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**OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)**

THE HONOURABLE ANNISSETTE-GEORGE
SPEAKER

THE HONOURABLE ESMOND FORDE
DEPUTY SPEAKER

Thursday 10th May, 2018

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Thursday, May 10, 2018*

The House met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAYERS[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, Dr. Fuad Khan MP, Member for Barataria/San Juan, has requested leave of absence from the sittings of the House during the period May 9th to May 23rd, 2018. The leave which the Member seeks is granted.

CONDOLENCES**(DR. MORGAN JOB)**

Madam Speaker: Member, I now call upon the House to provide condolences on the passing of Dr. Morgan Job and I call upon the Member for Tobago East.

The Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Ayanna Webster-Roy): Thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, I join with the nation and particularly the people of Tobago East in mourning the death of one of our own, Dr. Morgan Job. Dr. Morgan Job was known as an agriculturist, an economist, a writer, a radio personality. He was also a very strong family man. Growing up in Roxborough, Tobago, I had the opportunity interacting with the Job family on one or more occasion. I remember when my daughters started their music lessons, it was at the home of Dr. Job's sister, and during that time of their training in music they would have had the opportunity to interact with Dr. Job as well as his daughters.

What I remember about the man outside of the politics is his compassion, his love for people, and particularly his love for the development of Tobago, agriculture, and Tobago East in particular. Madam Speaker, today I join with his family, his friends, his loved ones to remember his legacy, to mourn his death, but also to remember that even though he is not with us anymore, he would have made a mark that would surely instruct the lives of all of us who remain in Trinidad and Tobago and particularly those of us who remain in Tobago East and who contribute still to the development of agriculture in Tobago.

Condolences (Dr. Morgan Job)
[HON. A. WEBSTER-ROY]

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May his soul rest in peace. I extend to his daughters, his wife, his sisters, his nephew—I attended school with Keron—his nieces—Jamilla and Salia who I attended school with—and all of the people of Belle Garden in Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie (*Caroni Central*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am very sorry that pancreatic cancer took Morgan Job down so fast. He was a very decent man who wished that his country and his countrymen could find the wherewithal to be better, and to do better, and he was always willing to contribute to public education and the common good. Dr. Job was an enlightened individual who shed light wherever he went. Sometimes the light was too bright for some, and perhaps too hot as well, but he shed light wherever and whenever he could. The thing he hated most was ignorance, and he did his very best to dispel it by sharing his thoughts and by making a plea for rationality. He saw ignorance as the inhibitor of personal development, and as an underminer of community strength and national progress.

Morgan Job was a simple man who was by no means simple-minded. His simplicity came from being a country boy who grew up in a rural environment with strong, protestant Christian values. He carried the experiences of having lived in a number of countries in his head and he had a good stock of reading on which he could draw from time to time, and he was intellectually very curious and provocative. He was a critical thinker, he was creative and entrepreneurial and self-made. He was confident and had a broad world view, but he could sometimes be brash and he had strong views which he would sometimes carry as a crusade. He was proud of his Afro-Trinbagonian country boy roots, but he had lifted himself out of the prison of narrow domestic walls to embrace all humanity as the one race responsible for the future of civilization. Culture and values to him were more important than ethnicity and made the difference to him between success and failure, progress and backwardness. He cultivated the land, he exercised his mind, and he tried to develop others.

An economist by training, he appreciated capitalism, but understood the limitations, not just of the imperfections of the market, but the sociological, structural and cultural impediments to inequality that could stand in the way of human effort. He understood and extolled the virtues of the law of rules and conventions which helped to make society civil and civilized, and the importance of the recognition of property rights as well as the protection of the precious nature of freedom of thought and speech. He himself had a fertile mind, a sharp

Condolences (Dr. Morgan Job)

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tongue and a clear head, and he was absolutely fearless. He was a public intellectual who liked to talk, to lecture, to engage in ideas, and to write down his thoughts in order to persuade others and influence their thinking.

He cared for his country. He worried about its deterioration and he was appalled by the manner in which those in political leadership positions would manipulate the weak, the vulnerable, and the uneducated, and failed to rise to the challenge of lifting them up, or perhaps more precisely from Dr. Job's point of view, failed to help them to stand up for themselves. At this time, the Members of the Opposition express condolences to his two daughters, and to his family, and all his friends in Tobago and in Trinidad, and we ask that God embrace him and take him in his arms so that his soul may rest in peace. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I join with you in paying tribute to Dr. Morgan Job, a former Member of this honourable House who served as MP for Tobago East during the Fifth Republican Parliament. Dr. Job during his parliamentary stint held the portfolios of Minister of Tobago Affairs, and later as Minister in the Ministry of Finance. He also acted in several ministerial capacities including Minister of National Security. His other career callings took him to places far and wide including such as places as Tanzania, Brazil, Kenya and Canada, just to name a few, but he always returned home, home to his beloved Trinidad and Tobago.

Dr. Job shall be remembered for his contributions in and out of this House to the national discourse, and as forthright and maybe some may term him as controversial as he may have been, there can be no dispute that in all things he spoke his truth. In honouring him, citizens have described him as a man of ideas, a great classical guitarist, a true fighter, a great thinker, a brave man, a teacher, a prophet, a historian, a misunderstood man, and a valuable asset to this country. And to that all-encompassing list, I shall add from my own observations, he was at all times a confident man, a man who was never openly attracted to material things, a humble man. At home, he was bigger than his career, for he was also a loving father, brother, colleague, friend, mentor and dedicated servant of our twin island Republic.

I take this opportunity to express my deepest condolences to his family during this time of mourning, and in particular to his daughters Dzifa and Nzinga who were classmates of my own daughters, and I pray that the Almighty grants them the comfort and strength needed in this time of bereavement. I now ask that we stand and observe a minute of silence as a mark of respect.

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The House of Representatives stood.

Madam Speaker: May his soul rest in peace. Hon. Members, I have directed the Clerk of the House to convey our condolences in writing to the family of the late Dr. Morgan Job.

PAPERS LAID

1. Consolidated Audited Financial Statements of the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards for the year ended September 30, 2014. [*The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]

To be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.

2. Audited Financial Statements of the Union Estate Electricity Generation Company Limited for the year ended December 31, 2016. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

To be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.

STANDING FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT (Presentation)

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present the following report:

Report of the Standing Finance Committee of the House of Representatives for the Third Session (2017/2018), Eleventh Parliament, on the consideration of proposals for the Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation for the fiscal year 2018.

PRIME MINISTER'S QUESTIONS

Lobbyist Arthur 'Art' Collins (Benefits from Work of)

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (Oropouche East): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Could the Prime Minister indicate the benefits accrued to Trinidad and Tobago from the work of United States based lobbyist Arthur 'Art' Collins from October 2015 to date?

The Prime Minister and Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, for very many years and under very many administrations, the sitting Government of Trinidad and Tobago noted the need to have its interest advanced in Washington and elsewhere, and against that background, the Governments of Trinidad and Tobago have consistently hired lobbyists to open doors, make representations, and to

further the interest of the people of the Trinidad and Tobago at these locations, making it easier to carry out our foreign policy, or our economic policy, and our national security initiatives. Art Collins brings all those benefits to us at this time in the same vein of earlier lobbyists who have served the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much. Could the Prime Minister indicate any one single benefit that has accrued to this country from the employment of Mr. Collins?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I thought I just did that, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal: Could the Prime Minister confirm that Mr. Art Collins continues in his role as lobbyist and on the payroll of the people of Trinidad and Tobago?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, to the best of my knowledge when Mr. Collins was sourced and hired, he was contracted for a period of time, and to the extent that that contracted period has not expired, in that case he would still be on the payroll.

Report of Ambassador Christopher Thomas (Dominica's Request Waiver)

Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Could the Prime Minister state when the findings of the report of former Ambassador Christopher Thomas on Dominica's request for a waiver of contributions to the Organization of American States will be made public and the action(s) he proposes to take regarding the report?

The Prime Minister and Minister of Housing and Urban Development (**Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley**): Madam Speaker, the report of Ambassador Christopher Thomas is in the hands of the Office of the Prime Minister and is subjected to considerations, and as soon as it is appropriate, that report would be made available to the Standing Committee on Foreign Policy which I understand is available to receive such report, and at the appropriate time my Office would make that available to the Parliament through that Committee.

Mr. Charles: Thank you. Would the Prime Minister be prepared at this stage to tell us whether the report attached responsibility to any party for issues which arose from the incident?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, the contents of the report indicate that there were shortcomings on the part of persons who hold office in this country, and that report will be available to the committee.

Mr. Charles: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Does the Prime Minister subscribe to the Westminster principle of ministerial responsibility, and if so, will he act accordingly, consistent with that principle?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, as Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, I have never hesitated to subscribe to the principle of Westminster.

MV Galleons Passage
(Estimated Date of Arrival)

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (Couva South): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Could the Prime Minister inform this House of the most recent estimated date of arrival of the *MV Galleons Passage* to Trinidad and Tobago?

The Prime Minister and Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, I just want to congratulate Members on other side for their consistent interest in the *Galleons Passage*. [*Desk thumping*] I am just nervous that one of them might try to punch a hole in the hulk. But, Madam Speaker, the *Galleons Passage* has been delayed by three to four weeks for various reasons, including bad weather and delays at designated ports of arrival in Honolulu and Acapulco where the vessel had difficulty in getting berthing spots on its arrival.

Madam Speaker, this small vessel has just completed a comprehensive trip completely across the Pacific from China to—where it is now?

Mr. Imbert: Mexico.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:—Mexico—that is approximately 6,000 miles—and after that journey as it has been exposed to routine maintenance along the way and is now experiencing some maintenance at Acapulco, the current estimated arrival time, and I say this pending good weather and also a progress at Havana when it gets to Cuba where some improvement works on the vessel has already been announced to be done, all things being done, against that background, we expect that the vessel could arrive in Trinidad and Tobago at the end of the month.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Taking into consideration that it was a new boat that was procured by the Cabinet Committee, can the Prime Minister verify the Acapulco Harbour Master's Report that the boat has a faulty water pump and the power supplied has been affected?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, today is a busy day for us in this Parliament, if a little coastal vessel has just done 6,000 miles and it has an issue—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Indarsingh: Tell us.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley:—with a water pump, I am particular happy that the only issue the boat might have after 6,000 miles is a water pump issue. *[Desk thumping]*

**Petrotrin
(Current President of)**

Mr. David Lee (Pointe-a-Pierre): Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the hon. Prime Minister: Could the Prime Minister inform this House—*[Interruption]*

Madam Speaker: May we have order please?

Mr. Lee:—state, sorry, who is the current President or acting President of Petrotrin?

The Prime Minister and Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, the board of Petrotrin, under Cabinet's guidance and instructions, had been taking very drastic restructuring actions at Petrotrin which has led to the removal of a number of persons at the top of the company. The company is currently actively engaged in the process of seeking qualified persons to serve as president and in similar positions. In the interim, the Cabinet has approved an executive body from the board for a six-month period and I think two months of that has gone. So in a few months that will expire and hopefully the board would have sourced a president and other posts that will run the company.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the Prime Minister: Could the Prime Minister state who is the one individual who is responsible for the day-to-day running of Petrotrin as we speak?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I have just answered that.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much. Could the Prime Minister indicate whether or not those persons who have assumed executive authority at Petrotrin are also being paid foreign travel as part of their compensation package?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I do not have that information, but if the Member wants to file an appropriate question in the appropriate place, at the appropriate time, he will surly get that and other answers.

**Trinidad Generation Unlimited
(Divestment of Shares)**

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Could the Prime Minister provide an update on the planned divestment of shares of Trinidad Generation Unlimited?

The Prime Minister and Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance had indicated at an earlier time some intention to divest some of the equity that the State owns in Trinidad Generation Unlimited. That is still under consideration. Madam Speaker, as we move towards the creation of the NIF that is being considered and if it is concluded in that way this House would be made aware of it, but at the moment consideration is being given to having that maybe as part of the contributing package into the National Investment Fund. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal: With that in mind, could the Prime Minister state any expected date for the offering of shares of TGU?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I think I see a question here that applies to that. So can I answer that now, or—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Answer that and we will vacate the question.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Okay. Well, I will answer question No. 6 now then, because that is question No. 6.

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister, if you answer it as a supplemental to question No. 5, we will then vacate question No. 6.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Can the Member assist me by repeating the question?

Dr. Moonilal: The supplemental question is: Would the Prime Minister state the expected dates of the offering of shares of TGU?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I just said that the TGU shares are being considered as part of the complement of shares that will be going to the NIF. So there is no share issue of TGU shares to come because if it goes into the Investment Fund, it would not be TGU shares that would be offered. It would be

the Investment Fund and there is a question here asking about the Investment Fund and what date it is supposed. So if the Member will wait to hear the answer to the side of his own question then he might get the answer he is seeking.

**National Investment Fund
(Details of)**

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*): Thank you very much. We could have saved all that if he had sit down.

Madam President: Member, please just ask the—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal: Could the Prime Minister provide an update on the creation of a National Investment Fund announced in March 2018, through which shares in a number of companies would be offered to the public?

The Prime Minister and Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, if the Member for Oropouche East is trying to confuse me I think he just failed, because I will say the establishment of the National Investment Fund as a closed—an investment fund to transfer into the NIF assets of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, the Deposit Insurance Corporation, Clico and CLF. These fund products would be offered to the general public units in this National Investment Fund and that is to be determined, and these units will be traded on the Trinidad and Tobago Stock Exchange. Engagements of appropriate consultants and legal advisors to establish these objectives are well on the way and it is expected that the Minister of the Finance will speak to that probably today, and we expect that this fund would be available by the end of July 2018.

**Couva Children and Adult Hospital
(Engagement of InterHealth Canada)**

Mr. Fazal Karim (*Chaguanas East*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Based on the Prime Minister's recent statement on the Couva children and adult hospital, could the Prime Minister state the terms of engagement with InterHealth Canada?

The Prime Minister and Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, the discussions are under way to establish an arrangement where that hospital would be made available for use, both for nationals, and regional and international clients. Those discussions are well under way between the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, the university and InterHealth Canada, InterHealth Canada being in this arrangement by a government-to-government arrangement with the Government of Trinidad and

Tobago and the Government of Canada. These discussions are currently under way and I am not now in a position to give a specific date as requested by my colleagues on the other side.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Prime Minister, can you indicate whether as part of these discussions whether any arrangements will be made to guarantee employment to local doctors, nurses and other health care workers?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, the outcome of the discussions will determine what happens with respect to that question.

Couva Children and Adult Hospital (Public Paying for Services)

Mr. Fazal Karim (*Chaguanas East*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Subsequent to any arrangement between the Government, the University of the West Indies and InterHealth Canada, could the Prime Minister indicate whether the public would be paying for services at the existing Couva children and adult hospital?

The Prime Minister and Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, as I have said before, discussions with respect as to what is going to happen there, what kinds of procedures, what kind of ownership and operational protocols will take place there, those discussions are currently under way. So the questions that Members are asking now are premature.

Dr. Tewarie: Prime Minister, with all due respect, the issue of whether the hospital is a paying or a hospital in which free services are offered is a policy question, and I do not think the—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Member, question please. You have 15 seconds to ask.

Dr. Tewarie: I would like an answer to the policy question of whether there will be free, paying or not. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, this Government has no intention of running away from this country, and if Members on the other side will listen to what I have just said, we are currently engaged in discussions to determine what will be the approach. So these issues that are being asked, Members are eager to find out the answers, but it is the discussions that we are having that will determine those answers. Those answers will flow from what is doable, what is possible, and what the outcome of the discussions are.

10.30 p.m.

And I simply ask my colleagues, do not be so previous, just wait, “we not running away”. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Prime Minister, in engaging in discussions, is it not prudent that you have a position in which [*Desk thumping*] you go into negotiation, subject to negotiation?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: And what make you think we do not have a position? [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister. Member for Chaguanas East. [*Continuous crosstalk*] Order, order! Member for Chaguanas East.

[*Madam Speaker remains standing*] [*Crosstalk*]

Supplemental question, Member for Chaguanas East.

Mr. Karim: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I know the exuberance has started early. The question is, if we do not know what is happening and you are telling us to wait, could you tell us when did these negotiations start and where?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I have just told this House that this Government is engaged in discussions with other parties, negotiations and discussions are taking place, and if what the Members of this House are asking me to do is to publicize the Government's position under the misconception that we have no position and no policy, I will not outline the Government's position in the middle of negotiations to prejudice those negotiations to please anybody in this House. [*Desk thumping*]

Infrastructure Development Fund (Discontinued Construction of Schools)

Mr. Fazal Karim (*Chaguanas East*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Question No. 9 and I will read the question very calmly and slowly. [*Laughter*] Could the Prime Minister state why the Government has discontinued construction of 70 schools at varying levels of completion as at September 2015 despite financial allocations in each of the subsequent financial budget statements of the Infrastructure Development Fund (IDF) projects?

The Prime Minister and Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, I will answer very slowly and very clearly and I hope my colleagues will hear me. An allocation made in the budget—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister, just now. Members, it is very early in the day. I hope we will abide by the provisions of the Standing Orders with respect to shouting across the floor and loud outbursts. That is not going to be tolerated today. Prime Minister.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Yes, Madam Speaker. An allocation made in the budget is simply an expectation to spend revenue if the revenue becomes available. As the Minister of Finance treats with all demands on the Exchequer, it has turned out that we do not have enough money to do everything that we want to do, including completing schools, and therefore, we make the most of what is available. And some schools are completed, some schools have not yet been completed but we are consistently working on it, and only recently, Cabinet has approved further allocations and expenditure to complete some of these schools.

And Madam Speaker, we are in this position because my friend on the other side had issued a huge amount of contracts, some of them paying moneys before the work has been done, and if those contracts had been funded at the time that they were issued, and that so much money has not been stolen and wasted in this country, we could have fixed all those schools a long time ago. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Chaguanas East.

Mr. Karim: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Based on the Prime Minister's response with respect to Cabinet's approval for funds to complete these schools, will the Prime Minister be able to supply us with a list of the schools that are due to be completed based on the additional funding?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I would not be able to supply that today but I am sure if the Member files an appropriate question to the appropriate Minister, he will get a comprehensive answer.

Purchase of Cargo Vessel from Australia (Estimated Budget)

Mrs. Vidya Gayadeen-Gopeesingh (*Oropouche West*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the hon. Prime Minister: In relation to a press release issued by the Office of The Prime Minister indicating the possibility of purchasing a cargo vessel from Australia, could the Prime Minister indicate the estimated budget for this acquisition?

The Prime Minister and Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, I am not aware that the Prime Minister's Office issued any press release about the purchase of any cargo vessel.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental question. Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much. Prime Minister, is one of the objectives of your visit and your delegation visit to Australia to look at ferries to purchase a boat? Is that an objective?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I am not one of the Prime Ministers of Trinidad and Tobago who “go abroad, see ah boat and say ah want one ah dat”. [Laughter and crosstalk] All that has been said by this Government, by me or by spokesperson for this Government, is that one of the issues that we would look at is the possibility of obtaining new ferries which can be made available through any assistance or programmes out of Australia. That is as far as it has gone so far.

So talking about price and talking about what I am going to do in Australia, Madam Speaker, I will simply ask my colleagues on the other side, “just wait ah lil bit nah, just wait ah lil bit. Why yuh so hurry?” As soon as you mention anything, they want answers for everything. “We not there yet.” [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Is the Prime Minister aware that a press release issued by the Office of the Prime Minister stated categorically that on the visit to Australia, they would look at the possibility of purchasing ferries for the sea bridge between Trinidad and Tobago? [Desk thumping and crosstalk] Are you aware of that? And if you were aware of that, why did you not say that in the beginning?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, just for the benefit of public eh because in recent months, persons who are not in the know or general mischief-makers have been confusing a cargo ferry with a passenger ferry. We are currently in the process of approaching the time when we place orders for new passenger ferries and also a cargo ferry. From Australia, the passenger ferries are built by Incat and Austal, so any reference to Australia, is specifically to deal with passenger ferries and we have done nothing, Madam Speaker, to date other than to be looking towards the possibilities that may be available to us coming out of Australia. That is all—that is where we are at the moment.

Trinidad and Tobago International Financial Centre (Decline of Recognition)

Mr. Fazal Karim (Chaguanas East): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Given that the Trinidad and Tobago International Financial Centre is an important plank

in the Government's diversification strategy, could the Prime Minister state what is being done to address the decline of Trinidad and Tobago as a recognized international financial centre?

The Prime Minister and Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, it is so not surprising that my colleagues on the other side could only see the negatives. I am not aware of any decline of any International Financial Centre in Trinidad and Tobago. What I am aware of is that the Trinidad and Tobago International Financial Centre is for the first time making meaningful progress towards the establishment and expansion of business process outsourcing in Trinidad and Tobago.

For example, Scotiabank's Shared Services Centre, in Chaguanas, which serves the region, is now employing 800 persons. That is not a decline; that is progress. Madam Speaker, progress is also being made towards attracting a large Asian bank, a North American bank to establish regional financial services in Trinidad and Tobago. That is not a decline; that is going forward and upwards in the correct direction. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Chaguanas East.

Mr. Karim: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Hon. Prime Minister, may I ask the question? You have given one example of a business process outsourcing as an optimism for the International Financial Centre which was started under our Government. [*Desk thumping*] Could you tell us apart from that initiative and the potential for the Asian, what other mechanisms, measures or outcomes or successes we have seen to say it was not a situation of decline?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, as far as I am aware, whatever was there before, in terms of employment and growth has doubled. And Madam Speaker, even if the first component, the first increment was there, there is no decline from what was there. But they forever want to give the country the impression that everything is going from bad to worse. There is no decline at the International Financial Centre. [*Desk thumping*]

Nine-billion-dollar Housing Programme (Government's Source of Funding)

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (Oropouche East): Thank you. Based on recent newspaper reports of Government's intention to embark on a nine-billion-dollar housing programme, could the Prime Minister state the source of funding for such an endeavour?

The Prime Minister and Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, the newspaper report that the Member speaks about was very clear, crystal clear, but if he needs assistance, I will help him. The funding that is to attend the housing construction programme in Trinidad and Tobago, Government driven, would come largely from mortgagers, meaning many persons who will pay for their unit by taking out a mortgage at the time when the unit becomes available. So it is their money paying for their house through the mortgage programme that will contribute to the funding.

Also, Madam Speaker, we are engaged in the invitation and incentivization of the private sector in public/private partnership where private sector agencies or persons can bring to the programme their funding to create housing units which, through the HDC, would add to the component. We already have four or five of those projects on the way. Madam Speaker, we also will continue to fund, particularly for those persons who will be dealing with the rental issues as their housing solution, with allocations from the Consolidated Fund.

And Madam Speaker, the HDC will continue to collect its mortgages from existing estates and wherever there are surpluses from that arrangement, that will also be used in the assistance and facilitation of the creation of additional new units. And also, we would be very well benefitted if the Member for Oropouche East stays far from the HDC. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much. [*Continuous desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Order, order!

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you so much, Mr. Prime Minister. Bearing in mind that the Member for Oropouche East has never been fired from the Ministry of Housing, [*Desk thumping*] could you indicate—[*Interruption*] has never been fired away. [*Crosstalk*] Could you indicate as a former fired Minister of Housing whether the PPP projects have reaped any benefit within the last three years? Have you built one house through this PPP measure? Thank you.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, if the Member for Oropouche East would like to get a comprehensive answer to that question, if he files an appropriate question, we will give him a comprehensive issue to every house that was built, every kitchen that was built and every Minister that has been fired as it has been built. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal: Could the Prime Minister indicate whether it is the policy of the HDC to evict persons who are up to date with their rental payments at this time?

Madam Speaker: I will not allow that as a supplemental question.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: He is going mad! [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: I would just ask all Members to contain their outburst and remember that we are governed by parliamentary decorum.

URGENT QUESTION

MV Galleons Passage (Repair of in Mexico)

Mrs. Vidia Gayadeen-Gopeesingh (*Oropouche West*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the Minister of Works and Transport: In the light of reports indicating that the *MV Galleons Passage* is currently moored in Mexico due to a faulty water pump, could the Minister indicate when the vessel will be repaired and allowed to continue its journey to Trinidad and Tobago?

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the raw water pump is scheduled to be replaced today. We shall be advised of the departure schedule from Mexico later today. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. There are two questions for oral answer, we will be answering both. There are six questions for written answer, we are asking that questions 200 and 207 be deferred for two weeks and we have the answers for the other four written questions.

Madam Speaker: Deferral granted.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you, Ma'am.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Official Tourism Travel Undertaken (Details of)

202. Ms. Ramona Ramdial (*Couva North*) asked the hon. Minister of Tourism:

- A. Could the Minister indicate the destinations, purpose and cost of all official travel undertaken by the Minister for the period September 2015 to March 31, 2018 and by whom?
- B. Could the Minister state:
 - i. the names of the Ministry officials/tourism stakeholders who accompanied her to the Berlin Tourism Conference; and
 - ii. the cost of travel for each person?

**San Fernando General Hospital
(Contracts Awarded)**

208. Dr. Lackram Bodoë (*Fyzabad*) asked the hon. Minister of Health:

Could the Minister provide the following:

- a) a list of contracts awarded for infrastructural repair works at the San Fernando General Hospital from September 8, 2015 to date;
- b) the value of each contract; and
- c) a status update of each project?

**CEPEP Contractors
(Details of)**

214. Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*) asked the hon. Minister of Rural Development and Local Government:

Could the Minister:

- a) list the names of all new CEPEP contractors selected from December 1, 2017 to date;
- b) the names of Directors of each company; and
- c) the constituency within which each contractor operates?

Vide end of sitting for written answers.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

**Organ Transplants in Trinidad and Tobago
(Details of)**

220. Mrs. Vidia Gayadeen-Gopeesingh (*Oropouche West*) asked the hon. Minister of Health:

As it relates to reports of the implementation of a sustained plan for organ transplants in Trinidad and Tobago via a partnership with Spain, can the Minister indicate:

- (a) the value of Trinidad and Tobago's investment in this partnership;
- (b) will expatriates from Spain be stationed in Trinidad and Tobago;
- (c) will training be administered to local health officials; and
- (d) what will be the procedure to procure organs from donors?

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you very, very much, Madam Speaker. During the period 2011 to present, the total amount spent on the plan for organ transplants in Trinidad and Tobago via a partnership with Spain was approximately TT \$150,000. This allowed for expansion of transplantation using deceased organs, donor organs. To date, there have been 22 deceased donors resulting in 41 deceased donor kidney transplants and two corneal transplants. The answer to part (b) is no. The answer to part (c) is yes, already established and ongoing.

The answer to part (d) is the procurement procedure is as follows:

A potential donor is identified by the Intensive Care Unit Consultant of the respective hospital. The Medical Director, National Organ Transplantation Unit, NOTU, is contacted with respect to characteristics of the patient to determine if the case would qualify as a donor.

Brainstem death is confirmed by conducting two independent tests by two consultant physicians who have no prior care for the patient. These tests are done six hours apart and the patient's next of kin is invited to witness the test. After brainstem death is confirmed, two Transplant Procurement Managers, TPMS, approach the patient's next of kin to inform them about the possibility of donation and seek permission for donation of kidneys, corneas or both.

If this is a natural death and permission is granted, the next of kin signs a consent form to provide the photo identification for themselves and the potential donor as well as proof of relationship such as birth or marriage certificate. Thereafter, the TPM, Transplant Procurement Manager collects the brainstem death test report and an independent designated officer from the RHA reviews all the documents to ensure that consent was obtained according to accepted standards of approval, and once relevant consents and permissions have been obtained, the organs are procured at the RHA where the donor is being nursed and

transported to the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex in case of kidneys, or Port of Spain General Hospital in the case of corneas, for transplant. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Hon. Minister, with respect to part (c), how many local health officials have been trained thus far?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, I do not have the exact answer but that could be provided on a subsequent question.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental question from the Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you for that response, Minister. Can you indicate when the health sector would be in a position to facilitate these organ transplants on a 24-hour basis?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will get that answer for you, Member.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Hon. Minister, is there an education awareness drive to educate people about this initiative?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Yes, there is. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Oropouche West Constituency Water Supply (Details of)

221 Mrs. Vidia Gayadeen-Gopeesingh (*Oropouche West*) asked the hon. Minister of Public Utilities:

In light of increased complaints of insufficient water supply within the Oropouche West Constituency, can the Minister please provide the existing water distribution schedule for:

- a) the San Francique area;
- b) the Woodland area; and
- c) Syne Village?

The Minister of Public Utilities (Sen. The Hon. Robert Le Hunte): Madam Speaker, the normal water distribution schedule to the following areas are as follows:

San Francique, Tuesday 6.00 a.m. to Thursday 6.00 a.m.;

Syne Village, Tuesday 6.00 a.m. to Wednesday 6.00 a.m.; and

Woodland, nightly from 6.00 p.m. to 6.00 a.m.

The water supply to these areas and surrounding locations areas were adversely affected by operational issues under WASA's south transmission system associated with intermittent reduction in flows from both the Caroni Water Treatment Plant and the Point Lisas Desalination Plant.

With effect from Wednesday, April the 11th, 2018, the regular water schedule has been restored to these communities. Residents in the affected areas were advised of the changes in the water supply schedule via public notices in the media. Truck-borne water supply was also provided to residents on request during the period of the disruption in the supply of pipe-borne water.

**FINANCE (SUPPLEMENTATION AND VARIATION OF APPROPRIATION)
(FINANCIAL YEAR 2018) BILL, 2018**

Bill to supplement and vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2018) Act, 2017 [*The Minister of Finance*]; read the first time.

Motion made: That the next stage of the Bill be taken later in the proceedings in accordance with Standing Order 64(1)(b). [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

Question put and agreed to.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 45(1)

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. In accordance with Standing Order 122(1), I beg to move that Standing Order 45(1) relating to the time limit for speeches and as set out in Appendix 1, that the Minister of Finance be allowed 55 minutes to complete his presentation this morning.

Madam Speaker: I expect that this is being moved under Standing Order 122.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Sorry, that is what I said, Ma'am, 122(1) and then 45(1) and Appendix 1. That is what I said.

Madam Speaker: All right. So that in these circumstances, I have to grant leave having regard to the nature of the business and the anticipation that I have heard in the public domain, I am prepared to waive the Standing Order and grant the extension as asked. Might I ask in terms of the Opposition and therefore—I would expect that if having regard to the fact that I have granted the 10 minutes, is there going to be such an application on your side?

Mr. Lee: Yes.

Madam Speaker: Okay. So that therefore, I will ask if you move that and I will deal with that also. So the 10 minutes is granted.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very kindly, Ma'am.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will do the same thing that the Leader of Government Business did. In the Standing Order 122(1) and also 45(1) and Appendix 1, the same amount of time as the Mover of the Motion.

Madam Speaker: So I now put the question to the House. The question is that the time be extended for the Mover of the Motion, the Minister of Finance and for the first person responding on the side of the Opposition, the time be extended to a further 10 minutes so that they will each have 55 minutes for their presentation.

Question put and agreed to.

**STANDING FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT
(ADOPTION)**

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Madam Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

Be it resolved that this House adopt the Report of the Standing Finance Committee of the House of Representatives for the Third Session (2017/2018) Eleventh Parliament on the consideration of proposals for the Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation for the fiscal year 2018.

