



REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Debates of the House of Representatives

4th Session – 10th Parliament (Rep.) – Volume 24 – Number 21

**OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)**

THE HONOURABLE WADE MARK
SPEAKER

THE HONOURABLE NELA KHAN
DEPUTY SPEAKER

Friday 14th March, 2014

CLERK OF THE HOUSE: JACQUI SAMPSON–MEIGUEL

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CONTENTS

	Page
LEAVE OF ABSENCE	1
... ..	145
CONDOLENCES	
(MR. DESMOND CARTEY)	
<i>[Mr. Speaker]</i>	1
(MRS. CORRINNE BAPTISTE-MC KNIGHT)	
<i>[Mr. Speaker]</i>	3
PAPERS LAID	3
... ..	66
ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS	
Santa Rosa Detention Facility	
(Details of)	4
Maloney Housing Development	
(Paving of Car Parks)	6
Maloney Health Centre	
(Dental Services)	
<i>[Deferred]</i>	6
Illegal Quarries	
<i>[Deferred]</i>	7
Saut D'eau Road, La Canoa, Santa Cruz	
(Completion of Road Works)	
<i>[Deferred]</i>	7
Maracas Bay ECCE Centre	
(Commencement of Works)	
<i>[Deferred]</i>	8
Petrotrin, Bunker C Type Oil	
(Details of)	
<i>[Deferred]</i>	8

PROCEDURAL MOTION							
<i>[Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal]</i>	...	...	...	...	...	...	114
ADJOURNMENT							
<i>[Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal]</i>	...	...	...	...	...	...	201

**THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
OFFICIAL REPORT
IN THE FOURTH SESSION OF THE TENTH PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO WHICH OPENED ON JUNE 18, 2010**

SESSION 2013—2014

VOLUME 24

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, March 14, 2014

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received communication from the following Members: Mrs. Nela Khan, Member of Parliament for Princes Town has asked to be excused from sittings of the House during the period March 10th to 21st, 2014. The hon. Dr. Tim Gopeesingh, Member of Parliament for Caroni East, is out of the country and has asked to be excused from sittings of the House during the period March 13th to 23rd, 2014, and Mr. Patrick Manning, Member of Parliament for San Fernando East, has asked to be excused from today's sitting of the House.

The leave which the Members seek is granted.

CONDOLENCES

(MR. DESMOND CARTEY)

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I wish to acknowledge the passing of a distinguished former Member of this House, Mr. Desmond Cartey, who served both as a Senator and a Member of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Cartey passed away on Tuesday, March 11, 2014. I now invite hon. Members to pay their respective tributes. The hon. Leader of the House.

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, of course, it gives us no joy in standing to pay tribute at the passing of former Members of this honourable House.

Today on behalf of the Government, I take this opportunity to extend to the family and dear friends of former Member of Parliament, Mr. Desmond Cartey, we extend our deepest condolences at his passing. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Desmond Cartey entered the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago in the Senate, where he was appointed as a Government Senator and also served as this country's Minister of Labour, Social Security and Co-operatives. Mr. Cartey later

Condolences

[HON. DR. R. MOONILAL]

Friday, March 14, 2014

served as Minister of Industry, Commerce and Consumer Affairs during the Second Republican Parliament 1981—1986 under Prime Minister George Michael Chambers. He was at that time the Member for Laventille.

Mr. Cartey would be remembered for his contributions in the House. He had served on several committees of the Parliament and served with distinction as a representative of the people. Mr. Cartey also served, hon. Speaker, between March 1985—1986 as Minister of Housing and Resettlement and earlier as Minister of Industry, Commerce and Consumer Affairs, therefore his span of service to this country ranged across several Ministries. His colleagues at that time—I have had the opportunity to chat with a couple of his colleagues who served with him during the Parliament in the early '80s, who have expressed their condolences elsewhere, but do recall that Mr. Cartey served with distinction and was extremely collaborative with his colleagues in the Cabinet and in the Parliament, and indeed, shared a sense of humour with his parliamentary and Cabinet colleagues at that time.

Mr. Cartey served his constituency and his nation. Regrettably, he was also remembered for his lines on the political platform, which I would not repeat, but, regrettably that also marked a stigma of some sort. But notwithstanding that, Mr. Speaker, he did serve with distinction and was a true patriot. We extend, again, to his family and friends, our condolences. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Port of Spain South.

Miss Marlene Mc Donald (*Port of Spain South*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And like the Member for Oropouche East—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Please, Member.

Miss M. Mc Donald:—we do extend condolences to the family of Mr. Desmond Cartey, who, I understand, was really a very good Minister and also one of the stalwarts of the People's National Movement.

I want to endorse what the Member has said, that he worked in various positions in the Government, occupying certain positions, Minister of Housing but, more importantly, he served the Laventille West constituency with distinction and for this he will be remembered. I do not know him personally, but I can tell you from the moment of his death, a couple people called and all I heard was very good things about Mr. Cartey.

I wish him peace and may God rest his soul. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I join with Members before me in paying tribute to this distinguished son of our soil, Mr. Desmond Cartey. Mr. Cartey was a Member of both the First and Second Republican Parliaments and hailed from an era that was a definite turning point in our nation's history, given our newly established republican status at the time. During the First Republican Parliament from September 1976—September 1981, he was appointed as a Government Senator under the People's National Movement administration, and when he faced the polls in 1981, he was successfully elected as a Member of Parliament for Laventille, and appointed first as Minister of Industry, Commerce and Consumer Affairs and then later on as Minister of Housing and Resettlement.

If one were to take a look at the *Hansard* debates from that era, one can easily see that the conduct and decorum of his contributions presented Mr. Cartey as nothing short of a statesman in keeping with the then high standards of our honourable House. I ask that the family of Mr. Desmond Cartey accept on behalf of my family, the staff of the Parliament and myself our deepest condolences on his passing.

(MRS. CORRINNE BAPTISTE-MC KNIGHT)

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I wish to acknowledge the passing of former Senator Corrine Baptiste-Mc Knight, who served with distinction in the Ninth and Tenth Republican Parliament of the Trinidad and Tobago as a Senator on the Independent Bench.

Mrs. Baptiste-Mc Knight, who was ailing for some time now, passed away on Friday, March 07, 2014.

Please be assured, hon. Members, that appropriate letters of condolence will be forwarded on your behalf to the families of Mr. Desmond Cartey and Mrs. Corrine Baptiste-Mc Knight.

I now invite all to stand for one minute silence in respectful observance of their passing. Thank you.

[The House of Representatives stood]

Mr. Speaker: May their souls rest in eternal peace. Thank you.

PAPERS LAID

1. Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic (Amdt.) Order, 2014. [*The Minister of State in the Ministry of Finance and the Economy (Hon. Rudranath Indarsingh)*]

2. Annual Audited Financial Statements of National Entrepreneurship Development Company Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2009. [*Hon. R. Indarsingh*]
3. Annual Audited Financial Statements of National Entrepreneurship Development Company Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2010. [*Hon. R. Indarsingh*]
4. Audited Financial Statements of Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme (YTEPP) Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2010. [*Hon. R. Indarsingh*]
5. Audited Financial Statements of Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme (YTEPP) Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2011. [*Hon. R. Indarsingh*]
6. Annual Audited Financial Statements of Education Facilities Company Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2012. [*Hon. R. Indarsingh*]
7. Annual Audited Financial Statements of Education Facilities Company Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2013. [*Hon. R. Indarsingh*]

Papers 2 to 7 to be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.

1.45 p.m.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

**Santa Rosa Detention Facility
(Details of)**

- 59. Miss Alicia Hospedales (Arouca/Maloney)** asked the hon. Minister of Justice:

With respect to the Santa Rosa detention facility could the Minister state:

- a) The amount of money that has been paid to the property owners Wala Wala Ltd since September 1, 2011 to date for the purpose of housing the Santa Rosa Prison?
- b) How many persons have been detained at the facility, since September 1, 2011 to date by monthly breakdown?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Justice (Sen. The Hon. Emmanuel George): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I wish to thank colleagues in this House for having me here this afternoon. The answer to question No. 59 is as follows—to part a): The sum of \$28,347,500 was paid to the property owners Wala Wala Limited during the period, September 01, 2011 to January 2014, for rental of the two buildings situate at the 26-kilometre mark, Churchill-Roosevelt Highway, Santa Rosa, for the purpose of housing the Eastern Correctional and Rehabilitation Centre.

The answer to part b) is as follows: Since September 01, 2011, the monthly breakdown of the number of persons detained at the facility as advised by the Commissioner of Prisons is as follows: September 2011, nil; October 2011, 111; November 2011, 111; December 2011, 126.

For 2012: January 2012, 105; February 2012, 87; March 2012, 94; April 2012, 114; May 2012, 111; June 2012, 100; July 2012, 126; August 2012, 125; September 2012, 110; October 2012, 105; November 2012, 102; December 2012, 54.

Year 2013: January 2013, 140; February 2013, 123; March 2013, 131; April 2013, 147; May 2013, 121; June 2013, 110; July 2013, 174; August 2013, 173; September 2013, 166; October 2013, 131; November 2013, 140; and December 2013, 113.

For the year 2014, January figure for the population at the Santa Rosa Eastern Correctional Centre was 149.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Supplemental, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Deyalsingh: Thank you. Could the hon. Minister state whether he considers the expenditure of \$28.3 million to house from a low of 87 to 174, a good investment—\$28.3 million to host about 100 people?

Sen. The Hon. E. George: You are asking an opinion, I cannot venture an opinion here.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Further supplemental, Mr. Speaker. Could the hon. Minister state at the height of the state of emergency how many of the 8,000 people detained were housed at this facility?

Mr. Speaker: No, no, hon. Minister, no. That is not pertinent to the question that is before us and the answer to that will differ. Any further supplemental? If not, we move on to—the hon. Member for Arouca/Maloney.

**Maloney Housing Development
(Paving of Car Parks)**

60. Miss Alicia Hospedales (*Arouca/Maloney*) asked the hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Development:

Could the Minister state:

- a) Whether a contract has been awarded for the paving of car parks within the Maloney Housing Development?
- b) If the answer to part (a) is in the affirmative, to whom was the contract awarded?
- c) When will the paving of the car parks commence?

Mr. Speaker: The Minister of Housing and Urban Development.

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Mr. Speaker, question No. 60, part a): It is my understanding and I am instructed that no contract for the paving of car parks within the Maloney housing development has been executed. Therefore, parts b) and c) are not relevant.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member for Arouca/Maloney.

Miss Hospedales: Yes, Mr. Speaker, could the Minister indicate to us exactly when those car parks are going to be paved?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, I do not have the information now, but I will certainly get the information and pass it to the Member with responsibility for that area.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Arouca/Maloney.

**Maloney Health Centre
(Dental Services)**

64. Miss Alicia Hospedales (*Arouca/Maloney*) asked the hon. Minister of Health:

Could the Minister state:

- a) From what date will dental services be made available at the Maloney Health Centre?

- b) Whether a dentist will be officially assigned to this Health Centre?

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Could I indicate that the Minister of Health is delayed and I will ask that, Member, if you can stand-down the question in particular or if we can defer it for one week. May I indicate as well, the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, the Minister of Education and the Minister of Local Government are not available, and I will ask that those questions be deferred for one week. The other Ministers are here and will answer the rest of the questions.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, I have been advised, well, all hon. Members would have heard that the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, the questions that are directed to him, as well as the Minister of Education and the Minister of Local Government, the hon. Leader of the House has asked that these questions be deferred for a week.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: The other questions can be pursued at this time. So the next question on the Order Paper is in the name of the Member for St. Ann's East.

Question, by leave, deferred.

The following questions stood on the Order Paper:

Illegal Quarries

- 65.** A. Could the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs state:
- i. How many illegal quarries have been identified throughout the country?
 - ii. Where are these illegal quarries located?
 - iii. How many persons have been arrested and charged for illegal quarrying from June 2010 to date?
- B. Could the hon. Minister list all the licensed quarries that operate within the country? [*Miss A. Hospedales*]

Saut D'eau Road, La Canoa, Santa Cruz (Completion of Road Works)

- 67.** With respect to the completion of road works at Saut D'eau Road, La Canoa, Santa Cruz, could the hon. Minister of Local Government state:
- a) When will paving works begin?
 - b) When will the project be completed? [*Mrs. J. Thomas*]

**Maracas Bay ECCE Centre
(Commencement of Works)**

- 68.** Could the hon. Minister of Education state:
- a) Whether any approval has been given by the Ministry for the commencement of works at the Maracas Bay ECCE Centre?
 - b) The projected date for the commencement of works for this Centre?
[Mrs. J. Thomas]

**Petrotrin, Bunker C Type Oil
(Details of)**

- 70.** Can the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs state:
- a) Whether fueling operations were conducted by Petrotrin, specific to the loading of Bunker C type oil to the state-owned barge, Marabella, between December 16 and 17, 2013?
 - b) Whether any oil leak associated with this loading occurred?
 - c) If the answer to part (b) above is in the affirmative:
 - i. What quantity of oil was leaked?
 - ii. How was the quantity determined?
 - iii. What was the identified cause of the leak? [Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon]

**Petrotrin
(Media Release re Bunker Type C Oil)**

- 71.** With reference to the Ministry's media release of December 27, 2013, could the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs indicate whether the Petroleum Company of Trinidad & Tobago Ltd. (Petrotrin) has determined the source of the Bunker C type oil that washed ashore at La Brea in December, 2013? [Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon]

**Petrotrin
(Suspension of Employees)**

- 72.** Could the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs state:
- a) The reasons for the recent suspension of employees involved in the loading and receiving of fuel at the port and marine operations of Petrotrin, Pointe-a-Pierre?

- b) Whether any disciplinary action has been taken against these employees to date?
- c) What is the current job status of these employees?
- d) What are the job titles of these employees and to whom do they directly report?
- e) The detailed chain of command related to these employees and the jobs which they perform? [*Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon*]

**Textbook Rental Programme
(Receipt of School Books)**

- 74.** Could the hon. Minister of Education state:
- a) As at January 1, 2014, how many schools have not received textbooks under the Textbook Rental Programme for the Academic Year 2013-2014?
 - b) The names of the schools?
 - c) When will these schools receive textbooks? [*Mrs. P. Mc Intosh*]

**Technical/Vocational Studies in Secondary Schools
(Details of)**

- 75.** Could the hon. Minister of Education state:
- a) How many vacancies exist in the area of Technical/Vocational Studies in Secondary Schools?
 - b) The schools that are currently without the requisite teachers as a result of these vacancies?
 - c) What provisions have been made to accommodate students who are pursuing Technical/Vocational studies in those schools adversely affected? [*Mrs. P. Mc Intosh*]

**Cascade and St. Ann's Rivers
(Clearing of)**

- 76.** Could the hon. Minister of Local Government indicate when would the Cascade and St. Ann's Rivers be cleared of bush and debris? [*Mrs. P. Mc Intosh*]

**Replacement of Chemical Corexit 9500
(Details of)**

- 78.** Could the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs state:
- a) The reasons for the replacement of the chemical Corexit 9500 with Spec Clean and Eco-Sperse in the December 2013 oil spill along the south western coast of Trinidad?
 - b) The name of the supplier of Spec Clean?
 - c) The name of the supplier of Eco-Sperse?
 - d) How much was paid for a 55-gallon container of Corexit 9500?
 - e) How much was paid for a 55-gallon container of Spec Clean and Eco-Sperse respectively? [*Mr. F. Jeffrey*]

Compensation Paid to Boat Owners

- 79.** Could the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs provide a breakdown of the compensation packages paid to boat owners operating within each of the following areas:
- i. Coffee Village;
 - ii. Carat Shed;
 - iii. Point Sable Beach;
 - iv. Bay Beach; and
 - iv. Otaheite Bay? [*Mr. F. Jeffrey*]

Compensation Package Paid to Residents

- 80.** Could the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs provide a breakdown of the compensation packages paid to the residents of each of the following areas:
- i. Coffee Village;
 - ii. Carat Shed;
 - iii. Point Sable Beach;
 - iv. Bay Beach; and
 - iv. Otaheite? [*Mr. F. Jeffrey*]

Questions, by leave, deferred.

Maracas Bay Beach Facility

(Tenders for)

66. Mrs. Joanne Thomas (*St. Ann's East*) asked the hon. Minister of Tourism:

Could the Minister state when will tenders be put out for works at the Maracas Bay Beach Facility?

The Minister of Tourism (Hon. Chandresh Sharma): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and thank you Member for St. Ann's East. Mr. Speaker, in 2009, TDC invited tenders locally, regionally and internationally for development works for the Maracas Beach redesign project. Six bids were received. In June 2009, a contract was awarded to one of the companies bidding: Beijing Liujian Construction Company Limited by the TDC for a cost of \$233,191,981.93; project management fees of \$14,700,000 and furniture, fixtures and equipment of \$15 million. Of course, the national community was concerned.

In May of 2010, this project was deemed to be excessive in scope and cost. Subsequently, that contract was terminated. A mobilization fee of \$2.3 million was retained by the company and a further sum of \$4,922,625.44 plus 15 per cent VAT was paid to the company in full and final settlement.

Present contract: With respect to the contract which was awarded in June 2013, to a consultant for the preconstruction stage for same facility which involved the preparation of scope of works and budget, the consultants submitted the final report in December 2013. Consultations took place at which the Member for St. Ann's East attended and actively participated. The said report is being reviewed and tenders will be invited for the construction works and completion of the review. It is expected that tenders will be invited for the said construction work for the same facility by May 2014. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Chaguanas West.

URP Agriculture Programme Initiative

(Details of)

105. Mr. Jack Warner (*Chaguanas West*) asked the hon. Minister of Works and Infrastructure:

With respect to access roads, drainage and irrigation projects undertaken in the URP Agriculture Programme initiative for the period May 2013 to September 2013, could the Minister please state:

- A. Have all the contractors been paid?
- B. If the answer to a is in the negative:
 - i. How many contractors are still owed payments?
 - ii. The total sum outstanding to contractors?
 - iii. The reasons for the delay in the payment of these contractors?
 - iv. What arrangements are being made to honour the debt to these contractors for the work they have done?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Minister of Works and Infrastructure.

The Minister of Works and Infrastructure (Hon. Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, part a) of the question is: how many contractors are still owed payments? Just to note, this is with respect to access roads, drainage and irrigation projects undertaken in the URP Agricultural Programme Initiative. At present, no contractors have been paid, however, payments to four contractors have been recommended.

With respect to part b) of the question: a total of 57 contractors are owed payments. The total sum outstanding to contractors amounts to \$111,232,092.66 from the Unemployment Relief Programme, Agricultural Programme Initiative.

Mr. Speaker, the reasons for the delay in the payment of these contractors is because the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure is now undertaking a verification process for the settlement of the claims that have been made by the contractors. The arrangements being made to honour the debt to these contractors for the work they have done: a team has been established with representatives from the URP, the Ministry of Food Production, and the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, and the team is in the process of verifying claims after which the payments would be made.

Mr. Speaker, just to give you an example of what is happening so that the House will understand how these audits are being done—I will refer to four projects that have been audited. Project No. 100, Sunnlyal Trace, the contractor, Desai Hardware and Plumbing Supplies where the contract sum was for \$239,914.10 VAT inclusive. The audit team found evidence of works, which was seen when they paid a site visit and they recommended that payment be made in full.

Project No. 101, Lal Beharry Trace, contractor, Actril General Contractors, contract sum \$234,914.18. Evidence of works was seen during the site visit with the exception of the ponding works where no ponding works was observed. Therefore, the contract sum was adjusted by \$38,191.15 resulting in a payment

being processed for \$196,722.68.

Project No. 96, Dan Trace, contractor, G&R Bisram Transport Limited, contract sum \$380,017.27 VAT inclusive, of course. Evidence of works was seen during a site visit by the audit team and they recommended that the payment be made in full. Now when evidence of works was seen, it does not mean that they just go and look at the work, Mr. Speaker. There is a scope of works with which they are working, and they use this scope of works to measure and see the amount of work claimed for was the work that was completed. This is why in the case of one of the projects, while the scope of works said there was a pond to be dug and no pond was found dug the payment had to be adjusted accordingly.

Project No. 97, Dan Trace Extension, contractor, Villama General Contractors, contract sum \$240,669.01 VAT inclusive. Evidence of works was seen during a site visit with the exception of the road works which were incomplete. Road works were only approximately 10 per cent complete.

Now, Mr. Speaker, when a bill is presented for the full amount and you go out and audit and you find only 10 per cent of the work complete, you do not expect that the Government is going to pay for work that is not done. We are responsible for public funds and these public funds must be paid in accordance with the quantum of work that has been completed. And in this case, this contract price was adjusted by \$52,236.36 resulting in a payment of \$188,432.65.

Mr. Speaker, up to Wednesday, March 12 the auditors were on the road and in preparation for this question, I asked them to give me further information through the Permanent Secretary. For example, they went to St. Philippa Road, Phase 1, 2 and 3 and this is what they wrote: At the St. Philippa sites no evidence whatsoever could be found of any works being done in a very long time, and this was also verified by residents of the area.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Chaguanas West would like to think and to be assured that the Government is only paying for the works that have been completed, and this is what we are about. Therefore, we are not going to pay for works that have not been done or have not been verified. This will be contrary to what we stand for as a Government which is integrity in public office and the responsibility for the way we pay funds of the Government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Warner: Member for Tabaquite, I have several so please bear with me. Can the Minister say when these contracts were first issued and then also when

the audits are being done, what date and time?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Minister.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, the URP Programme is divided into three: URP Agriculture which comes under the Ministry of Food Production, URP Infrastructure which comes under my Ministry, Ministry of Works and Infrastructure and URP Social which comes under the Ministry of the People and Social Development. I am advised that these contracts came about in the period June, July, August, September. Those months were when these projects came about and they were processed. When it came in most of the payments, or maybe all, came in after the end of the financial year. When that happens I am also advised that a proper process of audit has to be done in order to ensure that these works were completed.

When that came to my attention, we initiated through the Permanent Secretary the audit team that began to do work towards the end of October, into November/December and those works are continuing.

2.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the audit team also reported that they had security problems. When they went on some of these jobs which could not be verified, they were threatened and we have been facing this kind of situation. We are not going to allow thuggery and we are not going to allow this kind of bullying to in any way affect our decision to pay people. We are going to pay on the basis of work done. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, as a responsible Minister, I see it as my duty to ensure that the coffers of this Government are used in the proper way and that we pay for what has been audited on the quantum of work that has been completed. This is what we are doing and the audit process will continue, and people who have justifiable payments will receive their payments.

Mr. Warner: Mr. Speaker, that is a very long—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Let us not get confused. Just go on to your next question, please.

Mr. Warner: All right. Minister, you recall speaking in this Parliament on September 17, 2013 when you informed this House that 289 projects have been done at a cost of \$116 million, how did you arrive at those figures?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Those were figures that were given to me by URP Agriculture, and the figures were restated as being given by the URP Agriculture.

Mr. Warner: So those figures were not paid?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Those are the very projects that are being audited.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member of Chaguanas, do you have any further supplemental?

Mr. Warner: No, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Further supplemental, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, thank you.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Could the hon. Minister state in relation to the pond that was not built, in addition to the contractor not being paid for the pond, are any charges going to be laid against that contractor for malfeasance?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, wherever persons attempt to defraud the Government, there is a legal process that can be instituted and that can be used in order to ensure that those persons are treated under the auspices of the law.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Further supplemental. The hon. Minister said the process can be used. Is the process going to be used against this particular contractor who said they built a pond and did not build a pond?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, that is a matter that has to be dealt with by the Ministry based upon what are the final conclusions of the audit report.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Further supplemental, Mr. Speaker. Could the hon. Minister state exactly who threatened the auditors in the conduct of their duties?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, I do not know who threatened the auditors. It was reported by the auditors.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Further supplemental, Mr. Speaker. Was a police report of those threats made?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, what I would like to say is that, since some of these matters may involve the law and a legal process, I think it will be unwise for me to make comments on these matters that can in any way possibly prejudice any further action that is to be taken.

Mr. Speaker: Final supplemental on this one.

Mr. Deyalsingh: It is a very simple matter. You claimed that threats—

[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: No, no, could you ask a question, please.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Were these threats against officers of the State reported to the police, yes or no?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, do you want to respond, please?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, I think if the Member for St. Joseph wishes to file another question with these, I will research them and come back to Parliament.

Construction of Bagatelle Community Centre

106. Mr. Colm Imbert (*Diego Martin North/East*) asked the hon. Minister of Community Development:

- A. Is the Minister aware that in February 2011, the (then) Minister of Community Development informed the House that work would commence on the construction of the Bagatelle Community Centre in Diego Martin in 2013?
- B. Can the hon. Minister explain why no construction work was done in 2013 on this project?

The Minister of Community Development (Hon. Winston Peters): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Since the Member for Diego Martin North/East “finally find” a question to ask, let me try to answer him.

Mr. Speaker, the answer to question No. 106. The Ministry has rescheduled works to complete the Bagatelle Community Centre during the third quarter of fiscal 2014.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, supplemental. The Minister did not answer the question, so can I ask him by way of a supplemental? Is the Minister aware that in February 2011 his predecessor gave a commitment to start work on this centre in 2013; and, can the Minister explain why no work was done in 2013?

Hon. W. Peters: Well, I do believe that the same answer would apply. The Ministry of Community Development has rescheduled works to complete the Bagatelle Community Centre during the third quarter of fiscal 2014.

Mr. Imbert: Further supplement, since the Minister does not want to answer me. When will the work start, Minister?

Hon. W. Peters: Mr. Speaker, I am trying to figure out if I should even get up to answer that rhetorical question. I think he could answer that for himself because I answered the question. The works are going to—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: You said completed.

Mr. Speaker: No, no! Member, allow the hon. Minister to answer, please.

Hon. W. Peters: Mr. Speaker, this question can only be answered one way, and at the risk of being repetitious I would have to answer it in that way. The Ministry has rescheduled works to complete the Bagatelle Community Centre during the third quarter of fiscal 2014. Now, we have rescheduled the works and to complete in the third quarter in fiscal 2014.

**Country Club Wall
(Details of)**

107. Mr. Colm Imbert (*Diego Martin North/East*) asked the hon. Minister of Works and Infrastructure:

- A. Is the Minister aware that the country club wall was an integral part of the Maraval access project?
- B. Is the Minister aware that the construction of this wall was completed in May 2011?
- C. Is the Minister aware that this wall collapsed in November 2011, six months after it was built?
- D. Could the Minister explain why after more than two years have elapsed since the wall collapsed, it has not been rebuilt?

The Minister of Works and Infrastructure (Hon. Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan): Mr. Speaker, the Minister is aware that the country [*Crosstalk*] club wall—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Could we allow the Minister to speak in silence, please. Continue, hon. Minister.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, this Minister is aware that the country club wall was an integral part of the Maraval access project. I am also aware that the construction of this wall was completed in May 2011. I am also further aware that the wall collapsed in November 2011, six months after it was built. Mr. Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Please allow the Minister to speak in silence, please.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan:—the question seeks to find out why after more than two years the time has elapsed, since the wall collapsed, it has not been rebuilt.

Mr. Speaker, despite several meetings from December 2011 to present, the wall has not been rebuilt and there are good reasons for it. The Ministry of Works and Infrastructure and the Trinidad Country Club have been unable to arrive at a consensus on the design and budget for the reconstruction of the wall. And, Mr. Speaker, in the public interest, I want to give a chronology of events with respect to this.

November 2011: a portion of the country club's boundary wall along Saddle Road, Maraval, collapsed and this happened, you would recall, after a very intense rainfall event.

December 2011: the Permanent Secretary commissioned Earth Investigation System Limited (EISL) to carry out a forensic investigation to determine the likely cause or causes of the composite wall structure at that said property. The consultant was required to review the design of the retaining wall and fence wall and check whether it was compliant with internationally accepted codes of practice, and to recommend a strategy or strategies for sustainable restoration of the retaining wall and the fence wall.

March 2012: the consultant submitted his report and findings and these were made available to the PURE unit so as to guide its actions with respect to the reconstruction of the wall.

Mr. Speaker, it should be noted that during that time and up to the present, the owner of the property, Mr. Joseph Fernandes, continues to take objections to the designs done by the Ministry's engineers with respect to the rebuilding of the wall, and as a consequence he has lodged several complaints to the Ministry via his attorney. So it is not a matter as simple as meets the eye. He has taken issue with the design works done, claiming that it had several fundamental flaws. The Ministry took the decision to collaborate closely with the property owner with a view to achieving mutual consensus on the way forward.

You see, Mr. Speaker, as a Government, we do not bully our way. What we try to do is to engage in negotiations with people because we always want to have the best neighbourly relations between the Government and the community.

June 2012: a meeting was held with officials from the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure and the Trinidad Country Club to discuss the way forward with respect to the restoration of the boundary wall. A memorandum was sent from the Programme Director, PURE, to the senior legal advisor Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, with preliminary drawings for a new property—the preliminary

drawings were prepared so that we could have solicited comments from Mr. Joseph Fernandes of the Trinidad Country Club with respect to the design concept before detailed designs and drawings were prepared by PURE.

The hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East would be very well aware that it is very important to have consensus on the design concepts before detailed designs and drawings are done, otherwise you could incur, Mr. Speaker, extensive costs and then end up having disagreements on what is to be really executed.

August 2012: an email was sent from Mr. Fernandes' lawyer to the senior legal officer, Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, containing Mr. Fernandes' comments on the preliminary drawings prepared by PURE. So, Mr. Speaker, it took about two months for Mr. Fernandes to respond to the preliminary drawings.

October 2012: a letter was sent from Mr. Fernandes to Programme Director, PURE, with his comments on the preliminary drawings prepared by PURE, and in that letter Mr. Fernandes expressed disagreement with some of the proposed design concepts.

November 2012: a memorandum was sent from the Programme Director PURE, to the senior legal officer Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, addressing Mr. Fernandes' comments on the preliminary design drawings, and the Programme Director, PURE indicated, if Mr. Fernandes was not in agreement with the proposal of the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure in terms of the proposed design, then Mr. Fernandes could have considered providing his own designs for approval. A budget for the wall construction was given to Mr. Fernandes in this regard.

We move from 2012 to 2013. February 2013: an e-mail was sent from Mr. Fernandes' lawyer to the senior legal officer, Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, requesting the existing wall foundation drawings and geotechnical investigation report that was commissioned by the Permanent Secretary shortly after the wall collapsed.

March 2013: a memorandum was sent from the Programme Director, PURE, to the senior legal officer Ministry of Works and Infrastructure with copy of existing wall foundation drawings and geotechnical investigation report for onward transmission to Mr. Fernandes. Further, a meeting was held with Mr. Fernandes and his legal representatives along with senior officers of the Ministry and the hon. Minister of Works and Infrastructure, and it was agreed that engineers representing the Ministry and Mr. Fernandes will meet to discuss the proposed designs with a view to achieving consensus and agreement on the way forward.

April 2013: a meeting was held at the Trinidad Country Club with representatives from PURE, from consulting engineering partners CP Limited and Mr. Fernandes to discuss the preliminary drawings prepared by PURE with the aim of coming to a consensus on the design of the wall. During that meeting, Mr. Fernandes indicated that he will submit his own designs for the reconstruction of the wall through his consultants CP Limited—which was asked of him so long ago, that if he was not in agreement, submit your own designs.

CP Limited agreed to provide Fernandes with proposed design assumptions for approval before commencing final designs.

2.15 p.m.

In July of 2013 a proposal from CP Limited to Mr. Fernandes was submitted to PURE. The proposal was dated July 18, 2013 and was to provide design services for the restoration works to the boundary walls of Trinidad Country Club.

The consultant quoted a fee of \$190,000 VAT exclusive, for their services to Mr. Fernandes who then forwarded the quotation to the Ministry for payment.

Mr. Speaker: It is 2.15 p.m. at this time.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Sorry.

Mr. Speaker: We are now at 2.15 p.m., the end of question time. You have two more—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: One minute.

Mr. Speaker: Okay.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, in September 2013 a letter was sent from the senior legal officer, Ministry of Works and Infrastructure to the attorney who represented Mr. Fernandes, and the letter advised that if Mr. Fernandes wishes to provide his own independent design to the Ministry, the cost of the design must be to his own account and the cost of the new wall must not exceed the budget that was given to him.

The senior legal officer informed Mr. Fernandes' legal representative that this new development was contrary to the decision taken to have a team of engineers representing both parties meet with a view to achieving consensus and coming to an amicable resolution to the protracted matter.

Finally, in January of 2014, again our legal officer met with Mr. Fernandes and his legal team to discuss the outstanding issues pertaining to land acquisition and a reconstruction of the wall. Mr. Fernandes and his attorneys were once again

urged to reconsider the position regarding the reconstruction of the wall and to allow the Ministry to proceed with its reconstruction. The Ministry always wanted to reconstruct this wall since it is anxious to do so, but cannot proceed given the position of Mr. Fernandes on this matter. Mr. Fernandes and his attorney promised in January 2014 to contact the Ministry, and the Ministry is still awaiting a response. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, it is now 2.16 p.m.

Mr. Imbert: No supplemental?

Mr. Speaker: I will give you one question.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, could I ask the Minister, in light of this tale of woe where the Government has been unable to build a simple wall for two years, when does he expect that the eyesore at the intersection of Saddle Road and Long Circular Road, will be dealt with? The wall collapsed two years ago. Who is running this country?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Minister.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, I want to assure the Member for Diego Martin North/East that the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, is running the country [*Crosstalk*] with the Cabinet of this country and in partnership with the citizens of this country and that we are in control of matters relating to the management of the country.

Mr. Speaker, if Mr. Fernandes were to say to the Ministry, you have my permission to build the wall, the wall will start as quickly as I get that permission. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: All right. Okay. Hon. Members, please. Please.

Hon. Member: Foolish.

Mr. Speaker: Please, Members, please. Could I have your silence, please? [*Crosstalk*] Could I have your attention, please? Hon. Members, the Speaker is on his legs. [*Crosstalk*] Member for Diego Martin North/East, do you want to retire?

Mr. Imbert: No. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the remaining questions are going to be addressed at the next sitting of the House of Representatives. Continue, please.

The following questions stood on the Order Paper:

First Citizens Bank

(Overdraft Facility for Caribbean Airlines)

- 108.** A. Could the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy state whether an overdraft facility has been established for Caribbean Airlines with First Citizens Bank?
- B. If the answer to part (A) is in the affirmative, could the Minister state:
- i. When was this overdraft facility established?
 - ii. The name of the authorizing officer who signed on behalf of Caribbean Airlines? [*Miss A. Hospedales*]

Unemployment Relief Programme

(Divisions of)

- 114.** With respect to the Unemployment Relief Programme (URP), could the hon. Prime Minister state whether the programme is still divided into four divisions for its operations and to which Ministries are they assigned? [*Mr. N. Hypolite*]

Registration of Foreign Used Vehicles

- 116.** Could the hon. Minister of Transport state how many new and foreign used vehicles were registered with the licensing authority for the years ending December 31, 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013? [*Mr. N. Hypolite*]

Question time having expired, questions 108, 114 and 116 were not dealt with.

DEFINITE URGENT MATTER

(LEAVE)

Horrific negative outcomes in the health sector

(Failure of Government to address)

Dr. Amery Browne (*Diego Martin Central*): Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 12 of the House of Representatives—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Please, hon. Members, please allow the Member to speak in silence, please. Continue, hon. Member.

Dr. A. Browne:—I hereby seek your leave to move the adjournment of the House at today's sitting for the purpose of discussing a Definite Matter of Urgent Public Importance, namely: the failure of this Government to properly address the incidence of horrific negative outcomes in the health sector.

Mr. Speaker, the matter is definite as there has been an alarming epidemic of neglect and negligence within the health sector which falls under the purview and responsibility of the Ministry of Health. Trinidad and Tobago continues to experience unacceptable levels of perinatal mortality, infant mortality, maternal mortality, injuries related to health care procedures, negative complications due to botched surgeries, alleged exploitation of patients, and possible criminal medical negligence.

Mr. Deyalsingh: But the Minister of health is not here.

Dr. A. Browne: I do not know where he is. [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Speaker, the matter is urgent because in the recent past our society has been horrified by a sharp increase in medical atrocities such as the inexcusable, agonising, traumatic death by deep cranial laceration of a newborn citizen in an operating theatre at the Mount Hope Women's Hospital. Members of the public feel unprotected against the possibility of such atrocities occurring again in the future, and levels of trust in the health sector have been reduced to an all-time low. Our citizens perceive that there exists what is alleged a medical mafia in existence—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deyalsingh: Another cabal.

Dr. A. Browne:—the effect of which is that there is an expectation of little or no justice when these unfortunate incidents occur.

Mr. Speaker, the matter is of public importance because of public perception that there are many levels of cover-up and concealment that could prevent the truth from emerging in these circumstances. These strategies include the deliberate stigmatization of the victims and their families by senior officials, the issuing of conflicting press releases in what the public interprets as an attempt to confuse the citizenry. Additionally, the engagement of multiple agencies such as universities and other organizations to assist with the provision of explanations for these medical atrocities with little or no focus on the welfare of the victim and their families is highly unacceptable. Furthermore, the alleged reliance on medical practitioners to protect others within the field [*Crosstalk*] and the recruitment of investigating teams that do not appear to be truly independent.

Mr. Speaker, the agonizing and tortured death of tiny Simeon is the most recent case in a pattern of poor procedures and medical negligence that has resulted in many investigations by the Ministry of Health, all of which have culminated in a failure of justice, inadequate redress, frustration among the poor and vulnerable in our society, and a worsening of the culture of injustice and violence that plagues Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, this does not qualify under this particular Standing Order; that is 12. I advise you to raise it under 11 of the Standing Orders; Standing Order 11 that is. The hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

Official Visit (People's Republic of China)

The Minister of Foreign Affairs (Hon. Winston Dookeran): Mr. Speaker, as you are aware, from February 23 to 26, 2014, the hon. Prime Minister paid an official visit to the People's Republic of China.

During the visit, the Prime Minister held bilateral discussions with the Chinese Premier and paid courtesy calls on His Excellency Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China, and His Excellency Yu Zhengsheng, Chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference. The Prime Minister also officiated at the opening of Trinidad and Tobago's Embassy in Beijing, engaged the Trinidad and Tobago's Chinese's business community at business seminars hosted by investTT in conjunction with the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade in Beijing and Shanghai, and witnessed the signing of agreements between the University of the West Indies and the China Agricultural University.

It should be noted that the visit was the first of a head of Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago to China in thirty years.

The rationale for the visit—why engage China? Within this 30-year period China has made remarkable progress. Far from the war-torn country of the 1960s and 1970s, China has become a major player in international trade and south-south cooperation efforts. China has now become a major source of outbound investment and developmental assistance to countries in the developing world, with its state-led financial institutions lending more to developing countries than the World Bank in the current post-global financial crisis period. Trinidad and Tobago's engagement with China is premised on the prominent role it has played,

and would further play in reshaping the realm of international relations in favour of the interests of the global south. The paradigm shifting role of the BRICS countries should be noted in this regard, as it speaks to the changing world economic system that is moving from a state of economic unipolarity to one characterized by complex interdependence among all nations, big and small.

Mr. Speaker, as I had indicated in my earlier statement to Parliament on the visit to China, I spelt out the agenda for cooperation. Now I would like to summarise what has been achieved during this historic visit.

The visit served to add vitality to the already dynamic bilateral relationship that exists between our two countries. With regard to trade and economic cooperation, the visit made invaluable headway. During the bilateral discussions held between the hon. Prime Minister and the Chinese Premier, the Prime Minister announced two major projects to be financed by the Chinese Government that are carded to boost this country's capacity to engage in trade. They are, one, the design and construction of six new economic zones across Trinidad, and two, the development of a transshipment port and dry docking facilities in La Brea.

The first project is intended to create new economic spaces to facilitate the growth of both domestic and international business in Trinidad and Tobago by encouraging the formation of business clusters, new opportunities for employment in the non-energy sector, and increase our country's exports and foreign exchange earnings.

The second project is to ensure the country's position as a major player in the regional maritime industry in light of the forecasted increased maritime traffic that will result from the widened Panama Canal.

Tourism: Concerning the area of tourism, I concluded a memorandum of understanding, on behalf of the Ministry of Transport, with the Civil Aviation Administration of China, with a view to a full air service agreement being concluded between the two sides at a later date. As some of us are aware, China's outbound tourism market is currently the world's largest. As such, Trinidad and Tobago is seeking to position itself to capture a small but significant slice of China's 83 million outbound tourism pie. It should also be noted that an immigration attaché has been assigned to Trinidad and Tobago's Embassy in Beijing to play a critical role in simplifying the process for Chinese nationals seeking to visit Trinidad and Tobago.

Energy cooperation: Noting China's high demand for energy products and Trinidad and Tobago's current search for new markets, energy cooperation featured highly on the bilateral discussions.

2.30 p.m.

It is in this respect, therefore, the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs executed an MOU with the National Energy Administration of the People's Republic of China. The MOU will facilitate co-operation on scientific, technical and policy aspects of energy efficiency, and clean energy technologies, through the exchange of ideas and information. The National Gas Company and the Chinese company, ENN Energy, also executed an MOU for the undertaking of CNG initiatives locally.

Security cooperation also featured prominently in the Prime Minister's discussions. Acknowledging that Trinidad and Tobago's insular nature and porous boundaries have facilitated the growth in the trade of illicit drugs, guns and otherwise prohibited items, the Prime Minister expressed to her Chinese counterpart the need for strengthening bilateral cooperation initiatives to ensure our country can comprehensively respond to the challenges posed by these illegal activities. As such, the acquisition of long range vessels to aid in crime interdiction exercises was raised as a follow-up to previous discussions held between the Ministry of National Security and Chinese authorities. The proposal was raised also to utilize Chinese expertise in outfitting the National Operations Centre for the provision of necessary telecommunication infrastructure to ensure its efficient operation.

Infrastructure development: With regard to infrastructure development, both sides noted the number of infrastructural projects in which Chinese firms have been involved in Trinidad and Tobago, including the National Academies of the Performing Arts, the Diplomatic Centre and Official Residence of the Prime Minister, as well as the ongoing construction of the George Bovell III Aquatic Centre, the National Cycling Velodrome, the National Tennis Centre and the three multi-purpose sporting facilities, the Children's Hospital in Couva and the South Campus of the University of the West Indies.

The Prime Minister discussed with the Chinese Premier the desire of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago to fast-track the loan applications the Government has submitted to the Export-Import Bank of China for future infrastructural projects, including the construction of the new Arima Hospital. We will continue to engage the Chinese authorities on this matter in

pursuance of an agreement which can be concluded at a later date. I am advised that a team from the Ministry Commerce of China will be meeting with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development in the coming weeks to hold such further discussions.

Technical cooperation in sport and health: I concluded an MOU on sport cooperation, on behalf of the Minister of Sport, with the General Administrator of Sport of the People's Republic of China. The MOU will facilitate cooperation and exchange programmes in the field of physical education and its applied sciences through the exchange of sport delegations, expert officials, coaches, technical advisors and specialists.

With regard to the cooperation in health-related matters, a protocol was executed with the Chinese Government that will facilitate the dispatch of a medical team of specialists from China to carry out medical work in Trinidad and Tobago, aimed at improving the delivery of health services to the people of our country. I have been advised that the Vice-Minister of the Health Committee of China has already arranged to meet with our Minister of Health to discuss the imminent dispatch of the Chinese medical team in the near future.

Mr. Speaker, copies of these agreements to which I have alluded are to be made available on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Mr. Speaker, outside of the official discussions, business seminars conducted by invesTT, in conjunction with the Chinese Council for the Promotion of International Trade, allowed for matchmaking meetings and important contacts to be made between local and over 350 members of the Chinese private sector and senior officials of the Chinese Government, and provided opportunities where commercial agreements were concluded, concerning the previously mentioned projects, as well as the proposed Endeavour Business and Commercial Park.

Opening of Trinidad and Tobago's Embassy in Beijing: As a proud citizen of this country, I am sure the formal opening of the Embassy by the Prime Minister in Beijing was, indeed, a high point for us. The establishment of the Embassy has been long in coming, and will serve to expand our global diplomatic reach beyond the Far East by heightening our profile with other countries of the Asian continent. It was great to see it finally come to fruition, most fittingly in the year of our country that today celebrates the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations. The Embassy will provide a platform for further cooperation between our two countries at the bilateral level and allow for exchanges of views on pertinent international issues.

Mr. Speaker, during the visit, views were exchanged on global sustainable development issues, particularly food security and climate change, noting that they feature highly on the sustainable development agenda of Trinidad and Tobago and other Small Island Developing States due to the vulnerabilities that these developing countries face. Concerning the ongoing debate on United Nations Security Council Reform, both sides agreed that there is a need for enlargement of the representation of developing countries in the Council, in order to ensure that medium and small countries have the opportunity to play a greater role in the body.

I also noted the important role that China has played in maintaining the rule of law as it pertains to respecting the sovereign integrity of nation States. We noted, in particular, the commonalities of the position of China with respect to Syria, and that of the Caricom region, who have called for the situation to be resolved through dialogue, and not through the use of military force or any other action which would violate international law.

Agreements concluded by the University of the West Indies: With a view to promote the establishment of new linkages between local and international tertiary level institutions, the Prime Minister witnessed the signing of important memorandum of understanding between the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus and prominent Chinese universities. A memorandum of understanding was signed with the China Agricultural University for a joint development of UWI's new field station at Orange Grove, while another was concluded with Wuhan University for the establishment of a joint Caribbean-Latin American Centre at Wuhan's campus in China in collaboration with the Institute of International Relations at UWI. Both initiatives are highly laudable and I commend the university on its proactive stance in its engagement with prominent Chinese institutions.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, permit me to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to all persons who have made this visit the success that it was, both on the Trinidad and Tobago and Chinese sides. I would also like to assure the House and the nation that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and our team of diplomats in Beijing will continue to grow on the fertile ground that was laid during this visit, with a view to reaping the necessary rewards for the peoples of Trinidad and Tobago and China long into the future.

