say it.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Chaguanas East.

**Mr. Karim:** Since the Minister of Finance was not paying attention, hon. Minister, you are paying attention and I want to ask how much of that moneys that you get now are you going to be using to fix buses that are non-operational at the various hubs?

**Madam Chairman:** All right. So I will not allow under the Item 43, 06, 004, 52. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

**Dr. Khan:** Minister could I ask: Any of the old buses have been taken out of commission as we speak?

**Mr. Sinanan:** Yes, there is a programme where—

**Dr. Khan:** No, no, from what you had before, have any been taken out?

**Mr. Sinanan:** Yes. Every year—

**Dr. Khan:** Is that where the saving on the procurement of the spare parts is taking place.

**Mr. Sinanan:** A significant amount

**Dr. Khan:** Because of removing the old buses?

**Mr. Sinanan:** Yes

**Dr. Khan:** Okay, thanks.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Tabaquite.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Thank you. Mr. Minister, you said that the explanation given is that with the acquisition and operationalization of the 35 new buses in 2018, PTSC was able to reduce costs associated with procurement of spare parts and maintenance services and that is how you save \$29 million.

**Mr. Sinanan:** No, no. That was a major part of it. Some of it can be attributed to overtime, some of it can be allocated to oil and fuel, and obviously the new buses would have allowed a significant saving on some of the planned repairs to other bus to bring them into line.

**Dr. Rambachan:** So we have 240 buses now that are out of service—

**Mr. Sinanan:** Yes.

**Dr. Rambachan:**—is it possible that you can provide us with an appreciation of what is the current status of each one of these buses to know whether these buses can be rehabilitated or not?

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chair—

**Madam Chairman:** You know that I cannot allow you that question.

**Mr. Imbert:** Not only that, this is for the purchase of new buses. Come on!

**Madam Chairman:** And, Member for Tabaquite, I would not allow that question.



Member for Oropouche East.

**Mr. Sinanan:** Madam Chair, if I could just correct the statement? I did not say that there were 240 buses not in service. I said they need a complement of 500, we have 260 in service. I did not say that we have 240 down at the moment.

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you very much. Member for Oropouche East.

**Dr. Moonilal:** Ma'am, the question was asked already.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 43 varied by a decrease in the sum of \$44,000,000.*

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you, Minister. Thank you members of your team.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Appropriation for fiscal 2018 varied by a total decrease in the sum of \$586,161,666.*

**Madam Chairman:** We now move on to increases. Hon. Members, we now consider the proposals for increases for fiscal year 2018.

*Head 18: Ministry of the Finance, an increase of \$517,000,000.*

**Madam Chairman:** I will now invite the Minister of Finance to make a brief opening statement for a maximum of five minutes. Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Imbert:** Thank you, Madam Chair. With the operation of the Government's overdraft at the Central Bank, there is an interest charge that is applied to that overdraft. We had originally allocated approximately \$400 million—let me see if I can get the exact number. Let us use that figure. We had allocated approximately \$400 million to payment of interest on the overdraft and the payment actually came up to somewhere in the vicinity of \$900 million. So we had to find another \$517 million to pay overdraft interest charges at the Central Bank. But there is a very important point which I would like hon. Members—pay attention to this. Even though the Government is required to pay interest on its overdraft—and that is an

expense—the money is returned to the Government by way of profits from the Central Bank because the operational cost of the Central Bank is not anywhere close to the income they earn from charging interest on the overdraft, and the Government gets quite substantial sums in profits from the Central Bank on an annual basis. So the net cost for the Government is far less than this 517 or the \$900 million to run the Central Bank. We get it back.

*Question proposed:* That Head 18 be varied by an increase in the sum of \$517,000,000

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Caroni Central.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Yes. Minister of Finance, could you indicate what is the extent of the Central Bank overdraft at this time on which we are paying this interest?

**Mr. Imbert:** I beg your pardon?

**Dr. Tewarie:** What is the extent of the Central Bank overdraft on which we are paying this—

**Mr. Imbert:** This is why I begged—

**Dr. Tewarie:**—or on which we have paid this increase.

**Mr. Imbert:**—your pardon, because is that as of today? What are you talking about? This is fiscal year 2018. So what are you talking about?