Madam Speaker, upon our assumption of office in September 2015, some two and a half years ago, this administration led by Dr. the Hon. Keith Rowley committed itself to resolve two serious challenges facing the country, namely:

Firstly, repairing the damage to our fiscal accounts which had deteriorated significantly after the drastic fall in oil and gas prices in mid-2014 from US \$108 per barrel in 2014 to US \$26 per barrel in 2016, coupled with declines in crude oil and gas production. It is worth repeating that revenue from petroleum fell from over \$20 billion in 2014 to less than \$1 billion in 2016 after the Government changed, a 90 per cent decline. At one point in 2016, gas production dropped to below 3 billion cubic feet per day, down from over 4 billion cubic feet per day in 2015, a 25 per cent decline.

The process of adjustment to the global oil shock of 2014 and production declines in oil and gas has thus been a very challenging experience. It has not been easy dealing with a \$20 billion loss in annual Government revenue and the adverse effects of the extravagance of the former administration.

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Secondly, reversing the persistent decline in the economy which has been with us for several years. In the face of these two challenges, it was imperative that the economy be reinvigorated and put on a self-sustaining basis to ensure that the welfare and standard of living of our citizens was not unduly impaired.

Madam Speaker, I present the report of the Standing Finance Committee on the Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation (Financial Year 2018) Bill, 2018, for the consideration of hon. Members in the context of these public policy objectives. I would also provide this honourable House with an update on some of the public policy initiatives being implemented by this administration to facilitate the fiscal consolidation process and the turnaround in the economy which is under way.

Madam Speaker, after a long and discouraging period of economic decline, we are now witnessing a welcome upturn. [*Desk thumping*] Early estimates are indicative of a growth forecast of 2 per cent in 2018, 2.2 per cent in 2019, rising to 2.5 per cent in 2020. And Madam Speaker, contrary to the negative commentary of uninformed spokespersons who speak without having any facts, the turnaround is being driven by economic expansion in both the energy and non-energy sectors. [*Desk thumping*]

Within the energy sector, the full impact of the Trinidad Region Offshore Compression (TROC) project, on-stream in April 2017 under this administration and the Juniper Platform on-stream in August 2017 under this administration is now materializing. [*Crosstalk and desk thumping*] “Ah doh know why they do not like to hear good news.” Beginning in the fourth quarter of 2018, a number of new gas fields would begin production which would boost gas production levels over the medium-term, rising from 3.37 billion cubic feet per day in 2017 to an average of 3.8 billion cubic feet per day in 2018, 3.94 billion cubic feet per day in 2019, 4.05 billion cubic feet per day in 2020 and 4.14 billion cubic feet per day in 2021.

11.00 a.m.

These production volumes are being driven by enhanced activities among our major oil and gas upstream producers. Under bp, Juniper is fully on production; Angelin is to come on production at the end of 2019; Cassia Gas compression project will be in operation in 2020; the TROC project will come to an end in 2021; exploration drilling will be taking place in the period 2019 to 2021; and future field developments will be taking place from 2023 and beyond.

Under EOG Resources, exploration and development drilling will begin in 2019. Under Shell Trinidad, drilling in Starfish is in progress, with expected first gas towards the end of this year; development drilling in the Dolphin field will commence in the second quarter of this year; Block 5C, Bounty and Endeavour development will commence in 2022.

Under BHP Billiton, gas supply will be maintained to NGC at 340 billion cubic feet per day, for the next two years, and development of Block 3A is expected in 2023. Under DeNovo, production is expected to continue at current levels.

Madam Speaker, with average gas production at significantly higher levels, up 20 per cent from the 2016 levels, we have revitalized the energy sector. [*Desk thumping*] This boost in production is due to the hard work of a dedicated team, led by the hon. Prime Minister, and including the Minister in the Office of the Attorney General and Office of the Prime Minister, and the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries. [*Desk thumping*]

This team has worked unwaveringly—[*Interruption*] Madam Speaker, I do not know what is wrong with them. Disgusting. They have done nothing.

Madam Speaker: Members, I am on my legs. I know we are all eager to participate in this debate, and we shall all get there. I would like to hear the Minister of Finance, as I would like to hear each of you in your contributions.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Let me repeat. The boost in production is due to the hard work of a dedicated team led by the hon. Prime Minister, and including the Minister in the Office of the Attorney General and Office of the Prime Minister, and the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries. [*Desk thumping*]

This team has worked unwaveringly in complex negotiations and discussions with the oil and gas companies and the downstream companies, both here and abroad, to secure this country's future, in stark contrast to the empty posturing and grandstanding of the past. And this effort, coupled with appropriate adjustments by the Ministry of Finance to our oil and gas taxation regime, after detailed study and analysis, is already bearing fruit from a revenue outlook.

Accordingly, the energy sector is well poised to meet the demands of the downstream sector over the near term horizon, thereby supporting our medium-term growth recovery. Further ahead, access to additional gas from Venezuela will generate substantial opportunities for strengthening and supporting our economy.

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Madam Speaker, the pickup in the energy sector is having a knock-on effect on growth in the non-energy sector, where that sector is projected to break even in 2018, after years of decline, with gross estimates for the non-oil sector in 2019 of 1.2 per cent, rising to 2.9 per cent in 2020. And I stress these are forecasts for the non-oil sector. These improving growth forecasts are welcomed in the context of the lackluster performance of the economy over the 2013 to 2017 period.

Allow me now to share with you some actual figures for revenue collection in the non-oil sector. Our projection for the collection of taxes on income and profits in this fiscal year, up to April 2018, for other companies, as defined in the estimates, which excludes oil and gas companies, was \$3.8 billion. The actual collection was \$4.9 billion, an increase of \$1.1 billion. [*Desk thumping*] Drilling deeper into the figures, in the petrochemical sector, collection of corporation tax has moved from \$371 million in the period October 2016 to April 2017, to \$1.2 billion in the period October 2017 to April 2018, an increase year-on-year of \$835 million. [*Desk thumping*]

Very importantly, Madam Speaker, in the non-energy sector, excluding oil, gas and petrochemical companies, collection of corporation tax has moved from \$1.8 billion in the period October 2016 to April 2017, to \$2.3 billion in the period October 2017 to April 2018, an overall increase in the collection of corporation tax in the non-energy sector of \$500 million year-on-year, with, particularly, revenue for assembly-type industries increasing by \$146 million year-on-year and revenue from the financial services sector increasing by \$153 million, year-on-year, from October to April. It is clear, Madam Speaker, therefore, that not just the oil sector but the non-oil sector is finally recovering. Total net collection of corporation tax in all sectors is up year-on-year, for the period October to April, by \$1.3 billion.

In the energy sector in particular, despite Petrotrin's recalcitrance, actual collection of petroleum profits tax and supplemental petroleum tax, excluding royalties, is up by \$500 million, year-on-year, for the first seven months of fiscal 2018. Royalties, excluding Petrotrin, are also on target to reach \$2 billion in this year.

Further, because of the better than expected increases in natural gas production in the second half of 2017, the GDP figures for 2017 are being revised upwards and we expect that instead of negative growth of minus 2.6 per cent in 2017, the actual figure would be closer to minus 1 per cent. This improved out-turn for 2017, and the expected growth in 2018, will have a substantial effect on our nominal GDP, which is expected to increase by 9 per cent to \$168 billion in

2018. This will also have a direct positive effect on our debt to GDP ratio, which is now estimated to drop to well below 60 per cent, even with the planned borrowing programme in 2018.

Our inflation rate, Madam Speaker, has hit record lows. As reported by the Central Bank in its March 2018 *Economic Bulletin*, headline inflation dropped to 1.3 per cent by the end of 2017, the lowest level in many years. This low inflation rate, Madam Speaker, is a direct result of this Government's macroeconomic and monetary policies and is intended to cushion the effect of the recession on the population. [*Desk thumping*]

It is to be noted that our inflation rate is currently well below the global average of 3½ per cent and way below other oil-producing countries such as Nigeria, with an inflation rate of 14 per cent for this year and Egypt and Libya, each at 32 per cent inflation for this year. You hear those numbers, Madam Speaker? Other oil-producing countries have inflation rates varying from 14 per cent to 32 per cent, whereas in Trinidad and Tobago inflation is 1.3 per cent. Our economic recovery is thus taking place in an environment of price stability, and as a result of our policies we expect growth without high inflation, which is the most desirable outcome.

Madam Speaker, in October 2017, we formulated our 2018 budget on price assumptions for oil at 52 per barrel and gas at 2.75 per MMBTU. Since that time, crude oil prices have been strengthening at an average US \$59 over the first six months of the fiscal year. In fact, Madam Speaker, WTI oil crossed US \$71 per barrel yesterday, and I looked at it this morning and it was still over \$71. A word of caution however, to those who think that high oil prices automatically translate into higher revenues. Regrettably, at the current fixed prices for gasoline and auto diesel, a high oil price creates a requirement for a high fuel subsidy. Indeed, if oil remains at US \$70 a barrel, the fuel subsidy could reach as high as \$900 million in 2018, which was not budgeted for.

Additionally, our national oil company, Petrotrin, which produces almost 60 per cent of the country's oil, is not paying its taxes and royalties. At current prices, this translates into \$1 billion lost in revenue in 2018, which is untenable.

It is imperative, therefore, that in addition to transforming Petrotrin into a viable and profitable organization, we must also complete the work on an appropriate formula that allows the price of fuel at the pump to move up and down with the movement of the price of refined petroleum products. As stated previously on more than one occasion, it is our intention to have this mechanism in place by the end of 2018.

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As to the future, based on the best advice available, we do not envisage oil or gas prices to deviate significantly from the current trends, particularly in the context in the pick-up of global growth now being forecast for 2017/2018, at 3.6 per cent and 3.7 per cent respectively.

I turn now to revenue and expenditure. Since our assumption of office, this administration has been rebalancing the economy to cater for lower oil and gas prices and lower production volumes. In October 2017, this House adopted the 2018 budget, which established expenditure of \$50.5 billion, including a capital expenditure programme of \$5.1 billion and revenue of \$45.74 billion, including capital revenue of \$6.42 billion.

A fiscal deficit of \$4.76 billion or 3 percent of GDP, was projected to be financed through net external borrowing of \$3.69 billion and net domestic borrowing of \$1.07 billion. I can now report that our revenue projections for 2018 are on track. This is the first time in three years. [*Desk thumping*] When deposits in the Suspense Account at the Treasury are taken into account, we have collected in excess of \$19.5 billion in current revenue up to the end of March 2018, as compared to the projected collection of \$18.7 billion. We are \$700 million ahead of the game, actually \$800 million. [*Desk thumping*]

Our projected capital revenue, largely due to come from the recovery of debt from CL Financial and its subsidiaries, has not yet fully materialized. But we are making significant progress towards the launch of the National Investment Fund, which is intended to monetize the assets transferred to the Government from Clico and CIB. I will deal with this matter later in my presentation.

Madam Speaker, in keeping with our programme of fiscal consolidation, the expenditure by the end of March 2018 is estimated to be \$21.69 billion, some 15 per cent lower than the originally projected mid-year expenditure of \$25.03 billion. The lower than programmed expenditure arise from reductions in the purchase of goods and services, capital expenditure and transfers and subsidies. However, and significantly, expenditure on wages and salaries has remained at the budget levels.

Expenditure on the Capital Programme reached \$1.54 billion in April 2018, and we expect to close out the year at close to \$4 billion in PSIP expenditure. Delays in project implementation and the careful processing of claims for payment in the context of our focus on prudent cash flow management are contributing factors to this reduced level of programmed expenditure.

Madam Speaker, the rebalancing of the economy from the unsustainable and profligate expenditure of \$62 billion in 2014, by the last administration, to a more realistic but still difficult level of \$50 billion in 2018, is taking place within a structured and well-planned framework. Despite the difficulty, the adjustment process is moving steadily in the right direction. By way of example, the monetization of the Clico assets is in progress and nearly seven years after it was placed in compulsory liquidation, Clico Investment Bank has made its first dividend distribution to its creditors, including the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

The Ministry of Finance has been reviewing the evolution of budgeted revenue and expenditure and has determined at this 2018 mid-year review, that while expenditure should continue to be constrained, it should be reprioritized.

Accordingly, although Government expenditure for the year as a whole has been revised downwards by \$1.62 billion or 3.3 per cent, we are providing, through supplementation and variation, an additional \$213 million for much needed expenditure in key areas such as, but not limited to:

- The Tobago House of Assembly is receiving an additional \$20 million to fund the expansion of its agricultural access roads programme and \$100 million in reimbursement for back pay for TRHA workers.
- The Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs is receiving \$30 million to meet the cost of legal and other fees arising from matters raised in the Commission of Enquiry into CL Financial and Colonial Life Insurance Company.
- The Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts is receiving \$2 billion to enable the National Commission for Self-Help to assist individuals in the Tobago whose homes have been affected by flooding and other damages.
- The Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries is receiving \$38 million, of which \$31 million would fund the cost of the subsidy due to farmers under the Agriculture Incentive Programme and \$7 million to meet the cost of claims submitted by farmers for the loss of crops as a result of excessive rainfall and consequential flooding during the month of October 2017.
- The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services is being provided with the sum of \$23 million to meet expenditure for the Senior Citizens Grant to September 2018.

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- The Ministry of Works and Transport is receiving the sum of \$62.5 million to continue and expand its infrastructure works programme.
- The Ministry of Health is receiving the sum of \$121 million to assist with payments to trade creditors, among other things; and
- The Ministry of Education is receiving the sum of \$159 million to pay for security and janitorial services at schools, among other things.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Finance has determined that the oil and gas price assumptions and other assumptions, which informed the revenue projections for the 2018 budget should remain as is for the time being. Notably, in stark contrast to 2016 and 2017, we expect to generally meet our fiscal targets for 2018. However, the actual out-turn for 2018 would depend heavily on the soon-to-be launched National Investment Fund.

As a result of these revenue and expenditure adjustments, the overall deficit for 2018 is now being projected at approximately \$4.2 billion or over \$500 million lower than the original 2018 budgeted amount of \$4.76 billion. [*Desk thumping*] Relative to GDP, the budget deficit is now projected at 2.5 per cent of GDP. Compare this, Madam Speaker, to last year's deficit of 8 per cent of GDP, progress is truly being made. [*Desk thumping*]

We are moving into a period of long-term fiscal health and we are doing so at reasonable unemployment levels. In 2017, unemployment was on average in the vicinity of 5 per cent, compared with an average of 4 per cent in the time of plenty, from 2011 to 2015. The economic adjustment is also taking place with stabilization of the public debt. As at March 2018, our net public sector debt to GDP ratio was 55 per cent, down from 62 per cent in 2017, well within international benchmarks and well below our planned limit of 65 per cent. [*Desk thumping*]

Furthermore, our external financial savings or financial buffers are at healthy levels. At the end of April 2018, notwithstanding injection by the Central Bank of the Government's foreign reserves into the banking sector of US \$6 billion over the last three years, our net official reserves were US \$8.11 billion at the end of April, our import cover of over nine months. Indeed, for the first time in years, we actually saw a small increase in foreign reserves between March and April 2018. This careful management of our foreign reserves and our exchange rate since 2015 flies in the face of the predictions of the prophets of doom and gloom who told us that our foreign reserves would evaporate in six months, unless we devalue the dollar to 10 to one. How wrong these experts were.

Further, the net asset value of the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund was US \$5.87 billion at the end of April 2018. This was over US \$200 million higher than the US \$5.65 billion in the HSF at the end of September 2015, despite withdrawals totalling US \$637 million between 2016 and 2017. Clearly, therefore, all the “ole” talk from Members opposite and uninformed commentators about the Government raiding and destroying the HSF was unfounded foolishness. [*Desk thumping*] Truth is the HSF has more money in it now than before. We have managed the HSF prudently, resulting in income of over US \$850 million from the fund since we took office.

It was those considerations, Madam Speaker, which led S&P global ratings to confirm the recovery which is now taking place in Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] and informed the S&P affirmation of the Trinidad and Tobago credit ratings. [*Crosstalk*] Madam Speaker, they are ridiculous. Madam Speaker, let me just read this. They cannot help it, you know. It was those considerations which led S&P global ratings to confirm the recovery which is now taking place in Trinidad and Tobago and informed the S&P affirmation of the Trinidad and Tobago credit rating with the retention of our investment grade status of long-term sovereign rating at BBB+.

Further, Madam Speaker, we are in no doubt that, had the most up-to-date production data been available to S&P in a timely manner, not only our credit rating but our outlook would have been retained. Most importantly, Madam Speaker, this is the first time in three years. It is necessary to repeat. It is the first time in three years that the credit rating of Trinidad and Tobago has not been downgraded. [*Desk thumping*] The downgrade began under the UNC and this is now the first time in three years that the credit rating of Trinidad and Tobago has not been downgraded.

As our economy continues to improve, we expect a ratings improvement over the medium-term in the context of our improving internal and external balances and the increasing likelihood that our gas supply would meet the demands of our downstream sector on a sustainable basis and the pickup in the non-energy sector would be strengthened.

With respect to financing, Madam Speaker, in the first half of the year, our internal financing operations generated an excess of resources, which was utilized to cover the shortfall in external financing requirements. We are now filling that gap with the recently executed US \$300 million, or TT \$2 billion loan agreement with the Andean Development Corporation, the Development Bank of Latin

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America or CAF. As the economy adjusts to lower levels of revenue and expenditure, we are ensuring that the adjustment would take place in a growth-oriented environment, with appropriate and adequate facilitating mechanisms.

Let me share with you some of those activities with respect to infrastructure. We are safeguarding the gains which are emerging in the domestic economy. We are tackling the most binding impediments to growth. Our priorities include improving the quality of infrastructure, strengthening governance and institutions and enhancing the business climate. Some examples are highways. Our road network is at various stages of implementation. Some are at the conceptual design stage, for instance the Valencia/Toco road. [*Interruption*] Madam Speaker, this is ridiculous. They are like children.

Madam Speaker: Members, I am on my legs. Minister of Finance, please continue.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Our new road network is at various stages of implementation. Some are at the conceptual design stage, for instance the Valencia/Toco road, and others like the Churchill-Roosevelt Highway extension to Manzanilla, although temporarily suspended, and the Solomon Hochoy Highway to Point Fortin are in full execution, with completion dates in 2019 and 2020.

The Curepe flyover, which would improve significantly traffic in the East-West Corridor, is scheduled for completion by the end of 2019.

In Tobago, in order to meet the demands of a tourism-driven economy, the ANR Robinson International Airport is being modernized at a cost of \$500 million, excluding land acquisition. A public/private/partnership utilizing a build/own/lease/transfer mechanism will establish in 2020 the new airport terminal in Tobago and associated works. At present, the Development Bank of Latin America is supporting the project with technical advisory services.

Beach facilities. Madam Speaker, visitors to Maracas Beach would soon have an engaging and exciting experience with the modernization of facilities at that location. Maracas Beach will now become an important visitor point in the itinerary of international visitors. Other major beaches are being upgraded: Manzanilla and Las Cuevas. Facilities will be completed in 2018 and rehabilitation works are far advanced at Vessigny.

Hospitals. Madam Speaker, our hospital programme is well under way, including our drive to enter the area of health tourism. To that end, and in

collaboration with the Government of Canada, we are rebranding the Couva Medical and Multi-training Facility as a First World hospital and medical training facility. [*Desk thumping*]

We have secured, we, have secured an international operator for the facility, InterHealth Canada. The facility would be jointly owned by the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and the University of the West Indies. In the interim, the Government of India is offering opportunities to health care professionals to contribute to training at the facility by teaching traditional Indian medicine. Madam Speaker, this hospital, like the others which we are now establishing, will offer state-of-the-art health care to our citizens and promote health tourism.

The Point Fortin Hospital is expected to be completed in 2019. It would make available 100 beds to service up to 100,000 of our citizens in the southwest peninsula.

The Arima Hospital is expected to be completed in 2019. It would make available 150 beds to service up to 150,000 of our citizens in the northeastern district, including D'Abadie, La Horquetta, Malabar and Arouca.

The Port of Spain central block, which is expected to begin construction in 2018, on completion, will provide 540 beds to service up to 500,000 of our citizens in north Trinidad.

I turn now to institutional arrangements, the National Investment Fund. Madam Speaker, the debt owed by Clico to the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago is finally being settled. As an initial step, we are monetizing approximately \$4 billion of that debt with an initial public offering of 49.9 per cent of the shareholding of a newly incorporated company, the National Investment Fund Holding Company, into which would be transferred the selected assets of Colonial Life Insurance Company, Clico Investment Bank in liquidation, as well as shareholding of the Trinidad Generation Unlimited (TGU), among other assets.

We propose that the initial public offering will take place in June 2018, next month, thereby serving to widen and deepen the domestic capital market and at the same time ensuring that all of our citizens, large and small—[*Interruption*] Madam Speaker, there is a drone over there. There is a running commentary. It is very difficult. Members for Siparia and Naparima, it is a drone.

11.30 a.m.

Madam Speaker: Members. If we can allow the Minister of Finance to complete this contribution—and I know that we are all eager to join in the debate, you will do it in sufficient time.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] We propose that the initial public offering would take place in June 2018, thereby serving to widen and deepen the domestic capital market, and at the same time ensuring that all of our citizens, large and small, participate in the benefits, dividends and shareholding growth flowing from the quality of the companies in the National Investment Fund holding company.

In particular, in contrast to those naysayers who said it could not be done, let me give some details of what this Government has achieved so far, in terms of the recovery of the \$23 billion pumped into the Clico bailout. To date, as part of the first distribution of assets from Clico Investment Bank, a total of 42,475,362 shares of Republic Bank, valued at \$4.3 billion, have been transferred directly to the Corporation Sole or state enterprises and Clico for onward transfer to the Government. [*Desk thumping*] This represents 26 per cent of Republic Bank. It is to be noted that a further 25 per cent of Republic Bank was already held by the Clico Investment Fund.

In addition, 23 per cent of One Caribbean Media valued at \$200 million has been transferred to the Corporation Sole, or state enterprise on Clico, for onward transfer to the Government, as well as 29.9 per cent of Angostura, valued at \$1.07 billion; 5.4 per cent of WITCO, valued at \$402 million; and 19.5 million shares of Home Construction, valued at \$476 million.

This Government has also recovered \$3.8 billion in cash, so far, from Clico, since September 2015. [*Desk thumping*] And we have also recovered lands in Tobago valued at \$186 million, for the site of the proposed Sandals Resort.

The Government is also actively pursuing the sale or acquisition of shares held in Methanol Holdings International Limited, valued at over \$2 billion, as well as the recovery of another \$500 million in bonds. And this is not all, Madam Speaker, since there remains a further approximately 40 per cent of Angostura held by CL Financial or Clico, among other assets to be recovered. A selected portfolio of these assets will thus be placed in the National Investment Fund for offer for sale to the public in 2018. We anticipate that in the first instance, the value of the shares that will underwrite the fund will be between \$8 million and \$10 billion, of which we plan to offer up to 49.9 per cent in this year, 2018.

Our target date for the launch of the National Investment Fund prospectus and the offer for sale of shares or units to the public in the NIF is June 2018, and our objective is to monetize the assets of the fund and realize our projected capital revenue by the end of July 2018.

At this juncture, Madam Speaker, let me point out, that with respect to the recovery of billions of dollars of taxpayers' funds that have been spent on the Clico bailout, this Government and this Minister of Finance, have achieved what our predecessors failed to achieve [*Desk thumping*]—without any ballyhoo or “carrying on”. Since we took office in September 2015, we have, so far, recovered from Clico and CIB, 26 per cent of Republic Bank, valued at over \$4 billion for the benefit of all our citizens and \$6 billion in cash, on other assets. [*Desk thumping*]

Before I continue, allow me to say the details of the performance at mid-year of various Ministries and state enterprises and specific Variations of Appropriation, will be dealt with by the respective Ministers. My statement today is primarily intended to report on the fiscal outturn for 2018 thus far, and to give an insight in how we plan to finance this service of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for this fiscal year, and how we plan to achieve the Variation of Appropriation and supplementary funding that we are discussing in this debate.

Please also note, Madam Speaker, that because of time constraints this statement is not exhaustive, it is simply not possible in 55 minutes to report on everything that we are doing and achieving—it is so much. However, I can give some brief details of specific projects as follows: the industrial estates and business parks of Evolving Tecknologies (e Teck), are being modernized and expanded with the aim to assist in the diversification of the economy.

Twenty-nine bids have been received for an existing commercial building, the Duncan Street Complex, and five under-developed land areas in Reform, Preysal, Connector Road, Frederick Settlement and Tarouba. Evaluation of bids is now in process.

The sale of the rice mill owned by National Flour Mills to a preferred investor, is in advanced stage of conclusion. The securing of an investor to partner with the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, in the management of the Vehicle Management Corporation, is also advancing to the RFP stage.

I turn now to property tax, Madam Speaker. We are making progress in establishing the long envisaged property tax regime. In early February 2018, we introduced in the House of Representatives, two pieces of legislation: the Property

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Tax (Amdt.) Bill, 2018, and Valuation of Land (Amdt.) Bill, 2018, which seek mainly to correct anomalies which exist with these two pieces of legislation.

I wish to make it clear, that contrary to rumour, there is no plan for retroactive application of this tax. Accordingly, the waiver with respect to the payment of property tax, would be extended at this time, to the end of December, 2017, since it is our policy to collect the tax in the year that all of the required administrative work is completed, such as, for example, the valuation of 50 per cent of properties in Trinidad and Tobago in various categories.

The Revenue Authority. Madam Speaker, like the property tax regime, we have made substantial progress in finalizing the proposed structure of the Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority, which is absolutely essential to stop the billion dollar leakage of tax revenue and tax avoidance that is prevalent in Trinidad and Tobago today.

I wish to put hon. Members on notice, that we will be bringing the required legislation for the Revenue Authority, for the consideration of this honorable House in the near future. And, that after seeking advice from eminent senior counsel, we are of the view that the legislation is best passed with a special majority. It is thus our intention to send the Revenue Authority Bill to a Joint Select Committee of Parliament, and we look forward to the comments and contributions and recommendations of the Opposition and the Independents in this committee.

This major institutional reform would underpin our efforts to stem the revenue collection leakages now inherent at the levels of the Board of Inland Revenue and the Customs and Excise Division, and also strengthen our compliance risk management methodologies.

Hon. Members will recall that on March 16, 2018, I shared with this House, the Tax Administration Diagnostic Assessment Tool (TADAT) performance report on Trinidad and Tobago, which was not very complimentary about our local tax authority. The recommendations from this report are guiding our tax reform and modernization agenda, with its emphasis on improving business processes and automation. These skills will be enhanced as the staff transitions to the Revenue Authority which—now embracing best practice standards in domestic tax administration with improved efficiency and tax mobilization. We would witness the full benefits of this reform in the next fiscal year, in the context of the establishment of the Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority.

The gambling industry. Madam Speaker, the Joint Select Committee of Parliament is hard at work on the review of the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Control Bill. And, we expect that if all goes well, this legislation will be finalized for the approval of this House by the end of this year, 2018. And 2019, therefore, we should have in place a well-structured and regulated gambling environment, generating good quality jobs and making its rightful contribution to public revenue.

Procurement. Madam Speaker, we now have in place a procurement regulator and board, with staffing and training in progress. The new procurement regime, utilizing best practice, will be operational shortly.

In terms of assisting business, Madam Speaker, the US \$100 million Eximbank foreign exchange facility, is now operational with the grant to the Eximbank, of a license by the Central Bank, to trade in foreign exchange. Eligible, established and fledgling small and medium size manufacturers, will now be able to access the facility, to finance material inputs for their export operations. This strategic initiative is geared to promote the expansion of our local export sector while at the same time, creating a new financial model to improve our foreign exchange earnings. This is a budget promise that has been delivered.

The Business Development Fund. Madam Speaker, our \$50 million business develop initiative is at an advanced stage of implementation. The facility would finance through grants, the working and seed capital for small and medium size businesses which we envisage to become key drivers of economic progress.

Border control. With respect to border control I am pleased to report that at long last, the recently installed mobile scanning technology at Point Lisas is strengthening our border security with modernized customs functions. This will add another dimension to the security of our environment. The Port of Port of Spain will follow shortly. Importation of contraband, specifically narcotics, illegal firearms and ammunition, will now be detected with modern scanning technology and interdicted, while at the same time, trade will be facilitated through easier inspection and faster delivery times.

Madam Speaker, we are moving into an era of macro-economic stability, which is now underpinning our recovery. As I indicated, the economy is turning around. In fact, Madam Speaker, it has turned around. [*Desk thumping*] Revenue collection is up, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] The non-oil sector is growing, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] The energy sector is booming! Madam Speaker, [*Desk thumping*] but we are very much aware that the continuing consolidation of our fiscal finances is an essential condition for achieving our objectives.

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Our tax and expenditure adjustments, and broad based reforms, are contributing towards the establishment of this foundation. Over the medium-term we are improving tax administration and budget procedures and we are seeking with World Bank technical assistance, to eliminate waste and duplication in large areas of expenditure, such as education, health, national security and social programs. We recognize that this process is of a long-term nature and is painstaking. But, it is essential for growth to be placed on a self-sustaining and long-term basis.

And, Madam Speaker, just recently we had the benefit of a technical assistance team from IMF, who is assisting us with what is known as “fiscal transparency” and soon, Madam Speaker, for the first time in this country, we will have data, fiscal data, published and available to the public on a regular basis, Madam Speaker. For the first time the public will be able to see expenditure and income on a real-time basis. For the first time, the public will be able to understand the assumptions that underpin the budget process.

This Government believes in transparency. [*Desk thumping*] This is the first Government that has decided to do this, Madam Speaker, to publish data and make it readily available to every citizen of this country. [*Desk thumping*] We are not hiding like our predecessors. We are not hiding from the rating agencies, we are not hiding from the International Monetary Fund, and we are not hiding from the authorities.—[*Crosstalk and laughter*]

As a Government, Madam Speaker, we will always ensure that the benefits from our economic development are shared equitably among all members of our national community. And all shall be treated equally and fairly.

I wish to caution, Madam Speaker, however, that we are not “out of the woods” yet. After the sacrifices and prudent fiscal management—[*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Order, Order!

Hon. C. Imbert: After the sacrifices and prudent fiscal management of the last two and a half years, our economy is turning around, but we have to be careful. [*Desk thumping*] In particular, our core revenues from taxation are still fragile and still below \$40 billion, while we are running a \$50 billion economy. But, finally we are experiencing growth and recovery in 2018. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, we are convinced that as long as we as a people are disciplined and productive, our country will recover, grow and prosper. From all indicators, we are on the road to economic revival. [*Desk thumping*]

From my friend from Laventille, in the words of Johnny Nash, later made famous by Jimmy Cliff, “I can see clearly now the rain has gone”. [*Desk thumping and laughter*]

Madam Speaker, I wish now to commend to this House, the report of the Standing Finance Committee, on the Finance (Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation) Bill, the object of this Report and Bill is to supplement and vary the appropriation provided for by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2018) Act, 2017, and to authorize the utilization of any sum accruing from a reduction of expenditure under a Head of Expenditure for the purpose of meeting any liability incurred through the increase in expenditure under other Heads.