St. Vincent — Caricom Inter-Sessional Meeting

The Minister of Foreign Affairs (Hon. Winston Dookeran): Mr. Speaker, may I also take the opportunity to briefly inform this honourable House of the

deliberations that took place in St. Vincent recently at the Caricom inter-sessional meeting. There, the hon. Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, as the outgoing Chair of Caricom, in her statement at the opening ceremony, formally passed the chairmanship of the conference of the Heads of Government to Dr. The Hon. Ralph Gonsalves, Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, who assumed the chairmanship of the conference on January 01, 2014.

The hon. Prime Minister highlighted several outcomes during her tenure as chairman from July 01, 2013 to December 31, 2013. These included the establishment of the Commission of the Economy, the Constitution of the Caricom Reparation Commission, and the commencement of the regional dialogue on persons living with disabilities and special needs. The conference also deliberated extensively on, among other things, the issue of regional education and human resource development, sustainable development using information and communication technology, and the state of continuing Caricom-Canada negotiations on the trade and development agenda.

Mr. Speaker, I am certain that the honourable House will also be pleased to note that Caricom Heads of Government, in addition to undertaking to ratify the treaty—the Arms Trade Treaty—also endorsed the bid by Trinidad and Tobago to host the Secretariat of the Arms Trade Treaty. Mr. Speaker, the communiqué by the Caricom Secretariat, with more details, is being distributed for the information of Members. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Maternity Services Review Committee

The Minister of Health (Hon. Dr. Fuad Khan): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has identified the health of pregnant women and their unborn and newborn babies as a number one priority. The vision in maternal child health is to support a society where women and children enjoy the highest attainable levels of health, and that no one suffers the loss of a mother or child due to preventable and treatable causes. This has been, and will continue to remain, our overriding objective.

Pursuant to this objective, the Cabinet appointed the Maternity Services Review Committee in 2011. This was a multi-disciplinary team led by Dr. Lakram Bodoie to review existing practices, identify deficiencies, assess causes of maternal and perinatal deaths and recommend measures for the improvement of the access to and quality of services delivered to expectant mothers. The findings of this committee established common causes of maternal mortality such as haemorrhage, eclampsia and common causes of perinatal mortality such as birth asphyxia, congenital anomalies, sepsis and prematurity.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Health acknowledges that despite the implementation of programmes and service improvement strategies that have resulted in an improvement in maternal and child health, the maternal mortality rate and the infant mortality rate remain a significant issue that requires further input with regard to research and development, human resources and a collaborative effort across agencies and Ministries.

The health, Mr. Speaker, of mothers and children is recognized as paramount to ensuring the well-being, productivity and development of future generations in Trinidad and Tobago. A good level of maternal and child health forms the cornerstone of any society and, as such, the Government is fully committed to addressing and realigning its services in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, in particular, targets 4 and 5 which speak to a reduction in child and maternal mortality by the year 2015.

Mr. Speaker, I turn to some definitions. The maternal mortality rate is the number of maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in a specific time frame, usually one year. Please note that our birth cohort is 18,000 per year so this is a ratio and does not correspond to the actual number of deaths.

Mr. Speaker, a live birth: this is a complete expulsion or extraction from its mother of a product of conception irrespective of the duration of the pregnancy, which, after such separation, shows some independent signs of life. There are wide variations in birth registration procedures, even amongst industrialized countries. This means that the comparison of crude infant mortality may reward countries with a pragmatic approach to birth registration; that is, those who would register only infants who survive or have a reasonable chance of living.

2.45 p.m.

The Review Committee Report in Trinidad and Tobago noted there were numerous variations in recording our infant mortality rate from 28 weeks and 500 grammes—which is the international standard of assessment—and in some forms, 800 grammes and 23 weeks. Mr. Speaker, the under-five mortality rate—this is the number of deaths under five years of age per thousand live births in a given year. This indicates the probability of dying between birth and five years of age in a specified country.

The infant mortality rate is the number of deaths of infants under one year of age per thousand live births in a given year. The perinatal mortality rate is the number of deaths that occur in the perinatal period per thousand live births, which

includes deaths in late pregnancy, stillbirths, and during the first week of life. The stillbirth rate, Mr. Speaker, refers to the foetus of 28 weeks gestation, that at birth shows no signs of life calculated per thousand total births.

Mr. Speaker, there is a lack of comparability with international guidelines. The infant mortality rate is a useful indicator of a country's level of health or development. However, the method of calculating the infant mortality rate varies widely between countries and is based on how they define a live birth and how many premature infants are born in the country. Infant mortality rates can be flawed, depending on a nation's live birth criteria, the vital registration system and the reporting practices.

In light of this, the United Nations has created a formula for calculating infant mortality rate. If countries are to be compared, they should have the formula applied which gives an estimate. Note that this may be higher than the actual data. Several institutions, such as the United Nations Children's Fund and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) provide international rankings of countries based on perinatal, infant or child mortality. This annual updating of the health of children worldwide receives considerable attention in the lay press and medical journals and frequently serves as the basis for political rhetoric, especially in industrialized countries.

Mr. Speaker, may I add—in North Central Regional Health Authority, we have found that the calculation is based on 22 weeks gestation and a baby of 400 grammes, bearing in mind that the international checkpoint is 28 weeks gestation and 500 grammes. In North West Regional Health Authority, they count 23 weeks and 500 grammes, and in South West Regional Health Authority, they count 850 grammes and 26 weeks pregnancy—all under the international benchmark.

So, Mr. Speaker, it will be correct to assume that our infant mortality rate has been skewed towards a position of increase rather than that in keeping with the international best practice which is 28 weeks and 500 grammes. So you see, if you count 22 weeks and 400 grammes—a baby that is not viable—you will be getting additions to your infant mortality rate. That is not supposed to be counted.

The new definition—and it is now being discussed at the World Health Organization—is 28 weeks or below or first signs of life, depending on the foetal weight. Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Health collaborated with UNICEF in 2013, taking a whole systems approach to scrutinize the areas that need improvement in order to address and reduce the infant mortality rate. This was a consultancy from the Ministry of Health to UNICEF.

Since 2003, the Ministry of Health has revised the Maternal and Child Health Manual, as well as developed standard operating practices for obstetrics, midwifery and neonatal care. There has also been increased collaboration with other agencies and Ministries with respect to child protection and security issues, child development, maternal child health and NCDs.

Some findings and recommendations from the Maternity Service Review Committee include: there are late antenatal bookings; there is a limited availability of ultrasound; there are delays in receiving lab reports in medical records; there is a need for increased human resources; there is an inefficient referral system; there is a lack of postnatal visits and the need for a home visiting programme. There are minimal preconception services. There is a need for improved professional development; there is a majority of equipment needs and physical space and infrastructure needs.

Mr. Speaker, I shudder to think that all these negatives existed in the public health system that created a problem with maternal child health and infant mortality rates over the last couple years. And may I remind this honourable House that the People's Partnership has only been in office three and a half years. So, Mr. Speaker, one wonders what has been happening to these deficiencies prior to that. There have been recommendations that include the formation of a directorate for maternal and child health. That is being done in our implementation plan as we speak and we have passed a Note in Cabinet that dictates same.

The appointment of a clinical risk coordinator—Cabinet has already passed a Note on that implementation plan. HR—human resource solutions, that is what we are working on. Standardization of legal age of viability which goes from 28—which keeps up with 28 weeks and 500 grammes. The increased consultant role, the improvement for infrastructure and equipment—we have started a programme, Mr. Speaker, believe it or not, in the last couple years, for the electronic medical record system, the EMRs; and the health cards and the patient cards—thanks to the Minister of Legal Affairs.

There is supposed to be improved communication in referral logs; standardization and implementation of standard operating practices and clinical protocols. It is unfortunate that the previous government could not see it fit to implement these programmes. And also we have done and started the Maternal and Child Health Mortality Review Board. It is starting, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, in reviewing the recommendations from the Review Committee, the Ministry of Health and UNICEF Marginal Budgeting for Bottlenecks 2013

study—and I stress again, 2013 study, Mr. Speaker—and the WHO's Every Newborn Action Plan 2014, there are common threads in the following which have been used to align and develop services and programmes. One, increasing human resources and capacity in specialized fields pertaining to maternal and child care; the development of boards; the Maternal and Child Health inter-agency coalition/directorate for strategic planning and monitoring; the establishment of a death review board; updating national policies and protocols and establishing a well functioning referral system, including those for patient transfer. And also, Mr. Speaker, proper data collection, inclusive of electronic data recording and patient tracking.

Mr. Speaker, child mortality is a basic indicator, as I said before, of the country's development. Latin America and the Caribbean holds the most reduced rate of child mortality in the developing world and Trinidad and Tobago's child mortality rates have been decreasing, and I show: looking at the under-five mortality rate, this was 27.4 in 2002 and this has decreased by 41 per cent, to 16. Approximately 64 per cent of the under-five mortality rate occurs in the neonatal period. Prematurity accounts for 58 per cent of those neonatal deaths; and how do we count prematurity? Twenty-eight weeks. We have been saving babies in the last couple years, Mr. Speaker, of 22 and 23 weeks gestation and under 400 grammes. But those are counted and in other countries they are not even looked at in the statistics.

More than 15 per cent of babies who are born in Trinidad and Tobago are usually born before 37 weeks gestation. You see, Mr. Speaker, the neonatal mortality rate was 20.2 in 2002 and decreased to 9.4 in 2008. The infant mortality rate—this is a probability of dying in the first year of life—it has decreased. It accounts for 89 per cent, sorry, of under-five deaths. It has decreased to 13.2.

Mr. Speaker, the maternal mortality rates, I would like to read it. Country—maternal mortality rates: Barbados, 51; Cuba, 73; Jamaica, 110—this is 2010 figures. Suriname, 130; United Kingdom, 12; United States of America, 21; Venezuela, 92 and Trinidad and Tobago—in 2010—46 and decreasing.

Mr. Speaker, the strategies for addressing the recommendations are: in recognition of the majority of infant deaths occurring in the neonatal period, preventative measures to address these include:

1. Preconception and prenatal care.
2. Health screening for diabetes, hypertension and underlying diseases.

3. Health promotion—optimizing nutrition and physical activity. Family planning—these are just being done—including optimal pregnancy spacing.

Addressing the social factors, including poverty and education—and I thank the Ministry of the People and Social Development, Member for Caroni Central, for assisting us in that regard. Behaviour factors, Mr. Speaker. And just recently passed in this House—the smoking—alcohol and other high risk behaviours.

Mr. Speaker, according to a study conducted by Dr. Bharat Bassaw, and others, in 1995, and Roopnarinesingh et al in 1998, in Trinidad and Tobago, additional risk factors make women more susceptible to adverse health outcomes. A further UWI study by Bassaw et al, in 1995, revealed an incidence of diabetes in pregnancy as nine per thousand births. When compared to women with good sugar control, these babies are six times more likely to have hyalin membrane disease—respiratory disease—and nine times more to have sepsis.

In summary, Mr. Speaker, there is a high prevalence of risk factor for poor outcomes in our fertile female population. Obesity, 35 per cent—that is the Pan American Health Organization, 2012 supported by the STEPS 2012 finding. Diabetes, 19 per cent—PAHO. Adolescent birth rate, 32/1,000 births—CSO, 2013; and HIV prevalence of 1.5. These issues have been addressed throughout the strengthening of the primary health care services and outreach programmes. This highlights the maintenance of a continuum of care from preconception to postnatal care which is a goal of the Government, the Ministry and all concerned.

Training, Mr. Speaker: we have had, in 2013, neonatal resuscitation programmes that were carried out. It included train the trainers to support the sustainability of the programmes. This was sponsored by the Ministry of Health and the Church of Latter Day Saints. There is ongoing paediatric nursing training. In HR: gaps have been identified in the paediatric field and recommendations, Mr. Speaker, were made for paediatric specialities, especially neonatology. In the infrastructure and equipment—the Paediatric Intensive Care Unit was opened in Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex in 2011, led by a specialized paediatric intensivist.

There was the commissioning of the Scarborough Hospital in 2012, including maternal and child health services and soon to have its own MRI and cath lab, Mr. Speaker. There is the Chancery Lane Teaching Hospital—recently opened by UDeCOTT and the Ministry of Health—79 paediatric beds—56 medical; 23 surgical; a birthing suite and maternal; four levels of maternal and paediatric wards—eight, four and four.

There is an increase in the total number of health centres in the community, as well as extending the opening times and range of services provided with enhanced facilities. Mr. Speaker, the Mount Hope Women's Hospital: a contract was awarded last week for a new outpatient building, colposcopy suite, which would include family planning and also in the making is a two-storey birthing facility and postnatal services, including a 40-station NICU—Neonatal Intensive Care Unit—that will be going out for tender. There is point of care testing—on the spot blood testing—widely implemented in many of the health facilities in Trinidad and Tobago. This is a recent addition.

Services and programmes, Mr. Speaker: paediatric services have been decentralized to improve access. Community paediatric programmes in the South West Regional Health Authority. In the North West Regional Health Authority, child assessment unit recently opened in Barataria. The NCRHA is providing children services in three major locations in the community—Arima, Chaguanas and St. Joseph. The expanding programme for immunization has greater than 70 per cent coverage and includes the recent introduction of the HPV into the immunization schedule. This contributes to lowering the mortality and morbidity from communicable diseases.

Mr. Speaker, telemedicine in paediatric: this programme collaborates with the Sick Children's Hospital in Toronto in order to provide expertise. And let us not forget, Mr. Speaker, the first Cabinet Note of this Government and legislation—the Children's Life Fund. [*Desk thumping*] This provides referral and funding for treatment for care not available locally.

3.00 p.m.

Research and Guidelines: The nutritional guidelines have been developed for children, including breastfeeding guidelines and early years, and for school children and school health, and school dietary programmes.

Infection control, Neonatal Intensive Care Unit and record-keeping protocols; electronic medical records.

The UNICEF/MOH Recent Analysis of child mortality has identified challenges and recommendations.

So, in our 2014 plan, Mr. Speaker, we will start the formation of the directorate for maternal and child health internal in the Ministry of Health. There are plans in place for the formation of an inter-agency coalition in the Ministry of Health. There are plans in place for the death review board; it is part of the implementation plan to be developed in the first three months.

There is the construction of the Couva Children's Hospital going apace, offering a wide range of services. There is a child assessment unit going to be opened in St. James. There are paediatric services to be re-established in Port of Spain, with paediatric, cardiac and cardiology services. There is the launch of the e-health card, so we will have the electronic medical record system. There is the national health card that is going to be coming on line in vogue soon. It will record monitoring and tracking.

Mr. Speaker, there has been an adverse event in Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, and a recent adverse event, which is being—and the Attorney General will undertake an independent investigation into that adverse event. I say no more. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have been advised that another ministerial statement is to be made. [*Interruption*] Yes. May I have your attention? The statement is under the name of the hon. Prime Minister. She is not here at the moment. I understand she visited or she is visiting the former President of our country, ANR Robinson, who is currently hospitalized at the St. Clair Medical Centre. I would like, on our behalf, to wish Mr. ANR Robinson, former President, a speedy recovery.

So, hon. Members, we shall revert to that item, Statement by Ministers, later on in the proceedings. We shall now proceed.

STANDING ORDERS COMMITTEE REPORT

(ADOPTION)

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [February 21, 2014]:

Be it resolved that the House adopt the First Report of the Standing Orders Committee of the House of Representatives, Fourth Session (2013/2014), Tenth Parliament.

Question again proposed.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Minister of Science and Technology; Member of Parliament for Toco/Sangre Grande. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Science and Technology (Hon. Dr. Rupert Griffith): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I sincerely thank you for the opportunity to make a few brief remarks on this very important Committee Report—the Standing Orders Committee Report.

Mr. Speaker, I also thank you, and compliment you and the staff of the Standing Orders Committee for the exemplary work that you have done to resolve or to produce a report on the Standing Orders, that we perceive as very, very long overdue.

Mr. Speaker, as you will know, the Standing Orders regulate the procedures of this House and the conduct of the parliamentary business. As you will also know, the Speaker's job—and I am not speaking about the hon. Speaker, hon. Wade Mark. I am speaking about a Speaker's job. And I speak for myself from even experience as one time sitting in that chair, Mr. Speaker.

The job is to maintain order and discipline and to allow Members of Parliament to express their points of debate freely, whilst at the same time allowing the business of the House to proceed. A Speaker must, at all times, be perceived as fair, tolerant, and a balanced facilitator who uses the Standing Orders to encourage debate, expression of differing views, and to maintain—most of all, Mr. Speaker—control of the House. The Standing Orders is that document that guides the Speaker and Members of this House.

Further, the Speaker is responsible for the administration of the Parliament, and he serves as the chief spokesman on matters pertaining to the public. It does not matter whether you have a single two-party Parliament, with one-party in government as an alternative, or even a coalition government with several parties coming together to form a coalition as an alternative, and also an alternative opposition. It does not matter what are the compositions of the political parties. The role of Speaker remains the same, and he is guided by the rules of the Standing Orders to adjudicate over this House.

Mr. Speaker, the matter now before us—the matter now before this honourable House is the First Report of the Standing Orders Committee of the House of Representatives. The Standing Orders of Parliament have, since the independence of our nation, served as the procedural backbone for governing the machinery and the methods of democracy, viz, the House of Parliament, as the rules ensure that our parliamentary processes allow for fair and reasonable consideration before final decisions are made.

To this end, work has been duly undertaken by the Standing Orders Committee, which was capably led by your good self, Mr. Speaker. The work of the Committee has been driven with a view to ensuring the Standing Orders of the House; not only the well-established practices of the House but also to ensure that the Standing Orders remain cogent and relevant to the current exigencies of a modern parliamentary democracy.

In fact, the report shows that since 1962, 53 years or so ago, the Standing Orders were written and it was only amended in 2000. This fact is explained in the Report, on page 4, paragraph 11. I want to just quote that to substantiate this fact. It tells us that we have been working with Standing Orders that are long overdue for amendment. And I quote, Mr. Speaker, page 4, paragraph 11. It says:

“Since 1961, the Standing Orders have been amended once only”—and that—
“is in September 2000 upon the introduction of the Departmental Joint Select Committees, established under section 66A of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the Standing Orders were amended to provide for new procedures to operationalize these Departmental Joint Select Committees. However, over time practice has overtaken several Standing Orders.”—and that is a fact.—“and consequently, a comprehensive review was long overdue.”

And I end the quote.

Mr. Speaker, in fact, the report shows that following 2000, many of the existing Standing Orders—some of them not mentioned here, and many of them mentioned in the report—badly needed review. Areas such as the areas of referring to Her Majesty, or the Governor of Trinidad and Tobago, were all in the Standing Orders, which we were operating under. But the primary areas in this new Standing Orders Report have been highlighted and addressed for revision to relate to the following—and I list them, Mr. Speaker: One, election of a Speaker. Very critical. I spoke briefly about the role and function of the Speaker governing this House in terms of how we operate our democracy in Trinidad and Tobago.

The second emphasis follows the time limit of speeches. And, Mr. Speaker, we sit here from Friday to Friday, and other times, and realize that in many of the debates, the discussions are very repetitive, and very often—and I dare say, Mr. Speaker, with the greatest of respect—irrelevant at times. But the time limits on speeches will allow, in my opinion, and the opinion of my colleagues on this side, a better and more ordered Parliament.

And thirdly, the committee system. Very effective. The establishment of revised guidelines as it relates to the election of a Speaker of the House, as well as the time limit for speeches, are aimed at imbuing the required level of certainty as well as regularity and consistency in the deliberations of this House. This augurs well towards the provision of qualitative representation.

Mr. Speaker, consonant with the drive towards fostering greater transparency, integrity and accountability in the conduct of governmental affairs, it is with great commendation that the introduction of the nine new committees of the House have been duly established, which are as follows: One, The Public Accounts Enterprise Committee. This Committee shall have the duty of considering and reporting on the audited accounts of entrepreneurs, and shall expressly consider whether policies are carried out effectively, efficiently and economically, and whether expenditure conforms to the authority which governs it. So very, very critical and important committee.

The second committee to be established, is the Departmental Joint Select Committee, and this committee shall—and I use the word “shall”—be empowered to investigate, enquire into and report on the administration, the manner of the exercise of powers, method of functioning and any criteria adopted by the Ministry or body, which is assigned to it by the House.

The third committee, Mr. Speaker, the Public Administration and Appropriation Committee, which shall have the duty of considering and reporting on the budgetary expenditure and administration of the governmental agencies—very critical committee.

Four: The Committee on National Security which shall have the duty of considering and reporting on all matters related to national security policy of Trinidad and Tobago. And, Mr. Speaker, you know national security is big on the agenda of this administration and the hon. Prime Minister.

Five: The Committee on Energy Affairs which shall have the duty of considering and reporting on all matters related to the expenditure, administration and policy in relation to energy affairs.

Six: The Committee on Foreign Affairs—and there was also a Foreign Affairs Committee already on the current Standing Orders, but this Committee shall have the duty of considering and reporting on all matters pertaining to foreign affairs. So the Parliament will be kept abreast on contemporary issues, not only affecting Trinidad and Tobago, but affairs affecting us—global affairs affecting us.

Seven: The Committee on Human Rights, Diversity, the Environment and Sustainable Development. This committee shall have a duty of considering and reporting on matters of compliance with human rights, social justice and equality, as well as the environment and sustainable development.

Eight: The Parliament Broadcasting Committee which shall have the duty of considering from time to time, and reporting on all matters related to the live broadcasting and televising of parliamentary proceedings.

Mr. Speaker, I want to recall that when I sat in that very chair the idea was broached to have a parliamentary television and radio. At that time, there were lots of resistance. Many felt that Members would be caught off-guard. Some Members may be sleeping, and a whole host of things. But at that time, some years ago, I saw the importance of having a parliament broadcasting station, so that the people, at whatever points of presence they are, can observe what is happening in the national Parliament.

Hon. Member: You have had vision long time!

Hon. Dr. R. Griffith: Long time.

And finally, nine, Mr. Speaker, the Committee on Government Assurances, which treats with the matter of assurances, promises, undertakings, given by Ministers, as well—and I want to add, not only Ministers, Mr. Speaker, I think it is also any promise or accountability given by Members of the Opposition, or Members of Parliament; they should also be accountable, and from time to time on the floor give standard to it.

So, Mr. Speaker, it is clear that the application of the ambit of the committee system serves to concretize and reinforce the overriding function of the House of Representatives as the democratic vanguard for the people of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Further to this, Mr. Speaker, the introduction of new Standing Orders, which pertain to extraordinary sitting of the House, Prime Minister's questions and urgent questions, allow for greater flexibility in raising matters of great importance and/or urgency for deliberation and debate in the House of Representatives. So that is another powerful and positive step in the conduct of this House.

Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Science and Technology, it is also noted with great approbation that the accepted forms of communication in the Parliament have adapted to the digital environment as is recommended. That is, the term "writing" is amended to include any communication which is handwritten or printed or as delivered or transmitted by fax, post or any electronic means.

This is a positive step, because Trinidad and Tobago, like the rest of the world, is moving towards a paperless society. But as Minister, I would like to include other communication systems that we can use in this Parliament, such as smartphones or Android phones, laptops, tablets, PCs, and fax, and any other manner approved by the Clerk of the House.

This should also include the Parliament's website. And, Mr. Speaker, the real time updating of the Parliament's website is of paramount importance at this time. It should be real time. And even as we speak and debate in this House, the wider public, or even the world should be able to lock into what is happening in the nation's Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 18 now provides for the broadcasting of proceedings of the House on television, radio and Internet, which allows for Web streaming of the proceedings of the House, such as will expand the reach of the audience to any listener at any part of the world with Internet connectivity.

I want to just end now by bringing my contribution to a close. I would like to underscore the Government's unwavering support towards the development of a thriving, modern democracy, and in this regard, the much needed amendments to the Standing Orders of the House of Representatives. This represents a significant step, Mr. Speaker, towards the evolution and embellishment of the procedural, democratic machinery, which will augur to the benefit of this blessed country and the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Colm Imbert (*Diego Martin North/East*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, it gives me pleasure to join this debate, especially as I was a member of the committee that reported and made recommendations with respect to revision of the Standing Orders.

Previous speakers have spoken about the fact that our Standing Orders have been in existence for in excess of 50 years without amendment, or without significant amendment.

In the previous Parliament, a committee was appointed under the chairmanship, I believe, of the Member for Arouca South at the time, and a report was presented, which represented the consensus of the House, or the consensus of those members of the committee, which represented both sides of the House. One of the more fundamental recommendations made in the previous report, which, unfortunately, was not debated because an early election was called, was the reduction in speaking time. And while some misgivings have been expressed with respect to the reduction in speaking time—because there is a view that in the Parliament the Government will have its way, and the Opposition will have its

say. And, really, one of the few things that an Opposition Member of Parliament can do is talk and represent his or her constituents; bring points of view to bear on legislation, and so on; ask questions, et cetera.

So there is a misgiving—and this even found itself into some of the deliberations—with respect to the reduction in speaking time. And the view was that when you reduce the speaking time of a Member who is an Opposition Member, or does not have a portfolio, you are short-changing that Member, and short-changing their constituents in terms of representation. And the argument has some merit. But, in my opinion, Mr. Speaker, 75 minutes is just far too long. There are not many Members who can speak convincingly, sensibly, coherently and with relevance for 75 minutes.

Hon. Member: Except you.

Mr. C. Imbert: Yes, true. I accept that.

But, Mr. Speaker, most members, including—especially new members, find difficulty in speaking for more than 30 minutes. And these are facts. I mean, speaking for myself, when I started off in this Parliament, I found it difficult to speak for 75 minutes. In fact, I found it hard to speak for more than 20 minutes. And, really, after the first 30 minutes or so, unless you are an experienced parliamentarian, it is very difficult not to fall into the trap of tedious repetition. And, therefore, I completely support the recommendation that speaking time be reduced to a total of 40 minutes, with one caveat—and this was a recommendation made by the Leader of the Opposition, which I also made. I think we should round it off at 45; 30 plus 15. That is my opinion. And when we get to the end of this debate, I will be making that recommendation. It should be 30 minutes original time; 15 minutes extension. But that is about it. And if you cannot make your point in 45 minutes, well, you might as well sit down.

But there are several benefits that will come from the reduction in speaking time, Mr. Speaker. Not just the fact that with the shortened time MPs will be forced, or should be forced to be more relevant or more focused on the matter being debated, and therefore you would have far more—I hesitate to use this word, but I will use it—intelligent debates than we sometimes have, where MPs filibuster and waste time.

Quite apart from that—quite apart from the fact that the reduction in speaking time would make MPs more focused on the task at hand, it will also allow more participation by Members of the House. Because what happens, when persons speak for 75 minutes—and most Members of Parliament, given 75 minutes, decide to use the whole 75 minutes; and if they had 95, they would use it; and if

they had 105, they would use it to ramble on. By reducing the speaking time to 40 minutes—and I am recommending 45—you would be able to get in several speakers before the adjournment.

Sometimes at this time we are getting three or four speakers at most. Sometimes we just get in two speakers before the tea break. By reducing it to 45 minutes—[*Interruption*]

Miss Cox: Especially the statements.

Mr. C. Imbert: Yes. I am coming to the statements, because we had an example today of an abuse, in my opinion; an abuse of parliamentary process, where a Minister rambled on for about half an hour on a ministerial statement. And one of the best recommendations in this Standing Orders Report is that ministerial statements will be limited to 10 minutes. That is long overdue; long overdue. And what governments tend to do—and we, when I was in Government, were guilty of it, especially on Private Members' Day—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: At least you are honest.

Mr. C. Imbert: No; it is a fact.

Hon. Member: Well, in this regard.

Mr. C. Imbert: What governments tend to do on Private Members' Day, and even on ordinary days for Government Business, is they take up most of the early part of the session with ministerial statements. And you cannot even answer. A Minister may be speaking for 30 minutes. It is not a debate, so you cannot get up and question him, or respond, and so on, and a Minister may be, in fact, making some very outlandish and inaccurate statements. It is wrong. It is undemocratic. And, therefore, the reduction in ministerial statement time to 10 minutes, I warmly endorse and embrace that, and I am glad it will be applicable to all future governments as well.

But coming back to the question of reducing the speaking time; now that it will be down to 40 or 45 minutes, ministerial statements down to 10 minutes, we can get going with the business of the day before 2.30, or at the very latest by 2.30, and there will be two hours taking us to the tea break, and therefore we can get in four speakers, where, at present, we can barely get in two. And, you know, the media has a tendency—they tend to leave at 4.30. So I think it is best for all concerned that we reduce this time and have more participation. Because what tends to happen at eight or nine o'clock in the night—we are all human beings. You know, it is unconscionable that you ask workers—and we are workers—to

start work at 8.00 in the morning or 7.00; some of us start at 6.00 as Members of Parliament, and at nine o'clock in the night, you are still working. No overtime; no hazard pay; no shift premium. *[Interruption]*

We will come to that in a little while. It is unconscionable that we are being asked to go to nine, 10, 11, 12 o'clock midnight—

Hon. Member: Slave labour.

Mr. C. Imbert: Slave labour. I agree. I totally agree. And one of the benefits of reducing the time to 40 or 45 minutes is that far more participation will occur among Members. So you could get six, seven, eight Members in by eight o'clock in the night, and you can have a proper debate with this 40-minute thing. And we could easily complete our business by eight o'clock or nine o'clock in the night with full participation of a significant number of speakers from both sides. So that is one of the benefits. It will allow a much higher standard of debate and much greater participation from Members opposite.

Because as I said, the point I was making, as human beings, by nine o'clock we are tired. We have been on our feet since eight or seven o'clock in the morning. By 9.00 p.m., you are working more than 12 hours. I mean, you are supposed to get triple time for that, once you have crossed 12 hours.

Hon. Member: You forced us to take a debate for 27 hours, because you filed it.

Mr. C. Imbert: Very well. But, you know, I am being very serious about what I am saying. I mean, this is for the future. Forget the politics in all of this. This is for the future. This applies to both Opposition and Government. And we will have a much higher quality of debate and a much greater participation with the reduction in speaking time. So I am all for it with just that minor amendment that we round it off at 45 minutes.

Now, Mr. Speaker, some of the other features of these Standing Orders that I am interested in, and I think the public needs to be aware of, are changes—*[Interruption]* You know what I mean. I am coming to that. And we have a salaries debate later on, so do not worry.

One of the changes made here in these Standing Orders—in these proposed Standing Orders—is to—Mr. Speaker, could you control?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, would you allow the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East to speak in silence. You have my full protection.

Mr. C. Imbert: There is a little excitement today because there is a nomination day for PNM's internal election, so they are a little excited.

Mr. Speaker: A lot of excitement.

Mr. C. Imbert: But that is for another place. That is not for here.

Mr. Speaker, we had a situation during the 18/18, where I sat over there and my counterpart at the time was the hon. Ganga Singh, sat over there, and the hon. Ganga Singh walked with a file, about so thick, with names, because we both had 18 seats in the Parliament. So we made a proposal. I think our first proposal might have been Max Richards and our second one might have been Eustace Seignoret. And I think on this side it was a gentleman who is now chairman of NIPDEC, who I did not know at the time at all. But the thing was treated almost, by some people, as a bit farcical. So we just went through the process; nominated one name; the other side nominated another name. We voted; 18/18. And so it went on and on and on, until it became obvious that no one would break ranks and the votes would be split 18/18.

As a consequence, Mr. Speaker, we could not elect a Speaker. As a consequence, Members of Parliament were denied their salary, and had to go to the Privy Council to get their salary, because at that time there was a view in the Public Service that until and unless a Member of Parliament took the oath of office, he was not entitled to receive his salary. That was the view. That was corrected by the Privy Council.

But because a Speaker could not be elected because the votes were evenly divided, there was no one to take the oath of office, and, therefore, those MPs were left without their salaries until the decision of the highest court of our land.

In addition, the Government, of which I was a part, was unable to pass a budget. So that after the budgetary period expired on September 30, 2002, the then Government—PNM Government—did not have a majority, and was unable to pass a new budget, so an election was inevitable. And that is why the election of 2002 was called, because we could not continue under the present system. You can fund the country for about one month after the 30th September. After that, there is no appropriation, and you cannot run the country. So that is why the election of 2002 was held. There was no Speaker; no possibility of convening a sitting of Parliament to have a budget.

What is proposed now is that in the event of a tie—and this is for the election of a Speaker—the Clerk shall proceed in accordance with paragraph 10 of the Standing Orders. And paragraph 10 of these Standing Orders, which is Standing Order 4:

“...after the holding of a ballot referred to in paragraph (9) of this Standing Order the votes remain equal”—if—“the Clerk must determine by lot which candidate is to be eliminated.”

So the Clerk will just draw a straw and decide.

Now, one might say that is an unfair and undemocratic way of doing things, but that is a standard practice in many jurisdictions; that when you have an election and the votes are tied, you have to find some way of determining who the winner is. And in this case, what is proposed, the Clerk will determine by lot—just drawing lots—as to who the Speaker will be.

So what it will mean—although it is unlikely, because we now have an uneven number of parliamentarians, but it could happen at some time in the future when they change the composition of the House again. We might come back to an equal number. We might have a tie. In this case, the Clerk will determine, by lot, which candidate is to be eliminated. You will have a Speaker. You will still have trouble running the Parliament, because if you have an equality of votes on each side, although you have a Speaker, you might have some serious difficulty in passing measures and motions and bills, and so on. But, at least the Parliament can run, because a Speaker will be elected. You will have a Presiding Officer who will be in charge of the Parliament. So that is one innovation which I warmly endorse in the new proposed Standing Orders.

The other innovation which, you know, I am not too sure I am in agreement with, but I will go along with it, now Standing Orders have been made for the first time to deal with the lacuna, that is section 49A of the Constitution, where there is confusion over the leader of the party in the House of Representatives—and this is for the purpose of the Crossing of the Floor Act. You know, the Crossing of the Floor Act itself is highly controversial. I have my own view on it. I am not sure if it is a democratic piece of legislation. But it exists; it is on our books. And it could not have been activated before. Even though a decision was made by the present Speaker—that could have been challenged; it was not—when the Member for St. Joseph resigned. But be that as it may, we are now dealing with that problem. So that the Standing Order that is being recommended to solve that problem is as follows:

“For the purpose of section 49A(5) of the Constitution, the Speaker shall recognize as Leader of a party in the House of Representatives the person who commands the support of the greatest number of Members of such party in the House.”

Which is also obvious and logical. So now if the Member to my rear—
[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Let him rest, “nah”.

Mr. C. Imbert:—had another member—if he had another Member and that Member decided to cross—attempted to cross the floor, then the Speaker could recognize the Member for Chaguanas West as the leader—the person who commands the support of the greatest number, where you actually have to have another one. He will have to have two with him, because it would be one against one.

Actually, Mr. Speaker, there will be a problem if the particular leader does not have at least one other supporter with him. But be that as it may, this is a very unique situation, and that—it is a very unique situation to have one member from a political party in the House; very unique. It is reminiscent of the 1940s and the 1950s—the old Legislative Council—when men of wealth were elected to this House in their personal name. It is very reminiscent of the '40s and the '50s. I am not sure if you will ever see it again in the foreseeable future.

But be that as it may, that settles that. So we will no longer have this problem of trying to determine whether decisions made by Speakers—because two different Speakers have made two different decisions on this matter. Former Speaker McClean, when asked to deal with the crossing of the floor by the former—now current Member for Sangre Grande and the Member for Point Fortin—said he was unable to deal with it; that he looked at the legislation and he thought it ambiguous, and he could not deal with it, and he did not. He decided not to. He said, “I cannot figure out what to do. The Standing Orders need to be made.” The new Speaker had no such problem, and did an interpretation and made a decision, and it was not challenged. But that will no longer need to be interpreted by a court, because it is now being settled by these new Standing Orders.

The other innovation that I am very pleased to see is the new Standing Order 12, that:

“Except as otherwise provided by these Standing Orders, every sitting of the House shall begin at 1.30..., and unless previously adjourned, shall end at 8.00 p.m. on the same day.”

That is a very wise Standing Order, and I think we need to stick with that. We have no business in this place after eight o'clock in the night; especially those—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Warner: Unless you are a “Lagahoo”.

Mr. C. Imbert: Yes, true. Unless—well, you, that is you. You could say that when you are talking.

Because, Mr. Speaker, many of us begin work at six o'clock in the morning. If you are an elected representative, more often than not, you begin work at six o'clock in the morning, and by eight o'clock you have been working for 14 hours straight. So that I welcome this significant change in terms of the times of sitting. And I hope we stick to it too. I hope no government will try to waive the Standing Orders to move the time beyond eight o'clock, especially now that the speaking time has been reduced to 40 minutes or 45 minutes as the case may be.

I also would like to point out that there have been some changes made to questions. And one thing in particular—an innovation—I know I am not supposed to bring the Speaker into the debate, but I would like to give some credit for this to the current Speaker in terms of the Prime Minister's question time. I wonder that—Mr. Speaker, if you would allow me; I wonder if you got a little pressure for introducing this innovation, that the Prime Minister will now be subjected to questions. I could imagine there must have been some raised eyebrows.

Hon. Member: Prime Minister or the Acting Prime Minister?

Mr. C. Imbert: Prime Minister. Well, whoever is acting will also have to answer. And what we are going to have now is once a month in the second sitting of the House, each month, there will be a Prime Minister's question time at the time designated in the order of business, and during that time questions may be put to the Prime Minister relating to matters of national importance, general performance of the Government, or governmental agencies; and there is a 30-minute time period allowed for this.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I had the privilege of witnessing how Prime Ministers' question time works in the House of Commons. I was part of a delegation—a Public Accounts Committee delegation that went to the House of Commons about a year ago. And one of the things we actually saw was Prime Minister's question time. And what we found interesting; the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Mr. Cameron, walked in with a huge file like this; tabbed. And his handlers or his advisors had prepared for him a document with every possible question that they thought could be asked of him, and it was tabbed. And it was quite amazing.

I did not think there was any theatre in any of this. I did not think there was any conspiracy between the Opposition and the Government in the House of Commons. I thought it was quite spontaneous. Members of the Opposition and even Members of the Government would get up and ask the Prime Minister questions and he would immediately just go to this long file, go to the tab and answer the question. Quite interesting, and, I think very important—a very

important innovation for our Parliament, that the Leader of the Government can be put on the spot once a month and be made to answer questions of national importance.

Because sometimes when you get answers from ministers, they tend to waffle, you know; they tend to dodge; they tend to duck; they do not answer the question. They evade the issue; and one would expect that the Prime Minister would not do that during question time.

The other very interesting innovation in these Standing Orders, Mr. Speaker, is the formation of new committees. And the committees that are being formed include, in addition to the Departmental Joint Select Committees, the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committees, which exist at present, we are now getting a Committee on Public Administration and Appropriation; Committee on National Security; Committee on Energy Affairs; Committee on Foreign Affairs; Committee on Human Rights, Diversity, the Environment, and Sustainable Development; a Parliamentary Broadcasting committee; a very unusual innovation; Committee on Government Assurances. And let me start in reverse order.

“The Committee on Government Assurances shall scrutinize the assurances, promises and undertakings given by Ministers from time to time on the floor of the House and report on:

- (a) the extent to which such assurances, promises and undertakings have been implemented; and
- (b) when such assurances, promises and undertakings have been implemented and whether such implementation has taken place within the minimum time necessary for the purpose.”

Now, for example, if we had this Committee, this pretence that I received from the Minister of Community Development and Minister of Works and Infrastructure today when an assurance had been given by the former Minister of Community Development, the hon. Member for Naparima, that the new community centre in Bagatelle would be constructed in 2013, in answer to a question from the Leader of the Opposition—actually, the centre is in my constituency, but we are all from Diego Martin, and the Leader of the Opposition asked the question—the Minister of Community Development at the time said, in 2011, to our consternation, that that community centre, which had been started and stopped, would be reconstructed in 2013. That was an assurance given by a government Minister.

The whole of 2013 passed; not a nail driven; not a bag of cement appeared on the Bagatelle Community Centre. Now in this new committee—the Committee on Government Assurances, Promises, Undertakings—this committee would be able to scrutinize that undertaking, and report to the Parliament with respect to the failure of the former Minister—well, not the former Minister, the new Minister—to follow up on the undertaking given by his predecessor, same Government, to construct the Bagatelle Centre in 2013. But because there was no such committee in the past, it allowed the incumbent to dodge and duck today, and pretend he did not understand the question, when I asked him if he knew that his predecessor had promised to build that centre in 2013.

So this is a very, very important committee. And for hon. Members opposite, when you go into opposition next year, this will be important for you to follow up on promises and undertakings given by the new incoming PNM Government; very important for you.

Hon. Member: Under Penny Beckles? [*Laughter*]

Mr. C. Imbert: And, Mr. Speaker, another assurance that was given, back in 2012, when the Country Club wall collapsed in a flood, an assurance was given by the then Minister that work would begin within a couple weeks. That was back in 2011/2012. We are now in 2014, and I had to listen to some Anancy story about how the Government needs to get the consent—so the Government that acquired the property in 2010. It is now public state lands; not private lands. Government acquired the property, but I had to listen to “a” nancy story today, from a Government minister, when his Government gave the assurance back in 2012, that the Country Club wall be reconstructed, and that eyesore that all of us who travel to Maraval every day, including the Member for Chaguanas East, looking at that eyesore, that collapsed wall, every single day for two years, the assurance given by the Government in 2012 would have been the subject of public scrutiny, committee scrutiny, from 2012 to now, and hopefully a source of constant embarrassment to the Government.

So I welcome this committee, Mr. Speaker. It would put the spotlight on promises and undertakings given by Members of the Government in this House and allow proper parliamentary scrutiny of promises, so that these promises will not be empty promises, like the promise to reconstruct that wall in Maraval within a two-week period that was given way back in 2012.

So to me, that is an excellent innovation, Mr. Speaker, and it is something that, certainly for the next year—because after that I would probably have to report to that committee, but certainly for the next year, I would be happy to

receive reports from that committee on assurances given by Members of the Government. As I said, in 2015, I may find myself appearing before that committee to report on assurances that I may have given as a Member of the new Government, Mr. Speaker. But I look forward to it.

Let us go now to the Committee on Energy Affairs. Mr. Speaker, if we had a Committee on Energy Affairs, we could have a serious, informed and hopefully non-partisan debate on how we should plot the future of the Petrotrin Refinery and the Petrotrin Production Operations, Mr. Speaker, because there has been a debate for some years as to whether Petrotrin should focus on exploration and production of hydrocarbons, or it should focus on refining of hydrocarbons. And depending on whichever government is in place, they change the focus.

Some governments feel that, “Look, we should spend money on upgrading the refinery”, not recognizing that when you do that the margins on petroleum products—when you take crude oil and refine it into gasoline and whatever else, depending on the price of oil, the margins may be very small; you may find the refinery very uncompetitive. And therefore all the money you spend, the billions of dollars you spend upgrading the refinery may go to naught. You spend \$10 billion, or whatever it is, and you achieve nothing, because the margin on the difference from the crude product and the refined product is not even capable of covering the expense of refining the product.

On the other hand, if you focus on exploration and production, you may get more of your natural resources available, you may get more value for money, you may get more income. If we had a properly functioning Committee on Energy Affairs, these are the things that we could discuss and chart the way forward. And it is not politics; it is not a partisan thing. You get the best heads together and discuss these things.

We could have a discussion, for example, on that controversial agreement with Venezuela on the monetization of the cross border reserves in the Loran-Manatee field, and they would not have this shroud of secrecy, so the Parliament itself does not even know what was agreed to in Caracas with respect to the monetization of Loran-Manatee, where there are vast, untapped reserves of natural gas straddling the border, and we have to come to an agreement with Venezuela. But if we could put the best heads together from both sides of the House to look at it and chart a way forward in terms of exploiting our energy resources, it would redound to the benefit of this country. So I am anxiously awaiting this, Mr. Speaker. I am anxiously awaiting this committee.

We could talk about the pricing of natural gas, for example; whether you should use natural gas as an incentive to stimulate industry and production; whether the price of natural gas should be on a break-even basis; whether it should be on a competitive basis; whether it should be at a discount in order to encourage industries to come here to Trinidad and Tobago. These are the things we need to discuss; the whole question of the production of electricity. I am assuming that will come under the general subset of energy; that energy would not be narrowly defined as petroleum products. And it will be all energy: solar energy; wind power, and the generation of electricity. And we could discuss why Trinidad and Tobago does not have an official or a proper renewable energy policy.

We are one of the few countries in the world that we do not have a policy on renewable energy sources; on how we should try to move away from dependence on fossil fuels, and move towards renewable energy sources. There are some countries in the world, Mr. Speaker, like Sweden, for example, that over 50 per cent of their energy is got from renewable energy sources, like solar energy, wind power, biomass, and so on. We do not have these discussions in Trinidad and Tobago. What we have instead is antagonistic discussions; adversarial discussions; argumentative discussions. [*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: That is by you!

Mr. C. Imbert: Whatever. If you—that is why I am looking forward to this Committee on Energy Affairs, so we can discuss these things; trying to increase our utilization of renewable energy, of solar energy, of wind power and other forms of renewable energy, Mr. Speaker; trying to move away from dependence on fossil fuels and hydrocarbons. So I am looking forward to that.

