



REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Debates of the House of Representatives

1st Session – 11th Parliament (Rep.) – Volume 3 – Number 18

**OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)**

THE HONOURABLE BRIDGID ANNISSETTE-GEORGE
SPEAKER

THE HONOURABLE ESMOND FORDE
DEPUTY SPEAKER

Friday 22nd January, 2016

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Leave of Absence

Friday, January 22, 2016

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, January 22, 2016

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Madam Speaker: Members, could the person who has their device on kindly take it off or put it on silent, please.

Hon. Members, the hon. Anthony Garcia, Member of Parliament for Arima, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, Member of Parliament for Siparia and Dr. Fuad Khan, Member for San Juan/Barataria, have asked to be excused from today's sitting of the House. The leave which the Members seek is granted.

PAPERS LAID

1. Consolidated Audited Financial Statements of First Citizens Bank Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2015. [*The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis)*]
2. Consolidated Audited Financial Statements of First Citizens Holdings Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2015. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
Papers 1 and 2 to be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee
3. Annual Report of the Public Service Commission for the year 2014. [*The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Esmond Forde)*]

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE REPORTS

(Presentation)

**Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property
(Amdt.) Bill, 2015**

Madam Speaker: The Member for Diego Martin North/East.

The Attorney General (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Member for Diego Martin North/East, I beg to present the following report:

The Interim Report of the Joint Select Committee appointed to consider and report on the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property (Amdt.) Bill, 2015. [*Interruption*]

It appears, Madam Speaker, with your guidance, that that may have to actually be presented by the hon. Member himself, and I would rise on the second report, should it please you.

Mr. Adrian Leonce (*Laventille East/Morvant*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I beg to present the following report:

The Interim Report of the Joint Select Committee appointed to consider and report on the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property (Amdt.) Bill, 2015.

Whistleblower Protection Bill, 2015

The Attorney General (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): Much obliged, Madam Speaker. I wish to present the following report, this time properly so:

The Interim Report of the Joint Select Committee appointed to consider and report on the Whistleblowing Protection Bill, 2015.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Ortoire Fish Landing Facility (Details of)

16. Mr. Rushton Paray (*Mayaro*) asked the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries:

With respect to the Ortoire Fish Landing Facility, could the Minister state:

- a) the works to be undertaken for the facility to become operational;
- b) the time frame for the completion of works and the re-opening of the facility; and
- c) whether there will be a management system in place and if yes, can the Minister provide details?

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat): Madam Speaker, it is worthwhile to note that the Ortoire fishing facility was not in use over the past five years. The Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries within one month of the 2015 General Election, conducted an assessment of the facility and identified the works to be undertaken to put this

facility to use. This includes the installation of a three-tonne ice machine, redesign and reconstruction of the vending area, installation of additional mooring rings on the jetty, paving works, construction of a walkway with handrails from the landing bay to the sorting building, minor repairs to the leaking roof, construction of a training area, extension of the jetty to facilitate visitor tours to the Ortoire River and construction of a separate entry for visitors seeking to participate in tours on the Ortoire River. The Ministry expects to complete these works by the end of June, 2016. The time frame for reopening this facility is at the end of June, 2016. In respect of the details for the management of the facility, Madam Speaker, this facility will be managed by the Seafood Industry Development Company (SIDC) Limited in partnership with stakeholder groups in the community.

The facility is fenced and other appropriate security arrangements would be put in place by the SIDC. The cost associated with the security personnel will be borne by the SIDC.

**Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation
(Details of Sargassum Clean-Up Exercises)**

17. Mr. Rushton Paray (*Mayaro*) asked the hon. Minister of Local Government and Rural Development:

Could the Minister indicate whether the Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation will receive funds for sargassum clean-up exercises in the financial year 2016?

The Minister of Local Government and Rural Development (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): Madam Speaker, at present there is no sargassum seaweed on the Mayaro/Guayaguayare coastline that falls under with jurisdiction of the Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation. As a result, no funds have been allocated for any clean-up for fiscal year 2016.

Mr. Paray: Minister, in light of the fact that there is an expectation of the return of the sargassum, any consideration absolutely in terms of providing funding?

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: From a budgetary standpoint you cannot budget for an item whose eventuality is unknown. But having said that, sargassum seaweed has been there since Columbus' time. What happened last year is that there was an inordinate amount of production attributed to global warming I understand. But there is no predictive model to say that sargassum seaweed will re-enter the east coast in 2016.

**Drug Trafficking, Money Laundering and Human Trafficking
(Details of Convicted Non-Citizens)**

21. Mr. Rushton Paray (Mayaro) asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

Could the Minister provide the number and nationality of non-citizens convicted of drug trafficking, money laundering and human trafficking from January to November 2015?

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Brig. Gen. Edmund Dillon): Madam Speaker, hon. Members are advised that for the period January to November 2015, a total of 21 non-citizens were convicted for drug trafficking offences. The countries of origin of these persons are as follows: Canada, one; Guyana, three; England, one; Latvia, three; Holland, one; Jamaica, two; St. Vincent, two; United Kingdom, one; USA, two; Venezuela, five; a total of 21.

No non-nationals were convicted of money laundering or human trafficking for the period January to November 2015.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, if we can just revert to the item under Reports for Committees. I believe the Minister of Finance has now joined us. [Interruption]

Could the Member who has his or her phone on kindly take it off, please.

**STANDING FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT
(Presentation)**

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

I wish to present the following report:

The First Report of the Standing Finance Committee of the House of Representatives for the First Session (2015/2016), Eleventh Parliament, on the consideration of proposals for the Variation of Appropriation for the fiscal year 2015.

**FINANCE (VARIATION OF APPROPRIATION)
(FINANCIAL YEAR 2015) BILL, 2016**

Bill to vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2015) Act, 2014 and varied by the Finance (Variation of Appropriation) (Financial Year 2015) Act, 2015.

Motion made: That the next stage be taken at a later stage of the proceedings. [Hon. C. Imbert]

Question put and agreed to.

**JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE REPORTS
(Extension of Time)**

**Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property
(Amdt.) Bill, 2015**

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Madam Speaker, having regard to the Interim Report of the Joint Select Committee appointed to consider and report on the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property (Amdt.) Bill, 2015, I beg to move that the committee be allowed an extension of six weeks in order to complete its work and submit a final report by February 26, 2016.

Question put and agreed to.

Whistleblower Protection Bill, 2015

The Attorney General (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): Madam Speaker, having regard to the Interim Report of the Joint Select Committee appointed to consider and report on the Whistleblower Protection Bill, 2015, I beg to move the committee be allowed an extension of two months in order to complete its work and submit a final report by March 22nd, 2016.

Question put and agreed to.

**STANDING ORDERS
(Suspension of)**

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

On the last occasion we did give notice that we wanted to suspend Standing Order 35. Having regard to our discussions, we are suggesting and we are very happy to ensure that the Opposition gets its day. As a consequence of that, we are withdrawing that notice, and in agreement with the Opposition, Private Members' Day will proceed.

1.45 p.m.

May I indicate that the agreement went even further, in that, as the Standing Orders provide, today is the fourth Friday. We are going to do Private Member's Day, but as I said the agreement went even further and the Opposition has agreed with us that at six o'clock when the Adjournment will be taken, we will proceed to Government Business and we will proceed with the Finance (Variation of Appropriation) (Financial Year 2015) Bill, 2016 and we will be having one speaker each.

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Madam Speaker, may I indicate that after a very cordial conversation with my opposite number, we made—[*Crosstalk*] Yes. I am a very decent woman. [*Desk thumping*] We made that agreement. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. And certainly in the interest of the House and in the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Chaguanas West, before I recognize you. Having regard to all the decency that has been displayed here, I expect that your contribution will follow in similar vein.

Mr. Singh: Well I am certainly a decent man also, Madam Speaker, and you know that. I just want to indicate to the House and to the public that what the hon. Member for Arouca/Maloney said is reflective of our discussions, however there is one caveat. Providing—in the one speaker mode—that the Minister of Finance in his contribution stays within certain boundaries that which we agreed upon. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Leader of the House.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am assuming that those boundaries are within the Standing Orders and it will apply to both sides of the House. And just to put on the record that the conversation was initiated by the Leader of the House. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Singh: [*Inaudible*]—to that.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: You cannot.

Madam Speaker: I wish to commend all Members for the display of decency and all the honour today. Thank you.

**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
(PROVISION OF TEXTBOOKS)**

[Second Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [November 27, 2015]:

Be it resolved that this Government take urgent steps to ensure that all students are provided with textbooks, workbooks and/or other learning material in fulfilment of commitments given for the academic year 2015 to 2016.

Question again proposed.

Madam Speaker: The Members who have already spoken are as follows: Dr. Tim Gopeesingh, MP, Member for Caroni East, the mover, and hon. Dr. Lovell Francis MP, the Minister of State in the Ministry of Education, Member for Moruga/Tableland.

Mr. Fazal Karim (*Chaguanas East*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for allowing me to join in this very important private Motion, private business Motion moved by my colleague for Caroni East. We consider this extremely critical, particularly since we are requesting, and the proposal on this side is that the commitment that we made when we were in government, and particularly through my colleague as the former Minister of Education, as distinguished as he is and was in terms of the significant amount of accomplishments that he would have achieved during his tenure.

The commitment that we wanted to ask for in this debate is that with respect to schoolbooks, textbooks, workbooks for students in Early Childhood Care and Education Centres, primary and secondary schools, and learning materials for special needs students, Madam Speaker, as you mentioned that we get a commitment from the Government that this should continue in the academic year 2015/2016. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I think before I go into the substance of my contribution, it is important for us to contextualize or to locate the debate within a certain framework. I want to do this by referring to the Mighty Sparrow's calypso on education. I just want to quote certain parts of it for us to underscore the importance of this very critical element of the development of any society in the world and certainly one that has allowed us to progress substantially over the years, where we have seen ourselves as the knowledge capital of the Caribbean.

Madam Speaker, the Mighty Sparrow says, to remind some of us:

“Education, education is the foundation...”

I wish I could have sang it.

“Our rising population...”—he says—“...needs sound education. Children...”—he cautioned—“...go to school and learn well Otherwise...in life...”—you are going to—“...catch real hell”

I will give you a copy of it. [*Interruption*] Sparrow, not Kitchener. Sparrow. Especially when you sang calypso at Presentation College, San Fernando you must have mistaken Sparrow for Kitchener. [*Crosstalk*] I will give you a copy.

Hon. Member: What is the title?

Mr. F. Karim: Education. Education by the Mighty Sparrow.

Hon. Member: What year?

Mr. F. Karim: I just wanted to indicate—as a matter of fact, I always remember, Madam Speaker, when we are in the education system that Howard Gardner, a professor at Harvard would have indicated that students learn well when they engage in an atmosphere of disciplined learning. [*Desk thumping*] So I expect [*Crosstalk*] a lot of us will be listening and learning this evening.

Madam Speaker, I wanted to contextualize as I said because we are seeing in the context now of the new administration where there is a punitive tax of 12½ per cent VAT on books. [*Desk thumping*] I just want to underscore the chorus and the line goes like this:

Illiteracy is man's biggest enemy.

If we are talking about VAT on books, we are really attacking the functional literacy part of all our children, our students, all our citizens in this country. Reading, we have been told since primary school, make us a ready man or woman. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, the founding father of our nation, Dr. Eric Williams, also you would have heard on various occasions talk about the strength and the future of our society and about children and the books in their book bags. And in the world of technology the books have now been supplemented by laptops, by tablet computers, by desktops, by smartphones, by the new technology, and up to now in this honourable House we cannot get a response, a very clear, lucid response from the Government with respect to the laptops for students in this country. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, how are we going to compete in the world today when we look at competitive strategy? When you look at what is happening in the ASEAN countries, are we really going to talk about diversification of this economy? And I want to use another word, not simply diversification, but the transformation of our country. If you are not in the League of Nations and we are talking about the days of Adam Smith gone by, *The Wealth of Nations*, the League of Nations suggests that we must engage in competitive strategy. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, the time has come for us, as you complimented both sides of the House today, to move forward for the benefit of the nation and do not see sectoral politics. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, having said that, and I want to continue to lay the foundation. The hon. Minister of Finance came to the House and presented the Budget Statement 2016, and in a \$63 billion budget with substantial billions of dollars for the education and training sector, and we now have the former Ministry of Tertiary Education being on board with the Ministry of Education. In this budget statement, which is supposed to guide the policy direction of the country, I counted five paragraphs and 374 words allocated to the most critical element for our young boys and girls in the country—education.

As I say so, I wish to indicate that all of us talk about the human resource being the most important resource. I came across an article in the *Harvard Business Review* just a few days ago, and it was a very interesting title. It was saying that now in terms of what we are experiencing in the world today and certainly for Trinidad and Tobago, that we will want to seek opportunities outside of our country. We have been talking about diversification for a long time, since the time I was studying economics at UWI, whether we were reading George Beckford's *Persistent Poverty*, or Girvan, or Jefferson, or Kari Levitt, or Lloyd and Kari Levitt, all of those, we have been talking about diversification and transformation.

There is a substantial difference between an economic transaction and economic transformation. Two different things. Madam Speaker, that article I was referring to was saying as well what we always say in this House and elsewhere, that the human resource is the most important resource, but paying lip service to education will not get this nation very far. And I say that in the context of the article, the *Harvard Business Review* which was saying, and I think this might appeal to a lot of us. You can read the article. And the sub-line of the article says:

“Companies Don't Go Global, People Do.”

At a time when we hear that companies were supposed to be going global. And you know what the understatement is, that it is talent of the people. And it is my view, I have said before, that “talentism” is the new capitalism. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Madam Speaker, I continue to indicate that while we talk about successful national economies, they all share similar characteristics, and I want to out point out some of them to you. Successful national economies share characteristics of the following: one, excellent education systems. You know, a lot of us seem to have a different view of education. There is a difference—and if you read Ivan

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Illich, *Deschooling Society*, you will see that there is a difference between education and schooling. [*Desk thumping*]

I read somewhere where somebody was saying in an article—I was just reading causally—and they were saying that books are not too important anymore. I do not know how you could ever acquire knowledge without reading. The basic skills of literacy and numeracy—if you read the stories and you read the reports of the PISA scores—and for those I should explain what PISA is—not pizza; P-I-S-A, the Program for International Student Assessment. And one of the architects of that is Andreas Schleicher, who came to this country and worked as well.

And when you look at the survey of the OECD countries, when you look at what is happening in Korea, Madam Speaker, parents and children are struggling to become very literate, very numerate and to excel in scholarship. They even go to something called the Hagwon H-A-G-W-O-N which is night classes, which is sometimes done under the cover of secrecy.

2.00 p.m.

You see, Madam Speaker, you would know as a parent and maybe I can talk now as a grandparent, the only time you know what it is to be a child is when you have children. [*Desk thumping*] The only time you know what it is to be the protector of the nation—almost like the story of Las Casas—is when you are in charge. When you are in Opposition, as before you could say a lot of things, and when you come in Government you say different things. And I want to tell you some of the other things that successful national economies share. They share high levels of investment in R&D. Would you believe that we were moving the pendulum up in terms of research and development in Trinidad and Tobago? [*Desk thumping*] Research is the creation of new knowledge from existing knowledge. Strong links between industry and the education institutions—I am hearing people writing and talking in this country. You know sometimes if you say something regularly enough people believe that is true. And they are saying that there is no alignment.

As a matter of fact, I am hearing now—I was tempted to bring a list of all the books of the history of Trinidad and Tobago. Going back to when I was in Presentation College, San Fernando, and I am sure my colleague, the Member of Parliament for San Fernando West, would have read it. *The History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago* by Dr. Eric Williams.

Mr. Singh: They want to rewrite that now.

Mr. F. Karim: And there are many other theories. Prof. Emeritus, Richard Brereton, Campus Principal and PDC of the St. Augustine campus has written extensively on the history of Trinidad and Tobago. What is this history that you want to write again? As a matter of fact, I want to tell you that when you write the history of Trinidad and Tobago make sure that you have a lot of consultation, you have a lot of research and you bring a document that is acceptable to everybody. Do not write a divisive history of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, you know I am saying all of this in the context of knowledge. You know a lot of us talk about competition. A lot of us talk about competitive strategy. You could read Michael Porter how much you want. But if you want to understand competitive strategy, for you as an individual, for you as a firm, for you as a company, for you as a country, read Michael Fertik. And Michael Fertik has written *The Perception Economy*. And what is the perception of economy? The perception economy in three lines I will define as follows or summarize Michael Fertik's book.

1. How people see you;
2. Whether people will work with you; and
3. Whether people will work for you.

Madam Speaker, all of those questions continue to be answered by the way in which we have the education system. Madam Speaker, you would know too as a parent that the parent is the first educator. We often hear about *primus inter pares*. It is used in many ways. But the home is the first school. And what we are witnessing in Trinidad and Tobago today, Madam Speaker, is the breakdown of homes, the increase in violence and deviance and crime and criminality that are impacting on the lives of our young children. It is getting pervasive in schools now. It is very painful not only for us, but could you imagine the parents when you are waiting on your child to come home and you are told that they were dragged out of a car and killed?

You know, Madam Speaker, Stephen Covey in his celebrated book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* says:

The things that are closest to us we take most for granted—to which I have added without Stephen Covey's permission—until something happens and it is too late.

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Madam Speaker, as a former teacher I used to share with my colleagues that if we do not do our work in the classrooms they will wait for us at our gates. Very often when something happens, when there is an unfortunate situation as we experienced yesterday in this country, you will go and you will say to the home, to the parents who are surviving, I am here to extend my condolences. I know how you feel.

Madam Speaker, you will never, ever know how it feels until it happens to someone near to you. And I bring that in the context of the Motion that we need to ensure that we equip our students, our boys and girls, from a very young age with the necessary tools for them to learn, for effective classroom learning; to accomplish learning outcomes; to ensure that there is instruction in leadership; to ensure that there is classroom management; to ensure that what we are paid to do as teachers and as parents and as politicians and as policymakers that we do.

Madam Speaker, I just want to add as well, the ability to translate research into projects. When the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East was speaking and he was talking about VAT, I throw back my days to when I was in infants class. I do not think I ever had to get any more pan, old tin of juice and empty condensed milk tin and put a price on it, because the price would have changed so quick. Previously, there would have been no VAT. Now, I have to go and calculate and in that—infants at that time I might not have been able to calculate 12½ per cent. So it throws the whole arithmetic outside. But I wanted to just indicate to this honourable House that what is happening in the world as well is an emphasis on STEM subjects. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I have added when I used to give some discourses as Minister previously, I would have added an “A” to the STEM. And you know why I would have added that “A” to the STEM? When you look at digital printing now, 3D printing—and I was reading about the Boeing Aircraft Company in Seattle—Boeing was asking not only for persons who graduated with a competency in STEM, they were asking for the “A”, the art, the design. [*Desk thumping*] And a lot of times we used some words here called holistic.

Sometime I do not know if people know what they are saying, you know. Everything now is holistic. You have to define what you mean by that. Is left brain, right brain, no brain, white colour, blue colour, no colour, what it is. And therefore I was indicating and I want to infuse this now, when you want to develop your society you must not only diversify in terms of the economy, you must diversify in terms of learning strategy. [*Desk thumping*]

And therefore as we talk about STEM, we will see that McKenzie Group in a report indicated, and this is from the *America's Moment*, a book by Rework America, Madam Speaker, I am quoting from that publication:

When a McKenzie group sized up several game changers that could supercharge the American Economy, Madam Speaker, talent was at the top.

The report went on further to say that:

They estimated—this is the McKenzie Group—that improving skills development from kindergarten to post-secondary education could add \$1.7 trillion to the GDP by 2030.

Madam Speaker, at a time when we are facing some challenges, where the giants of the oil world are at play and we are facing the challenges here, we have to seek out opportunities as to how we could increase our learning capacity to sell our talent to the world. And therefore, when we went into the new Aviation Campus of the University of Trinidad and Tobago, one of the visions of that campus was to see whether we could have attracted foreign investment—FDI—but at the same time preventing the hemorrhage of foreign exchange outside of Trinidad and Tobago. And let me give an example.

Madam Speaker, Caribbean Airlines, the national airline of Trinidad and Tobago, will fly personnel from here on a 483 or a 484 flight to Miami for them to come back on the returning flight in the night, in terms of ensuring that they increase their competencies and they maintain their skill level, in terms of simply opening doors as well. How do you open and close an aircraft door; or in terms of simulator.

Madam Speaker, the vision of that campus was to ensure that some of those things would have been done right here so we would not have to pay for our employees to go abroad. But importantly, there is no nucleus of the aviation sector in this part of the world here in the Caribbean. Trinidad and Tobago has been described since the days of MacPherson, *Caribbean Lands*. John MacPherson would have written extensively on Caribbean lands. And we were always described at that time as an *entrepôt* Trinidad and Tobago. But we have not been very entrepreneurial in terms of using that location advantage of *entrepôt*. And therefore we thought, and I want to compliment the University of Trinidad and Tobago and my colleague who is acting or who is here now in the House, the Member for Moruga/Tableland, today when I picked up the newspaper I saw proudly and I want to congratulate you that the University of Trinidad and

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Tobago has continued to advertise the Certificate in Aviation Technology and the first degree in Aviation Technology and Maintenance.