I thank you, Madam Speaker, and I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: I am having some difficulty even hearing myself.

Question proposed.

Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC (Siparia): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. May I enquire, how much time would I be allotted, please?

Madam Speaker: You are allowed 55 minutes.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you very much, Madam. Thank you. [*Interruption*] I am sure you would welcome her with open arms. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: And Mariano Browne, too.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Together with Mariano, in tow. Madam Speaker, this mid-year review coincides with Government’s mid-term of their time in office. And given the Minister’s optimism over the last several days, as well as that of his Prime Minister, I think, like others in the population, we had great expectations with respect to what the Minister would share with us, today.

And I was clear that he would not be like Gollum—last year. But, that he would be today, like Frodo, the true hero, genuine hero, revealing his plans and policies to save Trinidad and Tobago from despair, defeat and destruction.

And so, Madam, I listened attentively—

Madam Speaker: Is there a device in the House? I am hearing a device, and would the Member please go outside and get it under control. I am sorry, Member for Siparia, please continue.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you, Madam. So, Madam, I listened

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attentively, as I am sure many of us all did. I listened, I listened and listened, and at the end of it all I realized that nothing has really changed. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, last year October, the hon. Minister delivered his budget statement 2018, and his mantra in that was, and I quote:

“Changing the Paradigm: Putting the Economy on a Sustainable Path”

After listening to the hon. Minister, it is clear that nothing has changed. [*Desk thumping*] It is clear that he has told us nothing that will put us on a sustainable path, and instead is more of the same old, same old paradigm and definitely no sustainable path.

You see, this Government has demonstrated that it remains—and up to today that has been very clear—it remains handcuffed to the energy sector and the gains from the energy sector, and as we know, that is a sector that is exposed to external shocks—whether they be price shocks, and in this case here in Trinidad and Tobago, that is tied with production and output. So, what does this Government do, and continue to do? Same paradigm—it is the same, you know, plantation to port, from the sugar—you are sending it away, in the same way we mine the hydrocarbons, we send it away, it is the same paradigm, it is the same economic model that they have handcuffed themselves in.

So, what do they—they wait for the windfalls from the energy sector, yes? You wait for the price to go up and then what to you do? You summon everybody with the good news, we are booming! We are booming! We are booming! With the price gone up, one month, two months? Nothing to tell us how you are going to increase production. Nothing to tell us how you will incentivize that sector if you want to tie and handcuff yourselves to the energy sector. But, it is clear that the energy sector cannot process on a sustainable path on its own. [*Desk thumping*]

And so, what we have seen today, Government on its last legs, summoned us to this House, really to tell us, look, we are going to continue to crash the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Having undermined and destroyed the economic fundamentals in less than three years, they now want to pull the plug on the Development Programme. [*Desk thumping*] The Minister of Finance, unable to chart an economic course forward, has taken the decision to raid or deplete the IDF, the Infrastructure Development Fund, to take from that fund and put it into Recurrent Expenditure. All at the same time, telling us that we are booming! We are booming! We are

booming! But, you are taking out of the IDF to put into recurrent. Why are you so booming? Why would you do that, why would you take it out from IDF to Recurrent Expenditure?

This is a colossal testimony to the failure of this Government, to generate sufficient revenues in spite of the host of taxes they have flung on the poor and the under-privileged in this country.

Madam, this is not the first time they have done this, you know. The Infrastructure Development Fund last year—and yes, we may have done it—but, what is interesting is that the wording—the rationale for taking out of the IDF—the wording is identical to the words that were used last year. So, when you go—let us remember this IDF was set up by a UNC government—[*Desk thumping*—]by the then Brian Kuei Tung, under section 43(3) of the Exchequer and Audit Act, and it was for the moneys to be placed in the fund to finance wholly or partially, certain capital infrastructure projects. That was the purpose of this fund.

And last year, here is what the Minister said when he took, I think it was, he took a large sum of money out of the IDF, in fact it was \$1.3 billion, taken out of the IDF, and listen why—the rationale he gave us.

Funds provided for capital projects under the IDF will not be fully utilized in fiscal 2017 given that contractors have not been finalized as initially projected. In addition, outstanding bills have not been verified.

This is his SFC note, page 4 of 2017. This year, 2018—it is the same old, same old, same old. [*Desk thumping*] Funds provided for capital projects under the IDF will not be fully utilized in fiscal 2018, given that contracts have not been finalized as initially projected, and the draw down on funding is based on overall cash management.

So, same old rationale for raiding development projects through the IDF, and then the Minister tells us he can see clearly now, you know, a very lovely song, a very lovely song. I think many of us even saw the movie with the Jamaicans and, you know, how they—imagine a country that has no snow. They were, what is it, bobsledding in the snow and you know, I think the Minister is more like Stevie Wonder, you remember, he cannot see. He cannot see. [*Laughter and desk thumping*]

Saying, he can see clearly now—I mean, whatever came here today. And so, the Minister of Finance, I am saying, having failed to raise revenues, now wants to thank Almighty God and—how great am I, he says, to all of us. How great he is— then, it is all due to really timely increases in prices and, thank God to the

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Government that I led, that is now reaping—the groundwork that was laid by the hon. Kevin Ramnarine, the Minister of Energy—for these projects like Juniper and all those others that he mentioned, the groundwork was laid during the period when we were in government. [*Desk thumping*]

And this economic turnaround—that is empty. Because people cannot feel such good fortune, because the majority of people in this country are in the throes of poverty, they are at the mercy of the criminal elements, they are depressed in their new found state of joblessness. And so what—I think now appears to be a paradise that we left in 2015, is now a nightmare republic under the Member for Diego Martin West. [*Desk thumping*] And here we are, as the Prime Minister and his “band of merry men” go off on another jaunt to absorb taxpayers’ dollars, soak up precious foreign exchange. What is left behind here, where—is a country that has been crashed and life has never been as nasty, brutish and short as it is now in Trinidad and Tobago.

And so, I ask if we can remember or think of any concrete project or investment that the Member for Diego Martin West has brought back from these jaunts in these countries. [*Desk thumping*] As they jet off to the Far East, the engine on the *Galleons Passage* stumbles somewhere on the western sea board, Honolulu, I think, and Mexico somewhere, as if we needed the reminder of bungling incompetence and boldfaced corruption. [*Desk thumping*]

When it comes to the area of procurement, this Government’s approach has been deplorable. They have thrown away the handbook on good governance and proper procurement. They have shelved the procurement policy. They began by hiring the services of a US based lobbyist. Absolutely no procurement process, sole select tender—said that he was his friend—hired the lobbyist, Art Collins, and the group. Today, when the Member asked, give me one single thing they did, the Prime Minister became very angry—we must not ask. Will not answer, I said “I just answered that”, that was his response. And we face that all the time in this Parliament, [*Desk thumping*] when, it is our right, it is our right to ask those questions and to expect replies. The majority of times we get no replies. And when the answer is given, it is really sometimes—I do not even know if they even hear the question because the answer is not even related to questions being asked.

And so, here we are, they like the “Art” they hired the “Art”. They admit there was no open invitation for proposals for resort in Tobago for Sandals—they like Sandals, they want Sandals. They spent millions on this *Galleons Passage*. Somebody told them about this boat, they like it, they buy it. We do not know any tendering process.

Mr. Lee: Madam Speaker 53(1)(f), please.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, there is a continuous murmur in the Chamber. I am having some difficulty—I am so happy that we each identify each other [*Laughter*] and therefore, you all yourselves from the floor give support to the complaint that I am now drawing to your attention. So, I expect it will not arise again. Member for Siparia.

12.00 noon

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you, Madam Speaker. And, again, questions asked about Australia and the comments reported in the newspapers that the Prime Minister says that they are going to Australia to see about boats. That is procurement, the Member for Diego Martin West and his Government style. [*Desk thumping*] And we cannot really be surprised about their conduct, because they ran away from the Parliament's JSC when we were dealing with the procurement legislation. [*Desk thumping*] To date, only some sections are proclaimed and we are still far away from having the legislation in place.

We have seen also in the past six months that they have been playing musical chairs in the Cabinet room. We have had four Ministers in the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development in less than three years. One Minister lasted 48 hours, only to be beaten by another who lasted a few hours, as a result of new information. And then the Prime Minister, having acted for quite some time as the Minister of Public Administration and Communications, returned to a Ministry from which he had been fired by the former Prime Minister. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*] Many doubt about the capacity for functioning in the substantive office, and now the Member for Diego Martin West assumes the tasks and duties of housing and urban development.

You know, a prominent trade union leader, a former trade union comrade, described the Prime Minister—what was it?—lazy or something like it—[*Crosstalk*]—these are people they are much arm in arm with. And now returning for a second stint at housing, the Prime Minister tells the country about a \$9 billion investment in the sector. When asked again today about what is the source of funding—[*Crosstalk*]—the response was far from, you know, giving comfort as to where this is going to come from. Where would this \$9 billion come from? Clearly it will be by borrowing, because we have not seen any of the much touted three-P model, the public/private/partnership model. Not a single housing unit in three years. This is a weight on an already crushing debt burden, \$9 billion for generations to come.

Now, the Minister spent some time telling us about things that he had spoken again—I said, “same old, same old”—from budgets before about the NIL—I think the name is now slightly changed from what is in the budget statement—that you would take the assets of Clico and others, you would create this fund, and you would sell the assets—and then tell us, this is changing the paradigm onto a new pathway of sustainable development. These things that you are going to sell belong to the people of Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] and when you sell them, that is a one-off revenue received. [*Desk thumping*] When you sell those assets, that is one time; it is gone. So the question will then be, what use are you going to put revenue gain from these one-time sales, asset sales? What is the use you will put it to? We have not heard the Minister share that with us. All it is, we are booming. We are going to get billions, billions, billions from the sale of the Clico assets, but no plan, no indication as to how you will use that to grow the non-energy sector, [*Desk thumping*] how you would use that to create jobs. Nothing of the sort. Just “gimme, gimme, gimme”. And I am reminded again, I am Gollum, let me get this money in my hands.

As we continue to listen, we are seeing a very heartless approach by the HDC which is now headed by the Member for Diego Martin West—and I think his golfing partner is also there, if I am not mistaken—because we see hard-working innocent poor people, working people, lined up for eviction, and many of them have paid all their rental obligations. Please have a heart. Stop this policy of evicting them. [*Desk thumping*] If they have fully paid up their rents—if they cannot for any reason convert rent-to-own to a mortgage arrangement, they are paying up their rent—then they must be allowed to continue in this belt tightening time, which you have provided for them over the last few years.

Madam Speaker, I said when I started, “the same old same old”. If you look at every sector, every promise from their manifesto coming down to their repeated budget promises, and you look for one thing they have delivered upon that they had promised, the only thing you will find is taxes. [*Desk thumping*] You will find no other thing that they have delivered. Nothing. [*Desk thumping*] And so, after spending more than \$110 billion—let us remember that—with nothing to show, nothing tangible to show, people are beginning to understand the very real consequences of electing—

Dr. Lee: Madam Speaker, 53(1), please. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I am having some difficulty. I am really having some difficulty, and the murmur is becoming uncontrollable. So, I would ask all Members—I think Members have pointed out how low the ceilings are here and, therefore, to adjust their volumes accordingly. Member for Siparia.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you again, Madam. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*] So, \$110 billion spent—midterm, mid-year, whatever it is—there is very little tangible that we can see, and so I think people are believing and beginning to understand the real consequences of electing those on the other side without a plan to govern Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] And the consequences are very clear, rampant unchecked crime.

If you look at the headlines of the newspapers yesterday and today—yesterday as well—I mean, my condolences go out to these people. The young boy who was killed on his birthday. He attends the Shiva Boys school in my constituency, and he has done exceedingly well in football. Gunned down on his birthday, for what? He was talking to a girl. That is what is alleged. Madam, if we look at all the headlines: War in the west—gangs blamed as eight killed in one week. Car thieves running rampant. These are some of the headlines. “Granny begs police to find grandchildren” and it goes on. These headlines, the screaming headlines, rampant crime.

A crashed economy, and I would share with you in terms of the state of the economy in a moment, Madam. Hospitals remain closed; doctors are unemployed; people are ill; schools remain incomplete and roads in disrepair. We are coming into the wet season and very little has been done, you know, to clear the waterways and so on, and that is where we are today.

I wonder, as I spoke of broken promises by those on the other side, if the Minister will remember what he told this Parliament in his Budget Statement 2016. He promised that they will bring the Government finances into approximate balance by fiscal year 2018.

Mr. Imbert: Really?

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Those are his words. [*Crosstalk*] It is there. It is in the budget statement.

Mr. Imbert: I do not believe that.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: It is in the budget statement.

Mr. Imbert: That was just an expectation.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: And today he comes back to tell us—we are in 2018, and he is telling us, he is going to get all these one-off sales moneys and so on, but we are going to still have a deficit, reduced perhaps, but a deficit. But fiscal he had planned and, therefore, his plan, he failed. He failed in his promise to the Parliament [*Desk thumping*] that he would bring approximate balance to the

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Parliament. And more Madam, what is the reality we face here now? Let us look at some of the things they promised us. And, you know, there was an old saying—and some of us will remember it—PNM means “promises never materialized”. [Desk thumping] The recovery the Minister is promising will come. It will come, but it will not be under that administration [Desk thumping] because they do not have the capacity it takes to put the country back on to growth and development.

As I come to another part of what I need to say of some of the things I think we could do, and they are very simple things, what you call low hanging fruit. So in this mid-year review, at the midterm mark, they have failed to deliver as I say, on any single big-ticket item. In fact, they have even failed to start most of these big-ticket items. And when you heard the Minister speaking about, “nothing is, you know, we have done you know”, it was all: We will, it will happen, it will come. It is like “Listen, stay tuned, coming to a cinema near you.” [Desk thumping and laughter] Yes, move on. And what? Why are you so hurry? They asked us that, why are we so hurry? Well, we are hurry because people are suffering in this country. [Desk thumping] Almost three years gone, and the economy is on crash, and you turn the corner—you tell us you are turning the corner, but when you turn the corner, you see the cliff in front of you. We are going down that cliff. [Desk thumping] We can see clearly that is where we are heading, unless we see the plans and the policies.

So, here we are, not one of these big-ticket items. Looking at their track record, promise after promise, with nothing done. Instead of delivery, we got destruction. They promised a port in Toco, instead they crashed the sea bridge. [Desk thumping] They promised an improved water taxi service, they crashed that too. [Desk thumping] They promised to implement a national drainage plan, I have not seen it, heard it, but more flood after flood left to come. Promise after promise, billions, and yet promises never materialized.

In their 2016 budget, they talked about addressing the shortage of medical personnel immediately. There are hundreds of doctors trained, highly trained, who up to today cannot get a job. Hospitals are remaining closed. In their manifesto they promised to ensure that the GATE system created in 2004 remains relevant, easily accessible and available to all who need it. What they had to do? Cut the GATE, cut the GATE funding. The Minister came today to continue their proven false narrative to make even more promises that there will be no delivery on.

So, here we are to review another bankrupt empty budget or part budget, midterm review. Let us talk a bit about the crashed economy, Madam. Is there an economy recovery as the Government would want us to believe? Here is what we

are facing on the economic front, state of the economy. Trinidad and Tobago's energy based economy contracted for the second consecutive year in 2017, despite a pickup in natural gas production. New natural gas output from the Juniper field, which was commissioned in the third quarter of 2017, made more gas available to midstream, downstream energy companies and, therefore, improving national gas liquids, LNG and petro-chemicals. Yes. So there has been a pick up there. What this means is that the Government will now benefit from the additional revenue from that natural gas production, as we said before, that is the work done under the Partnership. [*Desk thumping*]

However, the mismanagement of state-owned Petrotrin lies squarely at the feet of this Government. They have facilitated corrupt practices which has been pervaded over the once prosperous refinery. We all recall the fake oil scandal causing a haemorrhage of close to \$100 million. [*Desk thumping*] The person admitted to being a "bestie" of the Member of Diego Martin West. The negative spillovers from the energy sector combined with the severe toll on business confidence drove a further decline in non-energy activity in 2017, with contractions across major sectors such as construction, manufacturing and distribution. Madam, it shows where Government is unable to inspire confidence in the business sector. There will be a decline in manufacturing, construction and that will account also for low job creation and high unemployment.

As a review of the state of economy, real GDP, as measured by the CSO, is estimated to have declined 2.3 per cent in 2017 compared to a decline of 6 per cent in 2016. Conditions worsened in the labour market. The latest labour market information from the CSO shows that the number of persons without jobs increased by 9,600 to 36,100 between 2015 and 2017. So to talk of the rate is one thing. To talk about people—you see, in this world, it is about people. It is not just about the numbers. It is not just about a 1 per cent growth outlook or a 0.2 per cent. It is about the people. It is people who matter the most. [*Desk thumping*]

So, when it is in 2015 and 2017 you are now having, as reported by the CSO stats, over 36,000 people between 2015 and 2017 without jobs, Madam, so that labour market conditions have worsened. Information on the retrenchment from the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development indicates some 2,421 persons were retrenched between 2016 and 2017, but then that is a curious situation, because there are far more than that. Because of the law and the way the law is framed, you have to report if more than five persons are fired. But there are many places where individuals are being fired, losing their jobs. And so, while we paint a rosy picture of recovery, people are home. They are wondering where is the recovery for them and in their pockets and in their wallets.

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Weak non-energy activity has restrained domestic inflation. The Minister spoke a lot about—beating his chest on “how great thou art” about low inflation. The lowest rate on record, Madam, in spite of a pickup in food inflation in the later months and so on, the inflation effect of reintroducing VAT on previously exempted items in early 2016 has been cancelled out almost one year later in February 2017. Core inflation was contained in spite of upward pressure from higher transport cost as a result of the reduction of energy subsidies. So why then do we have this low inflation?

The Finance Minister boasts we have it because, first of all, it is his job. That is what he did. He caused it. He made that miracle happen—the low inflation, less than 2 per cent—because of his management of the economy. Madam, that is totally false. [*Desk thumping*] In fact, it is the opposite. Because of mismanagement of the economy, we have this exceeding low inflation rate. Low inflation is simply lower demand for goods and services brought on by lower levels of Government spending and lower levels of domestic spending. That is the truth. [*Desk thumping*] In fact, Standard & Poor’s said that the low inflation rate was due to low demand, and they expect it to average just over 3 per cent over the forecast horizon.

Madam, less money chasing the same amount of goods leads to low inflation. [*Desk thumping*] The subdued inflation performance raises two issues—this subdued inflation performance—one, the retail prices index which the CSO uses to measure inflation is based on a basket of goods from 2008/2009 household survey, 10 years ago. This is what the RPI, the retail price index, is being used to measure the basket today. This means the basket of goods and the relevant ways are not representative of the more recent purchasing habits of the typical consumer. [*Desk thumping*] Second, if measured inflation continues to slow down, the economy could enter into deflation [*Desk thumping*] both for non-energy output and prices.

Now, how do we then get out of a deflationary spiral, Madam Speaker? It is a serious issue. It would require massive fiscal stimulus for which the Government does not have sufficient fiscal space without raising public debt even more. So it is not about beating your chest to boast about it. This is a serious matter. This means that the brunt of Government austerity measures were borne by the everyday citizens as reduction in transfers and subsidies and so on affected the disposable income, living standards of the working class, the middle class, the poor and the marginalized.

Madam Speaker, the construction sectors crashed. If you go and look at, again, the available data, look at cement sales, look at car sales. All down. You look at all the areas and you will see from the RPI and the volume of matters in the construction sector being sold, that the construction sector has gone into tailspin or has crashed. [*Desk thumping*] And then I was saying they are looking at the state of the economy, the forex issue—but Madam, please, I really think I am being disturbed from the other side.

Madam Speaker: Members, the Member for Siparia, I can hear the strain in her voice to overcome the hum. I ask Members, again, for the last time, to please contain the crosstalk. Member for Siparia.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you again, Madam. I turn now to a very, very disturbing issue, that is the issue of forex, that forex issue where there is access or lack of access has, in fact, crippled the private sector. The Central Bank has depreciated secretly, I would say, the TT dollar by 6.5 per cent against the US dollar since September 2015, but this has done very little to help with the chronic foreign exchange shortages. Market participants' university report: shortages remained severe, fuelling a thriving black market for forex. Business relations with suppliers, foreign, are being damaged because of difficulties in sourcing US dollars for trade payments. The Government has paralyzed smaller businesses. Some of them have been plunged into crisis. They have no access to forex to pay for their goods and raw materials.

It is clear that the policy of this Government is in the big people and the big businesses as those have been able to access forex. The decline in revenue in the energy sector led to the shortfall partly to the forex. The Minister is aware of it. What has been done? We are being told Eximbank is going to see it. We will have to believe it when that happens and when we see it. I am aware that to even get US \$100 from a bank, Madam, you have to go and line up. Sometimes you go and you wait for days and beg. Nothing is happening. So if you want to travel, you have to go to the bank a few times. You have to go with your ticket. We are back to those days. I wonder if you remember those days. We are back to those days. Some of you may be too young to remember those days, but those of you who are not so young like me will remember the pressure and the controls. So, fiscal performance continues to deteriorate, Madam, fiscal 2016 and 2017. The overall fiscal deficit under the Government widened sharply to \$12.6 billion, 8.5 per cent of GDP; from \$8 billion, 5.3 per cent of GDP in the previous year. That deterioration in fiscal performance was due to lower than budgeted receipts of revenue, and it was in respect to those extraordinary receipts from the sale of the

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CL Financial assets, the same one—the same old where we told, “Look, we get big lump sums from them.” So they said they we are going to make X, then they did not get anywhere close to that.

What is worse is that they promised two years ago, as I told you, they will balance the finances in this fiscal year—in his budget, as I quoted before—yet another broken promise. So while Government spending fell in fiscal 2017, due to cuts on spending and goods and services, reduced fuel subsidies, debt servicing increased because of rising public debt. Interest payments consumed 12.5 per cent of current revenue in fiscal 2017 compared with 5.5 per cent of current revenue just three years ago. Reduced spending on the PSIP, again, very little fiscal stimulus in an already debilitating non-energy sector.

So I want to turn to that issue of the public debt because of the burden that is being placed on us citizens. The same March 2018 bulletin from the Central Bank revealed that interest payments rose to \$642.5 million from \$541 million in the first quarter, fiscal 2018, owing to a larger stock of foreign and domestic debt. The issue of the rapid growth in borrowings by the Minister remains great cause for alarm. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Imbert: That is going down.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: In 2015, borrowings represented—I am hearing whispers across there, “it is going down”, but we still have to debate the debt on the borrowings that you have already incurred. So that is not going down. [*Desk thumping*] That is going to be there to be paid for generations to come at the rate you are going. The borrowings represented, Madam Speaker, and the Auditor General’s Report 2017—gives us, end fiscal 2017—revealed the shocking news that in the last two years alone, Government borrowings have totalled \$24.4 billion; 24.4 in two years. This two-year total, Madam Speaker, is 1.3 times higher than the total borrowings of the Partnership government for five years; five years. [*Desk thumping*] And this can be found in the Auditor General’s Report which was laid right here in the Parliament on Friday.

Under this Minister’s version of good fiscal management, the figure has increased by more than 300 per cent to 22.61 per cent, meaning in 2017, it would have taken more than one-in-five of all Government revenue to repay borrowings for that year. So do not tell me that you are going to stop borrowing. You will have to repay all this public debt. What does that do then? What does that huge debt mean? We are at a very dangerous point. The Central Bank, March 2018, which is the most recent data we have, tells us that total public sector debt amounted to \$120.9 billion which is 77.5 per cent of GDP in December 2017.

Net or open market operations, public sector debt increased to \$96.2 billion, 61.6 per cent of GDP, up from \$93.8 billion in September 2017. So between September 2017 and December 2017, which is the first quarter of this fiscal year, this is what took place. So we are at a very dangerous point, as beyond 60 per cent debt to GDP, low revenue prospects, any further shock to the economy may result in debt levels that are so high that the State may have to default at worse or restructure at best. But even that has its problem. The former means bankruptcy, and economic collapse with all the ills associated with that. [*Crosstalk*] I am speaking of the high level of public debt.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Madam Speaker, 53(1).

Madam Speaker: Okay. So, Members, again, I think we consider this important. Every Member will have an opportunity to join the debate. I realize it might be—at the time of day, some of us might be a bit unsettled, but please maintain your decorum, your volumes. Member for Siparia.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and you see the truth offends. The truth offends. [*Desk thumping*] They do not want to hear that. [*Desk thumping*] So that I am saying we are at a dangerous point, as beyond 60 per cent of debt to GDP. That is where we are, as revealed in the Central Bank Economic Report, March 2018, just a month or two ago. Those are the facts. Talk about the facts. And what it means then, at that stage, bankruptcy or please— [*Crosstalk*] Will the Minister of Finance—he had his time. You are completely offensive. You are worse than Comedy Central. We would just laugh at you. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Members, I think we all consider this debate seriously. The Member in moving also wanted all attention, because he wanted to get his message across, not just to us but to the members of the national community. I would hope we would all give similar regard and respect to the Member for Siparia. Please continue.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] So what happens then? We can restructure as is what may have to happen with the Petrotrin debt—the very large debt there incurred under a former PNM administration. They can restructure, debt restructuring, or we can go into economic collapse. Those things are real possibilities on the horizon.

The latter action of debt, as I say, restructuring, may or could lead us back to the arms or the jaws of the IMF, together with the high rates of external debt, privatization of enterprises control commanded heights of the economy and hard

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times for a generation or more. This could result in a situation, Madam Speaker, a national income accounting that is known as debt overhang. This is the scenario where debt is so high that the State cannot easily borrow more funds and, if so, would find it very difficult to repay.

The recent declarations given by Standard & Poor's and the IMF foretell very similar concerns. My colleagues will pick it up. Time does not permit me to go into the quotations out of that. So, foreign exchange reserves, as we look at the state of the economy, our external position continues to worsen. The recovery comes against the so-called recovery backdrop of collapsing foreign reserves, and there has not been a single new revenue generation initiative by that Government [*Desk thumping*] or any particular enterprise designed to generate much needed foreign exchange, apart from loans of course—apart from borrowings from CAF and so on.

12.30 p.m.

According to the Central Bank data, net official foreign reserves have virtually collapsed from US \$10.46 billion when we left office in 2015 to now US \$7.99 billion in March of 2018. It means we have dropped from 11.9 months import cover under the Government I led. It has dropped from 11.9 to nine months under this Minister. What the figures do not show, however, is also that the Government took out the moneys from the HSF. I think it was, anyway, two withdrawals from the HSF of US \$626 million. So increasing demand—that is again foreign exchange—increasing demands on foreign exchange to repay debt will continue to pose a challenge in the very near future. Again, from the way the Minister spoke about that HSF and blamed everybody who said there would be problems if they took the money, it seems that he is planning to go back into the HSF again to take more money. There is nothing that remotely suggests in all of this that this Government has properly managed the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Moody's and Standard & Poor's downgraded Trinidad and Tobago's sovereign credit rating. Moody's downgrade was to a sub-investment grade, which is really what they call "junk" grade of Ba1. S&P's rating is still an investment grade of BBB+. So it is still an investment grade, and these downgrades, from reading the narrative in the various reports, triggered by insufficient policy response by the Government to offset the impact of low energy prices on Government revenues, a steady increase in public debt, declining energy production, coupled with limited energy investment projects. And please do not expect us to believe that when you blame Franklin Khan, it means that all is well

and merry. It was Minister Franklin Khan's fault that he sent the wrong data. You think the IMF and Moody's, and these people born yesterday? [*Desk thumping*] You think they are not looking; they are not reading and seeing all the signs, they are lined up, they are like pigs in a row just waiting to be bowled over? The signs are there.

You want to take one month, January—one month out of how much has gone already in the fiscal year and say, "ay", well we make so much money in that month; "oh", and maybe February. They do these things on averages. They do not do it in one month. So Mr. Franklin Khan was wrong. He took the blame. He was the fall guy, but Moody's and Standard & Poor's, I am more inclined to believe them, and Standard & Poor's tend to believe this Minister. [*Desk thumping*] These downgrades mean that our credit-worthiness is falling, making it more expensive for the country to borrow, either locally or internationally, and these downgrades mean that international institutions view our Government's economic management as too weak to tackle the country's challenges. And, again, over the next six to 12 months if Government is unable to convince Standard & Poor's that its economic policy responses will help to stabilize public debt, then S&P will downgrade Trinidad and Tobago's at "junk" stages. [*Desk thumping*] But the Minister has not told us anything about how he is going to do that. All he is telling us is how to sell things, sell the fridge and the stove, and the wardrobe from the house and make capital revenue once more.

Finally, Madam, I need to spend a few minutes on the "blame game". From their very first day in office, public relations slogan, blame Kamla, blame them, blame everybody, blame the police, blame the international foreign advisory, blame the United Nations, blame, "blame game". It was that thesis which has been presented in the public domain. So they set out, and I will talk to you about vestige and elite—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Charles: Art Collins.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: And Art Collins. [*Desk thumping*] So they set out to convince the population that the country was running on smoke, that we did not leave anything. The Minister of Finance talked about the overdraft, Minister of Finance, what is your overdraft today? What is your overdraft today? [*Desk thumping*] Your overdraft today is outside the limit permitted by law, and I would ask you to go and look at it. The law, the law permits the Exchequer and Audit Act and the Central Bank Act—[*Interruption*] no, you could respond after. The Central Bank Act and the Exchequer and Audit Act, Madam, talks of how this is to be calculated, and it is 15 per cent of revenue. Today, for 2016/2017 fiscal,

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your overdraft here, \$7 billion; \$10 billion is your overdraft, and the 15 per cent of revenue is \$7 billion. But you came last year, if you remember, late, to increase the margins. [*Desk thumping*] You increased the margins from 15 per cent of revenue to 17 per cent. So, look, do not be hypocritical, you maxed out the overdraft, you maxed out the overdraft. [*Desk thumping*]

I will tell you this, Government's revenue, in our first year in office we were \$47.5 million. Again, all of that is in the Auditor General's Report laid here in Parliament on Friday. Do you know what was the revenue received by that Government in the first year? It was more than we received. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Lee: Madam Speaker, 53(1)(f), please. My colleague only has a few minutes remaining.

Madam Speaker: Now both sides, as I say, I am somewhat sympathetic, I understand the time is 12.35 and Members may be a bit unsettled, but we continue with the business of the day. Please, continue.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you, Madam. Thank you. First year in office we were \$47.5 billion. The first year in office for that Government, \$60.3 billion revenue. So when they are telling you about we maxed out and they had no money, and tighten your belt, we had less revenue in our first year. Does that sound like a country that was bankrupt when we left office in 2015? In their first year in office that Government collected \$12.8 billion more in revenue than we did in our first year. But that was not enough, the Minister had a plan, you see, he had to suffer people, tax everybody. [*Desk thumping*] Reduce budgets from every Ministry, and all the while repeating ad nauseam, they maxed out, they "thief" out, they do everything, they bankrupt the country, but yet you had \$60 billion in revenue. And all the while in the first three years, I will tell you, again those reports laid here—God is good you know, all those reports came just in time before this debate. In the first three years of the Government I led, without introducing a single new tax, not one new tax, [*Desk thumping*] the total Government revenue was \$153.8 billion.