**Dr. Tewarie:** Yes, well. What was the extent of the Central Bank overdraft—

**Mr. Imbert:** In fiscal 2018?

**Dr. Tewarie:** Yes—on which this interest was paid?

**Mr. Imbert:** It would have varied from day-to-day, so I will provide that information to you in writing.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Can I ask whether the ceiling for the overdraft at the Central Bank was in 2018 the same as it is now?

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman.

**Madam Chairman:** I think, Member for Caroni Central, the questions will really have to be limited to 2018. Fiscal 2018.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Can you tell me, Minister of Finance, what was the ceiling of the Central Bank overdraft in 2018?

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, the overdraft ceiling is in the public domain. We do not answer questions that are in the public domain. It is in the law. You debated that. Go and check the law.

**Dr. Tewarie:** I am sure if the Minister does not answer now it will come up in the debate.

**Mr. Imbert:** It is part of the public law.

**Dr. Tewarie:** But I wanted to establish for the public record and for the public information how much the overdraft we were paying interest was in 2018, and we can find the figure for 2019; and secondly I wanted to know what the ceiling was; and the third issue is when was that ceiling established?

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, I repeat that we came to Parliament and we modified, amended the ceiling for the overdraft by way of debate. That is a matter of public record and a matter of public law, and the Member for Caroni Central participated quite significantly and had a lot to say in that debate. So that the answers are probably contained within the *Hansard* record of the Member for Caroni Central.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Chair, might I just explain that when we have these sessions, the idea is to give the public information—

**Mr. Imbert:** Really? No.

**Madam Chairman:** Minister of Finance, the Member is allowed a certain time on every intervention.

**Dr. Tewarie:** And the questions that I have asked were in order to give public

information to the population of Trinidad and Tobago.

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you. Member for Caroni Central.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Caroni East.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Minister, this sum of \$517 million which represents interest on the overdraft with the Central Bank—that is \$517 million in interest—what percentage does that represent? What is the interest rate?

**Madam Chairman:** Percentage of what?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** The interest rate by Central Bank—

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam President—

**Dr. Gopeesingh:**—on a day-to-day basis.

**Mr. Imbert:** Sorry, Madam Speaker. Madam Chairman, sorry, that is also a matter of public record.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** But tell us. Is it 2 per cent, 5 per cent, 7 per cent?

**Mr. Imbert:** That is in the—

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** So you are paying 555 million and you do not know the interest rate?

**Mr. Imbert:** I did not say that, Madam Chairman.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Well tell us.

**Mr. Imbert:** I said that is a matter of public record.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Well tell us the public record now. You are given an opportunity to answer the question. Why are you hiding?

**Mr. Imbert:** This meeting, Madam Chairman, as far as I am know, is to seek clarification.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** You continue to hide—

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, could I be allowed to speak? This meeting is to

provide clarification on the explanation given. We have explained that the reason for the increase of 517 million is that there was an insufficient allocation to pay interest on the overdraft.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Mr. Lee:** Thank you, Madam Chair. To the Minister: Minister, you had previously said the amount allocated was approximately \$400 million and now you are asking for an additional increase of 517 to take it up to 917. Could you explain to me what was the reason that the overdraft incurred this additional amount of interest over that period of time?

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, the overdraft did not incur an additional amount of interest. As in any year there are certain appropriations made to certain Ministries and they are varied. The whole purpose of this Standing Finance Committee is to debate the Variation of Appropriation Bill which we will be doing at the end of this week. And the budget is never cast in concrete. There are always adjustments during the fiscal year. So that that was the original allocation. It was anticipated at the time that we would not have to utilize the overdraft to that extent, however for one reason or another, during the year we had to utilize the overdraft to a particular extent causing for increased allocation in this particular line Item.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Tabaquite.

**Dr. Rambachan:** Well my question, Madam Chair, was asked in part by the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre. But hon. Minister, when you allocated \$400 million as interest, it had to have been on a proper supposition that you were going to use a certain amount in the overdraft and your budget would have been based on that. Now that you are asking for 517 million more, obviously you have utilized much more of the overdraft. In fact, you have probably doubled the amount of the overdraft that you had anticipated you would use. Is it possible for you to

enlighten us as to where that money was utilized in terms—was it recurrent expenditure, was it capital, what did you use it for that caused you to significantly increase the interest to pay interest by 517 million?