Madam Speaker, I say that because the United States of America—and I am sure that the literatures are available—if you have to become a pilot now the requirement is that you must have a university degree to do that. I say all that in the context that we must ensure that what we are asking for to be continued in this Motion—the availability of workbooks and textbooks and learning materials—will allow our students to excel.

Madam Speaker, you know, we have evidence that whenever we go away, or we know of Trinidadians and Tobagonians who go away to study they excel. And that is because of the emphasis on the three Rs: reading, writing and arithmetic. We can excel anywhere as we excel anywhere in the energy sector in the world, whether it is Qatar, Kuwait, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, whether you go to Saudi Aramco. And as I talk about oil and Saudi Arabia—I remember when I was reading the *Time* magazine many years ago, as a young boy studying for my degree at the University—I just say this as aside, Madam Speaker, —one of the most powerful men in the world at that time, I remember his name very well, Sheikh Ahmed Zaki Yamani.

Mr. Singh: OPEC man.

Mr. F. Karim: That is it. He was the Chairman of OPEC and the Saudi Arabian oil Minister. And even Saudi Arabia is diversifying their economy into the King Abdullah economic city. And therefore, what causes them to diversify? It is not simply say, let us open a next sector. You have to have the knowledge, the requisite power of the mind and the will to move your country forward.

Look at Lee Kuan Yew in Singapore. A lot of people saying, why are you comparing Lee Kuan Yew with us? I will tell you there are some things that we need to compare. When I went to Singapore in 1997, Singapore was buying water from Malaysia; when I went back as a Minister, Madam Speaker, Singapore was selling water to Malaysia. That is the spirit of enterprise. And you know it is a “D” word as well—Discipline.

Madam Speaker, I think what we need to engage in very quickly in this country are the three Ds: data, driven, decision. And I will tell you why. I saw in the newspaper that someone is saying that 100 primary schools are failing. And I read that article three times to find the source. Madam Speaker, if they come here they will be in trouble with you because you will ask them to quote the source. I am trying to find the source of this information to go and see the data and the

empirical evidence; I cannot find none. They say that it was published before somewhere in the papers. Madam Speaker, unless we do not define the problem we cannot apply critical thinking to the solution. [*Desk thumping*]

2.15 p.m.

Therefore, *The New York Times* bestseller, Daniel Levitin, in a book which I want to recommend and which I enjoy reading now, is called *The Organized Mind*. You could take notes, you know: *The Organized Mind*, my colleagues. And you know what the subtitle is of this *Organized Mind*? “Thinking Straight in the age of Information Overload.” Madam Speaker, he talks about something that a lot of us should engage in; ways to improve the brains we are given, and he defines this as neural enhancement.

Madam Speaker, for the benefit of all of us, and those who are listening, he says that there are three ways we can learn information. Number one, we can absorb it implicitly. Secondly, we can be told it explicitly and, thirdly, which is very important for our students, we can discover it ourselves. And that is the theory of discovery learning.

Madam Speaker, I was saying before and I moved away from the point of Ivan Ilyich. I was saying that there is a difference between education and schooling. Are you going to tell me that because my father was a sugar worker and he did not go past Standard Seven, that he was uneducated? No way. But you can say that the person like some of us who have gone on to do our law degrees, or who are pharmacists, or who are doctors or lawyers, we can be described as having been well-schooled. Therefore, implicit learning speaks about emersion of new language.

Madam Speaker, all of this will not happen by guess. All of this has to happen in the context of workbooks. Students use workbooks for the mastery of learning. Sometimes you read one textbook and you “doh” understand it and you read the same thing, or similar in another book, and you understand it well, because of the workbook, the examples.

Mr. Singh: If you have your computer you get it on YouTube.

Mr. F. Karim: And I will deal with the computer just now in terms of the eBooks. Madam Speaker, when I taught, I used to tell my students that the teacher is the embodiment of an equation called: textbook plus teacher equals present learning. Because the textbook was written at a particular point in time. “It doh

change, unless yuh get a revised edition.” But the teacher reads the textbook and adds to learning and it benefits the students. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I am talking about a new concept of learning. How are you going to have the new concept if you deny the students the textbooks, the workbooks, the laptops, the eBooks, the new strategies? What are you doing? And therefore, a computer—one computer—was described by one man as a classroom of 10 million students, and I will tell you who that is. The 10 million students at that time with one man and one computer was Salman Khan—not from Bollywood, eh, Madam Speaker. Let me make it very clear, it is not that fella. This is khanacademy.org. And you know, it started with Sal and I want to—

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, your speaking time has expired. You are entailed to seek an extension of 15 minutes. Do you wish to—

Mr. F. Karim: Yes, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Leave is granted.

Mr. F. Karim: Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*] I have to rush now. Madam Speaker, I want to tell you that the whole concept of the flipped classroom which, really, was an evidence of Salman Khan’s strategy of learning, started simply with his cousin called Nadia. And the book that he has written detailing the flipped classroom is the *One World Schoolhouse*. [*Desk thumping*]

And just to summarize, it talks about Nadia who could not do mathematics. She had to go on to medical school and they met at a wedding in Boston and Nadia asked Sal, who was a Harvard MBA graduate, whether he will assist her, and he said, yes, and they used the Internet. Today, Trinidad and Tobago can boast of thousands of programmes catered for, and launched by the last Government of Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, through UTT, called Learn TT, the National College Network. [*Desk thumping*]

That is how you are going to master things. And the flipped classroom was—we used to have lectures at home and homework at home. The flipped classroom is homework in school and lectures at home. “But how you going to have lectures if you doh have any technology? If yuh doh ha no books, wha yuh go read? If yuh doh have learning materials, how yuh goin tuh accomplish?”

Madam Speaker, we want to continue to make the plug for the book rental policy, especially now, where we are going to have, you know, real challenges for people to meet their ends with their little means. [*Desk thumping*] It is not only going to be physical hunger and starvation, it is education hunger and starvation.

[*Desk thumping*] You know, this is not about forward ever. It seems as though this is backward ever. [*Desk thumping*] We have to make sure that we move forward. [*Desk thumping*]

How are we going to compete with scholarships? How many scholarships “you would” be giving? You know, I remember when I was in the previous Ministry, I had to meet a young girl by the name of Sara Hack—in fact, they called her Sarah Hack—who came out of a very nondescript village on the Essequibo coast in Guyana, and that young girl got 16 CXC distinctions. And you know what?

Mr. Hinds: She should join the PNM. [*Laughter and crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: You need it. You need it.

Mr. F. Karim: Madam Speaker, I just—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Hinds: I hope she does not join the youth arm of the UNC.

Mr. F. Karim: Madam Speaker, I would not ask for your protection, all I would say is that we could understand why some people did not get, maybe six CSEC and others got 16. [*Desk thumping*] You learn by listening. When you disrupt a class you do not learn anything. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Hinds: And what happen when you disrupt a country? You get voted out. [*Laughter*]

Mr. F. Karim: Madam Speaker, you see, the country is seeing and looking on, on national television. The media is here to see how you all are trivializing education in this country! [*Desk thumping*] And you know, I will tell you why you trivialize education, because this is your manifesto and you want to debate against this Motion, but listen to what you are saying on page 41, under Education:

“Ensure that our system of education at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels prepares our young people for the challenging world of science and technology.”

But you are taking away the laptops. Some of the things in the schools are not working. And I would not go too detailed with this because, you see, Madam Speaker, I think it is important for me to deal a little bit with the whole concept of the eBooks. Madam Speaker, could you tell me how much more time I have, please?

Madam Speaker: You go up to 2.33:50. So you have about 10 minutes.

Mr. F. Karim: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I just want to indicate some of the serious impacts of a decrease in the quality of education due to the lack of textbooks and learning materials, and I think it is important we must say something. Everybody “does” say about, you have a class system, you have a plural society, but, you know, people “does” forget about the “haves” and the “have-nots”. Sometimes you will go into places, into rural areas, and you see children who “doh” have a proper home. But “yuh” know what? “Dey bright like bulb.”

I know of a family, very distinguished in this country today, comes from Tortuga, had to study under candlelight, under the lamps—gas lamps, and they distinguished themselves. You know why? They had the will. They had the determination. [*Desk thumping*] But very important, they had the supervision and the initiative and the interest of their parents.

Madam Speaker, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is like *primus inter pares*. Governments must take responsibility for the development of the people and the development of a nation. [*Desk thumping*] And, therefore, the lack of access to textbooks will seriously decrease education quality, especially for those who “cyar” afford it. The future impact on an individual learning and earning—President Obama is saying—President Obama, I am proud to say maybe has taken a page from Trinidad and Tobago—community college—two years—is now free. We had that a long time here. And you know what he is saying? “Seek a good education for a good job.”

“Sparrow tell we dat too. Yuh cyar make love on hungry belly.” You know how many people without jobs now are in a state of depression? Families are breaking up; social issues in the families. But you see, some of us will never know because we look like this, we dress nice. We looking good. But I will always say, as I said before, there are things that are closest to us we take most for granted until something happens and it is too late.

Madam Speaker, the lack of learning materials will demotivate students. The lack of learning materials will create a class society where those who could buy, will buy and those who “cyar” buy will have to do without. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, what will happen to the impact of test and exam scores? What will happen is when you have to do SBAs—School Based Assessment—those who have the technology with the world of knowledge will obviously have better quality in terms of *ceteris paribus*. The propensity to have a better outcome will be greater in that regard than if you had limited access to resources.

You know, even when we study in school, in terms of the humour, we still learn something. I remember when I started secondary school, for the first time in my life “I hearing bout Latin”. I remember the book very well, you know, Madam Speaker. *Latin Longman’s Reader*, a blue book. I am not going to define it, what I am going to tell you we learnt very quickly. I am sure my friend who went to that school as well, the Member for San Fernando West, remembers these words—we used to say: “Latin is a language as dead as it can be. It killed the ancient Romans and now it’s killing me.” [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, when we look at the whole concept of eBooks—I want to move quickly to eBooks. eBooks seem to mirror distance learning in similarity of cost and convenience. We are being told, we are hearing, we are reading in manifestos that we must be lifelong learners; we must be life-wide learners; we must reduce the skills gap; we must close the digital divide. Listen, do you know what you have done by putting punishment on technology and learning? You are engaging in a retrograde step in the development of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] You are going to be written—that history book you want to write—you will be written into the history book as contributing to the under-development of this society. [*Desk thumping*]

Read Girvan and Jefferson. “If yuh doh want tuh read dat,” read Beckford, *Persistent Poverty*.

I am now advised by my colleague, Madam President—I have five minutes and I want to crave your indulgence to put into the record the contribution of a very close friend of mine, an educator, unfortunately whose funeral I attended this morning. Madam Speaker, I speak about Sister Paul D’Ornellas. Sister Paul would have spent many years in assisting the development of workbooks and textbooks and learning materials. Sister Paul served in the education system for 35 years, 25 of which as Principal of St. Joseph Convent, San Fernando and Port of Spain.

2.30 p.m.

Sister Paul was born on Old Year’s Day, December 31, 1930. Sister Paul was also, as I described, a star in the education system in Trinidad and Tobago, and will forever be remembered. Sister Paul has moulded thousands of young girls into young women, into mature persons and success stories of Trinidad and Tobago. She would have obviously had to assess text books and work books. She would have had to get her teachers and her students engaged in material production. She would have had to mould people as subject matter experts, as

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assessors, as verifiers. Long before we had the Accreditation Council in 2002, Sister Paul would have had to accredit people on her own right in terms of their learning strategies. Sister Paul would have had to be a master of clinical supervisions to know whether there was effective teaching and learning, either at the preconference, or the conference, or the post conference stages.

Sister Paul was also a person who I described as a most wonderful human being. [*Desk thumping*] Sister Paul, although being a nun of the Saint Joseph of Cluny Sisters, counselled many young people for successful marriage life. You know, Madam Speaker, I want to tell you, some people might say, well, how is that possible? I have learnt when I did my Diploma in Education that you can assess a lesson of any subject without being an expert in that subject. If you are teaching Business, you could assess whether a Physics lesson was being taught properly. And Sister Paul was the founder of the Trinidad and Tobago Foundation for Human Development.

She was also the coordinator for contemplative outreach for Trinidad and Tobago and she was trained in counselling in England, Ireland and the United States of America. Sister Paul served on many committees. I know my colleague Dr. Gopeesingh would have served with Sister Paul as well. And, Madam Speaker, in 1986 when I was doing my Diploma in Education and the then Government of the NAR was coming into being, I read their manifesto and I changed my dissertation topic to the study of Community College, the concept of the Community College in Trinidad and Tobago, and it was there I met Sister Paul because I was one of the first persons to do research on the concept of the community college in the Diploma in Education Programme. I was called to give evidence, and there is where I first met her and we continued to have friendly and cordial relations.

Madam Speaker, as I pay tribute to Sister Paul, she was indeed a person who I had a lot of respect for. She was very kind-hearted, very caring, very loving, very fun to be around. She is a person who we can take a lot of examples from to ensure that learning takes place in this country for the benefit of every citizen. [*Desk thumping*] She was very compassionate, very charitable.

Madam Speaker, as I close I want to pay tribute to the one—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, your time has expired.

Mr. F. Karim: Thank you. Madam Speaker, I will just thank you very much for the opportunity to participate in this in Motion. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Joseph.

The Minister of Health and Acting Minister of Education (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you, Madam Speaker, as I rise to make a contribution to this Motion in my capacity as Acting Minister of Education. Madam Speaker, no one sentence demonstrates the philosophical difference between the UNC and the PNM when it comes to education than that of my colleague who just spoke. He made mention of that girl from Guyana who passed 16 CSEC at one shot and denigrated someone on this side because they passed one [*Crosstalk*] or talked about, shot across the floor about somebody who passed one. [*Desk thumping*] Nothing more demonstrates the elitist view of education by the UNC. [*Desk thumping*] Nothing more demonstrates the elitist view.

Madam Speaker: Members, I would like to hear the contribution. Please, continue.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: An elitism à la the UNC is what you are preaching here today. Let me give you a story, Madam Speaker, to counter the story of one person who passed 16 subjects. There is somebody I know, and you know, who does not have one certificate with six passes, but has six certificates. Do you know why? Because at first shot he only passed one subject, second chance passed a second subject, third, fourth, fifth and sixth.

He accumulated six certificates, but an education system that is elitist will not accommodate the majority of citizens because if you do a normal distribution curve and you take the outliers, the 16 subjects passed student is the outlier, is the exception to the rule. But most of us who are average and who need support will be in the middle of that normal distribution, and that is what PNM policy caters for, the majority of people. [*Desk thumping*] That person, after he gathered six certificates went to the police service; went to sell insurance; took a risk to do the LLB external programme here; did well; was accepted for a scholarship in England; did not buy a single book because he did not have the money, but went to every single university in London that would accept him and studied law. That person is the Member of Parliament, Fitzgerald Hinds [*Desk thumping*] and that is the type of education system that you want. Not elitist, but allows the average student of which there are hundreds of thousands, to aspire to an education.

Madam Speaker, friends opposite spoke about education as if it was invented by the UNC, friends opposite are speaking about rewriting history, but I have stood in this Parliament and I am going to say something controversial that will reach the Prime Minister's ears because I have always said the People's National Movement has done a poor job when it comes to telling this country what it has done for education. [*Desk thumping*] We have done a poor job when it comes to

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telling the country what we have done for education, so let me educate and enlighten. Let me educate and enlighten because, you see, in the contribution of the mover of the Motion, he spoke about equality and disadvantaged.

In 1962, when we became independent, secondary education was for the elite. You had to pay \$16 a term to go to secondary school. Not only that, Madam Speaker, in those days if you did not have a Christian name, if you were not a Christian, particularly a Catholic, you could not get the type of education you wanted or deserved. People had to change their names, people had to change their religion to get an education in Trinidad and Tobago, and who changed that? Dr. Eric Williams. He took secondary education and blasted it open and made it free, because in those days unless you want a certificate exam or whatever and there were 16 or 160 places in those days, unless you belonged to that elite—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Al-Rawi: Exhibition.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Exhibition—like the elite from Guyana with 16 passes in one shot, you were doomed to a life of poverty in this country with no education. It was the People's National Movement that then introduced Common Entrance. So there was a common exam to give everybody a chance, the everyday man [*Desk thumping*] and that is the basic difference between PNM policy in education and UNC policy in education.

It was the Patrick Manning administration that then took tertiary education to where it is today when we started GATE, because in those days before GATE, only about 6 per cent of the cohort actually went on to tertiary education. When the PNM left office, as part of their Vision 2020, 40-something per cent went, and then you ran with it and took it up to 60 per cent. So we congratulate you on that too. [*Desk thumping*] But as you say, governance is a continuum, but what we are trying to do now, what Dr. Eric Williams was to secondary education, what Mr. Patrick Manning was to tertiary education, Dr. Keith Rowley is going to revamp primary education. So we are going to come full circle and I will speak about that.

Madam Speaker, my friend opposite spoke about the flipped classroom and all these nice plans, and those are good. A country must have vision and something to aspire to, and we must always benchmark against best practice. I have no problem with that. But what is the purpose of that dreaming—and dreaming is good. I have no problems—when you could not open schools because the toilets were not fixed. It is only under this administration that all schools in Trinidad were opened after the Christmas vacation for the first time. [*Desk thumping*] So

we are seeing about the basics. You could not do that. You could not do that over the past five years and even years before, let us be fair. How many schools did not open under your watch?

But you see, Madam Speaker, when I look across from this visage that I have here, I see my colleagues opposite who all went to schools built by the PNM, and then they will say PNM “ain’t do nutten for rural areas. We ain’t do nutten for south.” All this free education, who brought it on?

Madam Speaker, let me get to some of the issues that were raised. We speak about the laptop, and my friend who spoke before me mentioned the words “consultation, effective teaching and learning”, and he mentioned the words “data and empirical evidence” I am asking the question: where was the data and the empirical evidence to show what the laptop could have done and what the laptop initiative did? Absolutely nothing! The laptop initiative was never integrated into the syllabus. Never! Absolutely never! And we have no problems with technology in schools. It was the PNM that took technology into schools via computer labs. But you see, you want to rewrite history as you have done to tell your sons, daughters and granddaughters, and brainwash them into this thing that PNM hate children, and hate schools, and never do nothing for south of the Caroni river.

That is how you maintain your political base. Where is the consultation—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Al-Rawi: The Opposition.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: The Opposition—that led you, where is the empirical evidence that showed that the laptop initiative would have done anything for Trinidad and Tobago? Show it to me and show me the subsequent study which says the laptop initiative worked. Show it to me. And where is the curriculum for the laptop initiative? Where is the curriculum? Can anybody show can me a curriculum for that laptop initiative? It does not exist. [*Desk thumping*] Simply does not exist.

Madam Speaker, the mover of this Motion spoke to a strong commitment to education, but which Minister of Education put a school on top of a rum shop? Not the PNM. Which Minister of Education put a school on top of a rum shop? Not us. That is your commitment to education. On page 45 of the *Hansard* of that day, it was said everyone should have a right to free education. Everyone has a right to free education in Trinidad and Tobago and has been from time immemorial. [*Desk thumping*]

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The education is so free that we even gave free bus, but you know I heard on the election campaign that their then Prime Minister introduced free bus pass for children. Could you imagine that? And you want to talk about rewriting history. That was a PNM initiative [*Desk thumping*] but on the campaign trail you hear them saying it is the UNC that brought about free transport for children. Education has always been free, from at least in my time and I am 57 years old.

Where did they get this from? No child must be left behind, the underprivileged. It is people like Mr. Hinds, the underprivileged, who got an education, but your vision of education is for the elite, the girl who has 16 passes one time.

2.45 p.m.

Madam Speaker, I have had the—not the pleasure, but the opportunity—to send condolences to two young men, Mark Richards and De-Neil Smith, on behalf of the PNM, on behalf of the Government and on behalf of all of us here. I do send my deepest condolences to those two children, Forms 3 and 4. But I want to correct one thing that has been making the rounds in the media that one of those boys, it is said, was not in school on that day. Whenever you hear that, you automatically make a certain connection and I want to dispel that talk. Both boys—and I have checked with the Chief Education Officer and the Permanent Secretary—were, in fact, in school on that day. And from all appearances, these were two well-adjusted young men [*Desk thumping*] and we have lost two potential bright stars. One was the captain of the cricket team, prefect at school—excellent people.

I want to assure the school, the parents of these children and the community, that a very high-level team being led, well, including the Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister, Hon. Ayanna Webster-Roy, the Minister of Social Development and Family Services, MP Fitzgerald Hinds, MP Leonce, will be paying a visit to the school, paying a visit to the parents—the Minister of State in the Ministry of Education—to give that community and the parents their absolute full support. [*Desk thumping*] We have arranged counselling and this Government remains committed, as it has always been, to that community.

But in addition to that, what I want to say is this, the previous speaker spoke about 3D printing. But it is good to benchmark, it is good to dream and hope, but let us get the basics right first and I will come to that. Because you spoke about the eBook initiative and you are decrying this Government for not launching—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Singh: Decrying?