Do you know how much it was then? In the first three years of this Government, and the estimate for 2018 which we got budget 2018, Government revenue would have been \$153.84 billion. And then the question comes now, they received over three-quarters of a billion dollars more than our party got when we were in Government over the same three-year time frame. So the question—and, you know, I remember a former Prime Minister said, where the money gone? [*Desk thumping*] Where that money gone? You had the money to spend but you

fool the people [*Desk thumping*] so you could come here to election now. You could come here to election and say, booming, we are booming, we are booming, turn the corner; suffering people, tighten your belt, no medication, no CDAP, no laptop, cut, cut, cut. That is all that went on. No Children's Life Fund. And so they had more revenues to spend, but it was quite the opposite, and then it comes to expenditure. Well then you should have had more to spend. If there was no "thieving" why did you not spend the money? [*Desk thumping*] Why did you not spend for the benefit of the poor and the working poor in this country? Why it is you would allow a child to die rather than give them [*Desk thumping*] for life fund for surgery? Why? Why? Why did you not spend the money? Because you had it.

In our first three years, we spent \$169 billion. In their three years they spent \$162 billion. So they had it, what did they do with it? What do you have to show for it? What can you point to as having been done by your Government? And so those are my final words, Madam. What does the figure mean, they had more revenue? They chose to spend less. There is a difference of \$2.3 billion per year between what we spent, what they spent, what does it mean? They spent \$4.6 per day per citizen, less than the price of a "doubles" when you take the expenditures. The Minister would have you believe he work so hard to reduce expenditure and manage, and so on, all of that was to come today to beat his chest and say, boom, around the corner, we are great; how great am I. There is no paradox, Madam Speaker, this Government is the "big people" Government, you know, I always said it. So where that money went instead of helping the small people out there, all these people losing their jobs, evicting people out of their HDC homes, and so on? No, no, that was not important.

Madam Speaker, there is a deficit which my other colleagues will deal with, and they will deal with other areas of details with respect to Ministries. I just want to close, some of the things, a very few in the two minutes I may have—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Lee: No, you have eight minutes.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you. Well then, fine, I will take my time. Here we are, what the Government should focus on, the first thing—*[Interruption]*

Madam Speaker: Member for Siparia, your time is up at 12.43, please do not be misguided, 12.43.

Mrs. K. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you. I think everyone in the country, what matters most to us are our children, okay. I do not think anyone would deny that. What matters most, what we work for, what we do, it is for our children, and I am sure

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it pains us very time—I am sure the Member for St. Joseph feels it likewise—that when the children come, they are told they do not qualify for treatment from the life fund. I want to make a suggestion, I would like the Minister and the Government to take immediate steps to review and amend the Children’s Life Fund [*Desk thumping*] and it would help you realign to where we have seen the shortcomings now with the use of it, and let us see if we can get these children the care and health care they need. And so in all of this what to do? All is not lost. There is hope. Our economy can be fixed. We can regain fiscal balance. We can stabilize public debt. We can stop the bleeding of official reserves. We can bring our economy back on a pathway to growth.

The first critical step is to restore confidence and rebuild trust. This Government from day one preached doom and gloom so the investor confidence has been eroded. And so to build that confidence and restore trust, the Government must come up with a credible medium-term economic plan, communicate the milestones along the way on that plan and act in implementing it decisively. Secondly, the Government should stop imposing all these taxes on the citizens. [*Desk thumping*] This is not generating revenue. Look at your own revenue numbers that have come in, all these taxes and the tax revenue is down, it is not up. And, by the way, the Minister had told us we would not get any tax from the oil companies, and so on, for seven years—it is in your budget statement—today he is coming and boasting about collecting taxes from the oil companies. What to believe? Which one is the truth? So, do not keep bringing these taxes, it has the opposite effect. I have used the example of the United States of America where they brought their taxes down and employment is going up, [*Desk thumping*] investment is going up.

Thirdly, we must stop trying to secretly depreciate the dollar. And, finally, we should consider increasing interest rates because that will prevent, to an extent, capital flight. It will allow people to keep their money, put it in the banks; raise the interest rate. It can help us to encourage savings, and that is a consideration again in the United States where we are considering. [*Desk thumping*] So that is end of that. As I have one second, Madam, I say, you see what, you are incapable, your time is up, your time of ruling this country without humility, without humanity, without incompetence, your time of tyranny is up, call election now. Thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister in the Office of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, as a taxpayer of Trinidad and Tobago, and in particular as a taxpayer who paid significant amounts of tax between the years 2010 and 2015, I can see where our tax-paying money went, by that administration paying the likes of Cambridge Analytica and others to present [*Desk thumping*] false news, and to prevent false news and to do what has become very familiar by political parties that are in a sense of great desperation to just throw things out there and hope that it will stick. To bring this back to a level of sanity, because that is what the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago deserve, and to bring it back and to ground it as to what is actually happening in Trinidad and Tobago and not what is wished upon the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and not the type of destructive fake news that is being spewed on the people of Trinidad and Tobago by what was quite interesting, a pre-prepared speech, a speech that, as soon as the hon. Minister of Finance sat down, was there, and we are reading speeches. A speech I understand that was prepared by “duppy”. A speech prepared by “duppy” that used absolutely incorrect facts, and I will point a few of those facts out before we tell the people of Trinidad and Tobago what this Government has done and why they made the right decision on the 7th of September, 2015, in electing a PNM Government. [*Desk thumping*]

Perhaps I could start, Madam Speaker, it was very interesting to hear the hon. Leader of the Opposition talk about forex leakage and the disappearance of foreign exchange. The first point to be made is, Trinidad and Tobago does not print United States dollars—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Or pound sterling.

Hon. S. Young: Or pound sterling. Quite interestingly, I will come to the pound sterling, shortly, Madam Speaker. Trinidad and Tobago and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, and the people of Trinidad and Tobago only earn foreign exchange from the oil and gas, or the majority of it is earned from the oil and gas industry and the payment of taxes and royalties. [*Crosstalk*] I hear “duppy”—I mean, the Member for Naparima—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Charles: Madam Speaker, 48(4), I will not be called “duppy”. [*Continuous desk thumping and laughter*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Laventille West, please. Members, all Members on both sides—Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, if you could just withdraw that statement. I also want to caution all Members, at 12.46

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maybe there is something happening with our sugar levels. Let us take that into consideration, and I advise all Members to take caution. Please, do the honourable. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Young: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I withdraw the use of the word “duppy” with reference to the Member for Naparima. [*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Princes Town, I just advised about our sugar levels. I will excuse all of that on the basis of our sugar levels. Please get it under control. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, as the Whip, I expect you know better. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Young: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. They say empty barrels make the most noise. Madam Speaker, starting with—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: I would like us to get back on even keel, please withdraw that comment. Continue with your valuable contribution.

Hon. S. Young: Withdrawn, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, back to the issue of foreign exchange, and in particular the leakage of foreign exchange. Madam Speaker, it is quite interesting that the Member for Siparia who was telling us about the leakage of foreign exchange, but the population of Trinidad and Tobago should know that out of the Office of the Prime Minister, and in particular during the months of August and September, 2015, there seemed to be quite a lot of leakage of foreign exchange, and in particular pound sterling in that office, going from the office of Prime Minister to different places abroad. Pound sterling leaking out of the Office of the Prime Minister in August and September, 2015.

The next thing we would like to talk about, I found it very interesting, I was reading an article in today’s *Newsday*, Madam Speaker, and it talks about, was it a loan or campaign financing, and involving a person by the name of Krishna Lalla and another person by the name of Jack Warner. We are talking about leakage of foreign exchange, in particular there was leakage of foreign exchange, millions of United States dollars being leaked out of Trinidad and Tobago by persons, two accounts in the British Virgin Islands and then making its way to Panama. I saw a video conferencing taking place from Panama in this particular matter. So I was wondering when there was this discussion about debt repayment and loan repayments, I was wondering if that is what they were referring to, Madam Speaker. So, Madam Speaker, just to bring it back now, foreign exchange is earned from oil and gas. Once again, Madam Speaker, they like to mislead, and foreign exchange is earned from oil and gas.

The hon. Minister of Finance started his presentation this morning by reminding the country—this is factual, this is not fiction or false news, spinning of wheels here, there, or anywhere, factually in 2014 Trinidad and Tobago earned over \$20 billion in oil and gas revenue. In the year 2014 they earned over \$20 billion in oil and gas revenue. In 2016, Madam Speaker, that figure dropped to below \$1 billion, meaning those are facts. So no matter how they have pre-prepared speeches, and they come here and they try to mislead the population, the facts speak for themselves. Madam Speaker, the energy industry, unfortunately, just before the election, at the then Leader of the Opposition's office, we were being informed that the energy sector was not all that it was being made out to be in the years 2010 and 2015. And, in particular, there was a lot of desperation and a lot of concern about curtailment issues taking place in the energy sector. No matter what noise is made, no matter what former Ministers go and find themselves on television, on radio, elsewhere, and try to explain to the population what it is they did and did not do, the facts speak for themselves.

Madam Speaker, the energy industry, and in Trinidad and Tobago in particular we have oil and we have gas. Just to deal with oil very briefly, we are dealing with this massive entity called Petrotrin, again, between the years 2010 and 2015 absolutely nothing was done with Petrotrin to make it a more manageable entity, make it a more profitable entity, to reduce its debt, to reduce its expenditure. This Government, recognizing immediately upon assumption into office, the importance of Petrotrin, and in particular the importance that Petrotrin plays in our sovereign risk and in all faculties of Trinidad and Tobago, immediately set about to appoint a specific committee under the former Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, Selwyn Lashley, to go in and to assess Petrotrin. As an all-embracing composition of that team, we even had members of the union participating on it. They came back to the Government, to the Cabinet subcommittee on energy and told us, look, these are the areas you need to focus on, this is what you need to do to address Petrotrin. The Government then took the decision to appoint a very specific board, a board that has the financial capabilities, the capabilities in oil production, in refining, et cetera, put them to work. And very shortly that board would report to the population of Trinidad and Tobago, and in particularly through the Joint Select Committee on energy and tell the population of Trinidad and Tobago what is going on with respect to the reconstitution and rebuilding of Petrotrin to make it a viable entity. That is not "ole talk", that is not false news, it is a fact, and it will be presented to the population of Trinidad and Tobago.

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So it now comes to the gas side of Trinidad and Tobago, and when we came in, Madam Speaker, what the population should be aware of is gas contracts, both from upstream, and upstream means those who go into the ground and produce the gas molecules and bring it up for sale—both the Atlantic LNG, and this rest of the downstream industry in Point Lisas, those are the contracts for upstream. You have bp, EOG, Shell and BHP as the major players. And on the downstream you have a host of ammonia, urea, and other producers in methanol, et cetera. Those contracts are very complex contracts, and any Government doing what is best for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, and in particular are trying to attain the best revenue levels of Trinidad and Tobago would negotiate those contracts at a time when they are not close to expiry, or have not expired. So you have a very stable playing field and a very stable table upon which to bargain and negotiate.

What did we find? Immediately upon assumption into office we had persons coming to us to say, the former Government had agreed something called CGCL, and in particular to provide gas to CGCL by taking it away from those who had invested in Trinidad and Tobago for the last few decades. They introduced something called a Green Field gas policy. The citizens of Trinidad and Tobago were never told of the introduction of this Green Field Policy. What it immediately meant is that persons would have claims against the Government and NGC for being treated differently, and for being treated in a manner that was not positive to them.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

We looked at the CGCL contract and realized that the public servants had put in writing in red-ink pen and were being pressured—and I remind the country—they were being pressured on the day of elections of the 7th of September, 2015, to give the final sign off, that is the Attorney General’s opinion. The public servants, Mr. Deputy Speaker, had said, in writing, and saw it fit to put it in red writing, there were certain elements of this deal that were not beneficial to Trinidad and Tobago and would actually equate to claims being made against Trinidad and Tobago. We immediately began to renegotiate that deal. And, in fact, what is was interesting, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if I remember correctly, the then Minister of Finance had actually told the then Minister of Energy in writing that some of these conditions were not going to be favourable to Trinidad and Tobago. The then Minister of Energy ignored that and was trying to force the deal to be finally consummated through the Office of the Attorney General on the day of elections, the 7th of September, 2015.

This Government took the difficult decision, went to the Government of Japan, the Japanese JBIC Bank, and to the Mitsubishi Group, and we thank them here today, because unlike what those on the other side like to say, and all the naysayers in saying, you cannot go and renegotiate contracts, it will run persons from Trinidad and Tobago, no international foreign investment will come here; we have experienced the exact opposite. [*Desk thumping*] The standing committee on energy sent a small team lead by myself, we went to Japan, we sat down with Mitsubishi. We sat down with the Government of Japan and we renegotiated a deal that is now beneficial to the people of Trinidad and Tobago and leads to us eradicating billions of dollars in claims. [*Desk thumping*] That was done immediately. The next issue we faced was the issue of curtailment of gas. All along we were being told there was maintenance taking place; not truth. Not true. The up-streams had gas contracts expiring. NGC and the up-streamers, bp and EOG had locked horns. It was not moving anywhere.

If that had continued, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it would have meant the complete collapse of the gas-based industry of Trinidad and Tobago, and all of the plants in Point Lisas, some who at that time had already filed billions of dollars of claims against the NGC would have collapsed and had to leave, because there was no gas contract for Trinidad and Tobago beyond a certain point. The Government then had done nothing. They had not renegotiated a single upstream gas contract. They had not renegotiated a single downstream contract. In fact, downstream contracts had expired since 2013 and 2014, and those on the other side were rolling them over month by month and not participating in the renegotiation. What was interesting, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is this was NGC. We have stood here in Parliament, we have stood outside of Parliament, we know between the years 2010 and 2015 NGC was bled of \$12 billion to \$14 billion in cash. So they were only focused on how to spend money. We know where some of that money was spent, on recreational grounds, in certain constituencies at cost that it should have been \$2 million, they spent \$12 billion. So rather than focus, Mr. Deputy Speaker, rather than focus on the renegotiation of downstream contracts and ensuring that NGC had upstream gas—[*Interruption*] I am hearing a lot of noise but I am trying to ignore it, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So let the people of Trinidad and Tobago know that is what we faced. [*Crosstalk*]

1.00 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, please. I would like to hear the Member in silence. Proceed.

Hon. S. Young: So on the energy side, immediately this Government set about renegotiating and negotiating contracts with both the upstream and the downstream. We have heard a lot of noise. I heard the hon. Member for Siparia ask, what is it that the hon. Prime Minister, the Member for Diego Martin West, come back with from these trips. That trip in Houston of last year and in March of last year, we were stuck, and if that was not unstuck, they on that side had placed this country in a position where we would have had no future gas supply for a downstream industry beyond 2018.

The Prime Minister went, led a very small team. We had all of the technocrats on the line with us, and we are happy to say once again, that we secured gas supply at prices, [*Desk thumping*] from 2019 going forward into the future, which then allowed this country to continue in discussions with downstream. Again, they painted us into a position, into corners with the downstream industry. The whole economics of gas supply has changed, so we are now called upon to negotiate with all of these downstreamers, and we had to do that in very difficult circumstances, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

So again, what have we achieved? We have achieved upstream gas contracts, gas prices and gas supply going forward from 2019 into the future. On the downstream side, for the first time, something that they could not achieve for five years, we have achieved the settling of billions of dollars in claims, and we have also achieved the signing of new contracts in the downstream industry. [*Desk thumping*]

Let it be said that those on the other side cost this country billions of dollars in claims because of their lack of effort, their lack of diligence, their lack of responsibility and duty. But what they were good at was spending the money; spending the \$12 billion at NGC, rather than making sure they were not put into a claims position.

We heard briefly from the Member for Diego Martin North/East talk about gas production. I actually think his figures are quite conservative. He talked about us getting back up to 3.7/3.9 at the end of this year. I actually think we will cross four billion TCF at the end of this year, because there are a number of projects that are going on that we will hear about very shortly. Again, those projects are taking place and secured, because of the relationship that this Government, at the level of the Office of the Prime Minister, has taken the time to rebuild—and I use that language very carefully—to rebuild and to ensure that there is a future energy and energy industry and sector in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the issue of CLF and Clico. I think it is worthwhile reminding the population about CLF and Clico. In 2009 it was felt by the then government that they needed to intervene and bail out CLF and Clico, because of the effect it would have on the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. Very shortly thereafter, that government was removed from office. You had a government there from 2010 to 2015, five years and three months, and up to this day you had two Ministers of Finance under that government say, “dey fix CLF and Clico”.

I want the people of Trinidad and Tobago to understand something. It was during that period of time, the debt owed to the taxpayers and citizens of Trinidad and Tobago by the CLF and Clico Group, was over \$23 billion and not a single shred of security was provided over the assets. What that means, and we have seen now the evidence that the UNC-led Government was advised by the lawyers and advised by the financial advisors, they should have securitized that debt of \$23 billion. They did absolutely nothing about it. What that means, citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, is that we as taxpayers were owed \$23 billion by two private companies in the majority, and we did not have anything covering that debt.

We did not have any mortgage. We did not have any debenture, we had nothing. The shareholders continued to not provide security to us, the taxpayers. So at any point in time they could have launched an action, taken back their assets, as they—

Hon. Member: As they did.

Hon. S. Young: And I will come to that. So the important point is for five years three months they were advised securitize the debt, which simply means, get them to agree that we can hold the assets for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. They did nothing about it. They did absolutely nothing about it.

When we came in as a government, immediately the shareholders set about trying to regain their assets, and through a—I do not want to say “surreptitious ways”—without paying back the debt. They wanted us, the custodians of the taxpayers’ money, to just hand the assets back to them. You know what hurt, Mr. Deputy Speaker? That two former Ministers who were actually at the table when intervention decision was taking place, then rushed to advise the shareholders how to take these assets back from the people of Trinidad and Tobago without repaying a cent to Trinidad and Tobago.

So what did we have to do then? This Government had the political will and had—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence!

Hon. S. Young: This political administration had the will, the wherewithal, the intellect—maybe that is what was lacking—as well as the fortitude, to take on the shareholders. The shareholders were about to appoint two new directors. They would have more directors than the Government’s directors. That government refused, point-blank refused, to secure the \$23 billion owed to Trinidad and Tobago. We were being told that they would not provide that security, they would not provide the piece of paper, and we fought it and we went to court. “All de senior counsel dey had in their Cabinet, all de senior counsel they gave themselves and otherwise”, they did not have the intellect or the fortitude to go to court and to liquidate CLF, and this Government did that. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: And they said we could not do it.

Hon. S. Young: And it was being said by them—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, Members, I will not tolerate—Member for Siparia, I will not tolerate the outbursts across the floor, please. Proceed.

Hon. S. Young: Thank you very much.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, hold on. Member for Naparima, please. I did not ask for a feedback. Member, you proceed.

Hon. S. Young: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I know it pains them, because this is the first Government, the first administration that had the will and perhaps the moral authority [*Desk thumping*] to protect taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago. That is why today we continue to recover the billions of dollars owed to the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago without the threat of the shareholders taking it from us.

When we went into court, the debt at that time was between 15 and \$17 billion, and it was unsecured and we continued to recover it from the people of Trinidad and Tobago. They also never told the population of Trinidad and Tobago that they entered into private deals. They entered into private deals with certain public listed companies, not to put anybody on the board. How could you protect the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago by entering into private deals where you have no governance over some of these public entities?

Hon. Member: Ask Siparia that.

Hon. S. Young: This Government will not do that. This Government will ensure that the taxpayers are protected by all means legally necessary. [*Desk thumping*]

Another thing that this Government has done, and the unpatriotic voices and noises and the false news have rushed to attack, and I have realized—sitting here today I realize that there are some in this country who do not want what is best for Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] There are some in this country who will go to any lengths and utilize anything necessary to destroy Trinidad and Tobago. And whilst this Government is in place we will not allow that. [*Desk thumping*]

I put the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago on warning. Look very closely at what is happening, what has happened and what will happen. Listen carefully to who says what. Listen carefully who objects to a revenue authority, listen carefully who objects to following the money legislation. Listen carefully to who objects to explain your wealth. Listening carefully to those who take objection to us entering into international treaties to say who has what in what account. Those are the people who are out to destroy this great country of ours—unpatriotic behaviour.

You hear a lot of noise, Mr. Deputy Speaker, about diversification. You hear a lot of pundits and punters who want to tell us how to diversify the economy. The single largest Fortune 500 brand that is home-grown in the Caribbean is an entity called “Sandals”. There is only one Sandals. There is only one Beaches. They are recognized as being the best in class in the world. Again, rather than be proud of our Caribbean heritage, they want to go and say, “Do not go with Sandals. How yuh reach with Sandals?” You know this country has never asked them how they reach with OAS, and perhaps that is a question we should ask. [*Desk thumping*]

The single largest corruption scandal in this world is OAS. Presidents in Brazil have gone to jail because of OAS, and let them on that side explain to us on the 4th of September, 2015, the deal they got into with OAS. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence!

Hon. S. Young: And I will remind the country. The single largest corruption scandal in the world—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, please, I will not tolerate the crosstalk. Each Member will have their opportunity. Each Member will have their opportunity.

Hon. S. Young: They have the gall, they have the audacity to ask why we are borrowing money, why we are taking measures to stabilize an economy. Let me remind the people of Trinidad and Tobago of this: the single largest corruption scandal in the world is what happened in OAS in Brazil. It has brought down the government of Brazil. There has been so much corruption, they actually had a percentage of their revenue dedicated to bribes.

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So let me tell the people of Trinidad and Tobago how that is relevant—and the Member for Oropouche East is “ra ra raaing” as usual. You know how it is relevant? Mr. Deputy Speaker, \$7 billion in cash—\$7 billion in cash—was utilized by that government to give to OAS. You know why? If you go for international financing, there is oversight. They will want to know how every cent is paid. And if that was not bad enough, on the 4th of September, 2015, the last working day before a general election, they signed a deal with OAS to let OAS out of the bag, off the hook and that taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago could not terminate OAS, a company that had already crashed, was in bankruptcy and the subject of the single largest corruption scandal and investigation in the world.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, your initial 30 minutes have expired. You have an additional 15, do you care to avail yourself?

Hon. S. Young: Yes please, Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

Hon. S. Young: So let us understand that that is who they wanted to do business with, but this Government has chosen for the people of Tobago the single largest and best brand in hotels, born and bred in the Caribbean, Sandals, [*Desk thumping*] and we will accept no criticism for that. We will not take on any unpatriotic talk, because we will ensure that Sandals is built in Tobago for the people of Tobago, who they have ignored.

Another area to just talk on very quickly is the area of corruption. So let us listen and hear where the noise comes from now. The area of corruption and what this Government has done about corruption that is unprecedented in all previous governments. First of all—the Member for Couva South, first one—allow me to remind the people of Trinidad and Tobago, constitutionally the only people who can investigate and charge for criminal activity is the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, and we will come to that shortly as well. And then the Director of Public Prosecutions—the Member for Oropouche East is making noise; the Member for Naparima is making noise. Listen on carefully, people of Trinidad and Tobago, because we are talking about corruption.

Dr. Moonilal: And paying ransom.

Hon. S. Young: The DPP and the TTPS—[*Interruption*] you will be paying bail.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, again. [*Crosstalk*] Members again, each Member will have the opportunity, right. The Member has 13 more minutes to complete his discourse. Please, let us listen in silence.

Hon. S. Young: So we are dealing with corruption and the issue of corruption. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I remind the people of Trinidad and Tobago that criminal charges are handled by the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. But did we as a government throw our hands up in the air? No. What we did is we went and found the best in class, international investigators, forensic auditors and lawyers. Sat very quietly and did a tremendous amount of work, and those matters have now been filed in the court, matters on behalf, not of this administration, but on behalf of the citizens, the law-abiding citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

We have followed the money, we have done the investigations, we have passed that information to the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service.

Dr. Moonilal: “Paying de ransom”.

Hon. S. Young: I hear the Member for Oropouche East making a lot noise. He is a defendant in one of those matters. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: Cause and effect.

Mr. Lee: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 14(4) and (6). Let him discuss—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled, proceed.

Hon. S. Young: Thank you very much. Everything I say is the truth, you know. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, again citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, listen carefully from now going all the way in at those who make the most noise when issues of corruption are raised, when issues about the Revenue Authority are raised, when issues of following the money are raised, when issues of explain your wealth are raised. Those are the persons we must look at.

This Government has tackled corruption. This Government has gone after the elements of corruption. This Government has made it very clear that it will not tolerate corruption in the award of contracts.

This Government has been faced with billions of dollars in claims by contractors, and we have been trying to protect the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago. But you know what we found? That documents do not exist. When we go to defend these cases, all of these contracts being awarded between the period 2010 and 2015, the documents in support do not exist. In fact, some of the procurement documents, you have four of the same tenders, four of the tenders with the same handwriting for different entities being put in. When we go now

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and we try to find the documentation supporting the work being done, it does not exist. But what exist are certificates signed by people—signed by people—who may have certain connections, saying that work was done, but no single document behind that, and that is what they are using to support their claims, not against this Government, not against the PNM, but against the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

What we have done is we have stood up and we faced it frontally, and we have said that we will do what we can for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, and there is no deal cutting here. There is nobody here saying, “I will give you the cheque if you give me a per cent”. That has not happened here, but that may have happened previously. That is something that this Government is not going to tolerate. [*Desk thumping*]

They talk about that overdraft, and again this is a prime great example of an attempt to mislead the population of Trinidad and Tobago. We just heard it said on the other side that legally the overdraft is supposed to be 10 per cent.

Mr. Indarsingh: I never had a write-off from ADB.

Hon. S. Young: We heard it said that it was supposed to be 10 per cent. We came to this Parliament with the participation of maybe some on the other side. My recollection is there was no objection by the other side and we raised the percentage of the overdraft in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: I said so.

Hon. S. Young: I will tell you something: anytime I stand up here and I say somebody has broken the law, I guarantee Trinidad and Tobago I have evidence that those people have broken the law. [*Desk thumping*] So we have some on the other side talking about breaking the law. There is no breaking of the law taking place by this Government with respect to the overdraft. [*Crosstalk*] The overdraft ceiling was lifted. We have now a 20 per cent—by Parliament, by Parliament—so once again the people who should know best, the people go who can vote on it—[*Crosstalk and interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence!

Hon. S. Young: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I can stand here today, and unlike what was just said and telling the population that the overdraft was maxed out and that we have exceeded the overdraft, which is the exact words that the Member for Siparia used—today the overdraft in Trinidad and Tobago being managed by this

Government stands at 77.8 per cent. How is that breaking the law? These are the facts. So people of Trinidad and Tobago, if that is what is being spurned and put forward by those on the other side, ignore them.

Mr. Imbert: Shame on you!

Hon. S. Young: If that comes from the highest level, ignore them, because when we say things on this side the facts are there, the supporting documentation is there and everything is there.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: The documents are here too; the Auditor General's Report.

Hon. S. Young: That is the documents you get from "duppy". [*Laughter*]

Mr. Imbert: That is last year.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members! Members! Member! Again, when this Member is finished with his discourse we will be proceeding on lunch. If anyone is desirous of having an early lunch, feel free to proceed. Members, do not let the Speaker have the authority in order to send you or anyone on both sides for an early lunch. Right? Proceed.

Hon. S. Young: Thank you very much, Deputy Speaker. We on this side today tell the population of Trinidad and Tobago, unreservedly and proudly, that there is growth. That everything the Minister of Finance has told Trinidad and Tobago this morning is true, and there is positivity and there is hope for Trinidad and Tobago, and we will continue to work night and day. I can tell you something, because I have been privileged enough to be asked by the hon. Prime Minister to accompany him on some of these trips and visits. [*Crosstalk and laughter*]

Dr. Moonilal: "He cyar go without you."

Hon. S. Young: And unlike what we are told that happened previously, it is only work taking place here. [*Desk thumping*] I have had not a single Head of any government in this world whatsoever, say anything negative about the Member for Diego Martin West. But I remember being very embarrassed going to Jamaica in that year that Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago celebrated 50 years of independence, and walking into the Jamaica immigration hall and seeing all the pride that Jamaica had a few weeks after their celebration. And the immigration officer when she saw my passport, asking me if I was from Trinidad, I said yes

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with a sense of pride. She reminded me, and it brought great embarrassment to me, that what had happened with the Trinidad and Tobago delegation in Jamaica in that year, and how they had embarrassed Trinidad and Tobago.

You have had not one single report of that type of behaviour here. [Interruption] Again, the noise. So we reject the “Kamlanomics”—economics. We reject the false news. We reject the lies. In fact it was interesting, they just held up a document. “Dey say, ‘Look it here’.” And I will tell the population of Trinidad and Tobago, we are in 2018 and they were referring to an outdated report, the 2017 Auditor General’s Report. We will send you the new report.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank the people of Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West for the opportunity to continue to contribute on their behalves. We give the assurance on this side that there will be no false news. We have delivered in our term the hard and the difficult news, we do not shy away from it. The important point that I conclude with is we came in under difficult circumstances, a revenue dropping from \$20 billion to under \$1 billion. We have held the economy together, stabilized the economy. Despite what they talk about unemployment, it is—[Interruption] Unemployment is 5 per cent. Inflation is 1 per cent, which is a record, [Crosstalk and desk thumping] and there have been no allegations against this Government about going out and hiring persons who are not qualified, who do not come to work, and who are being paid for not doing anything.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with those few words, I tell the people of Trinidad and Tobago that you are in good hands, and may God continue to bless our country.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, it is now 1.26. We will break for lunch and resume at 2.30 p.m.

1.26 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

2.30 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni Central.

Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie (*Caroni Central*): [Desk thumping] Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I take this opportunity to make a contribution to the debate on this Bill, “an Act to supplement and vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2018) Act, 2017”.

The Leader of the Opposition when she spoke addressed frontally the strategy of the Minister of Finance and to some extent the Government as a whole in coming into office in 2015 portraying a picture of totally depleted finances, addressing the issue of the lower production of oil and gas and the lower prices, and using that as justification for a very bleak and stressful economic and set of financial impositions on the population. And then taking the opportunity now, with the production of natural gas that is becoming clear and evident to say that they had in fact held good stewardship of the finances and the economy, and that we were now reaping the benefits of that because of their good work.

And the Leader of the Opposition tried to show that, in fact, the picture was not as rosy as the Minister of Finance was claiming, that a lot of the good work that had resulted in the increase in gas production had, in fact, been done under the People's Partnership. [*Desk thumping*]

And secondly, that the bleak picture that they presented to the population after we demitted office was a narrative that they wove in order to get to this point because when they came in office in 2015, this rise in the production of gas, if not the rise in prices, would have been predicted. It would have been a known quantity. It would have been anticipated.