With respect to the Committee on National Security; again, if it were possible, if we could engage in a non-partisan approach; crime affects all of us. Every government has been bedevilled by crime. The current Government is no exception. Forget all the old talk, and the “grand charge” and the gallery, and so on; we have an unacceptable murder rate. We had an unacceptable murder rate in the past, and we have an unacceptable murder rate now. But if we had a bipartisan approach to dealing with the big picture: the question of drug trafficking and trafficking in arms and ammunitions, and so on, and what our national, global strategy should be in terms of national security, I am sure we would be better off as a country if we could put our collective heads together.

And that is why the Committee on National Security—and I am certainly hoping, and I am asking the Government to make a commitment; because you

have brought these Standing Orders here. This is a Government motion. And you are asking for the creation of the Committee on Energy Affairs, and the Committee on National Security, and the Committee on Foreign Affairs, and the Committee on Public Administration. I am hoping these committees will function. They will not just be on paper. It will not just be lip service to the whole idea of the Parliament as an institution.

And I cannot resist talking about pay. Because if we are going to have Committees on Energy Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, National Security, Public Administration, in addition to Public Accounts, et cetera, then we will be here whole week, Mr. Speaker. And, you know, that has been recognized in these Standing Orders; hidden away in Standing Order 112: “General Procedures in Select Committees”; times of committee meetings. “And I musbe miss this”:

“Select Committee Meetings may be held on”

Mondays between 8.00 a.m. and 4.00 p.m.;

Tuesdays between 8.00 a.m. and 1.00 p.m.;

And, of course, you have Senate. [*Interruption*] It is not after, because you have Senate after that.

“Wednesdays between 8.00 a.m. and 4.00 p.m.;

Thursdays between 8.00 a.m. and 4.00 p.m.;

Fridays between 8.00 a.m. and 1.00 p.m.”—and then you have a sitting of the House.

So if there was ever any thought in any uninformed person’s mind that parliamentarians are part-time, which we most certainly are not, it is just some foolish thought in some uninformed person’s mind, one would think this would now disappear with this report, because it is 8.00 to 4.00 every single day. And I hope this also deals with the issue raised by the honourable President, when he said we must start work at 8.00. Well we do, and we intend to, because the Committee meetings have been set from eight o’clock in the morning, Mr. Speaker, every single day.

So, you know, if this is the kind of work we are going to be doing as parliamentarians, and if together we are going to be charting the way forward for this country in terms of energy, national security, foreign affairs, human rights, the environment, sustainable development, public administration, if we are going

to be working on this together as an entity, and we are going to be here from 8.00 to 4.00, in addition to our representational function, which will obviously entail working after these normal working hours, and on weekends, and so on, then only a very selfish person would say that Members of Parliament should not be paid on a full-time basis, and paid commensurate with their responsibilities, Mr. Speaker.

Now, there are other things in these Standing Orders; there are other things inside of here. One of the innovations is that there shall now be five days for the budget debate. I have always found it is almost impossible to complete the budget debate by eight o'clock on the fourth day. Impossible. And you find yourself having to go to two o'clock in the morning in order to accommodate everybody, because everybody wants to speak in a budget debate. All Members of the Government want to speak; all Members of the Opposition want to speak. So, invariably between 30 to 40 Members speak in a budget debate. And to cram that into four days, because the current Standing Orders require you to finish in four days; virtually impossible.

So now that we have reduced the speaking time to 40 or 45 minutes, as the case may be, and increased the time for the budget debate to five days, then I am sure we are going to have proper participation during daylight hours; focused debate by all Members, and it could only enhance the quality of contributions on the national budget, which is something that is extremely important, Mr. Speaker.

I also hope that the Government understands the new procedure that is in Standing Order 82, where

“The Estimates shall, upon presentation to the House, stand referred to the Standing Finance Committee. The Appropriation Bill upon being read a second time, shall stand committed to that Committee. By resolution the House may, in its discretion, also refer to the...Committee any other matter...relating to expenditure.”

So what this means, after the budget debate is finished, before the budget can be approved, the estimates must be referred to the Standing Finance Committee, which now has five days to examine the estimates together with the Appropriation Bill. And I am hopeful that this would be properly done. And we have also made a change with respect to the chairman of the Finance Committee. It is now going to be the Speaker. And I am hoping that with the Speaker chairing the Finance Committee that Members of Parliament would be given a proper opportunity to comment on the estimates, so that the estimates will not be a rubber stamp as they are now.

The practice now and in the past has been the Government uses its majority to railroad through the whole discussion. There is virtually no discussion on the estimates on the heads of expenditure; no give and take; no back and forth between members at all; no proper explanation as to what is happening. It is done in secret so that the public does not know what is going on, and at the end of the day, the public is none the wiser in terms of individual appropriations and allocations for heads of expenditure in the various Ministries. I am hoping all of this will change. Because, correct me if I am wrong, my understanding is now this will now be in public. The Finance Committee proceedings will be in public. So for five days after the budget is read, you will have a detailed examination of the estimates, which is now going to be held in public, chaired by the Speaker.

So you are not going to have this one-man show; this one-man upmanship where the Minister of Finance and the Economy just comes in and says, “Approved, approved, approved”, and five minutes later, it is done. That is an insult to democracy, Mr. Speaker. And I am hopeful that this entire system will now change; the public will get a much better appreciation of what the Government is doing, and what the Parliament is doing on its behalf.

So, Mr. Speaker, I completely support these Standing Orders. I just have one recommendation, that the time of speaking be changed from 30 plus 10 to 30 plus 15. That is something you could discuss at the appropriate time. I am not sure how it is done. Probably we have to move an amendment to the Motion. And I will most certainly move an amendment in that regard; that the extension will be 15 minutes instead of 10. But other than that, I see this as the beginning of a modern Parliament in Trinidad and Tobago; a participatory Parliament; a functional Parliament. *[Interruption]*

That is all right. Actually, it is not, you know. I still have about eight minutes of the 40 minutes. But I see this as beginning—and I have to pay credit to the current Speaker. I mean, he pushed, and we are here, and this is going to be done during his tenure as Speaker. *[Desk thumping]* I must compliment him for that. Other Speakers would not have—may not have done it. I hope they are not vexed listening to me. But this current Speaker pushed and pushed and pushed and got this done, and he must get some of the credit for us modernizing our—*[Interruption and crosstalk]* Campaigning who? He has no vote in PNM. *[Laughter]* I am giving credit where credit is due.

So, Mr. Speaker, I hope we can adjust the speaking time from 30 plus 10 to 30 plus 15. But with respect to everything else, I welcome this. And I hope now

those people who stand up outside and say parliamentarians must starve, and they should not be paid, and they are only skylarking, when they now see that we are going to have committee meetings from 8.00 to 4.00 every day, plus sittings of Parliament, plus the Parliament being empowered to deal with matters of importance such as energy, national security, public administration, foreign affairs, that they will not be so myopic in their perspective and not be so selfish in their outlook. [*Interruption and crosstalk*]

We have a matter—we have salaries review too, you know. I will deal with that then.

They will not be so selfish in their interpretation of the responsibilities of parliamentarians. I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I did indicate earlier that the hon. Prime Minister has a statement to make and we are going to now revert to Statements by Ministers.

I now call on the hon. Prime Minister. [*Desk thumping*]

STATEMENT BY MINISTER
Commission of Enquiry Report
(1990 Attempted Coup)

The Prime Minister (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as Members of this honourable House would be aware, a Commission of Enquiry into the Attempted Coup of 27th July 1990, was initiated by my Government and appointed on September 06, 2010 on our advice to then Acting President of our Republic, His Excellency Mr. Timothy Hamel-Smith.

Mr. Speaker, this was a major and paramount decision taken early by our partnership Government to enquire into the infamous and ill-fated attempted coup of 1990. Yesterday, the Chairman of the Commission presented its voluminous report to the President, His Excellency Justice Anthony Carmona, who forwarded a copy of the report to me as Prime Minister.

It is instructive that the Commissioners noted in the preamble that prior to the appointment as a Commission in 2010—which I note was soon after we took office—the Commission pointed out that there was no official public enquiry into the circumstances surrounding the attempted coup which occurred 20 years earlier; that is in 1990, 20 years down to 2010. And so I am pleased, Mr. Speaker, to lay this report in this honourable House for the benefit of study and debate by Members of the House, and by members of the national community.

The report comprises four volumes, Mr. Speaker. The first volume comprises 12 chapters, and basically gives the summary and overview, the terms of reference, and so on. So this is volume one.

Within volume one is contained a chapter 12, which is mentioned in the volume one, but has been put into a separate volume—volume four. So chapter 12 is contained in volume four.

Mr. Speaker, this chapter 12, as in volume four, was labelled “Confidential” in the report. After due deliberation and after study of this report yesterday in the National Security Council we have decided, as a Government, that we will waive the confidentiality of this part of the report, chapter 12, and we do so, respecting the wishes of the Commission, that they had wanted to keep it as confidential, but we believe that this could assist all of us in debate, in study, and allow us to move forward to ensure, and to take appropriate steps for planning, that we do not fall into the same fate as had happened in 1990.

And, so, as I lay the report, Government will waive the confidentiality and place this in. I thought long and hard on it, as I say, and we discussed it. I said should we withhold it, the entire report will be shadowed as to what it is that was being hidden, what it is we are trying to hide. As I see it, there is nothing to hide, and there is all to gain from getting the full benefit [*Desk thumping*] of the entire report of the Commission.

So volume one, 12 chapters containing the confidential chapter, which is separate, chapter 12, volume four; volume two and volume three, both of which are with respect to the various pieces of evidence, which came to the Commissioners. So basically, these four chapters are a voluminous amount of work, Mr. Speaker. Can we congratulate all the Commissioners [*Desk thumping*]*—three years of work—for this report.*

Mr. Speaker, I think the nation is fully aware that our illustrious former President and Prime Minister, His Excellency Mr. Robinson, was the prime target in the attempted coup of 1990. The report confirms that a central mission of the insurgency involved the life of Mr. Robinson. Today, Mr. Speaker, we are saddened that his health has taken a downturn, and he is currently hospitalized, so we join in collective prayer for his well-being.

Mr. Speaker, earlier today, before I came to Parliament, I took the opportunity to visit Mr. Robinson, and I did so as Prime Minister, yes, but also in my own personal capacity as a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago; one, along with countless

other citizens of our nation; one who has been inspired and strengthened by the leadership of Mr. Robinson, and demonstrated courage that he has shown, and as a person who has benefited from the wisdom and sagacity of this internationally renowned son of our soil, as I say, I paid a visit to him earlier today.

The visit was brief, given the prevailing circumstances, but I wanted to convey to His Excellency the fact that the Commission of Enquiry, which he deeply urged I should establish, to let him know that they had completed the monumental task and had presented the report to the President.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to dedicate the laying of this report in this House, which Mr. Robinson served for so many years, to the former President, His Excellency Mr. Robinson. [*Desk thumping*]

I think we all recall that he has been steadfast over the years in his calls for us to bring a clearer understanding of those dark and tumultuous days, which started on July 27, 1990, and which may have produced a different turn of events if Mr. Robinson was not of the calibre with an immense and demonstrated sense of national loyalty to his country, his people, regardless of personal consequences. I think the most famous words, and unforgettable words which came out of that coup, was Mr. Robinson, under siege in the Parliament with the parliamentarians there, and he said “Attack with full force”; “Attack with full force!” [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I will, at this point, want to join His Excellency Justice Carmona, on behalf of my Government in extending our deepest appreciation to Sir David Simmons, QC, eminent Caribbean jurist, who led a distinguished team of Commissioners, which included Sir Richard Lionel Cheltenham, QC; Dr. Haffizool Ali Mohammed; Dr. Eastlyn McKenzie and Mrs. Diana Mahabir-Wyatt. These five Commissioners, admirably supported by legal counsel, administrative staff and secretariat staff, devoted a considerable part of their lives for the past three and a half years to painstakingly enquire and produce a comprehensive report on an event which is indelibly inscribed in our history.

There is no doubt that the production of this report and its immediate presentation to hon. Members of this House is a signal event for all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. It fulfils one of the major manifesto pledges made by the partnership Government, when we overwhelmingly earned the mandate of the people to assume Government on May 24, 2010. And not to be too frivolous, Mr. Speaker, I would say through you to the Member for Diego Martin North/East, let not your heart be troubled; you will not form the Government in 2015. [*Desk thumping*]

Statement by Minister

Friday, March 14, 2014

I am mindful, Mr. Speaker, of more than just the meaningful fulfilment of a manifesto and subsequent Government pledge to the people of the country, the report seeks to provide valuable answers and tangible lessons emanating from what has been regarded as a dark stain on our history.

I am mindful that although the 1990 coup remained utterly perplexing, deeply vexatious, in fact, offensive to our citizens, our body politic, and the very psyche of our society, past governments, including those represented by my colleagues across the aisle, when they were in power, steadfastly chose not to want to bring greater examination and decisive closure to this sordid chapter in our history.

Citizens will recall when I called on our illustrious former President, Excellency Arthur Robinson, before the last general elections May 2010, Mr. Robinson strongly urged that any government I should lead should institute such a Commission of Enquiry. As I said earlier, he was central to the events as they unfolded when the band of insurgents stormed the Parliament on that fateful evening of July 27, 1990, and was made to personally suffer the grossest of indignities and humiliations, together with the other parliamentarians. I think Minister Dookeran was one of those parliamentarians in the House at that time.

This morning when I visited His Excellency Mr. Robinson at the nursing home, I indicated to him that an inscribed bound copy of the report will be sent to him immediately after laying, for his personal library.

It is my hope that the publication of this report will bring considerable satisfaction and some closure to our former President who withstood the intended humiliation of those days of infamy, with remarkable dignity and courage. His strength and resilience he displayed at that time continue even to this day to inspire an entire nation and remain a beacon and testimony to all of us.

Mr. Speaker, with the official laying of this report in the House, it is also being made available—and we want to thank the Parliament and the Parliament staff and your good self, that this report will be made available to the entire citizenry of Trinidad and Tobago through publication on the Parliament's website. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and Clerk of the House. [*Desk thumping*]

The report is comprehensive with detailed presentations and erudite analysis. It is, of course, based on an abundance of oral and written submissions. As Members know, the terms of reference of the Commissioners included:

- the causes, nature, extent and impact of the attempted coup;
- the underlying purpose and extent of and the intention behind the plot;

- any criminal acts and omissions, including looting which were committed and the motives and objectives of the perpetrators of such acts and omissions;
- the identity of any person, or any local, regional or international authority, institution, organization or entity who incited, masterminded, planned, directed, conspired towards, consented to, connived at, acquiesced in, participated in, aided or abetted the carrying out of, had prior knowledge of or was implicated or otherwise involved in criminal acts or omissions, including looting, which were committed in connection with the attempted coup, and the extent to which they had prior knowledge of it, or was implicated in it or otherwise involved any such acts or omissions,;
- the national security deficiencies and breaches of law that facilitated the attempted coup and the extent to which it was possible to prevent the occurrence of the attempted coup;
- the response and performance of the Government, the defence force, the protective services and other essential services, the foreign service and the media during and after the attempted coup;
- all matters pertaining to the negotiation, preparation, execution and effect of the amnesty and the negotiation of the terms of surrender; and
- the continuing propensities of criminal activity arising from the attempted coup and the correlation, if any, between the attempted coup and the trafficking, supplying and possession of illegal drugs, firearms and ammunition.

4.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the delivery of the report yesterday came during a meeting of our National Security Council which I was chairing. We immediately began, in that Council, to review its contents, particularly the recommendations made by the commissioners, including the ones which deal directly with our security arrangements and interests.

We have already decided to implement several of them and a further presentation will soon be made in this regard to this honourable House. Mr. Speaker, contrary to what a few may have believed, this Commission of Enquiry was initiated by my Government, was never with the intent of witch-hunting but

Statement by Minister

Friday, March 14, 2014

to deal with a critical issue upon which our nation was faced in our darkest hour. Thankfully, our law enforcement officials stepped up to defend our democracy and for that we would be forever grateful. [*Desk thumping*]

However, Mr. Speaker, things went wrong. Mistakes were made prior to, during and immediately after that day of 27th July, 1990 and based on the findings of this Commission of Enquiry, the recommendations would go a long way to ensure that there would be much less likelihood that history will repeat itself. It is better that we are prepared now than later because if we wait for later, it may not cost us just dollars and cents but also innocent lives that could be lost because of poor preparation and planning.

Because of what our nation would learn, based on this very comprehensive report by the Commission of Enquiry, it allows us that opportunity to be better prepared now than later. However, the findings would also greatly assist not just in prevention of further such eventualities, but to improve our national security apparatus as a whole, as the policies stated in the report equate with basic policies that are needed to improve our law enforcement. The findings of this report would be of value now as it provides recommendations to ensure more professional, sustainable and results-oriented law enforcement agencies, both in specific operations and also on a daily basis.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago will, indeed, now drive forward to implement the recommendation stated. However, based on intense research, I am pleased to state that some of these recommendations were already noted by the present administration prior to the report and we have been making efforts to implement such policies, some of which have already commenced and, of course, we will be guided further by the findings of this report.

I will take a moment, Mr. Speaker, to just mention a few of these recommendations, commencing with the fact that in 1990 there was the problem with intelligence gathering and intelligence sharing from the relevant agencies, as the commissioners have found and stated in the report.

Information sharing: the sharing of information indeed was a factor that affected the law enforcement agencies being better prepared with quotes from the report stating that intelligence gathering “was loose and haphazard.” Intelligence gathering “was loose and haphazard. “It stated that the National Security Council was not functional as it should be and that those not recognizing that there was a need for intelligence community that work cooperatively and in a formal manner.

Mr. Speaker, in the present administration, my Government, we have a very active National Security Council. It meets almost on a weekly basis and we have

Statement by Minister
[HON. K. PERSAD-BISSESSAR SC]

Friday, March 14, 2014

the foresight to ensure that our intelligence agencies are not monopolizing information, rather, information is now consolidated and forwarded to one main artery, via the statute-created SSA Strategic Services Agency for onward transmission to the relevant agencies for immediate operational tasking, if required.

SAUTT, of note also was the interesting discovery by the commission in regard to the knee-jerk decision to establish the Special Anti-crime Unit where in the report it quotes—I take the words out of the report:

“SAUTT was not an organization that was welcomed by most arms of the security structure because it was seen to be doing things that other people were already doing and there was a perceived duplication of effort.”

That criticism was supported by a further comment from the report:

“There continued to be the creation of agencies every time there seemed to be a political need to be seen to be doing something but without examining and rationalizing what you already had. Every time there was a need to do something they created something without going to the police service.”

The report continued to state that:

“SAUTT did not usually interact with the secretariat. It saw itself as a separate entity and tended to develop apart from the intelligence community. It had a direct link to the Executive. The compensation packages for its staff also caused dissatisfaction among other players in the intelligence community as did the fact that SAUTT had the ability to hand-pick personnel from other agencies.”

The police also complained that SAUTT had all the necessary equipment, whereas the police was lacking. It was also noted that there was duplication of effort between the intelligence agencies and SAUTT. In other words, the country did not need duplication from SAUTT and SAUTT was not the answer to our nation better prepared for any natural or manmade disaster.

Again, in the report, Mr. Speaker, and I quote:

“No National Security Operations Centre existed in 1990. We are of the opinion that such a centre, as a focal point for all arms of the security and intelligence community, would greatly enhance the capability of the State to respond to emergencies. It would provide the ultimate communications platform among the various security agencies and be the agency to issue

Statement by Minister

Friday, March 14, 2014

National Security Alerts when necessary.”

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to also state that this is exactly what the present National Operations Centre is doing now. We take credit, this Government takes credit, for setting up a National Operations Centre. So what is needed to improve our law enforcement is to provide them with the training, tools, policies and capability to perform at optimum level and also provide an agency to ensure that there be greater collaboration and understanding between varying arms in our law enforcement agencies.

Hence the reason for the establishment of a National Operations Centre upon which we can indeed note the success being derived from this centre and one which is required to ensure such information is shared between relevant agencies in real time and greatly minimize a repeat of the 27th July 1990 attempted coup.

The report continued in relation to flaws with intelligence in that information and intelligence from the different units of the security services were not centralized so there could be no proper processing, evaluation, and dissemination and that in 2009 the SIA, as the principal intelligence became more involved in providing intelligence for tactical and direct operational responses, as opposed to formulating policy on strategic intelligence.

In other words, Mr. Speaker, the findings of the Commission of Enquiry has stated that to better prepare our nation it does not need a structure such as SAUTT but it said what was needed was the National Security Centre and that is similar to what we have established as the National Operations Centre. The Commission also noted the deficiencies of the absence of a central body to manage the crisis occasioned by the attempted coup as there was no central emergency plan.

They stated that the case for a crisis management centre was overwhelming. Again, thankfully, we have been very proactive and our present policies are indeed in keeping with these recommendations. Again this is evident, as said before, through the establishment of the National Operations Centre, which is also responsible for such a management crisis and would provide such needs for a crisis management centre and a more scientific approach towards the operations of the ODPM, Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management.

In addition to all these methods, just a few months ago we instituted a structure for a National Security Alert State whereby the alert state is colour-coded and increases or decreases, based on the level of threat.

The protective services and the defence force were indeed the heroes during this period of July 1990 and had it not been the fine efforts by the vast majority of

police officers, soldiers, sailors, fire officers and other arms of the services, the situation may have become totally out of control.

The advantages for holding this enquiry are endless and based on the findings we have just stated a few and it could do nothing but to have us better prepared in the future, both to ensure such an event does not happen again or that the loss of lives and property will be minimized if such an event does in fact take place. The findings of the commission will be to ensure that history should not repeat itself and to see what can be done to ensure that if such an event arises again it can be better contained for the benefit of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

As I close I say, Mr. Speaker, it is the fervent wish of my Government that citizens everywhere will take the opportunity to read and study this report on the Parliament website. It now represents a fundamental contribution to our history and provides answers to many questions which have plagued us all over the past 20-plus years. We all now have an opportunity to put the 1990 coup into its perspective, to understand some of the salient factors which impacted on its hatching and execution, to dispel and reject the innuendos and patent falsehoods, and ascertain the true facts to acknowledge, recognize and honour the heroes of that experience, including the brave men and women of our protective services, of the Parliament, of the media and other citizens of this country and to remember the fallen, while, at the same time completely rejecting the notion that the attempted coup and its proponents were noble and honourable. This report may serve to reinforce a national commitment to the firm, unwavering principles of democracy and national honour, to which we universally subscribe.

This Commission of Enquiry benefited enormously from vast public support. Many persons were anxious to appear before the commission and to give pertinent evidence. Others chose to submit detailed reports and supporting documents. And again, on behalf of the commissioners and, of course, the Government and people of Trinidad and Tobago, we thank all those who came forward either orally or through their submissions. [*Desk thumping*]

This overwhelming citizen participation ensured that the commissioners became fully seized and possessed of vital information and pertinent data, which collectively and comprehensively served to inform and underpin detailed review and analysis leading to the production of a most incisive and far-reaching summary of this sordid experience.

Mr. Speaker, this report, a credit to Sir David and all those who worked tirelessly towards its completion despite some serious setbacks and utter frustration, including the noted non-appearance and enquiry of a key proponent in

this matter, and at this time I was heartened to read today that Sir David has said that his absence, though regretted for the sake of completeness, did not compromise the integrity of the exercise.

The report must go beyond mere study, mere scholarship, mere education and information, mere provision of final and substantial answers to long-standing and nagging questions. This report, Mr. Speaker, must serve to provide tangible lessons for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, with the objective of ensuring that such a grievous and heinous assault on our democracy must never happen again.

4.30 p.m.

Some of the descriptions are understandingly stark and graphic, but they are real and factual. The report refers to sitting MPs being victims of unspeakable indignities, of the wanton acts of destruction of our venerable parliamentary Chamber in the historic Red House, reminds us that our hon. Prime Minister at that time, Mr. Robinson and his Minister of National Security, Mr. Selwyn Richardson were singled out, badly beaten and then shot in their legs.

It highlights the widespread looting and wilful arson of public and private buildings, causing losses of millions of dollars. It draws the picture of our capital city devastated, and so this report must have fundamental and far-reaching impact on our citizenry. It must serve to reinforce the supremacy of law and order, of peaceful electoral transitions, highlight and reemphasize our badge and respect, for the noble traditions and values enshrined in our Constitution. It must contribute to our continued nation building, for the direct influence in our young people, as they prepare to assume leadership roles in the future.

Mr. Speaker, it is my respectful view that this report also has an educational value. Against this background, I am pleased to announce to this honourable House, that I held discussions with our Minister of Education, Dr. Tim Gopeesingh, that his Ministry should put together a team to translate this report into a distilled, but effective educational work/study programme. It would include a summary of the facts, a discussion guide and a covering teacher's guide, so that our students, particularly those in the senior forms of our secondary schools, could review this chapter in our history, now with the additional information, facts and studied analysis from the report.

I have also asked Dr. Gopeesingh and Sen. Fazal Karim, to communicate with the Principal of the St. Augustine Campus of the University of the West Indies, the University of Trinidad and Tobago, our Law Faculty at St. Augustine, as well as COSTAATT and other institutions of learning, to examine how some period of study can be allocated, to enable students of these institutions to formally

Statement by Minister
[HON. K. PERSAD-BISSESSAR SC]

Friday, March 14, 2014

facilitate discussion and review. I note that the availability of the report on the Internet, will add a further dimension to such a discussion by citizens, and I have no doubt that our population will find enlightening, such an opportunity to engage in meaningful and objective review and analysis, of this critical chapter in our history.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

PAPER LAID

8. Report of the Commission of Enquiry to enquire into the events surrounding the attempted coup which occurred in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on July 27, 1990. [*The Prime Minister (Hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC)*]

To be printed as a House Paper.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, it is a good time for us to suspend for tea. This sitting is now suspended until five minutes past five.

4.33 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.05 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

STANDING ORDERS COMMITTEE REPORT

(ADOPTION)

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for La Horquetta/Talparo, Minister of Land and Marine Resources. [*Desk thumping*].

The Minister of Land and Marine Resources (Hon. Jairam Seemungal): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to contribute on the tabling of this historic report of the Standing Orders Committee of the House of Representatives. Let me say on the onset, Mr. Speaker, that it was an honour and a privilege to have been selected to serve on this Standing Orders Committee, for the overhauling of this 53-year-old Standing Orders of the House of Representatives. Mr. Speaker, these Standing Orders were first provided in 1961 under Article 8 of the Constitution, where the Governor of the day was provided with the responsibility of coming up with rules and regulations to govern the House of Representatives and the Senate.

Mr. Speaker, by virtue of section 20 of the Constitution, in 1976, when Trinidad and Tobago became a Republic, it preserved the Standing Orders of 1961. Mr. Speaker, from 1961 to present is some 53 years, and during those 53 years, only once an attempt was made—only once any provision was added or changed in the Standing Orders, and that was in the year 2000 whereby under section 66A, the establishment of the department of the Joint Select Committees.

Mr. Speaker, all operating systems need overhauling from time to time. Let me also join with my former colleagues in congratulating you as the Chairman of that Standing Orders Committee, and other Members were: Dr. Roodal Moonilal, Mr. Colm Imbert, Dr. Delmon Baker, Mr. Collin Partap and Miss Marlene McDonald. All the Members of this Committee, Mr. Speaker, were very committed, and committed to change this long outstanding issue of Standing Orders, to make the Parliament more relevant to the changing and the growing society, and the change of society.

Mr. Speaker, all operating systems as I said, require from time to time some form of overhauling. And one's car, for instance, your motor vehicle, it is recommended at 100,000 miles, and kilometres in some instances, you do an overhaul, and for the average car owner, that would take you in about every six to seven years. Your house, Mr. Speaker, may require some overhaul with respect to electrical and plumbing, every 20 years. There may be upgrade in materials, the electrical, all these things you are required from time to time to overhaul the existing structures.

Mr. Speaker, for Parliament, however, we have been operating with this regulation for some 53 years. There were no cell phones or computers of the early days. Television, I was told came into Trinidad and Tobago around 1962, and in those days I was also told, that you had one television for the village. And, Mr. Speaker, for instance signed on at 6.00 a.m. and signed off at 6.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, in the early days I am told, that many parliamentarians held their constituency office under the village mango tree, and infrequently, many times they had to take their mode of travel, like by donkey cart or horse cart or whatever, and gather their constituents to come in a small town meeting, and that is where they will relate the business of the Parliament, or what occurred in Parliament to their constituents, Mr. Speaker. Time has changed, and today the average constituent can stay at home and receive on a real time basis, what occurs as the business of the House.

So, Mr. Speaker, it became necessary for the overhauling of this long-outstanding piece of regulation, in respect of the governance of this House. Mr. Speaker, I want to join my colleagues, the Member for Oropouche East and also the other Members who spoke, including the Member for Diego Martin North/East, in supporting this regulation, or the regulations of the House.

Mr. Speaker, one of the most fundamental change, as you know, is that of the speaking time of Members, and it has been said by every single Member what an important change it is. The Standing Orders of those days had—what?—less than

12 Members of the House at one point in time. Now, there are 41 Members of the House and time remains the same, and it has also become necessary that in the reduction of speaking time, more Members of the House can contribute towards the debate. And as other speakers have said, it now changes the way in which the debates are done, to make it more relevant and more relevant to today as well, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, one of the most fundamental provisions of these new Standing Orders, is that it creates a system of justice and justice for all as well, Mr. Speaker. Parliament is about the people, it is a representative of the people, and we work for the people, especially Members of the Lower House who are elected Members of Parliament. We work as others have said from six o'clock, but some of us work from four o'clock in the morning because now with the new technology, we can work on our computers, we can read the constituents' letters and emails, that were sent to us, and see how we can respond to some of them, Mr. Speaker. So the working time of a Member of Parliament is usually from four o'clock in the morning till about nine, ten, eleven o'clock for elected Members of Parliament, who have a constituency and for those who also have constituency and public offices as Ministers of Government.

Mr. Speaker, for long and how often we have heard about the injustice of Parliament, about people's name being soiled under the cloak of parliamentary privilege, and parliamentary privilege is really the immunity of the speakers of the House to be protected against proceedings of the court, by allowing them to be open and frank in their deliberations within the Parliament. And in most instances and under the current Standing Orders, they have no recourse to respond when their names are being used in the Parliament, and sometimes being soiled by the speaker, especially if that speaker is using it in any negative way. There is no recourse in justice for these persons who are affected outside of the House.

We now have included a "Broadcasting and the Opportunity to Respond" Standing Order, which is Standing Order 18, and this Standing Order, Mr. Speaker, if you permit me; it is really the "Broadcasting and the Opportunity to Respond" Standing Order.

5.15 p.m.

It says in subsection (1) that:

"The proceedings of the House shall ordinarily be broadcast, gavel by gavel, on television, radio and the Internet in accordance with the rules and standards adopted by the House as set out in Appendix II to these Standing Orders, as may be amended by order of the House

from time to time.

- (2) A person, not being a Member,”—of the House—“who has been referred to in the House by name, or in such a way as to be readily identifiable, may make a submission to the Speaker in writing:”

And under subsection:

- “(a) claiming that as a result of the reference, to have been adversely affected in reputation or claiming injury in occupation, trade or office;
- (b) submitting a response to the reference; and
- (c) requesting that the response be incorporated in the parliamentary record.
- (3) A submission must be made within two...weeks of the reference having been made and must be succinct and strictly relevant to the reference that was made. It must not contain anything offensive in character.”

In subsection:

- “(4) The Speaker shall consider whether in all the circumstances of the case”—that it—“should be incorporated in the parliamentary record.”

Mr. Speaker, this subsection allows the general members of the public to now correct the record in Parliament and gives the Speaker the full discretion, now in regulation, which allows that aggrieved member to have some form of redress in the Parliament.

I compliment this way of thinking because now the Parliament’s business—unlike 53 years ago when the Parliament’s business was discussed under the mango tree—is being heard gavel by gavel on live television, Internet and radio.

The Standing Orders also allow for improved representation and I suspect that no one in this Chamber will challenge the argument that from time to time there are constituents who have called upon Members of Parliament to make greater representation of their constituency and constituents’ concern in the Parliament.

The public certainly does not put water in their mouth when they complain about our representation. As a matter of fact, there was a calypso earlier on with that very topic, “*Who is the MP*”?

Hon. Member: “Where yuh MP”.

Hon. J. Seemungal: I am not saying that any Member of this House intentionally ignores their constituents, but often the opportunities for improvement are not available and the national public wants to hear more and more about Government business.

This is why, during our deliberation, it was well explained by other colleagues that the Prime Minister's time and questioning is one of the modern ways in which we can improve the Parliament and the business of Government being heard by other members of the community.

The inclusion also of the Standing Order with respect to urgent questions is another effective tool whereby constituents can be heard in the Parliament where their representative will bring those questions.

Each time committees are formed, it gives the opportunity to voice the concerns of constituents and Members of Parliament can discuss topics in much more detail and in-depth under committees than even in the Parliament and parliamentary proceedings. That is why I want to endorse the various committees that were set up in the Standing Orders, committees that allow for that kind of deliberation to occur and for members of your constituency to be heard and the voices at least to be carried by the Member of Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, it also allows for improved governance. There are many of the sections of these new Standing Orders, but two of them in particular which allow for an improvement in governance is Standing Orders 93 and 94 in particular. These are new Standing Orders.

Standing Order 93 deals with the Statutory Instruments Committee and under this Standing Order, if you permit me just to quote a couple of the sections:

“(1) The Statutory Instruments Committee shall consider Statutory Instruments that are subject to...negative resolution. It shall have the duty, *inter alia*, of bringing to the attention of the House any such instrument-”

Mr. Speaker, this is something new. It has been used in other jurisdictions and I want to compliment this section for being a part of that area that can help to improve the governance with respect to the House of Representatives.

Section 94 is about the Business Committee.

“(1) The Business Committee shall consider such matters”—by way of section (1)—“as may arise from time to time in connection with the

business of the House, including the composition of Members to serve on Committees.

- (2) The Speaker shall be a member and...Chairman of the Business Committee.
- (3) The Business Committee shall consist of six members inclusive of the Chairman.”

So again, these committees are very relevant to today’s society and the environment in which your constituents would like to be heard in the Parliament.

The Standing Orders also allow for more accountability. This is the last benefit I want to touch on because in this short address I am trying to keep up with the time of 30 minutes that will be allotted to Members in the new Standing Orders, and to be relevant and to the point. This will be the last point I want to deliberate on.

This was in mind with respect to the Members of the committee in our deliberation, that some specific structures be proposed to improve this aspect of parliamentary business. To this aspect comes in mind the Committee on Government Assurances and the Prime Minister’s Question Time. The Prime Minister’s Question Time was dealt with in detail by the Member for Oropouche East.

The objective of the Committee on Government Assurances is really self-explanatory and is designed to hold Government to assurances, promises and undertakings given in the House. As you know, the caricature of this quintessential politician is one who people feel promises every single thing under the House, but the House now will be regulating even that and holding Members accountable for what promises they have made in Parliament.

I am, therefore, confident that we all as Members of this august House will work hard towards adopting the new Standing Orders and we will also learn the Standing Orders. I myself was privileged to sit on the Chair, as well as the Deputy Speaker, and sometimes when Members raise Standing Orders you wonder if they really know anything in the book.

I must compliment the staff of the Parliament for they have worked tirelessly behind the scenes and they have actually brought into fruition these Standing Orders that have been attempted on several occasions and for many a year deliberated on. I understand it went back as far as 10 years or more deliberating on the Standing Orders and changing the Standing Orders. I also compliment the

Clerk of the House and her staff who worked on the Standing Orders to bring it to fruition. I must admit it made our lives as members of the Committee very, very easy and we had a lot of help from the Clerk and the Members of the House.

With this, I know that everyone will enjoy these Standing Orders for the simplicity with which they have been done. It covers a wide range of circumstances that could occur and they also allow for Members to conduct themselves and to regulate the House in a manner in keeping with new technologies and even up-to-date with respect to bringing the House into the 21st Century.

This also will bring the House on par with other jurisdictions such as the House of Lords, the Canadian House of Commons, the Lok Sabha in India and other jurisdictions that are larger than ours. We are now on par with many of those jurisdictions with respect to the Standing Orders.

I want to publicly thank and pay tribute to all the Members who worked hard on this committee. I know that in accepting these Standing Orders today, all Members will be very happy with how it has been laid out and how it can be operated. I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Miss Alicia Hospedales (*Arouca/Maloney*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great pleasure for me to speak on the First Report of the Standing Orders Committee of the House of Representatives.

There are some things that I identified in going through the Standing Orders. The first area that I want to highlight is the definition of “circulate”, which appears to be incomplete. The reason I am saying that it appears to be incomplete is that—let me just tell you, it says the definition of:

“‘circulate’ means to distribute via electronic means as far as possible;”

But when you go to page 139 of the Standing Orders, you see that the method of circulation refers to:

“Whenever in these Orders any Bill or document is required to be circulated to Members the same shall be circulated electronically or by placing a copy thereof on each Member’s desk.”

I think there is need to look at the definition of “circulate” again because, based on the method of circulation stated on page 139, documents or Bills can be circulated via electronic means; it can also be done by hand delivering, placing on Members’ desks, hand delivering to Members, transmitted by fax, by post. I suggest that it can state, “in any other manner approved by the Clerk”.

I am just suggesting that we look at the definition again and we try to expand it so that it is all-inclusive in that it covers all the various areas, all the various ways in which documents or Bills, et cetera, can be circulated to Members in the House.

5.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing I want to highlight is, I would like to say that I support the recommendation made that a new Standing Order, Standing Order 14, be included which specifically focuses on “Fixed Recess”. It says:

“Notwithstanding Standing Order 11 (Meeting Days), unless there are urgent or extraordinary reasons for so doing, no sitting of the House of Representatives shall be held from the first week in the month of July to the first week in the month of September in any year.”

Mr. Speaker, I looked at a report submitted by the Scottish Parliament when they were seeking to justify the reasons for having fixed recess, and one of the things they said was that most times people try to deny the fact that Members of Parliament tend to burn out and, as a result of burnout, they are unable to adequately service their constituents.

Apart from that, some people fail to realize that Members of Parliament also have family members. Most times we tend to sacrifice family time, quality family time, for work in the constituency and, Mr. Speaker, having fixed recess, particularly, not just for Members on the Opposition side, but Members on the Government side who are also Ministers, would really provide the opportunity for people to rest, rejuvenate, as well as get some quality time in with their family members. So, Mr. Speaker, I think that this particular Standing Order is beneficial for Members in the House.

Mr. Speaker, apart from that, I would like to go to Standing Order 22(6) under “Papers” which says:

“Within twenty-one (21) days of the return to Trinidad and Tobago of an officially recognized parliamentary delegation composed in any part of Members of the House, the head of the delegation, or a Member acting on his behalf, shall present a report to the House on the activities of the delegation.”

Mr. Speaker, I remember sometime in the House we had a debate, and the frequent flyer miles that were actually being accumulated by Members of the Government was highlighted—they are going on so many conferences—[*Desk thumping*] and most times we are not aware of what they were informed of. Some of them come back and they do not present any report.

So, Mr. Speaker, I am saying that this is an excellent idea in that it holds the Members or the frequent flyers to account, in that upon their return, they have to ensure that they provide a report of their trip wherever they would have gone, to ensure that everybody is kept abreast of what they would have learnt. For some of you, we know you even go on your runaway as well, and you do not go to the sessions, but it really holds you to account to ensure that you are attending the sessions that you would have been assigned to go to. Mr. Speaker, so I think it is an excellent, excellent idea [*Desk thumping*] that the report be submitted within 21 days of their return to Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing I want to highlight is Standing Order 34, which focuses specifically on issues for debate. Mr. Speaker, in Standing Order 34(2), I noticed that Standing order 34(2) states that:

“Except on the recommendation or with the consent of the Cabinet the House shall not—

- (a) proceed upon any Bill (including any amendment to a Bill) which, in the opinion of the Chair, makes provision for any of the following purposes-
 - (i) for imposing or increasing any tax;
 - (ii) for imposing any charge upon the Consolidated Fund or any other public fund of Trinidad and Tobago or for altering any such charge otherwise than by reducing it;”

It also states that the House shall not proceed upon any Bill:

- “(iii) for the payment, issue or withdrawal from the Consolidated Fund or any other public fund of Trinidad and Tobago of any moneys not charged thereon or any increase in the amount of such a payment, issue or withdrawal; or
- (iv) for compounding or remitting any debt due to Trinidad and Tobago;”

Mr. Speaker, I read the entire Standing Order, and I think that there would have been an error on the part of the committee, not that I am criticizing the committee in any way, but this particular Standing Order is repeated twice. It shows up under “Issues for Debate”, Standing Order 34(2), and it is also found on page 77 under the heading “Restrictions with respect to Money Bills”.

Mr. Speaker, I am saying, seeing that it is already under a separate heading “Restrictions with respect to money Bills”, I am suggesting that it be deleted in Standing Order 34 because if you look at the previous Standing Order under

“Questions for Debate”, the issues for debate is an amendment to “Questions for Debate”, and there were just three lines stating:

“Subject to the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago and to these Standing Orders, any Member may propose, by way of motion, any matter for debate in the House.”

It was actually amended in the revised Standing Orders. So I am just suggesting that Standing Order 34(2) be deleted from where it is, and it be left under Standing Order 59(1), “Restrictions with respect to Money Bills, to me, it is very unusual that the Standing Order is repeated twice. I read the old Standing Order, the current one that we are using, and there is nowhere in the current Standing Order where parts of the Standing Order are actually repeated more than once.

So, Mr. Speaker, the other thing I want to highlight is Standing Order 36. In my opinion, Standing Order 36(1)(a) speaks to the following—under Standing Order 36 the heading is “Period of Notice”, and 36(1)(a) states:

“The following periods of notice shall be required for debate on Motions:

(a) Government Motion - one (1) days’ notice;”

I am saying that this is a recipe for disaster. I do not know if anyone could recall the chaos that was caused last year when just a little less than one day was actually given for us to prepare for the Motion to approve the draft Elections and Boundaries Commission (Local Government and Tobago House of Assembly) Order, 2013.

At around 1.43 p.m. in the afternoon most of us received an email. Many of us did not see it until later that afternoon because on Thursdays we are in our constituencies. What would have happened was that by the time we were able to read it—we were required to read approximately over 300 pages to prepare for the next day to debate this Motion, and the hard copy of the Motion or the Order was actually delivered to some of our homes at 7.30, 8.30, 9.30 p.m. in the evening and most of us did not have the opportunity to really go through the extent of the document and to come here and debate it effectively; effectively present a good argument.

Mr. Speaker, many of us on this side felt gagged; we felt disrespected; and we were unable to effectively represent our constituents. I am saying that I cannot agree with just the one day’s notice. I am saying why not two days; why not three days; why not four days, that would give us adequate time to prepare for the debate on whatever Motion the Government decides to bring. One day is totally inadequate. After having that experience, again, I really cannot agree to it.

Mr. Speaker, the other area I want to highlight is Standing Order 65(2), “Printing and Circulation of Bills”. Under Standing Order 65(2), it states that:

“Before any Bill is printed, the Clerk shall satisfy himself that—

- (a) the Bill is divided into successive clauses numbered consecutively;
- (b) the Bill has in the margin a short summary of each clause; and
- (c) the provisions of the Bill do not go beyond its title.”

If you look at the current Standing Order, it states that:

“The Bill may be accompanied by a short explanatory statement of its objects.”

I am saying that this should not be deleted, but rather should be included as “(d)” under Standing Order 65(2). So, I am saying, Mr. Speaker, I do not know if you heard me, that under Standing Order 65(2), we should have “(d)” included which states that the Bill is accompanied by a short explanation statement of its objects. When I reflected on it, I thought that it is necessary because the short explanation of the Bill really provides us with basic insight into what the real meaning and intent of the Bill is, and sometimes some Members go as far as giving additional information, linkages in terms of things that we can log on to in order to get additional information. So I would like to see that included because it really helps us to really understand what is the intent of the Bill that is before us.

Mr. Speaker, under Standing Order 83, “Allotment of Time in Standing Finance Committee”, Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 83(1) says that:

“A maximum of five (5) days shall be allotted for the examination of the Estimates in Standing Finance Committee together with the Appropriation Bill.”

Under the current Standing Order, it says that seven days would be allowed for the discussion of the Appropriation Bill in Finance Committee, but I am asking, why has the days been reduced from seven to five? If you really understand the examination of the Appropriation Bills, the discussion of the Appropriation Bills is a lengthy process and I really think that we can say for the minimum five days, maximum seven days, rather than just reducing the time to five days which limits us in terms of really in-depth explanation into the Appropriation Bill. So we can give it five to seven days as against five days only. I am just suggesting because, as I said again, the estimates take a very long time to really examine, to really

discuss, if you really want to pick out the critical areas or the critical things that you want to focus on. So it is important that we reconsider the five days and give it a minimum of five, a maximum of seven.

Mr. Speaker, under Standing Order 94, which speaks to the establishment of the “Business Committee”, I am saying, Mr. Speaker, I am sure you would have heard concerns expressed by chairmen of the various committees. Sometimes it is terribly difficult to get Members to attend those committees and to even get a quorum for those committees, and I am saying, why create an additional committee, “Business Committee” when you could merge the business and the House Committees because basically the responsibility of the two committees seems to overlap. Why not merge it into one committee? We know the challenge would be getting a quorum to attend these meetings. We are having a difficulty as it is right now, far less for establishing this extra committee that really is not, in my estimation, very relevant. So, I am just suggesting you take a second look at the need to establish the “Business Committee”. The possibility exists that the work that is required for this committee could be done by the House Committee.