Mr. Karim: I never said that.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: When I said you—I apologize—the Member for Caroni East in his contribution. Let me tell you what has become of that eBook initiative because just like the laptop initiative which was done for PR purposes to deify one person, let me tell you about the eBook initiative. Because I want to ask the Member for Caroni East who moved this Motion, where is the evidence, where is the research that says the eBook platform is ready and set to go? Because my information is that you need at least six to eight months of planning to launch the eBook initiative, and I want to share some information with you because a great part of this Motion is calling on the Government to launch the eBook initiative.

But the same *vaille que vaille* way they launched the laptop initiative for PR purposes, they wanted to bring on the eBook initiative. Let me tell you what my research has told me about why that eBook initiative could not be launched now or in September 2015. One, only a mere handful of local publishers have eBook versions of their hard copies. So what are you going to launch? There are not enough eBook versions of the hard books. Two, there was no single platform to launch the eBook service. And this is not me talking, these are the book publishers talking. No single platform to host the eBook providers. There was nothing to engage them to offer services to work out the logistical and technical issues. Madam Speaker, launching the eBook initiative is not like giving somebody a text book. You have to have the technological backbone and the one provider they engaged with had severe problems in launching the initiative. So it is not that this Government did not do the initiative, it was logistically difficult to launch in the *vaille que vaille* PR way that you wanted it done.

Third, I am told by good sources, many publishers were concerned about the security of their proprietary information and how it will be used. You never addressed that, but you wanted to launch this for PR purposes to deify one person. You never addressed the data protection issues, you never addressed the copyright issues, but they want to come here today and tell their supporters that PNM do not want to do the eBook initiative. Nothing can be further than that, [*Desk thumping*] but I am not finished.

There were concerns raised about the secure distribution of eBooks, the physical distribution of the eBooks. There were concerns as to the cost of the eBooks and the eBooks were infinitely more expensive than a hard copy. How were you addressing that? Explain that to me and you never addressed the issue of connectivity. You never addressed the issue of connectivity because you need wide broadband. You never addressed the technological backbone to bring this

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project to fruition and those are the facts. Those are the facts, but my friends opposite just wanted to do this prior to the election for election gimmickry and to fool people and to come across as this populist Government.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Spin the wheel.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Yes, they wanted to be popular. But the eBook platform was never thought-out, as we say, the devil is in the details. So you would have given people these nice looking tablets and when they go home, they cannot connect to anything. There is no content, there is no security for publishers, but that is what you wanted to do to win an election. It was a pure election gimmick and we would have spent hundreds of millions of dollars on a project with dubious returns just like the laptop.

When you launched the laptop, all we said was why not focus on having the computer labs in the schools where we could teach the syllabus, where you have a degree of control. That is what we were saying. So, again, we have a diametrically opposite view. You want an elitist system, we want a system for all. [*Desk thumping*] You want to buy gizmos so somebody could make oodles of money, we want to deliver a platform ready for consumption at the schools. [*Desk thumping*] Totally different philosophy.

Mr. Hinds: Building schools for contract, not education.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: That is right. Who benefits from these things? Who benefits from these laptops? Who benefits from these eBooks? Certainly not the children. Right. So those are the facts behind the eBook initiative; absolute facts.

My friends opposite spoke about how to compete and transformation. Madam Speaker, the People's National Movement has always been at the forefront of education and people development. [*Desk thumping*] That is why we have a 60-something per cent take-up at tertiary education, which you did, but you inherited 40-something and you ran with it. Not a problem. But the base for that comes from the schooling that would have been put down by successive PNM Governments, but you refused to acknowledge that. [*Desk thumping*].

We made every single technological advance in this country to benefit all students across the country. When we put Point Lisas down in Point Lisas—and we will never win an election there but we put it there—we transformed generations of descendants of cane cutters and we transformed them from being cane cutters to users of cutting-edge technology. [*Desk thumping*] That is transformation. And that happened south of the Caroni River. We transformed

generations of people from being descendants of cane cutters to users of cutting-edge technology. We did that, you did not do that. We did that. Whole generations—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Rambachan: What you have against sugar people?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Nothing, that is why we did that.

Mr. Al-Rawi: He is from Caroni, he could speak from that perspective.

Madam Speaker: Members, Members, let us keep the crosstalk down, please. Hon. Member for St. Joseph, continue, please.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Yes, and do not forgot and let me remind this House, I am from Caroni. [*Desk thumping*] Everybody in that community: Basta Hall, Couva, Chaguanas, Phoenix Park. Everybody there, instead of cutting cane, is now human resource people, engineers, managing directors, IT specialists, Ministers. That is a transformation. That, my friend, is transformation via education. It was done and it will be done again under this administration when we review the syllabus for primary schools.

So let me get to some policy prescriptions because it is not enough to simply remind the population of what we have done. What are we going to do moving forward? Under the substantive Minister of Education, we have already started an examination of the syllabi for schools, especially at the primary school level. Because we recognize that the output you want out of a school system, the output you want from a school child who is 16 and 17, if you need to mould that output, then the input at the preschool level and the primary school level has to be fit for purpose. And in recognizing that the primary school curriculum is deficient, when Dr. Keith Rowley, hon. Prime Minister, was in Opposition, on the platforms, he said one of the first things he will do as Prime Minister is to have a review of the primary school curriculum and that is being done.

But as we move forward, our action plan at the Ministry of Education—and I am just speaking on behalf of the substantive Minister—revolves around six major policy goals. So I am telling the nation what they can expect from a PNM Government, committed as usual, as it has always been, to education. One, we will ensure access to quality education and training for all citizens. No one will be left behind. Every citizen of 1.3 million, whether you are young, old, in-between, 40s, 50s, you will benefit.

Two, to advance curriculum planning and development. We cannot solve the problem in our schools if we do not do a diagnostic at the curriculum level and

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that is what we are doing. We are not just seeking to launch eBooks just to make money. We have to do a diagnostic and that diagnostic, Madam Speaker, is being done now. We have to examine the curriculum. We have to advance curriculum planning. We have to advance curriculum service and delivery. We have to retrain teachers to deliver the new curriculum unlike what you did when you had the laptop and you did not train a single teacher, at the onset, how to use this thing. Fact of life.

Many teachers told me children were just given laptops and nobody knew how to use it. Nobody knew how to integrate it into the current curriculum and that is the difference between your policy and your approach and our policy and our approach.

3.00 p.m.

Part four of that policy, as I just said, is to ensure continuing teacher training, and my good friend from Chaguanas East mentioned stuff like that. We have to engage our teachers in continual education upgrade. The other plank of the one-year action plan is to provide for quality infrastructure and other educational facilities, and this brings you back to the eBooks.

Infrastructure, Madam Speaker, as we speak now about education, is no longer desks and chairs. For the eBook platform to work, you must have the technological infrastructure to deliver the curriculum, to have the books come up on your tablets when you press a button. You left us with no technological backbone to deliver it, but somebody would have made millions of dollars on selling the tablets; somebody.

And six, to effectively govern and administer the educational system. Let us admit it, the education system needs a strong governance structure so that we could deliver the programmes. That is what we are focusing on now, technology, infrastructure, both physical infrastructure and technological infrastructure. So that the promise they made about eBooks can be a reality, but we are not going to do the eBook initiative just because you put a Motion in the Parliament. We are not going to do the eBook initiative without proper consultation. [*Desk thumping*] We are not going to do the eBook initiative, unless we are assured that the publishers of the material are happy with security for their preparatory content; that they have the price down to a price point where the Government could afford it. All those details, Madam Speaker, have to be worked out and, unfortunately, our colleagues opposite never saw to that. It never even occurred to them that these backroom issues had to be worked out.

Madam Speaker, let me come briefly to the issue of the books and the workbooks because much sound and fury from the Opposition has come. One would get the impression that if you walked into a school now, you would see no books. That is the impression they would like to give, that is the impression they will give to their followers, that the PNM is taking away all their books. What we are doing, is rationalizing the system. We have looked at what the book stock is, and we have done a 10 per cent top up, based on the natural rate of attrition. We have done a 10 per cent top up.

But our friends opposite would misrepresent and scare their followers into thinking, as they normally do, that we have taken away all the books and there are no books. Madam Speaker, one of the reasons we are doing this rationalization is this: there are many editions that come year after year of textbooks for subject that do not—where the subject matter does not change dramatically from year to year.

One and one was two, 40 years ago, and one and one is still two today, but, what we have are some publishers who just make cosmetic changes and call it a new edition, and then you must purchase that book. We are saying no. Once the content is not significantly different from edition to edition, let us look at that. Why should we be buying a new math book this year, when it is just a change of cover, different sequences of chapters? Instead of putting one plus one equals two, they might put one plus one, and put an apple and an apple, whatever. But many so called new editions are not significantly new in content that deserve a Government to spend hundreds of millions of dollars, to buy a new edition. We are looking at all these things—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for St. Joseph, your speaking time has expired. You are entitled to leave for; you are granted.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you. Not only that, many school children when one brother or sister finishes school, because they now have to buy a new edition with cosmetic changes, it puts the family at a significant financial disadvantage. We are looking at these things and rationalizing the whole supply and distribution of schoolbooks.

So I want to alert the country, do not fall for the doom and gloom of the UNC, that somehow when you go into a school today, there are no workbooks, there are no schoolbooks. I assure the country that no Government in the world has education as a priority more than People's National Movement, [*Desk thumping*] as we have demonstrated tangibly from 1962—2016 and beyond. I want to make

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that crystal clear, pellucidly clear, not to fall for the propaganda falling from the lips of those opposite us. Nothing could be further from truth.

So, Madam Speaker, as I come to a close, this Motion is devoid of any substance. It is devoid of rationality. It is devoid of truth. It is meant to scare. It is meant to take this country backwards. It is meant to tell children to fear the PNM, because that has been their mantra. It is meant to cause concern, unnecessary concern, where there should be none. I want to assure the public as I take my seat, the People's National Movement as we have always been, we have your education number one, number two and number three, priority. Madam Speaker, I thank you very. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan (*Tabaquite*): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Madam Speaker. The last thing I want to engage in, is to say who is better at X or better at Y in terms of the education of the children of this country. What I am interested in is what has to be done in order to ensure that our children are best prepared to take their place in the global environment in the future, and that is what I am interested in. I am not interested in who got six certificates, one subject at a time. I failed virtually GCE O levels on three occasions. The first time I got three subjects. The second time I got five. I did not get English, and the third time I wrote English, was between my A levels in the first year, and I passed English, but I ended up getting three A's in my A levels. [*Desk thumping*]

So, some people are late developers and some people are quick developers and, therefore, I will understand if somebody is a late developer, God bless them, that is how the world works and that is how things happen. There are many reasons, Madam Speaker, why someone might be a late developer—it might be due to opportunity, it might be due to environment, it might be due to resources, a number of things. In my case I can understand why. So I am not here for that at all. I am here to celebrate the lives of children in terms of the best education that they should get, and how we might go about as a society, and as a responsible Government, in order to do that.

It is, Madam Speaker, a very disturbing thing for me that the University of the West Indies which should play a pivotal role in terms of the development of excellence in the school system, charged as they were with innovativeness in education and all the other things that will go towards excellence, in my view, somehow, they are falling short. I am disappointed that we are not seeing in the public—maybe it is there, maybe they are doing papers and putting them in files, and so on—the deeper research and case writing that should be part of a

programme transformation, a programme of research, and case development to transform all our schools into high-performance schools.

The lecturers at the University of the West Indies need to really get up and begin to think whether they are making the contribution that they ought to make rather than simply teaching in a classroom, but bringing the reality of performance, both in organizations, whether they are business organizations or school organizations, bringing the reality of high performance into the teaching modes that we understand, for example, what makes for excellence in schools.

We talk about the excellent organization, business organization. We can also talk about the excellent school as an organization. We need to do research into finding out what makes for excellence in schools? Why, for example, are denominational schools out performing Government schools? Why is it that they are winning most of the scholarships; 95 per cent of the scholarships? Why is it almost on every occasion, children coming in the first 200 in the SEA list, most of them come from the denominational schools? Why is that happening? I think that those are questions that the university must seek to ask and find out, on behalf of the education system.

What are the characteristics of a high-performing school? What are the characteristics of a high-performing teacher? What are the characteristics of a high-performing student? I am not seeing that kind of research being done by the University or by people in the society in order to bring that learning into the realm of academia to translate it into the classroom performance of both teachers and students. What is the home environment? What is the family environment that leads to a high performing student? That is a piece of research that we need to do also.

While we talk about the textbooks and the eBooks and so on, and so forth and try to score points, that is not the concern right now for our people out there. We want to know exactly what makes for a high-performing child, a high-performing school, a high-performing child coming from a family? What is it in that family that creates the environment for the high-performing child? What is the role of religion? What is the role of human values in a child's success in the school system?

I think all of these are important questions that have to be asked and answered, if we are also to transform the environment for our children. I believe that every child has the potential to become successful. I believe that every child has the potential to be a high-performing child. I really and truly believe that, but

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sometimes the belief factor, there might in schools be a teacher who will communicate to a child, “I do not think you are capable of performing”, and then the child will deliver poor performance. Sometimes the beliefs of the teachers, the beliefs of the parents, the beliefs of the community about a child, would bring about either success or failure about the child. There is research done by Roethlisberger and others in schools that shows that the beliefs of a community or teachers in particular about children, communicated to children, would cause their performance to be low.

As a Member of Parliament, I remember a father coming to me about two years ago with tears in his eyes, and his little boy because of how they perceive that family in the school, and they placed that child among other children to sit outside of an air-conditioned classroom, because they thought that those children could not perform as good as the ones whom they had in the air-conditioned classroom. That happens in this country, and those are the things we must fight for because when we talk about developing a society of equals, a society where everyone has equal opportunity, then we must work towards reducing and removing all of those kinds of inequalities wherever they occur in the society, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, so I think there is a role for research that perhaps has not been fulfilled by the University of the West Indies, and by teachers also. You know how good it will be to write a case study on a school like Naparima Girls’ High School in San Fernando, or Naparima College in San Fernando? A case study that shows what it is that makes this school a high-performing school, and bring that case study as part of the teaching experience in the classroom or in the Batchelor of Education.

So people can explore that, and then you send those students back into those schools as observers of what makes for a great teacher and so on. Perhaps we are not being practical enough. You know, part of the problem with this society is that we are still somewhat at a level of theory and theory, and theory and theory. We are good at talking but are we good at acting? Are we good at translating theory into practical action where it has to happen?

3.15 p.m.

Madam Speaker, the development of human potential is what is going to drive our country forward, it is what is going to make us successful, and while it is the responsibility of parents who bring their children into the world to ensure that they are well educated and they are well prepared for the future, and what have

you. It is also the duty and responsibility of governments who tax people in a country, who receive resources from the country to run the Government to ensure that the human potential of the individual is developed to the fullest extent, otherwise we would not be a competitive nation.

Madam Speaker, the hon. Member for St. Joseph said that the laptop programme was meant to be a PR exercise. Nothing could be further from the truth. The laptop programme was never meant to be a PR exercise. Let us be very, very careful about what we say in this House. There are many children in this country who would never have been able to have a laptop in their home to share with other members of the family, [*Desk thumping*] including their siblings and parents if there was not a laptop in the home. Let us face it. Every cent spent on laptops for the last five years is money well spent. [*Desk thumping*] Because what it has done it has catapulted our children into the technological world and made them competitive at a global level, and not just at a localized level.

The laptop programme was a serious programme, a responsible initiative to ensure that our children, all of them, were given the opportunity to be empowered, to develop and compete in a technologically-driven world, and I want to make that very, very clear. Madam Speaker, you know the word “elitist” was used in this House earlier on this afternoon. You know what is elitist? You know, if I were to go back a little bit in history, prior to the year 2000, for 38 years in this country, and I am not in a way decrying or taking away from what Dr. Eric Williams did in terms of contributing to education, but let us not also take away from what organizations like the Maha Sabha did, by building 42 schools which were described as cow sheds, and from which cow sheds have emerged some of the best professionals, [*Desk thumping*] the best doctors, the best lawyers, the best teachers also in this country. Let us not take away from what the Seventh-day Adventist church has done, the Kabir Panth Association has done, [*Desk thumping*] the Arya Samaj has done in the country, or any of the other bodies; the Baptists have also done in the country in order to ensure—ASJA—that people had an education.

So it is not just about the PNM and the Government schools. There were a lot of people in the society contributing to the educational development of our people, and when history is written, let history properly record the contributions of those people. [*Desk thumping*] Let it record it. I remember in my own village of Avocat, the Mahabir family in 1956 gave land that today is valued millions so that the Avocat Vedic School could have been constructed, such was their commitment to ensure the development of all of the children in the village. Dr.

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Bodoe, the Member of Parliament for Fyzabad, would remember that what I am speaking about. Had it not been for people generosity like that a lot of us would not have had the opportunity to be educated in our villages in the way that we were educated.

Madam Speaker, 1962 to 2000, 38 years, every year of those years—I am advised by the former Minister of Education, Dr. Gopeesingh, that the research shows that between 7,000 to 10,000 students from primary schools did not get a place in secondary school. Fast forward that and you know what that means? It means that today about 250,000 citizens were probably deprived of a secondary education from 1962 to 2000. That does not make them any less educated, but imagine if they could have been given the opportunity for a secondary education what might have been the outcomes for them. It was in the year 2000 that was changed when every child was then guaranteed a place in a secondary school [*Desk thumping*] when Mrs. Persad-Bissessar was then the Minister of Education, and that is an era in which a lot of schools were also built in the country, and the entire infrastructure, physical infrastructure in the physical environment, which is so important also to learning and development, was transformed under the schools. The former Minister said 57 schools were built during that time.

Back on the laptop initiative, the records will show that today more students are doing IT at secondary schools than prior to 2010, more students. Also, the ICT curriculum was developed, and was introduced by the curriculum department. Today, and particularly because of this initiative with the laptops, and what have you, Trinidad and Tobago is a leader in Latin America and the Caribbean in ICT in education, [*Desk thumping*] and that has been recognized. ICT has brought about the best academic performance ever in the history of our education in the years 2014 and 2015. [*Desk thumping*] You cannot dispute those facts, it cannot be disputed.

Our teachers have been winning world prizes from Microsoft. Under Dr. Gopeesingh as Minister of Education, the Government partnered with Samsung to have over 30 schools with state-of-the-art ICT in classrooms. [*Desk thumping*] We were making advances. We were progressing. You know, I am not scoring points, I am just putting the facts down to show you that we must continue to do the right things, not politically, but because the children deserve the best that they can get. [*Desk thumping*] You know, under Dr. Gopeesingh, the Minister of Education had partnered with Blackboard for the platform, and Digicel for the connectivity.

Member for Parliament for St. Joseph, you know you were talking about the eBooks, eBooks were available for Forms 1 in English, Maths and Science, and

proprietary information was addressed. Publishers had the system to secure information in the books, and you are free to go and check it with the people at the Ministry. Secondary schools had computer labs in the last five years ranging from one to six labs, and some schools have as much as 60 computers in the lab, so that the computer labs were not ignored, the computer labs were developed. But the children had an opportunity to go home also and use the computer for their study and their advancement.

Over 300 primary schools have computer labs—300 primary schools—so the environment for the delivery of education was substantially improved under the people's administration; substantially improved. [*Desk thumping*] You know, we talk about consultations, and what have you, under Dr. Gopeesingh when he was the Minister of Education consultations were done in 2011. I remember the reports about 3,000 educators, a two national and eight district consultations, and the environment for student development and character development was further enhanced with the introduction of Morals Education, Values Education, Ethics, PE, and also Visual and Performing Arts. All of this was introduced because we were concerned about the holistic development of the child as we went along. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, this debate is very important, but it is taking place at a time when the children of our country, particularly disadvantaged children, coming from low income families, and from, yes, what are still indigent families in this country are under pressure to make ends meet. This pressure to make ends meet is going to become even more difficult with the VAT that is being put on books and educational tools, and, also, with the VAT that is being put on so many other items which has raised the cost of living, and, therefore, it means that you are going to push parents somewhere along the line to say whether they choose to buy food or they choose to buy books. Do not underestimate what I am telling you. You have to be a Member of Parliament and have constituencies like I have to understand what exists out there; the reality with which you have to deal as a Member of Parliament. Do not underestimate it.

While we are talking here in the Parliament and shouting across the floor, and what have you, other things are going on in the lives of our children. Since November, there are Members of Parliament in here who will tell you that they sent in their list for book grants, they sent in their list for uniform grants, and in my constituency not one person has received a book grant, [*Desk thumping*] not one person has received a uniform grant. I do not know if the Members on the Opposite side whether they have been able to persuade the Ministry of Finance, or

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the relevant Ministry of Education so that they could have gotten grants for their constituents. But I can tell you, up to Tuesday when I checked in my constituency—yesterday, sorry—people had not gotten their book grants, no uniform grants, and we sent in the list. I was tempted to bring the list here today and read it into the parliamentary record, and let them go and check and see these students.