And she made that argument and I want say that, you know, in a court of law the objective is to deliver justice based on the examination of the facts of evidence, and in court each person being cross-examined is required to take an oath swearing to tell the truth. If you do not tell the truth and you are found out, I mean, there is something called perjury. The judge or the magistrate determines the guilt or innocence and they direct against any distractions. If there is a jury trial, the peers on jury get involved. If there is plea bargaining then the admission is that perhaps you would not get full justice, but you would settle for what is possible and then, of course, there is the press reports and then there is the court of public opinion, and people decide that, well, the verdict was fair or not. But that is public opinion.

Against this background therefore, it is useful to examine the run up to this presentation of this mid-year review, and I want to say, coming as it is now, two and a half years into the term of this Government, it is now a mid-term review as well. And as the duty requires us to examine the context, as well as the content, but because the House of Representatives consists of a body of men and women who represent others and who represent the public interest, we also have an obligation, Madam Speaker, to address the impact on our constituency or constituents, the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and particular segments of the economy as well.

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So, I want to say before I proceed that—I know that the hon. Prime Minister is proceeding to China, and I read in the newspapers yesterday that he had made some remarks about local contractors indicating that they had to step their game up because he was suggesting that the quality of their work, the level at which they function was perhaps not as acceptable as they should be.

And I want to say as a representative of the people on behalf of the contractors, and to the Prime Minister in good faith, that I hope his visit to China will not result in contractors in Trinidad and Tobago not being able to benefit from any projects that take place in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

The second set of people that I wish to bring into this picture are the homeowners in this country especially those who own homes that are being administered by the HDC. Many people are under economic and financial pressure now because they have either lost their jobs or they are stressed in the marketplace and have difficulty managing things and some of them managing their mortgages.

But I want to make a plea on behalf three sets of people who hold mortgages with the HDC. These are pensioners who get an income of about \$3,500, people who are on public assistance who get an income of about \$1,800, and people with disabilities who get an income of about \$1,150. And I want say to that sometimes it is just impossible for these people to be able to meet their obligations with HDC. I do not think that any Government should take the position that, well if they cannot meet it, they should not have a roof over their heads.

So the question I want to raise and I want put forward is that: Can we find a solution to make sure that these people are able to stay in their homes? I do not advocate that people should not pay, but certainly we could find a formula that would allow these people to stay within their homes. And I want to make the case and I want to make the position, whatever it takes to be reasonable to make it possible. I am not saying \$100 a month. [*Crosstalk*] No. Some of them pay more than that. Some of them pay \$800, \$1,000, \$600 and, you know, I mean we could find a solution.

The other issue, the other group of people that I want to take into account are the small business people, small and medium enterprises in this country. I think the Minister of Finance made a concession in his presentation by talking about many of the manufacturers as small and medium businesses. And I want to say to small and medium enterprises, generally, I wonder if the Minister might consider he has what you might call differences or different bands of taxation already in

this country from 35 per cent to banks, 30 per cent, et cetera, and I think that while it might not be at this point prudent to carry out what the hon. Leader of the Opposition said, which is to say, she advocates a policy of lower taxes for everybody so that businesses could prosper, but certainly in the current context I think small and medium businesses could benefit from lower taxes in this country.

And the Minister said that his taxes are going up. I think the most important thing for him would be to expand the net of people who actually pay rather than raise the taxes, and this might give them a break and perhaps they could be linked as well to the Eximbank and to a plan for export production as part of their strategy. That may not include every small and medium enterprise, but it could improve and include a number of enterprises that are in the private sector that are small and that are medium in size, some of them family businesses.

I want to say that another group of people that need to be spoken for are the tertiary educated in this country who have just graduated or who have graduated over the last few years. [*Desk thumping*] We saw a situation recently in which the doctors were talking about the fact that they could not get jobs. And I know doctors now are taking short contracts for two months or three months, if somebody is gone they could replace those people. And I am not only talking about doctors though, we do have a problem with young graduates, and these people need to have the opportunity to think about building a family, getting married, getting into home ownership, et cetera, and I believe that these people need to be addressed as a special category in this country.

I want to also include in terms of my representation the middle class of this country. They are under severe pressure now. Middle class is not what it used to be. People are under pressure to put their children through school. They are under pressure to pay their mortgages. They are under pressure in the marketplace, in the groceries, everywhere they have to cut, here, there and everywhere. And I want to say that this middle-class pressure is something that the Government needs into take account.

The working poor is in a worse position, because this is not a market in which the workers have a choice anymore. The employers may have a choice because there is a larger pool of workers from which to draw, but the workers do not have a choice. They are afraid to lose their jobs. They are in difficulty. They have to stretch the dollar beyond where it can go, and they are in real problems. And therefore, we need to take into account and pay attention to the working poor so that they can live a decent life.

And finally, the jobless poor and the vulnerable who are always the people that one must be most concerned with in a society. No matter how prosperous a society is, no matter how unprosperous it might be at any point in time, one cannot ignore the very poor and the vulnerable, and they must be taken into account in such a way that they can live, that they can survive, that they can have some kind of individual sustainability and for their families.

And therefore, I mentioned these categories of people, the contractors, the homeowners, especially those on very small incomes, small business, tertiary educated youth, the middle class, the working poor, the jobless poor and the vulnerable, as citizens of this country that we need to pay attention to.

Now, the Minister of Finance when he presented his statement here today he used statistics, he used numbers, and he did provide the economic data and information. But he presented here more a political speech in a way, than—it was financial in many respects, but it was more political, and in terms of giving us what you might call security about the economy, I do not think it was strong or convincing this morning here before the Parliament, and I do not think it will convince many people outside as well.

He started off this narrative though at a partisan political meeting in Diego Martin, where he said, where he announced an economic turnaround, that was perhaps a month, a month and a half ago. Then he changed that statement a little bit to “turning the corner”, and then, of course, the IMF’s downward revision came and then, the Standard & Poor’s assessment of the state of the economy, the adequacy of the Rowley Government’s action to date and the implication for future trends in the economy, that also came out; and when that happened he stepped up his narrative. He stepped up his narrative to say that, in fact, there was growth. He used his own figures from the Ministry of Finance, from the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, et cetera, and his assertions became, I think, more forceful.

Then there was the issue of the distraction involving the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries where he had to get up and basically claim ownership of a mistake. And I have no reason to say that the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries are not honourable men, in fact, I am sure they are. But it does not give us comfort when we have situations like that disputed by the international agencies that are meant to monitor and give security to us when we see the numbers.

And therefore, this morning, or this afternoon now, I feel that we are in some difficulty in taking the numbers and the statements and the claims, and the upbeat tempo of the Minister's presentation seriously, not because we love bad news, I wish everything that you said was true hon. Minister. [*Desk thumping*] I wish that we were in a period of growth. I wish that we, in fact, would see the non-energy sector begin to boom together with the energy sector. I wish we would create more jobs. I wish that we would have confidence to have investment. But the Minister himself and all the Ministers and representatives on the other side know that that is not true. [*Desk thumping*] What we do have is an increase in the amount of gas that we are producing and the price is now up, so that there is a temporary and limited increase. And I want to explain a little bit about it, Madam Speaker.

The energy has, in fact, increased and that was anticipated production. We also have higher prices and that is as a result of luck. It is the international movement of prices to which we have always been subjected. But all of this is limited; it is temporary. We cannot bank on this, Madam Speaker, for our long-term future. We need new investment in natural gas drilling, and that is the issue that I want to stress. We need new investment in natural gas drilling. [*Desk thumping*] Even with Sercan, TROC, Juniper, Angelin, eventually Savannah and Macadamia, they will not provide enough gas to meet the maximum demand of 4.4 million standard cubic feet per day.

Now, I say on purpose because I heard both the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, I did not hear the Minister of Finance say this, talk about numbers over 4 million standard cubic feet, but not as high as 4.4, and that is part of the issue because the production that we have now will reach close to that and begin to decline. I heard the Minister of Finance say that it will increase until 2023. Did I hear right, Minister of Finance?

Mr. Imbert: And beyond.

Dr. B. Tewarie: And the information that is available from the gas supplies from the fields already paid for, so to speak, that is not going to take us higher up to after 2019. And there is an issue, which is to say that it will peak at 2019 and begin to taper off thereafter. And I want to warn the Minister of Finance— [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*] No. No. I want to warn the Minister of Finance out of patriotic duty, contrary to what [*Desk thumping*] the Member of— [*Crosstalk*] No. No. Sorry. The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, contrary to what he was suggesting, out of patriotic duty, I want to warn, not only is this short term

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and temporary, but it will peak in 2019, it will not keep moving up after that, and we should be concerned about it. So the good news might not be so good news after all.

So the best that we can say about the good news is that we have gotten a natural gas boost. I concede that. But that was due to the decisions between 2011 and 2014 as the Leader of the Opposition pointed out. And those decisions made sure of that, and it was anticipated, but this boost is both limited and temporary.

So, we must get on with the job, Madam Speaker, both in the energy sector and in the non-energy sector because we have a little more gas and a little more cash flow, but we are still in a bad place and it requires work and action and a clear plan to get us there.

And I want to say, managing the economy is more than cash flow, and management of Government business is less than management of the nation's business. I want to point out those two things because what is required of the Government is management of the economy, not just the cash flow. And what is required of the Government is to manage the nation's business, not just Government business.

So our energy, our non-energy sector, Madam Speaker, is in steep decline and the numbers for this sector continue to decline further, and no amount of high energy assertions by the Minister of Finance is going to change that reality right now. [*Desk thumping*]

Let me remind the citizens of this country that the decline for the whole economy was minus 6 per cent in 2016. It was minus 2.3 last year, and it is now projected by the IMF as 0.9 per cent for 2018.

I will not argue about projected growth figures because they could change. We will know at the end of the year. But the Minister of Finance has given us his own figures, reported he has said 1.5 to 1.8, and he bases this on numbers from the Ministry of Finance.

Now, the Minister of Finance has admonished this House on several occasions that the only official source of statistics is the Central Statistical Office. I remember once in 2014 we brought a *Review of the Economy* here where the CSO was slow in the determination of the GDP for that year. And the Minister of Finance used numbers from the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries and the Central Bank. And the Minister of Finance, then a Member of Parliament here, went to town on the Minister of Finance for using

figures that were not CSO figures. I cannot imagine on what basis he can pull figures out of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries and the Ministry of Finance and come here and tell us that we can expect such and such a growth during the course of 2018. [*Desk thumping*]

Now, what we have here is an attempt by the Minister of Finance to make things seem better than they are. And I want to concede, Madam Speaker, that the gas is more, that the price is higher, and in terms of cash flow, we are better off, but it is not the story that the Minister of Finance is telling. He wants to make things better than they are and that is the source of the problem, because it is not just the IMF and Standard & Poor's, but business leaders, business leaders both big and small.

I just looked at my WhatsApp here in one of the things and a couple of people from the business sector sent me WhatsApp to tell me that they heard the Minister of Finance and they find the rosy picture somewhat incredible. All right? They are hoping, of course, that he is right. And like me, they would like to see the economy move from decline into growth, but they know in their heart, they know by instinct that this information could not possibly reflect the reality.

So business leaders big and small, "doh" talk about the poor and the vulnerable, they cannot understand what the Minister is talking about. The working class, the middle class, every citizen knows very well what the situation is.

So the Minister started by saying that what he was about today was to show that they were achieving two things that they had set out to do; repairing the damage to our fiscal accounts and, again, I want to concede that there has been some reduction in expenditure. He gives us some information today which suggests that there has been increase in revenue. I wait to see what the numbers will be at the end of the year before I make a final judgment on that. So, I will concede that something is happening there, but he talks about reinvigorating the economy and revitalising the energy sector. Madam Speaker, nothing is further from the truth.

He has not revised the energy sector. There is nothing that that Government has done that is the cause of the revitalization of the sector now which is simply energy growth, production growth and higher prices outside. And I will deal a little bit based on what the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West says, and there is absolutely no reinvigoration of the economy outside of the energy sector whatsoever.

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So, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, I will deal only with the areas that he mentioned that I think are worth dealing with because they relate to the energy sector, and they relate to some of the issues that have to do with governance and the conduct of government business.

The Minister mentioned the upstream gas contract which we left in abeyance he said, and they had to go and sign it. I do not know if the Member is referring to the contract between NGC and bpTT, but that was due in 2018, Madam Speaker, and they, in fact, signed the contract in 2018. Maybe you could make the case that somebody should have signed it before, but why would you sign a contract in 2015 for 2018? And you have done your job. You have done your duty. 2018 came and you signed the contract, so there is no miracle there and there is reason to blame anybody there. The contract is signed, nobody did anything wrong, and you got the contract signed. That is a solution to the problem.

3.00 p.m.

The downstream gas contracts, well, yes, you have solved those issues. It took some time. You almost blew it, but eventually people sat down. [*Interruption*] Are you going to let me talk, or what? So, they took their time, they did what was required. What about the two methanol plants that are still down, involving disputes with Proman? Is that not something that also requires—is it settled?

Mr. Young: [*Inaudible*]

Dr. B. Tewarie: All right, well if you correct me, somebody else could always do that. And finally, he got the \$12 billion number for NGC right. Last time he came here, he said, 16 [*Desk thumping*] but, yes, he is right, it is 12, and the reason for that was very simple—which is that this was taken out in the year that NGC had its highest ever dividend in the history of the—[*Inaudible*] [*Continuous desk thumping*] And, Minister, did you not take it the year after 2016?

Mr. Young: Of course not.

Dr. B. Tewarie: Of course not. Let us go back to the books. Let us go back to the books, you will see that you took it out the next year. The same amount. [*Interruption*] Yes, so, you know, you must be careful what you say. [*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Caroni Central, your original 30 minutes are now spent, you are entitled to 15 more minutes, if you wish.

Dr. B. Tewarie: Thank you. Yes, I would like too. [*Interruption*] All right, well just because of that, I would not say anymore on this. I would not say anymore with the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Now, the Minister talked about non-energy growth, and I want to say that that is the real issue for Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] The biggest issue for Trinidad and Tobago, now that we are getting the benefits of the 2011/2014 decisions in the energy sector [*Laughter*] is that, one, we must have decisions that give us new investment in the energy sector. In 2009, the Ryder report said we had nine years of gas. Because of 2011/2014 decisions, we now have 20 years of gas, and what we need are decisions to give us another 30 years of gas in our own waters, and that means bringing negotiations to completion. And, we should not think about Venezuela at all. Nothing is happening in Venezuela until the Maduro situation is settled in Venezuela. [*Desk thumping*] But, let me tell you what is happening in the non-energy sector; agriculture, the decline in agriculture was minus 15.1 per cent in 2016, and minus 2.8 in 2017. I cannot get 2018 numbers. Where will I get 2018 numbers from—agriculture? You are the CSO— [*Continuous crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni Central, do not be distracted. Please!

Dr. B. Tewarie: Yes, sorry.

Madam Speaker: Do not be distracted.

Dr. B. Tewarie: The manufacturing—the decline in 2016 was minus 7.4. It was minus 9.4 in 2017, Madam Speaker. I do not know what the Minister is talking about.

Construction was minus 5.2 in 2016. It was minus 4.8 in 2017. Finance in insurance grew by 7.6 per cent in 2016, but only by 4 per cent in 2017. And despite the BPO's that he talked about with Scotiabank, it is very difficult to see how that financial sector is going to continue to grow without new inputs, new investment in it. The unemployment rate is now 5.3 and climbing, based on second quarter reports for 2017. The GDP has declined. He says that the GDP is rising now, and that will change the debt to GDP ratio. I will believe him when I see it, at the end of the year. So, I will not deal with the debt to GDP ratio. I think we still have a serious foreign exchange problem, notwithstanding what you say, but I will go on.

We have social challenge with the unemployment, the poverty, the loss of jobs. It is a real problem. And, we have a problem with the aversion to ideas as well, and independent thought. If you are a policymaker and a Member of

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Cabinet, Madam Speaker, and you know that gas will peak in 2019 for the period 2017 to 2022, and that it will not fully meet demand, as I just pointed out—I would think that would be a major source of worry, although with cooperation solutions can be found. This gas-given growth will take us to 2.1 per cent growth eventually, but for 2018, the non-energy sector will remain negative, as it will in 2019. So that I dispute, I dispute the Minister of Finance’s assertion that we are going to have non-energy growth. If we do nothing now in the non-energy sector, the economy’s current account balance will not improve. Borrowing will become the temptation of first resort—I want to warn. Rising interest payments and growth based on temporary gas, will only make it difficult to make our debt commitments. And, contrary to what they say, notwithstanding all the good news, we could still have the IMF at our door. There are therefore four urgent imperatives that I want to identify:

- Fiscal consolidation—like yesterday the Minister talked about that. I imagine he is in the process—
- Decisions to stimulate new energy investments now.
- Export earnings from diversification from non-energy sources.
- Import reduction and production geared towards import substitution.

And I noticed when the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West spoke, he did not mention the one big construction project we brought to this country in energy, which is the Mitsubishi project [*Desk thumping*] which will bring us downstream into—[*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Order!

Dr. B. Tewarie: I know when he went to Japan, and I do not want to deal with that, because last time he “geh” vex with me. And the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West—I “doh” like to quarrel with the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, and I “eh” want to unnecessarily get him upset. But, the truth is that we brought that investment. [*Desk thumping*].

Now, I have a short time and I will try to make one or two points before I go. The first thing I want to point out is that the capital expenditure trends in 2013/2014, we had \$8 billion; ’14, ’15, \$7 billion; 2015/2016, \$4 billion; 2016/2017, \$3 billion, and we have now reduced it by what we did here during the finance committee, by \$800 million. So, we have taken \$5.1 billion down, to

just over \$4.3 billion. And, one of the problems we have, is that you have investment neither in the private sector nor in the public sector, in fact—and this is a major source of difficulty. I mentioned the manufacturing figures already, so we will leave that for now.

So, Madam Speaker, these days, given the present economic circumstances, the financial challenges that most people face, and notwithstanding the good news and the buoyancy of its presentation by the Minister of Finance—these days one can see the strain on everyone's face, and one can see the drain of energy that subdues the human spirit in Trinidad and Tobago. No one has to make an effort to curb the enthusiasm of the ordinary citizen. Everywhere, enthusiasm of the citizen is curbed. [*Interruption*] Madam Speaker, these gentlemen in front of me are speaking all the time and disturbing me.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, please, let us respect the Standing Order, and allow the Member for Caroni Central to make his contribution. If people are having difficulty paying attention, I am sure they could exercise their attention otherwise and then revert here when they feel they can. Member for Caroni Central.

Dr. B. Tewarie: Thank you. The financial situation is improved, it is true, because of additional gas revenue in terms of cash flow. But the fundamental question is, will they spend it willy-nilly or will they put it in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, or take a decision to deploy it to productive purposes. It does not give us hope that they took the IDF money and put it in Recurrent Expenditure. Will they work out a plan of action? Do they know how to get out us out of the recession and re-stimulate the economy without the current gas flows? In other words, can other sectors of the economy be stimulated? The economy of Trinidad and Tobago, notwithstanding the good news of the Minister, is largely in shambles because confidence is shot—that is the main reason. And, because first of all, people cannot [*Desk thumping*] see any coherence in the Government's thinking.

People cannot, by and large, figure out: what the Government is doing, how they are going to do it, what difference it will make to their lives. And, the truth is that, as the Leader of the Opposition mentioned, it is not just the numbers, because you can—for instance, the Minister of Finance is telling me that I am reading 2017 numbers, and he has 2018 numbers. The last numbers we have for 2018, in this country, is from the Central Bank, in March. The Minister of Finance cannot appoint himself as Central Statistical Officer [*Desk thumping*] and give us information based on numbers that he dreams up or drums up in the Ministry of

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Finance and brings to us. And since that is an issue here, it raises the whole issue of the veracity of the numbers. [*Desk thumping*] And secondly, the value of any policy measures or any decisions that they are taking, based on those numbers.

Madam Speaker, I would like to say that I wished all the good news that the Minister mentioned was in fact true, because the country needs to come out of this recession. It needs to have growth. We need to bring confidence back. We need to have people invest both at home and abroad. We need—from abroad, I mean—into the country. We need to create jobs. We need to have buoyancy. And, most of all, we need to restructure the economy. We need to diversify and we need to have export growth, because it is only new sources of foreign exchange outside of energy, that will give this country sustainability. [*Desk thumping*] I want the Minister to understand that.

We have to have new sources of exports outside of energy, to give this country sustainability, and to build a sustainable economy. There is nothing that the Minister said today, nothing that is executed from the budget of 2018, and nothing that has been said also by the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, that gives me any confidence that such things are either being thought about, or being done, and as a consequence, I have no other alternative but to say to the population of this country: be sceptical about what you swallow in terms of information from the Government's side, because your best bet about what is happening in the country, is what you are actually feeling and experiencing in the economy of Trinidad and Tobago.

Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Many thanks, Madam Speaker. It is an absolute honour and pleasure to be a part of this Government, led by this Prime Minister, and having this Member for Diego Martin North/East as Minister of Finance. [*Desk thumping*] I am absolutely pleased that Dr. Keith Rowley as Prime Minister, and Mr. Colm Imbert as Minister of Finance, have resisted the temptation, over the past two and a half years, to implement populist measures which would have brought this country down. [*Desk thumping*] We have taken hard decisions. We have taken the knocks in the public domain, but, “the proof of the pudding” is the growth projected for this year, and the growth projected for 2019 and 2020. That is the proof. [*Desk thumping*] The proof is the news coming out of energy, that my Member for Siparia did not hear. The proof is the good news coming out the non-energy sector, which my friend did not hear. [*Desk thumping*] If we had listened to uninformed opinion, all of this stabilization would not have occurred. And, this is only because you have a Prime Minister

who has a deep and abiding love for this country. [*Desk thumping*] And as all parents, as all parents we know, very often, you have to make hard decisions for the long term viability of your family, of your constituents—and that is what we have done. We have made the hard decisions, and those hard decisions are bearing fruit today. Madam Speaker, the history, the recent history of this country, following periods of high oil prices and high kleptomania, will tell us that we have done the right thing. High kleptomania—we have done the right thing. And we are now speaking to a rational public, a well-informed public, a well-educated public, and we speak to patriots. Madam Speaker, there is a word called “to bloviate”. What does “to bloviate” mean? It means, to speak at length, especially in an inflated and empty way—to bloviate. And, when the Member for Siparia read out a prepared speech and could not respond to the Member for Diego Martin North/East, that was “bloviation”. [*Desk thumping*] She had to stick to her prepared speech. She did not have the mind—the ability—to respond to what the Member had to say, which would require some thinking and listening, and thinking fast on the spot. But, my friends opposite do not have to worry too much. Very often—very soon, I think the number 26 seat just might be occupied by Mickela Panday, and then we will see where the loyalties of our Members opposite lie, and that is the end of “duppy”, as we know him. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker—

Mr. Lee: Madam Speaker, 48(1).

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Google the word “duppy.” And, when you Google the word “duppy”, Madam Speaker, we just go to “Dopey.”

Madam Speaker: Could you—[*Interruption*] I am on my legs! Reference was made to no one. [*Interruption*] Please continue. But, I am mindful that that has come up before, and therefore I had asked us to adopt another course. Please!

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you. Madam Speaker, I have to respond to some issues that the Member for Siparia raised, and the Member for Caroni Central raised, about taxes and raising taxes. You know, if you are a student of history, you would understand that at one point in time in this country, personal income tax was 70 per cent. Do you know who decreased that to as low as 30 and 25 per cent? A PNM Government. We decreased personal income tax—a PNM Government.

Madam Speaker, my colleague, the Member for Caroni Central, spoke about the Mitsubishi plant. The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, spoke at length about the Mitsubishi plant, but what the country needs to know—where the UNC was leading us with that Mitsubishi plant, and why we had to renegotiate

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it. They negotiated a contract with Mitsubishi that sold out our rights to gas, because under your contract with Mitsubishi, they were getting first call on gas. We would have had to shut down Point Lisas because the contract said that Mitsubishi had to get first call on gas. Could you imagine the liabilities if that had gone off? If gas production fell, you could not feed Point Lisas—what the liability to the taxpayer of this country would have been if we had consummated that deal? That is why the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West had to fly to Japan to save that, and reopen negotiations—renegotiate, and come back with a contract beneficial to the taxpayer of Trinidad and Tobago. That is the history of your gas diplomacy—to sell out—to sell out, and put us in debt. “Bloviation.” Absolute “bloviation”.

Madam Speaker, the reason the Minister of Finance can stand up here today and say I am so proud to be a Member of this Cabinet—and I want speak to all the commentators out there with facts:

- Fact number one, we have had no devaluation. [*Desk thumping*]
- Fact number two, we have gone to no IMF.
- Fact number three, we have had no significant loss of import cover.
- Fact number four, no mass unemployment.
- Fact number five, do you remember, for this budget, when the UNC and casino owners?

—used poor casino workers to demonstrate—and the sky is falling, that if we pass that tax on casino owners, the world will come to an end. They protested. Where is that mass closure of casinos? Did not happen, because the UNC used casino workers, and the casino owners used their own workers.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Madam Speaker, 48(6).

Madam Speaker: Continue, Member.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: You have got to be kidding. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Member for St. Joseph, I have made a ruling. I do not need any support when I make a ruling. Just continue in your contribution, and remember your contribution is directed to the Chair.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you. So I want to tell casino workers, I want to tell all workers: be careful of who you listen to in this country, right? Be careful.

Madam Speaker, on Tuesday, we had the Standing Finance Committee, and in the Standing Finance Committee one of the big issues was, this Government is going into the Infrastructure Development Fund, taking moneys to put it into recurrent—and the world is coming to an end. And, because we have gone into the Infrastructure Development Fund we are incompetent, the economy will crash, this will happen, that will happen, the sun will rise in the West and set in the East, and it will be mayhem—absolute mayhem. But, Madam Speaker, you know something? The *Hansard* is a wonderful thing. The *Hansard* is a wonderful thing, the Member for Oropouche West and, Madam Speaker. Variation of the appropriation for fiscal year 2015. Who was in power in 2015? The hon. Member for Siparia and her Government. Head 18—

Mr. Lee: Head 18?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Yes, this is your fiscal year. Appropriation Bill, yours. Head 18. [*Interruption*] No, if you listen you will learn a couple of things this afternoon:

Ministry of Finance and the Economy, Infrastructure Development Fund; funds provided for capital projects under the Infrastructure Development Fund will not be fully utilized in 2015 as a result of contracts not being finalized.

And, what did my friend, the Member for Caroni Central, say?

Hon. Member: It is Siparia.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Yes, and the Member for Siparia, and the Member for Caroni Central? We are taking funds from there in an election year. And, how much did they take, Madam Speaker?—\$747,763,690—three quarters of a billion dollars, and the Member for Siparia, said: That never happened. “Dey have ah calypso, ‘you hear’.” You hear! Untruth. Untruth. And what were they going to use this money for, Madam Speaker? You would have heard a song and dance in the finance committee, that \$20 million was going to Tobago, to do what?—to build agricultural access roads. They do not want Tobago, under this Government, to get \$20 million to build roads.

But when you look at the variations, do you know what the then Tobago House of Assembly was getting to give to two Tobago MPs, the hon. Vernella Alleyne-Toppin and Mr. Delmon Baker? You know how much was going there?—\$110 million dollars. You know how much money they took from energy in 2015?—\$693 million, to put into recurrent. It is astounding! But the Member for Caroni Central has the gall, has the temerity to say, he is not confident now, that

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the money we are taking from IDF will be used properly. But when you did it—no big thing. This is your figure, sir. And, they were going to take \$410 million to put into something called a Constituency Development Fund. “Allyuh remember dat?” Where, they were going to give—in an election year—41 MPs, \$10 million each, to spend as they see fit, and we warned them not to do it. [*Crosstalk*] And we warned them not to do it. That is what they were going to do with the money, give every MP—and we told them give the money to local government, let them fix drains, let them clear courses. But that is corruption. That is corruption. So, they raid the IDF.

Madam Speaker, let us talk about health. The Member for Siparia brought up two issues: no CDAP and no CLF—and doctors unemployed. Let me deal with all three things, frontally. You know, whenever the UNC talks about health—and every group of people in this country need to have their voices heard; doctors, nurses, lawyers—everybody, not a problem there. But when they talk about health, you know who they never talk about?—the patients. They never talk about the patients. Never! So, let us deal with CDAP. Do you know what this country did with CDAP in an election year? Let me put some gross figures for the population to understand how CDAP was manipulated. It cost this country \$26 million in drugs for CDAP per annum—\$26 million. Do you know what our friends did in an election year, with the administrative cost for CDAP? In an election year, the administrative cost went to \$46 million. And the hon. Member for Barataria/San Juan had the gall to tell people—I have the newspaper clipping for the Member for Barataria/San Juan, when patients could not get CDAP—go and buy it. I have the clipping for the Member for Fyzabad, when he was CEO of South-West, when they could not get cancer drugs—when he was the chairman of the board. And the Member for Barataria/San Juan said, go and buy CDAP.

So you have CDAP, \$26 million worth of drugs—our friends next door took the administrative cost to administer the programme, to run the programme, to \$46 million. And that is not drugs. And the drugs are still not reaching the patients. [*Interruption*] I “eh” finish. I “eh” finish. And then, in an election year, they gave out a \$30 million contract to launch something called the “National Health Card”. And when you gave your name at the pharmacy, the next two days, you got a call on your cell phone saying, vote for me.

Hon. Member: Cambridge.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Yes, that is called Cambridge Analytica. [*Desk thumping*] So, we are still paying that contract for \$30 million, we still owe \$3 million on that contract, to launch the National Health Card. So, in one year, the

cost of drugs is \$26 million, the administrative cost is \$46 million, and then they gave out a contract for \$30 million; so that is 46 and 30—\$76 million, to give out \$26 million worth of drugs. *[Interruption]* Right? I have taken a position to the Cabinet, to put CDAP drugs in the hands of patients. *[Desk thumping]*

And to give patients the relief. That is going to happen soon. No CLF—for those of you who saw this morning the Ministry of Health brought a file for me to sign. I signed off on four CLF cases, four. But CLF cases are for people and children who have life threatening illness, *[Cellphone vibrates]* life threatening conditions. *[Cellphone vibrates]* I will say no more on CLF. *[Cellphone vibrates]*

3.30 p.m.

Madam Speaker, *[Cellphone vibrates]* when I come now to speak about some of our initiatives in the Ministry of Health, *[Cellphone vibrates]* this country, *[Cellphone vibrates]* when I speak about the next achievement—

Madam Speaker: Once again, that offending device. *[Cellphone vibrates]*

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, on becoming Minister of Health, if anybody could remember back to those dark days of 2015, 2014, 2013, 2011 and beyond, the number one issue facing this country in health, could anybody remember? You know nobody could remember now, because we have solved it. It was the issue of maternal mortality. On my first day in office, I had a maternal mortality to deal with. In my second week in office, I had a maternal mortality to deal with and somebody next door—opposite—asked me a question within one month of becoming Minister of Health. And in the crosstalk I said, I would do something about it. And the Member of Siparia say, “You could solve that”? I said, “Yes, watch me”.

Madam Speaker, within six months of attaining office as the Minister of Health, we have brought maternal mortality rates down. Down.