5.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing I want to highlight is Standing Order 108, which speaks to the Committee on Government Assurances. I really think it is an excellent idea. Like the Member for Diego Martin North/East, I myself in 2011 was given assurances by the then Minister of Community Development that the community centres for the Bon Air Gardens area as well as the Trincity community would have been constructed in 2013. When the same questions were posed to the current Minister of Community Development, he just seemed to have, I guess, ignored that those assurances were made, and just simply said that he does not know when it was going to be done. I think that this Committee on Government Assurances is indeed relevant, it is indeed valuable, particularly when Members come here and make a whole lot of promises and give assurances that they are going to do things and they are not done.

I even remember under the Ministry of Education, we were given assurances that the library for the Arouca area—which is actually going to facilitate both the Arouca/Maloney constituency, Lopinot/Bon Air West constituency and a number of other constituencies—would have been constructed in 2014, but to date the library has not yet been constructed. Mr. Speaker, there are so many other promises that they would have given, especially to other Members as well. I really appreciate the fact that there would be a second look in terms of the assurances,

that this committee will surely be established so that Members would be held to account.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to say thank you.

The Minister of the People and Social Development (Hon. Dr. Glenn Ramadharsingh): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this very grand opportunity to contribute to this historic debate, and being a recent student of the law and a believer in the rule of law, I thought that it was a debate that I could not restrain myself from participating in. [*Crosstalk and laughter*]

The democracy, the right to speak freely, is a right that we treasure, and indeed throughout history we have seen that it is the right to speak that caused even slavery to be abolished in the British Empire, were it not for the countless private member's Bills brought by William Wilberforce. Also abortion and homosexuality were decriminalized in the United Kingdom by the ability of the Opposition to bring motions to the Parliament. Smoking was restricted in federally regulated workplaces because of a private member's Bill in 1988. Therefore, the Parliament is a place that refreshes the democracy, that breathes life and ventilates oxygen to ensure the continued health, invigoration and sustenance of our right to be free.

Mr. De Couteau: Tell them, man, tell them!

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: Therefore, after 53 years of no serious convulsion or review or modification of our Standing Orders, the time has certainly come. The time is now and we are happy to participate in this debate that will bring this measure to fruition.

Mr. De Couteau: Historic!

Mr. Roberts: You are waxing poetic.

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: The Standing Orders that will govern our procedures have not been overhauled, as we have said before, since 1961. They contain references to the Governor and debar uncomplimentary remarks to the conduct of the royal family, in a country that has Republican status since 1976.

This formed the basis of a *Guardian* editorial on December 20, 2013, lauding the work of this committee, the Standing Orders Committee, and welcoming the change. It says:

“Update Standing Orders, modernise Parliament”

Therefore, we really must commend—and we did in fact commend the politicians and MPs—but certainly the public servants who would have worked before in the

committee in its previous incarnation, certainly the public servants and members of the staff of the Parliament, I really want to applaud the work that they have done.

One of the key measures, Mr. Speaker, is the reduction in speaking times, and certainly it is a welcome measure and in sync with modern research that shows us that the attention span of persons has reduced significantly because of the amount of data that we are confronted with, because of the technology that exists. Because of the television, the cable, satellite television, cellular phones, smartphones, text messages, emails on phones, we are bombarded with information and therefore it would really be very incongruous that you have information coming to you—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Rowley: Very what? [*Crosstalk and laughter*]

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: It would be really a departure from what is taking place in the modern world, [*Laughter*] that you have a system where you are receiving information in a timely manner, and you are receiving information at the flick of a button and then in the Parliament you have long hours of repetitive statements. When you look at the attention span statistics, we see that the:

“Attention span is the amount of concentrated time on a task without becoming distracted. Most educators and psychologists agree that the ability to focus attention on a task is crucial for the achievement of one’s goals. It’s no surprise attention spans have been decreasing over the past decade with the increase in external stimulation.

The average attention span in 2013 was eight seconds. The percentage of teens who forget major details of close friends and relatives, 25 per cent; the percentage of people who forget their own birthday from time to time, 7 per cent. The average length watched on a single Internet video, 2.7 minutes.

From the latest research, in an article entitled, “The Attention Deficit” by Julie Hill, from presentations.com, we can see that for the first couple minutes the attention span is quite high, but as you continue, it continues to go down and decline precipitously. [*Dr. Ramadharsingh displays graph*]

Mr. Speaker, we have heard from other speakers of the need to prevent the situation that occurred when there was a deadlock. Therefore, the election of a Speaker, we have seen from our history, is a very, very critical election that can cause the entire country to suffer the consequences.

When many who have been participants in that deadlock speak, they sometimes speak from their own experiences, but Dr. Selwyn Ryan has devoted an entire book to this stand-off that occurred, and it is called *Deadlock*. In it one can see how significant the review of the election of the Speaker is. I will not quote from his book, because the entire book is dedicated to the issue, but I will just quote from another book: *Politics in a Half Made Society*, this is by Dr. Kirk Meighoo. [*Crosstalk and laughter*]

Hon. Member: No, no, no!

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: According to the Constitution, Parliament was required to meet at least once every six months. Manning had waited until the last possible day, four days before the deadline.

Hon. Member: Oh, lord! Oh, lord!

Mr. Roberts: Point of order! [*Laughter*]

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: The election of the Speaker was crucial because according to the Standing Orders, the Speaker held central place in the Parliament. [*Crosstalk*] He went on to speak about both sides, [*Crosstalk*] in fact, Mr. Panday saying that he had 3,000 potential nominees and the PNM saying that there was more than one way to skin a cat. He continued to tell about the long parliamentary session from 1.30 p.m. to 12.30 a.m., and then on April 6th going on to 5.30 p.m.

But what is instructive is how this caused the institutions of government to experience shutdown, that what in fact the then Prime Minister did was to call an election and prorogue the Parliament. In fact, it was really a time when the country did not benefit from the institution of government, indeed, the Parliament functioning, because of the election of a Speaker. Therefore, it is a very welcome change that has come, where we have a clearly defined method of electing a Speaker in the case where there could be a potential deadlock.

Certainly we must indeed congratulate the Parliament for fulfilling the targets and goals set by the strategic objectives that were outlined for the period 2013/2018. Indeed the Parliament, as its Mission Statement said:

“As the national legislature of Trinidad & Tobago, our mission is to ensure that Parliament exercises its legislative, oversight, representation and outreach duties effectively and that Parliament remains the main forum for national political debate.”

Its specific strategic objectives are:

- “1. To increase the institutional capacity of the Parliament...
2. To improve the legislative process in Parliament to ensure enhanced scrutiny and quality of legislation...
3. To improve the capacity of the Parliament to provide effective oversight
4. To develop the outreach work of Parliament and to strengthen the representative role of MPs”

Certainly with this change of the Standing Orders, they have certainly gone a long way in producing this magnum opus, large and important work that will change the way representational politics unfolds in Trinidad and Tobago.

We must highlight the election of the Speaker and the time limit of the contributions, as I indicated with the attention span, the fact that one can summarize, one can make their points without fully utilizing the length of time, that was really onerous and kept the Parliament here days upon days sitting, when those sessions could have been more useful during the day.

Mr. Speaker, I must also applaud the fact that the Parliament continues to be on the cutting edge of technology. One must be very proud of the parliamentary website. There are applications in that website that I know takes quite a lot of work. One can click on a particular constituency and the information comes up with the MP and, therefore, also I see they are being tagged to Facebook, Twitter.

Standing Order 18 on the “Broadcasting and the Opportunity to Respond”—this Standing Order provides guidance on how the proceedings of the House should be broadcast on television, radio and the Internet. In accordance with the rules and standards adopted by the House, in line with the new Standing Order 107 that establishes the broadcast committee.

6.00 p.m.

In Appendix II, further details are provided as it relates to the broadcast of Parliament through television and radio, while providing guidelines on its subsequent usage so as not to bias or prejudice the population, especially during periods of political campaigning, and that is an important safeguard that has been included there as well.

I will, in fact, myself be very brief so as to welcome in the change of the curtailing of the speaking time to 30 minutes with a further 10 minutes, [Interruption] but I will speak to that. Also, the fact, that we are copying the model or utilizing the model that has worked very well in the United Kingdom, the Prime Minister's question time, that is Standing Order 26. This will deepen the democracy, it will widen the sphere of issues that are looked at in the Parliament and it will give a greater voice in the administration of the national patrimony. It will increase transparency and, together with the time limits, will create greater efficiencies in the pursuit of effective representation for and on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

We have now also included "Urgent Questions", where, under the new Standing Order 27, 15 minutes will be allowed for Members to ask questions on the grounds of urgency. Those must be submitted as much as an hour before. This is cutting-edge change that will bring a greater democratic voice to the Parliament and will give people more power at the end of the day through the representatives who they have elected in the general election.

The committee system—and I want to just quote from the document that was produced by the committee when they indicated that while the time limits may be curtailed, the amplification of a better working system for the committees and the expansion in the nature of the committees, and the creation of new committees will give greater voice on more issues in the national debate and discussion. Therefore we have the Public Administration and Appropriation Committee; a Committee on National Security; a Committee on Energy Affairs; a Committee on Foreign Affairs; a Committee on Human Rights, Diversity, the Environment and Sustainable Development. These are now issues that are grabbing global attention. And, particularly, what is even more welcoming is the Committee on Government Assurances where we can monitor the assurances that have been made by the Government.

Fixed recesses, we spoke about that. An MP is besieged by requests to site visits, to visit particular communities, events, cultural events, and therefore the "Fixed Recess" will give the Member an opportunity to also plan vacation or get some time off, and therefore these are your very, very important changes.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, after 53 years we are here today to bring major change to governance in Trinidad and Tobago, and I am very happy to be part of this great change that has been so long in coming from the 13th Century when King John did not affix his seal to the Magna Carta in Runnymede [Interruption]

that went on to 1295 when Edward I summoned the model Parliament 80 years after, trying to get funds to campaign against the Scots, including William Wallace, which led to 1376, the good Parliament which elected the very first Speaker, Sir Peter de la Mare. I must say that he did not last that long; John of Gaunt had him arrested just a year later.

Sir Thomas More, the man featured in the common man, made the first known request for the right of freedom of speech in the Parliament. In 1523 he sought that from Henry VIII. It is something that is still done in certain jurisdictions in the Commonwealth. All of these made way for the Bill of Rights Act in 1690, which created the first real Parliament where there was freedom of speech and the beginning of the democratic process that we enjoy today.

Your chair, Mr. Speaker, is an important safeguard and vanguard of our democracy, therefore this is a very, very important and red-letter day for the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Therefore, I am very pleased, not only to contribute to the debate but to beg to move the following amendments. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, having regard to the debate I propose to:

“, subject to the following amendments to the proposed Revised Standing Orders:

18(5) Insert a new sub-paragraph 18(5)(b) to read as follows and renumber appropriately:

“(b) may confer with the person making the submission and with the Member who referred to that person in the House;”

105. Delete and substitute the following:

“105The Committee on Foreign Affairs shall have the duty of considering from time to time and reporting, whenever necessary, on:

- (a) International treaties and agreements entered into by the Government on behalf of the State; and
- (b) other matters relating to Foreign Affairs as may be referred to it by the House”.

Appendix I Delete and substitute the following:

Appendix I – Time Limit on Speeches

A Member may speak for the periods as specified below -

Motions

Mover	45 minutes
Any other Member	30 minutes
Mover in reply	30 minutes

Other than the mover, if the Member speaking so requests during or immediately upon the expiry of a speech, the time for the speech may be extended by the House for a further 15 minutes.

Ministerial Statement

Minister	10 minutes
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Personal Explanation

Member	10 minutes
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Explanatory Statement - Papers

Minister	3 minutes
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Matters on the Adjournment of the House

Each Member	10 minutes
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Definite Matters of Urgent Public Importance

Presenter	20 Minutes
First Minister	20 Minutes
Other Member/Minister	5 minutes
Maximum time for discussion	60 minutes in total

BILLS

Private Members' Bills

Introduction and First Reading

Mover	5 minutes
Other Members	2 minutes
Debate	15 minutes in total

*Appropriation Bill**Second reading -*

Mover	unspecified
Opposition's response	unspecified
Any other Member	45 minutes
Mover in reply	45 minutes

Other than the mover and the Opposition's response, if the Member speaking so requests during or immediately upon the expiry of a speech, the time for the speech may be extended by the House for a further 10 minutes.

*Other Bills**Second reading-*

Mover	45 minutes
Any other Member	30 minutes
Mover in reply	30 minutes

Other than the mover, if the Member speaking so requests during or immediately upon the expiry of a speech, the time for the speech can be extended by the House for a further 15 minutes.

In Committee

All Members —unlimited periods not exceeding 5 minutes each.

Mr. Speaker: I think I need, seeing that these amendments have been moved, we need a seconder. You will get back up and speak, I need a seconder?

Mr. Roberts: Now?

Mr. Speaker: Yes. Now.

Mr. Cadiz: I beg to second and reserve the right to speak.

Mr. Speaker: All right, continue.

Hon. Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I beg to move.

Question, on amendment, proposed.

Mr. Speaker: Any other Members or do I call on the Leader of Government Business at this time?

The hon. Leader of the House, Minister of Housing and Urban Development.

6.15 p.m.

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I remember several years ago while researching for my own PhD thesis, I had cause to read the record of Parliament for a particular day in 1965, when the first administration of Dr. Williams came to Parliament to move and to pass in one sitting the infamous Industrial Stabilisation Act, and that was a historic day in Parliament given the nature of those proceedings.

Mr. Speaker, since 1965 to today, we have had several critical points in our history when Parliament met, debated, passed significant legislation, passed significant Motions and debated very, very critical matters pertaining to our national life. I am thinking of when was the last time we would have had such a day in terms of the conduct of parliamentary business.

On this day, Mr. Speaker, March 14, 2014, those of us, Members of this House, are extremely fortunate that we have participated in the events of this day in which the Prime Minister, the Member for Siparia, laid in the House the Report of the Commission of Enquiry established to investigate into the events of July 27, 1990. Twenty-four years later, we have placed on public record the findings of a commission investigating and enquiring into those horrific events. So, it is extremely significant and historic, today's sitting and there will be a time later in life when many of us, when we are long gone from here, we will sit and reflect that on March 14, 2014, we were in the Parliament when the Commission of Enquiry report was laid, but we will also now reflect that we were in the Parliament when the Standing Orders were amended and redrafted and fundamentally changed. For the first time in our independent history it is another significant mile mark, and I want to congratulate and thank all Members of the House, on both sides, for their contributions to this very important debate and for participating in the events of the day that have led us to this historic moment.

Mr. Speaker, governance is today one of the hot topics in debates on public policy across the globe, not only in Trinidad and Tobago. And while it is very important to deal with the bread and butter issues, it is critical as well to address governance issues and governance issues that deal with institutional innovations, making our institutions more efficient to meet the contemporary challenges of public policy and the contemporary challenges of Government. Today, we have completed an important chapter in our national history, that we have made the business of the people more efficient, and hopefully the Parliament can conduct its business in a more competent manner because of this debate and because of what we intend to do in a few minutes.

So, Mr. Speaker, I wanted to really begin by placing this event in its historic circumstance and that historical framework to compliment all Members on both sides of the House. This, as the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo indicated, was really the product of work by Members across the aisle, and benefited in no small measure from the collaboration of Members of the Opposition working with the Members of the Government.

Mr. Speaker, apart from the amendment which the Member for Diego Martin North/East inspired, there were really no other major issues raised that would attract amendments.

Mr. Speaker, I received a very small note from a colleague earlier indicating that the person was looking at the debate and at the same time reading a book entitled *A Journey* by Tony Blair, the former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, in which he describes the weekly Prime Minister's question sessions he had to face as Prime Minister, and he described it in his book, *A Journey*, as terrifying and stomach churning and indicated that he had to put together a virtual permanent staff to anticipate and prepare for the sessions.

Mr. Speaker, I am sure that this Government will be equally well prepared, but I am sure it will not be as terrifying as it may have been for Mr. Blair. We look forward not only to this change, but to all the changes that we will now usher in as we prepare to conduct the business of the House in a manner that, you know, will bring greater efficiency, not only in time but we believe in value and content to debates.

Mr. Speaker, several areas have been outlined fully by Members. Some of the key issues for clarification, I just wanted to be absolutely clear that in this Standing Order, while we place eight o'clock as the time limit for the sitting of the Parliament, it is in the same context as we operate now where at 7.45 p.m. or thereabout now, we do an extension for the time for the Parliament to meet.

Hon. Member: I hope you will not do that.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: At eight o'clock, the Government reserves the right to move an extension of time to continue the business of the day.

Mr. Speaker, one of the deeper underlining issues that arose during this debate is really the movement of Members of Parliament from being of a temporary part-time nature to a full-time professional occupation as a legislator. And, Mr. Speaker, the debate that will follow will touch and concern the matter of remuneration, but we have now evolved to the stage where, with the passage of

this measure before us, we can now say as a matter of fact that a Member of Parliament is indeed a full-time occupation in Trinidad and Tobago, and to assure the national community that Members of Parliament are occupied not only in the constituency, not only in the Ministries if they are Ministers of Government, but in the Parliament, and for Parliament joint select committees to be meeting and to conduct that business is an enormous amount of work.

Very few people understand the preparation that is involved when you are preparing yourself for a select committee, joint select committee, PAC, PA(E)C and those meetings—meetings of that sort. You have enormous amount of materials to read, to study, to prepare yourself with questions, to raise issues. You are looking after the business of statutory authorities, state enterprises that expend hundreds of millions of dollars, and as a Member of the Parliament you are called upon to study documents. Members of Parliament, Mr. Speaker, whether you are in Government or Opposition, you may also have to enlist the support of colleagues, professional colleagues, in areas of law, accounting, engineering, business, to get vets as we had to recently, to get their expert opinion and comments on reports that are before you.

Mr. Speaker, as Members of Parliament, you meet and examine persons who themselves are captains of industry, leaders in other sectors of the society, social leaders in some cases, persons who are highly qualified in terms of academic training. You come up to brilliant people like the Member for Diego Martin Central, you know. You meet persons who are highly trained and qualified, and, as Members of Parliament, you have to prepare yourself to examine persons of this calibre. So that it is not easy and persons sometimes do not see our work as important. As I said in my opening statement, politicians, like lawyers I imagine and other areas, they get the brunt of a great deal of ridicule and attacks and so on, and that is natural because it is a profession that attracts that.

People want to believe the bad, so you attract that, but the real hard work of being a Member of Parliament is really not appreciated by many people, and it is only when they are in the position that they realize that this work is so hard, that you get up from early morning to attend to constituents' matters, you remain late in the night in your ministerial office. If you are in your Opposition office, you are hounded down by your constituents on all range of matters. You have a thousand appointments and functions and invitations. You cannot attend everything, but yet people expect that you will attend everything because to one community group that is their one function a year, to you, that is your fifth function on an evening. So that it is highly, Mr. Speaker, demanding.

One of our colleagues, the long serving Member for Fyzabad, who I believe now is the longest serving Member in the House of Representatives with continuous service, Mr. Speaker, he is deemed by many of his colleagues to be the—what is it?

Mr. Sharma: WWF champion.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: WWF, the WWF champion, and I will explain—it is deemed because he is present at all wakes, weddings and funerals. [*Laughter*] He is so present everywhere and he is deemed to be this champion because he is so much present in the community, not only of Fyzabad, but I must say across the island, he can be seen everywhere. Very few people would have his energy and his determination and his considerable capability.

So, Mr. Speaker, these are some of the demands that we hope that the national community take note. The changes will add more work. The point I am making is that these changes will add more work to a Member of Parliament, and we hope, in the fullness of time, that Members of Parliament will also benefit from greater—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Continue to [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Yes, sure. I understand, Mr. Speaker, what you are doing.

Mr. Speaker—they are working on an amendment—in the fullness of time, we all believe that Members of Parliament would be adequately rewarded for their work which is not just being on their legs and speaking in the House of Representatives. We believe that Members of Parliament will be recognized as persons who contribute in the community at the level of the constituency, at the level of the Ministries and at the level of Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, regrettably today, we did not have the opportunity but to congratulate as well other Members of Parliament who have come before us, have worked very, very hard and have left Parliament having given enormous service to the Parliament and to the people of Trinidad and Tobago at a time when they earned much less, their benefits were much less.

The origins of Parliament—I do not have the encyclopedic knowledge of my friend, the Member for Caroni Central, but I will complete this point. [*Laughter*] I do not have the encyclopedic knowledge of my friend, the Member for Caroni Central, but I could tell you that a generation ago a Member of Parliament operated with a bicycle. You met him or her—and generally him—under the

house. You sit on a bench or a hammock and you wait, you conduct your business and then once per week, you come up to the Red House to have tea and coffee with colleagues and you talk until midnight and you go home. Today it is much more than that.

Today, in fact, Mr. Speaker, when you are in the Parliament, the technology allows you in some cases to conduct a great deal of work with your iPad, your iPod, your mobile devices, so that you are in touch with people, you are doing your letters, you are reading, you are researching. So, Mr. Speaker, the work is even harder than sitting and just listening to the Member for Diego Martin North/East, which would have been tough by itself.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move and request the insertion of a commencement date to coincide with the opening of the Fifth Session of the Tenth Parliament. This is important since we believe that it will take a few weeks well for Members, for staff, for everyone to read, to study, to internalize and to be on song with the new Standing Orders. But what I could say is that in our session here when we end and we return—I think we are looking at some time around July—that we will also be the first to participate in parliamentary proceedings under new Standing Orders for the first time in our independent history. [*Desk thumping*]

6.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, as I close, I want to say this is in keeping with our commitment to changing and improving the level of governance in Trinidad and Tobago. The Parliament is a critical institution, an important branch of the State, and if we can bring better governance to Parliament, we will also intend to bring that to other areas, whether it is in crime fighting, in the social security sector, in housing, in labour—whichever sector we go, we bring better governance to that sector, and today, we have done this and we have accomplished with the Parliament.

So, Mr. Speaker, on the Motion stated in my name:

Be it resolved that the House adopt the First Report of the Standing Orders Committee of the House of Representatives, Fourth Session (2013/2014), Tenth Parliament.

On this historic day, when the Member of Parliament for Siparia and Prime Minister, hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, laid the Commission of Enquiry Report in the House, we also beg to move that new Standing Orders be adopted. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I will first put the question on the proposed amendment, but rather than read the entire amendment again, with your indulgence, as circulated, including the commencement date.

Question, on amendment, put and agreed to.

Question, on amended motion, put.

The House voted: Ayes 33

AYES

Moonilal, Hon. Dr. R.

McLeod, Hon. E.

Sharma, Hon. C.

Ramadharr, Hon. P.

Peters, Hon. W.

Rambachan, Hon. Dr. S.

Seepersad-Bachan, Hon. C.

Seemungal, Hon. J.

Roberts, Hon. A.

Cadiz, Hon. S.

Baksh, Hon. N.

Griffith, Hon. Dr. R.

Ramadharsingh, Hon. Dr. G.

De Coteau, Hon. C.

Khan, Hon. Dr. F.

Indarsingh, Hon. R.

Roopnarine, Hon. S.

Ramdial, Hon. R.

Alleyne-Toppin, Hon. V.

Partap, Hon. C.

McDonald, Miss M.

Rowley, Dr. K.

Cox, Miss D.

Hypolite, N.

Imbert, C.

Jeffrey, F.

Deyalsingh, T.

Browne, Dr. A.

Thomas, Mrs. J.

Hospedales, Miss A.

Gopee-Scoon, Mrs. P.

Warner, J.

Persad-Bissessar SC, Hon. K.

Question agreed to.

Resolved:

That the House adopt the First Report of the Standing Orders Committee of the House of Representatives, Fourth Session (2013/2014), Tenth Parliament, subject to the following amendments to the proposed revised Standing Orders:

18(5) Insert a new sub-paragraph 18(5)(b) to read as follows and renumber appropriately:

“(b) may confer with the person making the submission and with the Member who referred to that person in the House;”

105. Delete and substitute the following:

“105 The Committee on Foreign Affairs shall have the duty of considering from time to time and reporting, whenever necessary, on:

- (a) International treaties and agreements entered into by the Government on behalf of the State; and
- (b) other matters relating to Foreign Affairs as may be referred to it by the House.
- Commencement (New) These Standing Orders shall come into effect at the commencement of the Fifth session of the Tenth Parliament.

Appendix I Delete and substitute the following:

Appendix I – Time Limit on Speeches

A Member may speak for the periods as specified below -

Motions

Mover	45 minutes
Any other Member	30 minutes
Mover in reply	30 minutes

Other than the mover, if the Member speaking so requests during or immediately upon the expiry of a speech, the time for the speech may be extended by the House for a further 15 minutes.

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Minister	10 minutes
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Personal Explanation

Member	10 minutes
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Minister	3 minutes
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Presenter	20 Minutes
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First Minister	20 Minutes
Other Member/Minister	5 minutes
Maximum time for discussion	60 minutes in total

BILLS

Private Members' Bills

Introduction and First Reading

Mover	5 minutes
Other Members	2 minutes
Debate	15 minutes in total

Appropriation Bill

Second reading -

Mover	unspecified
Opposition's response	unspecified
Any other Member	45 minutes
Mover in reply	45 minutes

Other than the mover and the Opposition's response, if the Member speaking so requests during or immediately upon the expiry of a speech, the time for the speech may be extended by the House for a further 10 minutes.

Other Bills

Second reading -

Mover	45 minutes
Any other Member	30 minutes
Mover in reply	30 minutes

Other than the mover, if the Member speaking so requests during or immediately upon the expiry of a speech, the time for the speech

can be extended by the House for a further 15 minutes.

In Committee

All Members unlimited periods not exceeding 5 minutes each

**NINETY-EIGHTH SALARIES REVIEW COMMISSION REPORT
(ADOPTION)**

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [February 21, 2014]:

Be it resolved that the House approve the Ninety-Eighth Report of the Salaries Review Commission of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Question again proposed.

Mr. Speaker: On the last occasion, the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre and Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development had spoken for 34 minutes and has 11 minutes of original speaking time remaining. I call on the hon. Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development.

Hon. E. McLeod: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, hon. Members. When the adjournment was taken last day, I was attempting to respond to what we identified as anomalies raised by Members on the other side and the Office of Commissioner of Police, that of Executive Director of the Occupational Health and Safety Agency and, I think, the Executive Director of NALIS. Mr. Speaker, if one looks, if one reads, very carefully the report of the Salaries Review Commission, one will find other anomalous situations, okay. But still, Mr. Speaker, we must caution that we deal with this situation as carefully and as professionally as possible.

The Salaries Review Commission has under its purview, for the purposes of terms and conditions of employment, salaries and so on: The Office of President of the Republic, the higher Judiciary, the Ombudsman, the Auditor General, the Industrial Court, Tax Appeal Board, environmental commission, Police Complaints Authority, Equal Opportunity Tribunal, top managers in the public service, top managers on the statutory boards, senior officers in the protective services and the defence force, senior diplomatic representatives, chairmen and members of commissions and boards, the judicial and legal service, Members of Parliament, Tobago House of Assembly, local government officials—to name

quite a few of them. The experts will tell us that there is a relationship between many of these offices, if not all of them, and that in determining salaries and other conditions of one will affect salaries and other conditions of the other.

The Salaries Review Commission has been, we are advised, offering to do a job evaluation exercise for the longest while. [*Crosstalk*] For?

Hon. Member: Twenty-five years.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: For 25 years. The absence of that work and the rejection—if you wish—or the non-acceptance and application of previous reports have helped only to exacerbate a bad situation, and we are called upon now to identify where that situation is worse, and to move expeditiously to taking corrective measures.

Last day, I suggested that the Salaries Review Commission was established to deal with these offices because it is not the best thing for us to deal with our own office ourselves. And to reject the SRC's report, Mr. Speaker, on this occasion, our having suffered as a result of previous rejections, will not help the situation at all, it will only make it worse. So, I want to suggest that except in those cases that are blatantly anomalous, in which situation—the paymaster or whoever it is—must go through the report and make the necessary adjustment, such as in the case of, say the Commissioner of Police whose job was in a particular group, and every other job in that group has been moved to a salary rate that is more than that of the Commissioner of Police, if you catch my point. It is only the job evaluation exercise that should, if carefully examined, result with a job falling out of the particular group in which it now finds itself.

Outside of that, Mr. Speaker, the strong recommendation is that we accept the salary adjustments that have been proposed, that have been recommended, and that we retain, for parliamentarians, the exemptions that we have enjoyed insofar as the acquisition of motor vehicles and so on is concerned.

6.45 p.m.

And we rely on a job evaluation exercise being done as early as possible, with our directing that the necessary resources for such an evaluation exercise to be done is afforded the SRC, and hope for a competently done job evaluation exercise that would resolve all of the issues that are being raised here. While the Government agrees, Mr. Speaker, with some of the SRC's recommendations, if not many of them, we must disagree—and we do disagree—with the recommendation to remove full exemption of duty from motor vehicle tax, value added tax and

customs duty for parliamentarians. But it is being suggested that we do not just do this for parliamentarians, and leave those anomalies that we have been identifying, leave them there without at least putting them back where they belong, pending the outcome of the job evaluation exercise.

It has to be noted, Mr. Speaker, that prior to this latest report, the most recent application of any adjustments to the salaries of people or the offices in the groups that I mentioned a little while earlier, the most recent was some eight or nine years ago—2005. And if we were to examine what has happened in other sectors, over that period of time, there would have been about three applications of collective bargaining processes, salary adjustments and so on and if we tabulate those adjustments, we would find that what is recommended here, averaging about 24 per cent in the main, would fall even below, in terms of percentage adjustments—it will fall even below what has applied in other sectors.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development and Member of Parliament for Pointe-a-Pierre has expired.

Motion made: That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Hon. C. Sharma*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: You may continue, hon. Minister. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. McLeod: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and hon. colleagues. I should take less than the half an hour that has been suggested anyway.

The Government's approach, Mr. Speaker, is really to find what I prefer to identify as common ground in this situation and to do that, we are asked to go beyond the traditional scope of collective bargaining. And if we were to adopt a conciliatory approach to dealing with this issue—and very strong points have been made, important demands indeed have been made. And one would perhaps have enjoyed if we were able to identify who is the employer and we sit down with that employer and we have all of these projections being made and so on; and people substantiating the points that they would like to make in defence of a more decent salary package and other terms and conditions of employment.

It is, in my view, going to be quite an important exercise but we are not in that kind of situation—yes?—where everybody looks at us as the employer and whom do we identify as representing that interest from which we want to get the best possible benefit for ourselves? So we are encouraged to adopt a conciliatory

approach in this regard and in conciliation, one would normally approach the issues with a view to pulling together the areas of least disagreement, if not the areas of full agreement, and that following on this particular tenet, Mr. Speaker, we would urge that the current arrangement with regard to exemptions be maintained. I made the point earlier.

And I also alluded, Mr. Speaker, to what had happened in other sectors, 2005—2008; 2008—2010; 2010—2011 and 2011—2014. We still have a backlog but we have done appreciably well to have settled 75 collective agreements, Mr. Speaker, all of which had bunched up because nothing was taking place. State enterprises; in a couple of cases, private enterprise, following perhaps on the example that the Government apparently was taking, they were not negotiating. Nothing was being settled and everybody was getting angry and we just pulled up our socks and rolled up our sleeves and we, to this date, have settled 75 outstanding collective agreements. [*Desk thumping*] And yet there are those who would suggest that Members of the Parliament should have nothing.

There were times perhaps when the Government became so sensitive to that, that rejection of SRC reports and so on was taking place. We are called upon to bite the bullet and to take the bull by the horns and I feel certain that we can justify, as Members so far have been attempting to justify, that we are doing a very important job and that the great majority of us—I have absolutely no doubt—are doing that very conscientiously and the Members of Parliament and members of these statutory bodies, and so on, that have been identified, themselves have to exist in conditions that permeate the society of Trinidad and Tobago and we ought to be treated better than we have so far been treated.

So we could not discuss compensation for public officials and ignore this Government's settlement of 75 wage negotiations over that particular period identified. And we should not forget, Mr. Speaker, that many of those were unresolved for as far back as 2008 and that some of those settlements—and they were very challenging, Mr. Speaker. They were very, very challenging. Some of those settlements included a \$90 million settlement between the Public Transport Service Corporation and the union—that is the Transport and Industrial Workers Union—and what we sought to do there, as Members of Parliament are seeking to do, no doubt—what we sought to do there and we succeeded in doing it—was to bring those PTSC workers' salaries in line with other statutory bodies.

They were lagging too far behind and we engaged, for many hours—as a matter of fact the negotiating teams sat down for some 17 hours straight. After all of the preliminary work that would have been done at the bilateral level and then

at the level of conciliation, when they thought that they could go no further and that there was no settlement and perhaps the Minister would assist them in arriving at that settlement, the Minister sat with them for 17 hours and ensured that there was a new approach to a collaborative spirit between the executive of the PTSC and the workers' representative, the Transport and Industrial Workers Union. And I want to extend my congratulations to them and to express my very deep regards for the manner in which they came and very maturely approached the question and so on, and moved to satisfy the travelling public—that part of the travelling public that depend on the less expensive PTSC mode of transportation.

And there were the negotiations at the energy sector, Mr. Speaker, when we went overnight on Carnival Saturday, as a matter of fact. That was 2012.

Mr. Cadiz: That was a Panorama night.

Hon. E. McLeod: Yes, Panorama. And we settled that and prevented a situation that would have caused confusion for Carnival. And we know—and it has often been said, said by the now Minister of Transport, said by the now Minister of Tourism and by the Minister of Finance and the Economy—that Carnival, as a contribution to our economic activity, is a most important feature in the activity of our people in Trinidad and Tobago. And we had to avoid, as much as we were able to do, the disturbance that would have been caused if there was no transportation fuels available for transportation and so on.

And the negotiations at the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission, Mr. Speaker, that one escaped settlement at the conciliation level and was referred to the Industrial Court and the court moved speedily to settle in that case. But we are again in a situation, at this time, where these negotiations are supposed to be going on at the bilateral level. *[Interruption]* Yes? Okay—taking five more. Yes. We also—*[Laughter]*—settled—“yuh unsettling meh dey man”. *[Laughter]* We also settled the teachers, Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers' Association, yeah. And I am sure that you all remember, as a means of appeasing a situation in the protective services, this Government decided that a \$1,000 non-taxable allowance would be effected for officers of the protective services.

7.00 p.m.

I say all of this, Mr. Speaker, to have those doubting Thomases and other agents who would be in the public—and we are in fact a society with short memory. Many will forget the efforts that this Government made to settle other workers, coming, first of all in 2010/2011, and adjusting the minimum wage from the \$9.00 that existed for so many years before, to \$12.50. *[Desk thumping]* And

as we speak now, Mr. Speaker, an exercise is being done to ensure that those unrepresented people in the national community who are doing important jobs, they are in important sectors, and they are being considered right now. I do not want to let the cat out of the bag because the report has not yet officially come to me, but work is being done.

As we are working, Mr. Speaker, on a package, really, of amendments to the Industrial Relations Act, we received the first report of the Industrial Relations Advisory Committee set up under section 80 of the Industrial Relations Act and there are very, very important amendments that we must make to the existing law if we want to keep in step with what is happening in modern times all around us, even in the Caribbean.

It has been taking some time. But it must take time, Mr. Speaker. Yes? We did not want to just be jumping at every bell that is rung, at every demonstration that is organized, at every call that is made and if you did not particularly articulate the position that you are interested in achieving, and if you did not examine these positions, as they will affect others in the particular relationship, we are not just going to take a demand made by any of the social partners and just foist it on the rest of Trinidad and Tobago. We must engage in consultation. The relationship is with the employer, the workers and their union and the Government. It is a tripartite relationship.

The Government must be looking after the interest of all, while the others would, perhaps, be looking at their own particular interest. But they have to be encouraged, through the social dialogue process now, to examine each other's interest and that they must be working collaboratively to ensure the success of the enterprise, so that the success of the individuals employed in the enterprise would also be advanced and that is the approach that we have been taking. That is the slowcoach approach that Mc Leod has been taking, insofar as labour legislation is concerned and I have absolutely no regrets or any apology to make to anybody who thinks that Mc Leod is taking too long. He has crossed the line. He has sold out. I do not know what I have sold out. Yes? It is so easy to say that. It is so easy to say that.

We made particular commitments, Mr. Speaker, and we will fulfil those commitments. We did say that within the first 100 days or 120 days, I think it was, that the minimum wage is going to be settled, that we will follow with the maternity protection amendment. That has been done. Yes? And what else?

Mr. Speaker, I want to allow the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East to make his contribution and then—[*Crosstalk*] now you are going to the airport, I

understand and you are going to be travelling on very good road that the Minister for Works and Infrastructure—[*Desk thumping*] That should help you.

Yes. So that, while we are proposing, Mr. Speaker, that we accept the report with the amendments that have been suggested, it still ought not to be seen as this Government's report. Yeah. You know. As the Member for Chaguanas West would have suggested that it is my report. No, it is not my report. We would have done a lot more than has been done here. But we must also thank the members of the Salaries Review Commission for the work that they have done. Yes.

Miss Cox: It is cut and paste.

Hon. E. McLeod: It is cut and paste?

Miss Cox: Check the reports from before.

Hon. E. McLeod: They have done some work. They have not really completed their job. I have a particular attitude, Member for Chaguanas West and other Members of the Parliament. As much work as we would have done, and if I might speak for myself, as much as I would have done, when I look at the situation and I realize that there is still more to be done, I say to myself that I have not yet done enough and if we were to accept that, you know, we will be contributing in a serious way to higher levels of productivity and all of that.

So the proposal is that we accept the recommendations with amendments, as has been identified earlier, of the 98th Report of the SRC as a working document and while in need of modification, it is at least moving in the right direction regarding the level of compensation for public officials under its purview.

If I might just reiterate what that position is, it is that we accept the salary adjustments, we call—[*Crosstalk*] well if you do not accept it what will you get? I take the point about duty allowance and all of that but we could not do that now and if you had been engaged, as I am sure that you were engaged at some time—[*Crosstalk*] perhaps, and we meet many employers in the process who play the fool and we meet some unions too that play the fool and what the conciliator's job really calls for, is an identification of the positives in both positions and you congratulate and thank them for having a positive in their position and you encourage them to move further. Yes? And as I would have said to them, if you jump off your high horse across there and I jump off mine across here and we walk towards each other, we should meet at some point and shake hands and say together, we have done a good job.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you very much, and Members of this Parliament, for agreeing to support the acceptance of these recommendations, insofar as the

salary adjustment is concerned, that we retain the provision insofar as motor vehicle allowances are concerned and we demand that the job evaluation exercise that has been promised for 25 years be approached as immediately as we can provide the resources for that to happen, so that we can give to the offices of the Parliament and other very important institutions and offices in Trinidad and Tobago the respect and the compensatory terms that they certainly require and might well be very well entitled to. Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I want to, with your leave, revert to item: Statement by Ministers.

The question is therefore that in accordance with Standing Order 37(3) the debate on the Motion to approve the 98th Report of the Salaries Review Commission be adjourned.

Question put and agreed to.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

Mr. Speaker: I have been advised that the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs wishes to make a very important statement on a very important national issue in Trinidad and Tobago at this time. I know the hon. Member for Chaguanas West would like to speak, but with the leave of this honourable House— [*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: West?

Mr. Speaker: Oh, you are next yes. Sorry. So, with the leave of hon. Members of this House, I shall now call on the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs.

Beetham Wastewater Project Report

The Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Kevin Ramnarine): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for permitting me the opportunity to make a statement to the House of Representatives.

At 6.00 p.m. yesterday, March 13, 2014, I received a report which I had requested from the National Gas Company, as it relates to the Beetham Wastewater Project. I wish now to read the majority of the contents of that report into the Parliament record.

Mr. Speaker, the NGC and WASA entered into a memorandum of understanding to— [*Interruption*]

Miss Mc Donald: Mr. Speaker, may I intervene at this point, please?

Statement by Minister

Friday, March 14, 2014

Mr. Speaker: I am allowing the Member leave. We will talk about that after. Continue, please. Continue hon. Minister, please. [*Interruption*] No, no, no, I have already granted leave.

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NGC and WASA entered into a memorandum of understanding to work together for the construction and commissioning of a water recycling plant in the vicinity of the existing Beetham Wastewater Treatment Plant, with the objective to supply water for industrial consumption to the Point Lisas Industrial Estate.

The genesis of this collaboration was initiated between National Energy, a subsidiary of the NGC and WASA, since 2005 and titled: Partnering for Successful Development of Energy and Water Sectors in the Interest of Sustainable National Development. This culminated in the signing of an MOU on the 6th of January 2006, between both companies.

This MOU was signed by the former Presidents of both companies, on behalf of the NEC, Mr. Prakash Saith and on behalf of WASA, Mr. Errol Grimes. Mr. Speaker, this project was therefore conceptualized by the former PNM administration.

The water recycling plant is an initiative designed to recycle wastewater to industrial standard and use it to supply the Point Lisas Industrial Estate. Currently, treated water from this facility is disposed of into the Gulf of Paria. This project requires pipeline infrastructure to transport water over land to Point Lisas. The project will be the first to include water recycling among the nation's many technologies for water provision. The existing modalities of water supply are surface water, ground water and desalination.

The Beetham Water Recycling Plant will provide 10 million gallons of water per day to Point Lisas, thereby freeing up for distribution to domestic customers across the country 10 million gallons of water. That additional 10 million gallons of water per day will provide a full-time water supply to over 150,000 citizens of this country and positively impact over 200,000.

7.15 p.m.

The Point Lisas Industrial Estate, Mr. Speaker, is a major consumer of water, using an estimated 23 million gallons of water per day. It should be noted that water is also required for power generation. If that supply, Mr. Speaker, is compromised, and the operations of the Point Lisas estate are negatively impacted, this could have serious economic consequences for Trinidad and Tobago. The reality of such an event became apparent during the 2010 dry

season, in which water supply became so critical, that it almost led to a complete shutdown of the Point Lisas Industrial Estate, and the Petrotrin refinery. The project is, therefore, of critical, national importance from the perspective of water and energy security. That was also recognized by the previous administration now in Opposition.

The project, Mr. Speaker, will ensure sustainability of a large sector of NGC's customers. NGC and WASA each has existing and crucial right of way availability on land which, when combined, provides a much more cost-effective option than a marine pipeline route to Point Lisas. This project, Mr. Speaker, will be funded and managed by the NGC and when completed, NGC will be responsible for its operations.

NGC, Mr. Speaker, retained CPG Consultants PTE Limited, an international firm with expertise in water recycling, to undertake a technical feasibility study and assist in developing the request for proposals, RFP and an evaluation methodology. CPG also secured the expertise of KPMG to assist in this project. A technical team, Mr. Speaker, comprising employees of NGC, WASA and CPG, examined both engineering and financial feasibility of this project and prepared the RFP for the facility.

The RFP, Mr. Speaker, included preliminary design work, process design, equipment specifications, plant layout and right of way for pipeline construction. As such, with this high level of pre-bid engineering, it was determined that the bid period of eight weeks was sufficient for the submission of proposals.

I now turn to the RFP process, Mr. Speaker. The process of this RFP was conducted in strict accordance with the National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited Tenders Rules, Procedures and Standing Orders 1998, for Supply of Goods, Works and Services for the Disposal of Unserviceable and Surplus Goods as last amended in 2009, referred to as "the Rules".

The process was conducted in accordance with the two-envelope system, whereby bidders are required to complete and submit separate packages: envelope A, technical proposal and envelope B, financial proposal. This two-envelope system facilitates selection of suitable proposals, through a systematic process, such that only financial proposals from bidders that demonstrate suitable technical competence are assessed. The proposals were assessed utilizing a predetermined evaluation methodology, which was further subdivided for the specific assessment in the technical and financial areas.

Statement by Minister

Friday, March 14, 2014

This predetermined evaluation methodology, clearly identified how the overall combined scores from the technical evaluation, and the financial evaluation would produce a total score for each bidder. The highest overall score is the best bid, and it should be noted that the one with the lowest overall price may not be the best bid.

The following is a summary of the process from issue of RFP to award of contracts for this project:

1. On September 02, 2013, notice of RFP was published, for which the initial closing date was October 28, 2013.
2. On September 25, 2013, a site visit was held with prospective bidders. The prospective bidders were given a period of approximately five weeks from viewing documents and purchase, to submit request for clarifications.
3. Fourteen companies purchased RFP packages.
4. On October 09, 2013, the request for clarifications period closed to ensure that NGC's engineers and consultants had sufficient time to issue responses, and give all prospective tenderers sufficient time to effectively review documents to compile their proposals. Clarifications were issued by addenda to all purchasers, through the RFP period in response to several requests for clarifications.
5. On October 10, 2013, NGC received 11 letters of intent out of the 14 companies that purchased packages, by which they confirmed their intentions to submit proposals for this project at the initial closing date of October 28, 2013.
6. Request for time extensions were received as follows:
 - September 16, 2013, Super Industrial Services Limited; this was not granted.
 - September 27, 2013; Universal Projects.
 - September 28, 2013, UEM India Private Limited.

as a result, after reviewing the requests received, NGC's engineers and consultants granted an extension to December 02, 2013.

Other requests were received on December 15, 2013 from Technologica Intercontinental and WOG Group, and were again reviewed, and the second extension was granted with a new closing date of December 10, 2013, Mr. Speaker.

7. As a result of these extensions of time, companies were, therefore, granted 14 weeks—a 14-week time frame to submit their proposals.

The RFP package, Mr. Speaker, informed companies clearly of the five stages of the predetermined evaluation methodology, with a breakdown of the parameters and the weightings of 70 per cent for technical and 30 per cent for financial.