Madam Speaker, I want to tell you something: this matter of not giving children clothes to go to school is a serious thing. If you go to my office in Tabaquite you will see I have there over 3,000 khaki pants. I had shirts, cream shirts, blue shirts and white shirts that we secured. I have been sharing; I kept sharing them to the Members of Parliament. I shared them even with Members on the Opposite side. Principals come to my office and I give them out, because I go to warehouses and I beg the warehouse, I say, you have all this clothes sitting here and nothing is happening—please, either sell them for me at a dollar or give them to me. Some of them have been actually giving them to me, all I do is get a truck to go and pick them up. It is all there, this is true, and if any Member of Parliament here wants to get some khaki pants and shirts, and so on, I have them, and I share them with everybody.

So I know what is happening there with people who are not able. Because principals know who are the poor children in the school they actually come to my office, from my constituency in particular—and they are joining Princes Town constituency and Naparima—and they actually collect clothes back to take for their children to come to school. So I understand the pressure children are on and you come and you put VAT on schoolbooks, you put VAT, 12.5 per cent on all these other things.

You know what is going to happen? Madam Speaker, the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East and Minister of Finance, you know, spoke about extra money now being made available to people, because you moved people from \$60,000 to \$72,000 in terms of the availability of funding—\$60,000 to \$72,000—so that people who earn over \$72,000—no, because of the \$72,000 who get a \$12,000 benefit will now have about \$250 more a month in their pockets. But what the Minister failed to say, and what the Minister failed to tell us, is how many people really are earning or benefiting from that.

I asked the head of the Labour Force Survey of the Central Statistical Office, Mr. Bruce Spencer, to give me some statistics about what exists in terms of how many people earned under \$5,000 a year and how many people are earning under \$6,000 per month, and when I worked out from the statistics he sent me, what is

clear is that at this point in time about 56 per cent of persons are earning below \$5,000 a month. And from the statistics, based on a working population of 636,851; 356,000 persons, or about there, earn below \$5,000 a month. They are not going to benefit from the \$72,000 change in personal income tax; 13 per cent earn between \$5,000 to \$6,000 a month of that workforce; 13 per cent, or about 83,000, right. Madam Speaker, 356,000 persons are not benefiting from that \$250 a month in terms of the benefit from the personal increase, but yet the VAT has gone up on school books, yet, VAT has gone up on school. So when I say that the children from poor families are living under pressure you will understand what I mean, because these benefits are not reaching down to them. So the Minister of Finance can spin it anyhow he wants, the reality is that the children of our nation are under pressure because of the policies of the PNM Government. [*Desk thumping*] They are under pressure.

3.30 p.m.

Madam Speaker, the egalitarian society which I am sure was the vision of Dr. Eric Williams and which all of us have laboured hard to build, one in which the opportunity to advance and realize one's potential that was available to all is now under threat. Those who are rich will be able to meet the cost of education for their children—let us face it—because the next thing that is going to happen, and there are signals for it, already we hear that scholarships are going to be cut, we already hear that means tests will be employed for the GATE programme, so you can expect some changes in the GATE programme. You are already beginning to see the advocates of PNM policy beginning to write in the newspaper and to signal to the population what is going to happen. Those who are rich will be able to meet the cost of education, and a whole lot of people will be left behind. They will be left as we say in this country “to ketch”.

I want to say something that might not be too palatable, but it is not unparliamentary. I want to ask whether we are creating a kind of caste system in education, whether we are not perpetuating a kind of caste system, where certain people—not now based on anything about birth and what have you—will be excluded from getting a proper education. If that is the case then who is creating the elitist system in education? Whose policies are doing that? That is the question to ask.

Madam Speaker, let me give you another example in terms of the disbursement of funds for schools. From September 14 to June 15 of the last school year, one school received \$156 per child. That very school in 2016 in January received \$99 per child. I do not want to call the school, because I do not

want to put any pressure on the principal or the other teachers and administrators who gave me this information, because there is a kind of viciousness in this society today. It is a Jwala Rambarran justice existing, so one has to be very careful.

This principal now has to service four more children. When she was getting \$156 per child, they had 478 children, now for 482 children she is getting \$99 per child. Now you tell me, how is that going to happen? What is that principal going to do? By the way, when this announcement was made, it was made at the Naparima College auditorium on Wednesday, January 13, at a principals' meeting of the Victoria Educational Institute, so that is where the information is coming from. It is not to say somebody is speculating.

You have cut, you have now slashed the support of the children now. Do you know what that means? The physical environment is under threat—toilet paper, soap. So you are going to have immediate problems of hygiene in the school. The next thing they are going to ask the parents, "Send your child with toilet paper in their bag. Send your child with soap in their bag". But you are going to have a bigger problem: chalk, photocopy paper, a number of other things. So not only are you talking about the school books that have not been given—by the way, I checked; three schools in my constituency and none has received school books so far for this year; none has received.

The Member for St. Joseph, to get emotional about people of the south versus people of the north of the Caroni, that is immaterial to what is the real problem in this country, which is how do you create an environment. Do you continue to place priority on education or do you continue with the cuts that you are making in education? That is the point. What are you prioritizing?

I know the value of a scholarship. I know the value of a scholarship. I come from a very poor family, but we worked very, very hard to be where we are, and I know that. [*Desk thumping*] Had I not won a scholarship while I was at university, I could never have done a Masters in Business in Canada; I could never have done it. I had to work very hard to win it, because there was only one scholarship at that time given in the entire Caribbean to go to University of Western Ontario to do Business—one. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Moonilal: "What scholarship you won?"

Mr. Deyalsingh: I was a very average student.

Dr. S. Rambachan: So when people are talking about cutting scholarships that bothers me very, very much.

The physical environment is under threat also. So it is not just about the books. You might say that toilet paper and soap are not learning materials, but it is just like a workplace. If you go do not give a person the proper environment to work, the person does not feel motivated. So you have to do it for the teachers and you have to do it for the students; like you have to do it, Minister of Health, for the nurses and the doctors.

Sometime back in this very Parliament somebody got up on your side and read a whole list of 35 complaints I made about Mount Hope Hospital. I went back into Mount Hope Hospital and almost all the complaints are still there, after you all have been in office for 134 days, and you have done nothing about it. You should go and do something about it.

Mr. Deyalsingh: What you could not do in five years, I must do in 133 days?

Dr. S. Rambachan: Madam Speaker, you now put VAT on computers and computer peripherals. But you know what? You did not increase VAT on cigarettes and alcohol. In fact, you reduced VAT. So those who love cigarettes and who can transmit cancer because of secondary smoke, and those who drink and drive, now they have a 2.5 per cent break on alcohol; encouragement. I am very serious, you know, very serious, because it is as conflicting as what you have done in terms of the school also. You have put VAT now on a number of sporting items. Sporting items in schools are important for the holistic development of the child—very, very important. Today, what is going to happen to the 140 schools, 80 secondary—*[Interruption]*

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, your speaking time has expired. You are entitled to a 15-minute extension time. Do you wish to avail yourself of it?

Dr. S. Rambachan: I am availing myself of it. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

So you have put VAT on sporting goods. What is going to happen to those schools which have to buy equipment for their children? Madam Speaker, 80 and 60, 140 schools between primary and secondary right now; they are involved in cricket and have teams—140—with VAT added on. Do you know what it costs to set up a cricket team with basic equipment? I checked this morning with Ramsingh's Sport World; I checked with Mr. Leo Doodnath, whose brother runs a sporting goods store, and I checked with another one in central Trinidad. It costs for a normal school team about \$10,000. So immediately they might have to find about \$1,200 more in order to—so what are you doing?

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The Member for Chaguanas West would know that because of VAT on sporting goods now, a lot of big teams are under pressure also. I do not know how much information you have about this, but let me tell you something. In every village there is a cricket team. In every village there are very, very good cricketers, but some of those boys would not have the money, the ball fee, and if somebody does not pay the ball fee on their behalf, they may not be able to develop their talents. These are facts, you know.

So when we are shouting here about south of the Caroni and this and that and so on, there are bigger issues that we have to deal with in terms of the people in this country. [*Desk thumping*] That is what we have to deal with. So VAT on all of these items is bringing additional pressure to bear. As I said, the choice could very well come down to buying food or buying books, and which one would a parent choose? There are very poor children in schools now; ask teachers and they will tell you that there are families in financial crisis based on their own experiences with the children who they teach in their classrooms.

With jobs becoming difficult—today Centrin workers are protesting because they have been sent home. I have information where litter wardens who have been working, they have been advised to turn in their badges and that they are all going to be sent home next Thursday, and another set the following. What are these people going to do who have children? What is happening to them? What is going to happen with their kids in school with their ability to buy books for them? This is very serious. It is an urgent issue. This loss of jobs in relation to a parent to provide for the education of their child?

Madam Speaker, the construction sector has virtually ground to a halt. Contractors are owed millions, they cannot pay their workers, and the workers therefore are finding it difficult—they are home already—they are finding it difficult to support their families. How many of us sitting in this Parliament understand what the reality of that economic situation is? What is the Government doing to pay the contractors their money so the parents could have money to feed their children? [*Desk thumping*] I am very, very serious about this. This is why it is important that this Private Members' Day be kept sacrosanct so that these issues can be brought to the public.

What is happening, therefore, is that retrenchment plus VAT on food and books, increased cost of transport, means that you have PNM-induced marginalization in this society once more. A lot of people are being marginalized. So when I use the word “caste” system, understand what I am saying. You know what it is for teachers to teach without textbooks? How prepared would the child

be to move to another level, if the child does not have the textbooks to study? So he does not have the computer to go and do his studies now; you took away that. You are not delivering the textbooks. What are you doing to the child? You are impoverishing the child at the knowledge level. What are you doing?

I am sure the Member for Moruga/Tableland who is an educator cannot be happy. He must be suffering from some pang of conscience about this.

Mr. Singh: He should be acting Minister of Education.

Dr. S. Rambachan: What are we doing to the motivation of teachers, when their basic resources for them to do their work are not being met? What are we doing to teachers, when they cannot have the basic resources that they need in order to deliver the curriculum in the schools? What are we doing for them? Today someone is saying that there are 100-plus schools underperforming. I asked some very important questions, and I hope the university takes me seriously in terms of the questions I asked here today.

When I was in local government I invited a political scientist from the university who was going to a conference. I said, "Listen, we have done a remarkable job of transforming local government, both as a mayor in Chaguanas and then as a Minister of Local Government". I said, "Come, I want to give you all the information to write the case study, that you can present as a Trinidad and Tobago case study at this conference". To this day I have not seen the case study. Ministry of Local Government, I expended money with the University of the West Indies, Arthur Lok Jack, to write three case studies; up to today I have not seen the case studies. What is the university doing? Therefore I ask again—that is why I am asking these questions. The university must not exist as it existed apart from the society. The university must reflect what the realities are of the society, by going and researching it there, so we can learn from the experiences of the successful, and make everyone successful. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deyalsingh: "Yuh vex with the university, boy?"

Dr. S. Rambachan: I am not vex with the university. The university fired me in 1981 when I contested the election; I am not vex for that. I went on to become a self-made successful entrepreneur and businessman. So I am not vex with them. If I walk the road and take a risk, I bear the burden of that risk. I have no problems with that. I do not have hate in my heart. I just have love for people and I understand that is part of my karmic effect. I have that; no problem. [*Desk thumping*]

How will the overall performance of disadvantaged schools, especially in rural, low-income communities be affected by these policies? How will the overall performance of what really are disadvantaged schools, especially in rural, low-income communities be affected? High-income communities may subsidize the shortfall in resources in their schools, but low-income communities will have a difficulty doing that, and that is going to be problematic.

3.45 p.m.

Now how does this tie in with the PNM's espoused commitment to rural development? You are working at odds. You say you are committed to rural development, but you are destroying the fabric of rural development and human resources. [*Desk thumping*] Rural development has to do with more than infrastructure. This cannot be a Government for all the people of the country. It cannot be a Government for all the people of the country. It cannot. It cannot. You cannot be doing all of these things to the detriment of the future of the children and say that you are a Government for all the people. Children are going to be growing up very insecure under this PNM administration. The next five years is going to be critical in terms of the psychological development of children and their view of the future.

Madam Speaker, there are two different kinds of schools in this country, there are denominational schools and there are the government-run schools, but it seems that there are two different cultures also, if we are to speak truthfully. More likely in denominational schools you tend to have strong social support systems where the disadvantaged children find great support. Sometimes I ask whether that is happening in the schools where it should really happen. And if it is not happening, what are the interventions necessary to make it happen. Can the same not be done in those schools?

Is it a fact that the culture of dependency is higher in government schools than in denominational schools, and if so, why? Is that a fact? Madam Speaker, with cuts already occurring in education, it begs the question as to what other cuts are going to be made and how they are going to affect education in the country, how are they going to affect education?

Madam Speaker, under the People's Partnership Government a lot was done in terms of schools. I believe if—I am subject to correction—the former Minister of Education, correct me, 102 new schools were constructed?

Dr. Gopeesingh: Yes. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. S. Rambachan: And when we left, [*Desk thumping*] 98 were under construction. [*Interruption*] Then, I am corrected.

But what is interesting, Madam Speaker, is in 2004 we signed on to ensuring that one of the millennium development goals by the year 2015 would have been universal primary school education. Well, we not only achieved universal primary school education, we achieved universal early childhood education. [*Desk thumping*]

Today I ask, what is happening to the early childhood education schools that were going to be built, and which foundations were started, like those that were started in my own constituency, but nothing is happening to them after that. Why have they been shut down? What is happening to the Flanagin RC Primary School? What is happening to that? What is happening to the other preschools that are supposed to be built? Why are you shutting it down? Are you shutting it down, all of this, in order to project a message to the population that really you do not have any money to do it? Is that what you are doing in order to say that this Government spent all the money? That argument is not being bought by the population again because we have already said what we left. And I want to repeat. The fact that you can draw down US \$1.5 billion from the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund means that money was left there for you to draw down. [*Desk thumping*]

The fact that you had US \$700 million to pay within two months for foreign exchange for business people means that you had money left there. [*Desk thumping*] You cannot say that there was no money left there for you to do things. The fact that you are saying now that you are going to pay public servants by September, which is a promise in terms of their back pay, means that you know where the money is coming from. [*Desk thumping*] Why are you doing this? Why are you trying—and this is what the population—why are you using politics in a sense of punishing the people to prove a point? [*Desk thumping*] “Why you doing that? Why you doing that?”

Madam Speaker, I want to thank you for this opportunity to contribute, but I want to end by asking those questions again that I asked in the beginning. If we are serious about the educational development and the holistic development of children, let us change the paradigm. Let us change the paradigm to begin to research the successful schools, the successful teachers, the homes from which successful children come, and some of those might be very poor homes eh, to understand what it is that is created in those homes and environments that leads to the success of a child. What is the excellent organization called a school like St.

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Augustine Girls' or like Naparima Girls' High School or St. Joseph's Convent or one of those schools—Presentation College. And even one or two of the government schools, you know. What it is that causes a school like ASJA in Charleville, in such a short time of their existence, to begin to win scholarships? What it is that causes a school like Lakshmi Girls' High School to be winning 22 to 25 scholarships after such a short time as a secondary school? What it is that they are doing right? What it is they are doing right? These questions must be asked and unless you go and find out from the people who are part and parcel of the process you are not going to find the answers; [*Desk thumping*] you are not going to find the answers.

Madam Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for San Fernando West.

The Attorney General (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): Thank you, Madam Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to rise on Private Members' Day to contribute to the Motion before the House. This is a debate which commenced Friday, November 27, 2015 and is one brought on behalf of the Member for Caroni East, my good friend.

The Motion itself starts off dealing with the period:

“...2010 to 2015,...”—indicating—“...that the People's Partnership Government...”—had—“...provided core textbooks and workbooks...”—that it is was—“...at no cost to parents;

“...a commitment was made...to continue the arrangement for the academic year 2015 to 2016;

there was a commitment for the academic year 2015 to 2016—for—“E-books”—to—“be introduced on a phased basis...Forms 1 and 2...”

And then there is a statement in the “Whereas” that:

“...the Ministry of Education has not provided new text books, workbooks, learning material or replacements for the academic year 2015 to 2016 which has resulted in financial hardship for families and loss of educational material for both students and teachers;”

And then it says:

“*Be it resolved* that this Government take urgent steps to ensure that all students are provided with textbooks, workbooks and/or other learning material in fulfilment of commitments...for the academic year ...”

That was the Motion before us. Now, I wish to confess that I did not come here today to participate in this Motion at all, but having listened to my learned colleague from Tabaquite I am compelled to join the debate. And I do so, without having prepared to come into this debate, confidently, because I am a graduate of the education system of Trinidad and Tobago, Grant Memorial Presbyterian School, San Fernando West; Presentation College, San Fernando, San Fernando West; the University of the West Indies: St. Augustine Campus, Cave Hill Campus; the University of London, King's College, the Hugh Wooding Law School, all of which, I can say confidently, found their roots thankfully to a dedicated pouring of resources by the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*]

Now the hon. Member for Tabaquite started off by saying let us not get into a debate taking pips about who did what and who did what. He said he would not do that and then he very passionately and convincingly proceeded to do exactly the thing that he said he would not do. But, you know, there is a certain charm to raising the level of debate, to putting a little fire into the House and I compliment him for a very lively and energetic contribution. After all are we not here with unified purpose to agree, firstly, that the education of our children, of our citizens, because there are elder people being educated as well, is of paramount concern to any Government in Trinidad and Tobago because it is a paramount concern for its people?

Is that not why the independence Constitution and the republican Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago, in the preamble of the Constitution contemplates that we have respect for all things good, be it democracy, rule of law, equality, education. Is that not why as an enshrined right in section 5 of the Constitution we see there appearing as a fundamental right that parents have the right to choose the education for their children? That is a very fundamental right, Madam Speaker.

Under the chapter dealing with enshrined rights, Chapter 1, Part 1 of the supreme law of Trinidad and Tobago as a right enshrined, there appears at sub paragraph:

“(f) the right of a parent or guardian to provide a school of his own choice”—and—“for the education of his child or ward;”

That is the framers of our Constitution.

The debate, starting off in the Motion of what one, the hon. Member for Tabaquite, did not want to do, but then going there became a very wide debate. The hon. Member very confidently waded into the issue of VAT. He waded into

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the issue of an allegation of cut for scholarships, an allegation of cut for GATE, for the GATE funding. He went confidently into why contractors were not being paid in Trinidad and Tobago—a very wide debate.

So let me construct a response to the hon. Member as follows. In relation to the Motion I would like to say that it is a fact that the People's National Movement now in Government accepts the concept of governance as a continuity and that the Textbook Replacement Programme, the Textbook Rental Programme having started in 2002 under a People's National Movement administration, having been implemented as a pilot project in 2003 in respect of Forms 1 and Forms 2 for four subjects only; having then grown out of the book grant system where that ended in 2008 and the full Textbook Rental Programme ensued in 2009; having then seen the People's Partnership Government come in, take control of the system in the period 2010 to 2015, 2016 as we are now, we are obliged to continue with it. And what was undertaken was that there would be two things in operation, two limbs of this programme.

Firstly, a full replacement of textbooks when they had died the natural death of a cycle; when they had in fact died as a result of either being outdated by reason of new versions that were deemed to be better versions of textbooks or when the useful life of the books which were held onto have actually come up and therefore, the books are too tattered, et cetera, and needed to be replaced fully. But what was implemented as the second limb, that being the first one, was that there would be a top-up. Ten per cent of the books would be topped up at certain periods along the life of the rental programme so that books which had become worn, and books which had become lost or damaged could be replaced.

And the Government met this system with the indication in August 2015 coming as it did in September the election occurred, we came into office and immediately took control of the system. In fact, I wish to put onto the record right now, it was not that there was supposed to be only a full replacement now. I heard the hon. Member speak across the floor saying this year was the year for full replacement, but in fact what we met was the 10 per cent top-up in operation this year. And all that we had to do, which we did at Cabinet level, was to pay a part of the money. The EFCL paid a part of the 10 per cent top-up to complete that tranche. So it is far from the position that a full replacement cycle was due now.

What we met was a payment already made by EFCL of several millions of dollars and a balance of nearly just a million dollars to be paid of a sum total of about \$20-something million, as far as my memory recalls the event.

Dr. Gopeesingh: That was for last year.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: The fact is—[*Crosstalk*] No. That was for this year. The fact is that the books have been guaranteed to be given to students. Parents can rely upon that and it is therefore not true to advance an argument to say, as the hon. Members opposite do, that the Government seems to be on some mission to deny textbooks to students.

4.00 p.m.

There has been a perennial problem of the late delivery of textbooks to students. I know, I have children in high school. I understand the position. Parents work within the cycle. Relative to the Motion, strictly, on eBooks, it is a fact that in August 2015 what we saw in relation to the eBooks was that there was a Cabinet approval. The tranches for the introduction of eBooks across four subjects in Forms 1 and 2 was intended to be ruled out, but the operationalization as my learned colleague, the Member for St. Joseph put forward, was not factored into the matrix. And one can give a great statement of intention, and I applaud the move when the hon. Member for Caroni East stood in the Senate in answer to a question, when I then stood in Opposition in the Senate, we specifically dealt with the issue of eBooks. I openly complimented the hon. Minister of Education then, that it was a progressive move.