Hon. Member: You sure?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Yes, yes. And you know what is so sad about that? You had a health commission set up under Mr. Vasant Bharath which included the Member for Caroni East, Dr. Tim Gopeesingh, who never waste time to tell us what an excellent obstetrician he is; how much people he lectured to; how much patients he had. You had the chairman, the Member for Fyzabad, who is an excellent obstetrician; you had the Member for Oropouche East who was there, the Member for Caroni Central—*[Crosstalk]* Oh, you backing out from it now? The Member for Chaguanas East was on that.

Mr. Karim: There was no commission.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: And you know they could not do it.

Mr. Karim: It was never called a commission.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: National health whatever.

Mr. Karim: No, no, you have it wrong.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: They could not bring down maternal mortality rate. We did it.

Mr. Singh: How did you do it?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: This Government—by policy, training and engaging PAHO. That is how we did it. [*Desk thumping*] And we did not spend a cent.

Mr. Karim: Put some CDAP.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: You could have done that. But the Member for Fyzabad who is an excellent obstetrician, who was the Chairman of South-West and the Member for Caroni East who is an excellent obstetrician who waste no time telling this country how good he is, they could not do it.

Mr. Karim: Free advertisement, free advertisement.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: So I would like all 41 Members to thump their desk and congratulate our doctors, our midwives, our nurses for doing a wonderful job [*Desk thumping*] in reducing maternal mortality rates.

Hon. Members: You do it, you.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you, the Member for Chaguanas West; thank you, the Member for Fyzabad. You are the only two who recognized it. Thank you very much.

Madam Speaker, we want to know what else we are doing. It is no secret that this country never addressed its obesity problem, its diabetes problem. And in zeroing—zero-ing in to maternal mortality issues, we are now going to have a national plan. It has been done piecemeal. I think southwest did it. We are going to have a national plan for gestational diabetes, that is, diabetes in pregnancy, because that is a cause of maternal mortality.

But, Madam Speaker, I want to mention one more thing about maternal mortality and the Attorney General can bear me out on this. I hate it when we refer to Mount Hope as “Mount hopeless” when it comes to maternal mortality

over the years, because the story of Mount Hope has not been told. And I am going to tell it. The story of our public institutions when it comes to accepting patients has not been told, and you all will be shocked to hear what I am going to say next.

In this country, Madam Speaker, we have about 17,000 live births per year; 17,000 babies being born; 17,000, well, pregnancies, roughly. Of that, 90 per cent takes place in this public health sector. Only 10 per cent takes place privately. But do you know that all the difficult cases that the private sector does not wish to handle, do you know where they send them? To the Port-of-Spain maternity hospital, to Mount Hope, to Grande and San Fernando. And very often we get those mothers in their last trimesters with serious complications and the doctors and the institutions in the private sector no longer want to handle them.

The Attorney General, he could tell you, he had to call me in a panic last year. Somebody he knew was being refused treatment, could I accept? I said, “No problem, we will accept it”. All the difficult cases, do you know where they come to? The public health care system. Right now we have two women in our hospitals, sent to us by the private sector that are touch and go, and if something happens, you know what the media will say? It is the public health care system, not knowing that all the difficult pregnancies are sent to us, and we do not refuse. We cannot refuse.

So when we speak about the public health care system, especially when it comes to maternal mortality, understand what we are talking about. We are talking about a system that refuses no one. We are talking about a system that accepts everybody, and very often we get them in their last month of pregnancy with no records, no patient history, and we are expected to bring that pregnancy to a successful end. We get no records, because they come to us in an ambulance, “weee, weee”, rushing down there—[*Crosstalk*] Right, that is what we get. Yeah, you could laugh, because everything for the Member for Oropouche East is a joke.

Dr. Moonilal: No, you are a joke.

Hon. Member: You are a tragedy.

[*Madam Speaker stands*]

Dr. Moonilal: He is provoking me, Ma’am.

Madam Speaker: But you are experienced enough. I know you could rise above that, okay. Member for St. Joseph.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. So, that is the reality of maternal mortality, where we have reached, we have brought it right down, but I need the public to understand that.

Madam Speaker, on the issue of oncology, we are asking where the money going. We are going to invest \$84 million in the Linear Accelerator at St. James. That ULINAC will provide radiation treatment to patients where we currently send all to the private sector. Completion date, February 2019.

Madam Speaker, I want to bring to the attention of the public another major achievement that this country should be proud of, should be proud of. And again, all 41 of us should thump our desks in unison, but it is not going to happen. On coming into office, Madam Speaker, the second major crisis to face me as Minister of Health after maternal mortality was people dying from the influenza. Not the common cold eh, influenza. In that year, my first tenure as Minister of Health, I inherited a flu vaccination distribution drive of 6,000 vaccines per annum. And going back to 2009 when we had the last H1N1 pandemic, coming up to 2015, early 2016, people would die every year from influenza. We used to only give out 6,000 doses of flu vaccines per year and every year people would still die.

Madam Speaker, for the second consecutive year, do you know how many people have died from the influenza in Trinidad and Tobago? None. None. [*Desk thumping*] And that is due to two reasons. One, this Government has moved Trinidad and Tobago from a 6,000 dose vaccine regime to a 60,000 dose vaccine regime. We are now giving out for the second consecutive year, between 50 to 70,000 doses of vaccines; a 12 time fold. And I would like to think that has played an important part. But, however, it is quite possible that next year that might not be so. Because people have to understand how a flu vaccine is formulated and how it works. And I want to read from a CDC Report, with your permission, Madam Speaker:

“It takes at least six months to produce large quantities of influenza vaccine. For vaccine to be delivered in time for the vaccination to begin in the fall”—October—“manufactures may begin to grow one or more of the vaccine viruses in January...”

So for the upcoming flu season this year, October 2018, they start to grow the vaccine in January of this year:

“...based on”—and this is the word—“based on their best guess as to what have viruses are most likely to be included in the vaccine.”

So it is quite possible that our vaccination drive is succeeding for two reasons. One, where we have control over, that is, we have moved the country from 6,000 to 60,000 and, two, the CDC and the manufactures have guessed right as to what type of influenza is circulating. It is quite possible that they may get it wrong and they could give out a million doses of vaccines and people will die. So I just want to put that proviso on the table, Member for Fyzabad.

Madam Speaker, a very important—a very, very, important improvement over the past two and half years has been our HIV/AIDS Programme. We have been widely successful. And, Madam Speaker, I want to put on record that our colleagues opposite, from the years 2010 to 2015 for reasons best known to themselves, steadfastly refused to deal with the US Embassy in Trinidad and Tobago and they refused to accept PEPFAR funding, grant funding, free money to fight HIV/AIDS. They refused grant funding because there had to be accountability, you had to have projects and you had to tell the people what you are spending your money on.

Madam Speaker, in 2015 there were 2,799 people whose viral loads were sufficiently suppressed to mean that, their ability to transmit the virus is virtually nil. Only 42 per cent of the HIV population was so suppressed. By using the PEPFAR grant funding and funneling that money through the medical research foundation around Queen's Park, you know what the figure is now in 2017? We have moved it from 2,799 to 5,849. Now is that not wonderful, by using grant funding which your Government refused to use? [*Crosstalk*]

You refuse to use it. You do not want to know what the international agencies have to say, you know.

Dr. Rambachan: Let me hear what they have to say.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Well, I cannot tell you that here, right. So we moved it from 2,799 to 5,849. [*Crosstalk*] We have doubled it, absolutely doubled it. Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for St. Joseph, your original 30 minutes are now spent. You are entitled to 15 more minutes if you wish to avail yourself.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Please proceed. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, I recently gave a speech at the Palliative Care function a couple weeks ago, and these are people who volunteer

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their time. And I told them I admired what they were doing and I started off my speech by referring to John F. Kennedy:

“Ask not what your country can do for you”—but—“what you can do for your country.”

And I spoke about discipline, production and tolerance and I spoke about, “Here every creed and race, Find an equal place”.

And, Madam Speaker, part of the culture change we are seeing in the health sector now is that when we have a patient on a bed we no longer see them as only a patient. We see these people who could be retired teachers, retired dock workers, retired sugar workers, retired this, retired that, as people whose tax dollars sent us to school free of charge. We got a free primary school education, a free—[*Crosstalk*] Madam Speaker, could you ask the Member for Naparima to please cease his constant monotonous disturbance?

Madam Speaker: Okay. So I will say to all Members, okay, you will have the opportunity to join the debate. I cannot hear more than one person at the same time. Apparently I am deaf in one ear and therefore when the Member is speaking if they direct the contribution to me, they will rise above some of the mutterings. I will also ask those who are sitting to cooperate and keep their levels down. Member for St. Joseph.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you. And, Madam Speaker, we now see patients in the health care sector as people who supported us when we were children and because of that support we could have gone to primary school free, secondary school free and university free, and now it is time for us as health care professionals to give back to these people. In that spirit, to date, our cataract initiative, we have performed for this year 1,698 cataract surgeries. We have performed in four months 50 per cent of what we did last year in four months. Fantastic achievement. And for that I want to thank the following: At North West RHA, Dr. Jankee Seisnarine, and head nurse, Anna-Lee Peters; at North Central RHA, I want to thank most sincerely, Dr. George Hanomansingh and nurse Duke; at South West RHA, on behalf of citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, I want to thank most sincerely Dr. Anil Armoogum and nurse Cecilia Marcus; at Eastern RHA, I want to thank Dr. Shivanand Ramdeen, Dr. Robert Fraser and nurse Ashaki Adams. At Tobago RHA, I want to thank most sincerely Dr. Dorian Dwarika and nurse Annette Dick. This is the best of our professionals in the health care system, giving back to people who send them to school free.

Madam Speaker, I also want to thank Dr. Kelly Sookoo, Dr. Patrick Harrinarine, Dr. Ravi Lalla, who performed the 10-hour surgery to reattach the right hand at southwest. They did excellent work, excellent, excellent work. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I now want to come to possibly the biggest fraud ever brought upon this country.

Hon. Member: OAS?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: The Member for Oropouche West asked me a question last week about when last a structural report was done on San Fernando General Hospital. And I said the last report was in 2009. But do you know, the Member for Oropouche West, that report also spoke about Central Block in Port-of-Spain and that Central Block in Port-of-Spain should be immediately rebuilt? But do you know what our colleagues did next door—opposite? Nothing, nothing. They told health care workers in Port-of-Spain, too bad for you, we do not care about you, let the thing fall. This Prime Minister took it upon himself with my assistance to start the process rolling to build a new Central Block. But, the big tragedy in all of this was all the untruths told about the Couva facility. Untruths.

Untruth number one. That Couva was supposed to be a loan or a gift from the Chinese. Not true. We are paying for it. [*Crosstalk*] Untruth number two. That hospital was going to be built in the constituency of Chaguanas East together with a mall and a hotel.

Mr. Karim: That is not true.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Untruth. Untruth number, three. It was going to be the country's first children's hospital. Not true. The Wendy Fitzwilliam Children's Hospital is the first children's hospital and has never been more than 70 per cent utilized in this country. There was no need for a children's hospital. And for the first time today I heard the Member for Caroni Central refer to it as a children and adult hospital. Untruth—and this is the biggest untruth of them all. Why I do not open the hospital? But, Madam Speaker, they opened it on August 14, 2015, two weeks before a general election. So how could I open something that you opened—[*Crosstalk*] and, you know, whenever the media ask me when I am going to open the hospital, I say, why you do not ask the Member for Siparia why she closed it? [*Crosstalk*] You opened it on August 14th and you shut it down on August 14th.

Mr. Young: “Ooh Lord.”

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Not one patient treated. But you have the audacity to ask me, when I am going to open Couva. They opened it, you know, when it was still a construction site to win an election and then asking me, when I am going to open it, when they opened it and shut it down on the same day. Untruth next, at a Monday night forum the hon. Member for Siparia was saying, “I moving out equipment”. I think the Member for Fyzabad was a member of a Joint Select Committee that visited the facility. Did I move any equipment, Sir?

Dr. Lackram: I asked you a question and you did not answer it.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: The answer is no. The answer is no. So you have the seven deadly sins; you have the seven deadly untruths about Couva—

Mr. Young: “Whey!”

Hon. T. Deyalsingh:—and I expose our friends next door, especially the Member for Siparia, who build that facility to deify herself. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker, I want to come to the hospital construction programme. The Minister of Finance spoke about the two hospitals, Port-of-Spain—Point Fortin hospital is 46 per cent complete; Arima hospital, 44 per cent complete. But there are going to be jobs, jobs, jobs, opportunities, opportunities, opportunities.

Mr. Young: “Aye-yay-yaye.” [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: But not only for doctors and nurses because we tend to focus on that only. I want to tell people of Point Fortin, La Brea, Sobo Village, people in Arima, Grande, Samaroo Village, there will be opportunities for you in the area of health records.

Mr. Karim: How much?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: There will job opportunities for you as orderlies in sewing, in the central sterilization unit, in the laundry, in admin, in social work, in finance, in domestic services. There will be job opportunities in both the Point Fortin hospital and the Arima hospital. Jobs, jobs, jobs, opportunity, opportunities, opportunities.

Madam Speaker, a tragedy in this country again, which we are correcting, is the state of our Neonatal Intensive Care Units called NICUs. All of us know about Intensive Care Units for adults, ICUs. You put an “N” in front of it for Neonatal, young babies, NICUs. We have upgraded San Fernando—

Mr. Young: Six more minutes.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: So they now have a better NICU, but we are going to go out to build a brand new one. That will bring our infant mortality rates down. Do you imagine that Sangre Grande Hospital never had a NICU? We have built one. We have built one. We have upgraded the Port-of-Spain NICU to one of the best in the Caribbean and we are going to start to do some work, hopefully, with Mount Hope Women's Hospital, NICU. Because two of the markers that the World Bank, WHO and UN will judge us on is our SDG goals to be achieved by 2030. And two of the markers are, the impact we will have on maternal mortality. We are far advanced in that now and two, our impact on infant mortality rates.

Our infant mortality rates are currently 12.6 per thousand live births, which is not bad, but I would like to think that we could get that down to high single digits within two to three years. That is the objective. And the same way I work to get maternal mortality rates down to develop country status, we are already there. I want to work to bring infant mortality rates down to high single digits within about two to three years. And that is something this country could be proud of. Because we have our SDG goals to achieve by 2030, but we missed the MDG goals, the Millennium Development Goals which ended in 2015. We missed our goals on both maternal mortality and infant mortality. We have already made rapid progress, our SDG goal for maternal mortality and we will do so for infant mortality by 2030.

So, Madam Speaker, in San Fernando, expansion of the lithotripsy services, \$4 million investment. We have converted the old ward 14 to house a new hemodialysis unit with 14 chairs, investment of \$1.7 million. ERHA, new CT scanner, investment of \$7 million. Electrical upgrade to Eastern, it is an old facility, \$6 million. Three new ambulances brought there because it is a rural area, they need more ambulance coverage. New generator for Toco, the Member for Toco/Sangre Grande. So that Health Centre is getting a new generator. We did leptospirosis sanitization in Nariva and Mayaro. We came down to Mayaro as the Member will know. Madam Speaker, this is one of the proudest achievements for Eastern. From zero joint replacement surgeries, we have now gone to 41 in 2016. Could you imagine that? What that means to people in Toco, Grande, Coal Mine, "all them places".

Hon. Member: What about Tunapuna?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Yeah, we coming there, right. From zero to 41. So these people do not have to go to the private sector again. So, Madam Speaker, those are some of the developments taking place in health. My file is too long, I do not have much more time. However, before I close I want to say that this country is

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now facing all the challenges in public health. I do not think there is any country in the world where public health does not come under scrutiny. It is the nature of the beast, it is the nature of the game. But I think in some of the things I have outlined in what we are doing with maternal mortality, infant mortality, infrastructure, better drugs, fixing CDAP, I think we are in a better place as we move forward and we face the challenges one by one.

With the last three minutes I have left, Madam Speaker, I want to talk about what should be the stellar moment in health, and that has to do with our Non-Communicable Diseases Programme. All of us could agree that this country is a sick country when it comes to diabetes, hypertension, high cholesterol. And when you look at our hospital admissions, especially in the A&E, a lot of it is due to diabetes, uncontrolled diabetes, chest pain and all of these things. And our wards and our bed space is taken up with people suffering from NCDs. This Government has wisely signed up with the Inter-American Development Bank for US \$49.5 million loan to tackle NCDs over the next four years. It started last year and that will have long lasting benefits. As I said during the finance committee, a future Minister of Health will reap all the rewards of this foundation we are laying today—

Hon. Members: “Whey yuh going?”

Hon. T. Deyalsingh:—because to tackle NCDs you are not going to get the results today. You are not going to get results next month. You may start to get some of the results next year, right? You may start to get some of those results next year. But the full effect of this NCD plan would start to be felt within three, to four, to five years, as we get this country going. And one of the biggest manifestations of that was the banning of the sale of soft drinks in schools to start to protect our children—[*Desk thumping*] and to break the cycle of childhood obesity in this country. It is a problem. And I urge parents to get your children active, to watch their diet, cut out all the soft drinks, all the fast foods, all the flour—

Mr. Singh: KFC.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: I said fast foods. I am not calling a brand. Do that, get your children out in the road. I personally am leading the charge in the schools, the Member for Fyzabad will know that. I came down to his constituency. If we can do that, we could have a healthier nation.

Madam Speaker, with those very few words, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

4.00 p.m.

Madam Speaker: The Member for Fyzabad. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Lackram Bodoë (Fyzabad): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute on this Bill, the Finance (Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation) (Financial Year 2018) Bill, 2018. Madam Speaker, I just want to start by saying that I really should not have spent all this time last night preparing this, because I did not know [*Desk thumping*] that the Minister of Health would have given me such an opportunity to speak about health today. So I thank you for that opportunity. I just want to address a few points that the Minister would have raised in his bloviating manner—[*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: “Yuh learn dat on Bill O’Reilly, yuh know.”

Dr. L. Bodoë:—and, Madam Speaker, to advise the population that they got good advice when the Minister said, “Tell workers be careful of who you listen to”. And I will say no more about that. The Minister spoke about the Constituency Development Fund and spoke of it as being corruption. I am surprised that the Minister would say such a thing because it is a fund that has been used and is well recognized in other countries, in other jurisdictions, and, of course, if it is administered properly it can bring value to a country and can help in development for all Members of Parliament.

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

Dr. L. Bodoë: So I just want to correct that, you know. Somebody else will talk about it, Minister.

Hon. Member: Talk to him. Teach them.

Dr. L. Bodoë: The Minister spoke about the National Health Card with regard to CDAP. I know CDAP is very close to all of us, especially those patients who cannot afford private health care or afford to pay for drugs. It is a good programme which has started—has gone over the years. It continues to be improved and, of course, the National Health Card, perhaps, would have been a good, important issue. In fact, just yesterday, Madam Speaker, you will recall in front of a PAAC meeting where we had Ministry of Health officials, one of the issues that was raised there was the fact that it is very difficult to trace and to prevent multiple access by the same patient to the system, in fact, where you can have hoarding of drugs. In fact, the Ministry of Health officials alluded to the fact that this very same health card that the Minister is bad-talking, is in the process of being utilized, or will be utilized soon by the Ministry to bring some sort of

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accountability to the administration of the system. So I just wanted to put that out. But I look forward, of course, to the suggestion that the Minister is making that he is going to bring the CDAP drugs into the hands of patients. I am all for that, once it is a properly administered process. I look forward to that and hopefully I will hear some more about that, Minister.

I just wanted to speak about the health initiatives and the fact that the Minister said that he has solved the problem of maternal mortality. And, you know, Madam Speaker, I just want to raise the issue and, Minister, with the greatest of respect, no one can claim that they have solved the issue of maternal mortality because, you know, you can bring maternal mortality down, but there are factors that nobody has control over, where you will have—and God forbid, that mothers will die.

Hon. Member: Teach them. Teach them.

Dr. L. Bodoë: But, you know, I am very happy that the Minister spoke, that some of the initiatives that he has started, a future Minister of Health will benefit. What he really means is that the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago will benefit in the future, because no Minister of Health benefits personally from these initiatives. We all do this because we want to make the country a better place. So I am very happy that he spoke about, and raised the issue of maternity mortality, but to point out to the Minister—and I am sure he knows this very well, and I am surprised—well, I should not say I am surprised, but he knows the genesis of this improvement in maternal mortality. And this would have started, actually, in 2011 with the death, unfortunately, of a mother which triggered an enquiry that generated a report into maternal mortality. And the Minister and, of course, the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, have benefitted from that report, because one of the recommendations from that report was the suggestion—was a recommendation that a Director of Women’s Health be appointed. And, with respect, Minister, you did do that. [*Interruption*] No, it came late in the game and it came to you, and I have to say—[*Laughter*] no, it was a recommendation of the report, and I have to say that you took it and because of that, things have gone forward.

So you have been able to build on the platform that was left you by the previous government [*Desk thumping*] led by Kamla Persad-Bissessar. So, Minister, you have to be gracious. You have to be gracious and, you know, acknowledge that health care and improvement in health care is a continuous process; it is a continuum. It is not political. It is not about what you can do and

what you cannot do. You know, a government in power for five years will make a little impact on improving health care, but you cannot claim credit, you know, broadside for that.

So, you know, I just wanted to comment on that and to say with regard to the high risk cases, again, I want to make the point that a Minister of Health is responsible for the health care of all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, and, therefore, if high risk cases from the private sector are referred to a public institution, so be it. That is no big thing. I mean, that happens all over the world and, Minister, you should be happy that the public facilities are there to deal with these high risk cases. With regard to Mount Hope, of course, we know that a lot of the high risk cases from Sangre Grande are referred to Mount Hope. I am sure you are very much aware of that, rightfully so, Minister, until the Sangre Grande facility can be upgraded to deal with those high risk cases.

The other point with regard to the Linear Accelerator at St. James, I am happy to hear will be commissioned in 2019 for the treatment of cancer patients. But, Madam Speaker, when I looked at the budget, the allocation was made for that since 2017, so that is two years ago. But I am happy to hear that it is going to be installed in 2019. So we are grateful for that. I am sure the country is grateful for that.

You know, Madam Speaker, influenza vaccine, the Minister was responsible for no deaths from influenza in the last year? I mean, you know, I am happy that the Minister corrected himself and recognized that, you know—a vaccine—you cannot claim credit because you administered a vaccine, that nobody died. It is not like that. Life and death do not operate like that. But, I mean, of course, he came back and he redeemed himself. I am happy for that.

The HIV/AIDS Programme with regard to the PEPFAR funding, again, at a PAAC meeting yesterday, the Ministry of Health officials actually revealed that the programme was renewed—the grant funding was renewed. But it also came to the attention of the Committee that during the previous grant, US \$275,000 was actually allocated to that programme. So to say that the previous government did not access any funding, Minister—well, okay.

Mr. Deyalsingh: That was last year.

Dr. L. Bodoë: All right. Now, cataract surgery. Minister, you know, I am happy that you spoke about cataract surgery, and, again, I am just doing this to quote and to show how things operate in health care. And the Minister—you know, just last week Friday, if I am not mistaken, you know, in answer to a

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question in this very House on the number of cataract surgeries—and, Madam Speaker, you have to permit me to quote here, and I will just take one hospital. I had asked about the three major hospitals: Port of Spain, Mount Hope, San Fernando. And, you know, fortuitously, I have the figures right here in front of me. And just for the records, let me just look at the records. I had asked for 2008 to 2017. This was just a span of 10 years and it ran across various administrations. It was not meant to be a political question, but let us look at it.

2008—and we are talking about San Fernando, and I quote—and these are the Minister's figures: 381 cataract surgeries; 2009, 367 cataract surgeries; 2010, 747. Madam Speaker, I do not want to get political, but the Government changed in 2010, so I could say that, okay, in 2010, the figures moved from 367 to 747, but I would not say that. I would not say that that was due to a change of government. But let us go on: 2011, 1,072 cataract surgeries; 2012, 1,085 cataract surgeries; 2013, 1,992 cataract surgeries.

Hon. Member: Who to credit for it.

Dr. L. Bodoë: No, I will not take credit. I was the Chairman of South-West.

Hon. Member: Barataria/San Juan.

Dr. L. Bodoë: 2014, 1,673 cataract surgeries; 2015, 1,368; 2016, 1,634 and 2017, 1,499, and I am grateful that the trend has been maintained. [*Desk thumping*] The citizens of Trinidad and Tobago will build on that, and that is simply because the Minister was able to build on a platform, again, that was left for him. [*Desk thumping*]

So the Couva hospital, the Couva children's hospital—the Couva children's and adult hospital—we want to call it all different names. Fine, we know what we are speaking about. And we talk about a loan being paid, or starting—the loan is going to be due this year, I believe, Madam Speaker, for a facility that is not being used. And we have arguments here about whether it is the first children's hospital, or which one is the first and what not, and so on. What I want to point out about the Couva children's hospital is that in conjunction with world trends there are hospitals now that are being built where you have a separate emergency entrance for children and there is a very good reason for that. Because when children access a hospital, especially an emergency facility, they require special kinds of care. And, really and truly, it was with that in mind that this separate entrance was provided.

In fact, Madam Speaker, in 40 per cent of hospitals in the United Kingdom, these hospitals are so designed, so it will show that this hospital, really, would be ahead of its time. And I see the former Minister would know that, and I am sure that he would have been aware of that during the design process for that hospital—the Member for Oropouche East. But I am also a little bit concerned, and I am very happy that the hospital is finally going to be used. I am grateful for that on behalf of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. I am sure everyone is happy, but I am a little bit concerned because there are concerns raised about whether the children's beds are not going to be utilized. We all know that 80 children's beds are present there and, really, if there is going to be a refocusing of that hospital, I would wait to see.

And, you know, we hear this talk all the time about the hospital being opened on August 14, 2015 and being closed. You know, Madam Speaker, the Minister of Health—in the Ministry of Health there is a very senior member of the Minister's staff who was actually the head of a commissioning team that was appointed to commission that hospital, and there is a plan which was put out by the South-West RHA in conjunction with the Ministry of Health, and that plan was meant to have the hospital fully operationalized by January or February of 2016. *[Interruption]* But, of course, because of that, the hospital—when the Government changed, of course, the plans were scuttled. So, really, the hospital was not built to deify Kamla. All right? It was built because of the former Prime Minister's well-known and well-publicized care for looking after the needs of children. *[Desk thumping]*. And, in fact, the Member of Siparia, of course, would have been the one who implemented the Children's Life Fund, which has now benefitted so many children.

The Minister mentioned the decrease in infant mortality. Again, I am very happy to hear that there is a decrease in infant mortality, but, again, if we look at the statistics, we would notice the figures for Trinidad would show a decrease that started way back in 2008/2009 under his Government—under the PNM Government—but continued and has continued to decline. It has nothing to do with who is the Minister of Health. It has to do with the work that is in progress, with the work that the doctors and nurses do, based on the policies, and so on. So it is as simple as that.

But I do want to point out, Madam Speaker, for the benefit of the population that I see on one of the—in fact, I really do not know why I asked these questions. I did not realize I would have to use the answers here today. But, you know, I asked a question about the list of contracts for infrastructural repair at the San

Fernando General Hospital from September 08, 2015, to date. And, in fact, just today I got a written response to that question. You know, and I am shocked, Madam Speaker, to see that one of the projects here was the repair of the labour ward roofing which was awarded in January of 2018. You know, Madam Speaker, when I was Chairman of the South-West RHA, that is a project that had been on the board and I am shocked to know that that project has taken three years to be awarded and is only 20 per cent complete.

So, Madam Speaker, I just wanted to move on. I thought I would address those issues with regards to the points raised by the Minister of Health, and I want to take up, in terms of the focus, on the treatment of NCDs, and I do have, at this point, you know, to give the Minister some credit for some of the initiatives that have been implemented in terms of treating with non-communicable diseases. It is a big issue. It is something that has cost the country, and continues to cost the country a tremendous amount of money. Again, yesterday, at a Joint Select Committee, it was revealed that the economic cost to this country for—and I say economic cost for non-communicable diseases, is \$3.2 billion, Minister, and perhaps more than that. Those were the figures that were given at the meeting, but I am sure it is more than that.

So I think it is important that we focus in terms, as a population, in dealing with the non-communicable disease. And Minister, I just want to throw out a few thoughts. I am sorry that the Minister of Finance is not here, but I am sure he would be aware of this. So we spoke about—and I want to relate it back now to the SFC Report that is before us, Madam Speaker, because we are speaking about additional allocation of \$10 million for medical treatment of nationals in institutions. That is the line item on the Standing Finance Committee Report. And that additional \$10 million is in addition to \$60 million which has already been budgeted in 2018. So that is going to give us \$70 million. But if we were to compare in 2017, \$72,523,000 was spent on that amount. So it is a big burden and we all have a responsibility to deal with this. We know that heart and kidney diseases are really lifestyle diseases which continue to take up a large bite of our national spending, and whilst we continue to treat conditions resulting from poor dietary and other choices, we must examine other initiatives that can impact on prevention of disease and promote better health.

And, you know, Minister, I know that you are partnering with various international agencies. That is commendable. But I just want to throw out a few things that, you know, it is outside of the box, that perhaps we can look at. You know, we focus on the whole issue of providing health education to the public.

And really and truly, is this really working? Is the public listening? No matter what methods we use to educate the public about health, we still have not made an impact on non-communicable diseases. I am sure you will agree with that. It does not make a big difference.

I am not saying we should stop it, but I am saying we have to do things in addition to that. So it does not seem to have worked. So I was thinking that, perhaps, we should look at—and I say this slowly and I am throwing it out because, you know, maybe it is thinking outside the box. I am looking at, maybe, incentivizing. What I am saying, perhaps we should look—and because it is a budget debate we should look at incentivizing preventative health care measures and good numbers. Minister, you know what I am talking about when I say, good numbers. We are talking about your blood pressure, your cholesterol, your sugar. And, therefore, Madam Speaker, should we create circumstances where every home in this country should have a blood pressure machine; where every home in this country should have a blood sugar machine—

Hon. Member: Good thinking there, boy. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. L. Bodoë:—where every home in this country should have a scale that can weigh you. But, more importantly, it has to be a smart scale that can give you something called your BMI, your Body Mass Index, because your absolute weight may not necessarily be an indicator of poor health, but your body mass index, which is the relation of your weight to your height is the figure that matters. And, of course, a BMI of 25 and less is considered healthy. So I am saying that perhaps we should create a situation where we can do this. How can a government do this?

Hon. Member: Thinking outside the box.

Dr. L. Bodoë: What will it cost, if you are going to do this? [*Interruption*] So, you know, it is for the Minister of Finance to look at it. Do a comparison. See what it would cost if you have to provide a free machine, or free scale to each household, whether you can make back that cost in terms of decreasing your expenditure on the health care. [*Desk thumping*]

But I wanted to go further, Madam Speaker, and Minister, and to suggest that in addition to this, if you are going to incentivize it and give it, do not just give it for free. We have the technology available now where you give it with a little condition, and that condition should be that you have your numbers—WhatsApp. Send a WhatsApp. Everybody has a cell phone. So take your blood pressure, take

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your sugar and check your BMI and send it to a central station where you could employ some of those 250 doctors who are presently unemployed to man that station [*Desk thumping*] and they could read those figures.