9. The detailed predetermined evaluation methodology was developed by KPMG, subcontractor to NGC's consulting firm, CPG Consultants Pte. Limited, in July 2013 and adopted by NGC.
10. On December 10, 2013, 14 weeks after the initial advertisement on the closing date, the NGC received two proposals. These sealed documents were recorded and locked away until the project evaluation team requested access on December 16, 2013.

On December 16, 2013, the evaluation commenced and the tender evaluation report was submitted on January 17, 2013. The tender evaluation report dated January 17, 2014, was submitted to NGC's management tenders evaluation committee on January 17, 2014. Thereafter, the tender evaluation report was submitted to NGC's Board Tenders Committee on January 22, 2014, and thereafter to NGC's Board of Directors on January 29, 2014.

NGC's Board of Directors considered the tender evaluation report on February 06, 2014, following which the project's evaluation team was asked to provide additional information requested by NGC's Board Tenders Committee and Board of Directors, and submitted a revised tender evaluation report to all levels for approval.

On February 14, 2014, the revised tender evaluation report, with same date was submitted to NGC's management tenders evaluation committee, and was recommended to NGC's Board Tenders Committee for consideration.

On February 17, 2014, NGC's Board Tenders Committee considered the revised tender evaluation report, and recommended the approval for consideration by NGC's Board of Directors.

On February 19, 2014 at NGC's Board of Directors meeting, the revised tenders evaluation report dated February 14, 2014 was considered and approved, and approved the award of contracts to the preferred bidder, Super Industrial

Services Limited, together with subcontractors Foster Wheeler USA Corporation, and Hyflux International Pte. Limited who obtained the highest overall score.

The letter to the preferred bidder was issued on February 20, 2014 and accepted by SISL on February 21, 2014. Letter to unsuccessful tenderer was issued on February 26, 2014 to Atlatec, and the contract, Mr. Speaker, was executed on March 10, 2014 by the NGC.

Mr. Speaker, a six-member, cross-functional team from within NGC's group was convened to evaluate the proposals received. The evaluation team evaluated the proposals received independent of CPG. However, as required, clarification and advice were sought at some point in time from CPG. The evaluation team was guided by the predetermined evaluation methodology, the five stages of which were provided to tenderers in the RFP, disclosing the following weightings:

- (a) Quality evaluation (technical), 70 per cent;
- (b) Price/evaluation (financial), 30 per cent.

A summary of the main determining factors is as follows:

The following are the main reasons SISL together with Subcontractors Foster Wheeler USA and Hyflux International were recommended for award of contract:

- i. SISL scored 77.93 per cent in technical evaluation or 54.55 out of 70.
- ii. SISL complied in main with the plant design proposed in the RFP and actually provided a superior design.
- iii. SISL proposed a superior pipeline methodology.
- iv. SISL submitted a superior construction programme.
- v. SISL's information submitted on reverse osmosis pumps was of superior quality.
- vi. SISL proposal had greater local content.
- vii. SISL design team has extensive membrane plant experience.
- viii. SISL indicated, Mr. Speaker, that only if global steel prices changed, they may consider applying for a variation in the contract price. SISL confirmed that EIA and soil condition risks were considered in their bid. Their bid price can be considered, therefore, to be firm apart from, of course, the variation in world steel prices, having a degree of confidence and consequently, subject to low variability.

Statement by Minister
[SEN. THE HON. K. RAMNARINE]

Friday, March 14, 2014

The following are the reasons Atlatec, together with their subcontractor Universal Projects Limited, the reasons put forward for their bid not being accepted are:

- i. Atlatec scored 52.71 per cent in the technical evaluation or 36.90 out of 70.
- ii. Atlatec's deviation in the plant design as proposed in the RFP increased the risk associated with plant maintenance.
- iii. Atlatec failed to provide a detailed pipeline construction methodology, even after request during their bid clarification exercise.
- iv. Atlatec's construction programme was not comprehensive.
- v. Atlatec's overall price was 46 per cent lower than the in-house estimate, significantly increasing the risk of completing the project within the proposed price.
- vi. Atlatec confirmed 3 per cent to 5 per cent of the risk contingency in their price, this is extremely low for a design and build project of this type with the likelihood, Mr. Speaker, of several requests for variation of the contract price, if awarded, via variation orders, and the possibility of increased cost during implementation.

Mr. Speaker, the energy sector has had a terrible experience with that approach to engineering projects at Petrotrin, and that is something which we will speak about again, especially as it relates to the gasoline optimization programme, where the cost of that project [*Continuous crosstalk*] went from US \$350 million in 2005, and ended up at US \$1.5 billion, because of this same approach being adopted by Petrotrin, where there was not a fixed lump sum approach to procurement, but a variable costing approach to procurement at Petrotrin. That has left Petrotrin seriously crippled from a debt perspective, and that is something which I will give more details on during the finance Bill debate.

- vii. Atlatec identified global steel prices increases, variations in the EIA.

So they also indicated global steel prices could vary for them and, therefore, escalate cost; variations in the EIA and soil condition risks as factors which would contribute to price increase. In effect, Mr. Speaker, Atlatec has, in fact, signalled its bid price is subject to higher levels of variability, resulting in a lower level of confidence in the proposed price.

7.30 p.m.

It should be noted too, Mr. Speaker—and this is a very important point—that NGC’s own in-house estimate was \$149,999,000, or roughly \$150 million; and that \$149,999,000, in terms of Trinidad and Tobago dollars, using the exchange rate at that time, which I think was 6.43, translates to TT \$965,093,000. That is roughly \$965 million if I were to round off to the closest million. That was the NGC in-house estimate. So it was \$150 million roughly and \$965 million when you convert to TT.

The SIS proposal was US \$167,755,000. When converted to TT dollars, that is \$1,079,337,785 or we can say, roughly \$1.079 billion. That was the SIS proposal. Atlatec’s proposal was US \$95,224,643. That, converted to TT dollars, was \$612,675,354. The salient point, of course, being that the Atlatec’s proposals was well below the NGC in-house estimate by more than TT \$300 million.

Therefore, for those non-technical people in the House and listening and so on, if one were to want to build a house and we know that our house would roughly cost about \$1 million and you ask a contractor for an estimate and he gives you an estimate of \$200,000, you know something must be fundamentally wrong with the price that he is quoting you. That is the analogy that we use with regard to this matter. So the SISL proposal therefore was closer to the NGC in-house estimate.

After considering the determining factors above, the evaluation team determined that Atlatec’s bid contained significantly below-market value elements, which are subject to higher levels of variability of their prices. Again, we may end up with a situation of Petrotrin and the GOP, where the cost ballooned and escalated from US \$350 million to US \$1.5 billion.

Also, in post-bid clarifications, Atlatec noted several areas where they may seek to revisit the price submitted, for example, changes in global steel prices, soil conditions, as previously mentioned in this report. One of the major elements which attributed to the variation in bid prices was the pipeline unit rate per metre supplied and installed.

NGC’s in-house estimate was US \$1,700 per metre. That estimate was based on local industrial rates. The NGC manages a pipeline network of 1,000 kilometres of natural gas pipeline and therefore would be well placed to understand the different rates for laying pipeline.

SISL submitted a unit rate of US \$1,339.72 per metre. Atlatec submitted a unit rate of US \$525 per metre and is well below the market price of the pipeline. The rate was considered by the evaluation team as being extremely low when

Statement by Minister

Friday, March 14, 2014

[SEN. THE HON. K. RAMNARINE]

considered with the in-house estimate and significantly increase the risk of price variation. So we may have ended up with a situation where a project, if that was awarded to Atlatec for \$612 million, the cost would have ballooned significantly well above the in-house estimate of the National Gas Company.

Mr. Speaker: How long again do you have?

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Mr. Speaker, two minutes. I am about to wrap up here.

The rate was considered extremely low when compared with the in-house estimate and significantly increased the risk of cost variability. That is the salient point.

In conclusion, SISL's bid package received the highest overall number of points, technical and financial, and offers the best technical and financial advantage to the NGC. NGC therefore obtained the approval of its Management Tenders Evaluation Committee, the NGC Board Tenders committee and NGC Board of Directors to award this contract to Super Industrial Services Limited and those other contractors along with it, Foster Wheeler and Hyflux. Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*] [*Mr. Imbert stands*]

Mr. Roberts: Chaguanas West now.

**NINETY-EIGHTH SALARIES REVIEW COMMISSION REPORT
(ADOPTION)**

Mr. Speaker: I just want to make it very clear that I am guided by these Standing Orders. The Member who catches the Speaker's eyes is the Member I am going to recognize unless I am advised by the Chief Whip that after the Government speaks, their speaker is going to be the Member for Diego Martin North/East. I was not advised, and even though, when I am advised, I am still guided by the Standing Orders. The Member for Chaguanas West rose before the Member for Diego Martin North/East, so he caught my eye. The hon. Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Jack Warner (*Chaguanas West*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, sorry to have put you in that position. The debate on the Motion is:

“Be it resolved that the House approve the Ninety-Eighth Report of the Salaries Review Commission of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.”

I want to say this to bring back the focus really on where we are at this point. I want to say at the outset that I totally and comprehensively reject the SRC report.

[*Desk thumping*] But I hasten to add—because it is very easy for people to impute motives about being self-seeking and wanting money, I must say very early—it has nothing to do with me.

Let me make it quite clear that up to now I still get \$1 a month. Up to now I have never bought a tax-free car as a Member of Parliament. I have never gone on any trips anywhere as a Member of Parliament or as a Minister, except once when I paid for myself. I have never spent any money for entertainment of any kind as a Minister for two years. The point I am making therefore is, it has nothing to do with me and therefore it has to do with what is right.

Every day I am here, you say the prayer before we start and as you end you say:

“Grant that peace and happiness, truth and justice be established among us for all generations.”

This is not justice. This cannot be justice and I will tell this House why. I am amazed. I know my friend, the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, was one of our inveterate, almost number one trade union leader before this role. I could not understand, however, the change of role because it is not so much being a board of directors, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre. As you said, you see this as a board of directors. If that is the way at all, then it is the worst thing to see it as, a board of directors.

This is a Parliament and we have to respect the service and the work that is being done here by us. [*Desk thumping*] It is quite easy, you know, with 33 Members of Cabinet, all perks and so on, not to understand, but that is not the issue.

Today was a very important day in the life of this Parliament. We passed Standing Orders here which were not passed for 53 years. This is a Government that boasts of its bravery and so on passing the Bail Act, the Dog Control Act—they have walked where other Governments have not walked before—but today to walk and to give justice to the Members of Parliament, we are regaled with all kinds of hunky-dory and old talk.

Therefore, I will try to see how quickly I can bring some perspective to the arguments which have been raised before. Let us understand that the SRC was appointed, first of all, in 1976. The group that SRC has to see about is comprised of 300 categories of offices representing about 900 persons, from the President, the Prime Minister, the Chief Justice, the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House, top officials and senior managers in the three arms of State.

From 1976 to now, the SRC has submitted 98 reports and many of those reports are brief reports which are related to individual officers. In that period of time, over 30 years—almost 40 years, four decades—only nine general reviews have been done by the SRC. In 40 years, nine general reviews have been done by the SRC! The SRC comprises a chairman and four members and admittedly they work part-time, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre. I want to make the point that this report we have here is almost similar to the last report of 2009 and if they take five years to produce this, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, something has to be drastically wrong.

Mr. Speaker, the work on this report commenced in February 2012 to be exact, at the President's request, but if you look at this report and the last one, you have to admit it is cut and paste. The Member for Laventille East/Morvant is correct. It is cut and paste and I am ashamed that this can come to us as a report from the SRC. I will go into more detail to tell you why I am ashamed. This report is not worth the paper on which it has been written.

One of the things you will see in this report is that there is no formula or clear principle which has been used. You cannot say what they used. Apparently they got up a morning in a good mood or a bad mood, depending on which mood they got up, they said, okay, fine. This does not make sense and if this Government wants to leave the legacy that it is aspiring to do, you have done well so far with the Standing Orders revision. You have done well. Why do you not go the extra mile to do even better? If you are afraid as a Government for people to say that you are passing, of course, salaries and so on for yourselves, then what you have to do is to say, "Look this will come into effect from 2015", when in any case more than half of you will not be there. But say it.

7.45 p.m.

So, therefore, in any case, it will not affect anybody, and they cannot say it is self-seeking, but you have to say from 2015, we shall have new salaries and so on and effective A, B, C, D.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, when we came here in Parliament, we knew what the salaries were. We knew a backbencher was \$14,000; we knew a Minister was \$23,000 plus, so we knew the salaries we came here for and, therefore, all you have to say is, "Okay, fine, we came here knowing the salaries they have, but from 2015 this is what will take place."

Mr. Speaker, before I came here today, I studied New Zealand, India, Australia, England and Singapore; all of these before I came here, and I would tell you a little more about them just now. I tell you, if these persons in the SRC study

even one of those countries, they would not arrive at this. If they study only one country—and Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, I admire you for years, but your last contribution, I think you fell short. It cannot be right; it just cannot be right. Okay 33 Members of Cabinet, feel free, but that does not make this right, and I would tell you why because, you see, one of the points I am making here is that this report is pregnant with inconsistencies, and I would give you two examples.

You have the one about—we talked about it before, but I would tell you again—the Commissioner of Police. Mr. Speaker, the Commissioner of Police, I mean, how could these people in their right mind—Chief of Defence Staff, they recommend for him, \$31,080; Commissioner of Police, \$31,080, but defence advisor, \$31,080. [*Crosstalk*] Do you know what is worse, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre? For 10 months I was the Minister of National Security, I have never seen a defence advisor. So I have to ask the Minister, who we have there now, who is he? This superhuman who has to get the same salary as the Commissioner of Police; the same salary as the Chief of Defence Staff, who is this superhuman defence advisor? That is one.

The second thing I want to show you, Mr. Speaker, is the Leader of the Opposition. The Leader of the Opposition is in our Constitution. Forget the person, you do not like Keith Rowley, that is your business; the office is Leader of the Opposition, and you have to treat the office with respect. You know something, I say so. If we do not have respect for the office here, the people who have to decide for us on the outside will not have respect for it either. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Members.: Exactly.

Mr. J. Warner: I recall when I resigned from this Parliament on April 27, last year, I had given back everything—bus pass, the sticker for my car, iPad and so on. I handed back everything and then when I was reelected and sworn in, I assumed that I would get back what is my entitlement. So I got back my iPad; I got back my sticker for my car from the Clerk of the House, no bus pass for me.

Hon. Members: What? [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. J. Warner: No bus pass for me. [*Crosstalk*] Let me tell you something. [*Crosstalk*] Hold on, let me tell you something. [*Crosstalk*] From July last year—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deyalsingh: Correct that; correct that.

Mr. J. Warner: Hold on; hold on. I am on the *Hansard*, you know. From July last year, up until three weeks ago, I had no bus pass, then the chief secretary

called me a day to come and see her—sorry, the Clerk of the House, Mrs. Sampson-Meiguel—to come and see her. I was a bit late. She said, “But why you late?” I say, “Listen, traffic girl, traffic.” She say, “Do you have a bus pass?” I say, “No, since last year I have not gotten back a bus pass. She say, “But, Mr. Warner, this is wrong, they would blame me.” I say, “They ain blame you. I did not give it to you, why should they blame you?” I said but do not ask for any, I will wait and see when I get a bus pass. She refused to listen to me and she went, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, and got a bus pass for me. My bus pass I have now came from Mrs. Sampson-Meiguel. [*Crosstalk*] I say this to you, to tell you if you do not have respect among us here, people outside will not have it for you either.

Whether you like Jack Warner or not you do not have to eat with him; you do not have to drink with him; you do not have to sleep with him, but you have to work with him here, and when you work with him here, you have to respect him, his office, and then you have to respect the office that you give people here. So therefore, I am making the point to you, the Leader of the Opposition is in the Constitution, and one of the functions of the SRC, they say, is to maintain differentials—so he gets or she—according to what happens next year—[*Laughter*—the Leader of the Opposition gets \$29,590.

Mr. Roberts: How much?

Mr. J. Warner: The Leader of the Opposition, his remuneration is \$29,590, but the Chief Secretary who is not in the Constitution at all gets \$41,000. So you are telling me that the constitutional post of a Leader of the Opposition is \$29,000; the Chief Secretary, who is not in the Constitution at all, gets \$41,000. Something has to be wrong, and I must stay here and say to accept this report. I cannot do that. It has nothing to do with me.

But to compound it further—because you see this belief about people being part-time as MP and so on—I will take that just now—that has to be debunked because the fact is, because of how we behave here and outside there, people talk and they write editorials and they shout: “MPs are crooks.”

Mr. Speaker: Member for Chaguanas West, we have a Procedural Motion to address.

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 10(11), I beg to

Procedural Motion

Friday, March 14, 2014

move that the House continue to sit until the completion of the Motion being debated now; the Motion to approve the Ninety-Eighth Report of the Salaries Review Commission. I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

**NINETY-EIGHTH SALARIES REVIEW COMMISSION REPORT
(ADOPTION)**

Mr. J. Warner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the inconsistency goes even further, and I would tell you when I saw it last night, I had to laugh. Mr. Speaker, Members of Parliament, MPs, the figure recommended is \$17,410 from \$14,000, but the Mayor of Port of Spain gets \$20,890. That is not part-time. The Mayor of Port of Spain is my friend. He is president of the football association; he is a top insurance executive for Guardian Life; he is the Mayor of Port of Spain; in May, he will be Treasurer of the PNM. He has to be more than a “lagahoo” to perform those functions and his work—they say is \$20,890. He has no constituency to see about; he does not go there at 4.00 in the morning or 5.00; he does not have to go and buy a trophy every week for a function and so on; he does not go to events and so on. Mr. Speaker, something has to be wrong, and I must come here, Member, and accept this.

Miss Cox: No way!

Mr. J. Warner: It is wrong; it is an insult. If people do not respect us outside there, we must respect ourselves. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, I ask the question: is the SRC prepared, as is presently composed, to do its job effectively, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Members.: No.

Mr. J. Warner: What tools have they used? What tools they have to do this job? What resources? Who do they recruit, Mr. Speaker? Who advises them in their decision-making, Mr. Speaker? I ask the question. Mr. Speaker, what is even painful for me is that the housing allowance—I have nothing against judges. These days I am in the court so much, let me be careful. I have nothing against judges, but the housing allowance for judges has been increased by 150 per cent, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members.: Tax free.

Mr. J. Warner: Tax free! And do you know why? Because the SRC quote, “received a legal opinion on the matter”. Well, if it is so, tell the SRC to take a legal opinion on us as well.

Hon. Member: Yes, I agree.

Mr. J. Warner: And, as such, therefore, a judge now receives a monthly housing allowance of \$24,000 tax free. [*Crosstalk*] Something has to be wrong. And, of course, Mr. Speaker, his salary will move from \$33,800 a month to \$42,000 a month, plus over \$29,000 in tax-free allowances. Mr. Speaker, he gets overseas travel grant and a contact allowance, all told annually, \$187,000 tax free, Mr. Speaker; vacation leave and medical assistance, but the Members here, until we respect what we do and ourselves, nobody will respect us. Nobody!

A Cabinet Minister, a tax payable salary of \$41,000 a month—from \$33,000 to \$41,000—with allowances, \$20,000 but, Mr. Speaker, he has vacation leave and for himself and his spouse medical assistance, but an elected MP, nothing, zero—\$17,000 plus and he takes that. The problem is the guys on that side who agree with this, guys next year, who knows, you might be on this side. So it is not the point of where you are, the point is what is right, what is just, what is correct. This just does not make sense. [*Desk thumping*] I will go further to say that what is important [*Interruption*]—“ah finishing jus now, ah know yuh anxious but ah finishing just now”—is that they believe that MPs are part-time. They fall for this part-time mantra. There are no part-time MPs; there are none. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Peters: I have to go to Mayaro just now.

Mr. J. Warner: In fact, Mr. Speaker, if even the Standing Orders had not been revised to have those different committees from 8.00 to 4.00 and so on, any MP who is worth his or her salt cannot be part-time. [*Crosstalk*] “I eh finish yet, hold on nah man.”

Mr. Speaker, I am saying that there has been a kind of indoctrination taking place for people to believe that it is part-time. I do not know about others, but I have never worked so hard. If I have to relive my life again, “I eh coming here at all.” It is a full-time job and you are telling me it is because of a lack of respect by the SRC why we have been given this kind of a salary.

Mr. Speaker, what is also important is that the MPs here are the bulwark of democracy in this country. We as MPs here have, in a sense, to look at the hopes and aspirations and so on of our constituents and the country, Mr. Speaker. But what happens?—and I say this here for any Prime Minister—what happens here is that people see the Parliament, not as the House of Parliament, you know, they see it as the House of the Prime Minister; not this one, any one—from Eric Williams go right back. What the Prime Minister says, goes and, therefore, it is to

keep the salary small, give you some perks and so on, and you remain at the beck and call of whoever the Prime Minister is and, therefore, you compromise your position and you cannot talk. Many Members would disagree.

Mr. Speaker, in England, Members in the same party like Cameron voted against Cameron on a particular issue, and there is nothing wrong about that. And, therefore, I make the point to you that we have to change this game. We have to make sure that Parliament becomes a place, an institution of accountability, Mr. Speaker, and not, of course, a House of acquiescence. Mr. Speaker, you know, as I think here, if the Leader of the Opposition does not get medical assistance as a leader; does not get, of course—in fact, Mr. Speaker, some months ago he got security from the present Minister of National Security, that is his choice. There is nothing in the statutes or anything that says he has to get security.

8.00 p.m.

If the Leader of the Opposition is supposed to be your Prime Minister in waiting, should he not be given a modicum of decency? They did not do that here.

Mr. Speaker, I am making the point, I ask the question: What are the consequences of all of this? Because people believe that it is part-time and because people have to have a job or two because of the small salary—small salary—there is no way anybody could live on \$14,000 in this country here and survive, as an MP. But because of this, I am saying that you find that in the Parliament there are certain deficiencies and defects, because of the situation that prevails here.

For example, there are hundreds of reports from the Government laid in Parliament which are never read. I know that for a fact. There are also numerous reports which are laid here but never arrive to Parliament, and that is a fact that is overlooked by all and dismissed by all. Mr. Speaker, because of what they have done here, they have made this Parliament not a watchdog, but a lap dog, and until they correct what they have done here, nothing will change.

Members of Parliament are not even provided with sufficient research support. Every MP should have access to some legal person, for example, some lawyer to help them do the research, especially on legal matters. No support for MPs, and yet they have to perform. The initiatives for parliamentary strengthening are given minimum support. Speaker after speaker in this House, you do your best within the constraints of not only time, but resources. But the fact is, speaker after

speaker—[*Interruption*] You see, if this guy was not hustling me so much, I would have finished it.

Mr. Speaker, take Singapore. Singapore is a rock in the south of Malaysia. It is just by south of Johor Bahru. From Singapore, which of course the SRC did not see, I will read for you, I quote from the book *Salaries for a Capable and Committed Government*:

“Singapore has succeeded over the years as a small nation in a competitive and uncertain world.”

We could come here and talk about Singapore, Singapore, Singapore; this is about Singapore:

“A key reason for this has been Government policies that have built up our capabilities and attracted investments, and developed a cohesive society. The Government has also taken a long term perspective, envisioning Singapore’s future and dealing with challenges and opportunities in advance...

In his swearing-in speech on 21 May 2011 after the General Election, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said: ‘We will always need committed and capable ministers. Politics is not a job or a career promotion. It is a calling to serve the larger good of Singapore.’—It is a calling to serve the larger good of Singapore.’ But Ministers should also be paid properly in order that Singapore can have honest, competent leadership over the long term.”

Mr. Speaker, I will fast-track:

“Politics is a calling and a privilege and those who want to serve must have a sense of duty to the nation and a desire to contribute to the public good.”— Singapore—“For a country to succeed, talented people”— must—“step forward to serve when they are in their prime.” Therefore— “In designing salaries, it is important to consider the quality of talent that we desire to lead our country and the opportunity cost faced by this group”—when they decide—“to enter”—into—“politics.”

What he is saying, Mr. Speaker, it is not when you are 70 or 80 you come into politics; that is when you should be leaving, like me. A lot of us here should leave and encourage young people to come in. Let the salary be attractive; get the best talent.

He goes further:

“While money should never be the motivation for anyone becoming a politician, the financial sacrifice should not be so large that it discourages outstanding and committed Singaporeans...We must recognize that there is also a sacrifice of personal space and privacy...”

You sacrifice personal space and privacy—Singapore, Mr. Speaker.

“This is why the Government’s philosophy has been to pay competitive salaries, so that highly capable individuals in their prime can seriously consider politics and take on political leadership roles,...”

Singapore—Singapore, but we come here—

I heard the Member for Oropouche East say in his contribution that he knows that we should get more money, but based on austerity measures and so on. But I want to tell him something: there will always be a time when you cannot pay enough. If you wait until you are able to pay, Mr. Speaker, they will not increase it in our collective lifetime. There will be no such time as the right time.

The fact is that you have to recognize the need, and you cannot—there is an old saying, “If you pay peanuts, you will get monkeys”. I tired sit behind monkeys, because you are paying peanuts, and that is why we are where we are, and with the best will in the world, people outside there are bound to say how politicians corrupt, how they are not good. All kinds of things they will say. Do you know why? The impression is that we simply go there for a handout. Mr. Speaker, give this job the respect it deserves. I am saying that the SRC did not do that. They did not do that.

Mr. Speaker, let us go to England. [*Interruption*] Okay, I will finish. I will leave out India. I will leave out Australia. I will leave out New Zealand. [*Crosstalk and laughter*]

Mr. Roberts: “Doh worry with he. Send him to find de plane in Malaysia.”

Mr. J. Warner: You have to go to England. In fact, before I say this, Mr. Speaker, do you know that in England they have something called resettlement for MPs, that when MPs go up and they lose, they give them severance? If we follow the Westminster system, why do we not have that, Mr. Speaker? I do not even know what the pensions are for Members of Parliament. [*Crosstalk*] The fact is, even that needs to be looked at.

I recall many years ago, Mr. Speaker, when you were in the other place, and you were the firebrand in those days in the other place, I asked a Member of Parliament: Do you all have any pension for Senators? They told me, “No”. They

told me, my colleagues told me, for Senators they had no pension. Yet for all, this is our Upper House; these are the guys, of course, who have to work to see that things are in order, and so on, but no pension at all, and I felt that was wrong. I am saying, look at that also. I am saying this did not go far enough. It did not go far enough, and right through this, it is riddled with inconsistencies.

My friend wants to speak, so I will finish in two seconds. I will say, Mr. Speaker—[*Interruption*—“Ah finishing now. [*Crosstalk*] Ah finishing now.”

Mr. Speaker, if you want to give MPs more money, as they should get, I think MPs also deserve, or they have a right to show that they earned that as well.

Last Saturday, for example, in Chaguanas West, I went there half past four. It had about 95 people. Yes, about half past four. Four persons came. What they came to see me about? For one year they have not been able to see their MP, and can I help them to see their MP—four persons. Two of those persons who came to see me said that they went to a particular constituency and the MP said, “Doh come to me, go to your MP; I cannot see about you.” And this is the cry right through.

Mr. Speaker, MPs also have to show some degree of accountability. At the end of the year, if not before, have some system whereby you show how you have functioned, what role you have played, how many persons you have seen. Have some system where the MPs can be held accountable. Raise the salary and therefore make the MPs and them get the kind of remuneration the office deserves. Ask them, of course, to give account to the public, what they have been doing, if you want to do that. Publish their salary, what they have been getting, and let their constituents see it. By the end of the day, whatever you have to do, Mr. Speaker, I am saying do it, because if you do not do it now it would mean another three/four years. This report should never be accepted by any Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

Mr. Colm Imbert (*Diego Martin North/East*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will have to cut short my contribution because of that abuse of process that took place earlier. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: Uhhhh!

Mr. C. Imbert: You could go “uhhhh” all you want. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, when I listen to the Government contributions on this matter, when I hear what the Leader of Government Business has to say, what the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development has to say, there

are two schools of thought with respect to this, and the Member for Chaguanas West touched on one of them, that this is really a system of domination by the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister calls the shots; so you have a wide disparity between the salary of an ordinary Member of Parliament and a Cabinet Minister. The Prime Minister rules the system by fear, by controlling her Members or his Members with the threat that if they misconduct themselves or misbehave or do not toe the line, they are going to be reduced from the salary of a Minister to the salary of a Member of Parliament. It is a sword that Prime Ministers hold over MPs' heads. That is one school of thought.

The other school of thought is when you hear all the cackling and the noise on that side, it is that the Members of the Government they are getting enough in other ways, and therefore they do not need increases, and that is a pervasive—pervasive—school of thought. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Standing Order 36(5)—that is imputing improper motives?

Dr. Moonilal: He said Members getting enough in other ways.

Mr. Speaker: I think the Members feel strongly about that imputation, so I call on you to withdraw that.

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, I will withdraw whatever, but they are getting enough in other ways.

Let me go to the report itself, because I completely agree with the analysis of the Member for Chaguanas West. Mr. Speaker, it is weakness on the part of the Government to give in to pressure, whether it comes from the Prime Minister or it comes from some external force or general fear of what people would say if parliamentarians are paid properly. It is weakness on the part of the Government that gives rise to all of these platitudes and vague mutterings from Members opposite.

Any proper analysis of this report would lead to its automatic rejection. Any proper analysis of this report would lead to its automatic rejection. We have already looked at the question of how they have treated the Commissioner of Police, but I think that needs proper examination. Let us go through what they have recommended for various categories within this report.

The head of NIHERST—NIHERST is a very small organization involved in the promotion of science in Trinidad and Tobago; small establishment, very minimal responsibility. The President of NIHERST has been recommended for a salary of \$31,950.

8.15 p.m.

The head of the library services, \$31,950; the Commissioner of Police, \$31,080. So, this brilliant Salaries Review Commission has recommended a lower salary for the Commissioner of Police than the head of the library services and the head of NIHERST. [*Interruption*] They did no work. They are incompetent. Incompetent [*Desk thumping*] and they should be dismissed, and I call on the President to dismiss them for two reasons; [*Interruption*] one, because they did no work and they are incompetent; and two, because they have breached standard industrial relations practice in terms of [*Desk thumping*] attempting to remove a benefit that Members of Parliament have received, which has been put into law by a Motion that has been adopted by this Parliament since 2002.

And basic industrial relations practice would lead you to the conclusion that you cannot take away a benefit from a worker without, either his agreement or without an Act of Parliament and there is copious case law to that. [*Desk thumping*] You would tell me the Salaries Review Commission is headed by a lawyer, by an attorney, an experienced attorney, this is the ABC of law, that you cannot reduce the salary, the terms and conditions, the emoluments of a worker without his agreement or without an Act of Parliament. That is the ABC of law, and the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development knows that. He knows that! [*Crosstalk*]

If an employer attempted to reduce the salary and terms and conditions of any one of the oilfield workers, you will see how fast the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre in his previous incarnation would be on the streets, but yet he has come here like a little lamb in weakness telling us we must accept this nonsense. [*Interruption*] But, Mr. Speaker, to tell you how ridiculous this Salaries Review Commission report is, can you imagine this same Salaries Review Commission that has decided that the Commissioner of Police who has 7,000 men under arms, that is single handedly responsible for promotions, for discipline and for management of the police service—7,000 men under arms—is entitled to be paid less than the head of the library services of Trinidad and Tobago.

Apart from that, listen to this, listen to what the Chairman of the Integrity Commission has decided to pay himself, and you see you all do not know these things because you do not read and you are too frightened, you are coward, you do not want to challenge prime ministerial authority, you do not want to speak up in Cabinet, but I will tell you, I am not in Cabinet. [*Laughter and desk thumping*]

The Chairman of the Integrity Commission who might attend a meeting once per month, and as the Member for Chaguanas West has pointed out, is so

inefficient that in 40 years, they have only been able to do nine reviews of terms and conditions, sometimes there are periods of eight years between reviews of terms and conditions of office holders—sometimes there are periods of eight years. They are so inefficient, they may meet once per month, they are accountable to no one, they have nobody calling them at 12 o'clock at night telling them they have no water or they need an ambulance in the Mayaro hospital.

When I was Minister of Health, Mr. Speaker, I used to get calls at 3.00 a.m., and I suspect the current Minister of Health gets it too, because there is no ambulance in some one of the outlying health centres or hospitals and I had to deal with it. I had to wake up the Chief Medical Officer, wake up the principal medical officer and get an ambulance to that health facility at three o'clock in the morning. That is the job of a Minister. When my constituents do not have water, they have no qualms about calling me at midnight on a Sunday night and demanding that I wake up somebody in WASA and get water for them, because they believe that is my responsibility.

That is the responsibility of everybody in this House. Everybody! We are welfare officers; we must seek the interest of everybody in the country; of all disparate groups; of all interest groups; people come to us. As an MP people come—I am the MP for Diego Martin North/East, people come to me from as far south as Point Fortin, as far east as Toco. If they have a problem they come to me and they ask me to solve it, and when I ask them why, I am the MP for Diego Martin North/East, why somebody from Chaguanas or Toco is coming to me, they say but you—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Warner: Not from Chaguanas. [*Laughter*]

Mr. C. Imbert: “You hush! [*Laughter*] I have a whole set of marshals on PTSC buses from Chaguanas who have been calling my home every day for the last month asking me to assist them with their terms and conditions. So, you hush!

So, Mr. Speaker, I am simply giving you an example of the life of a Member of Parliament, and I could imagine for a Minister; I was a Minister for 12 years, it is 10 times worst. And yet the chairman of the Integrity Commission believes that a Member of Parliament should get \$17,000 a month—sorry, the Salaries Review Commission. Sorry, Mr. Speaker, the Chairman of the Salaries Review Commission, the one that has presided over this monstrous report, has decided to pay himself—paying an MP \$17,000; that same MP that if he has a problem, he will call me. If he does not have water or if there is a pothole in his road, or there is a crime in his area, he will call me, but I am part-time.

The same Member of Parliament that he thinks should get \$17,000; he has decided to pay himself \$28,720.

Hon. Member: Madness!

Hon. Member: Shame!

Mr. C. Imbert: The same Member of Parliament that he has decided is not entitled to a duty allowance—look at the time, 8.21 and I still have somewhere to go tonight, Mr. Speaker. And everybody here has somewhere to go tonight and deal with matters. He is in his bed! He is in his bed or having a drink somewhere with somebody or having a good time, but I am here doing the people's business. *[Interruption]* He must be paid \$28,000; I must be paid \$17,000 and he is meeting once a month and, I who do not deserve a duty allowance, which is what you pay people who work beyond normal working hours—standard industrial relations practice, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre. *[Crosstalk]*

I saw some strange character writing in the paper, say, what is a duty allowance? What is that for? He never hear about that! Mr. Speaker, a duty allowance is paid to people who work beyond normal working hours and are not compensated with overtime, they get a duty allowance. Standard! If it is not called a duty allowance, it is called a service allowance; same thing, different terminology. The Chairman of the Salaries Review Commission who has decided that MPs, who he knows have to work 24/7 are not entitled to a duty allowance or a service allowance, but has decided to pay himself a service allowance of \$5,050 a month. *[Crosstalk]* That is in there and they accept that. Weakness! Weakness on the part of Government Ministers to accept that—\$5,050 service allowance for the Chairman of the Salaries Review Commission.

Hold on! I am not finished, and that same individual has decided that Members of Parliament do not deserve a housing allowance, has decided to give himself a housing allowance of \$7,740 a month.

Hon. Member: No! *[Crosstalk]*

Mr. C. Imbert: You all do not believe me. *[Continuous crosstalk]* Mr. Speaker, you know there are so many anomalies in this thing. The Chairman of the Law Reform Commission, \$31,000 a month; law revision, \$31,000; equal opportunity, \$28,000; Integrity Commission, \$28,000; the recognition board, \$21,000; the Teaching Service Commission, \$23,000, Mr. Speaker.

Miss Cox: And that is part-time.

Mr. C. Imbert: And they are all part-time jobs. Part-time jobs! *[Interruption]* Mr. Speaker, I am sorry, I do not really have much more to say. I

do not have much more to say. I would simply read from a legal opinion with respect to the attempt by the Salaries Review Commission to reduce our benefits. And you have the case of the *Council of Civil Service Union v Minister for the Civil Service*, a 1983 case. And in that case, Mr. Speaker, the court was looking at attempts by employers to reduce the emoluments of workers, and they said:

“To qualify...for judicial review”—any—“decision”—that may—“affect”—a—“person...by depriving him of some benefit or advantage which...he has in the past been permitted by the decision-maker to enjoy and which he can legitimately expect to be permitted to continue to do until there has been communicated to him some rational ground for withdrawing it on which he has been given an opportunity to comment...”

It is unlawful. Standard case law, Mr. Speaker, in our own jurisdiction.

You have the case of *Naidike v Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago*, a 2004 case. That there is a category of cases where an applicant seeks the renewal or confirmation of a benefit, and the Privy Council ruled that this should properly ought not to be denied without good reason or without his having a chance to satisfy whatever concerns the decision-maker may have. That is a Privy Council decision, Mr. Speaker. Here in Trinidad and Tobago, the case of *Sam Maharaj v Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago*, a 2004 case where Justice Dean-Armorer ruled that the benefits of employment of a member of the Industrial Court were his property that could not be taken away without due process, Mr. Speaker.

You also have the case of *Bernadette Hood-Caesar v Attorney General*, High Court Action 3015 of 1987, where COLA and increments were properly found to be property within the meaning of section 4 of the Constitution and could not be taken away without an Act of Parliament. That is the case law in Trinidad and Tobago. I could cite numerous cases across the Commonwealth, in the Eastern Caribbean, in all Privy Council jurisdictions, where it is settled law, that you cannot take away a benefit from a worker without his agreement or without an Act of Parliament. Yet this Salaries Review Commission took it upon themselves to decide they are going to reduce our benefits in terms of privileges on taxation of motor vehicles which we have enjoyed since 1999.

Trite law! Trite law! You are talking about the Chairman of the Salaries Review Commission, who is a lawyer and other industrial relation practitioners on that commission and this is the kind of error that they are falling into. Mr. Speaker, I do not have much more to say on this. If the Members opposite want to

be weak; if they want to just go along with what they are being told to do; if they want to sit down in their private moments and grumble and whine and complain like little babies, that they are entitled to duty allowances and entitled to proper compensation, and come here and mumble all of this foolishness about we must give them time. How much time we must give them?

I went to see the Salaries Review Commission almost 20 years ago, Mr. Speaker, with respect to pensions and improved terms and conditions and they tell me they are doing a job evaluation exercise and they are seeking the services of an actuary and in due course. Twenty years later, same old talk; job evaluation exercise, seeking services and so on. It is not that they do not have the resources; there is a contempt that is coming from that organization. It is contempt for parliamentarians.

Miss Mc Donald: Yes.

Mr. C. Imbert: It is absolute contempt! It has to be. [*Desk thumping*] Because, how can you decide to pay yourself more than a parliamentarian and give yourself allowances that you think parliamentarians are not entitled to. That is contempt!

So, if the Members opposite want to be weak and they want to go along with it, that is their business. The quality of representation in Trinidad and Tobago will suffer; the Parliament will suffer; we will continue to have a dysfunctional Parliament; we will continue to have a broken system; we will continue to have weak oversight of governmental action; we will continue to have a situation where Ministers are in constant fear of being fired from the Cabinet every day if they displease the Prime Minister, because their salaries will be half or even one-third of what they are in Cabinet.

So, you Members opposite, you go ahead. You go and live the lie. You want to live the lie, live the lie. You know that the Salaries Review Commission is incompetent; you know what they have done is wrong; you know what they have done is unlawful; you know they should be fired, but you are afraid to say so.

Mr. Warner: Fire them!

Mr. C. Imbert: You are weak! You want to be weak, I will not join you. I am afraid I cannot remain for the rest of this debate, but I am not joining you. [*Laughter*] I am saying from now, I resolutely object and I demand the dismissal of the Salaries Review Commission.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: The Minister of Works and Infrastructure.

[*Miss Cox stands*]

Mr. Speaker: Oh, yes you are. Okay. The hon. Member for Laventille East.

Miss Donna Cox (*Laventille East*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, the purpose we are here today is to approve the Ninety-Eighth Report of the SRC and this report is indeed a replica of the last general report of the SRC. In fact, it is almost a word for word replica of its Eightieth Report submitted some 10 years ago, but with a 24 per cent increase in salary being applied to all offices, having regard to the fact that the entire group of office holders have experienced no increases in salary since 2005.

8.30 p.m.

So, Mr. Speaker, we have no issues with the fact that the SRC found it appropriate after almost 10 years to apply an increase in the salaries of offices within the review groups, and it is our understanding that this figure bears some resemblance to what has been granted in the wider public service during the intervening years. We must note, however, that the salaries of parliamentarians fall within the range of a part-time salary. We are far from pleased with the manner in which the SRC has performed its reviews over the years, bear in mind that the SRC has one mandate and, that is, I quote:

...to review the terms and conditions of services of the offices and make recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, it is my understanding that this commission only sits when it receives instructions from the President to conduct a review, and then it meets bi-monthly. So, is it any wonder that it has been unable to conduct any significant reviews for quite a while now, but has been more or less involved in a cut and paste exercise? It is that cut and paste exercise that we have difficulty in approving.

Mr. Speaker, of the 300 categories of offices, several fall within the Executive branch. So you have offices like Minister, Permanent Secretary and local government offices. Some fall within the judicial branch like judges, magistrates and registrars of the Supreme Court, then there are the chairmen and members of commissions, boards like the Chairman of Election and Boundaries Commission, the Chairman of the Police Service Commission and the Deputy Chairman of the Public Service Commission.

Mr. Speaker, while I cannot comment with certainty on the recommendations of the SRC after its review of the terms and conditions of others groups or offices, I believe that I am eminently qualified to discuss the recommendations in relation to parliamentary offices. Since the laying of the report now under consideration, I have spent some time reading available and published material on the question of Members remuneration here and abroad, and I have carefully read the following:

- The Parliament's 2012 submission to the SRC sent via the Office of the Clerk of the House to the commission;
- The dynamics of legislative rewards and empirical analysis of Commonwealth countries of the World Bank Institute, London School of Economics 2007/2008;
- The Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority First Report January 2013 on a review of Member pay and pension;
- A background note dated August 17, 2013, on parliamentary remuneration and entitlements undertaken by the Department of Parliamentary Services of the Parliament of Australia;
- The changing nature of parliamentary representation; a 2012 global parliamentary report of the IPU and the UNDP.

So, Mr. Speaker, this is just a handful of the material available on the issue of parliamentary remuneration published over the past two decades, and since it is the constitutional duty of the SRC since 1976 to review issues related to parliamentary and other remuneration, well I am inclined to believe that the SRC must have also read some of these. I will hope that they would have read some of these. Assuming they did, they would have discovered that in the United Kingdom, Members of the House of Commons were not always paid a regular salary.

Mr. Speaker, permit me to quote from a 2011 House of Commons Information Office Fax Sheet on Members pay, pensions and allowances. I quote:

“...until the last century”—being an MP—...was not considered to be a ‘full-time’ job and it was assumed that”—Members of Parliament—
“would have another income. The first regular salary for an MP was set in 1911, at £400 per year.”

And might I say, that was quite a handsome salary at that time.

Today, Mr. Speaker, there is a base annual salary of Members of Parliament of the UK House of Commons of £65,000. The equivalent is, TT \$689,103. This figure is expected to rise in 2015 to £75,000 and the equivalent TT \$795,119, and

this is to be determined by the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority. Bear in mind, that the sum £65,000, equivalent TT \$689,103, is but the base salary of an elected MP. Additional remuneration is paid to the MP who is appointed to certain special offices like the Speaker, a Minister, a Leader of the Opposition and even a Chief Whip.

Mr. Speaker, the base annual salary of a Member of Parliament in Trinidad and Tobago at present is \$168,000, and the base salary of a Member of Parliament in the UK is £795,119. With regard to the UK Members of the House, this does not include allowances that are paid to each Member to cover a series of expenses including having homes near Westminster and in their constituency, and travelling between both. Mr. Speaker, do you know that there is no limit on the amount of travelling expenses UK MPs can claim? But it is subject, of course, to certain rules and regulations.

They can claim business class airfares, first-class rail travel for parliamentary business within the UK, and up to three visits a year to European institutions, as well as up to 30 single journeys a year for spouses or children. And for those who would say that this is all related to the size of the UK, Mr. Speaker, are we aware that each UK MP is paid an incidental allowance worth up to £22,193, the equivalent of TT \$235,281 annually to cover costs incurred in the course of an MP's duty such as office accommodation cost, office equipment and supplies? Staff allowance is £100,205 equivalent to over TT \$1 million a year, and the list of allowances go on and on. In addition to a pension, UK MPs are entitled to a winding up allowance worth a maximum of £40,799, equivalent TT \$432,492. This winding up allowance is paid to cover the cost of any work on parliamentary business done on behalf of an MP who has died, retired or lost their seat. Then there is the resettlement allowance spoken about by the Member for Chaguanas West. This is paid to MPs who lose their seat or decide to stand down for the next election, and it is based on their age and length of service and it amounts to between 50 per cent and 100 per cent of their annual salary. This is the resettlement allowance.

This resettlement allowance is indeed important because the reality is, as Members of Parliament, parliamentarians not only have difficulty getting jobs while employed as a parliamentarian, but even after, and the job of a parliamentarian is, of course, a risky one: today you are here; tomorrow you are there. Remember that. Today you all are there, tomorrow you will be over here. *[Laughter]* Mr. Speaker, if unseated, a Member becomes unemployed immediately and most likely may be unable to find employment for a long time, of course, because the stigma of politics stays with you.