But I asked the hon. Minister on the floor of the Senate then, what about the operationalization so that the eBooks can be utilized. I asked it because one of the areas of my Masters, an area of great interest for me in law is, in fact, in information technology. And the issue of the licensing arrangement for the books, the copywriting of the books, the need to make sure that the exploitation right for the authors and publishers are respected, where we in Trinidad and Tobago have some difficulty with copywriting issues, was a critical one.

As a nation we spend money to Microsoft on bulk licensing arrangements to the tune of, how much?

Mr. Deyalsingh: Hundreds of millions.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Hundreds of millions of dollars in licensing arrangements to Microsoft, and when we translate the intellectual power, the diversification to our economy that can happen through intellectual property, we must be careful to grow that sector correctly and we cannot encourage pirating. There are exceptions under the copyright laws of Trinidad and Tobago for reproduction of material for educational purposes. There are exceptions in law. How is that going to be

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applied? How do we guarantee those things? Let alone the issues, high speed Internet. Let alone the issues, provision in schools. Let alone the issue, of charging carts.

My children are recipients of laptops. I see them go to school once a week with it. There is a class once a week with it. There are no charging carts, no Internet connection, there is no integration in the syllabus for it. Projects are not required to be handed up on platforms of information technology. You are not required to type at school. And most respectfully, whilst it is a good intention, we are not seeing the benefit of the integration in the schools and therefore one has to make sure that the system operates efficiently.

But let us get to some of the broader issues because the simple fact is that the Government has kept its commitment to deliver the textbooks. It will be done. There is a deep consultation on it. We are looking at the wider issues.

Mr. Singh: When? When?

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: We are looking at it right now. The hon. Minister of Education has commenced public consultations and the announcement of that will come very shortly by next week in the newspapers.

Dr. Rambachan: What? The books?

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: The consultation—the books are on their way now.

Dr. Gopeesingh: It was announced yesterday.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: It was announced yesterday in post-Cabinet. The gap that occurred happened as a result of the calling of a late election. We warned the then Government, now in Opposition, that the consequence of hanging on to office till the very bitter constitutional end was that you were going to create a problem in Trinidad and Tobago as it related to the budget, as it related to Cabinet Notes and decisions taken, there was a pause and a practical issue.

The hon. Member for Tabaquite said across the floor, and I will indulge the comment, what were the public servants doing? Public servants are right to be extremely careful about spending hundreds of millions of dollars without authorization and approval. That is why I can say today that a permanent secretary in one of the Ministries that I manage is on suspension facing charges for not conforming with things that ought to have been conformed with.

I came to the Parliament, I addressed issues of ghost gangs, in terms of employees, over payments, under qualifications, bad procurement, the population

asked what was being done about it and I am here to say, the Fraud Squad is involved, disciplinary charges and suspension is in effect. This is not something to be brandished about. The gentleman on charge, in fairness to him, is entitled to defend his good name and due process must happen. I make no conclusion on the matter, hence the reason for lack of publication on the issue because he is entitled to defend his name and he has that right. But the population in Trinidad and Tobago even though it is in the newspaper wants to know what was being done.

The hon. Member for Tabaquite asked this House, tell us why contractors are not being paid? He said contractors have books to buy, tied it in, experienced as he is, great debater as he is, to the Motion because they would not be able to buy text books. And I would like to tell the hon. Member, that when you come in to a Ministry, and I can say with certainty as the Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs, that Minister Young and I have been extremely busy at reviewing contracts on deck right now, because what we have had put before us is a situation where there is massive complexity resembling fraud in many contracts, overpayments, lack of proper procurement, lack of validation and certification of works. But to be responsible, what we did, was to instruct that valuations on the ground be performed and that people be paid in relation to measured works on a value for money basis. It is the same thing that we have instructed in relation to legal fees, \$1.432 billion in legal fees, and what have we said? Legal fees just like contracts will be paid but we want to make sure the work was done. We want to make sure that there was value for money and that, Madam Speaker, is exactly what we are dealing with.

There is a guarantee that all contracts must be honoured, but there is a need for propriety. When you enter into a Ministry as I have explained in the Ministry of Attorney General and Legal Affairs and you see mayhem at work, paralegals earning more money than lawyers. CPO recommends one salary, another salary is being paid at twice the value, you have got to make sure that efficiency matrices come back into operation.

The hon. Member raised the issue of value added tax. “How yuh taxing schoolbooks.” What are people going to do? How are they going to pay for it?

Mr. Deyalsingh: Toilet paper.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Toilet paper, soap at risk; hygiene at risk; education at risk. So what do we do as a nation? Hon. Members of this House, persons looking on through you, Madam Speaker, let us have a reality check for a moment. We stand

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in Trinidad and Tobago where the price of oil is at \$28-odd per barrel—
[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: West Texas.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: West Texas. Gas is skirting at around two something. We are looking at a couple of billion dollars shortfall in our budget. Trinidad and Tobago is faced with a situation where we need to have revenue, there having been no revenue generated in the last five years, notwithstanding the expenditure of close to \$400 billion, where you have actual budgeted expenditure and contingent expenditure and guarantees that have happened through state enterprises, \$400,000 million spent and not one revenue generating asset to show for it.

Hon. Member: Not one.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Not one. Not a single revenue generating asset and I will put on the record, when the People's National Movement spent \$272-odd billion in the period 2002 to 2010, a longer span of time, you had industrial parks, you had these complexes that we are in, you had the Trinidad Generation Unlimited, you had the base platform for an aluminum smelter, you had Alutec as an industry that could stand alone by itself, you had—Madam Speaker, the list could go on and on. The fact is, what you had was revenue generating assets. And what do we do in Trinidad and Tobago right now at \$28 a barrel, gas at \$2-odd, what do we do? Do we say to people, right, taxation is a bad idea. “Doh pay your taxes.” Do we say that? Do we say listen, we will spare you from the VAT man. That is what we will say. We will spare you from the VAT man and instead of applying value added tax or property taxes to you at lowered rates, at a more equitable distribution, instead of doing that what we will do is that we will listen to the Opposition, we will just fire half the workforce and say we sorry we are firing you because we “cyah” raise the money for VAT, because it is a bad idea.

Paying \$120 a month in property taxes for a million dollar home on the existing law, the property tax law 2009, is a bad idea. “Doh” worry how we are getting the money to clean the roads; deal with rat infestation; deal with primary health issues. “Doh” worry with any of those things. We will save you from paying taxes, we will just have to fire half of you. Is that what a compassionate, sensible Government does?

You see, let me speak in terms of confidence now, Madam Speaker. This country should be confident that we can get out of the cycle. Why? Because if you simply eliminate waste, corruption and mismanagement and you apply an

equitable system through due process we can make it, and let me explain why. [*Desk thumping*] If every member of this country paid their fair share on an equitable basis where they could see their money working for them, we would have collected in value added tax alone \$12 billion. The Public Sector Investment Programme price tag is \$7 billion. That is nearly—\$12 billion is nearly close to double that. That is on VAT alone. Is that such a bad area? Is having a balanced revenue authority where you have an equal and level playing field, where we in San Fernando West see our taxes drop down to the national average, because we are paying higher taxes. I as the representative for San Fernando West want to see my taxes dropped in conformity with the standards elsewhere, and that is what we have committed to.

When the hon. Member for Tabaquite spoke about rural development and said it is not just infrastructure, what are you going to do? And tagging that now to the issue of confidence, is there no confidence to be found in proper targeting of resources? Is it not a prudent thing to say to people your social targeting is better done closest to the ground where the issue is by the social workers in your regional corporations? Is it not the social worker in Marabella West who works along the train line in San Fernando West better able to speak to the issue than somebody sitting in an office in Abercromby Street? Is that not a better spend? Is it not a register of unemployed, underemployed and properly qualified people and employment exchange register at local government level are better idea than just not knowing what your statistics are and hiding unemployment in make-work programmes? Is that not a better spend? Is it not having the San Fernando City Corporation collecting taxes in San Fernando and spending it through local contractors so that “San Fernandians” fix San Fernando roads, “San Fernandians” fix their own drains, “San Fernandians” fix their walls? A better idea to stimulate environment.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Madam Speaker, I stand on 48(1). My good friend, I mean, come back to the Motion. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, I would allow it. The debate has opened up very wide.

4.15 p.m.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: I know my learned friend, my very good friend, perhaps was not listening to the Member for Tabaquite. But I promise you the Member for Tabaquite raised all of this. I identified it very early in the debate.

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So, Madam Speaker, the idea of rural development beyond infrastructure, as the Member for Tabaquite has put to the floor, hon. Member, tied into local government reform where you are using local enterprise, where you are making sure that you bring the work to the communities who pay the bills, locally. That is an important concept, because for us, it is important for people to keep their jobs. Better for a man and a woman to understand, “I can keep my job and I will pay my little bit extra. I will be a little bit tighter in my spending.”

I notice some memes, as I call it—“meems” as some people call it, but the French word, “meme”, to mimic—I notice some memes going around from some UNC activists, talking about how Brazil cancelled Carnival and Trinidad and Tobago did not cancel Carnival, speaking about the whole issue of how we deal with our culture and education and all of that. What were we, as a Government to do, when Carnival events are planned a year in advance? Walk in and cancel everything? What we did, as the hon. Minister in charge of it did, was to make sure that we organize it in a tighter and cleaner fashion, all announced publicly. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Deyalsingh: Yes. Very good, Minister. Very good.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Keep on with the show, keep the encouragement. A spoonful of sugar helps to make the medicine go down, after all. [Desk thumping]

So, Madam Speaker, where are we? Where is education today? The hon. Member for Caroni East will bear me out when I say this. We do very well at primary school. Seventeen thousand students matriculate into secondary school every year. The hon. Member for Tabaquite says, “Are you trying to punish people? Why are early childhood centres not happening? I want to ask the hon. Member for Tabaquite if he would be willing to take a tour of San Fernando West with me. Because alongside early childhood centres-cum-community centres where all the after-school homework supervision goes on.

Come on to St. Vincent Street in San Fernando and watch the disaster that is on the ground when the People’s Partnership stopped a project midway in stream, so that nobody in Vistabella, nobody on the hillside ends, on Penitence Street, or on anywhere there, on the wharf, nobody could access a community centre; no homework supervision, no parental supervision.

The hon. Member asked us to compare why some schools do better, some schools do not—denominational schools versus others. I can say as the Member for San Fernando West, we have, collectively, in the Naparima basin, the highest number of scholarships in the whole of Trinidad and Tobago. Why? I will tell you

why. In San Fernando West, in San Fernando East, in other places, the firm concept of family still prevails, and your neighbour could still “buff yuh, and yuh aunty could buff yuh, and yuh uncle could buff yuh. And yuh aunty and uncle are people who are friends of your family. Yuh neighbour could still buff yuh because there is still a community spirit.”

At the train line in San Fernando West there are some of the most beautiful people. There is a feast and a harvest that goes on by the virtue of community spirit by a gentleman who was the patron of it in a wheelchair, where 200 children are fed on a constant basis. You mean, we did not have the dignity to allow them a home or a community centre to do that in the last five years?

Mr. Deyalsingh: “Dat was tuh spite Carolyn.”

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: It is as if time forgot it. I walked in San Fernando West, every single street, hill, gully, drain, track, and it was the same state and condition as when I was nine years old and 10 years old, in large part. It was the land then that it is now. It is the place that time forgot. And then we come to talk about prejudice and spite today in this Parliament?

I was saying 17,000 students matriculate at primary school level, but what happens at secondary school level? What happens to the matriculation number by the time we hit O levels or A levels? It certainly is not 17,000 students matriculating then. And we wonder why we have a societal problem with crime? We saw the most horrific of incidents, where two young men, teenagers, close in age to the age of my son—and I would not be ashamed to tell you, each time I see a tragedy on a child and I think of my own child, it brings tears to my eyes. Who, in their right mind, could drag two boys in their uniforms—

Madam Speaker: Member for San Fernando West, your speaking time has expired. Might I ask how much longer you intend to be?

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: I will safely finish at 4.30.

Madam Speaker: All right. I will grant you the extension of time to continue.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Much obliged, Ma’am. Thank you.

I was just saying, who in their sane, right mind, with a conscience and a soul, could enter into a car, take two young boys out from that car in their uniform, take the young lady who is in the middle and the driver and say, “You all go”, and shoot them dead, five times? And this has nothing to do with PNM and UNC, it is about the state and condition of our society, and it is anchored to education, and it

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is at the point of what happens in the gap between 17,000 people entering primary school and by the time they hit Form 5, and what goes on.

What is going on in terms of the dichotomy between male and female? At the call to the Bar every year, I have noticed—I have been counting the number of women that graduate versus the number of men that graduate in law. At the last call to the Bar that I went to—not this year, the year before—in a class of 100, I counted 90 women graduating and 10 men—90 women being called to the bar and 10 men.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Which year?

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Year before last. Year before this year. That was on one of the special calls, not the Hugh Wooding graduation. I look across the field and I notice that our curriculum is heavily geared towards, what I would call a female mind, in some senses. And let me tell you why I say that. I have daughters, I have a son. I notice that schools are geared towards a certain style of academics. Boys tend to blossom a little bit late. They tend to need to have the energy taken out of them through physical sport, through balanced activity, through a little careful guidance. It is why at Presentation College having a football field in the middle of the school was a great idea. Recess time, lunch time, after school, “yuh bussin ah sweat”.

Have you ever seen the show the *Dog Whisperer*? There is a beautiful theory that goes on there that you have to make sure that you harness energy and bring it under control. But is our curriculum at secondary school really geared towards dealing with our young men, towards empowering them, towards making them disciplined? Are we really encouraging that? When we have a scholarship system that rewards in Trinidad and Tobago+ pure academics, what are we saying to the Renaissance young man, or the Renaissance young woman who is a brilliant scholar across the field?

A Member of Parliament opposite has a niece, brilliant young lady academically, top performer all round, national awards. She is a Renaissance woman, but she cannot qualify for a scholarship in Trinidad and Tobago because we grade only on grades. Is that the kind of reward that we want in Trinidad and Tobago? Where is the urge to be the Renaissance man or the Renaissance young woman?

I think that that is where we ought to go. That is where the concept of the revision of GATE or scholarships has to start with some conversation. Meritocracy is important, but all-round ability—it is why while I was at school performing in

academics—not the greatest of academics at some points. I recall in Form 5, distinctly, coming out with an A at A levels in AdMaths, but in Form 4, first term, I got 11 out of 100. Next term, 17 out of 100, then 25, then 35, then 45 and then an A. Why? Because the teachers that taught me said, “Listen, believe in the theory that says if that one could do it, you could do it too”. Past papers, orientation and confidence, that is what took us through our examinations, helped us to blossom into good students.

But are we really thinking right when we say we are condemning X or we are condemning Y? Let us agree, as a society: the economy, education, health, crime, have to be apolitical. And I want to point out something. When we sat in Opposition for the last five years, as a Senator opposite I participated in voting 97.6 per cent of the time with the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. Look at the record. Watch the support we gave to the Minister of National Security, the Minister of Health, the Minister of Education. I stood and openly complimented the Member for Caroni East on his job in relation to the SEA exams—openly.

Do we see a reciprocity right now? Is this not a time where, as a nation, we need to start talking, “Listen, tax is not a bad thing. Efficiency is the important thing. Equality is the important thing. Fairness is the important thing.” I came into my Ministry and did not fire a soul, as I have said on record. My personal advisors were hired by Anand Ramlogan, Attorney General. They are still there.

Hon. Member: They are good.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Yes, they are good. And if you have someone with merit and ability, respect it. And I can tell you that the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Dr. the Hon. Keith Rowley, told us time and time again, in his Cabinet, in his Government, there will be no discrimination. [*Desk thumping*] He said if something is good, if something is working, you must respect it. Because if you start a cycle of slash and burn, where do we stop? Every five years you are retrofitting a situation. That cannot continue in a small country. Ask hon. Members opposite, if, when some people are in trouble, in the last five years I did not come personally to volunteer assistance.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Yes, correct.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: I do not see division that way. We do not see division that way. Sometimes the repost may be a little bit sharp; the humour may be sharp, but ladies and gentlemen, hon. Members all, through you, Madam Speaker, it is time we wake up and see where we are, and all that I ask as an hon. Member of this

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House, as one voice only: health, education, the economy, crime and security, let us deal with that on a bipartisan, national level. [*Desk thumping*]

You have our support to do that and we did it when we were in Opposition. We showed you what we were capable of. Our Prime Minister leads that charge. But do not fool us “nuh”.

Hon. Member: Walk the talk.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Yes, walk the talk. Beat the drum and we will dance to it. But our citizens are looking to us to set an example. And I look at this opportunity, short as it will be—55 months in this cycle left ahead of me—as a great privilege to serve as a Member of Parliament in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, a third generation parliamentarian; my mother and my grandfather preceding me.

Hon. Member: Uncle.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: And uncle, sure. But that is no exceptional thing. That is nothing to be praised. All that I am saying is that I can speak with certainty that the reason why I think it honourable is that it is national service, and you, a politician, stand in a revolving door the same way a judge does, the same way a policeman does, the same way a teacher does. Let us leave it with a little dignity “nuh”.

Dr. Gopeesingh: It is temporary.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Let us accept the transience of our passage through this system and on this earth and let us raise the level a little bit.

So, Madam Speaker, 31 seconds left to contribute. May I summarize as follows. This great democracy, Trinidad and Tobago, requires all hands on deck. This great democracy, Trinidad and Tobago, has the capability to navigate all storms. We have the intellectual ability, we have the economic prowess, and for heaven’s sake, we have the humour and goodwill to help us to pass through some bad times. But it takes us all to participate in that process.

Madam Speaker, hon. Members, I thank you—as ill-prepared as I was for this debate—for the opportunity to contribute. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, it is now 4.30. This session is suspended for half an hour.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Madam Speaker: The Member for Caroni Central.

Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie (*Caroni Central*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am very, very happy to join in this debate on the private Motion filed by the Member for Caroni East, and this Motion basically is at the heart of something of substance and value in any society which is the business of education.

I think whenever we debate or discuss the issue of education or any aspect of it, we have to always be very sensitive to what it is that is really important to talk about in education. The focus of this Motion is on the issues of core textbooks, workbooks to all students in the various institutions—the childhood centres, the primary schools and secondary schools—and the focus therefore is on learning materials and the institutions, the question of what depriving the students, the impact it will mean and ultimately what would be the impact on the parents economically, financially. The reason I raised the question of being sensitive to what it is we are really talking about is because talking about the children in the early childhood centres we are really talking about our babies, our toddlers, our young ones.

In the primary school we are talking about the formation stage of young children in the society who are going to grow up to become adolescents and adults. In the secondary school system we are talking about these adolescents, and although the Motion is focused at this level it raises the additional issue of higher education and the emphasis that is being placed in almost every society now on the human resource base, the capacity of individuals; the education of individuals and the focus on the mind, on brainpower; and more significantly the imaginative capacity in the world in which competition is a reality, competitiveness is a necessity and innovation is an essential element of sustainability. And therefore, the focus in education and when we discuss issues in education, it is always about the quality of the human being and the value of this human asset in a society, to the society and in terms of the contribution to the society and wider. This is why this debate is so important.

When we juxtapose against something that happened which I think has, I mean, caused all of us to rethink what is happening in the society, maybe probe a little deeper, that is to say the execution of two young boys, school age, Denilson Smith of Picton and Mark Richards of Sogren Trace. I think that this business of the value of human life and education, and nurturing human beings in a society, and giving them the opportunity to contribute; and more than that, of creating the systems and the institutions that secure and protect them and give them the

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opportunity for the validation of their own life and presence in the society and in the world, and therefore, the opportunity to contribute to the betterment of that world, I think it hits us very starkly that the Motion before us is not simply a question of textbooks and computers, or eBooks, nor is it a question simply of dollars and cents. It is really something that is at the heart of the development process in the society.

You know, I am speaking after the Attorney General who gave, in my view, a very provocative speech in some ways, a very political speech in other ways, and at the end as he came to the resolution and conclusion of his contribution he made an appeal which I think one can take in earnest that there were certain things that required national effort, that required collective support, that required seeing beyond narrow divisions, whether in the Parliament or in the society at large. And I want to say that I agree with him on that point. He mentioned health, he mentioned education, he mentioned crime, he mentioned the economy and I agree with him on all those fronts, but I think there are even more things. I would not, on this occasion, enumerate those things, but I do think that it is important for us to have a wider world view, first of all; secondly, I think it is always important for us to put country before party. I think it is always important to put the things that are more valuable, that are bigger, give them their rightful place in the society and understand that the politics of the moment is only a transition in some ways. It is an opportunity to contribute and I do agree with him on those things.