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, we in Trinidad and Tobago have been operating a deficit budget for a number of years. [*Interruption*] Madam Chair, the Member for Naparima is disturbing my response to the Member for Tabaquite. We in Trinidad and Tobago have been operating a deficit budget now for a number of years. The deficit is the difference between income and expenditure, just as simple as that, and the deficit is financed whether it is 2 billion, 4 billion, 5 billion, whatever it is. The deficit is financed in a variety of ways. It is financed through borrowing, it is financed through withdrawals from the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund and so on. Even the borrowing is done in a variety of different ways. The Government has the option to go to the market, issue a request for proposals and invite proposals from the commercial banks to finance the deficit. The Government also has the option to utilize temporary advances from the Government overdraft to finance the budget in terms of cash flow. So it is simply a financing mechanism.

What is good about the use of the overdraft is, as I said, the Central Bank does not utilize the full amount of the interest that it earns on the overdraft for its expenditure to run the Central Bank, to pay its wages and salaries, to pay cost of goods and services, accommodation, et cetera. That is what is good about utilizing the overdraft. So that you get back a substantial percentage of whatever interest you pay on the overdraft back as profits from the Central Bank. In fact, we just got substantial sum back from the Central Bank just couple a weeks ago which assist us with our cash flow. So it is really a timing issue and a cash flow issue

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Tabaquite

**Dr. Rambachan:** Is the Minister, therefore, suggesting that the deficit might have been much higher than what was anticipated that brought about the use of this extra amount from the overdraft that caused the 517 million?

**Mr. Imbert:** No. What I am saying is that it is cash management. You can use the overdraft, you can go to the market to borrow, you can withdraw from the Heritage Fund. These are decisions made at the Ministry of Finance in our best judgment to get the least cost option, the most cost effective option, to financing the budget and financing the budget deficit. Okay?

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Naparima.

**Mr. Charles:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Could the Minister indicate whether the use of the overdraft facility at the Central Bank is consistent with the historic usage, particularly in the past three or four years, to give us a sense of whether there has been consistency over the years during our period and your period?

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman, we are dealing with fiscal 2018. I do not know why the Member is asking me about his period. We are dealing with fiscal 2018.

**Mr. Charles:** Madam Chairman, could the Minister indicate whether the use of the overdraft facility, how does it compares with 2017, the previous year?

**Mr. Imbert:** But that is not before us.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Mr. Lee:** Thank you. One final question to the Minister. Minister, in your enlightenment of explanation, you also had said that the Central Bank, the 517, was the overdraft interest and you normally would incur profits from the Central Bank—

**Mr. Imbert:** You do not incur profit.

**Mr. Lee:** Well, you get profits.

**Mr. Imbert:** You receive profits.

**Mr. Lee:** You receive profits. So can I ask you—

**Mr. Imbert:** Please rephrase your question. [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Chairman:** Order!

**Mr. Lee:** You said you received profits from the Central Bank in respect as a Government—

**Madam Chairman:** May we have some order, please. I cannot hear—

**Mr. Lee:**—so can I ask you—

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, one minute. Could we have order, please? I am not hearing the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Mr. Lee:** Madam Chair, the Minister of Finance said he received profits from the Central Bank in relationship, all right? So can he state for us what sort of profits you would have received from the Central Bank at the end of fiscal year 2018 in relationship because you said even though you said it was an expenditure you would have received profits that would more than offset this expenditure from the Central Bank.

**Mr. Imbert:** I did not say that. We are dealing with fiscal 2018. It is after the fiscal year is completed the Central Bank would pay the profits in the subsequent fiscal year which not before us.

**Mr. Lee:** Okay.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 18 varied by an increase in the sum of \$517,000,000.*

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you, Minister of Finance, and your team.

*Head 70:* Ministry of Communications, an increase of \$69,161,666.

**Madam Chairman:** I will now invite the Minister of Communications to make a brief opening statement for a maximum of five minutes.