Mr. Speaker, the 2012 submission to the SRC by the Parliament team was quite modest in its proposals. It did not request any term—It did not request terms anywhere near what a British Member of Parliament gets at this time, and the focus of the submission was on correcting the Commission’s erroneous treatment of the status of parliamentarians and requesting a repositioning from part-time to full-time in recognition of the work of the Member of Parliament today. So, the SRC ignored all the facts presented, but interestingly the base salary paid to UK MPs is considered a regular salary as opposed to a full-time salary. It is termed regular because it was recognized as far back as 1911 that it was important to pay MPs a salary for a regular 40 hour a week job, appropriately discounted having regard to the social obligation to serve.

As a consequence, the average Member of the UK House of Commons is able to devote his time full-time to his work as an MP because he is adequately paid regardless of his profession. As you are aware, Mr. Speaker, most never make it into the Cabinet and many are quite content to work solely as an MP looking after their constituents and attending to their legislative duties, and for that UK MPs are adequately paid. If that person decides to do additional outside work, he cannot do so on parliamentary time. In fact, one report states that the average British MP reported being unable to spend any more than eight hours a week on his professional career.

So, Mr. Speaker, a UK MP has been in receipt of a regular salary since 1911, yet in 2014 our SRC with the sole duty of studying and reviewing issues like these, reports that it is uncertain whether the work of an MP is part-time or full-time in nature. Mr. Speaker, they could not be serious.

Permit me to quote from an article, *Trinidad Guardian*, February 19, and this was an interview given by former Head of the Public Service, Reginald Dumas, regarding the 98th Report of the SRC and I quote:

“The committee’s report said the work of an MP was full-time and their salaries and benefit should reflect that. But Dumas said the SRC indicated in its report that it was unaware if MPs’ work was full-time or part-time and it was awaiting a job evaluation exercise and compensation survey to address that issue. Dumas expressed surprise that ‘in 2014 we are now trying to find out whether MPs were full-time or part-time’.

He said he wanted to know what had the SRC been doing over the past several years. ‘So there is a grey area here and I think it is slackness on the part of everybody concerned. Surely by now, in 2014, we should know whether an MP is full-time or part-time’,—Dumas...”—stated.

Mr. Speaker, you would no doubt agree that over the years the SRC ought to have looked at the Canadian Parliament. I am sure that they did that as part of their remit, but do you know that 50 years ago a talented athlete named Red Kelly played professional hockey for the Toronto Maple Leaf while holding down a job as a Member of the Canadian House of Commons for the constituency of York West? You see, in Kelly's era, the job of an MP was considered a part-time activity paying Canadian \$12,000 a year, even then a generous \$92,000 in 2014, dollars, and that was until 1953, Mr. Speaker, the year that Canadian MPs were deemed eligible to be paid a full-time salary and a pension upon retiring from the Parliament. Today, a Canadian MP's base salary is Can. \$160,200, the equivalent of TT \$919,000 close to TT \$1 million per year, and this figure, Mr. Speaker, does not include allowances like travelling and housing.

There are 60 sitting Canadian MPs listed as business executives, 46 are lawyers, 21 are farmers, six are physicians or surgeons; there are also nurses, accountants and economists, but most of them are unable to do work in their profession while performing full-time duties as an MP. The question is why? Because decades ago it recognized that so much was expected of Canadian MPs, Senators and Cabinet Ministers, that they needed to be paid a salary that could demand their full attention to the work of the Parliament in the interest of the people of Canada.

8.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, is it any different for us here in Trinidad and Tobago? We, too, are doctors, lawyers, communication specialists, geologists, engineers, et cetera, and we also devote over 40 hours a week to our legislative and representational duties.

Paul Ledwell, Executive Vice-President of the Public Policy Forum, a think-tank on government issues, in a report published on canada.com in June 2013, agreed that an MP's work should be considered full-time and he stated and I quote:

“I don't think that anyone would expect an elected official to have any time to get themselves to a second' job.”

He added though that:

“...there may be circumstances when a little moonlighting is acceptable.”

He states:

“Doctors, lawyers and other professionals have to keep their hand in to maintain their credentials...They don’t have the security of knowing how long they will keep their jobs as MPs.”

So, Mr. Speaker, for those who are wondering about the relevance of this information to this debate, ponder on this: A Canadian MP has been in receipt of a regular or full-time salary since 1953, and in Trinidad and Tobago, in 2014, our SRC reports that it is uncertain whether MPs work part-time or full-time and ask that we await a job evaluation exercise that, I understand, was promised on a previous occasion.

Mr. Speaker, one must wonder, what does the SRC believe this job evaluation will reveal in relation to the job of an elected MP today? Will it reveal anything that this country does not know already? I have no doubt that the SRC knows better but functions in morbid fear of doing what is right in relation to parliamentarians, and the question is: why? So it essentially reports that it is powerless unless someone else, most likely some foreign consultant, gives it the “Go ahead”, meanwhile we are being asked in this Chamber to give, not only inconsistencies but also glaring mistaken conclusions contained in this report, our nod of approval.

Interestingly, the debate in Canada today is not whether an MP deserves a full-time salary, the debate, now, is what type of work an MP should be permitted to do. Democracy Watch Co-ordinator, Tyler Sommers, in the same article referred to on canada.com, believes that and I quote:

“...any outside work related to the responsibilities of a MP should be prohibited and this should be made clear in the Conflict of Interest Code, the ethical rulebook for MPs.”

Mr. Speaker, there are many other countries that have long recognized that a Parliament cannot function properly with part-time parliamentarians. They did not require any comprehensive job evaluation exercise to do so, it was a natural conclusion over time. Included in this long list are New Zealand, Spain, Italy, Kenya, Mexico, United States of America, Bermuda, Australia and all of Commonwealth Africa—just to name a few.

Mr. Speaker, what are the facts? Well, here in Trinidad and Tobago, the nature of parliamentary work leaves an MP, like myself, with no time for outside work. While the UK and Canada are large Parliaments with hundreds of MPs and so the work is shared among the MPs, small Parliaments like ours are plagued

with the many problems associated with a small size. There are not enough of us to go around so we have to do more than a fair share of the work of the Legislature. Where we can, we serve on multiple committees, as the Member for Diego Martin North/East and the Member for Arouca/Maloney could attest.

Mr. Speaker, in fact, in the large Parliaments, many Members just visit the House to ensure that they are recorded as present or to assist in the maintenance of a quorum, and off they go to their offices, but that is not the case here in Trinidad and Tobago. Due to the size issue, our participation and attendance at the lengthy House meetings are critical on almost every occasion the House sits, and the work is constant and excessive.

When the new Standing Orders are adopted, parliamentarians will have to sit on many more committees. Some of us will have to be here almost every day. In addition to the Public Accounts Committee, Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee and other committees established by the Constitution, proposed Standing Order 94 provides for a Business Committee as well. There are several new proposed joint standing committees and they are as follows: the Public Administration and Appropriation Committee, national security committee, energy committee, foreign affairs, human rights, diversity, the environment and sustainable development committee, parliamentary broadcast, government assurances committee. Mr. Speaker, it is clear that the work of an MP has changed drastically over the past decades. An MP is called upon to work on a full-time basis, and I do not understand how come the Salaries Review Commission cannot see that.

Mr. Speaker, you know a lot about other Parliaments and how they function. How many others have an app just for Parliament's work? Well, we have an app just for that and it is called the "Rotunda", and it sends us notifications whenever new work material is uploaded. So, Mr. Speaker, you and your staff have ensured that our legislative work follows us wherever we go, whether at home or aboard. On top of that, Mr. Deonarine sends regular emails, reminders, of urgent work requiring our urgent review. I know for a fact that we are among the first in this regard, Mr. Speaker, yet, the SRC is not sure whether our work here, in Trinidad and Tobago, is full time or part-time, and, consequently, they repeatedly recommend a part-time salary, one that is less than the salaries paid to part-time commissioners like the part-time Chairman of the Equal Opportunity Commission, the Public Service Commission, the Teaching Service Commission. I understand the Public Service Commission Chairman receives \$24,000, almost

equivalent to what is paid to other part-time office holders. Could you imagine many of these bodies meet once a month or bi-monthly and yet they are earning more money than a sitting Member of Parliament?

Mr. Speaker, the institutional means by which any Parliament performs its duties involve the input of Members of Parliament and staff, and the utilization of financial and other resources. The activities of all Parliaments surround four main lines of activities: in the parliamentary Chamber, in select or joint select committees, in our constituency offices, in our party caucuses in preparation for meetings. And what are our outputs? What are the products of parliamentary activities? They would include the laws we pass—substantive and subsidiary—the resolutions we affirm, our work in committees, the reports we present, the assistance we give to our constituents.

Mr. Speaker, how many hours a week on average would you say a typical MP spends on these activities? This is a very important issue for this country. It is important and relevant to this debate because if no other institution or body is interested in what and how we work, at least we here in this House should be. This debate requires parliamentarians, not just to stand up for themselves individually, but to stand up for the institution of Parliament and the office of the parliamentarians. Because, you know why? No one else will.

Mr. Speaker, there are always those who claim that they can do our jobs better than we can because it is impossible to please everyone. The public would always have misgivings about what, if anything, an MP deserves to be paid, but this is not unique to Trinidad and Tobago. Those public misgivings exist also in the UK and Canada and even in the US, but that does not stop the relevant remuneration tribunals or commissions from doing a fair assessment of the role of a Member of Parliament.

I remember completing surveys on the work of an MP some years ago and if I were to complete this survey again, it will go something like this: normal hours a week in meetings, 18; normal hours a week in office, 16; normal hours a week in research and preparation, about 12; normal hours a week dealing with constituency matters, it would be about 35, and this does not include the hours we spend assisting the individual constituent or doing the many aspects of public service that we willingly engage in. But, of course, no matter what we do, we can never satisfy all our constituents, whose expectations are quite high and who clearly must be of the view that MPs are to be available to serve their needs 24/7.

Mr. Speaker, I even heard on one talk show someone calling in and stating that she knows for a fact that MPs get free groceries [*Laughter*] and that is part of

our service. That is part of what we get. [*Crosstalk*] The person called in and the person said for a fact she knows that we get free groceries, and it is part of the terms of our service. But I do not know if anybody else here gets free groceries, I never got any free groceries anywhere.

What I know is that an elected Member of Parliament in Trinidad and Tobago is paid a part-time salary for a full-time job, and that that salary is taxed, and that the Parliament takes PAYE and NIS from our part-time salary, and that we contribute to a pension scheme. So, you see, Mr. Speaker, everything else points to full-time work except the status of the remuneration proposed. Or, could it be that what is regularly recommended is what the SRC believes is the value of our contribution to governance? We receive less than part-time commissioners whose remit is much narrower and who work fewer hours.

I would love to be available to respond to the call of each and every constituent, but no matter how hard-working an MP is, that is an impossible task. Often, when I hear complaints that MPs are not seen in the constituency, and while I have no doubt that there may be room for improvement on the part of some of us, I know that the work expected of us, under the Constitution and the law, requires us to also be in Parliament or in committees, or working in our offices. Sadly, many constituents do not understand that and maybe we are at fault in not educating the public sufficiently about the work of an MP and the bulky legislative portfolio of duties and responsibilities we have.

I just want to give a recent example in my constituency. A calypso tent—some folks got together and decided to open a calypso tent, and about a week or two before the tent opened—I think it was just a week or so—I got an invitation to the opening of the tent and a letter asking for support for the tent. Okay. I called the person who wrote the letter, and I met with him and I said, “Listen, this is next Friday, I have Parliament on Friday so I know I will not be able to attend the opening of the tent and so on”—I said—“but I see you have a request. At this time, I do not have any money to assist you but if I can get someone to help sponsor or, you know, a businessman or somebody, I would see what I can do, but I only just got this information and you are opening next week.” So, of course, the tent opened and, well, it was a Friday and I had to come to Parliament. Mr. Speaker, up to this week, I am being ridiculed on the radio because I did not attend the opening of the tent and they are saying that I did not give them money and so on for the tent. So, I mean, this is something that Members of Parliament will go through in different ways. You know, a group of them got together and

decided that they will keep calling the radio station and they will continue to try to ridicule me. Up to this week, it is happening, since that tent opened. So, we, as Members of Parliament, it is not always easy, that comes with the job.

Then, I had a recent incident in my office on Tuesday. I was here, I had Public Accounts Committee meeting, and when I came out of the meeting, I saw a member of staff was calling, and when I answered, I heard a lot of noise in the office, I said, “What is going on?” There is a man in the office here carrying on in the office, and he has been there for a while. In other words, he held my staff to ransom. There were two ladies in the office.

9.00 p.m.

And what had happened is that someone from the Land Settlement Agency, I had arranged for that person to meet with persons who had land problems and the lady was running a bit late. So because of that the guy started to carry on and curse, and get on in the office, frightened the staff, promised that he is going to shoot up the place, he was dipping in his back pocket as if he had a gun or something. At that time I said: did you all not call the police? And I said: call the police now. When I called back the office, they said that the Morvant Police Station said that they had no vehicle. So I now had to look for a senior superintendent’s number I had, call him who was situated in Port of Spain, and he sent police officers to the office.

They escorted him out and they said that he was “high” and he was just escorted out of the office, after holding my staff to ransom for almost—about half an hour, cursing and carrying on. He could have, you know—there were two ladies in the office at the time. There was a gentleman, I had to call him and tell him, you know—he said that he was on lunch and I said: go back to the office because there are only the two ladies in the office and there is a man—I am hearing the noise in the background. I can barely hear what the staff is telling me.

These are some of the things that we have to go through, as Members of Parliament because I might have been in the office at that time and I would have been subject to that same abuse, because of the fact that he was “high” and he did that—the lady was running late. So these are some of the things that we have to go through, as Members of Parliament also, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the SRC deserves a failing grade for being nonchalant in relation to the issues of repositioning the office of MP over the years, given the clear evidence of the need to do so. Mr. Speaker, you know that the SRC has not been slow to make repositioning or status adjustments to other categories of offices

because even in the 1998 report before us, the SRC has admitted to having done so and there have been other reports submitted by the SRC from time to time, reflecting the SRC's modified views in relation to certain offices.

So Mr. Speaker, why does this become rocket science when it involves parliamentary offices? Mr. Speaker, look at the treatment of ministers in this Report. The SRC, itself, in its 52nd Report, in 1998, that was debated in this House and implemented—Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to get some undivided attention here, from my colleague.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, yes.

Mr. Imbert: I apologize.

Miss D. Cox: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, [*Interruption*] the SRC itself, in its 52nd Report in 1998—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Please, please, please let us have silence, please.

Miss D. Cox:—that was debated in this House, and implemented, provided for Ministers to be entitled to fully furnished, rent free, super grade housing or to be paid an allowance in lieu thereof. Judges were entitled to the exact provision. Therefore, since the entitlement is the same, currently judges and Ministers receive the same sum—\$10,300 per month in lieu of housing. The judges to not pay tax, of course, while Ministers do; but the figure is the same. However, Mr. Speaker—and I know that the Member for Chaguanas West mentioned—on page 18 of the report under consideration, the SRC informs us that they have received opinions from Queen's Counsels and Senior Counsels informing them that there is a legal "obligation on the State, to provide" judges with "fully furnished...super-grade" housing or "an allowance in lieu thereof" and that the monetary allowance must legally be equivalent to securing housing of such super-grade quality.

I mean, I have no issue with that, Mr. Speaker, but what does the SRC do? Mr. Speaker, in accepting Queen's and Senior Counsels' options/opinions, the SRC recommends a housing allowance to a Puisne Judge of \$24,000 tax-free monthly and to an Appeal Court Judge of \$28,000 tax-free monthly. So okay, an MP is \$10,000—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Members: No, no.

Miss D. Cox:—no, a Minister; an MP is nothing.

Mr. Imbert: Zero!

Miss D. Cox: An MP is zero. Zero for an MP. So Mr. Speaker, that will correct the problem for the judges—no problem there. But, Mr. Speaker, do you

know what the recommendation is for Ministers and for the Speaker, who are entitled to the same quality of housing? The recommendation is \$12,360 before tax. Okay? Note—Ministers eh. So it means we are just MPs.

Mr. Imbert: How does that work? Who “come” up with that?

Miss D. Cox: The Salaries Review Commission. The Salaries Review Commission—they said they got legal opinions. Okay? So Mr. Speaker, parliamentarians have a duty to ensure that all public authorities practise fairness and parliamentarians must be able to say when the act of unfairness is being perpetrated against parliamentarians themselves because no one else will. It seems like we were singled out for unfair treatment by the Salaries Review Commission. Mr. Speaker, I want to quickly make reference to the unfairness in the treatment of the Office of the Speaker or the House and the Office of the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, look at the arrangements in any of the parliaments referred to and you would observe that the Offices of the Speaker and Leader of the Opposition are two Parliamentary Offices that are remunerated equivalent to a Cabinet Minister. Not so in Trinidad and Tobago. With regard to that of the Speaker, there are good reasons for this because quite apart from the constitutional and administrative duties of the Office, a Speaker is thus remunerated as a means of ensuring his or her independence, having regard to the fact that the person is usually appointed by the preference of the ruling majority.

So the Speaker is plucked out of reach of the Prime Minister and the majority and is properly remunerated. Mr. Speaker, a Speaker is usually provided super quality Government housing and other appropriate allowances and is assured a superior pension upon demitting office, so that he/she is free to act independently, insofar as he/she need not be overly concerned about meeting living expenses after office, in case one is threatened to toe the party line or so on. So Mr. Speaker, this is important to any parliamentary democracy, except those like ours that are so dysfunctional that the dysfunction itself has become the culture or norm; and, Mr. Speaker, thanks to the SRC, we dare not change it.

The Parliament’s 2012 submission to the SRC made the recommendation, in relation to fixing the Speaker’s remuneration, but that was ignored by the SRC. The Parliament’s submission also made the case for the Leader of the Opposition to be paid the equivalent of a Cabinet Minister. Now, Mr. Speaker, it is important to note that this submission was not prepared by Members of this House. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I am advised that the Parliament’s submission was prepared by a

research team made up of consultants and researchers recruited by the Clerk of the House and that Members did not even have sight of the submission before it was dispatched to the SRC.

In the countries referred to—which are the UK, Canada, Australia—the salary of the Leader of the Opposition and a Cabinet Minister is the same, in recognition of the important constitutional role that the office of Leader of the Opposition plays in our parliamentary system. Additionally, Mr. Speaker, the office holder is expected to take the lead in oversight of the Government and must be able to speak to all issues of governance and to comment on all matters of current government concerns.

Mr. Speaker, is the position any different in Trinidad and Tobago? And if so, is it in our interest to maintain this position? Mr. Speaker, are you aware that in 2014, it is the SRC's position that the Leader of the Opposition in Trinidad and Tobago should not be entitled to medical benefits covered by the State? Yet there are those offices with less constitutional responsibilities falling under the purview of the SRC, that the Commission is recommending should be provided with medical benefits for the office holder, spouse and dependent children. Mr. Speaker, I must repeat—parliamentarians have a duty to ensure that all public authorities practise fairness and parliamentarians must be able to say when the act of unfairness is being perpetrated against parliamentarians themselves because no one else will.

Mr. Speaker, are you aware that Members of Parliament have no medical benefits, no vacation leave, no telephone allowance? And when we talk about telephone allowance, we talk about telephone allowance, as a Member of Parliament? In my constituency, people call me all the time. “Miss Cox, I have no money on meh phone—call meh back.” Could I now say: “I doh have no money mehself”? You know, could I now say, well I have no money on my phone also? I mean it is embarrassing because, I mean, people would not believe the little pittance that we get.

So they would expect, when they call the Member of Parliament, regardless of where I am, I should be able to call back. I mean—now with, you know the high cell phone bills and so on, it is not an easy situation. We have no housing allowance, of course. We have no clothing allowance. Mr. Speaker, it is a good thing I have a lot of clothes—[*Laughter*—you know?—so I can always look like if, you know, the clothes new and so on, you know. [*Interruption*] Nice clothes, thank you very much.

You know what, Mr. Speaker, we do not even have a clothing allowance. I mean, you have to—all these meetings you have to come to, you have to wear proper clothes. Here is cold, you cannot put on cheap suits; you have to put on suits that are lined.

Dr. Khan: And many functions to attend.

Miss D. Cox: And you have many functions to attend in your constituency, all about, and you have to dress and look the part, Mr. Speaker. And there is not even a clothing allowance. Okay? Mr. Speaker, with regard to subsistence allowance, there is an area that I saw and it speaks about parliamentarians who—I will read part of it:

“Entitlement to the cost of accommodation and meals in the event that the office holder is required to stay overnight as a result of late sittings of Parliament, provided that he/she resides beyond a radius of sixteen (16) kilometres from Port of Spain.”

Mr. Speaker, you know, I have a pet peeve about this because I think when this came about, I am not sure if we had this, you know, the crime rate was, you know, as it is today. I live just still within this radius and when we sit here two, three, four o’clock, we are not entitled to a driver or a chauffeur as a Member of Parliament. And as a woman, having to go home three/four o’clock in the morning, I mean, we are live on television, somebody just has to look to see, you know, when you are finished and wait by your house.

And I feel that this is archaic because they are saying here now that you have to be living in a certain area so that you would be entitled to accommodation. So when I am kept here, especially for budget debates and so on, many times I leave here and I am afraid. I am frightened on my way home because, I mean, the road is clear; no one is there when I enter my street. It is quiet, dark—the works, you know.

So Mr. Speaker, this is something that has to be—that we have to be given some allowance and particularly for the women parliamentarians who are not entitled to a chauffeur or a driver. This really is definitely unfair to us—very unfair to us. And many times we are here very late, okay, so this is not a comfortable situation for me.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to make it clear that this debate is strictly not about money but references to figures and facilities are important to show the many things that are wrong with the Report under consideration and why it should be implemented, with appropriate amendments, as has been done in the past, or sent

back to the maker with a failed grade. No Parliament likes to talk about money, to talk about remuneration to MPs, whether here or abroad, but no Parliament must knowingly approve arrangements that are manifestly unjust, Mr. Speaker.

All three arms of State come under severe criticism, from time to time, from a demanding public and a critical media—all that is good for democracy. We often hear that the judicial process is slow; that Ministers are otherwise engaged; that the state sector is inefficient and that some people are dissatisfied with Government now and past. But that does not change the reality that we, as a country, have to pay such office holders a fair wage for the work expected of them. Just reflect on what the State expends in the state sector.

Mr. Speaker, my colleague mentioned some salaries before, of members in the state sector and I had asked to check on the remuneration for—*[Interruption]*—okay, he will correct it—for the Chairman of the SRC. Mr. Speaker, I suggest, for the benefit of the SRC and the people of Trinidad and Tobago, that Members of Parliament should be fairly remunerated for the work they do and the total cost to taxpayers should be affordable and fair. Salaries must be competitive so that people of the right talent and competence are not deterred from stepping forward to lead our country. The ethos of political service entails making sacrifices and hence there should be a discount in the pay formula but such discount or sacrifice should not be so enormous that it acts as a deterrent to many, and all must be paid a clean wage with no hidden perks.

9.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, within recent years, parliamentary development efforts here in Trinidad and Tobago have grown, most receiving international support and this is largely in recognition of the vital and important role our Parliament should play in sustaining good governance and underpinning democratic progress.

As recent reports by the UNDP and the World Bank have documented, there are important causal linkages between development and the quality of democratic governance, in a country. Mr. Speaker, if we have to improve the structure of governance, we cannot do so whilst still holding on to those arrangements that keep us enfeebled and weaken the operations of our Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, we cannot improve if Members are told to go elsewhere and “find a work”, we can only pay you for part-time service. Members of Parliament should not be asked to choose which work they must complete in a week. They should know that for a fact their parliamentary duties are paramount. As I

explained, Mr. Speaker, all that I have said is supported by sound research that I can happily make available to anyone interested, including the Salaries Review Commission.

Mr. Speaker, the benchmarks for democratic Legislatures adopted by all Parliaments in 2012, including those within the Commonwealth Caribbean, which are slowest to implement the needed improvement, include the following:

1. The Legislature shall provide appropriate remuneration and reimbursement of parliamentary expenses to Members for their service and all forms of compensation shall be allocated on a non-partisan basis.
2. The remuneration arrangements for legislative office holders should sufficiently reflect their considerable roles and responsibilities.
3. A Member shall be provided with a salary adequate to require him or her to give priority to his parliamentary duties.
4. In order to maintain a decent standard of living and to upkeep his or her family a Member shall not be placed in the position of having to sacrifice parliamentary responsibilities in order to pursue a competing career.
5. Members should not be required to place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organizations that might influence them in the performance of their official duties or might give the impression of so doing.
6. There shall be provided an adequate resettlement allowance payable on a prompt basis to retiring Members so that departure from political life does not leave a Member who retires from political life in dire straits desperately searching for a means to make ends meet.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion I wish to state that as parliamentarians we derive our authority from the public and maintaining that authority requires us to continually evolve and adapt to public expectations.

The public perception of our relevance depends on us being effective in the areas expected of the public and we must also ensure that the public understands and recognizes what we do. There is need for the public to understand the representative role of an MP. It is clear that many constituents do not understand this.

Note the popular calypso sung by Brian London: “When last yuh see yuh MP?” Mr. Speaker, it is not so important to see your MP. What is important is that your MP must work on your behalf. Seeing your MP is one thing, but your MP must make representation on your behalf. “And yuh see people feel that yuh supposed tuh see your MP.” A lot of people do not understand by the time you are seeing your MP, they could be doing something for you. And they feel that you as the MP must just be seen. But that is long-time politics. That is mamaguy thing where I would just be coming around and talking to you and saying: “well you know, yes, yes” but I am doing nothing. That, apparently, is what some people want. Your MP must work on your behalf and that is something that they do not understand.

Mr. Speaker, we as parliamentarians should not be here today speaking about money. I know there would be comments that we are talking about money, “we begging” for money. I expect to see the articles in the newspapers and the talk shows, and so on, but I do not have a problem with that. Mr. Speaker, if the SRC treated us fairly we would not be in this position today. Some of the same part-time salaries we receive, we sometimes have to help our constituents.

Mr. Imbert: Sometimes?

Miss D. Cox: Many times it is your salary that you use to help your constituents and everyday persons come to my constituency office asking for financial support in some way. I recognize that the Government is, maybe afraid about the negative public opinion or publicity that may come if they accept this SRC Report. Mr. Speaker, at some point in time you have to stand up as men and women and say that this is wrong because nobody else will speak on behalf of parliamentarians. You all need to remember that. If we do not speak for ourselves no one will and this is not just in Trinidad and Tobago because when you are doing research, you are seeing that all over the world, once it comes to anything involving parliamentarians, they are going to say no. You will hear no and we have to stand up and say: “Well listen, even if you do not want to accept everything, but when you look at it, it is wrong. It is definitely wrong.”

It is clear that the SRC did no research, they did no work and they just cut and paste and decided well “dem doh deserve dat.” And by us accepting that we are saying to them that we deserve that. That is how I look at it. I see it as a disrespect to us. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, per capita we are one of the lowest paid MPs in the world, in the world. The reality is that the CEOs and senior executives of state enterprises earn

from \$55,000/\$65,000 a month, as much as \$200,000 a month. What MPs are making in the year, some of the senior executives in companies are making in one month and that is the reality and this is happening in Trinidad and Tobago today. This does not include the allowances and perks, which include housing, vacation, leased vehicles, and so on.

I just want to say that I am not here—I am almost through, I just have one more paragraph—to talk money, money because being involved in politics for me, being a Member of Parliament, I took a pay cut. Mr. Speaker, I knew when I had a vacation, I got a vacation allowance. My vehicle was leased by the company that I worked for before. I received a lot of allowances.

I am not here just talking for myself or talking that because it is about money, but I think we need to be fair. We need to be fair to each other and we are asking that the SRC conduct the much needed job evaluation exercise and compensation survey on the role and functions of parliamentarians. If the problem is the exercise, what is the keep back? We need to demand that it be done immediately. Because the job of an MP is definitely a full-time one and should be classified as such, and if parliamentarians do not speak for themselves, no one thank will, Mr. Speaker. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Before I call on the next speaker, which is the Member for Tabaquite, the Minister of Works and Infrastructure, I have invoked section 33(4) of our Standing Orders, which, as you know, allows a Member to speak more than once. In this instance the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East would like to clarify some facts or matters that he advanced during his contribution and I am allowing him to do so under Standing Order 33(4). Hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East, please.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. During my contribution I had started out speaking about the allowances and the perquisites and the salary given to the Chairman of the Integrity Commission. Unfortunately, during the crosstalk, I switched that to Salaries Review Commission. I just want to correct that the salary of \$28,720, the service allowance of \$5,050, the housing allowance of \$7,740, the transport allowance of \$3,900 and entitlement of medical attention, treatment and prescribed drugs at any health care facility, are applicable to the Chairman of the Integrity Commission, the Chairman of the Equal Opportunity Commission, the Chairman of the Law Revision Commission and the Chairman of the Law Reform Commission. I inadvertently applied these allowances to the Chairman of the Salaries Review Commission—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal: Saying that he gave himself.

Mr. Imbert:—saying that he gave himself and I apologize for that. But the point remains the same. The same principles that I espoused in my speech remain the same; that all of these chairmen of these commissions get salary, housing, subsistence, transport, service and full medical attention when Members of Parliament do not. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr. Speaker: Before, hon. Member for Tabaquite, I just want to revert to item under “Announcements”. I have received correspondence from Mrs. Patricia Mc Intosh, Member of Parliament for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, who is currently out of the country and has asked to be excused from sittings of the House during the period March 14 to March 28, 2014.

Members, we have been here for a long time. I think—I do not have a Deputy Speaker—we need to—and dinner has arrived and I would like to suggest that we suspend our sitting so that Members can stream out and have their dinner and we shall resume at around 10 minutes to 10.

This sitting is now suspended until 10 minutes to 10.

9.27 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

9.50 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

NINETY-EIGHTH SRC REPORT (ADOPTION)

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Tabaquite, Minister of Works and Infrastructure. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Works and Infrastructure (Hon. Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am very happy to be afforded this opportunity to join this debate on the report of the Salaries Review Commission. I want to take the opportunity to compliment the Member for Laventille East/Morvant, Miss Donna Cox, for her well-researched contribution and the ideas towards the end of her contribution as to some of the matters that the Salaries Review Commission should take into consideration in terms of perhaps its next review.

Mr. Speaker, during the contribution of the Member for Chaguanas West, he made some statements regarding his Priority Bus Route Pass. I listened to him intently, but I want to say that it is not the role of the Minister of Works and

Infrastructure to find out who has a bus pass, or who does not have a bus pass as Members of Parliament. If there is a new Member of Parliament, I am advised that it is the role of the Parliament to request the bus pass from the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, and the bus pass will, in fact, be given.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Issued.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Be issued, but Mr. Speaker, you know, the Member for Chaguanas West, Mrs. Warner, his wife, also requested a bus pass by letter to me and I issued it, but I must say, I refused to issue a bus pass for Catch of the Day, which I am made to understand is perhaps a company associated with them. I am not going to give private enterprise because you are a Member of Parliament and so on, a bus route pass, I am not going to do that. Bus route passes are not to be abused. My colleagues would even tell you that I tell them that, you know, in the issuance of a bus pass, there is—we have to follow the rules, and we have to follow the regulations in that regard. So I just wanted to make that clear here in the Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, my party, our party and the Government as such, has already made its views clear on the contents of the Salaries Review Commission Report. I do not think that there is anyone happy with what is there in the report, and we must be frank and courageous enough to admit that. People are generally not happy and not satisfied with what is in the report, and particularly Members of Parliament who are not Ministers of Government. I want to agree that the work of a Member of Parliament is not a part-time affair. There will always be errant parliamentarians, people who go in this, and then discover that they do not like it, and they really neglect functioning as Members of Parliament.

We have also made it very clear, that the removal of the benefit with respect to our vehicles, and vehicle taxes, is illegal and we will not accept that. And this, of course, is in keeping with the spirit of good industrial relations. However, I think every Member speaking on this side, recognizes that the SRC has a constitutional mandate, and we respect that constitutional mandate. However, having said that, I also think it is important to say that those entrusted with making decisions at the level of the SRC, or other similar institutions, where it is expected that such decision will be well considered and determined, in the context of the realities of the situation, that they must pay more attention—and I speak particularly about the SRC—to the work undertaken by MPs, and not make decisions based on the assumption that being an MP is public service and, therefore, sacrifice is essential and you can just decide, that you know, you have come into this with your eyes wide open, you know this is the salary, and this is a

sacrifice that you are making.

I accept that there is going to be some element of sacrifice you make once you get into public service. There is going to be some element of sacrifice, and I am prepared to make that. I entered politics in 1980, and I have been in it now for 34 years, and I make that sacrifice, but at the same time one expects to be fairly treated. And when an institution is given in the Constitution of the country, the right to determine salaries for us here in the Parliament, one expects that they will do a fair job. Without casting any aspersions, one also hopes, that in making the salary revisions that they do, that they are not moved by the kind of public opinion about politicians in making those decisions, but they make them on the basis of fact.

I am surprised that a job evaluation exercise for Members of Parliament cannot yet be done. I am surprised. In a country like Trinidad and Tobago where we have the University of the West Indies, where we have the Arthur Lok Jack Graduate School of Business, and as I understand it now, where they give master's degree in human resource management, where we have several consulting firms in this country, I am surprised, Mr. Speaker, that you cannot have a job evaluation exercise done in this country. I am very surprised at that.

Mr. Speaker, if you look around the Commonwealth and examples were given here today, you will find countries that have done job evaluation exercises. I was flipping through the Net, and if the issue is one of a job description, then since 2001 there is a job description here done by one of the countries that talks extensively of what is involved in the job of a parliamentarian. I can write a job description for you in one or two days if you want a job description written about the job of a parliamentarian. It is not difficult. It is very easy. So I cannot understand the negligence, and I use that word cautiously, the "negligence" by the Salaries Review Commission, in not getting down to the task of having a job evaluation done, and keep promising over and over, that such is to be done.

Mr. Speaker, it is in my view, to their credit, that excellent professionals sit amongst us on both sides of the table. Professionals with lucrative practices and jobs, and they have chosen to give up those jobs and careers to enter politics and to serve. This nation would have been worse off had it not been for such persons dedicating themselves over the years. And, therefore, if you want to attract good people, and you need to attract professionals into the Parliament. If you want to have a proper Ministry of Legal Affairs, if you want to run your Attorney General's department with someone of great experience and resolve and so on; if

you want to have the best Sport Minister as we have in MP and Minister Anil Roberts; [*Desk thumping*] if you want to have the best labour Minister as you have in Mr. Errol Mc Leod; [*Desk thumping*] if you want to have the best health Minister as you have in Dr. Fuad Khan, [*Desk thumping*] a professional of international renown; and if you want to have a person who has the compassion and social competence, that Dr. Glenn Ramadharsingh has, [*Desk thumping*] then you have to pay to attract that kind of talent into the Parliament. [*Desk thumping*] You cannot escape that. You must do that.

And, therefore, we have to—the Salaries Review Commission must bear these kind of things in mind when they look, because you want to have a Parliament that functions with Ministers and parliamentarians who can really serve the country. We are not just any ordinary people in this Parliament. We make laws of this country that affect the lives of people. We are not just here as representatives, we are lawmakers and that is a serious vocation, and a serious responsibility that has to be undertaken.

When, in fact, Mr. Mc Leod in his capacity as Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise, with his team have been able to successfully negotiate 75 agreements [*Desk thumping*] in four years, understand what that means for the thousands of persons, workers in this country who have benefited from that, and whose salaries would have caused them to be meagre—under stress, prior to him intervening and achieving such a feat in his Ministry. You do not get that talent cheaply if you have to hire it in terms of a private negotiator. But he has brought that talent into the Government and people like that ought to be rewarded. I am going to say something about that in a different context, because I do believe that the Salaries Review Commission has to start thinking outside of the box.

Mr. Speaker, on this matter of vehicle taxes, because of a particular statement, and an article that appeared in one of the newspapers, it appeared to the public, that an MP or a Member of Parliament can buy any number of vehicles as he wishes. [*Crosstalk*] If you remember that article that appeared, and I was very surprised that, you know, coming from the distinguished gentleman who wrote that article, that that kind of insinuation was made. Let us just say that that was not correct and let us put it on the record that a Member of Parliament can buy/purchase one vehicle every two years.

When you have a constituency like I do, in which 70 per cent of the infrastructure, road infrastructure was very, very dilapidated, or like Minister Griffith in Toco/Sangre Grande or my good friend here, Minister Winston Peters, and better yet, in Moruga/Tableland, you will understand why you need to change your vehicles every two years. You need to change it. [*Crosstalk and laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, the MP gets a loan or can get a loan of \$350,000 at 6 per cent interest. Let me also say that the 6 per cent interest is no subsidy on the loan, since this rate is comparable or maybe even higher to that offered by the banks. So, Mr. Speaker, we ought to note these things because the impression given to the public is that, you know, we are the beneficiaries of some very large-scale benefits with respect to these vehicles and what have you.

Mr. Speaker, not every MP is able to buy a high-priced vehicle. And in any event if you buy a vehicle, you have to explain to the Integrity Commission by way of your submissions, the source of your funds. I remember last year, the Integrity Commission wrote me a letter saying that they noted that I had bought two vehicles, and they wanted to know where I got the money from to buy the two vehicles. The very form that I had submitted to the Integrity Commission, I had withdrawn cash money from my Abercrombie Fund to buy one of the vehicles. So I wondered, what was the question they were asking when, in fact, it was very clear where my funds came from to buy my vehicle.

Mr. Speaker, the people of this country do not want MPs to serve them part-time. Let us also face that. They want full-time MPs, and we have moved way beyond the discussion of whether an MP is a full-time or a part-time, an MP is a full-time person. But today's Member of Parliament is dealing with a different kind of constituent which makes it even more important that we look at the reward system.

Mr. Speaker, today's constituent is more demanding. Let us start with that; more demanding: they are less loyal, they are cynical, they use bargaining tactics very much on you, they want personalized service, they generally tend to be inflexible, they are more knowledgeable and intelligent than they were before, they know their rights and they show it, they sometimes show that they understand the basics of law. So it is more difficult to manage the relationship with constituents. So the part-time matter is out when you have to manage a constituent who has these new set of characteristics. I am supporting the Member of Parliament for Laventille East/Morvant, in terms of what she was saying about her whole case that we are full-time Members of Parliament, rather than part-time Members of Parliament.

The reality is that constituents today do not want explanations. You cannot explain to a constituent about why you cannot do something. They want a solution to their problem. They want instant coffee solutions to their problem; they want delivery, not promises. And on the matter of delivery not promises, one thing I

can say with confidence, I can assert very strongly and courageously, and with all the confidence in the world, that if you ever had a Government that shows that they could deliver, it is this Government. [*Desk thumping*] If anything has distinguished this Government in terms of delivery, as a Government or any other Government, it is delivery.

10.05 p.m.

In every aspect, in every Ministry—you know, I am committed to 20 minutes here this evening as I promised, but if I had the time I would roll it in and rub it in as to the kinds of things.

But just to show you: we promised that you are going to have the Couva Children Hospital and if you drive past there now, you will see the hospital rising out of the ground. [*Desk thumping*] We promised that you would have the aquatic centre and if you drive past now, you can see all the auditorium and so on already being cast. [*Desk thumping*] We promised that you will have the Debe Campus and if you drive past now, you will see the Deba Campus rising from the cane fields. [*Desk thumping*]

In every area, in every Ministry, I can list performance after performance after performance. If I may just say this, the policies introduced by the hon. Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara in terms of sports, have resulted in the last three years in the most number of athletes gaining medals in Olympics as well as performing at very high levels. [*Desk thumping*]

So even there, in his Ministry, he has been able to bring out a potential that was always there in our people. And what did that take? That took special management of the person by the Minister in his Ministry.

I want to make a point of that as to how Ministers should also be rewarded. Maybe we have to change the whole thinking about how Ministers ought to be rewarded. Mr. Speaker, I agree that Members of Parliament should be full-time Members of Parliament. I agree with that. In terms of the view of the Salaries Review Commission, but while the public wants you to be a Member of Parliament who is full-time, there seems to be a doubt in their minds whether they want to pay you as a full-time Member.

When this whole discussion of the SRC came about and you looked at the questions that were being asked in the newspapers and you heard the talk shows and so on, you really wondered whether members of the public understand and appreciate the role of a Member of Parliament and what a Member of Parliament does.

It is perhaps because over the years people have become very cynical about politics and politicians to such an extent that it has now coloured their opinions of the work MPs do and, in that regard, have perhaps distorted their perception of the value, monetary or otherwise of the contributions MPs make to the quality of life in the country.

Again, I want to say—we all know it—that there are MPs who are lackadaisical and who, after winning, do not properly represent their constituencies. Mr. Speaker, I would be very much in favour of legislation that seeks to recall MPs who poorly represent their areas. I have no difficulty with that. If it is that the public wants representation and they are prepared to pay for representation, then they must be given the opportunity to recall representatives who do not represent them. At the end of the day, the public is our employer and therefore we have to satisfy the public.

One of the good things that have happened is that Members of Parliament do have offices now and they have paid staff provided by the Parliament up to a total of \$30,000 in salary, plus allowances for telephone and what have you; but you wonder whether that is enough in order to do the kinds of things you have to do.

For example, as a Member of Parliament, you are expected to have an office of some stature; you expect to have an office that is properly maintained. Mr. Speaker, without making a public complaint, my office, for example, for the last year I have been making appeals to have it repainted; after four years, to have the carpets changed and it is very difficult to get the money out of the Parliament to get this done. So sometimes you now have to step into your own pocket to repair an office that should be publicly funded. These are some things we have to be concerned about otherwise people come in there and what do they see. They come into an environment that is decrepit, not the kind of environment that is befitting of a Member of Parliament, so that is something we need to talk about.

I do not know for the Opposition, but in our party, in the partnership, MPs have been mandated to have their offices open a minimum of five days a week and to be physically present at their office for a full one day and as many other times.

Mr. Speaker, most of our MPs are at their offices more than one day per week. In my case, I am there on both Tuesdays and Saturdays like most of the Members of Parliament on this side.

I do not think that the average citizen, as I said, really understands the challenges which Members of Parliament face to show quality representation and even more so the actual work done by a Member of Parliament.

From the salary that a Member of Parliament or Minister gets, he is not only expected to meet his and his family's needs, but unless he or she has some NGO or CBO or some donors able to get—you know the party groups and so on that support the MP with fundraisers, they would not be able to really serve the constituents.

For example, although you have the Government providing school books for children, every year everyone here will tell you that parents come to their office for money to buy books to complete the list of books. They will come to say, we got books, but we cannot buy the notebooks and uniforms. They come to your office with their children hungry—this is true—some with no money for rent; some thrown out of their family home; some needing a place to secure themselves, domestic violence. What do you do as Member of Parliament? They expect you to help them. They have thrown their life at your feet as it were. They have surrendered to you. Can you just look at them and say, “I cannot help you”?

Do you send them to the social services where they find unsympathetic clerks who insult them and treat them with indignity as has happened to so many who come to my Gasparillo office, having gone to the Princes Town Office or the San Fernando office for assistance? Mr. Speaker, it happens every week.

When you hear the stories of these people and they sit before you and tears begin to flow from their eyes, what do you do? You have to dip into your pocket and give them something so they could get by. This is a reality. Or you call, like the Member for Laventille East/Morvant, a businessman and say can you give me a hamper to help someone or tide someone? Thankfully, we have food cards that we can give, but not everybody can be given a food card.

Mr. Imbert: You lucky!

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: It is very difficult. It is not luck, maybe I am a better representative than you are to your constituents. Maybe that is the problem.

I have said to my colleague, Dr. Ramadharsingh, for example, that he should place cameras and record the conversations between officers of his Ministry and the members of the public, particularly in the social service offices so that we will begin to have more empathy and play back some of these conversations to these people. You need to go out there.

What do you do—I will give you a real case—with a young woman in her thirties who comes to your office with five children between the ages of two and maybe 10 and when the children leave the office and go outside, she sits there and she says to you: “I am dying of cancer.”

Mr. Samuel: Or HIV.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: What do you do? HIV, it was HIV. I am dying. What do you do? So you go on and you beg Trinidad Cement Limited for a piece of land and now you want to build a house for her and in the middle of that she dies, as has happened. What do you do? Now you have to try to help those five children. Do you want to turn them away? Can you in conscience turn them away? What does a Member of Parliament do?

Mr. Imbert: “So how we supposed to pay for that?”

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Because when it comes to that, you ask how you are supposed to pay for that, because that is where representation comes in. Now, you cannot sit in your office and hope for something to happen. That is when you have to leave and go to the Social Services Division and walk them through the process until you are able to assist them fully.

Mr. Imbert: “Who paying for dat?”

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: That is why we are saying that MPs have to be paid better in order to do a proper job of representation. The constituent does not care where you get the money. What the constituent wants is that you get it for them.

The MP today is seen as a provider. The MP today is seen as a supplier—

Mr. Imbert: “Allyuh have enough.”

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: And if you do not provide, then the MP is seen as callous; the MP is seen as indifferent. So, if there has to be reform, the Salaries Review Commission should also consider the provision of some means to satisfy these extraordinary demands that are being made on MPs.

This debate is not new. Recently the suggestion was made for a \$10 million fund for each Member of Parliament, properly accounted for, to be used for infrastructural work and some Members of Parliament remember that. Every Member of Parliament deep down knows that this is important and should be done, but the first thing you heard even before the plan had a chance to get off the ground, was corruption, corruption. Even today we are hearing the cries from the other side who called corruption and they are talking about the same thing, denial of resources; yet this Government was prepared to move in a direction that would close some of that gap.