And, Madam Speaker, I put it to you that a simple measure like that, a measure that is really not expensive when you balance the figures, could have a major impact on preventative health care. We already have the burden. We have to treat those patients who have renal dialysis, who have end-stage renal failure; we have to treat those patients who have cardiac disease. We cannot get over that. It is going to take a long time before those numbers decrease. We have to do that. But in the interim, we have to make sure that the next generation, those who are going to come 10 and 15 years down the road, will not need those services. And these are some of the measures that we should be looking at.

So in addition to providing these simple devices, you also want to make sure that you tie it in to the numbers being read, and again, you can create some sort of mechanism to do that. Why not have a treadmill for every Government office building? I am starting with the Government buildings. Of course, you can extend it to the private sector. But, you know, more than that, do not just have the treadmill, have the treadmill in the building and have it in a way that if your employees go and use the treadmill and you document their use for half-an-hour or 45 minutes three times a week, you give them some kind of bonus. You work out something. I am not saying a tax break, but you give them a bonus, so they have an incentive to do something.

Now, there are those who will say—Madam Speaker, I am sure there are those who will say that that is not the Government's responsibility. It is people's personal responsibility to look after their health and to look after what they eat and to exercise, and so on. And, sure, that is fine. But you know what? If citizens do not do that, who pays the bill?

Hon. Member: Taxpayers.

Dr. L. Bodoë: Yes, taxpayers. We come here every year and we approve funding to pay for that. So why not find a situation where we can incentivize it?

Hon. Member: Good thinking outside the box.

Dr. L. Bodoë: Madam Speaker, perhaps the Minister of Finance—you know, I am sorry he is not here. These are some thoughts. I am sure some food for thought for him, hopefully. [*Interruption*] What about some tax breaks on treadmill and gym equipment? [*Desk thumping*] And gym subscription, Minister? Something to look at. So I thought I would throw out those ideas, Madam Speaker.

The other item on the Standing Finance Committee and the Bill before us, of course, is the outstanding payables to the regional health authorities, and that sum is \$111 million. Again, I want to look at this in a holistic way, and again to ask some questions. Now, that \$111 million extra is in addition to an approximately \$3.4 billion, when you total the allocation that is already allocated to the RHAs. So we are looking at an additional \$111 million. Nothing is wrong with that. When you add—if you look at the budget allocation in 2017, page 192, line 39, the line item of Drugs and Other Related Materials and Supplies, you add another \$630 million, so it is a considerable expenditure for the RHAs.

And the question, really, that needs to be asked is: Is the public receiving better service? And I say this across the board. I mean, the Minister has claimed some improvements, some gains, some victories, and so on. That is fine. We expect that, you know, as time goes on, that you will have improvements, but, really and truly, is the public really receiving better service? What outputs are being measured in the RHAs? Are we measuring patient outcomes? Are we measuring patient satisfaction? Are we measuring output, the number of surgeries? Are we looking at waiting times? We do all of this, but have we done a study to check and see whether we are getting value for money? And have we examined the issues with the RHAs? I know we have had this Welch Report which came to the Parliament and did not get any further, but I know the issue of the RHAs was addressed in that. I know somebody will jump up later on and say, okay, well we scuttled the report, and so on. But be that as it may, I think we have to look at the RHAs, Minister. You have to look, Minister, at whether you have too many RHAs. [*Crosstalk*] That is all right, Minister. That is all right.

Mr. Deyalsingh: We could look at it now.

Dr. L. Bodoë: No, no, I “eh” politicizing. I am just throwing out some ideas for you, Minister. [*Crosstalk*] No, but it is your hands. Madam Speaker, the Government can still deal with that report. But the point is, really, are there too many RHAs? Maybe the time has come to look at rationalizing the number of RHAs. You have one RHA which deals with 600,000 people in the south, and then you have three other RHAs in the north and the west and the east. It may be that if you combine the RHAs or you reduce the numbers, the administrative cost might be less. It might be easier to administer. Again, just some food for thought.

Madam Speaker, if you will permit me, I want to refer to an article published on Sunday, May 06th, by Rosemarie Sant in the *Trinidad Guardian*. It says:

“Worrying situation. Graduate medics say they can’t get jobs.”

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And there is a quotation here by the Minister. We are saying here that there—and if you permit me to quote, Madam Speaker:

“Hundreds of young graduates in the medical profession are finding it difficult to get jobs and are forced to take jobs which pay significantly less than the ones they are qualified to do.

But Health Minister Terrence Deyalsingh is insisting the Ministry of Health tries to ensure that every intern in the system is employed. Sometimes though, Deyalsingh says the problem is that the young doctors are not willing to work in the rural areas and want to be placed in the regional health authority of their choice.”

So we do have a situation where we have over 200 young doctors who have completed their internship and are now seeking house officer positions. And I know, Minister, that some of these young doctors are fussy about where they want to work and what they want to do. I agree with you, but there is still substantial—there are solutions that can be found for them.

And, again, I want to throw this out, through you, Madam Speaker, to the Minister to consider. There is a system in the UK where every graduate who finishes internship and wants to train as a postgraduate, is assigned something called a training number. The problem we have in the RHAs is that if somebody is placed out in a district, there is no guarantee that they are going to get back into the hospital. In the UK, when you are assigned a training number, you enter a programme and you are guaranteed a certain path that you will follow over a three or four-year period.

So if it is that you have to spend six months out in Point Fortin or Sangre Grande and that comes at the beginning of your training, fine, but you are guaranteed that you will move back into the system. So that is something that we can look at. Perhaps the time has also come to look at incentives for doctors who are working in the remote areas. I know you will have some issues in terms of the unions, and so on, and what not, but we do have to find solutions. We have to find ways to work around that and look at incentivizing; providing incentives for those who are working in the rural areas.

The other issue is, the system as it is now, Minister—and you mentioned in that article there about the interview process at the RHAs for the doctors to get their house officer posting. I am not sure, really, what the purpose of conducting the interviews are, because I will tell you what. When you are finished as a

medical intern, you have to be certificated by four consultants that you have satisfactorily completed your internship, and therefore you are in a position to enter a basic house officer job. But more than that, the interview process—

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Fyzabad, your original 30 minutes have now expired. You are entitled to 15 more minutes. Please proceed. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. L. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Speaker. So I was making the point, Madam Speaker, about the problem with the interview process, is that there can be all sorts of manipulation and influence and so on, in the interview process, and you will hear stories of some doctors who graduated two years ago not having a job and others who graduated six months ago getting a job. You know, our system lends itself to all sorts of things. But there is a system—when I worked in the UK, there was a system where you have a central—what is called a central hiring agency. So what that central agency does—and Trinidad and Tobago is well suited for that kind of system, because in Northern Ireland where I worked, the population was about 1.8 million, quite similar to ours, spread over a larger geographical area. But the system was that you have the central hiring agency which would look at the health needs, the needs throughout the RHAs, so you would hire centrally and then you would assign the doctors to the different RHAs.

4.30 p.m.

There is also the option of partnering with the private sector to hire doctors and to come up with some sort of arrangement. I think, Madam Speaker, we also need to review the training needs not only of doctors but of all the young graduates, and my colleague, the Member of Caroni Central, raised this point with regard to the unemployed young graduates, and really and truly we need to review the training needs in conjunction with medical schools. So perhaps the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health needs to look at that. In fact, in one system which I would have visited previously, in the Cuban system, the medical schools actually come under the administration of the Ministry of Health as opposed to the Ministry of Education. So the Ministry of Health has direct information as to how many doctors are going to graduate and, of course, there is also—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Singh: “Why don’t we export the talent?”

Dr. Bodoë: Yeah, there is also that possibility for exporting the graduate talent that we have here, and perhaps this can be explored at a regional level, maybe at the Caricom level and so on.

Madam Speaker, one of the issues of course I have and the concerns I share with my colleagues in this debate is the whole issue of shifting money from the IDF to Recurrent Expenditure, and I just wanted to raise that in the context of certain projects which were listed under the IDF for the Ministry of Health with regard to the *Social Sector Investment Programme*. I have those documents here which I would have gone through on page 143 and page 152 of the *Social Sector Investment Programme*, and the PSIP would have spoken about a new primary health care facility in Chaguanas. At the Point Fortin hospital, both the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Health mentioned the Point Fortin hospital, but the question is whether the moneys allocated in this financial year will still be that sum or whether the sums are going to be lessened; and, of course, if moneys are going to be taken from those allocations it means that there will be delay in the delivery and the completion of these hospitals: the Point Fortin hospital, the Arima hospital, the National Oncology Centre as well, which we know can make a big impact on cancer care in this country. That remains a project that needs to be completed, and I would hope and trust that the Government is moving full speed ahead to deal with that.

Of course, the Couva hospital is one of those that came with allocation for completion under the IDF, and I just wanted to raise a few points with regard to the Couva hospital in terms of the new proposed arrangements that were announced by the Prime Minister. I think it is very important for some of these issues to be aired. My understanding is that it is going to be owned by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago in conjunction with University of the West Indies and the operator will be InterHealth Canada who will be the operator. I understand it is also going to be renamed as a hospital and multi-training facility. So there are two facilities there. The multi-training facility I imagine will be a medical school together with training for other health care staff and so on. So the question really would be: Who will be operating this multi-training facility? Will it be the UWI and will it just be available to foreign entrants, or locals will have access to the training as well, and if there is a cost to the training whether locals will have preference cost as they experience when they go to UWI? So that is something that we can look at, or maybe I would want the Government to consider.

With regard to the hospital part of it, who will operate this? Well, I believe that the operator is InterHealth Canada. And again, who is going to access those facilities and benefit from the services provided at the hospital? Now, I know the issue of medical tourism has come up here. So is it just going to be foreign

patients, or local patients are going to be able to access this facility? What will be the conditions for using the facility? Will it be free at the point of delivery for the local patients? And, of course, I am sure that the public and the unemployed doctors, health care workers, other staff that are unemployed would be interested as to whether they would get jobs at the Couva hospital. I know that the Minister mentioned about Point Fortin and Arima, and so on, but that is the question that I would want to raise.

So, with regard to the decrease in the Infrastructure Development Fund, Madam Speaker, I just want to close by asking: With regard to the impact on my own constituency in Fyzabad as to whether there would be any impact? The Siparia Union Presbyterian School remains unfinished. There was no allocation in the IDF for that project so I am just asking whether this movement of funds will impact on the completion of that school. There are also three major landslips in the constituency at Namdeo Trace, Murray Trace and Thick Village and, again, my concern and the concern of my constituents would be whether movement of the funds from IDF to Recurrent Expenditure will impact on the repair time for those.

So, Madam Speaker, I just wanted to close by quoting from the Budget Speech of October 2013, where the hon. Minister of Finance, and I want to quote from the budget document on October 02, 2017, and he drew attention and the stem of the paragraph says:

“Other indicators of the old paradigm...”

And I just want to highlight three, and the three that the Minister highlighted were:

- inefficient capital expenditure management, characterized by inordinate delays and cost overruns in project execution, often overlooked”—because—“funding was not an issue;
- a highly staffed public sector, in terms of numbers, coexisting with staff shortages in key departments;
- a tendency for wage increases to outpace productivity;...”

So the Minister correctly identified that these were major impediments to the development of a country, but the question, Madam Speaker, is whether any activity of this Government in the past six months or any projected activities are really going to address these issues in any meaningful way, and whether there is really going to be improvement based on the presentation of the Ministry of

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Finance today? So I look forward to what the others on the Government side would have to say, and with those few words, Madam Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Education (Hon. Anthony Garcia): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to be given the opportunity to add to this debate, an opportunity that really gives to the Government in general and the Ministry of Education, in particular, to really highlight its achievements over the last year in spite of the fact that we had faced tremendous challenges. The challenges that we faced did not only reside in the fact that the economic position of the country was not as healthy as it should have been, but more so because of the general morass that we were confronted with when we took office in the Ministry of Education. Because as I have been saying on several occasions, we met a very dysfunctional Education Ministry and it was the task of both Ministers in the Ministry of Education to try to repair the damage that was inflicted on the education system by the former administration. [*Desk thumping*]

I am pleased to say today, Madam Speaker, in spite of all those shortfalls and shortcomings, we have been able to achieve quite a great deal, but before I go into my general contribution, let me just respond to a question that was asked by the Member for Fyzabad with respect to the completion of the Siparia Union Presbyterian School. I have stated on several occasions that we have identified a number of schools that we have given priority attention. There are a number of schools that have been left in various stages of incompleteness. However, we have stated openly and on several occasions that the Siparia Union Presbyterian School is on our list of priority. I want to give him the assurance that as soon as we are able, we will do everything possible to ensure that school is completed.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Education has focused on three major areas of focus or of direction. These are access, equity and equality. In order to achieve these objectives, immediately we embarked on planning what is referred to as a school-based management system, and this system is all-encompassing. It deals with almost every aspect of the education system in an effort to correct the many ills that we were confronted with. We were poised and mandated to address the issues of school operations, leadership and governance in our school, and the students' underperformance. We found that there were several weaknesses in the education system, weaknesses that we have been able to identify and put things in place to correct. For example, consistently from 2010 to 2015, perhaps 2016 and so on, we found that the results of the SEA exam showed more than 2,000 students operating at the level of under 30 per cent achievement, and that is something that we could not condone. We cannot allow to happen.

Dr. Rambachan: Two thousand?

Hon. A. Garcia: Twenty-three hundred to be exact. Twenty-three hundred of our students were operating at the level of below 30 per cent achievement.

Dr. Francis: Every year, consistent.

Hon. A. Garcia: Consistently. In the area of the secondary sector, we find that there was massive failure of our students. In fact, in one of our secondary schools, not one student was able to gain one pass at CSEC level.

Dr. Rambachan: What school is that?

Hon. A. Garcia: Let me repeat that, and this is what we found. In a secondary school, under the previous administration, not one student was able to gain one pass at the CSEC examination that is administered by CAPE—by CXC.

Hon. Members: Which school?

Hon. A. Garcia: I would not call the name of the school, but you know very well. Yes, it is a school that you have neglected. It is a school that you know very well. So do not ask me questions about which school. You know that. Do not be hypocritical now.

Hon. Members: Which school?

Hon. A. Garcia: It was decided, Madam Speaker, that we will pay some attention to curriculum implementation and delivery and, of course, leadership and management of our schools, and very importantly, teacher training and development. And we paid special attention to these components, all under the rubric of school-based management, and I can tell you that the things that we have put in place are already bearing fruits. For example, in the area of clinical supervision, we have directed officers to visit schools regularly. Curriculum officers are supposed to visit schools regularly, meet with heads of departments, interact with teachers and assist them by way of clinical supervision.

We have found that the system of clinical supervision is not supposed to be, and it was never intended to be one of a burden to our teachers, but it was meant to be developmental, never meant to be punitive. A curriculum officer would go into the school, he would meet and interact with the teachers—first of all with the heads of departments—and he will interact with the teachers, he would listen to the teachers teach and show, if there are any shortcomings, discuss those shortcomings with the teachers, and in areas where the teachers are strong, assist the teachers in building on their strengths, and this has been working quite well.

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We have also asked our school supervisors to visit our schools on a regular basis. There was a time when school supervisors visited the schools only to carry messages for the Ministry of Education. We have insisted that school supervisors should visit schools, interact with the principals and provide support to the principals in their management of the schools. Today, Madam Speaker, I am very happy to state that our school supervisors have been actively engaged in meeting with our principals, both at the primary and at the secondary level, and from the feedback that we have been receiving the principals themselves are very happy with this state of affairs and with the support that they have been receiving.

We have also put in place a system of student monitoring from Infant I in the primary school up to Standard 5 in the primary school, and from Form 1 to Sixth Form we have student monitoring, where the performance of our students is being monitored almost on a daily basis, not only by the curriculum officers, not only by the principals, by the teachers themselves and, therefore, we have found that in many cases where our students were falling back, particularly in primary schools in the areas of literacy and numeracy, we have seen great improvements.

Madam Speaker, what we have found and that was most distasteful to us, was that there were many students, on graduating from the primary schools, who could not read nor write. They were proficient in terms in literacy and numeracy, or let me put it another way, their proficiency in literacy and numeracy was lacking severely. We decided on this student monitoring system to attack this problem at the level of Standard 1 because we found, in all our research, that the Standard 1 level is the most critical level in our primary schools and, therefore our school supervisors and our clinical supervisors have been working with teachers, particular teachers in the Standard 1 classes to help them, because the transition from infants to the standards was one that many teachers were having some difficulty in coming to terms with. As a result of research that has been done, it was shown that this is a critical area in the performance of the children in the primary schools, and a lot of attention now is being paid to that area in our primary schools. We are monitoring the performance of the students.

At the level of the secondary schools, we have put in place what we refer to as the adaptive curriculum because what we found, many of our students leaving primary schools cannot read properly, they cannot write, they are having difficulty in stringing a few words together to form a sentence. In fact, in some cases they cannot even string a few letters together to form a word. The adaptive curriculum in those schools, we have identified 53 of our secondary schools where some of those students are placed and they are now engaged in a different

curriculum that is proving very worthwhile and very supportive. In fact, recently I attended a function at one of our secondary schools and sitting next to me was a principal of one of those schools who was high in praise of this new approach where our Form 1 students had been exposed to a different type of curriculum, and that principal was thankful to the Ministry of Education for what we have been doing in this area.

All of these things would tell us that we have been able in a short space of time to achieve tremendous gains in the area of education, and one of the spinoffs of this is the fact that there has been a decrease in the levels of violence and indiscipline in our schools. I have said this on more than one occasion and I think it is important for me to keep repeating it because there are some persons who seem bent on carrying false information. In our school system now, we do not find that there are many instances of indiscipline and violence in our schools. What has been happening now is some students are taking their bad behaviour outside of the classrooms and into the streets and because of this we have engaged the assistance of the community police, we have been speaking with the Minister of National Security who has given us tremendous assistance where this is concerned, and we are pleased to state that there has been this decrease in the level of indiscipline and violence in our schools. [*Desk thumping*]

Let me now turn to the ECC sector. This is an innovation that has been started by the People's National Movement Government some years ago, and it is a system where we are providing our children from the age three to age four-plus with the opportunity of social interaction with each other and, again, we have a number of schools who are engaged in this new initiative. We have trained quite a large number of our teachers and we have had a curriculum that has been so organized that it would give rise to the improvement of the performance of our students in this area. Remember, the ECC centres are really, as I said before, opportunities that are given to our students for social interaction and, therefore, when they move into the primary schools we find that the transition is much smoother than what happened before, and again we find that this has been working tremendously well.

We have been able to review and update the curriculum in this area so as to ensure effective usability and quality delivery. We have been able to ensure that the activities with which our students are engaged are appropriate for children at that age. We have been able to create a strong and equal partnership between the ECC centres and the primary schools and that has allowed us to achieve educational continuity, and as I said before, an easy transition from the early childhood centres to our primary schools.

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Madam Speaker, let me for a few moments address the issue of ICT in education. I have heard the Leader of the Opposition recently using every opportunity to misguide the population where ICT is concerned. I have heard many persons on that side spurring untruths where this is concerned. Let me state that this Government has embarked on the ICT in Education Programme which involves five really major components. One of the components is the use of laptops in education which I will come to in a little while, but it is an overarching facility, or initiative, that really deals with five major components. One is governance; the other one is policy making; the third is infrastructure; the fourth is curriculum; and the fifth is training of our teachers.

In terms of governance, we have established ICT committees in schools. We have established an ICT committee at the level of the Ministry of Education, and from the Ministry of Education the information is translated to the ICT committees in the schools so that the governance of this programme is well on its way. In terms of policy, we have developed and finalized ICT in education policies which provide overarching direction and guidance. One of the things with this Government is that we do not do things *vaile-que-vaille* as we found previously. [*Desk thumping*] We operate strictly on policy formation. We set the policies and we make sure that we carry out the dictates of those policies, and the ICT in education policy is one area that we are talking about today. This policy is meant to provide overarching direction to the teachers, and the principals, and the heads of the department in all our schools, so that whatever is done is not done in a haphazard method that was done previously by those on that side.

Infrastructure, and this is an area where the country, the people of this country will want to know the truth, and I take the opportunity this afternoon to tell the country the truth where this is concerned. Infrastructure: we are in a position now where we are able to provide high speed Internet service and connectivity to all our schools, something that was severely lacking, [*Desk thumping*] totally lacking before. All schools are now being provided with adequate Internet bandwidth for access. Now remember previously I spoke about access? Adequate Internet bandwidth for access, something that was severely lacking when we came into office in 2015.

The provision of laptops, Madam Speaker, and again I want to spend just a few minutes where this is concerned because what has been bandied about by the Opposition was total untruths, and today I stand here on the basis of truth. [*Desk thumping*] The Opposition boasted—and I am surprised that the former Minister

of Education, the Member for Caroni East, is absent today. I think he knew that I was going to speak today [*Desk thumping*] and, therefore, where is he? Where is the Member for Caroni East today? Is he hiding? [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: He “fraid” the whop.

Mr. Karim: Who is the whop man?

Hon. A. Garcia: Instead of providing laptops for every child who took the laptops home, and in a matter of weeks the laptops were damaged, they were useless, teachers were not provided with the requisite training, there was no Internet connectivity or access and, therefore, the laptops proved to be a waste of time.

Hon. Member: No repairman, no repair person.

Hon. A. Garcia: Yes, there was no repair mechanisms that were put in place and, in fact, the guarantee on those laptops was only for three months. So after those three months those laptops became no more. Our position now is that the laptops will remain in the schools. The laptops will remain the property of the schools [*Desk thumping*] and, therefore, every secondary school will be given a minimum of 50 laptops depending on the size of the school. [*Desk thumping*] Those laptops, as I said before, will remain the property of the schools and they will be subjected to the type of security that will ensure that the laptops remain safe and secure.

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Together with the laptops will be charging carts and the charging carts themselves will be a part of the security measures that we have put in place. Because once the laptops are placed in the charging carts, apart from charging, they will provide the type of security that will make it impossible for an outsider to remove the laptops from there. In each school, we have directed the principals and heads of departments to ensure that there are secure places in the school’s laboratories to house these laptops so they will not be subjected to vandalism, and that is positive thinking by this Government.

Another area of this initiative is teacher training because if you are to use the laptops effectively, if the laptops are to be infused properly into the curriculum delivery, there must be training of our teachers. Madam Speaker, the sadness of this whole situation previously was that the teachers were not exposed to any type of training at all. There was no training and therefore, the teachers could not have used the laptops effectively as a curriculum aid. This has changed. [*Desk*

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thumping] This Government has made that change. And therefore, already 500 of our teachers have been trained and an additional 600 teachers are at present, undergoing training at various different centres in Trinidad and Tobago. There are other technology devices that we have acquired in places where there is no Internet access and these devices are referred to as the Aptus devices that will allow a teacher to upload and download certain curriculum and teaching materials so that the students can benefit. That is the vision of a PNM Government. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, there is an initiative of which this Ministry is very proud and I dare say this country is very proud but more specifically, the people and children who reside in Laventille/Morvant community, those persons are very proud. It is referred to as the Laventille/Morvant Initiative. [*Desk thumping*] It is built on four major pillars. One is enhancing literacy and numeracy. The other is infrastructure and aesthetics. The third one is parental involvement and the fourth one is promoting discipline. We have been working actively where this is concerned. We have community liaison officers who communicate with the community and they would feed back that information to the schools and to our committee and therefore, we are able to understand exactly when is happening.

In the area of Morvant/Laventille, what we found previously—first of all, those areas were neglected by the former Government. They were neglected. The former Government paid absolutely no attention to the plight of the children in those communities and we have decided to change that. [*Desk thumping*] We have ensured, again, that our curriculum officers are liaising with our teachers almost on a daily basis in those schools. And in fact, if the statistics can be told to you today, we have seen an improvement already in the academic performance of the students in those schools. In addition to that, when I receive reports on requests for extended suspensions that now come very rarely, but when I see those reports, I am yet to see a report for extended suspension coming from any school in Laventille/Morvant district and that speaks volumes. That speaks volumes of what we are doing.

Parental involvement, Madam Speaker, we have been having several workshops with parents of those communities and those workshops have been doing very well. Those workshops really allow our parents to understand that they have a role to play in the education of their children and as such, we find that there is greater collaboration between our parents and our schools. And at our schools, the information that has come to us now is that there are more active parent-teacher associations in those schools, giving vital support to school and to

the school community. We have found that there is an increase in the reading proficiency, particularly in Standards 1 and 2, classes of primary schools in that area and this is simply because of what we are doing as part of the Laventille/Morvant Initiative.

Let me turn now, Madam Speaker, to the area of physical infrastructure. In spite of the financial constraints that we met when we came into office, in spite of the fact that we did not have all this money available to us, we tried our best and we have been able to succeed in ensuring that our children have access to an education. And one of the areas where students can have access to an education is ensure that they go to school and the schools are there to receive them. A major success of this Government and of this Ministry is that at the end of every school term, when school resumes in the new term, all our schools have been able to open and receive our students. That is a major success. [*Desk thumping*]

But we have been able to repair many of our schools. We have in excess of 540 primary schools, 125 secondary schools in Trinidad and we have been able to do a substantial amount of work in areas like plumbing, fencing, roofing, ceiling, civil works and in the area of sewer. I have had the occasion to chastise— [*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Arima, your speaking time is now spent. You are entitled to 15 more minutes if you wish to avail yourself of it.

Hon. A. Garcia: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I have had the occasion to chastise some persons unknown—I must confess unknown—who seem hell-bent to sabotage the sewer systems in our schools and people spoke about providing the evidence. The evidence is there. And, Madam Speaker, I will make a statement now that I was reluctant to make before but where the sewer is concerned, what we have found in addition to large pieces of clothing, we have found condoms in the sewer system. Let me repeat. We have found condoms in the sewer system and that does not augur well for those who have access. We have asked our principals to ensure that there is closer monitoring of the security systems in our schools so that we will not have to face with the ignominy of such a situation.

Madam Speaker, in terms of penmanship, you know when we first came into office, Minister Dr. Francis insisted that we visit schools on a regular basis and this is what we have been doing and every opportunity during those visits, we would take to look at the copybooks of our students. As an educator, we know that one of the best ways of assessing the performance of a student is to look at

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the copybooks and what we found, in many cases, was our children lacked basic handwriting skills in many instances. And as a result, we have embarked on a programme “Penmanship with a Purpose” and that programme is working well.

We have found, as a result of a survey that we conducted, that only 45 per cent of our schools had the opportunity to teach our students proper handwriting skills and 95 per cent of the teachers indicated that they had little or no instructional resources available for classroom instructions in terms of penmanship. The “Penmanship with a Purpose” Programme seeking to correct this deficiency and as a result, we are focusing on Standards 1, 2 and 3 in our primary schools at the moment because these are critical areas and we have put in place a plan that we will be evaluating in about a year’s time and I am sure I would be able to stand here and report on the success of this plan. [*Desk thumping*]

We have established a number of committees to deal with some of the problems and some of the challenges with which we are faced in the education system. One is the weight of the school bags. You know when I look at some of the children in our primary schools with very heavy school bags on their backs, not only the fact that that will cause some physical problems but there is no need for a child to carry so many textbooks on a daily basis. Madam Speaker, I remember if I want to be personal, when I was at primary school, I had two copybooks, a reading book and an arithmetic book and I did well. [*Crosstalk*] Yes, sometimes in my back pocket, yes and I did well. I am proud to say that. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Hinds: “And yuh still doing well.”

Hon. A. Garcia: Thank you very much, Sir. When I saw our students bending over with large book bags, Dr. Francis pulled me aside one day and he said “This has to stop”, and it has to stop. [*Interruption*] He is very polite, he is very polite. [*Laughter*] And we have put things in place by way of a committee to look into this and the committee is due to report by the end of this month.

The Student Transport Service Evaluation Committee is another committee that has been established. We hear a lot these days about the maxi-taxi drivers staging some kind of protest. What we have decided to do is to carefully evaluate and monitor and look at the invoices that have been sent. Dr. Francis told me the word to use is “audit”, so I will use audit. We have been auditing the invoices that have been sent to us and for the months of October, November and December, because of careful auditing, we have been able to save \$1.7 million where this is concerned. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

We are also rationalizing the school dietary service provision, in other words, school meals and with the concurrence of our principals, we have been able to see a reduction of 4,000 meals on a daily basis. There was an excess of 4,000 meals being served on a daily basis, we have been able to achieve a reduction of that. We have put in place a committee that is looking at the school code of conduct and we are involving all our stakeholders where this is concerned, including our students because we want to get the perspective of our students. Again, this is going to be revealed in a short space of time.

Madam Speaker, pan in the schools, you know this Government—no, the previous Government sought to belittle and devalue the “Pan in the School” project. Let me state that we must recognize that the steel pan is our national instrument. Must recognize that. [*Desk thumping*] And whatever was done previously, we will correct it because it is important for our children and our country. [*Desk thumping*] We will continue the development of the steel pan manufacturing and steel pan tuning and currently, this programme is being done in six of our secondary schools in Trinidad and one in Tobago and we are going to bring two more secondary schools on-stream very shortly, and this is a programme that we are very proud of.

In the area of tertiary education, we have received so many positives where tertiary education is concerned, it would take me two days to talk about them, but we have a number of tertiary education providers: MIC, YTEPP, NTA, NESB, COSTAATT, NIHERST, UTT, and the University of the West Indies. Because of the constraint of time, I just want to say one or two things. This Government instructed this Minister of Education, when the office of the Chancellor of the University of the West Indies came up, that we must lobby to ensure one of our very good, very accomplished citizens was named as the Chancellor of the University of the West Indies. Madam Speaker, I had to use my trade union negotiating skills when I met at the university council and I am pleased to say that we were able to ensure that one of our citizens has been placed as Chancellor of the University of the West Indies. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Hinds: They supported somebody else. Tell the country.

Hon. A. Garcia: They supported somebody else? Time does not permit me much but just let me say that MIC is embarking—apart from its regular programme, it is embarking on collaboration with a series of regional countries in terms of technical/vocational education. For example, St. Maarten that saw half of its country devastated by the recent hurricane, sometime next week, we will have

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a number of students coming to MIC to be trained in building, construction trades, lifestyle, workforce assessment, technical consultancy services. Partnership will commence with eight St. Maarten nationals in a matter of days.

In Grenada, we are working with the Grenada Airports Authority in the area of supervisory management, plumbing, electrical installation, general building/maintenance. In Guyana, we are engaged by the Demerara Distillers to provide welding and plant automation training. The NESC quite likely has decided to consolidate its course offerings at locations throughout Trinidad and Tobago in response to the demands of the public and the needs of the industry.

COSTAATT is doing exceptionally well in the provision of tertiary education, and recently, they received re-accreditation by the Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago for a further period of seven years.

At UTT, I have been able to facilitate negotiations between the management of UTT and the representative union, OWTU and we are trying to work out ways and means whereby we can deal with the very unpleasant state of affairs that we met where the previous Government just used UTT to just bring in people, just fill people without any regard as to what they were supposed to do. UTT is bloated and we had to find the ways and means whereby we can correct that. And I have facilitated meetings—in fact, I have been able to chair three such meetings, again, with the help of Minister Dr. Francis, where we are trying to work out ways and means where we can correct this.