I want to say also that it must not for a minute be misunderstood that we on this side of the House understand the challenge that Trinidad and Tobago faces today. We understand very, very clearly the challenge posed by oil prices, it has dropped phenomenally. Gas prices have dropped and those things have a serious impact on an economy that is so energy dependent. We understand that. It is the major source of our revenue base in the country, but even against that background I find it very, very difficult to come to terms with a \$119 million immediate dramatic cut in the education sector, I find it very difficult to come to terms with the assault on books and computers in schools, I find it very difficult to appreciate the assault on books and computers in the marketplace by the imposition of VAT, and it is in that context that I feel the Motion has been proposed by the Member for Caroni East who was the former Minister of Education of this country. So that what is really bothering me is the thinking in the Government. That is what bothers me.

When the Attorney General reaches out to us and he says that look there are things that we should take a collective, collaborative look at—and as I said, I do

agree with him that there are such things—we need to see that in the context of other things because I think that if we are to take the appeal of the AG seriously, it then requires two things. We must pay attention to process and, secondly, we must pay attention to substance. So if you want to break it down, you might say we need to pay attention to behaviour and we need to pay attention to the walk.

Now, I know that the Leader of the House and the Leader of Business on our side, the Chief Whip, have agreed on a certain course of action today, but look at the challenge we faced to secure Private Members' Day for instance; look at the challenge which the recently debated Orders which came to the House posed for us in terms of process. I am only dealing with the process. Therefore, for us to be able to engage in a more collaborative way on any matters, this issue of process is important [*Desk thumping*] and when we come to the other business of the House, I will say a little more about that particular situation. But what I do want to emphasize and I emphasize it earnestly, I am not trying here, nor will I during the course of this particular contribution, to score any political points about anything.

I do believe we have a major challenge in the country economically. I do believe that there are very, very dramatic steps that need to be taken. I do agree that in being judicious about the choices we make, there are real challenges and there are going to be differences of opinion. But I want to say that for us to get to the point where we can have the tone of the conversation at a higher level and at a different level of engagement, this matter of honouring the process and not allowing us to feel, or suspect, or believe that the process is being subverted or undermined whether intentionally [*Desk thumping*] or in error, or because of inadequate thought or planning, whatever the reason, we have to be assured that the process will be honoured. So I want to make that point. The second thing is the substance itself.

You know, I will not dispute the percentages—the numbers—that the Attorney General indicated in outlining the number of times he supported legislation when we were in Government. He might be right, he may be off by a point, it does not matter, but I do know that the Parliament, during the time that I was there, became very, very combative at times, and I do know that the politicization of issues which perhaps did not require such politicization, during the time that we were in Government, were heavily politicized.

5.15 p.m.

And sometimes things were said that were known to be not correct by the then Opposition, and a campaign ensued which was conducted in a certain way. There

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were matters which happened in the Parliament which, as yet, unresolved and that have no rootedness in any reality or truthfulness. And therefore, that history, that process which was followed at that time is, in fact, important. [*Interruption*] I am speaking to the issues that the Attorney General raised.

Mr. Cuffie: After the motion of no confidence in the Opposition Leader, you really want to go there?

Dr. B. Tewarie: I do not know what you are speaking of. So we proceed.

I said that those things are also part of what needs to be taken into account. And in our situation, as well, we also have what you might call—and we will see it, perhaps, differently where the Government, even when it first came into office, the Finance Minister in his first speech, started his budget speech with a big iron ball thrown at the Opposition as his preliminary point before getting into the budget. That, of course, affected the tone of relations in the Parliament; it must because you are dealing with human beings. And therefore, I say to the Attorney General, let us see how you continue on the issue of process in relation to the Parliament and in relation to the Opposition.

We have also seen it in the Parliament in terms of the matter of the Executive domination of the committees. I have raised that on several occasions and I will not go there again, but let us see how you proceed in the process. Let us also see how you proceed in the substance itself and how they talk and the appeals are reinforced by the walk and the action, because that will make a big difference in terms of how the Opposition operates.

Because we are on record as indicating, the Leader of the Opposition held a press conference at which she made it very clear and other speakers at that press conference, one of them being myself, also made our position very clear. So that it was a collective caucus position of the Opposition that we understand the challenge that the country is facing. We do not in any way wish to be obstructionist. We want the country to move forward. We want our people to progress. We want this country to have a sustainable capacity for growth and development. We want investments to come here. We want confidence to be built here and we are committed to Trinidad and Tobago, and in that spirit, we said that we are willing to help, we are willing to support, but let us establish the tone and the basis on which that collaboration can take place. Is that reasonable, Attorney General?

Mr. Al-Rawi: Yes, Sir.

Dr. B. Tewarie: Okay, and you realize I have not tried to politicize it in anyway. I have simply told you how I have felt, what has happened and we have indicated that and therefore, I am talking to you, personally in that way. Madam Speaker, no disrespect to you. I am talking through you, Madam Speaker, to the Attorney General because I want him to know that I am speaking here in sincerity, as he claims to be on that side which I believe, and if we are to do that, there are certain things that are required of both sides, I suspect, because he may have his own things as well.

I want to proceed now with some of the issues that I wish to raise and I will not be long, Madam Speaker. I said that the problem I have is with the thinking and nothing bothered me so much as the beginning—not the whole contribution but the beginning—of the contribution of the Member for St. Joseph when he chose the 16-subject reference made by the Member for Chaguanas East and former Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training as representing—when he mentioned the person who had gotten 16 subjects as being an elitist view of education and when he then used the example of the Member for Laventille West—a person with whom I have a good rapport, despite our bantering [*Laughter*]*—*and talked about the fact that he had six separate certificates one year at a time, which to me does not really matter.

In fact, because of the little bit I know about the Member for Laventille West, I know that he has only achieved what he has achieved, not because of the paper and so on, but because of the ambition, the drive, [*Desk thumping*] the stick-to-it-iveness that allowed him in the face of whatever difficulty to achieve, and I think those things are to be admired. Those are not things to be looked down upon. It is not an elitist view to recognize the ambition and the drive and the energy and the commitment in the Member for Laventille West.

And indeed, if I look around to our Bench here, you would find that most of the people on our Bench came from very, very, humble beginnings in what might well be called quite deprived conditions and I am sure that there are many people sitting on this Bench who were poor and grew up in poverty and did not even know they were poor. They just did what they felt they had to do because they wanted—they had a vision of something and they did it. I do not feel we should get into that.

I mean, nobody in the world—there has been a massive global democratization of education. Everybody is going to school. All right. You have more PhDs now than you had 30 years ago. You have more people with Master's degrees now than you had 10 years ago. I mean, by literally double, triple and

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quadruple. And you have more people going for first degrees and different kinds of education related to that level, whether it is technical, vocational, et cetera. You have more people doing that. It is like a revolution in the world and to politicize the development of education, that disturbed me a lot.

I mean, I went to school in Trinidad and Tobago. I would not mention the schools that I went to. I mean, I went to Guaico Presbyterian—I guess I will do it. I went to Curepe Presbyterian Primary School. I went to Queen’s Royal College in Trinidad and Tobago. Those were very different, and I certainly will not mention the universities that I went. [*Interruption and laughter*] No, I will not say anything of that because that is not the point. The point I am making about all of this is that you cannot say you got an education because the Government gave you an education. You cannot say that “this Government gave me an education” and that Government—I mean, “wha is the job of ah Government?”. The job of a Government is to create the conditions so that all its citizens can develop. [*Desk thumping*]

Now, I like to treat with the history and the reality of the country in an honest way and I think that it was very important to have a Prime Minister in 1956 who was Oxford educated and a PhD, and who understood the significance of education [*Desk thumping*] and whose policies would have reflected that in a time when we really had an entire colonial process limiting the educational opportunities in the country. But I would hate to think that we think of the development and evolution of the education system in terms of the party that was in power. If a party is in power for 30 years, I mean they must make the most significant contribution to everything. [*Desk thumping*] And if the history after those 30 years is a history of in-and-outs of political parties, and that is why you see I stand up and I make the case here for continuity of Government. Continuity of governance is a two-pronged thing where you look at the institutions so you want the continuity of the institutions but you can have shifts in policy. But continuity of Government means building one Government and the efforts of another Government on the other and that is what will help the progress.

So if a Government is in power for 30 years and they do something and they do some good, then another Government comes in for five years, you do a little more good, and then, you know, after 60 years, you end up with significant progress and all Governments do things which turn out not to be so good. I mean that is the nature of the game. You have the best intentions, you do certain things and you strive for 100 per cent but you get 55 per cent or 60 per cent. I think it is important to understand that in it. I think we have been lucky. I mean, we have the

history we have. Let us not try to misinterpret the history. It is the reality of Trinidad and Tobago. I think many of us have lived it, many of us understand it, many of us have read books about it and it does not make sense to try to reinvent it.

So, for instance, let us take this thing of GATE. You cannot talk about GATE in Trinidad and Tobago without talking about Dollar for Dollar. [*Desk thumping*] I know because I was involved with both. Some of you over there may not know that but I was involved in both. The Minister of Human Development, Youth and Culture and Minister of Education, at the time, who is now leading our business in the House would know that—Dollar for Dollar and GATE. The Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, now the Member for Diego Martin North/East, [*Interruption*] if he is truthful, knows that I had a hand in it. [*Desk thumping*] All right and if he goes further and be truthful—[*Interruption*] “Yuh could claim what you want.” If he knows anything about what happens, he will know that on the Vision 2020 Committee, I was the Chair of the Tertiary Committee. [*Desk thumping*]

5.30 p.m.

I am committed to Trinidad and Tobago, [*Desk thumping*] and I want to say, so are all of us on this side. [*Desk thumping*] We choose political options on the basis of all kinds of decisions and connections. So we are not because we are in the Opposition now, against you because you are the Government. We are not against your policy because it is yours, but we have a view of how these things should happen. [*Desk thumping*] We value education. We value personal development. We value human development. We value the focus on people in development.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Caroni Central, your speaking time has expired. You are entitled to seek leave for a further 15 minutes.

Dr. B. Tewarie: I would like your leave, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: It is granted, please continue.

Dr. B. Tewarie: Yes, thank you. [*Desk thumping*] I may not take the 15 minutes, but—[*Interruption*] Why are you so uncharitable when I am so charitable to you? [*Laughter and crosstalk*] All right. So, we are committed to these things and human development. I want to say something about human development.

You see, if you live in a country like China, and you do not develop a million persons, it really does not affect the price of cheese, because you have so many. But if you live in a country like Trinidad and Tobago, with 1.3 million as opposed to 1.3 billion, and you lose 10, 10 slipped among the cracks, it is a big deal, and that is why it is so important. And, therefore, because we have that view, we are very concerned about when there seems to be lack of inclusion in any policy related to education or human development. We are very concerned about when you diminish the value of books. We are very concerned when you make light of technology in an age of revolutionary, technological change, [*Desk thumping*] and we are very concerned about the fact that you might do things that would add to both the economic and financial divide, as well as the digital divide. Those are our concerns. We are not against you. We are looking at what you are doing, and we have a problem with it. So there is a policy difference, there is a policy issue. If we have to take a \$100 million out of something, let it not be education is what we are saying. [*Desk thumping*]

Now, the Member for St. Joseph also said that, you know, you all are trying to get the basics right, and I have no problem with that. That is good, but because you are getting the basics right, does not mean you have to forget every other progress that has been made. You know, you do not sideline every other progress that has been made. You can get the basics right if you think that there things that are deficient, that you need to address; if you think that there are things that require attention and focus, perhaps in your view we did not give that, you can do that, but at the same time, do not try to destroy or to simply ignore things that are progressive things, that we have been able to do.

Now, I want to say something related to education that connects with the national security issue. You know, I have had a conversation with the Minister of National Security. I have known the Minister of National Security way outside the politics, for many, many years, and I have no doubt that he would like to do well and means well. We have a real problem here. I am very concerned about two things, the fact that the violence in schools is now evolving into a situation, in which the violence outside is breaking the walls, so to speak, between the community and the school. I am very, very concerned about that. I think we have to have a kind of safe zone and control zone approach, beyond the ordinary policing that we are having in the country.

I think it is important that some communities, if they are extremely violent—and we know them because I have one not far from where I live in Central Trinidad. If we know that these communities are prone to violence, that they have

drugs, that they have gangs, that they have violent people, we need to have a system that controls the entry and exit out of these communities, so that there can be a monitoring of a certain kind, because if you do not do it, you are not going to ever have control of it.

The second thing that I would like to suggest is that we need what you might call safe zones in the country, in areas in which we know and can anticipate and plan for large gatherings, whether it is a mall, whether it is a tourism area, like Maracas Beach. I think those things, we need to classify as safe zones, and we used a model in Chaguaramas in which we basically control the peninsula in a certain way. Therefore, you can manage it differently and I would suggest, humbly to the Government, that they use a strategy of control zones, for high crime, high criminal, high violence areas, in which exit and entry are monitored and managed; and they use a strategy of safe zones for areas in which there are large numbers of people congregating, which can be planned for and organized, and on that basis we might have perhaps some more control over the situation, but certainly we cannot allow this situation to continue as it is.

Now, I would just close with two points, Madam Speaker. One is that we must recognize that there is a revolution in education, and education is changing all the time. Therefore, the education we would like to see at every level is an education that looks at the curriculum, because a curriculum is a mind-altering device. You can be born to poverty. You can be born to any physical condition. You could be born in any place, and you could have so much brain, it does not matter, but curriculum is a mind-altering device, because the brain then interacts with the nature of the curriculum.

We would like to say that the thinking in the world today is that you focus on STREAM education. That is to say, science, technology, research, [*Desk thumping*] engineering, the arts and mathematics, and you kind of bring these together in a complementary and holistic way for the development of students, and you do it at different levels in an appropriate way, so that you can get the best out of that. [*Desk thumping*]

The final thing that I want to say is that, the Government should not see education as an expense. I want to say, this is my problem with their thing. Education is an investment, [*Desk thumping*] if you understand development. Education is an investment, if you understand the human factor, as the most critical factor in development. In today's world, the human factor, brain and imagination, and the technological factor, computers and its powers with software, those are the things that are making the big difference in development. I

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would say that these things should not be seen as expenses. These are investment opportunities, and what you need to manage is the outcome that is anticipated, how you link that into the other elements of your economic strategy.

Therefore, I would say that education also has great potential to be a foreign exchange earner in this country. And as a proper investment, certainly at the tertiary level, education has the opportunity to make Trinidad and Tobago a major centre for education, and if you link that with tourism, with agriculture, with creative industries, there is a lot that we can do to deal with the foreign exchange situation in our country.

I want to say that I think the Government has missed an opportunity, because as soon as Brazil closed down its carnival, we should have gone on a massive marketing drive, [*Desk thumping*] to make Trinidad and Tobago's Carnival the centre of attraction, and it would have had benefits for next year and the year afterwards.

So having said that, I want to say that I support this Motion. It is a worthy Motion. Education is not a cost, it is an investment. We cannot penalize people in the area of books and in the area of computers, and we must not short-change education in any way, and contribute to the economic and financial divide, and to the digital divide. On that basis, we want to see that the focus on books and computers, as being important in the education sector. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts (Hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity in a short space of time, to rise and add my perspective to the debate that is happening this afternoon. Now, I am glad that the Member for Caroni Central in his closing up, came back to the core business of the Motion, because we have gone far and wide as we have discussed this, and I think it is important for us to retain the core of what we began to discuss. It was:

Be it resolved that this Government take urgent steps to ensure that all students are provided with textbooks, workbooks and/or other learning material in fulfillment of commitments given for the academic year 2015 to 2016.

Just reading that gives the sure impression, as the Member for San Fernando West rightly pointed out, that there are no books in the schools at this moment, and as a mother of three children in the school system, I can tell you that there are books in the system. So I do not know why it is being said over and over. I heard one of the

Members on the other side suggest that, if you say something over and over long enough, it will be taken as truth. And I want to believe that is the strategy being used, because we have said over and over that textbooks are on the way, there are textbooks in the schools right now, and that we are going to focus on the consultation in education that is necessary at this moment, that is on the cards, and will be announced very soon. This is part of the process that the Member for Caroni Central would have alluded to; process. He said process is important, and I want to say that process is also important in deriving policies, and that is the business that we are about in ensuring that we do the consultation in education at this moment. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to say that I have heard accusations from the other side that this Government is intent on making light of technology, intent on decreasing the value of books, and destroying or ignoring progressive things such as books and computers and so on. I have heard that. I want to caution against the danger, one, of using generalities like that, and the danger of thinking that the provision of new technologies, the computers and so on, that is a cure-all for what plagues the education sector. To underscore that point I want to use an example of the time when there was chalk and talk in the education system, and then we started to use computers and the PowerPoint.

5.45 p.m.

Being an educator, I was there with the chalk and talk and I was there at the cusp of the change into the PowerPoint, and everyone was so concerned that this new technology would revolutionize learning and that we would see a total change in our education system, and not five years later the discussion changed; we are discussing now how learning has not really been revolutionized by using this new technology. So, Madam Speaker, I want to say that this emphasis on equating the use of computers in schools and bemoaning the fact that they are not given as yet in this education system for this year, I want to say that does not mean that there is no good in the education system. I want to state that very categorically, because it was the PNM Government who has always been at the forefront of education in this country. [*Desk thumping*]

The future of the country is in the schoolbags of the children; that was at the foundation of this country and our independence. The Constitution is clear, clear, and will ever be. The Constitution is clear that we are at the forefront of education in this country, and the PNM has always been there. When I can hear from the other side that not getting the computers will cause functional illiteracy, and that without laptops students are non-competitive, our country cannot be transformed,

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our country's progress is retarded; I have a simple question to ask: where is the data that supports these types of generalities being said? Where is the data?—functional illiteracy, reading and writing skills which are inadequate to manage daily living and employment task that require reading skills beyond a basic level.

Is supplying computers in the school the answer to functional illiteracy? I do not think so. I am sure, not. How could it be that is being shown to be the result of no computers in the schools? That is not logical. If we are depending on the laptops to transform us, society and our country, I want to tell you that we are in trouble. I want to know if any data, and I have not seen it, has any data been provided to show how many laptops are still working? The thousands of laptops that were given, has any data been provided to show which are still working?
[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: You want to give way.

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: No, I would not. How many laptops are still in the hands of the students? [*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: 75,000.

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: Is there any data on the success of the laptops in the education system? [*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: Yes, there is, it is a failure. [*Laughter*]

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: Well, is there any data on how the laptops are being even integrated? I heard someone said the laptops are being integrated into the curriculum; I have three children in the school system and I can tell you that is not true. My daughter's laptop is still at home, how many years at home, because it has not been used in the school system.

In addition to that, the laptops are of such poor quality that they cannot be used more than one year, and there is no technical support when the laptops are not working. I can say that with certainty, being in the system and having a child who has a laptop in the system. So, therefore, what then can we formalize and give as real current data that these laptops were making the system progress and it was carrying our students forward, and it was transforming our society? It is nice to say, but it is not fact unless it can be proven; and I submit that it cannot be proven.

I want to say that I taught at St. Francois Girls' College for a number of years, and St. Francois Girls' College, under the stellar leadership of the former Member

for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, Mrs. Patricia McIntosh, was one of the first schools to have a very well-established ICT system. We had computer labs, smart boards; other schools came to our school to see how to do it, and I am telling you that over the years we have not seen an improvement necessarily linked to those computers in the school. It is nice to have but it is how you manage it that makes the difference. So I want to tell you, beyond a doubt, that the data that is necessary to prove that the computer provision really made an effect on the school system is still outstanding, and we need to ensure that we make data-driven policy decisions. That is important. [*Desk thumping*]

So what we have is an emphasis on throwing money at education; we spend all of this and we see that, we hear about it, how much money was spent on these things, but is there any data to show the quality?—and that is what the emphasis is, providing quality, ensuring that we consult on the system, ensuring that we understand what is needed to bring the change that is necessary in our education system. I have heard on the other side that a caste system is being introduced, and I want to say something, because there are many, many children who are suffering from what could be thought as the caste system introduced when the CAC was introduced without consultation into the primary schools, and I say it because children who do not have the support of their parents under the CAC system will not do well.

When the exercises are given to the students it is difficult for them to complete, parents have to be involved and, therefore, if a child does not have the parental support then they cannot succeed. So, therefore, where is the equity, and who then is creating a caste system? You have to think about that. Many children in St. Ann's East have that problem, and the parents come to you and they ask, what is the help provided?—and then you are hearing echoes of a caste system, and I am saying to you that in itself is more of a caste system being created than a laptop not being provided—a laptop which most of the time does not work for a very long time, and a laptop which you cannot even prove remains in the hands of those to whom it was given. [*Interruption*]

Dr. Rambachan: Are you saying we were supplying bad laptops?

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: Yes. I am saying it very clearly, yes, without question and no apology.

So we are saying—[*Interruption*] That is not stretching the truth, it is more the truth than anything else I have heard from the other side, because I have heard as well that increasing the cost of textbooks means that students cannot buy books so

Provision of Textbooks
[HON. DR. N. GADSBY-DOLLY]

Friday, January 22, 2016

children will be left behind. There was a time in this country when no textbooks were given and parents had to buy all the textbooks, and I passed through that time, and I can tell you, I went to St. Augustine Girls', first form, second form, third form, no textbooks, no textbooks—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deyalsingh: And you were not left behind.