Mr. Speaker, we could have created this fund and allow the MPs to spend up to 10 per cent of it to meet social needs of impoverished and unfortunate

constituents. That could have been possible. The other 90 per cent could have been used for infrastructural work in the constituency. You could have built, for example, homework centres, thousand square feet homework centres, land not included with 10 computers and printers could have been built for \$500,000. A 1,600 square feet activity centre, land not included to host 75 persons, including exercise equipment, a computer room could have been built for \$900,000.

Mr. Speaker, there are many communities that will never get a \$500,000 community centre, but if you had provided this money to MPs, they would have been able to make decisions for some of the communities that have never gotten facilities like this. So if we are talking about empowering the MPs, we have to think about empowering the MPs, we have to think outside of the salaries also because the MPs are expected to do a job of representation that goes beyond the salaries they get, to help themselves and their constituents.

Mr. Speaker, when I was Minister of Local Government, the Self-Help Commission came under me. One year we built six or seven activity centres and you can go and see them, communities that would never have them, Jacob Village in Wallerfield, Bank Village; all over. They were built and you should see how people are using these small centres and MPs could have done that and provided.

So when an MP is being harassed because you do not have a community centre, the MP would have had some control. Sou Sou Lands in Carlsen Field. They will tell you, Mr. Speaker, if we are talking about salaries, I want to talk in the larger context of how do you really empower MPs to service their constituents?

I think that perhaps the Salaries Review Commission, and this is an opinion I am expressing, perhaps the remit of the Salaries Review Commission is too narrow and they must now think of the changes of demands that are being made on MPs. This is a country in which culture and festival are an integral part of our lives. This is how we express ourselves. We are an expressive people and we do so through our cultures and festivals. An MP is supposed to support every cultural activity and festival in his constituency. How can he do that if he does not have some subvention to do it? You cannot go to the same business houses all the time.

10.20 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, MPs are supposed to help in the fight against crime, and one of the ways to do this is to get people involved in sports and in culture, but how can you do it if you do not have the resources to do it?

Mr. Speaker, we must not just think about sports and culture in the urban centres, you know; we must think about sports and culture throughout the country. This is why I wish to congratulate the Member of Parliament for Naparima and Minister of Public Utilities, for the manner in which he has gone about to ensure that recreation grounds are lit up across the country, because now that you go out there you are finding people coming out and walking on the jogging tracks at night; playing a game of cricket; playing a game of football and what have you.

Dr. Browne: Plenty lights and no people sometimes.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, there are plenty lights and no people in some areas like Diego Martin Central because the Member of Parliament does not know how to organize, motivate and inspire his people to come out and play sport and to organize as a community [*Desk thumping*] but if you go down tonight or you went there last night to the constituency of Tabaquite in Guaracara, you will find there about 1,000 persons looking on at 20/20 cricket, which is being played every night under lights. [*Desk thumping*] Something that never happened before, but the 20/20 cricket at night is being played because you now have the lights and you now have the facilities, and you have a Member of Parliament who has organized the Tabaquite Cricket League.

Mrs. Thomas: And he did not pay for that.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Because I love what I do. Mr. Speaker, thankfully, when I applied to the Minister of Sport he gave me some trophies. [*Crosstalk*] I am just letting him know that I need some more, but the essential point I am making is that all of these activities cannot be funded—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Roberts: Protect me please, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I am seeking to protect the *Hansard* people because they are being disturbed. So allow the hon. Minister to speak in silence. Continue hon. Minister, please.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, you know, the villages have an important role to play in the sustenance of value systems which provide for healthy lifestyles and this cannot be met only from the pocket of the MP. I do not know if it is the remit of the Salaries Review Commission, but maybe we need to widen so that they can say, “Hey, listen, MPs must be provided with such and such”, and maybe we need to think afresh; we need to think out of the box.

Mr. Speaker, if you have to fight crime and move youths on the crime line to somewhere else where you really want them to be, you have to provide opportunities for them, and you have to provide facilities for them and these come at a cost. Mr. Speaker, in my constituency, because I have been able to mobilize some support from the business community, I have a Tabaquite Cricket League going on, 20/20 at night with 20 teams; a Sunday league with 30 overs with about 17 teams. I have an annual football league competition and I am distributing table tennis boards now throughout my constituency, so that I can have table tennis as another sport growing in the consistency.

Miss Cox: “Whey yuh get de boards from?”

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: You go and beg. That is all I can do. You go and beg, and you beg and you get them and you put them there. I am just showing you the kinds of things that you do, but people think that is not the role of a Member of Parliament. Maybe some of them think that should only be the role of the Minister of Sport, but if you are really a full-time MP that is part of what you have to do. You have to go and raise funds and you have to do all these kinds of things.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say that with respect to Ministers, maybe we need to look at the performance of our Ministers as it is looked at in the context of the private sector. Mr. Speaker, why can we not introduce pay for performance and performance incentives for Ministers? Why can we not do that? The Prime Minister is managing Ministries—it is like any president of a large corporation managing departments in an organization—and if we really think about it, and if we want to drive performance and productivity, maybe the Salaries Review Commission should think of ways and means of empowering a Prime Minister to reward high-performing Ministers to do that.

Somebody talked about having MPs accountable to the Parliament and accountable to constituents. Well why not set up a committee and let the MPs bring their reports to the Parliament and let us have ways and means of seeing what goals they have set out to achieve and what they have done and reward people accordingly, if you want to take it to the extreme. In fact, there is one country—I believe it is Singapore, if I am not mistaken—where pay for performance has, in fact, been introduced.

It is not difficult, you know. When the budget is read, a certain budget is given to a Minister and a Ministry, you know what are the goals to be achieved, what is to be measured and you look and say, well, at the end of the year, have the goals been achieved? Have you exceeded the performance that you expected and maybe by incentivizing the Ministers you might get a higher level of performance

in Government, and maybe the SRC should look at how they might empower the Prime Minister, and give the Prime Minister some kind of allowance, monetary allowance, to do that in a country.

Mr. Speaker, maybe pay for performance is a concept that is right. Maybe the time for that has come. I think what I am trying to do is introduce new thinking.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: What about the system?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: The system is not difficult. I have just described the system. You came in late. [*Laughter*] It is interesting that I was not hearing the Member for Point Fortin for the whole day, and I kept looking at this side to say something is wrong here, but I forgot she had migrated and put into seclusion in a little corner there where we cannot hear her. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, the question of job evaluation: I say there is a lack of will on the part of the SRC to have this evaluation done; there is a lack of will, Mr. Speaker. Such an exercise should not take more than six good months if we are serious. You require a job description; you require what jobs in the private and, perhaps, public sector as well as other domains where you are going to benchmark the job of an MP and the job of a Minister. Mr. Speaker, this is no small thing, you know.

You have a Minister, for example, who might have \$5 billion or \$7 billion of budget, 7,000 employees. That is a big job; a big job, and there are companies with similar budgets and so on. So the idea of benchmarking is not something that is alien or cannot be done, but what is missing is the will, and for the SRC to come and keep saying that they are going to do this job evaluation, that is something that has to be cut, and they have to get serious and do the job evaluation. I think not only the parliamentarians will be happy with it, but the public will be happy, and then the public will be in a more empowered position to say. “This job is worth X or this job is worth Y.”

Mr. Speaker, I do not know if persons recognize what the week of a Minister who is also a Member of Parliament is. Let me just walk you through, Mr. Speaker. You come to work on a Monday morning after having gone to all kinds of functions on a Sunday as well as your constituency office on a Saturday. After lunch on a Monday, if you are a member of the F&GP as a Minister, you spend the afternoon there. Then if you are a member of the LRC, you have to be there in the Legislative Review Committee.

On a Tuesday you are in your office—sorry, constituency office. Tuesday night you are out in the constituency—you are forming party groups; you are

dealing with problems and X, Y and Z. You go on Wednesday, you are back in your office, you are dealing with paperwork; you are seeing members of the public who are coming to see you. On a Thursday, as a Minister, you are into Cabinet; if you are a Member of the National Security Council, you are there. On a Friday, you are in Parliament, but in the night now you have to read F&GP notes; you have to read Cabinet notes; and if you have to present a Bill in Parliament or speak in Parliament, you also have to prepare for that. So it is a very tough job—and all the committees. What I am saying is that sometimes people do not really recognize how much you do. It is also true for the Members of the Opposition. You cannot come here just to speak like that, you have to prepare; you have to research. It takes time; it takes effort in order to do all of this.

Mr. Speaker, there are many things in this report that bother me; bother me deeply, many inconsistencies. Take for example—and this is why I say that I do not think enough thought went into how the SRC arrived at their salary scales. The Executive Director of NIHERST and NALIS, they get \$31,950 a month; they get a service allowance of \$5,050; they get a travel allowance of \$3,900; a housing allowance of \$7,740 and telephone allowance of \$500, and if they come from outside the public service, at the end of their term of office, they get 20 per cent severance benefits. What do you get as a parliamentarian at the end of five years? *[Laughter]* Compare that now with the Chief of Defence Force. How did you arrive at equating the salary of the Chief of Defence Force with the salary of the Executive Director of NALIS?

The Executive Director of NALIS gets more money in terms of salary than the Chief of the Defence Force. The Chief of the Defence Force gets \$31,080 whereas the Executive Director of NALIS gets \$31,950. How do you equate that when the Chief of Defence Force has the security of the country at heart? What are you benchmarking the salary of him as against the person from NALIS or NIHERST? And you give a service allowance of \$5,050 to the Executive Director of NALIS but \$3,110 to the Chief of Defence Force. How do you equate that? How do you understand that? I can go through the Report of the Salaries Review Commission and show you the inconsistencies that exist in the Salaries Review Commission.

Mr. Speaker, it is important we speak about this truthfully because this can go over and over if we do not speak about it, because it is not just about—it is unfortunate that in the debate here, the focus has been in the country on the parliamentarians when it is a whole range of positions that are involved in this particular report.

Mr. Speaker, one in particular I would like to talk about is the salaries that are paid to mayors and chairmen of regional corporations. Mr. Speaker, somebody

talked early today about the salary of the Mayor—well they call it an honorarium and, by the way, it is taxed—of Port of Spain. The Mayor of Port of Spain gets \$20,890, but he also gets a subsistence allowance of \$1.050; telecommunication allowance of \$400 a month and he gets also a travelling allowance of \$3,900 per month, but he also gets a gratuity equivalent to 20 per cent of gross honorarium earned during the term of office. So 36 by 20 is \$720,000—three years in office—and 36 by 1 is another \$36,000 plus \$756,000—20 per cent of that is about \$150,000—so he gets \$150,000 at the end of three years, gratuity.

Now, what makes the Mayor of Port of Spain different to the Mayor of San Fernando who gets \$18,280 a month? The Mayor of Chaguanas gets \$17,040 a month, and the Mayor of Arima gets \$15,670 a month [*Crosstalk*] and the Mayor of Point Fortin gets \$15,670 and a chairman of a regional corporation gets \$15,670 a month.

Now, Mr. Speaker, if you look at the statistics for 2011—I just give you some statistics—the number of buildings in Port of Spain in 2011 was 11,723, but in Chaguanas it was 21,777; the number of dwelling units was 25,404—means like apartments and so on together—but in Port of Spain, it is 13,662. So the Mayor of Chaguanas is overlooking double the amount of dwelling houses than the Mayor of Port of Spain, but he is being paid \$3,850 less.

Miss Mc Donald: You are missing a fundamental point, the capital; the capital.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Tabaquite and the Minister of Works and Infrastructure has expired.

Motion made: That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Hon. A. Roberts*]

Question put and agreed to.

10.35 p.m.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, I was not filibustering today at all, so I wonder whether this new Standing Order will facilitate having to make a contribution, but that is gone now and we have already agreed to that.

To carry the point further, the City of Port of Spain has only 12 square kilometres and has a population of 49,031—I am quoting 2011 figures—but the Borough of Chaguanas has 84,216 persons and 1,427 square kilometres. If you go to Tunapuna, as the Member for Barataria/San Juan was asking, 211,741, and the square kilometres, 415—415. Yet the chairman of the regional corporation in Tunapuna is paid so much less, but has much more territory to cover, so many

more people to deal with, and you are continuing to have this kind of discrimination in what you are paying people. How does the Salaries Review Commission explain that?

When I was a mayor I made representations to the Salaries Review Commission on behalf of all the mayors outside of Port of Spain, and the regional chairmen and so on, and nothing was done. I think that anomalies like these must be corrected, [*Crosstalk*] because the job of a mayor, having walked that road myself, is not a part-time job; it is a full-time job. If you really want to develop an area, you have to give it the importance that it should be accorded.

Mr. Speaker, I think that the Salaries Review Commission has a lot of work to do. My colleague, the Member of Parliament for Pointe-a-Pierre, said that this report is a work in progress, maybe he is right, and I think he was being very kind in terms of how he put it in that perspective. But seriously, you cannot have a situation where you are only saying you are going to do a job evaluation, you have members of the public having a certain kind of perception about their Members of Parliament and the work they do, when in fact it is part of the responsibility of the SRC to help correct that.

That is not to say that Members of Parliament themselves do not have a role in correcting the perception that people hold of them. It is unfortunate what happens in the society, that you might do 101 good things in your constituency and someone writes one letter to the newspaper and makes a complaint, and that is taken as representative of what the MP is doing, and the 101 good things are forgotten. Mr. Speaker, it is very important that we note these things, because Members of Parliament are working very hard. They are really, really working very hard in their constituencies.

If you go through the work that Ministers are doing also, you will see that Ministers are producing. They are being highly productive in this country—highly productive. In my own Ministry, I have already spent my PSIP for 2013/2014. It is already done. That was unheard of under the former administration, that by the month of March, in the first six months, your PSIP has already been spent, and that covered about 300 locations for jobs under the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, and we are launching another 423 projects in the next week.

Mr. Speaker, what I am saying is that we have big portfolios, and this Government has distinguished itself as a Government of delivery. That is why I say that maybe the time has come to look at how you reward Ministers and do it on the basis of performance, and also find a way to deal with the rewards for Members of Parliament. It is disheartening to know that a Member of Parliament

who is not a Minister does not have a telephone allowance. That is very disheartening to know. One would like to think that you have a telephone allowance.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this debate, and to move that the Motion be amended by inserting at the end the following words:

“with the exception of the recommendation to reduce the terms related to transport facilities.”

Mr. Speaker, I believe the Motion requires a seconder.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, I need a seconder.

The Minister of Sport (Hon. Anil Roberts): Mr. Speaker, I second the Motion brought by the hon. Minister of Works and Infrastructure and Member for Tabaquite, and I reserve my right to contribute later on.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, I beg to move. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member for Tabaquite, you did not have to beg to move. *[Interruption]* Yes, he is right. Let me just put the question.

Hon. Members, I shall now propose the amendment moved by the Member for Tabaquite and seconded by the hon. Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara.

Question, on amendment, proposed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, who is going to speak next, you can deal with the substantive as well as the amended portion of this Motion. *[Interruption]*

Miss Mc Donald: We do not have the amendment.

Mr. Speaker: I just read it.

Mr. Terrence Deyalsingh (St. Joseph): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can be very brief and just have a contribution of one sentence long—

Mr. Roberts: Yes, please! *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. T. Deyalsingh:—that anybody with the power that they think they have or think they do not have, should fire the SRC in the morning. *[Desk thumping]* That SRC should be fired, but I need to explain why they should be fired by anybody with the power to do so, whether they think they have the power or do not think that they have the power. *[Laughter]*

This SRC has perpetrated a fraud on the country and they have acted unconstitutionally, and I will show why. If we strip away all the emotion and just read a case, which the Member for Diego Martin North/East alluded to in passing, but I am going to dwell on that case a while, to show how this SRC, headed by a lawyer, has acted unconstitutionally and should be fired.

That case is High Court Action No. 3015 of 1987. This had to do with the NAR Government and the infamous Legal Notice No. 14, which sought to take away COLA and increments from civil servants—remember the NAR Government. If I just quote some parts of that judgment, it talks about property and what constitutes property. COLA constitutes property; it is money, it constitutes property. An annual incremental increase in salary constitutes property. What else constitutes property, Mr. Speaker?

COLA and increments in salary are part of the applicant’s remuneration package. The terms and conditions are binding on the employer and the employee, and accordingly cannot be unilaterally altered.

What shocked me in the contribution of the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, a former trade unionist—a great one at that—if he was a unionist, would he have stood for this? But we have nobody to fight for our rights, Mr. Speaker—no one, no one. If anyone had sought to take away COLA and increment from a unionized worker, all the unions would have been on the streets. It would have been mayhem. But take it away from a Member of Parliament, and the public rejoices: “It good for dem. It good for them. They ain’t deserve it.”

What is property? Lord Diplock, speaking on behalf of the Lord in the Privy Council in *Attorney General of the Gambia v Jobe*:

“...Constitution, and in particular that part of it which protects and entrenches fundamental rights and freedoms to which all persons in the State are entitled,”—is to be given—“a generous and purposive construction...”

Property is generously defined.

That case which was presided over by former Justice, may his soul rest in peace, Mansoor Ibrahim, goes on to talk about the legitimate expectation of persons—Mr. Speaker, you are a former trade unionist, and a good one at that—and the right to be heard. There is something called “natural justice” and “the right to be heard”, but the SRC unilaterally and unconstitutionally took away our property, without the right to be heard. They should be fired. They should be fired. It is quarter to 11; they should be fired by 12.01 tonight. [*Laughter and crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: Too long!

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: Somebody with the power that they think they have or think they do not have, should fire the SRC by 12.01 tonight. [*Desk thumping*] They have acted unconstitutionally.

Mr. Speaker, it is never going to be a good time to remunerate politicians well—never. But the only body that got this whole issue of remuneration right, in my view, is the *Guardian*. The *Guardian's* editorial of Sunday, February 23, spoke about the headline, “Challenging the Salaries Review Commission”, and we as a body politic are being criticized for seeking our own interest. The reason we have to seek our own interest is that the SRC failed in its constitutional duty to treat us with equity and fairness and respect.

You have three arms of the State: the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary. When you read the language of the SRC report regarding the Judiciary, it seems that the SRC bent backwards to accommodate the Judiciary and gave them everything that they wanted, and we have no problem with that, because we understand the separation of powers. But the Judiciary got legal opinion, and the language that the SRC used to justify treating the judges in the way that it did, leads me to think that the SRC has something against the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] They have something against us. The SRC has failed, because they have now forced us to do their job, which is to articulate a position benefiting the work of the Members of Parliament.

What is a parliamentarian, Mr. Speaker? We are the temporary managers of this country's patrimony. We are the managers of our country's heritage. We determine the future trajectory of a country; that is what we do. We are the inheritance of the great legacy of people like Dr. Eric Williams, the Capildeos, the Mohammeds, the Karl Hudson-Phillips—recently deceased; may his soul rest in peace—people like Stephen Maharaj from Princes Town, who I was lucky to know—Mr. Basdeo Panday, Mr. George Weekes.

10.50 p.m.

That is the legacy that we have. Those are the footsteps that we are following in, and we are the upholders of the Constitution. Mr. Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago has grown tremendously over the past 50 years. Our first budgets were in the order of a few million dollars. Today we are being asked to oversee \$50 billion budgets—

Miss Cox: Sixty.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: Sixty billion dollar budgets. I want to alert the SRC and the members of the public who treat us with disdain, by alerting them to some of the hours that we spend. Oversight committees, we can spend up to three to four hours on that. *[Interruption]* Just oversight committees. You have JSC Group I, number of meetings: seven in the first session, six in the second session, eight in the third session, five in the fourth session; twenty six meetings for JSC Group I alone.

JSC Group II, similar picture; JSC Municipal Corporations, similar picture; Public Accounts Committee; Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee. And if you are diligent as all of us are, it is not only the hours spent attending those meetings, it is the preparation for those meetings. *[Interruption]* So you would have spent close to 10 hours per week if you are on one committee.

What about legislation, our role here as legislators? How many hours do we spend here? Many hours, preparing and coming could take up to 20 hours. We have been here since half past one; it is now close to 11 o'clock. Right! And some of us were here before if you had a committee meeting, and then you had to spend hours preparing. Constituency and servicing your constituents, it varies from a low of five hours to a high of 40 hours. I have checked it. It is within that range.

Each of us fall within that range, a low of five hours to a high of 40 hours; that gives you, Mr. Speaker, a total of about 50 to 70 hours a week doing committee work and servicing your community, at least. But what the new Standing Orders are going to do? We are now going to have six new committees—pray tell—and this is the problem with small legislatures around the world. Where are the people coming from? *[Interruption]* Where are you finding the time? Where are you going to do that? And this notion that Opposition Members can have a second job or a second career is balderdash; utter and total balderdash and I will explain why. No employer is going to hire any of us on this bench when we are at the whims and fancies of a parliamentary itinerary.

For example, the Leader of Government Business can get up now and say, okay, Parliament starts at 10.30 a.m. next Friday or Wednesday, we have our schedule, that is your prerogative. How do we tell an employer, well, boy I have Parliament Wednesday, and as happened with the last sitting where we started early, we still had a CPA meeting that Friday morning, but you get a call from the Parliament on Thursday, saying, well, Mr. Deyalsingh, you know the Leader of Government Business call Parliament half past 10 so the CPA meeting which was

supposed to start half past 10, we are having it Monday morning now. That is what goes on. We are at the whims and fancies of the parliamentary agenda. Who is going to hire us? We cannot be loyal to an employer with time. No way! So we have no second career. None!

Mr. Speaker, in addition to having no second career, what about life after politics for a politician? Life after politics. You know, Mr. Speaker, it has become blood sport now for members of the public after a politician is no longer in office, especially if he loses an election, that they like to beat you up now and spit on you. Yeah! No board is going to hire us; no Ansa McAL; no Neal & Massy. “The only board we are going to get after we lose is the two-by-four the public would beat you with and wood yuh in de morning, an de go wood yuh lunchtime; and de go wood yuh in the evening.” That is the only board that we are going to get “bois, we go get bois from the public”. *[Laughter]*

Because it is blood sport for members of the public to give you “bois” when you lose an election. That is it! That is the reality! We are persona non grata, we are lepers in our own country, face it. Face it! That is the only board we are getting. “We eh getting no bois from Neal & Massy, we eh getting no bois from Ansa McAL; is bois from the public, because they like to see us down; they like to trample you.” And that is the reality.

Mr. Speaker, we get no medical. The hon. Minister of Health gave us a Cabinet Note talking about health benefits, and stupidly, some of us, myself included, presented bills thinking that we were going to get paid and reimbursed. *[Laughter]* You know what, Mr. Speaker, the civil service has decided otherwise. *[Interruption]* The civil service in this country is not honouring a Cabinet Note, a Cabinet directive, a Cabinet decision to reimburse Members of Parliament for their medical expenses. The civil service does not respect us; the public does not respect us; the SRC does not respect us. Who is going to fight for us? Nobody!

The Minister of Health can tell you how many claims he has from MPs based on a Cabinet Note—*[Interruption]*

Dr. Khan: Quite a lot.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh:—given to us in good faith, that the civil service is not going to honour.

Dr. Browne: Who is running that Ministry? *[Laughter]*

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: Where is the equity for us, Mr. Speaker? Where is the fairness? *[Interruption]* The civil service in addition to the SRC, it is absolutely amazing.

Mr. Speaker, members of the public think being an MP is this nice “wok”. [Interruption] Let me alert the public to some incidents stretching as far back as 1966—2010, that bring the exposure to life and limb of ourselves and of our families as Members of Parliament. [Interruption]

Mr. Speaker, the year was 1966, there were two factions within the DLP, one backed by Bhadase Sagan Maharaj and one backed by Capildeo. Dr. John Bharath, father of current Minister of Trade, Mr. Vasant Bharath, was a candidate for the St. Augustine seat, but he was on the Capildeo faction. He was threatened by the other faction with death. The only reason he escaped death, Mr. Speaker, was the night before the election, in deciding to make a last swing throughout the St. Augustine constituency with his personal vehicle with the mike on top—and they are still using that, eh, 1966—2010, we are still using the mike on top. At the very last minute he was so tired he could not make it, and his brother-in-law took up the car and was driving by the Caroni bridge—living in Caroni in those days—the silver bridge, it was a one-lane bridge in those days—the brother-in-law that night and the assassins shot at the car. John Bharath’s brother-in-law got shot.

Hon. Member: He died?

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: No, he did not die, luckily. But that is what we are faced with. [Interruption] And current Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development, Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie, his parents living in Curepe who were supporting John Bharath, had their house threatened. That is what we go through as Members of Parliament.

Let us go now to the year 1990. We laid a report today with fanfare about the attempted coup. A parliamentarian died, Mr. Speaker: Leo Des Vignes. He died in the execution of his duties, and how do we treat that person? In the Red House, Mr. Speaker, the portrait of Mr. Leo Des Vignes adorned the western wall of the public gallery. When I was in the other place twice I asked for that portrait to be found and given the same prominence on the western wall here. To date nothing! [Interruption]

I am making a third appeal, Mr. Speaker, because the Red House restoration is way behind schedule and is not going to be finished in the time frame that the Government has set. [Interruption] I am appealing once again, because if we do not respect ourselves, if we do not respect the memory of Leo Des Vignes, who is going to respect us? That picture should have been bubble wrapped, treated with reverence and put up right there again. I have made two calls in the other place and I make a third call here tonight, because as a Member of Parliament if we do not respect ourselves no one will.

I turn to 2010: violence against Members of Parliament. So, do not think this is a 1966 thing. The 2010 general election, Member of Parliament for Arouca/Maloney, Alicia Hospedales, during her campaign somebody took a gallon of paint, threw it at her. That is the disdain in which we are held. That is the risk to life and limb which we expose ourselves to, to service our constituents, and the Salaries Review Commission treats us with utter and total contempt. They should be fired by 12.01 this morning. Fired! [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: Before that. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: Mr. Speaker, the Ombudsman gets \$37,180 a month.

Mr. Imbert: What does he do?

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: Then he gets a service allowance of \$5,050; then he gets a housing allowance of \$12,360; and he gets a travel grant of \$34,500 a year. [*Interruption*] The Ombudsman!

Mr. Imbert: What is the package?

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: That total package is \$62,000 for the Ombudsman, [*Interruption*] and we accept this disrespect from the SRC.

The Tax Appeal Board, a full-time member, \$32,080 plus the motor vehicle, housing, \$12,360; overseas travel grant, \$40,200 per annum. The Tax Appeal Board chairman gets more than us by multiples. The Environmental Commission, the chairman, \$40,160; the deputy chairman, \$33,820 plus a transportation allowance of \$4,560; plus the chairman gets a chauffeur; plus the chairman gets a housing allowance of \$12,360; plus a travel grant of \$69,000 per annum. That is the Environmental Commission chairman. [*Interruption*] But, let me read my MP payslip: salary, \$14,000; that is as much as the housing allowance for the Environmental Commission chairman, is \$12,360. [*Laughter and desk thumping*] The housing allowance for the environmental commission chairman is \$12,360 and my salary as an MP—look, I have the payslip here—is \$14,000.

11.05 p.m.

Mr. Seemungal: That is before tax or after tax?

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: Before tax. Before tax, and we get a transport allowance of \$4,100. The SRC, you know, they have failed, but look at this. I also got a payslip for when I was a Senator. Salary \$10,500, but this is where the gross absurdity comes in. A Senator gets a telephone allowance, but you know a Member of Parliament does not get a telephone allowance. Who uses a phone

more? A Member of Parliament or a Senator? So a Senator gets a \$400 telephone allowance and a Member of Parliament gets no telephone allowance.

But look at this differential. A Senator, which I was in a previous incarnation, gets a transport allowance of \$3,800. A Member of Parliament—“now, a Senator doh really travel all that much. He has no constituents. “He ain ha to go and see nothing, he ain ha to go to no wake, he ain ha to go to no wedding, he ain ha to go to no funeral.” Nobody vote for him. “He doh ha to go to no function here, he aint ha to go and drive up de hill to see de box drain and to see dis one”, but a Senator gets travelling of \$3,800.

Do you know what a Member of Parliament’s transport allowance is?—4,100, three hundred dollars more and we probably use our car a hundred times more than a Senator. That differential has to be crazy. This whole thing is madness. Total and complete madness and balderdash—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Roberts: “Doh worry, we go help yuh. You going back as a Senator just now.” [*Laughter*]

Mr. T. Deyalsingh:—and that is why—no, I really cannot depend on the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre to protect me. [*Laughter*] The Member for Pointe-a-Pierre has sold out to the parasitic oligarchy. The Member for Pointe-a-Pierre is now a member of the parasitic oligarchy. He is not going to defend me. He is not going to defend to reverse the unconstitutional actions of the SRC.

Mr. Imbert: The man say they do a good job.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: Right, yeah, they do a good job. Yeah, imagine that. That is why we are beaten up like “Good Friday bobolees” by everybody because nobody speaks on our behalf, and when we speak on our behalf—I could imagine the letters to the editor that are going to appear on Monday based on my contribution tonight. I could imagine what the letters to the editor are going to say about Deyalsingh tonight.

Hon. Member: The editorial too.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: And the editorial too.

The Member for Tabaguite skirted an issue and I want to tackle it head-on. He spoke about somebody who spoke about motor vehicles, and that we could change motor vehicles often. Let us stop pussyfooting around the issue. Mr. Ken Lalla has disappointed me. It was Mr. Ken Lalla who made the unfortunate statement, not knowing what the law is. We can buy a motor vehicle every two years—one motor vehicle. Mr. Ken Lalla is somebody I have the utmost respect

for, but when you step out of your crease you must expect to be criticized. And not only that, Mr. Ken Lalla went a little further. He said because a Member of Parliament gets these tax allowances, we should sell our cars not at market value, but at less than market value. That is what Mr. Ken Lalla said, that we should sell our cars under market value. [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Ken Lalla, I have the utmost respect for, but he disappointed me. He disappointed me.

Dr. Moonilal: He is your constituent.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: No, he is in St. Augustine. That is the constituent of St. Augustine. He is in south Valsayn. I am in charge of north Valsayn.

Dr. Rambachan: You are the mayor of north Valsayn.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: Yes!

The Member for Tabaquite spoke about some of the requests made to Members of Parliament. When I was duly elected, let me state the first request for money I got. This is a true story, Mr. Speaker. I kid you not, so do not laugh. One of the very first visits I got in my office after being sworn in was from a constituent. He comes to me and says he has a common-law relationship with somebody from Santo Domingo. I said, "Very good. Nice for you. I happy for you." He said, "But unfortunately she is deceased." I said, "Well, I offer you my sincerest condolences." Mr. Speaker, this is a true story. I took an oath in this place. So I said, "Condolences on the passing of your partner." He says, "But the body is in Dass Funeral Home." I said, "Well, that is a good place to be." [*Laughter*] No, it is a reputable funeral home. They would treat the body with all respect. He says, "But, I need \$32,000 to send the body back to Santo Domingo. I said, "Well." And he says, "Well you are now a Member of Parliament so you have that money." So I took up the phone and I called Dass Funeral Home. As soon as I took up the phone to call Dass Funeral Home, he ran out the office. That is the kind of thing we are faced with.

Dr. Khan: The pie man come by you yet?

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: Yeah. [*Laughter*] So, these are the kinds of request we—every school bazaar, every church bazaar, money; every doctor bill, money; and where is the money coming from? [*Crosstalk*] But, Member for Tabaquite, whilst I agreed with everything you have said, there is one issue that the Member for Tabaquite raised which we on this side have a fundamental, ideological difference over. The same way you explained your position, I would like to explain our position, that is, the \$10 million fund.

Mr. Speaker, the solution in our humble view to the delivery of goods and services lies with the empowering of those agencies to do just that, whether it is local government or the Ministries. If you give a Member of Parliament \$10 million, do you know what is going to happen? Every bandit is going to form a company and appear on your doorstep for a contract, and if you do not give them a contract you are going to be threatened, your family is going to be threatened. That is the reality. Plus, I do not think it is our position to be handing out contracts and doing development. We are not contractors. So, it is a fundamental difference in ideology, but we could agree to disagree. Good? But we could agree to disagree.

Mr. Speaker, the public, as I said, will give us “bois” in the morning, “bois” for lunch and “bois” for dinner, but let me alert members of the public and the SRC to the decisions that Members of Parliament have made over time, which have benefited us, and tell me if \$17,000 is enough for us, “Good Friday bobolees”. The floatation of the dollar was a decision made by Members of Parliament, PNM Members of Parliament. That decision has served us well. Members of Parliament had to take a decision on the Grenada invasion. That decision has served us well. This Government may have to take a decision on Venezuela and what is happening there and the threat to our borders, immigration. But those are the types of decisions that we as Members of Parliament are called upon to make. Strip away the old talk, strip away the Valentine Day massacre that happened here a couple weeks ago, strip away all that, at the end of the day Members of Parliament make serious decisions that have long-term implications.

The One-China policy in 1981 was a decision made by Members of Parliament which is serving us well up to today. That was a 1981 decision, the One-China policy and not to go with Taiwan. Those are the kinds of onerous decisions which have long-term implications for the country’s trajectory.

Energy policy, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, over the years, both the PNM and the UNC—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Peters: Mr. Speaker.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: Mr. Speaker, sorry—would have made decisions as far as energy policy is concerned. Permit me to read into the *Hansard* a few:

1993	Caribbean Methanol Company;
1996	T&T Methanol Company;
1996—1998	PCS Nitrogen III and IV, Farmland/MissChem, Methanol IV;

1999 Cleveland Cliffs Direct Reduced Iron;

1999 Atlantic LNG Train 1.

Those are the decisions, policy decisions, made by Members of Parliament.

1999 Titan Methanol;

2002 Atlantic LNG Train 2;

2002 Caribbean Nitrogen Company;

2003 Atlantic LNG Train 3;

2003 Atlas Methanol (Methanex);

2004 N2000;

2005 M5000;

2005 Atlantic LNG Train 4;

2009/2010 AUM.

Where would this country and our fortunes be today if MPs did not make these types of decisions? But we must be paid the same as the housing allowance for the environmental commission chairman. Where is the equity in the deliberations of the SRC?

This debate is not about us asking for more money. This debate is about the SRC being negligent and being reckless and being incompetent in the execution of their duties. This has nothing to do with parliamentarians asking for more money. It is about the SRC being arrogant, being negligent, being callous and acting unconstitutionally. It goes again to the whole question of institutional failure. This is a classic example, my friends, of institutional failure and we cannot and should not condone it, and I urge the Government to reject this report outright. Reject it! Reject it!

Mr. Speaker, earlier today there were some young people here. I do not know if you caught sight of them. They were members of my St. Joseph Youth League. This is a youth league of people in their late teens, early 20s, mid 20s, and when we had a meeting with them last Saturday, they actually asked me to alert them to what is coming up in the Parliament so they could analyze and give me a position. Mr. Speaker, to say I was pleasantly surprised and shocked that the young people in their late teens and early 20s would want to get involved in the parliamentary process was wonderful and they came today. They asked to come to the

Parliament and they alerted me to another injustice—not injustice to the MPs, but injustice now to local government councillors and that has escaped all of us to date.

Dr. Rambachan: That is what I talked about.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: You spoke about that. Let me amplify, Member for Tabaquite. Local government councillors are one of the most important people in delivery of goods and services, but hear what the SRC did by sleight of hand and this is where the dishonesty of the SRC comes in.

There is some allowance that they have which were reduced from \$2,900 to \$1,860.

Dr. Rambachan: Which allowance is that?

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: So there was a loss of \$1,040—I will come to that now—but do you know what they did? They increased the salary for councillors from \$3,500 to \$4,360. So they increased part by \$860, they decreased part by \$1,040, giving the councillors a net loss of \$180.

Mr. Imbert: They cut their salary?

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: You making joke.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: No, no, no! They increased the salary and cut the total package. So the councillors have a net loss of \$180 and we must—hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, we must accept that. [*Crosstalk*] Because the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre did not find much—[*Crosstalk*] “Yuh said he did ah alright job.”

11.20 p.m.

Mr. Imbert: You said, “They do a good job”.

Mr. Mc Leod: You heard that?

Mr. Imbert: You said that.

Mr. Mc Leod: You heard that?

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: Diametrically opposed to the Member for Tabaquite and the Member for Oropouche East when he piloted—diametrically opposed. Councillors have been treated unfairly.

But, there is another issue affecting councillors. The same way the Cabinet Note to pay the medical expenses for MPs has been frustrated by the civil service,

there was also a Cabinet Note to grant councillors motor vehicle tax exemptions and some councillors were able to access it, but then, for some reason, it has been rescinded. Why? Why are we treating councillors with the same disdain as Members of Parliament and we are the elected ones? Nobody elected the SRC Chairman! They have no responsibility to a constituency. Based on this alone, they should be fired.

How could the SRC seek to treat councillors with that disdain? Why are the motor vehicle tax exemptions, once offered to councillors, taken away? As a matter of fact, they need it more than MPs, and I am making a plug here tonight for all 143 councillors—is it?—142, 143 councillors, to be afforded, not the luxury of exemption, you know, but the necessity. We need to have our councillors access the benefit of tax-free motor vehicles just like us and we do not need the SRC to take it away from us.

So, Mr. Speaker, I lay my argument on two planks: the High Court opinion which I read out earlier, maybe I should quote the case just for the *Hansard*. It is High Court Action No. 3015 of 1987 in the matter of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago between Bernadette Hood-Caesar and the hon. Prime Minister and Minister of Finance and the Economy and the Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago before the honourable Mr. Justice Mustapha Ibrahim. The SRC is led by a lawyer.

Mr. Sharma: He is alive, eh.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: Sorry. He is alive? I do apologize. The SRC is headed by a lawyer—any two-bit first-year lawyer will know this—plus the Industrial Relations Act speaks about this. Where are the unions? Are we, as a class of employees, not worthy of the union's attention when our salary is affected, when our property is taken away? But take it away from a unionized worker, all hell will break loose and rightly so. But who acts for us? Nobody! Not Mr. Lambert.

Mr. Roberts: Not Roget.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: Nobody, nobody has our best interest at heart. So when the SRC acts unconstitutionally, we have no choice but to stand up here and defend ourselves, and until we respect ourselves, nothing is going to happen. So, the SRC has egg on its face, it has embarrassed the country, it has embarrassed those that appointed it. They have acted unconstitutionally and I am submitting that heads should roll.

Mr. Speaker, as I wind to a close, I make my third call—and I hope this call falls on fertile ears. Could we please have the portrait of Mr. Leo Des Vignes, former Member of Parliament, who died in service to this country, take its rightful place on the western wall of this Chamber. Mr. Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Amery Browne (*Diego Martin Central*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to begin by endorsing the call just made by my colleague from St. Joseph. The hon. Mr. Des Vignes was the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin Central—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deyalsingh: Ahh, yours, right!

Dr. A. Browne:—and we should not forget the costly sacrifice he laid on the altar of democracy.

Mr. Speaker, there were several protests outside of this parliamentary Chamber during the course of this afternoon by citizens and groups who were disgruntled for various reasons, and on reading this SRC report, again, today, I actually felt like joining some of those protests. You see, there are lots of people suffering in Trinidad and Tobago and sometimes these discussions and deliberations can be a bit painful for some of them. They may not have the degree of forbearance, some parliamentarians would wish for, because they look at their own situation, depending on education, depending on access to employment, and we recognize that persons are having a difficult time.

But, Mr. Speaker, we, as parliamentarians, represent individuals in society and families, and I have certainly stood here and represented nurses, policemen, prisons officers, coast guard officers, the voiceless, CEPEP workers, URP workers—all focused on remuneration and the needs for improvement. But the question remains throughout this debate: who represents parliamentarians? Who speaks for parliamentarians?

There was an expectation—I would have to say—created when the President of the Republic addressed this Parliament and gave a very rousing and inspirational call to action and advice on what to do, and I really would have thought that we would have gotten—or the SRC would have gotten a little more guidance and direction in coming up with, what I regard as, some very reprehensible conclusions focused on public officers and parliamentarians in particular.

Mr. Speaker, this report is a disgrace to the people of Trinidad and Tobago and to the Lower House of Parliament, and I agree with the calls that the Salaries Review Commission should resign or should be removed from office as soon as

possible. They have demonstrated a fundamental lack of understanding of the role of a parliamentarian, and you do not really need a formal review to arrive at a fundamental understanding of that role. They have demonstrated a fundamental lack of understanding of what it takes to manage a constituency of tens of thousands of individuals who have a variety of needs. They have demonstrated a fundamental lack of understanding of what it takes to provide proper service as a Member of Parliament or even as a Government Minister in a country as diverse as Trinidad and Tobago. They have demonstrated a fundamental lack of understanding of the reality that we, parliamentarians, are on call 24 hours per day. We are on call 24 hours per day.

Mr. Speaker, even while we are here—I do not know if any other MP has experienced this—my phone is ringing continuously, even during sittings of Parliament. So some persons do not even realize sometimes—maybe they do not look at parliamentary channel and realize—[*Crosstalk*] “All right, yuh say they do not care”—that we are actually engaged in debate, and the phone is ringing. Sometimes, I would actually answer the phone so that they would hear the proceedings and they would understand. “Eh-heh, yuh know what happens?” As the call ends, they call back again and again because that is the kind of pressure, so when we talk about call, it is not on call in theory, it is on call in reality.

Mr. Speaker, if there is a flood right now in Diego Martin, your child could be at home crying, whatever could be taking place in your residence, the expectation, the demand and the responses, you are going to have to go and respond to that. If my colleague from Point Fortin has an issue down in Point Fortin at 11.30 tonight, she is going to have to find herself down there, but again, this SRC report appears to demonstrate a complete lack of understanding of that basic reality, and it is my view that you do not need any consultancy to provide you with that. You just need—well, common sense—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: Not even that.

Dr. A. Browne:—you certainly would not benefit from dinosaur brains or dinosaur mentality, which appears to be what has been mobilized in arriving at these conclusions. If there is a fire right now in Diamondvale, the expectation is this MP would probably have to fold up and head down there as I have done many, many times in my constituency, and I do not speak only for myself. I am certain, whether I like you or not, every parliamentarian has done exactly that. Sometimes arriving in houses while the smoke is still going up, soot on your clothes, but people expect that kind of response and that is the kind of response we have to deliver and we have been delivering.

Mr. Speaker, as my colleague did, I do not know if he made it as clear as possible, my payslip is in my hand and my net salary is \$11,746.84 and I am going to put that in a different perspective shortly. So, we spoke about fire, flood—rape. When there is a rape sometimes in the constituency or involving a constituent—I do not know if it is because I am a physician with some STI expertise, sometimes that call is made.

I am standing here and I am tired, Mr. Speaker. Do you know why? Last night, I left Port of Spain General Hospital, not as a doctor but as a parliamentarian after midnight on Ward 16 with a constituent who said she was having some challenges. The expectation was that I would leave my wife and my baby, bathe and dress and head down to the hospital, stay with her throughout the duration of her experience there—everything worked out in the end I would say—and then drop her back home in Diego Martin Central. Maybe, I should just for the record say and also stop for a meal for the individual as well, but most people do not realize that because there is no camera or television crew behind you. And again, I do not pretend I am any superhero, I do not think I am just speaking for myself alone. I mean, if I was some kind of big controversial MP with whatever going on, I am sure there are cameras that follow certain MPs for various reasons whenever they do anything, but not all of us are like that.

Mr. Speaker, citizens—because the media really does not care about any of this and that is fine—over the years have been deprived of any understanding whatsoever of what is the real role of an advocate and parliamentarian, so they have developed a very perverse view of what it is parliamentarians do. When that is backed up by a dismissive SRC report, then that simply confirms the views of society. These people really serve no function, they do not function, and therefore, if there is any prospect of improvement in remuneration, it should be dismissed out of hand, but that certainly is not an attitude that is going to get us anywhere in the neighbourhood of development. If there is a shooting, you better be somewhere around.

Neighbourhood disputes: two neighbours fighting, the expectation is somehow that the Member of Parliament is going to be a mediator in such circumstances. No training whatsoever in mediation. Thank God some of us do courses and so on to help build our roles, but the expectation is the parliamentarian is going to find themselves between there and find a solution. If a tree falls, they are not calling the Ministry of Agriculture or Food Production, they are calling their MP.

11.35 p.m.

There is a wedding coming up, we are proud of our son or whatever, Mr. MP better be there you know—right? And if there are two or three weddings on that day, well I “doh” know how that choice is going to be made because the two that you do not go to, bad blood starts to flow and somebody, and some brave person stands up to make their speech and “dey” say: “well, we invite the MP and we aint see him here today; like he does not care about my family”; not realizing that you might be at a similar event somewhere else just trying to juggle things. So there is a fundamental lack of understanding. Well that is for weddings; “doh” talk about funerals. Do not talk about funerals, Mr. Speaker, and sometimes it clashes even with sittings of the House. Recently I had to leave a funeral and rush up to Parliament and I saw other parliamentarians in similar circumstances, sometimes having to leave an event prior to its conclusion because of their responsibilities, and sometimes that creates a perception “oh, you too busy; you too busy to see it through”.

Mr. Deyalsingh: “Yuh too big.”

Dr. A. Browne: “Yuh feel yuh too big.” Or “yuh” come late—I “doh” know who—some people might sleep late but some of us do not sleep late at all because there are those types of demands. There is an Orisha ceremony—and every religion has a calendar of events. This is serious business you know. And you better find “yuhself” and find a way, and that is where sometimes the skill comes in and nobody does training in these things. You have to develop these skills, as parliamentarians, to somehow pray to God for the wisdom and discernment to balance and make the right decisions so that you do not cause a political or social calamity, just by the demands of what I am holding out is being on call 24 hours a day. There are very few physicians in Trinidad and Tobago, from the highest level of consultant, who can describe their duties in that way; very, very few.