**Mr. Young:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, in June of last year there was a separation of Communications out of the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications and the creation of a standalone Ministry call the Ministry of Communications. So this sum of money is the money that was transferred from Public Administration and Communications to help fund the establishment of the Ministry of Communications. Thank you.

*Question proposed:* That Head 70 be varied by an increase in the sum of \$69,161,666.

**3.20 p.m.**

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Fyzabad.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, if I can refer you to page 31 with regard to CNMG. Page 31. This is on the Schedule.

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chair, the Schedule is for noting. It is not for debate or for answering questions, it is for noting. That has nothing to do with this Head, Madam Chairman. This Head is the creation of the Ministry of Communications. Has nothing to do with what is for noting. I want to make that point very clear for your ruling, Madam Chairman.

**Dr. Bodoë:** I was just going to ask, the allocation for CNMG, whether that was—  
[Crosstalk]

**Madam Chairman:** Just one minute. Let me hear the question, Member.

**Dr. Bodoë:** Yeah, the question really was whether the amount of \$12,485,000 listed for CNMG was for the transformation to TTT.

**Mr. Imbert:** Madam Chairman.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay and therefore, Member for Fyzabad, I cannot allow that question. Member for Naparima.

**Mr. Charles:** Could the Minister state how this \$69 million—in what areas will it

be disbursed?

**Mr. Young:** Madam Chair, this is historic. This was for fiscal 2018 so it would have already been accounted for in the budget that went through in October 2019. Line Item by line Item, Actual Expenditure.

**Mr. Charles:** Could Minister indicate if he is aware how much of this \$69 million was allocated to CNMG?

**Mr. Young:** It was not for Ken Ali, it was not for Tony Deyal, it was not for the Voice, it was not for Marcia Braveboy, it was not for Phillip Alexander, it was not for Vasant Bharath—

**Mr. Charles:** It was for One Alexandra Place?

**Mr. Young:** No, we will have to provide that. [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Chairman:** All right, so could we get serious? Any other question?

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Head 70 varied by an increase in the sum of \$69,161,666.*

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you to the Minister and his team.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Appropriation for the fiscal year 2019 varied by a total increase in the sum of \$586,161,666.*

**Madam Chairman:** We now go on to write-off of losses. Hon. Members, we shall proceed to the consideration of the proposals for write-off of losses.

*Head 30: Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, a write-off of losses of \$134,644.03.*

**Madam Chairman:** I will now invite the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development to make a brief opening statement for a maximum of five minutes. Minister.

**Mrs. Baptiste-Primus:** Thank you kindly, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, the team

and I from the Ministry, we are really honoured to be here this afternoon to discuss the Variation of Appropriation for fiscal year 2018/2019. Madam Chair, permit me to say that this Government has stated, time and time again, that it is committed to the effective management of the public sector. In fact, Madam Chair, Theme II of our National Development Strategy 2017—2030, popularly known as *Vision 2030*, is dedicated to “Delivering Good Governance and Service Excellence” under which one of our goals is for public service to have modern, effective and efficient management systems.

Madam Chair, this administration has recognized that good governance and service excellence are crucial to the achievement of a high quality of life for all of our citizens and to encourage business expansion. In this regard, one of the guiding principles of our *Vision 2030* is accountability, accountability that ensures that actions and decisions taken are subject to oversight and that public officials are held responsible for the decisions they make and for spending from the public purse. And today, Madam Chair, this is what this exercise is about, the principle of accountability and commitment to good governance and efficient public sector management.

Madam Chair, the issue before this gathering is a very simple one and may I offer the explanation and then would entertain any questions. It pertains to an officer who was unaware, unknowingly received the incorrect allowance as he dutifully served this country at the Commonwealth Caribbean Seasonal Agricultural Worker Programme, labelled Liaison Branch in Toronto, Canada, under the former Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development. The applicable deduction from his salary for the rental of his public quarters was also not made as required.