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: I was not left behind. [*Desk thumping*] So what is more important than throwing money at education, is awakening the love for learning which transcends the ability to buy a book. That is what is important, and we have to recognize that. It is too much talk about what we give and how much money we gave; that is not the issue. The issue is how we address the bigger problems in education.

We have many parents who do not buy books but they buy everything else for the children. Students are coming to school with expensive sneakers and no books, this is what we have to address. We are in an economic crunch and we know this, and as MPs our responsibility is not to cry wolf and not to accuse of caste, and so on, but as the other side has been saying, put it into practice. Talk about how you could encourage your constituents to make their priorities right, and that is what it is about at this time. We have to ensure that we do what we have to do as responsible representatives of the people. [*Desk thumping*] In recent years we have had the provision of free textbooks, and I can tell you again with certainty that they have reached the streets and are being sold as used books; those books that are provided by the Government. Again, the process that is being spoken about, where is the monitoring? Where is the evaluation? Where are these processes to ensure that the money that is being spent is being spent well? This is where we deal with it, consultation, finding out where we are, what we have to do, and, therefore, how we go forward; data-driven policies, that is where we want to go. It is not politics, it is science.

So, Madam Speaker, I want to thank you for the opportunity of contributing, and I want to say that it is extremely important that we recognize the importance of the issue. The importance of the issue is that we have to make decisions driven by data. We have to come away from throwing money and just counting how much we put in, and we have to focus now on seeing what we get out of it. That is why we are saying, unequivocally, that there are books in the school. There is no need for panic. More books are coming to top up what is there. There is no need to panic. There is no need for any scare tactics. There is no need for accusations. What there is need for, is what is being provided, and that is a consultation to

make the right decisions, to ensure we know where we are going to redound to the benefit of all our students and our country, in general. Madam Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Madam Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 50(3), I beg to move that this debate be now adjourned.

Agreed to.

STANDING FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT (ADOPTION)

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and consistent with the agreement with the other side, where we shall have one speaker each, provided I stay within the Standing Orders, I beg to move to following Motion standing in my name:

Be it resolved that this House adopt the First Report of the House of Representatives for the First Session (2015/2016), Eleventh Parliament on the consideration of proposals for the Variation of Appropriation for the fiscal year 2015.

Madam Speaker, all Members would have been circulated with the First Report of the Standing Finance Committee of the House of Representatives, House Paper No. 3 of 2016. This document quite comprehensively explains what we are about; the Standing Finance Committee is established by Standing Order 82(1) of the House of Representatives, and it considers estimates and on the Appropriation Bill. It also looks at all proposals for expenditure that were not included in the annual estimates, including proposals for supplementary and unforeseen expenditure.

The Committee held a public meeting on January 20, 2016, and the purpose of this meeting was to consider proposals for the variation of appropriation provided in The Appropriation (Financial Year 2015) Act, 2014, as amended by the Finance(Variation of Appropriation) (Financial Year 2015) Act, 2015. The approval of proposals is required to seek authorization for the utilization of any sums accruing from any reduction in expenditure under a certain Head for the purpose of meeting liability incurred through the increase in expenditure under another Head. Madam Speaker, the Committee agreed to a variation of the 2015 appropriation and the write-off of losses approved for fiscal 2015.

The Committee also noted there was no discussion on the transfer of funds between subheads under the same Head of expenditure of fiscal year 2015. The first proposal was for a variation of appropriation of resources in the sum of \$200 million to bring to account expenditure funded by an advance from the Treasury Deposits in fiscal 2015. The second proposal was for the approval of write-off of losses in the sum of \$461,573.74, approved by Cabinet during fiscal 2015. Lastly, the Standing Finance Committee noted the transfer of funds between subheads under the same Head of expenditure in the sum of \$1,396,805,793 for fiscal year 2015.

6.00 p.m.

I wish to point out that the committee merely noted these transfers, there was no debate on it. Madam Speaker, the total increase in the Head of expenditure being proposed is \$200 million. The total decrease is an equivalent amount of \$200 million which produces a nil net effect. The approval for the reallocation of funds is currently being sought by way of the Finance (Variation of Appropriation) (Financial Year 2015) Bill, 2016. The details of all of these proposed changes were circulated to all Members of the Standing Finance Committee, and discussed at its meeting on Wednesday, January 20, where clarification was sought with respect to some of the proposed changes.

At this time I will like to advise the House that the Head of expenditure for which additional funding is being proposed by way of a variation is Head 69, Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, whereby an increase of \$200 million is being sought to retire an advance made from Treasury Deposits to honour financial obligations associated with the extension of the Solomon Hochoy Highway to Point Fortin, since the long-term financing arrangements for that project on the local and international market had not been sourced in full in fiscal 2015.

Members are asked to note that in accordance with section 17(1)(b) of the Exchequer and Audit Act, Chap. 69:01, advances made from Treasury Deposits are recoverable within 12 months after the close of the financial year in which the advances are made. So we are well within that 12-month period.

I would also like to explain the Head of expenditure for which a reduction of \$200 million is being proposed in order to supplement Head 69 in the Ministry of Works and Transport, and this will be Head 40. It is noted that the prices of petroleum products, as a result of the decline in oil prices in fiscal 2015, resulted in savings in the petroleum subsidy. So that there was a \$200 million saving in the

fuel subsidy, as it is colloquially called, because of the rapid decline—somebody even say “collapse”—of oil prices.

Madam Speaker, although prices are so volatile, I just would like at this point in time to let Members know that every time the price of oil drops a dollar I am asked about it. The last time I checked the price of WTI, it is back up to about \$32. It is interesting; it is extremely volatile. It dropped to \$28 the other day and now it is actually \$32.23. It has increased by \$2.70 today alone. A 9 per cent increase in the price of oil just today alone; but tomorrow it will be back down to \$29. It is highly volatile, but at least things are looking up today. At least we are back up above the \$30 mark and hopefully it will continue to go back up, but we will see. So there was a significant decline in oil prices, causing a significant decline in the subsidy, which realized the saving of \$200 million in the subsidy of petroleum products, which is now being applied to fund the additional \$200 million for the Point Fortin Highway project in 2015.

The Finance Committee also agreed to the write-off of sums totalling \$461,573.74 under Head 18, Ministry of Finance and the Economy, Head 56, Ministry of the People and Social Development, Head 61, Ministry of Housing and Development, as those Ministries were known then in fiscal 2015.

In the case of the Ministry of Finance and the Economy, the write-off of the sum of \$32,976.40 represented overpayment of salary to Mrs. Pushpa Toolsieram-Rampersad—I think I got the pronunciation correct, Clerk Stenographer I/II—Ministry of Finance and the Economy, over the period April 6, 2004 to June 30, 2011. The Minister of Finance and the Economy at that time was off the view that the officer received her salary in good faith and that the overpayment was as a result of an administrative error, and succeeded in getting Cabinet to agree to the write-off of the overpayment

With regard to the former Ministry of the People and Social Development, the write-off of the sum of \$45,368.21, represented overpayments of salary and allowances to Miss Maureen Joseph-Bishop, former Human Resource Officer III, Ministry of the People and Social Development, over the period April 2003 to December 2011. The Minister of the People and Social Development at the time was of the view that the officer received her salary in good faith and that the overpayment was as a result of an administrative error, and succeeded in getting Cabinet to agree to the write-off of the overpayment.

Finally, the Minister of Housing and Development at the time recommended the write-off in the aggregate sum of \$383,229.13, which represented a mortgage

debt owed to the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Committee, SILWC, by eight former sugar workers. In the case of these former sugar workers, as Members would have observed both in the report and in the agenda for the meeting itself, it was felt that because of the circumstances involving the money owed by these eight sugar workers, the Lands and Arrears Subcommittee of the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Committee embarked on a collection drive, discovered that six defaulters were unable to meet their financial commitments because of health challenges, and two others were deceased. Therefore, based on the subcommittee's assessment—this is the subcommittee of SILWC—assessment of the family's socioeconomic conditions, the board of SILWC approved recommendations to write off the total debts for these people in the sum of \$383,229.13. The committee agreed to recommend to Parliament that we write off these sums ranging from \$1,000 in one case to \$91,532.56 in another case.

I think we would also agree that we should do the right thing and write off these payments, and not go behind the families or the estates of the deceased or the persons who are challenged in terms of health.

With respect to transfers, with effect from August 01, 1988, Cabinet delegated this authority to approve transfers between sub-heads to the Minister of Finance, when it agreed, among other things, that requests for transfer of funds between separate sub-heads under the same Head of expenditure should no longer be submitted for the Cabinet, but can be decided by the Minister of Finance on the advice of the Budget Division.

Consequently, in fiscal 2015, the then Minister of Finance and Economy approved the transfer of funds in the sum of \$1,396,805,792 between sub-heads under the same Head of expenditure. It should be noted that these transfers were approved by the then Minister of Finance and the Economy based on documentation submitted by respective Ministers requesting the transfers.

It should be noted that these transfers were requested to reflect changed circumstances in Ministries and departments and reordering of priorities. They do not increase the total appropriation in any way. Statements showing the transfers and full details were given in the agenda for the committee. It is all there for Members to see; I do not think I need to go into them. Full explanations were also given in the agenda for all of the transfers.

So having kept completely within, entirely within the four corners of the agreement with hon. Members opposite, I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie (*Caroni Central*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I think this is an important presentation by the Minister of Finance, and although the report itself is straightforward and not remarkable in any way, I think the facts that come out of the report are in a way worthy of note. Because the first thing is that in the report and presentation by the hon. Minister of Finance, there is no increase of expenditure over budgeted allocation. I think that in itself is something worthy of note. What it means is that while there have been variations in the 2014/2015 expenditure, there are no new allocations or appropriations required.

There is only one variation for \$200 million from one Ministry to another. This variation does not increase the total expenditure, as the Minister himself pointed out. The transfer is from the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs to the Ministry of Works and Transport for a project that is ongoing, that has significant impact on the country and especially the southern part of the country. All other variations are within individual Ministries and institutions, and all of these are within budgetary allocation.

I wish to emphasize, therefore, that there is no spending beyond budgetary allocation, that there is only variation and there is no spending above the budget. [*Desk thumping*] So there is no overspending of any kind. I think that if the Minister were to give us the numbers, and I know that this is not the appropriate context to give those numbers, he would find and he would be able to inform us that on the \$60 billion budget for that year there would have been savings on the expenditure side. So I want to emphasize that as well.

The reason I say this is because a lot of the discussion on finances has been focussed on the repetition of the words “waste, mismanagement and corruption”, and in that context I want to say the facts and the numbers before us in the 2014/2015 period, which was an election year, tell us that there have been variations only of \$200 million, that the money is easily found within the budget, that there are savings, in fact, in expenditure from the budgetary allocation and, more than that, there is no need for any additional appropriation for the year 2014/2015. [*Desk thumping*]

6.15 p.m.

So the write off—the first payment, as I said—the first variation has to do with the payment for building a highway to link San Fernando to the deep south and open up the country. The write off of losses was for relief of citizens in which administrative errors were made and in which poor and sick citizens were unable

to pay their loans. So that I would think that the Minister of Finance exercised a fair amount of compassion, as well as good judgment in giving relief to these citizens.

When you look at the document which we examined in committee and which is referred to in the report, we find that in that year of 2014/2015 when allocations were made from one Head to another—varied from one Head to another—they were for good causes such as electronic voter registration and election management system in an election year; remuneration to members of commissions of enquiry; for salaries and COLA payments; for debt servicing; for the reduction of armed violence and capacity building within the protective services which was a project with the UN; on public safety and communication system for police; multipurpose boats for fighting crime; agricultural incentives to farmers; relief for flood damage to farmers; support for the Cocoa Development Company which was a transition of the arrangements which traditionally held for cocoa; they were for employment creation; strengthening of the seamless education system.

They were for worthy causes such as the Princess Elizabeth Home for the handicapped; St. Michael's School for Boys, the St. Jude's School for Girls; St. Dominic's Children Home; association for retarded children; they were for training of librarians and for scholarships; the construction of a Servol Life Centre in Port of Spain and the settlement of a debt, partially, to cane farmers in the country.

Now what it means is that the budgetary allocations in the year 2014/2015 allowed us to build a highway linking San Fernando to the deep south; it allowed us to complete the Children and Adult Hospital in Freeport; it allowed us to complete a substantial part of the South Campus of the University of the West Indies; it allowed us to complete the state-of-the-art Sporting Complex in Couva for cycling and for swimming at Olympic standards; it allowed us to build 103—no, sorry—I could not use the building in that; it allowed us to build a number of schools and to engage in construction for some 96 schools in the country.

And these five projects alone that I mentioned, the highway, the hospital, the south campus, the sporting complex and the schools will give you a sense of the major thrust and focus of the People's Partnership Government over the last five years. [*Desk thumping*] The focus was on physical infrastructure development as support for economic expansion, social infrastructure development, in these specific cases, health, education, higher education, sports and, of course, the boats which are now being used to guard our coastline.

I want to indicate as well that at the end of 2014 these were some of the highlights of the legacy we left in that year: public sector debt—43 per cent of GDP; Heritage and Stabilisation Fund—US \$5.6 billion; official reserves—US \$11.3 billion; inflation—5.7 per cent; food inflation—10 per cent; unemployment—3.7 per cent; [*Desk thumping*] serious crime down; murder rate being contained; investments in energy well in process; Starfish and Juniper are—if all goes well with what is happening now in the drilling—it should boost production of gas in this country by 15 per cent [*Desk thumping*] beginning in 2017/2018; and in January 2015 we cut the budget by \$4.5 billion and readjusted the energy pegged to US \$45 and US \$2.25 from US \$80 and US \$2.75 respectively for oil and gas. And at that time although we pegged at those numbers, a review had already been done by the technocrats at the Ministry of Finance for oil at the price of \$30.

Now what is the position going forward beyond September 15? I want to indicate some of the things that we documented as being important to do beyond September of 2015. We took the position then that it would be prudent to take a conservative view of how to proceed in the future in terms of budgeting and fiscal management. We took the position that creative measures would need to be taken to stimulate oil and gas production. How? One of the things we suggested was lease operatorships to individuals and small companies in both the oil and the gas sectors, and the Government does have the option of doing that now.

In energy also I think it is important to address the fiscal regime involving suppliers, NGC and the downstream operators, to increase gas supply. I think it is important to peg subsidies at the pump at a level that would eliminate subsidies when the price of energy goes up and to eliminate the subsidy on premium gas altogether.

I think it is important for the state enterprises to concentrate on living within their means in order to avoid waste, cost duplication and operational inefficiencies. We had also commitments in our policy for the state enterprises to focus on productivity, competitiveness and innovation. And in the area of social welfare we were going to use the World Bank study now underway to address duplication, overlap and wastage in the social welfare support sector.

In the business sector we were focused on building confidence and we identified six things that we would do with business, labour and the NGOs. A partnership for innovation-led growth; a partnership for economic diversification; a partnership for increased productivity; a partnership for peace, security and justice; a partnership for social inclusion and protection; and a partnership for the

10 flagship projects that we identified for implementation which were to be public/private in nature. And we also identified a strategy for both the construction, the manufacturing and the services-related sector, especially the ICT sector. We also had a reform agenda which would have resulted in integrated financial management and three-year rolling budgets; an integrated project management strategy with the PSIP rolling over three years. I think that is in motion now. We had an employee share ownership strategy for the state sector. We had a reward system for teachers and public servants in order to drive innovation in these sectors. We mentioned and committed to the idea of diaspora bonds, and we were committed to full proclamation of the Procurement Bill and to initiate and continue finance reform.

I think in the circumstances the Government has a strong base on which to proceed in terms of macroeconomic fundamentals. The challenge that it really faces is the price of oil and the reduced revenue. We understand that very well. But I would say in closing that we do need some clarity as we go forward in a way that allows people to feel a comfort level about the day to day developments that are going to come at them. And in terms of the critical things that need to be done going forward, we certainly need to reduce expenditure and to live within our means. We need to address revenues without a discouraging tax policy. We need to contain the deficit within reasonable propositions. We need to borrow judiciously and target projects strategically. [*Interruptions*]

Mr. Hinds: Only now?

Dr. B. Tewarie: We need to build confidence in the private sector and in the consuming citizenry. [*Desk thumping*] We need to keep the energy sector calm, focused and productive. We need to keep people working and productive and able to look after themselves. We need to keep improving the education and link it to economic strategy. We need to stop dwelling on the past, manage the present and plant futures. [*Desk thumping*] And the planting of the futures has to do with investment, growth, and diversification.

Mr. Hinds: We have to jail a few.

Dr. B. Tewarie: And I think that in keeping with an openness towards dialogue and cooperation, we need understand that in this difficult situation, we will not have economic and political solutions without consultation, collaboration and inclusive approach and also with respect. And with these few words, Madam Speaker, I take my seat.

6.30 p.m.

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I had to jump up fast. [*Laughter*] You will never know.

Hon. Member: For not recognizing you.

Hon. C. Imbert: No, that is not the reason. You will never know. Madam Speaker, I think this matter has been sufficiently ventilated and everything that could have been said has been said. I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this House adopt the First Report of the Standing Finance Committee of the House of Representatives for the First Session (2015/2016), Eleventh Parliament on the consideration of proposals for the Variation of Appropriation for the fiscal year 2015.

**FINANCE (VARIATION OF APPROPRIATION)
(FINANCIAL YEAR 2015) BILL, 2016**

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Madam Speaker, I beg to move:

That a Bill to vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2015) Act, 2014 and varied by the Finance (Variation of Appropriation) (Financial Year 2015) Act, 2015, be now read a second time.

Madam Speaker, this Bill is a natural result or product of the report of the Finance Committee and essentially the Bill seeks to vary the appropriation that is not supplemental, so that the total expenditure remains the same. We have already gone through this, that if you look at clause 5 of the Bill you are simply increasing the Head of expenditure, Head 69: Ministry of Works and Infrastructure by \$200 million and reducing Head 40: Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs by \$200 million and the reasons have already been given. This was necessary to provide supplementary financing for the Point Fortin Highway. That is why we need to increase that Head and there was a saving on the fuel subsidy because of the decline in oil prices, this is why the money became available under Head 40. I beg to move.

Question proposed.

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Since there is no other speaker, Madam Speaker, I just want to deal with one issue before I take my seat with respect to some of the things, in the out-turn in 2015. What we have discovered, Madam Speaker, is that there was a sizable accumulation of arrears to contractors, the full extent of which is still to be verified and we will do so at the mid-year review, but so far four Ministries have reported arrears of payments to contractors in the amount of \$2.1 billion.

There was also significant off-budget expenditure and, in fact, state enterprises were instructed to go out and borrow. So far our tally of government guaranteed borrowing amounts to \$4.7 billion. Some of the items that stand out are: HDC borrowed \$750 million to refinance maturing debt; UDeCOTT contracted a loan of \$1.2 billion to refinance outstanding debt and to finance the outfitting of the Government Campus Plaza; NIDCO borrowed \$1.5 billion for the Point Fortin Highway; EFCL borrowed \$285 million for the payment of contractors; PTSC contracted a loan of \$57 million to pay salary arrears; EMBD borrowed \$400 million to pay arrears, and this is just some of the things that we are picking up in terms of fiscal year 2015. So that is just to deal with some, one of the questions raised about expenditure on the other side. I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

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

Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion made and question proposed: That the House do now adjourn to a date to be fixed. [Hon. C. Robinson-Regis]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, there are two matters that qualify to be raised on the Motion for the Adjournment of the House filed by the Member for Caroni East and the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre. I now call upon the Member for Caroni East.

Trinidad and Tobago Representation (UNESCO General Conference)

Dr. Tim Gopeesingh (Caroni East): [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, I thank you for giving me leave to raise this matter on the adjournment and to speak

on the matter of Trinidad and Tobago's representation at UNESCO at the just concluded UNESCO General Conference held in November.

Trinidad and Tobago became a member of the United Nations in 1962 and is bounded by the United Nations Charter and the United Nations Human Rights Convention. Trinidad and Tobago has been associated with UNESCO since 1962 and through this commitment is bounded by this charter that I spoke of earlier.

I bring to the attention of this honourable House what may be considered as blatant disregard for these international covenants by the present administration delegation to the 38th Session of the UNESCO General Conference and its failure to provide proper representation for Trinidad and Tobago at both the 38th Session of the UNESCO General Conference held in Paris from November 3 to 18, 2015 and the 198th session of the UNESCO Executive Board, 2015.

I also bring to the attention of this House reports from the 38th Session of the UNESCO General Conference in Paris that shows that while Trinidad and Tobago sent three representatives to the 38th Session of the UNESCO General Conference on taxpayers expense, no contributions were made by the delegation on behalf of Trinidad and Tobago at the commission meetings where essential decisions were taken on UNESCO programme of works.

No contributions were given at the meeting of the National Commission on November 2, 2015; no contributions of the meeting of the Education Commission between November 5th and 7th; no contributions of the meeting of the Science Commission from November 09 to 10, 2015; no contributions by Trinidad and Tobago's delegation at the Human and Social Sciences Commission, November 10th to 12th; no contribution on the Communication Commission; no contribution on the Culture Commission between November 11th to 14th. So where were the country's delegates and representatives? They were absent with no contributions made at these six international most important conventions and conferences taking place in UNESCO.