I know our judges work very hard and I see some of that hard work is being recognized in terms of dollars and cents in this report but I do not think they can describe themselves in that manner at all. Even some of our senior public servants can hardly describe themselves—God help them; they work very hard, many of them—in those terms but when you look at the report and you ask who are the least of the apostles in this report of—how many pages?—255, that is an easy question to answer, Mr. Speaker. Parliamentarians are the least of the apostles. When you weigh up the weight of expectation, by far it is the heaviest. I am not even going to go to the Office of the President, which should always be well

rewarded and respected in every country but 11.30 tonight; I am not going to ask where the rest of the officers, named in this report, are. I know where we are, Mr. Speaker—and it is working in respect of our duties.

If there is a christening, well I have almost lost count of godchildren, in this short time as parliament—I have almost lost count. I am trying, with my brain, to keep a count; but there is that expectation. I am sure some of the wealthier parliamentarians must be even more burdened because people just expect—you have to say yes. “Ah want you to stand as godfather”. What “yuh” going to say. “What wrong with meh child?” Eh? [*Laughter*] “What wrong with meh child?” Eh? And if you dare say no then you get some bizarre reasons why you said no: “is because ah living here or meh hair is like this?” I mean, that is the reality. Does the Ombudsman face that?

Mr. Deyalsingh: No.

Dr. A. Browne: How many godchildren they going behind the Ombudsman with?

Mr. Deyalsingh: The environmental commissioner. [*Laughter*]

Dr. A. Browne: I am not going to go through all of them because my colleagues have done a very good job at that and I do not want us to go to tomorrow morning. I am trying not to, Mr. Speaker. A drain is blocked; there is a pothole developing on the road in San Fernando West; who are they going to call? And sometimes the councillor—yes, we advocate for them but sometimes they are slippery, elusive [*Laughter*] and they—we going to talk the truth, or “we not” going to talk the truth? [*Laughter*] But the citizen knows: I vote for her; I vote for him; I calling him. It matters not whether it is a local or central government issue. They are calling the parliamentarian.

I tell you a tree leaning over a house, or a wire, “they calling” the MP. Bees in a tree sometimes; bees in a tree—and if you do not go down there immediately, Mr. Speaker, “doh matter” what you are doing, or what duties you are responding to, if you do not go down there, it says you do not care and you want bees to kill my family. Mr. Speaker, humps, street lights, a cloud of mosquitoes, rats in the road—and this is not an academic discourse, Mr. Speaker. I am laying out the kinds of calls that I receive and, I expect, my colleagues receive. “Fence fall down, wall fall down”, landslide, clogged river, slipper drain, no ambulance sometimes and the expectation is that the parliamentarian would have to function as the ambulance with this legendary vehicle that they want to—at 3.00 a.m.

Mr. Imbert: The vehicle “yuh” get free eh.

Dr. A. Browne: Hmm. A piper—you see a piper in the neighbourhood, who you going to call?

Mr. Deyalsingh: Who “yuh” going to call? Not the police, you know—the MP.

Dr. A. Browne: Not Ghostbusters, the MP. The opening of a parlour or a small business—but, Mr. Speaker, I am going through this shopping list, as it were, because most people do not understand because we only see what is in front of us. So most persons would say: all right, well probably I never called my MP before; or I called them only twice in the last four years but you are dealing with tens of thousands of citizens with a wide spectrum of needs and expectations, plus many, many groups and entities, all focused on one person. And again I do not know if anyone else, any other category in this report can be described in that way—not denigrating or demeaning any other station, you know, Mr. Speaker, but this is just to try to put this report in perspective and to hopefully—and I do not know how successfully or not—assuage the concerns of some people who somehow feel that we should not talk about these things at all.

So while on every other day I would be expected to stand here and represent others, today, excuse me, myself and some colleagues would be representing ourselves as parliamentarians. [*Desk thumping*] I do not think that is—“low it”. I do not think that is too much to ask for.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to go on. Sometimes you receive a packet of tickets, as I have already several times for the month of March. [*Laughter*] And when you open the package, Mr. Speaker, there are 15 tickets. I added up one packet—and you do not dare say no, you know because the perception is: all “yuh” have millions; the Parliament giving “all yuh” millions. Everybody is a millionaire—well, maybe some but you do not dare send back those tickets—fifteen tickets. When you sit and work it out, sometimes 15 per cent to 20 per cent of your net salary, sometimes, just in tickets to events and so on. Well, I can imagine what the Member for Baratara/San Juan—[*Laughter*]

Dr. Khan: Tickets.

Mr. Deyalsingh: “Fuad fete.”

Dr. A. Browne: Yeah, I mean—I do not know how much WITCO would pay for [*Laughter*] but, Mr. Speaker, no, no, I am not going to let them distract me because this is serious business. But most people do not understand that that is part of the role. If there is a landslide; an oil spill—my colleague from La Brea,

up and down still, behind the issues related to the oil spill. Do not talk about the flood. Your spouse better not be afraid of thunder and lightning because sometimes you have to leave them in those circumstances—frightened—and head for a response. I remembered in the big flood in Diego Martin, Mr. Speaker, I jumped into a little X-Trail that I had, on Morne Coco Hill, in the black of night; heavy rain, thunder and lightning. When I reached into Petit Valley, the flood water was so strong, the vehicle—in fact, it was still on Morne Coco Road. I told my MP, the Member for Diego Martin North/East—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: You called your MP?

Dr. A. Browne: I did not call him. I told him afterwards. The flood water is so strong; the surge is so strong, that X-Trail literally started to drift laterally on the road. I did not know where was road or drain. It was just flood water in the black of night. Nobody cares, and I do not expect anyone to be shedding tears because that is the duty. That is the job. But again, that is not reflected. Those realities—and again, I just want to repeat, for clarity, it is not just me. I expect other parliamentarians do exactly the same thing, or are on call in exactly the same manner. So do not dare say no, Mr. Speaker, in terms of this.

So Mr. Speaker, I think a lot of the noisemakers out there and over—as this debate has dragged on for a little while—a few weeks, you see people calling and writing and, you know, others have expressed that: “what going on here? They want to give themselves some big set of money.” But most of those noisemakers have no understanding whatsoever of what professionals are paid in society. That is one reality. So I do not know if they just want parliamentarians to be alien from that.

And then, Mr. Speaker, my disappointment though is that there are many out there, even those listening right now, who know and who hear a salary of \$11,746 and they know—sitting in all our constituencies—that they make three, four, five times that amount and they are comfortable in their living rooms or their bedrooms right now. And they know that this is absurd and ridiculous but they are very silent in the circumstances—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: They would write a letter to the editor.

Dr. A. Browne:—because it is no skin off their back. They will write letters saying we should not get an increase. All right, well that is a very cynical—I thought they would have been silent—anyway, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, then that is just the routine, but then there are development projects and every Member of Parliament has their passions. I heard the Member

for Tabaquite talking about sport. And we would all have our sporting initiatives—and I forgive him for the very derogatory comments he—but that was maybe just banter. But, Mr. Speaker, there are other projects that MPs would engage in, with very little resources or support. And where does the money have to come from? Unless you are begging some contractor or corrupt individual—and most of these people have agendas, these so-called donors and beneficiaries—you are going to have to take it out of your pocket. I will give a quick story, Mr. Speaker.

Recently I met a young nursing student and, at the time, I was eating a caimite and I saw her looking at the fruit in a very strange way. I said: “yuh doh know what dis is?” She said: no; what is it? I said: it is a caimite. She asked me to repeat. She never even heard the word before. And then I started to ask her about various fruits. I said: have you ever eaten a sapodilla? She said: no, but she has heard of a sapodilla, because of “sapodilla brown”, the term sapodilla brown. So I asked her: where is she from? She said she is from Petit Valley. I said: “you from” Petit Valley, one of the greenest places in Trinidad and you do not even know these local fruits? And that inspired, Mr. Speaker, a project where I went to the farm, the Ministry’s farm and bought a range of fruit trees and took them into a primary school—because I have a strong opinion that we have so lost our identity in many ways, even the things that are consumed in Trinidad and Tobago, we have lost it.

So one way to help our primary school children, because that is where it starts, the young ones, to reconnect with our Trinbagonianness is to reconnect them with some of our local fruits. And I did a little planting ceremony with staff and students and so on. I would like to do that with every single educational institution in Diego Martin Central, those that have a little bit of ground. I have already approached many of the principals. But, Mr. Speaker, where is the money going to come from, unless—again, you have some corrupt financier who is going to come hunting you down for a contract afterward if you end up in office, or in a position to reward them, you are going to have to take the money out of your net salary of \$11,746.84.

And, Mr. Speaker, I have to say, while we are on the issue of agriculture, I cannot leave my friend, the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, out of it because the Member for Chaguanas West started a trend which I am going to continue now, in expressing my disappointment in aspects—certain aspects of his address today. Because the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre is a hero to many, has been a hero to many in this country, as a fearless warrior and representative of justice for

workers in Trinidad and Tobago, but when I heard him today on related matters—I do not know if he was afraid of conflict of interest or anything else, but I will give you another quick story. I have planted a few bhagi trees in my small yard. The first time I harvested the bhagi leaves and my wife cooked it, I realized that you could have a big bowl of bhagi leaves but when you cook that, when you steam that, you end up with about three tablespoons of bhagi, you know, Mr. Speaker.

So when you have a plate of bhagi, that must be like a forest of bhagi that was cut down there. Anyway, all that to say that when I listened to him today, it reminded me of the phrase “boil down like bhagi”. From a nice, big, green comradely bush, to three tablespoons. Yeah, but “ah mean”—so I would not dwell on it, I just wanted to—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deyalsingh: He joined the parasitic oligarchy.

Dr. A. Browne: “Nah, nah, nah”, I would not go there.

11. 50 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, but when I listened to the Member for Tabaquite and others who were a little more forceful and who, in their content, basically tore this report to shreds, I wonder who was in that Cabinet meeting that embraced this report and said: “let us send it as is to the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago.” Who was there? There have been administrations before who failed in this regard. That is the literal truth. But we have people in office now who proclaim that they could do better and they could right wrongs and correct injustice. It appears to me that every single Member of this House, whether openly or quietly, recognizes that this report is ridiculous in content and nature and I am just wondering how the votes will be cast.

I see the erudite Member for Oropouche East with his eyebrows raised and it is possible that he may have made some further communication. [*Crosstalk*] Well we have our doubters. Never happen! Because we amended a Bill earlier, it is possible he may have spoken to the Prime Minister and swayed her position.

Mr. Imbert: He was spoken to. [*Laughter*]

Dr. A. Browne: We will see. Mr. Speaker, I am willing to even say if it is not even done for this batch of parliamentarians, at least we should do something for the future, when some of us are wiped off the slate completely, those to come, at least because you are putting people in a sense of vulnerability that if they are not brought up well, with the very highest of standards, they are going to be exposed

to some unnecessary fiscal temptation. And if we are relying on the Integrity in Public Life Act and that Integrity Commission to restrain parliamentarians from such temptations we are making a gross error. We are making a gross error because the loopholes are huge and some day in the very near future I am going to stand here, because I do not want to take us too late into the morning, and I will share with the public my view of what some of those loopholes are, without making any accusations against specific parliamentarians and how the system is being abused on an ongoing basis.

Mr. Speaker, again to the Cabinet who seem to have embraced this report, why no housing allowance for a Member of Parliament—a simple question—and the chairman and members of the Integrity Commission?

Mr. Deyalsingh: The Environmental Commission.

Dr. A. Browne: And all of them. “Housing allowance sharing like wild oats. Yuh stoning dog with housing allowance outside dey.” But the least of the apostles, in my view, the hardest workers or should be, the highest expectations, the 24-hour on call people, for some reason should they be vagrants, nomads, wandering the streets?

Again the media has fed this thing about “when yuh last yuh see yuh MP?” Parliamentarians somehow are expected to be like nomads wandering the road: “good evening, hello, hello, hello,” not following up and advocating on specific issues, not in the Parliament or outside of the Parliament or in constituency offices, seeing persons, developing documentation, working through with Government Ministries and other entities, somehow just wandering the road and some of us have relinquished and are sort of just trying to meet that expectation, Mr. Speaker, which I do not view.

I heard a colleague opposite actually lamenting about it. Those types of perceptions have to change because it is not a realistic expectation. It is not an expectation we see in other parts of the world and it is something that just feeds into a confusion between councillor, parliamentarian, litter warden or whoever else you would have just wandering the roads being seen and saying hello and so on. I would not dwell on that any further.

The President of NIHERST, twice the salary of a Member of Parliament. When does the media call that president? Where is the public pressure on same? When they squeeze one weekend in a quarter year and maybe go to Maracas Beach, do people bombard them with pen and paper “leh meh get yuh number please? Ah need a house, Sir?” Well, I could imagine. I need a house.

Mr. Speaker, I am on the bus route and a police officer doing their duty might stop me. This has actually happened, let me not say might, stopped me in a roadblock, doing their job. Licence, registration. I have no problem with that because I am just a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, I would show it. And they say: “okay Dr. Browne, all right, nice. Ah could ask yuh something?”

Mr. Deyalsingh: “Ah want ah house.”

Dr. A. Browne: “Ah want ah house.” [*Laughter*] Mr. Speaker, there is nothing wrong with that. If people need shelter for their families, fine, but I am just again highlighting, when you talk about 24 hours you better have some little notepad and pen on the passenger seat.

Mr. Deyalsingh: No, you have to have a house.

Dr. A. Browne: Well, I do not think people are that unreasonable. I do not think the President of NIHERST and all others, I do not want to pick on any one office, they do not have that kind of burden.

Mr. Speaker, I see officers in here, in this same report and because the media will never really expose the true contents, except with regard to parliamentarians, people do not understand what is in here and the kind of perks and packages that every other public officer, senior officers are getting.

Attire, I mean, one of my colleagues spoke about her lovely attire and she does dress well, but that costs. But there are officers here who get outfit and clothing allowance and so on, on a regular basis, on an annual basis, up to several thousand dollars per annum. But I do not know. The expectation is you better dress properly as a parliamentarian, you know. “Doh come to a wedding in some kind of ‘nashy’ suit.”

Mr. Imbert: They run a survey.

Dr. A. Browne: Of course, and they run polls and then they want to say who is best dressed. Gypsy has that locked down for a few years. That is fine. We are not jealous. And they would mock you if you are not properly attired. But you have to pull that out of the sky or you have to be dependent on a corrupt financier to go and buy some Armani suit for you and then demand contracts from you afterward. I do not know if that is a reality persons want to continue in existence.

I am not going to be much longer. What about driver? Oh my goodness! I saw some entities in here with chauffeurs and drivers and so on. By the time you use the word chauffeur, Mr. Speaker, people get this expectation of “Driving Miss Daisy”, some fancy-schmancy thing and a hat and a Rolls Royce. But a driver,

Mr. Speaker, when we leave here at 4.00 a.m. on several occasions, having come here at 10.00 a.m. the previous day or 1.30 p.m. the previous day, and you are expected to drive to your home sometimes sleepy because no one is—a colleague or two might nod off for a few minutes but that does not constitute rest. There is no other office that I am aware of, whether policeman or security guard, there must be some kind of provision for refreshment or rest. That does not exist here.

I do not know if parliamentarians, if there are some secret facilities where people go and bathe and so on but you are here all these hours under these circumstances and then some of us—when others exchange side with us they would—and some of them have been in the circumstance. Let me not be light with it. But you have to find your way home. My colleague is going to La Brea. There is no provision for a driver even part-time, even associated with his constituency office who can relieve some of these duties.

Do not talk about security, everyone assumes we have bodyguards—some of them probably need their bodyguards—we all have bodyguards and so on. Mr. Speaker, that is just a flight of fantasy. It does not exist. So when we leave here, do not dare—when you are driving home at this hour—not stop at a red light in fear or concern, because somebody is going to take a picture of your licence plate and say: “look at dem, dey making laws but dey breaking laws.” You stop at every red light on your way home and you pray that some bandit or nefarious character was not monitoring the television and might be already home waiting on you, because they know what time you left, what time you probably arrive. It is a very insecure environment.

I am not the only citizen of Trinidad and Tobago with security concerns but I am saying when you have a paid Salaries Review Commission that has addressed these concerns for a range of public officers, why on earth would you treat parliamentarians 24 hours on call, as the least of the apostles? That, Mr. Speaker, is a perverse mentality. It is mirroring the mentality that some citizens or the view of some citizens of MPs but it is a self-perpetuating myth and it just creates a further lack of function where there might be lack of function.

Mr. Speaker, there are times when there may be very contentious matters broaching the Parliament. I have heard the Member for Diego Martin North/East, who might be slightly more experienced than others in the House, raise some matters of serious allegations of public corruption. Sometimes it might be implicating an individual who is sitting, looking at the television.

There was the case of the notorious cocaine surgery, of which I have heard very little, except coming out of this mouth standing in this Parliament and that is

not going to go away if I have anything to do about it. There are people sitting, listening to that, who might be getting very, very, angry and they might be very powerful persons. But, in terms of security, in terms of any type of provision for yourself or your family, “dem is just MPs man. Let them fend for themselves.” I do not think that is where Trinidad and Tobago should have their minds. There is a bigger picture that has to be dealt with. Other countries have dealt with it. I do not know. At some stage, we are going to have to treat with these things very realistically.

And then what about the bad boys who come to every politician’s office at some point or another? Mr. Speaker, I do not know where this note has originated—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deyalsingh: From me.

Dr. A. Browne:—but it is something that I will read out. It is 12.01 a.m. It is time to fire the Salaries Review Commission. Mr. Speaker, I endorse those words. [*Desk thumping*]

Try telling some of these bad boys no. Trust me, there are parliamentarians who do exactly that and explain to them why. But, again, that creates some issues.

Mr. Speaker, I have a few recommendations and I would just start with one, which goes like this: we really need to consider some more institutionalized representation for parliamentarians. In health care we have a concept of caring for the caregiver and that has developed over the last several years, which says that you can best administer care for others as a health care practitioner if there are structures and systems to help care for you. It is an ongoing cycle of care.

In terms of representation, I do not think it is sustainable over the course of the years. Again, it might be a self-fulfilling negative prophecy that we have been seeing in this country. But I do not think it is a good reality that you have a cadre of workers, because that is what parliamentarians are, who find themselves unrepresented. I am not saying to form a trade union, but to help formalize and change this reality so we do not engage in this debate next year or in three years’ time or in five years’ time. And we have some, I would say, outstanding parliamentarians on this issue. I would not turn to the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, based on today, but—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: “All yuh ponging up”—

Dr. A. Browne: Yeah, yeah. That is the last time. I could certainly reference Member of Parliament, Colm Imbert and maybe Indarsingh, as an alleged trade

union background, to help build some kind of institutionalized representation for parliamentarians. Maybe we could start with those two from the Lower House. Well, why not.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to end with a few observations and again I repeat what my net salary is, \$11,746. But let us say that goes up to \$15,746 at some point, I challenge any citizen listening who might be a little cynical, who might be a little uncomfortable—I challenge any of them—to walk into the office of your bank manager, walk into the office of your insurance company manager, walk into your credit union and ask to speak to the president or the director, walk into your telephone company next time you go to pay your bill and ask to speak to the director or the supervisor or the CEO, or the managing director. Ask to speak with them.

12.05 a.m.

Walk into any energy company, walk into the office of any senior public servant, walk into the senior staff of any corporation in Trinidad and Tobago, walk into the offices at Petrotrin, NGC, UDeCOTT, or any entity of worth or stature in this country, walk up to any judge or senior attorney—some of whom are asleep right now or lying in their beds looking at television—walk up to any senior physician in Trinidad and Tobago, walk up to any newspaper editor or managing director, walk up to the head of any security company, walk up to the senior staff in any regional health authority, walk up to any teacher in any university or lecturer in this country, walk up to a senior official at WASA, T&TEC, anywhere else, walk into their offices—Mr. Speaker, that is my challenge to any citizen who might be a little cynical—and offer them \$11,746 for a month's work or even offer many of them a current Minister's salary, in the service of Trinidad and Tobago, offer them \$15,000 per month, just make that offer to any of those persons that I have mentioned, they would reject it, and tear it up and throw it on the ground.

They would look at any commission that came up with that type of offer, for their duties, far less for being on call or in service 24 hours a day, and they would tear that report up, and they would demand that the authors of that report be dismissed, immediately to be fired. So anyone who has any clue about what a parliamentarian's role is, would totally reject this SRC report, and I certainly do so now, but our Cabinet did not do so, and I really wonder why. Mr. Speaker, again I would not go through the report in any further detail because some of my colleagues have.

Mr. Speaker, some people have a problem with a significant increase in the salary of a Minister, or in the salary of a parliamentarian, but they have no problem at all with the head of their telephone company, to whom they pay lots of money every month, getting over \$100,000 a month; \$200,000 a month. They have no problem with that you know—state entities sometimes, but there is just a bizarre reality, a twilight zone that unfortunately our media has fed into, where there is an exclusive focus on these small remunerations and a pretence, that those types of salaries are not commonplace in senior management positions, and positions of responsibilities right across the spectrum, public and private spectrum in Trinidad and Tobago. We make the laws that guide those same officers, you know, with those \$200,000 salaries per month; the laws that guide those same officers. We sit on the committees before which all of them come. These Ministers sometimes have to call those same persons in, and we have had exciting experiences with that over the past few years, who are making multiple times—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: Ten times!

Dr. A. Browne:—10 times, et cetera. This is not an appeal to make anyone here wealthy because that is not what this is about. But if you are producing a report of 255 pages covering all the senior public servants in the country, there should be some element of justice and reason in how you compile that.

Talking about a clothing allowance, I am talking about a decent travelling allowance, and at least a housing allowance just like everyone else, unless you are trying to work with vagrants or you are only looking for wealthy people to become Members of Parliament, that again, would be a very dangerous—duty allowance, et cetera, my colleagues have already expressed some of this.

Mr. Speaker, we provide oversight of the policies of all of those agencies. They appear before us in committees to be examined, none of that makes any sense, but again, we are dealing with—in some respects it is an upside down society. So you pay your basketballers all this big set of money, your baseball, your cricketers, millions, but \$11,000 or \$15,000—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member. Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central has expired.

Motion made: That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Miss M. Mc Donald*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: You may continue, hon. Member. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. A. Browne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the Member for Port of Spain South, for her very generous and kind extension.

Mr. Speaker, I was saying in some ways we are dealing with very upside down values and upside down society. So you give your basketballer, your cricketer, your baseball player all these millions, but when the discussion is \$11,000 or \$15,000 for a parliamentarian, or a proper salary for a Government Minister, in keeping with the current socio-economic realities and parity with other significant salaries in your same country and society, somehow you cannot have a proper or logical debate on that.

Mr. Speaker, we are all always in the public glare, and when someone's house is on fire, or there is a flood, or someone is sick, the parliamentarian is the person to be called.

Mr. Speaker, I think it was mentioned a little earlier, there are people who assume, I—[*Interruption*] no, it was not. Thank you for the correction. I have had the experience being in Hi-Lo pushing a trolley, putting a few items in, and somebody would walk up to me and say: “what you doing here, I thought the Parliament has staff to go and buy things for you.” [*Laughter*] Not just giving you money for groceries you know. Somehow there is some magical grocery, they buy things for you and send it to your house, and I am like, what is going on here—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: “How many times dey tell you that?”

Dr. A. Browne:—many times. And do not play you are going into the market: “wha yuh doin in de market”? [*Crosstalk*] It is almost like you are not allowed. You are supposed to send your staff. What staff? Who? Butler? Driver? Bodyguard? Who are these mythical figures that are doing these things for you? And you know it is crazy, Mr. Speaker. It is crazy. [*Crosstalk*]

There are those high demands, sporting events, et cetera, Mr. Speaker. I am leaving out quite a few aspects, but I am very concerned and again, I want to make the point that an increase in salary or a parity in salary, is not going to immunize any politician from the temptation to be corrupt. It is not going to happen, but that is not a reason to maintain this folly at all. So I just want to debunk those who may feel that because this is not going to prevent corruption, it should not be done at all.

Mr. Speaker, as a parliamentarian, I have had to repaint the interior of a primary school within my constituency. I had to rely on money coming out of my

own pocket and a few very close friends, including staff members who take money out of their own pockets to do things like this. I have painted over the apartment of a disabled gentleman within my community, that money had to come out of my pocket, and you know, you are dealing with issues of service and they are joking on the other side.

Mr. Speaker, as parliamentarians, we have to put personal funds into hundreds of events during the course of a calendar year. Am I exaggerating? Where is this expected to come from? Is there some magic? And sometimes the councillors are hiding and dodging, you are dealing with burst pipes, bad roads, water truck needs, bees, mosquitoes, rats, et cetera, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker, the sacrifice includes the sacrifice of privacy. I see that there are officers who get—and I am not necessarily advocating for that—but annual travel grants. I do not know, I mean, if the public really read this, I think there would be great consternation of enormous size. Some officers get first-class tickets on an annual basis for themselves and their spouse. I do not necessarily know that everybody needs to get that, but what I do know is that as a parliamentarian, it is—I will try to put this in the right way—it is virtually impossible for any of us—I am not speaking for myself alone—to have anything that can be construed as a vacation or recharge time or time off in Trinidad and Tobago. Because anywhere you go, you can go and hide in Grande Riviere at a beach house, there is somebody there who—they know us, and they have needs, [*Crosstalk*] and it is only human and I cannot be angry with that, because there are those needs— [*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: They ever tackle you at a funeral, while the body is going down?

Dr. A. Browne:—of course, of course, at funerals, it does not matter, people have needs. So again, it is the issue of caring for the caregiver. I mentioned the parallel earlier. I do believe that should be applied here.

The media does very little, and I want to chide them again, in terms of clarifying what the role of the MP is, and it sometimes boils down to these little programmes and talk shows: “when last yuh see yuh MP” and everybody having a nice time laughing and carrying on, which has nothing to do really with the role of a parliamentarian as an advocate for citizens in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, with those few words, I want to indicate that I join with colleagues on both sides who reject this Salaries Review Commission report. I

reject this Salaries Review Commission's logic, and I call upon the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to think again, and as a Parliament, we should all vote against this particular injustice.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Leader of Government Business. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Mr. Speaker, we have come to the end of another very significant debate in the House of Representatives, over matters pertaining to terms and conditions of those persons under the purview of the Salaries Review Commission. In a way, Mr. Speaker, this was an unusual debate of sorts because it meant that Members of Parliament were on this one occasion, speaking to issues in which they have a direct interest, speaking to issues that concern Members of Parliament, particularly their terms and conditions of work, but also other persons in public life who are also under the purview of the Salaries Review Commission.

Mr. Speaker, a lot has been said and it is not my intention at this time to go into detail of the contributions of various speakers, because clearly, several speakers echoed the same issues. It was an occasion I believe, when I did not feel the need to invoke the Standing Orders to ask the Chair to prevent persons from repeating themselves because, Mr. Speaker, I believe that Members had the right to speak and to give their own thoughts and impressions on this matter, since really it is a matter—it involves matters personal to the Members. On every occasion we meet, we discuss matters that affect members of the national community and various sectors. This was an occasion when we discussed matters that affect persons in public life, and Members of the House as well. So we did not see the need to be strict as it relates to repetition.

Mr. Speaker, a few comments were raised very early in the debate by the Leader of the Opposition; the Member for Diego Martin West raised several matters and a couple issues I will just respond to, and those matters as I say were echoed and repeated by several colleagues on the Opposition Benches, and I do not believe—I do not think at this time, I want to single out contributions and so on.

Mr. Speaker, I am almost tempted to say at 12.19 in the morning, I am almost tempted to shout out: London, where are you? We are not seeing you, because he shouted my name. So I could shout his name now, and ask him, “what he doing at twelve past”, whether he is sleeping in his house or somebody else's house, or whether he is working, because I am working, my colleagues are working in the Parliament in Port of Spain.

12.20 a.m.

Hon. Member: Say Brian London, “nuh”.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: It is Brian London not Orville London. The calypsonian Brian London started with Moonilal, so tonight I want to say at this time, “What you doing now?” Because I am here in the Parliament working at this time and in the morning I have an appointment in the constituency as well, very early.

It really leads me to reflect on the statements made by the Members for Diego Martin Central and St. Joseph. I also share their views. I have a point of departure, but I share their views.

On becoming Minister of Housing a few years ago, I thought I would continue the life I lived before when I was in Opposition, until I went to a restaurant, which was almost a few months after being sworn in. I was there with Mrs. Moonilal. We sat there and a gentleman came, the waiter, to take the order and he said, “You are Roodal Moonilal.” I said, “Yes.” He said, “You know, I always knew that one day you would come in this restaurant and one day you would sit down in this area; and I always knew that I would serve you one day.” Then he went into his back pocket and pulled out an HDC card, that was his card under which he had applied for housing—his reference number.

Soon after, I was at a particular watering hole in San Fernando where I have been for 10 years and more. We were having a few beverages, so I went to the counter and told the waitress at the counter, the server, I said, “I am ready to leave; give me my bill. Give me my bill, I want to pay. I want to leave.” So, she jotted down something. She gave me and when I looked at the bill, I said, “But what kind of bill has V and R and Z on it?” That was her HDC number. *[Laughter]*

I was in Point Fortin with the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, Kevin Ramnarine, I think last year. It was Saturday night in Point Fortin, so we were walking the road. When he saw my pocket and all these pieces of paper and chit and so on in the pocket, he said, “You look like a Play Whe banker, collecting mark as you walk down the road.” But these were people’s names and their telephone numbers. The stories can continue and continue.

Once I was returning from London to Piarco and I was in the first-class cabin, sitting there with a cup of coffee. Suddenly somebody burst open the curtain and came into the cabin and they said, “Dr. Moonilal, I saw you when you came in. I know this is not the time.” I looked at him and said, “But this is not the place.” He had applied for many years and so on. He wanted a house.

Mr. Speaker, I give you just one more because I really want to stop this now. I was at the Marriott. We had attended a meeting in New York and I was in the hotel room at the Marriott. I think it was the 46th floor somewhere there. I was feeling unwell, so I called the room service and indicated that I was feeling unwell, in New York, and if they would have some Aspirin or Panadol or something for me. I was developing a flu’.

A lady came to the front door dressed in the uniform of a person working there at the hotel. She gave me this Panadol and so on and she looked at me. She said, “You are the Minister of Housing in Trinidad.” I said, “Yes.” She said, “I have a sister living in San Juan and she applied for a house.” [*Laughter*] I was in New York. So, Mr. Speaker, when Members opposite speak about these things, I understand very, very well and maybe much more than all of you.

In fact, I have colleagues here on my side who themselves abandon me sometimes when we are out publicly and they see people approach me. I turn to them for help, but they would not; they leave me to continue talking and engaging.

Mr. De Coteau: “Yuh does run away from me.”

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Some I run away from as the Member for Moruga/Tableland reminds me. But it really dramatizes the point that all Members of Parliament and, not me alone certainly, because you are in the Parliament, the people believe that you can help. You may not be the Minister of Housing but certainly every Friday you see the Minister of Housing and you could talk to him and you can make representation.

It is not just housing, it is road and it is drainage. Drainage is a major—when I was in Opposition, I came to this House and I said that when you win the Lotto, they should offer a box drain. I thought everybody wanted a box drain. There is a terrible problem in the country’s infrastructure and people ask for that a lot, so it is a real problem and the life of a Member of Parliament, whether you are in Government or in Opposition, carries with it that burden, you really do not have private moments as the Member for Diego Martin Central indicated. Your life is in public and you live for the public and that is how it is, you know, Mr. Speaker.

I also wanted to hear the Members opposite because today was a day when, and on the last occasion, members of the People’s National Movement were in a way liberated—their instinct and passion that were suppressed for over 10 years were liberated today. All Members spoke with great passion on this matter.

You see, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin North/East explained, and he is right, that Prime Ministers, over time, how they behave and why they behave how they behave. Mr. Speaker, I said in the opening and I say in the closing, “Had the last administration adopted the reports of the SRC, we would not be in the position we are in today.”

Miss Cox: You have a chance to fix it.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: But their fix is a leap, a great leap forward, but if over time, if between the year 2001 and 2010 they had adopted the reports of the Salaries Review Commission and not thrown it in the dustbin, or not, as a former Cabinet did, send it back to the SRC, today your increase and your benefits would have been adding on to what you got before. But there has been no increase in benefits because former Governments did not accept it.

So when people say, “Reject the SRC report; throw it away; throw it down”, what happens when it goes back and we or others who come here wait a next four years for the same exact benefit?

Mr. Imbert: Accept the pittance.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: What you say is that in wage negotiations, you collect your wage, you get your increase in your benefit or wage, then you move on to your next negotiating round where you can make a cry, make a plea for an increase.

Mr. Imbert: “Dey not listening.”

Miss Cox: “Dey not negotiating.”

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: So that the danger—they who rejected these reports, advising now to reject again so that when you go next four years, when some people may not even be here, you will get nothing. But they, in office for 10 years, did not adopt any House Committee Report, did not make any great leap forward to equalize all the offices.

Miss Cox: The more you talk is the more fuel for the SRC, you know.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Today, there is something on the table and what we are saying is that we know it is imperfect; everybody speaks of that; we know of the discrepancies and so on. We spoke about that.

Hon. Member: But they never told Manning that.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: They could not and they know it. They could not because the former Prime Minister had a view and that view was that Members of

Parliament were from 1966; that they were part-time; they were getting nothing and they did not deserve nothing because they should be working elsewhere. That was the view.

It was the UNC administration that introduced a benefit of this car allowance. It is a former Attorney General of a UNC administration that provided the benefit of transport for Members of Parliament.

Mr. Imbert: What is the point you are making?

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: The point I am making is that it has always been a UNC administration that has improved terms and conditions of Members of Parliament and this is why we place this in this context.

Mr. Speaker, many colleagues also raised the issue of the car allowance and I want to focus on that because that is the subject of a direct amendment that we have placed in that we have heard all the arguments; we were very clear on the industrial relations principle; we were very clear on the legal issues involved in it. Regrettably, a former Member of Parliament and head, I believe, of the public service, Mr. Kenneth Lalla, wrote a column in which we believe he was terribly flawed, misinformed and misguided and misdirected and missed the complete issue.

I think the Member for St. Joseph had some business with the family earlier. Mr. Speaker, I want to get to this. The Member for Diego Martin West touched on the issue, too. People believe that Members of Parliament buy and drive around in luxury cars, they are rich and so on. The first point, as the Member for Diego Martin West repeated, is that you buy those cars. You do not get them free. You pay for it, so you are paying. Whether you get a loan or not, you are paying.

The other matter is that over time what upsets people is that there has been no change. In 1985, you would probably buy a Super Saloon Toyota; then something would change to a Laurel; then something would change, they would make it commercially cheaper for somebody to buy a Honda; then somebody buy a BMW; then today the Porsche motor car is making it cheaper, you buy that. One day, they will bring a Ferrari that you can afford within the range because a lot of the luxury car dealers in the world today have discovered that instead of trying to sell 10 cars for millions of dollars, just reduce it, sell 100 cars for less.

So they are actually producing cars now under a certain range, whether it is Jaguar, Lamborghini, Ferrari, that is how it goes over time. That is how it is, but there are some people who believe we should still be in a Cortina or a Zephyr or an Austin.

When I came to Parliament for the first time, I had just come back from Europe as a student. I was being appointed as a Senator, temporary Senator. I went to Parliament the very first time with a March, PAW 8676, I think. When I went there, I was trying to park on Abercromby Street, the police “race” me. The police came out of the Red House and said, “You cannot park there.” I said, “But they called me to be Senator.” He said, “Hello, you cannot park there.” I said, “But I have this piece of paper.” He said, “I am talking to you for the last time.” I went higher up the road and parked in a car park and paid \$10. When I came back he saluted me when I was going through the Members’ entrance. [*Laughter*] That was my March.

People believe that the Members of Parliament should still be like that. That March had one wiper. There was a block in the back. It was too expensive to fix the handbrakes. So there was a block in the back, one wiper, one winder, so when someone wind down the glass, you send it to everybody else to wind down the glass.

Mr. Speaker, there are people who genuinely believe that Members of Parliament—if you drive a car like that, they say all is well, but do not come with a BMW, an X5 or anything like that, they feel upset. Mr. Speaker, this is something that Mr. Lalla will understand, but the benefits are provided there, I think it is every two years. It is not every week or every month as he implies in that article. This is every two years and there are provisions where when you go to sell, you have to declare to the Comptroller of Accounts, I think—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: And the Integrity Commission.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:—and the Integrity Commission what you are selling for. This thing is not done by “vaps” and you cannot abuse that rule. I am not sure how you could abuse that. It cannot be under two years. You cannot transfer that motor car. You have to keep it and when you sell, you have to declare how much you sell it for, then you can purchase a new vehicle. So, Mr. Speaker, I think the comment by Mr. Lalla was regrettable and he should really correct himself at some time.

The Members also mentioned the issues of the sacrifice and the Member for Diego Martin West had also raised that. There was a time when Members of Parliament would be members of the plantocracy, retirees and so on from the medical profession, from law, but you are attracting today increasingly, young people—our colleagues from Oropouche West and Couva North and Cumuto and other areas, D’Abadie/O’Meara, Pointe-a-Pierre and Tabaquite and so on. We are attracting persons who are beginning their professional life. When you begin your

professional life in politics, you are sacrificing a lot. You have been educated; you can work in the private sector, in the international private sector; you give up that for public service, so that it is a monumental career shift to take a young person and commit them to public service. You are doing that with all the risk associated with that.

12.35 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, I was in Opposition as well. I had a PhD, I was in Opposition. When I was in Opposition, I applied for a job at NGC, they did not even reply; they did not acknowledge the letter. I applied at the Cipriani College of Labour and Cooperatives Studies. Well they did not send me back a letter; I thought it was lost in the post. They fired my colleague, the Member for Tabaquite, from UWI. They were firing the colleague from Caroni East. In fact, he had to write the Queen who wrote back. He had to write the Queen to defend himself when they were going to fire him at UWI. He was a lecturer there. So, Mr. Speaker, the point I make is the sacrifice and, particularly, for professional and young people.

So, Mr. Speaker, I agree, we must respect ourselves. I agree with that. I mean, I have no difficulty with that; we respect ourselves. But, Mr. Speaker, the Government accepts the report and has moved an amendment which is to add to our Motion: “with the exception of the recommendation to reduce the terms related to transport facilities.”

Mr. Speaker, I want to make it abundantly clear, as the mover of this Motion, in my wind up, that when we say “transport facilities”, we are covering all office holders whose transport arrangements have been disadvantaged by proposals and recommendations for transport facilities and allowances. We are amending to ensure that the existing situation, the status quo, as it relates to all office holders under this report, their transport facilities and allowances remain as is, and are not changed, in any way, to their disadvantage. So that it is not only Members of Parliament we are dealing with in this report, and this is consistent with the Cabinet decision. [*Desk thumping*] So that those persons concerned with local government and other office holders, their transport facilities and allowances should be what obtains now, and not to their disadvantage that, Mr. Speaker, is the effect of this amendment.

Mr. Speaker, as I said before—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deyalsingh: Minister, would you give way?

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Sure.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Minister, am I correct in interpreting your statement to mean that local government councillors can now buy vehicles tax free, just to be clear?

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: That provision was done through Cabinet; it was not done through the SRC. It was not an established condition under the SRC, so that this Parliament cannot deal with that matter. What we can deal with is a facility that existed before by the SRC, the transport allowance. If it is going to be to their disadvantage now, but that specific matter of the cars for the councillors, it was a matter of Cabinet. The Cabinet may choose to revise that matter, to revisit that matter, but not through an SRC report.

Mr. Imbert: I thank the Minister for giving way. You need to be careful. Do not make the amendment such that it retains existing transport facilities; make it so that no transport facility is reduced because there are some transport facilities that are being increased.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Okay, let me state for the record, I thought it was clear. There should be no diminution or—no office holder should be disadvantaged by any recommendation vis-à-vis the transport facilities or allowance, or suffer a reduction in terms of their transport facilities or allowances. It is very consistent not with those words, but with the spirit of the Cabinet decision.

Now, may I also remind Members opposite—I mean, Member for St. Joseph, again, I think he read from his payslip or something like that and told us about telephone allowance and so on—the House Committee of this Parliament reviews, time and time again, all the facilities extended to elected Members of Parliament by way of provisions for your office.

Again, I mean, there was a time in this country when an elected Member of Parliament had literally nothing; today, Members of Parliament, you have your office, you have staff and you have allowances to provide for certain goods and services for your office. The House Committee can revise those allowances and revise the provision of goods and services. We have done so in relation to security where some Members will know, if all Members do not, that we can install security devices.

A Member was talking earlier—Member for Laventille East/Morvant—about criminal elements and so on visiting your office and the danger that poses to staff and so on. We have provided facilities for offices to have state-of-the-art electronic technology, CCTV and so on to monitor and to have access, but in the

event that specific offices because of where you are located, which is a reality, you would have problems with crime and so on, you can approach the House Committee and ask for another level of security if that is possible, and we can look at that because it is not that we are unmindful and arrogant to the reality that faces Members of Parliament in the office.

Today we have heard Members ask about matters of a driver. While it is very clear that the Salaries Review Commission has always provided for chauffeurs for Ministers of Government and so on, that is not so for Members of Parliament, Opposition Members or Members who do not enjoy ministerial office. It may well be that a recommendation is made from the House Committee to provide—*[Interruption]*—yes because the House Committee is responsible for many of the facilities—well, all the facilities of your offices and so on, so that the House Committee can look at a recommendation for the provision of an additional employee at the office of the Member of Parliament for messenger/driver, for a position of messenger/driver, and that would mean an increase in the allowance. So instead of \$30,000, I believe that is provided now, you can provide an extra allowance for the purpose of Members of Parliament employing a driver/messenger or something to that effect. So that some of these challenges we can deal with at the House Committee, and it may not be necessary to look to the SRC.

Mr. Imbert: Yes, I thank the Minister. But how do you deal with a situation where based on a recommendation from the House Committee, the Cabinet took a decision to provide medical facilities for Members of Parliament and the public servants have refused to carry out that Cabinet decision? You are talking about using the House Committee for the benefit of Members, but public servants are refusing to recognize the authority of the House Committee, and even of the Cabinet in accepting recommendations of the House Committee. How do you deal with that?

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Let me first say, there are two different types of benefits. There is a personal benefit to a Member; that is medical—medical is a personal benefit—but there is a benefit to the office of Member of Parliament, which is your employees, which is your desk and chair in your office. The medical issue, the Attorney General is looking at that, to shape a legal opinion on that, because there is a conflict and there is a tension on that issue, so that the Attorney General is looking at that from a legal standpoint of that. Yes, it is the subject now of a particular investigation, but what I am saying is that for the staff issue, it is not a benefit personal to you.

The House Committee has a jurisdiction to consider a benefit to your office which is clearly a driver; which is clearly a telephone allowance; which is clearly a postal allowance; which is clearly a cleaning allowance or anything like that. So that more and more the House Committee can help there if there are recommendations made. As Chairman of the House Committee, I undertake to receive your recommendation, call a meeting of the House Committee with the view of looking at the issue of security and the issue of driver.

Mr. Speaker, I promise that I would not be very long on this matter at this time, so unless there are any other queries, and there were several other issues raised but, again, there is no need to repeat. Mr. Speaker, I beg to move with, of course, the amendment in place. Mr. Speaker, I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question, on amendment, put and agreed to.

Question, on amended Motion, put.

The House divided: Ayes 19 Noes 9

AYES

Moonilal, Hon. Dr. R.

McLeod, Hon. E.

Sharma, Hon. C.

Ramadhari, Hon. P.

Peters, Hon. W.

Rambachan, Hon. Dr. S.

Seepersad-Bachan, Hon. C.

Seemungal, Hon. J.

Roberts, Hon. A.

Cadiz, Hon. S.

Baksh, Hon. N.

Griffith, Hon. Dr. R.

Ramadharsingh, Hon. Dr. G.

De Coteau, Hon. C.

Khan, Hon. Dr. F.

Samuel, Hon. R.

Roopnarine, Hon. S.

Alleyne-Toppin, Hon. V.

Partap, C.

NOES

Mc Donald, Miss M.

Cox, Miss D.

Hypolite, N.

Imbert, C.

Jeffrey, F.

Deyalsingh, T.

Browne, Dr. A.

Thomas, Mrs. J.

Gopee-Scoon, Mrs. P.

Question agreed to.

Resolved:

That the House approve the Ninety-Eighth Report of the Salaries Review Commission of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago with the exception of the recommendation to reduce the terms related to transport facilities.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday, March 21, 2014 at 1.30 p.m. and to serve notice that it is the intention of the Government to debate through all the stages Bills Nos. 1 and 5 on the Order Paper: No. 1 dealing with a Bill to amend the Liquor Licences Act; Bill No. 5 on the Order Paper, a Bill to amend the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act and Motion No. 2 for the Legislative Proposal to be referred to a Joint Select Committee. Mr. Speaker, those three items we intend to deal with next Friday: two items and a Motion, Motion No. 3; two Bills one Motion.

Miss Mc Donald: It is 1, 5 and 3.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Yes, Nos. 1, 5 and Motion No. 2 on the Order Paper today.

Miss Mc Donald: Motion No. 2.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Yes, Motion No. 2 and Bills Nos. 1 and 5. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: What about the Finance Bill?

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: The Finance Bill would be available—from my information—next Monday for all Members, so we would want Members of the Opposition to have some more time to study the Finance Bill before debating. So if it is circulated on Monday, we can look at the following Monday or Wednesday to have a sitting of the House to deal with the Finance Bill. So, Mr. Speaker, next week we will deal with Bills Nos. 1 and 5 and Motion. No. 2. I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 12.51 a.m.