Madam Chair, our own internal audit procedures brought to our attention

this error which amounted to an overpayment and in an effort to ensure that the Ministry acted as a responsible employer and followed the prescribed industrial relations procedures, a legal opinion was sought. Madam Chair, this legal opinion advised that if the allowances in respect of the officer's appointment were never communicated to him in writing prior to the discovery of the error, it would be deemed unreasonable and contrary to good industrial relations practice to blame or penalize the employee for the failure of the employer to properly notify him of the terms and conditions of his employment with respect to his foreign assignment.

Madam Chair, in this regard, as a reasonable and caring employer, the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development is seeking to write-off the loss of \$134,644.03 representing an overpayment to the former Acting Accounting Executive I in the Commonwealth Caribbean Seasonal Agricultural Worker Programme, Liaison Branch, Toronto, Canada, under the former Ministry.

Madam Chair, it is clear that an administrative mistake was made in 2011/2012 but we recognize that to err is human and this administration is committed to doing what is necessary to correct these errors. It is my hope that this matter receives favourable consideration so that it can finally be settled to allow all parties to move forward and for us to focus on good governance, improve service delivery and value for money through greater efficiency, productivity and accountability. Thank you, Madam Chair.

*Question proposed:* That the write-off of losses in the sum of \$134,644.03 for Head 30 be approved.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*The write-off of losses in the sum of \$134,644.03 for Head 30 approved.*

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you, Minister and members of your team.

**Mrs. Baptiste-Primus:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

*Head 67:* Ministry of Planning and Development, a write-off of losses of \$137,536.35.

**Madam Chairman:** I will now invite the Minister of Planning and Development to make a brief opening statement for a maximum of five minutes. Minister.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Thank you very kindly. Madam Chair, specifically in relation to this matter, there has been a write-off of overpayment to Messenger I, Julie Samuel who, during the period 2002—2015, was employed at the CSO. During this time, she was also—after 2015, she was reassigned to the Human Resource Management Division and routine checks of the attendance register indicated that from 2006—2015, Ms. Samuel had been absent sometimes without authorization.

Madam Chair, despite verbal advice, Ms. Samuel did not produce any improvement in her conduct and after the period 2015, Ms Samuel sought to account for some periods of her absences over the period 2006—2015 by submitting medical certificates and reports which indicated that she was suffering from vertigo, hypertension and an ear, nose and throat disorder. She indicated that her illness rendered her unable to perform her duties since she experienced dizziness and fainting spells. After continuous absences and due to illness, this necessitated an examination by a medical board and on July 08, 2014, she was examined to determine her fitness for further service and the medical board boarded her in 2016.

Madam Chair, prior to Ms. Samuel's retirement on grounds of ill health, during the period 2008—2010, she was paid salary and COLA for her unauthorized absences from duty and when the revised salary agreement for the period 2008—2010 came into effect, the Ministry withheld salary arrears in the sum of \$9,890.45 in an attempt to reduce the overpayment amount owed to the

officer. Aggrieved by this decision to withhold the arrears, the officer approached the PSA who, acting on her behalf, referred the matter to the Industrial Court. The Industrial Court matter started in 2015 and the judge advised the parties—that is, the CPO, the Ministry of Planning and Development and the PSA—to arrive at an amicable agreement taking into account the negative impact that the period of unauthorized absences would have on Ms. Samuel's years of service and her eligibility for pension as well as her standard of living after retirement.

Arising out of several meetings and the last meeting held in January 2017 with the Permanent Secretary and the Human Resource officers of the Ministry of Planning and Development, it was decided, based on humanitarian grounds and Ms. Samuel's inability to repay the sum owed due to her medical costs on her finances, to approach the Comptroller of Accounts for the write-off of Ms. Samuel's overpayment in the sum of \$137,536.35. The Comptroller of Accounts agreed and a Note was submitted to the Cabinet and the Cabinet approved the write-off and that is why we are before you at this time.

*Question proposed:* That the write-off of losses in the sum of \$137,536.35 for Head 67 be approved.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*The write-off of losses in the sum of \$137,536.35 for Head 67 approved.*

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you, Minister and thank you to the members of your team.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Thank you, Madam Chairman.

**Madam Chairman:** Hon. Members, please note that the debate for the adoption of the Committee's report will take place on Friday, January 18, 2019 at 1.30 p.m.

**3.34 p.m.:** *Standing Finance Committee adjourned.*