Madam Speaker, the Trinidad and Tobago national who was elected by the Executive Board and endorsed by the General Conference to chair the UNESCO Education Committee had the expertise to make an impact on all of these commissions in the interest of Trinidad and Tobago and the UNESCO community, but was banned from the Trinidad and Tobago spaces at these UNESCO meetings by the head of the country's delegation to the 38th Session of the UNESCO General Conference. Their records will also show that the UNESCO Community had high regard and respect for this Trinidad and Tobago national and her knowledge of its

systems and operations from Grassroots Community levels upwards, through to regional mechanisms, to UNESCO international systems.

Madam Speaker, it was because of her expertise on this matter and a sound independent career as a journalist and cultural and media practitioner and development advocate that the PP Government appointed Dr. Kris Rampersad as the Trinidad and Tobago representative on UNESCO Executive Board in her independent expert capacity as required by UNESCO and for the duration of the four-year term from 2013 to 2017. She co-shared the programme, “An External Relations Commission of the Executive Board”, not once but four consecutive times, unanimously with no dissenting voices four times previously. This is one of the two highest decision-making organs of the executive board responsible for all of its programmes and which sits jointly with the finance commission to make decisions related to budget and finance as well.

During this time she also earned the respect and confidence of colleagues from the Group of Latin America and Caribbean Countries in UNESCO, GRULAC. I was there on two occasions, Madam Speaker, and I saw the respect that was meted out to Trinidad and Tobago and its delegates in previous occasions. She was unanimously nominated to the chair of the Education Commission of the UNESCO General Conference.

This, the General Conference at its first plenary also unanimously endorsed with no dissenting voices including that of the delegations from Trinidad and Tobago who were present and sitting in the room at that time. It was also unanimously proposed and endorsed at the first sitting of the Education Commission on November 5, 2015 with no dissenting voices including that of the delegation from Trinidad and Tobago sitting there as well.

Madam Speaker, given the process outlined above, that the persons identifying themselves at the Trinidad and Tobago delegation raised no objection to the proposals of the chair of the Education Commission, neither at the opening plenary of the UNESCO General Conference, nor at the opening session of the Education Commission when the opportunity to raise objections were present. Why then did the head of the delegation take this circuitous and clearly ill-advised route, because he did not know where to send his poison pen letter so he sent it to a department which took three days to reach its destination and that while he was on the ground and could have requested a direct meeting with the relevant parties, including the national.

So he took this route to painstakingly point out by name that Dr. Kris Rampersad was not a member of the Trinidad and Tobago Delegation. Why? If it was not meant to deliberately embarrass, hurt, intimidate and disrupt both the individual and the international process. Madam Speaker, it really makes us want to know how—want to bow our heads in shame at this blatant display of bullying and from the Ministry of Education who is charged with instilling anti-bullying values in our young population. What kind of example is this setting for our school children?

Madam Speaker, think of what this has done. It has also tarnished and embarrassed the Trinidad and Tobago image that this national has consciously protected, guarded and presented in the best possible light in the interest of all our nationals, not only in her recent functions at UNESCO but in all of her international undertakings. Think of what it has done to this national who has devoted her life's work to treating and representing the best interest of Trinidad and Tobago with the effect of embarrassing not only the national serving in the interest of our country but all of Trinidad and Tobago at an international organization like UNESCO, all of the Latin American and Caribbean Region and the UNESCO Community that wanted to signal its respect for commitment to the principles and ideals of UNESCO and its efforts at recognizing the value of SIDS, Small Island Developing States like ours, to give due recognition to the talents and skills of the Latin America and Caribbean Countries region.

Madam Speaker, the actions of the so-called Trinidad and Tobago delegation to UNESCO did not stop there. The head of the delegation—I would like to use the word “chase” but I would say—removed this Trinidad and Tobago national out of the Trinidad and Tobago space at the high level meeting to adopt the framework for education to 2030; a clear case of naked abuse of power; [*Desk thumping*] a clear case of bullying; a lack of statesmanship at an international forum and not any international forum; it is a forum that promotes peace, dialogue, reconciliation and it does not end there. When we think that it is bad enough, it gets worse.

6.45 p.m.

Madam Speaker, because of all these ill-informed issues, these instructions from the line Minister—I was the line Minister when I was Minister of Education, and the Minister of Education now is the line Minister responsible for UNESCO affairs as the President of Trinidad and Tobago at UNESCO. The Trinidad and Tobago seat at the 198 sessions of UNESCO executive board was vacant, having removed Kris Rampersad, and it became vacant. No one in the Trinidad and

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Tobago seat, and they were not even there themselves. That is the kind of representation that Government is providing for Trinidad and Tobago. After we won with the highest numbers of vote in the Latin American Caribbean Region, when we named the Trinidad and Tobago representative for the four-year term, 2013 to 2017. No one in the seat, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Imbert: Two minutes, two minutes. [*Pounds desk*]

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: No, no, I have two more minutes.

Mr. Imbert: No, you have no more minutes.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: No one in the seat of a crucial meeting to decide on matters that will affect the next two years of the board. They prefer to leave it vacant than to have a competent representative. It wreaks of persecution, and discrimination, and victimization. “Oh judgment thou has fled to brutish beast and may have lost their reason”.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, your time has expired.

Dr. T. Gopeesingh: No, I—

Madam Speaker: Excuse me please, Members! I now call upon the Minister of State in the Ministry of Education. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of State in the Ministry of Education (Hon. Dr. Lovell Francis): Madam Speaker, good evening. [*Laughter*] Also a pleasant evening to all the Members of the House. It is always a pleasure to speak after the hon. Member for Caroni East. He asked me such wonderful questions—they are always “gimmes”—so I would endeavour in my allotted time to give reasonable answers to his assertions.

Madam Speaker, our nation was represented at the 38th Annual UNESCO Conference at Paris. I was indeed, the head of the delegation. [*Desk thumping*] I need to make it clear that the composition of that delegation is a matter to be determined by Cabinet. Cabinet opted to select myself as head of that delegation. [*Desk thumping*] I was accompanied by Secretary General of UNESCO, our local chapter, Miss Susan Shurland and by a member of the permanent delegation of Geneva, Miss Mariella Fonrose. We constituted the delegation to this conference. I could stand here and give you a number of stories about Dr. Rampersad, but in the spirit of the detente that has been exercised, [*Desk thumping*] I will reserve all editorializing and just stick pointedly to the facts.

The Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago selected three individuals as a delegation to this conference, meaning that even under the strictures of UNESCO we were the only persons who were supposed to be representing this nation at that delegation. By the time I arrived at Paris, I was bemused, confused and slightly amused [*Laughter*] to realize that there was another individual there purporting to be part of our delegation, who had already arrogated unto herself the right to speak on our behalf.

Hon. Member: Stormers.

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: Madam Speaker, it was not my place to allow that. But, I believe in being a reasonable person, and I was quite willing if this individual, who I will not editorialize about, had spoken with me and said that she was willing to be a de facto, if not a de jure member of our delegation. I was willing, given the fact that the Member has spoken about her vaunted and much overrated credentials, but I was willing to allow a space.

Hon. Member: Because you are in charge.

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: No, not because I am in charge. I was willing to allow some participation. This did not occur. This individual arrogated unto herself the right to speak on our behalf in an attempt, on behalf of our nation, our Government, our education system, unilaterally, without any discussion with me, unapproved by Cabinet, without having the decency to even speak with the local delegation at the conference.

Madam Speaker, even at that point I was not aggrieved, which, I will reiterate, is contrary to the strictures and rules of UNESCO. She should never have been allowed to position herself to speak on our behalf, given the simple fact she was not a member of our delegation. Matters came, I would not even say it to a head because that would be excessively dramatic, and it was not dramatic. At the same high-level meeting that the hon. Member for Caroni East referred to, this individual placed herself in an allotted space that was provided/reserved for our delegation. Of the three members only two were allowed to participate in this session, and the rules were that it should be the Minister and the Minister's choice.

Hon. Member: What! She was not his choice.

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: That is the rule.

We entered the room to see this individual seated there, and I politely say, “Well, this high-level commission is supposed to be only represented by—we are only supposed to be allowed to have two participants, and those participants are

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prescribed. It is the Minister and the Minister's designate". You are not a member or our delegation. I have not designated you. We would prefer that you give up the space. And she literally refused to move.

Hon. Member: "Nah, nah." What! [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: She opted instead to sit in a seat allotted to another country, and it was only when all of the members filed in and she had literally no choice but to leave, she left.

Hon. Member: Musical Chairs.

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: And this is an example of the kind of behaviour that we would have faced throughout this entire conference.

Madam Speaker, I was not going to allow our participation, on one hand, and our representation of our nation, on the other hand, to be undermined by any of this. [*Desk thumping*] So, instead of "paranging", or putting out, or arguing, or making a fuss with the representative, we went about the business of representing our country, which is what I was sent to do. [*Desk thumping*] To that end, contrary to the misinformation provided by the hon. Member, we participated in all of the major sessions during that conference. [*Desk thumping*] And if I were a bit more egotistical I will tell you how well we participated, but that is beside the point. Moreover, we were there at every GRULAC meeting, we were there at every Caricom meeting. We had a very, very successful 38th General Conference. [*Desk thumping*] So, I will accept that the Member has been misinformed.

On the other issue, which is the lack of representation at the Executive Board meeting, I want to state categorically, membership of this board is allotted to the nation, not the individual. No individual has an entitlement to that position. It is allotted to the country, meaning that Trinidad and Tobago, hon. Member, through you, Madam Speaker, has a place on UNESCO's Executive Board, not Dr. Rampersad. Moreover, given that, the individual is to be determined by the Government. This Government has the prerogative to select which individual it feels best will fill that post. And we are in the process of determining that person, and I am assured that we would find an individual of the requisite qualities and we will be well represented on that very important board.

The board of UNESCO has not yet been appointed, so this is a matter that is in process. So, it is not a tragedy, it is not an earth-shattering situation that we were not represented. I am not suggesting that it is not important, but the fact that we were not there at one meeting is not going to make the earth rend. Madam

Speaker, at the end of the day, the issues surrounding UNESCO will be sorted out, we shall have a competent representative, and that long partnership which is the only meaningful part of the contribution made the hon. Member, that there has been a long and successful and meaningful relationship between our nation and UNESCO, shall continue. Thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

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(Government's Lack of Consultation)**

Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for allowing me my Motion—[*Crosstalk*]—to allow me this afternoon here—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Members, may we have some order, please! Proceed, hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. D. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It gives me great pleasure here this afternoon to be able to raise my matter, and I want to thank you, firstly, for allowing my matter to be raised here this afternoon, and my matter is, the failure of the Government to engage in consultation with the relevant stakeholders prior to the imposition of a punitive policy on the foreign-used motor vehicle market.

Madam Speaker, and it is heartening to see the hon. Senator, the Minister of Trade and Industry, here this afternoon to help us get some clarity and elucidation on this matter here, which is of grave concern for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, not only my constituents of Pointe-a-Pierre and the businesses of Pointe-a-Pierre in the foreign used market, but also all the foreign used market dealers that span from Diego Martin to the East-West Corridor, to central, to San Fernando, and also in Tobago.

Madam Speaker, the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry, Minister Paula Gopee-Scoon, in her release, a press conference on January 15, and I quote from the *Trinidad and Tobago Express*, January 15, 2016, for the hon. Member of Diego Martin North-East. I know he would ask for the date and time.

Mr. Imbert: How I reach in this?

Hon. Member: Time and source?

Mr. D. Lee: Madam Speaker—11.37 a.m.

Mr. Imbert: All right.

Mr. D. Lee: [*Laughter*]—the article states that the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry in a press conference at her office on January 15, detailed a policy change for the foreign used car market. And the revisions are:

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1. The age limit of the gasoline powered foreign used cars, which are allowed for importation be revised from four years from the existing six years with immediate effect. And immediate effect meant on January 15, 2016.
2. The current age limit of three years from diesel powered cars, and for four years for CNG powered cars, which are allowed for importation be maintained.
3. Individuals be allowed to import foreign used right-hand cars for personal use once every four years instead of once every three years. The age limit of such cars imported for personal use will now be four years, as before it was up to a maximum of six years.
4. The Ministry of Trade and Industry will temporarily suspend the application process for any new person or business seeking to register as a foreign used car dealer at the Trade Licence Unit as at Thursday, January 14, 2016.

The hon. Minister in her media conference went on to say that:

“The foreign used car market, in particular this industry, has positively impacted the economy by increases in employment and income generation, as well as having made vehicle ownership affordable for many lower and middle income families throughout the years.”

Madam Speaker, also in her press conference on that day of January 15, she highlighted some of the challenges, and she also went on to congratulate the foreign used market which has also contributed considerably to the growth and development of a number of related downstream activities in the industry, including servicing and repair of cars; trading of spare parts and tyres; tint and graphics; and the supply of ancillary accessories for cars, such as alarms, audio systems, customizing auto body works.

She then went on to say the reason why the Government has changed its policy, and she cited four reasons:

1. The increase in traffic congestion on the nation’s roadways.
2. Foreign exchange leakages, as the foreign used car industry is comprised of net importers.
3. Safety environmental protection considerations for the citizens and the environment.

4. Irregularities associated with the operation of the foreign used car industries in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, it is very concerning for me representing the constituency of Pointe-a-Pierre, and also for the nation, and a voice for the middle and low income individuals of Trinidad and Tobago. Over the years, and I am still trying to understand why this Government would want to change this policy at this time. And, as one article said, and my Member reminded me, that it came as a “tief” in the night by the president and a quote from the President of the Used Car Dealers Association:

“Foreign used car dealers”—and I quote from the *Guardian*—“laying off workers”.

January the 14th.

“Foreign used car dealers have started laying off staff because sales have slowed down.”

What they have asked, is that this policy change had no stakeholder consultation, and when we listen to this Government in today’s House sitting and previously, they talked about consultation. And no consultation through representation or consultation with the respective stakeholders took place. The President of the Used Car Dealers Association is really up in arms, and their members are up in arms with this change of policy. It is really, and I would call it, a very draconian measure at this point in time, really taking away individuals who were able to afford a vehicle. And we tend to believe that a vehicle is not a necessity, but in the times that we are living in in Trinidad and Tobago, a vehicle is a necessity when we look at our family's safety, when we have our children, our single mothers who work late in the night, family members who cannot afford to be able to—they have saved their funds to be able to afford a low income car.

And, Madam Speaker, it is really disingenuous by this Government to really change this policy at this time without proper consultation. And, you know, as the Member reminded me, why is this change? And there is an article in the *Guardian* called—if I have it here, one second—“What's driving this car policy?” The *Newsday*, Wednesday, January 20, 2016, and I quote some of the areas:

“Some groups have said there was no consultation leaving stakeholders flabbergasted and disillusioned hours after initial announcement last week.”—and that announcement was on January 15.

What impact will be Cabinet new foreign used car policy have on the numbers of cars on that road? The absence of statistics, projections and estimates mean that

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it is near impossibility to adequately weigh the merits of the new policy. And I hope the hon. Minister is here, I am sure she has some numbers for us here this afternoon, as I have been told.

So, Madam Speaker, when we look at her concerns of her foreign exchange leakage. Let me draw an example, when we looked at an article back in December the 5th, a *Newsday* article by Verne Burnett—and I would not quote—and it has to do with the Central Bank headline about the exchange control and who and who got the exchange. I would not go into that, Madam Speaker, the individuals, but I just want to say that when you look at that article and you take the new car dealers over a three-year period, they utilized US \$866 million. When you look at the foreign used car dealers and take into account their quota, and I have averaged at least US \$3,500 per car by their quota of 10,000 approximately because they have never used up their quota, I get for the last three years, US \$105 million. That is about 12 per cent of the new car dealers.

Mr. Khan: Over US \$105 million?

Mr. D. Lee: Over the three-year period, used car. A new car, 866.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, your time was spent. I now call upon the Minister of Trade and Industry. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Trade and Industry (Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I really am not sure how I should be guided. Because, if I read this Motion correctly, it really speaks to the matter of engaging in consultation.

The Minister, however, seemed to have gone down a road of rambling.

Mr. Deyalsingh: The Member.

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: The Member has rambled all over the place, and it is very clear that he is uncertain of where he is at concerning this Motion. [*Desk thumping*]

Certainly, there is a mismatch in what he said today, and how this Motion was in fact written. So, it speaks to the question of consultation with the relevant stakeholders, and I will address the Motion.

And let me start by saying that I have had discussions with several stakeholders since coming into office as Minister of Trade and Industry. And as a matter of fact, I did have discussions with several stakeholders with regard to the foreign used car industry. I have had meetings with new ones, with old ones, with

large ones, and with small ones. The point about it, I have had discussions with members of the [*Desk thumping*] foreign used car industry.

And the point about it is, what has happened here, is that this Member has in fact failed to consult with his superiors hence his line of rambling. If he had done so there is no way that he would have brought this matter before us. So, I look to the question of the basis of the legislative power of the Minister of Trade and Industry. Madam Speaker, the powers exercise by the Minister of Trade and Industry in respect of the foreign used motor vehicle industry, came from the Import and Export Control Regulations of 1941, and by virtue of these regulations, the Minister grants licence for the importation of amongst other goods, foreign used motor vehicles. And the question arises as to the issue of consultations in respect of the foreign used vehicle industry.

Madam Speaker, there was a similar case in 2014 with which the public is very well aware, where my predecessor, the Minister of Trade and Industry, sought to make changes to the then policy to regulate the fully assembled right-hand drive foreign used vehicle. And it is that some stakeholders from the industry brought an action to the courts, and it was found that there is absolutely no legal obligation on the Minister to consult, and that the Minister of Trade and Industry—[*Interruption*] hold on—had no legal obligation to consult—and I am going to qualify this—with the claimant, and that the formulation of the policy in this case fell squarely within the remit of the defendant.

So, I want to repeat, Madam Speaker, there is no statutory obligation under the Trade Ordinance and the Import and Export Control Regulations to consult before taking a decision. Notwithstanding, I want to emphasize that there is in fact a duty to act fairly, and fairly in all the circumstances, and the question arises, whether or not the Minister and the Government acted fairly in the circumstances. And I would contend that the Government did in fact act fairly in the circumstances.

The question is, whether or not this was a punitive policy as the Member has contended? And, I want to say, having regard to the economic scenario and circumstances before us, this can be considered a reasonable policy having regard to the circumstances of the day, [*Desk thumping*] and that we did, in fact, have discussions, and we did, in fact, act fairly and responsibly.

I want to say that, in fact, there was no substantial policy change; two measures were attended to, and I will not take my time to detail them, because the Member has already done that. What we have said, clearly, and in my press

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conference as well to the public is that we are undertaking a full and comprehensive review of the foreign used car policy, and this is not only with regard to the foreign used car dealers, but also to all of the individuals who are also a part of this industry. We have acknowledged, and we have given the commitment via the press conference to the public, that when the comprehensive review is in fact completed—and in fact that will happen by the end of March 2016—we will, in fact, partake in discussions with all of the members of the public who have an interest in the foreign used car industry. I give you my commitment to that and the Government's commitment to that. [*Desk thumping*]

And let me say to you that this Government is clearly very committed to effective consultation. [*Desk thumping*] So that valuable information can be brought and there can be feedback, and all of these ideas can be put forward so that we can, in fact, as a Government, effect solutions, and make informed decisions as we seek to improve the delivery of public services, and to improve accountability. We as a Government embrace the concerns of all. We listen. We are there to build consensus, to garner support, and all in the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

And let me say that consultations can take many forms—formal, informal, compulsory—and let me say that we continue to have discussions in the form of dialogues, meetings, with all of our stakeholders on all matters of interest. And I want to give some examples of the kind of formal consultations that we have been engaging in. With regard to local government reform, we have just had two sessions in Preysal and in San Fernando, and these are ongoing. And with regard to the gambling commission as well, senior members of the Government have been involved in going out to stakeholders, and, in fact, the Minister of Finance has committed that he would in fact meet with members of the churches with regard to this gambling commission. And, also, Cabinet did in fact, only this week, agree to a public formal consultation on education, primarily on the primary education system, where there will be ongoing reviews and assessment [*Desk thumping*] of exam preparation as well.

Consultations are designed so that members of the public will have their say. And I want to say that I am fully committed on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to consult with all members who have an interest in the foreign used car business. We are a Government which has been elected to govern, and govern we will. [*Desk thumping*] We will continue to consider, as best as we can, all of the ideas and the views and the interests of the public. We will look at the pros and the cons. But, let us admit that there are circumstances when we cannot face the public before we make a decision.

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Madam Speaker, it is highly nonsensical that before we meet in Cabinet on a Thursday where we make decisions, that we go to the public and place on a public notice board, all of the decisions that we are going to make. I want to, again, emphasize that we are committed. At the end of the day we want the optimal outcome for all of the public. We are going to continually act in the public's best interest, and I must say I do believe that the Government has acted fairly in the course of action which we have taken with regard to the foreign used car industry.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 7.14 p.m.