Madam Speaker, I would have liked to speak of the number of things that I have been doing with respect to my constituency but I will leave that for another occasion. Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Fazal Karim (*Chaguanas East*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for allowing me to join in this debate this evening. I would have spent a lot more time in speaking about the tertiary sector but since my colleague, the Member for Caroni East is not here, and so many things were said about the Ministry which he previously held, I feel obligated to respond to a few matters.

Madam Speaker, I want to make it abundantly clear that the government, under the People's Partnership, and with both Ministries of Education, the Minister of Education before, Dr. Gopeesingh, and myself as the Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training, what we were about, is really driving the creation of a knowledge-based society. [*Desk thumping*] And for my friend who is now leaving the Chamber, I did recommend—but two of them are leaving so I was going to give them some reading homework. And the reading homework is, it

is very clear on the last occasion I spoke, I gave my colleague an assignment to read a book entitled *Vocational Education and Training in Times of Economic Crisis: Lessons from Around the World* by Matthias Pilz, the editor. It seems as though he got that book and he started to read that book, because last night on CNC3, I saw a clip where he was saying that vocational education and training is the master key for development and it is not only academic.

But I wanted in the context of the laptop issue that he made reference to, I wanted to give him another piece of reading homework because since he talks about literacy and numeracy skills, and let me just say that with respect to penmanship, I think “all ah we in this Chamber here did penmanship when we was in primary school. Dais is nothing new.” We would have to do it on the board there, we would have to go up. The black board, they had drawn lines and you will go up there and you will curve your letters and so on. So that is nothing new.

But I wanted to make the comment in terms of laptops and I want him to read this book. It is called the *Fourth Industrial Revolution* by Klaus Schwab and this person, Klaus, is the founder and Executive Chairman of the World Economic Forum. I know that some of my colleagues on the other side will be going on a long journey from Saturday and since I like to read, I will share with them another text that they could read too on their long journey, particularly the Prime Minister who was here earlier today and that book, he might very well read, it is called *The Rise and Fall of Nations* by Ruchir Sharma. And in case when they are flying to China, they may pass very close to Singapore, a country that I always hold as a model of development and I also recommend for my friends, the book *Singapore and Switzerland: Secrets to Small State Success* by Yvonne Guo and J. J Woo. This is just in terms of the reading homework for the assignment that they were supposed to have.

Madam Speaker, as I indicated, I wanted to raise some matters in the tertiary sector. I will do that subsequently but since my colleague on the other side, the Member for Arima, Minister of Education, made reference to so many matters and particularly with respect to laptops, I want to say that the \$50 million which has been allocated for the purchase of—of how many laptops?—13,000 laptops is in no way comparable, even its intent and its delivery, to the laptop programme initiated by the hon. Prime Minister at that time. [*Desk thumping*] No way. I have some questions that I would like to ask with respect to this laptop programme.

Madam Speaker, the secondary school laptop initiative, as we have just been advised, it is really, in my view—I taught in a secondary school for many years. And what you are really seeing happening now with this laptop initiative is really

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an expansion of the computer lab. So what you are doing is putting laptops where you have desktops. [*Laughter and desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, this is could not be a serious—I mean, “leh we geh serious with this country, man”. I always tell people, if you want to read about the global innovation index in the world, three countries consistently come first, second and third and they are Sweden, Switzerland and Singapore. You cannot tell me that in this age of technological development where you want to create this new industrial revolution, you are talking about laptops in secondary schools within the computer lab. And therefore, I want to ask the question and I have a number of questions to ask and I just want to make it clear.

The hon. Minister stood here and told us that there were a number of untruths that were being spoken of. He stood up here and told us that every school in this country, where you have these laptops or where these laptops would be, you have full broadband width. Madam Speaker, that is absolutely not true and the figure is only 50 per cent of these schools are there in terms of broadband. Madam Speaker, my friend forgot to talk about Aptus, A-P-T-U-S. Do you all know what Aptus is? What is Aptus? Aptus is a device where you do not have broadband connectivity, that device is what you are going to use to get that connectivity.

Dr. Francis: He mentioned Aptus.

Mr. F. Karim: Yeah, but did he say anything else about Aptus? He did not say anything else about Aptus. As a matter of fact, I hope when you start to speak, you speak to your colleague, the Member for Arima, because he is expanding—he is saying technical and vocational education and training and went on to close down the NESC in your constituency. [*Desk thumping*] And yesterday, “yuh on the papers today turning the sod”. [*Crosstalk*] I know you want to deal with it, well you will deal with it, but “doh deal with me” because I will tell you about—you will talk about history eh.

Madam Speaker: Yes, do not be distracted. Keep your focus directed this way and remember it is honourable. We are all honourable.

Mr. F. Karim: Yes, sorry. The Member for Moruga/Tableland. I just want to remind him, maybe he should speak with his colleague again to reopen that NESC facility. They presided over the closure of NESC in Moruga and yesterday, you are turning the sod, smiling on the papers today, of a \$70 billion facility in Moruga for processing and development. Where are you going to train these people? [*Desk thumping*] Have you done a needs analysis for that \$70 million? Madam Speaker, I want to just stay a little bit in terms of the Ministry of Education and

the question I want to ask as well is how many teachers have been trained. How have these teachers been selected? Who is going to ensure the safety and security of these laptops in the schools? What about the eCAL project? Did you speak about the eCAL project? What is the eCAL project? What about e-learning?

As a matter of fact, Madam Speaker, much has been said about the tertiary sector. A lot has been spoken about even in terms of—well, like today, I listened to the Minister of Finance and I cannot remember a line or a paragraph in terms of human capital development coming out of this mid-term review. [*Desk thumping*] We are talking about all kinds of things. He mentioned diversification, he mentioned about increase in production and so on, of oil and gas. But what about the human capital?

These things “doh run on dey own”. And therefore, when we speak about this laptop initiative, I want to make it very clear that we knew what we were doing. [*Desk thumping*]

5.30 p.m.

I want to also spend a little time, since my colleague, the former Minister of Education, is not here. Because I will spend time later on, in terms of—as a matter of fact, the Member for Arima only spent about 15 minutes, if so much, about 10 minutes, on the tertiary sector. And the Minister of Education made mention of the fact that—well, his contribution this afternoon, the hon. Minister that is, his contribution this afternoon was hardly with response to what was said by the Minister of Finance today or even in terms of supporting, or in terms of extending the presentation. But his contribution today was really a list of achievements of the Ministry of Education. So it is on that basis that I am responding.

One of the things that he mentioned, and I am just taking it from the last going up, the Member indicated that he was rationalizing, or they have rationalized the National School Dietary Programme, the School Feeding Programme, and that they were able to reduce the daily amount of meals by 4,000 meals per day. Am I correct? Four thousand meals.

But Madam Speaker, there are still many children who may be suffering. There are still many children who would like to have a good meal. I could tell you as a teacher, during the time of the School Feeding Programme, you will find that when we did not have school meals everyday—but when we did have the delivery, the attendance was higher on those days.

Madam Speaker, I want to ask the Member for Arima, the Minister of Education, to also consider the fact that there is still a significant amount of money owed to the school feeding contractors who are providing meals and breakfast on a daily

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basis. And today we are hearing that there are better days ahead. What is the song? “I can see clearly now”. And, therefore, people are going to make demands. But after he gave us those glowing things this morning, “he come and he tell us: ‘Listen, in spite ah all ah tell yuh, we eh out ah de woods yet yuh know. So doh take me too seriously with dis.’”

Madam Speaker, I want to also make mention of the fact that the Member for Arima, the Minister of Education, in his contribution, spoke about ECCE schools. I want to say that the construction of ECCE schools in Trinidad and Tobago, in terms of the education mandate, was praised—not only by on the hon. Prime Minister of this country and led by her, but was praised internationally in terms of the participation in the ECCE centres. [*Desk thumping*]

The hon. Minister went on to indicate that there was a strategic move to have ECCE centres placed near to primary schools for easy articulation. That did not start now. If you look at the period 2010-2015, you will see, in the proximity of all the ECCE centres—a primary school, some of them in the very same compound, and there was a reason for that. There was an easy transition from ECCE to primary.

And in this regard, I want to again ask the hon. Minister of Education if he will be so kind enough, to join me on a tour of the Dass Trace, ECCE Centre in my constituency, and in very close proximity to the Egypt Oasis Primary School, both schools of which, he answered to a question in this Parliament, that they were 99 per cent complete. And I call upon the Minister to ensure, now that we have seen the light, now that we have turned the corner, now that we can “see clearly now”—to spend money and finish the 1 per cent of those schools.

And I am saying that in the context that the hon. Minister of National Security—in answer to a question right here as well. I have been clamouring in my constituency of Chaguanas East, in the area of Enterprise, for a police station. We have a police post, but a police post with army and police personnel sharing the same facility and it is an HDC property in Lions Gate. That could never be equated to a full-fledged police station, particularly for the needs of an area like Enterprise.

When we had a walkabout with the hon. Minister, the Member for Point Fortin, on the 31st of March, 2017, we looked at different locations and he subsequently confirmed to a question in this House that: yes, we will have the police station constructed in Enterprise. And more recently, when I asked the question again, you said that they were looking at a piece of land but they were not finalizing that property as yet. But guess what, Madam Speaker, that is a piece of state land.

I just say that in passing, because it was important for us to ensure that we have this whole aspect of safety and security, not only in terms of the constituency but in terms of the children who attend school and the parents and all those who live in that community.

Madam Speaker, the Minister of Education, Member for Arima, also spoke about the whole concept of clinical supervision. Madam Speaker, I have sat here for many occasions and listened to both Ministers who work in that same Ministry. And if you look at the *Hansard*, basically 90 per cent of the content and delivery is the same, and you hear about clinical supervision. And for those persons who are not aware as to what clinical supervision is, since the Minister did not explain in any great detail, let me give you the three components of clinical supervision.

Clinical supervision is an enhancement process, in terms of the teaching/learning experience. It comprises a supervisor, who look on at a teacher who is going to teach a lesson, and what you have, is you have three stages of that. You have the pre-conference stage, where you will decide and you will listen to what the teacher is going to teach, the lesson plan. Then you have the conference stage, which is where you deliver the actual lesson. And then you have the post-conference stage, where you evaluate how the lesson has been accomplished, in terms of its stated education objectives.

So, Madam Speaker, clinical supervision is not new. And this concept—and again I want to say this on behalf of my colleague, former Minister of Education, when the Minister said that one of the significant accomplishments that we are seeing in the Ministry of Education is that principals are now interfacing with school supervisors. Madam Speaker, that is one of the significant duties and responsibilities of school supervision. Who will you go and talk to when you go in the school, the people in the cafeteria? The librarian? The janitor? The MTS security? You have to interface first and foremost, with the principals and the vice-principals, and if need be, with the school management committee, which will comprise of heads of departments and deans of discipline.

The hon. Minister made mention about one of the accomplishments—it is that you have the school community liaison officer. And again I want to refer in this case to former Minister Gopeesingh's tenure as a Minister. The school community liaison officer is nothing new. We had that there all the time. In fact, when we had heads and deans, those persons were not paid in the beginning. They were only formalized later on. So, the school liaison officer, in a sense, works together with

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the Parent Teacher Association, the PTA. And therefore, I do not think that these are significant accomplishments. I think these are things that are expected of any system in education.

But one of the things I want to make mention of—and my friend did not really make mention of it in too much detail. He spoke about the whole aspect of reading and literacy and numeracy skills. Madam Speaker, one of the key persons involved in this in the world is an expert by the name of Andreas Schleicher. Andreas Schleicher really did some work with the OECD countries and what he attempted to do—and he is called the father and the founder of P-I-S-A. PISA. And what is that? It is a programme for international student assessment. And, therefore, while we are doing everything in Trinidad and Tobago to ensure that we have literacy and numeracy skills and penmanship skills, and so on. One of the things that we have to ensure in the education system is whenever there are vacancies, these vacancies are filled as expeditiously as possible. [*Desk thumping*]

How will you accomplish the education objectives? You could read B.F. Skinner as an education psychologist. You could read all of them. They could tell you what you need to do. But if you do not have the infrastructure, the architecture, the mechanisms and the human resources that are attained in the school system, it will go nowhere.

Many years ago, we were speaking about the supply teacher. I have heard nothing about that so far. Madam Speaker, what the supply teacher is, is you have persons, for example—it happens in Canada particularly as well—if teachers do not come out to school on a particular day, you would have a database of teachers you can call upon, who will supply their services to the school, so that the students are not left unsupervised/unattended. I can tell you that one of the reasons why we continue to have a high level of indiscipline—wherever that happens in schools—is because of “teacher present on register, absent from class”. [*Desk thumping*]

You know, that could only be corrected as well, by MBWA. What is that? It is not an MBA. “MBWA” means, management by walking about, going to the classrooms—visiting. When you look at a senior comprehensive school as before, now called a high school, it is a large acreage and expanse of land. Some of these schools have about 1,200 to 1,500 students on 22 acres of land.

Dr. Francis: Not anymore, the population.

Mr. F. Karim: Well, the population would have dropped. I said senior comprehensive schools. So, Madam Speaker, now the population is probably half

of that. But I also want to say, one of the reasons why we have to have increased supervision—and we hear the terminology, “school-based management system” all the time. I think it is important. But you have to make sure that you do not just talk about it—that it effectively functions and how will that effectively function as well?

I can tell you from experience—and my friend who was the former President of TTUTA, the Member for Arima will tell you, when he was on that side in the trade union movement, some of the complaints he would have had are that vacancies are not filled. So let me just give you an example now. In many of the schools and particularly in the technical and vocational areas—and I can tell you where to visit them. In any senior comprehensive school of the past, secondary school now—you go and you look for Block A and you look for Block O, and you look for Block L. Those are basically your vocational blocks. What we are hearing, and what I am seeing, and what I am being told, is that where some of these teachers are exiting the system because we have an ageing population, these vacancies are not being filled. How are we going to—we are talking about expanding vocational education and training, and I know my friend from Arouca/Maloney is just waiting for me to say, the lovely words of “CVQ”. [Interruption] See, she knows it by heart—the CVQ, the Caribbean Vocational Qualification. Every time I have to remind them about that—do you know why? Because it is the first time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago that that is being delivered and it was delivered under our Government. [Desk thumping]

And listen, I have no problem with continuity. But when you take on something and you are continuing—improve it. You now take the NESC—I do not know why you are treating the Member for Point Fortin like that. You closed down NESC in Point Fortin. You closed down NESC. I do not know what you have against La Brea. Look at the three constituencies you closed down NESC: Point Fortin, Moruga and La Brea/Palo Seco. And you are coming to tell us and tell all of us who were looking at TV last night, that technical vocational is the master key for development improvement.

I want to say this as well: the hon. Minister spoke about NESC. If I were Minister continued in the tertiary sector, NESC today would have been in Georgetown, Guyana. [Desk thumping] “What you waiting for, an invitation from President Granger?” Guyana has told this country, after the best salesman went to Guyana and tried to sell—in fact running a pipeline from Guyana to Trinidad. Because remember, Madam Speaker, the information that we are getting is that in the next 10 years ExxonMobil will be actually producing thousands: 50,000

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barrels of oil, 500,000 barrels of oil; 500,000 barrels of oil a day. And we are sitting. And do you know what has happened? Because we are sitting and our best salesman could not sell properly, Guyana told us: “We are not waiting for you. We are going to Petrobras in Brazil.” So, Petrobras in Brazil is going to be setting up a refinery in Guyana and also training, because Petrobras is not only an oil company. It is also a university. They have their own university.

And we are talking about MIC. Madam Speaker, I want to tell you something. We were training people at the NESC and other places here, from Nigeria, and earning foreign exchange. Trinidad and Tobago—well I see—it has a negotiation going on here, Madam Speaker, in terms of ExxonMobil.

But all I can tell you is this—and I think that we should capitalize. I remember—and I know you said, Madam Speaker, that the language of this House is English, but I want to tell you two words I learnt in Latin when I was at Presentation in San Fernando. I want to talk about that just now. It is *carpe diem*. And *carpe diem* simply means seize the day. But, you know what? I have elongated those words to this, seize the day because if you do not, this opportunity will never return to you. And that is what we have to do in Trinidad and Tobago. And in terms of “seize the day”, I want to also call on the Minister of Education, my friend, to open—*carpe diem*—and open the aviation campus in Camden now [*Desk thumping*] of UTT. The aviation campus is completed. Set the date.

And I want to tell President Sarim Al-Zubaidy, the President of UTT—Madam Speaker, President Al-Zubaidy is no relative, I think, of Mr. Al-Rawi. But I am just calling upon the President to open the aviation campus and I will tell you why. He has to be careful with those who associate with him around him. They are putting stumbling blocks in his way. They are talking about accreditation of that campus, so that they will stall the opening of it. I call upon my colleague, the Member for Arima, to do everything possible to make sure that the millions of dollars that were spent, and you can see the physical infrastructure, a Boeing 727/300 aircraft landed at Camden on 2,500 feet of runway and they have the potential for an airport—open the facility now. [*Desk thumping*]

But I also want to indicate, Madam Speaker, one of the things—and I am talking about programmes here now. So let me just, since my colleague spent some time, in terms of programmes, one of the things that the Member for Arima indicated in his contribution, Madam Speaker, he said that one of the achievements and the accomplishments was in fact in terms of the improvement, in terms of the performance of students and that they had ensured that a system of student monitoring for the performance, was in place.

Madam Speaker, I want to tell you, for those people here, I went to a school in south and I see the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries is here with us and he went to that same school as well. Every week, every fortnight you had a mark sheet; you had a report card; you had a report book. If you made under four out of 10 in that, you have to stay in detention and correct what you did not know.

And, therefore, the system of monitoring and performance management was there long before now. But of course, you have the system, in terms of examination and various types of tests, and so on and so on and I would not go into that. But simply to say as well, if principals and school administrators do not ensure adherence to the monitoring, evaluation—and there is another important word that you did not use, which is called measurement in education terminology, we will not be able to get the student performance outcomes that we desire.

Madam Speaker, I raised the matter of UTT just now. I want to just remind us—I think it is on page 58 of the 2018 budget speech. It is a left-side page with five lines in one paragraph. In there, the Minister of Finance indicated that one of the things that is going to come on stream, out of the 2018 budget, is that there is going to be a tailoring programme, a Bespoke Tailoring Programme. “Now dis eh hah nutten tuh do with bicycle tyre and rim eh.” This is—and if you look at the hon. Prime Minister’s suit you will notice it is well-sewn, so it may have been—I can tell you about him.

Anyway to make a long story short, I want to ask the question—that programme in the 2018 budget was assigned to the University of Trinidad and Tobago. I want the hon. Minister to tell us and whoever is speaking afterwards: “How come this tailoring programme, this Bespoke Tailoring Programme, is now being conducted at the Metal Industries Company Institute of Technology, MIC? That is where it is being conducted. It is being conducted by one Prof. Andrew Ramroop. And I want to ask the question: What is the role of the Ministry of Trade and Industry in that programme, as opposed to the Ministry of Education who has responsibility for both UTT and—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Chaguanas East, your original 30 minutes is now spent. You are entitled to 15 more minutes. I just want to advise Members, by agreement, that we will take the break at the completion of the contribution by the Member for Chaguanas East.

Mr. F. Karim: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. So, I want to ask the question as I was asked: Is this programme that is being conducted at the MIC Institute of Technology, is this the same programme that the Minister of Finance spoke about that was supposed to be conducted at John Donaldson Technical

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Institute Campus UTT, which is called and which we rebranded as the “creativity campus” in Port of Spain? And if it is the same programme, I would like to ask the question: Who is paying for this programme? I want to ask the question: Is it true that CreativeTT, through the Ministry of Trade and Industry, has financed this programme to the tune of \$4 million-plus? I want to ask the question: Is this programme accredited by the Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago? Just like you were asking about accreditation for the aviation campus in Couva, “it cyah be one rule fuh one and ah next rule fuh ah next one”.

I want to ask the question: How has this person who works on Savile Row in England come to be treated with this class in Trinidad? And I want to ask the question whether he teaches a similar programme in England and whether it is accredited there? The reason I am asking that question, hon. Minister of Education, is that there is a reciprocity agreement for accreditation with the ACTT from Trinidad and Tobago. Therefore, we have to ask a lot of these questions. How many students are there? Are they paying? How much are they paying? And very importantly, I want to ask the question, I want the Minister or whoever is talking afterwards to tell us: Is this programme GATE approved?

Madam Speaker, there are a number of matters I have to raise and one of them has to do—in terms of the University of Trinidad and Tobago. I do not know, we have seen a really rollercoaster situation with the University of Trinidad and Tobago. I remember when I was Minister, I was on that side, I had to present for the GATE programme, and there was the Member here for, Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West at that time. Well, you would remember because you were a Senator. When I was finished talking about UTT, after the debate concluded, the person met me outside and say: “Ah like how yuh fixing up we university. Ah say what yuh mean?” The person indicated: “Ah see yuh breakdown de wall in front ah John D and it looking real nice. Dah we university. I say: ‘I really thought was all the taxpayers’ university in Trinidad and Tobago.’” The point I want to make to you is this. This university—we are all taxpayers. But “ah doh want tuh go down dey.” Madam Speaker, let me continue uninterrupted, otherwise I would have—[*Crosstalk*] I know—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Order, order.

Mr. F. Karim: Madam Speaker, I know how to respond to my colleague from Arouca/Maloney. I just have to say “CVQ”.

Anyway, the question I want to ask is: We are hearing about—and again the hon. Minister indicated today that he is intervening with meetings with the University of Trinidad and Tobago and the Ministry and the Board of Governors.

He indicated today—he said today, for the record in *Hansard*, that under our administration we filled that with a number of people. I want to tell the country and I want to say today, every person who was employed, particularly at the upper levels of UTT, were well qualified and well-placed and delivered.

I will give you an example. For the first time in the history of UTT, quite apart from aviation and I will finish with that, we opened a university store in Piarcó. Oh my Lord! How hard is it to understand? Why are you doing that? You are really promoting and marketing your international brand. You know what, Madam Speaker? As soon as the election was over they closed down the store—and the products and the publications of UTT were being sold there. Students were getting jobs there. It was an incentive for upward mobility and for research. You could not see that. That is what makes the difference with us and Singapore.

Singapore is a society that uses its brain and they have progressed. But I want to ask some questions about UTT. I want to ask the question: How come some persons are being promoted to professorship at UTT? There is a standard for professorship—being, promotion. How many publications?

We saw recently as well that UTT jumped 500 points up the world ranking. When I asked the question right here, it was about a webtronic improvement. So you put out all your research on the Web. “Ah mean, leh we get serious nah.” We talking about Harvard, MIT, Princeton, Yale, NUS, Cambridge, Oxford. We cannot have our universities be less than, we want to be equal to in the rank of universities. So there are many questions I would have asked, in terms of the promotions and in terms of the—

And I want to say this as well: Would you believe, Madam Speaker, that when we exited office UTT appointed a number of auditors to audit the various projects? They have found absolutely nothing wanting in any of those projects. But guess what?—and I want to tell the country and I want to ask the question too: Will UTT or the Minister or Ministers indicate and confirm to us that these auditors are now on the full-time payroll of the University of Trinidad and Tobago? I also want to ask the question: Is it a legacy project of somebody before they die or exit in this world that you want to open the Tamana Signature Complex? You have no dormitories: “Yuh doh know where the students coming from.” The number of students declining, as my colleague from Moruga/Tableland indicated. But you spend over \$300 million of UTT’s account, unspent balances and you took it to Tamana and that is what is causing the problem with staffing. You cannot maintain your wages bill.

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And, therefore, Madam Speaker, when you read President Sarim Al-Zubaidy, when they asked him about the 287 letters that he has to deliver for employees of UTT to be severed, he said: “I doh know nothing ’bout dat.” I am just the conveyor of the letter. So they “find ah fall guy”.

And, therefore, Madam Speaker, before I close, I want to come to a very important point. I want to show that one of the things that this Government went to the polls and indicated is that we placed a lot of emphasis on the young people.

Madam Speaker, I have in my possession, I will look at just a few. I will call the following: UWI, UTT, COSTAATT, NESC, MIC and YTEPP. Madam Speaker, would you believe that for 2017, 13,000 students or more graduated in the year of 2017? Madam Speaker, could you tell me, if we were to do a survey, what has happened to those 13,000 young lives in this country who we have invested taxpayers’ moneys at some times of \$650 million with the GATE Programme, reducing in the last fiscal year to \$547 million?

And you have not said one word today, Minister of Finance, anything about the human capital development, about talent, about trying to stem the migration of what we have invested in, investing in people, investing in development, investing in prosperity.

But I want to tell you, another thing I just want to mention—how many minutes I have again?

Mr. Charles: Until 6.06.

Mr. F. Karim: Oh, I have some time. Since I have so much time, I just wanted to make mention of the fact, the On-the-Job Training Programme. The OJT Programme was really a hope for our young graduates who had no sense or no sign of hope.

In the years of plenty, a number of people will look down.—they will condescend on an OJT. Mind you, some of these OJTs performed even better than those who were in full-time employment and in the service. You know why? Because they had to perform to stay. Madam Speaker, we have invested in these young people. This Government went to the polls in September of 2015 and told the young people: “We will ensure you have a good tertiary education. We will ensure you have jobs.” I want to ask the Minister of Finance: How many jobs have you created?

6.00 p.m.

And with the OJT Programme, when I left as Minister, for the records, Madam Speaker, and you can check it as a line item in the yellow book. I left \$374 million in the OJT account. I have asked a question, I have not gotten the response as yet: How many persons have been employed in the OJT Programme over the last three years?

Madam Speaker, I do not know if you recognize this, but some people, husband and wife are OJTs and they live on that OJT salary, that stipend. They depend on it. They have a family, they have to pay loans, they have to buy food, they have to travel, they have to pay medical bills and you are not employing these people.

Madam Speaker, you know what the Minister of Labour told us. The hon. Minister of Labour in a newspaper article: “That I spent the last two and a half years chasing ghosts in the OJT Programme.” Well, I have some news for the exorcists. The exorcists are required ASAP because there is a ghost that was transferred from the Port of Spain OJT office to the Chaguanas Head Office and that ghost was paying 29 other ghosts, one of whom was his mother and members of his family in excess of \$1 million of OJT funds.

Hon. Member: Follow that money.

Mr. F. Karim: So, we call upon the exorcist, whoever that is, to make sure we find that ghost. And therefore, Madam Speaker, I think it is so very important that we ensure, as far as possible that we take these moneys and put them to purposeful use.

Madam Speaker, again exams are on our doorsteps, we will have another 13,000 persons from the schools I spoke about, who will be entering the job market. I asked the Minister of Education, my friend, when I was Minister I created something called the jobs report, and I likened the jobs report to the weather report. That is where I got the idea, and I said you could look at your television during prime time news and just how you see the weather report, what will happen in terms of cloud cover, humidity and so on. Why could we not—and we started to do that to promote jobs, the jobs report. Where are the jobs? What is available? What are the categories? And how you can apply for them?

I call upon the Minister of Education again to revisit the jobs report. Because people in this country are losing their jobs. Thousands are not having their contracts renewed and they do not know where to turn for another job. Why do you not tell them where the jobs are? You said that you created so many jobs.

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But very importantly, Madam Speaker, I want to call upon the Minister as well, to ensure that the national needs list is supplied to the national community. The country must know, what are your projected labour demands for the next year, the next five years, [*Desk thumping*] the next 10 years. So that if you do not do that, Madam Speaker, all of this career guidance, infrastructure and moneys we are spending will not be so effective. It will not be as they say in the common jargon “efficacious”. We have to understand what we are doing. You cannot be doing things by guess and therefore, I want to say as I conclude with three minutes to go.

I ask the question like my other colleagues, if you are converting IDF to Recurrent, what are the programmes that are going to be sacrificed? The Minister of Finance sat right there on Tuesday, you were there—and he said on Thursday when we asked the question, he said “on Thursday you will hear it”. I call upon the Minister of Finance to tell the country if, for the example of the tertiary sector or in the case of the primary school, the \$159 million that was sent to the Ministry of Education, \$75 million was for salary and COLA for primary schools and \$42 million each for janitorial services and for security services. Well tell us, if you are taking \$159 million, what projects are going to be compromised? [*Desk thumping*] We want to know that.

And therefore, Madam Speaker, I think that is going to be important. As I conclude, I just want to indicate that I was very disappointed in my colleague, the Member for Diego Martin North/East. I do not know but he was at one time my boss.

Hon. Members: What!

Mr. F. Karim: The Minister of Tertiary Education—he was the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education and let me just say. It was under his watch as a credit to him, but through us at the National Training Agency, that we launched the Multi-Sector Skills Training Programme, and for the records, for those who may want to claim to that initiative, that initiative was under Mr. Patrick Manning, who went and walked the streets and found out.

Hon. Members: A good man.

Mr. F. Karim: Madam Speaker, as I close, I just want to indicate that I would have loved to hear much about it. I know that we heard—we did not hear much about the foreign exchange, about the school infrastructure, investment, jobs, the payment of contractors and crime. But I want to just end by saying, Madam

Speaker, what this country has been inflicted upon for the last two and half years will never be forgotten by the people of this country. They are just waiting to vote out this Government and to return—[*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, we will take the suspension now. We will return at 6.40.

6.06 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

6.40 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay, as we resume after dinner, I recognize the Member for Moruga/Tableland.

The Minister of State in the Ministry of Education (Hon. Dr. Lovell Francis): [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, good afternoon, good afternoon to the House it is a pleasure to stand and participate in this debate. I really initially had no intention of talking education because I fervently believe that the Minister of Education, the substantive Minister of Education, gave a very coherent and cohesive contribution in terms of the part played by education in all of this budgetary framework. But I have been dragged back into discussing education by my colleague on the other side, the Member for Chaguanas East.

In my two years plus in this Parliament, it has been clear to me that the Member considers himself to be an expert on tertiary education. I will avoid any editorializing on that issue. But after his discussion this afternoon it is quite clear that when it comes to education per say not the tertiary part he is a bit of a neophyte.

So, in response to his uninformed meanderings, his untethered meanderings, I will attempt to correct some of the erroneous pathways that he took down.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would have been a lecturer at UWI during the 2010-2015 period when the Member for Chaguanas East would have been the Minister of Tertiary Education. So, I would have been travelling a little bit out of the country every now and then. Never spent more than a month out of the country, I did not have any kind of out of the body experience. I was not kidnapped by the body snatchers. So I was here in my body being myself during those five years. But it always amazes me that the UNC is trying to pull off the greatest act of political conjuring in the history of this nation.

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Now, when I was a child, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we would play a game with a coin, you put a 25 cent in one hand and you put your hands behind your back and you get your friends to pick which hand it was in when you take them in front. The UNC is playing a similar political game, but they lack the very basic decency to at least put their hands behind their backs. They are trying to fool us in front of our eyes.

Because I lived here between 2010 and 2015, but I keep hearing explanations for things that I know to be this way from my lived experience and my observations being described in a totally different way. It is a very interesting phenomenon, but I tend not to be fooled by things that I see in my eye.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have been talking about this laptop issue in this Parliament for the last two and a half years. And in 2018 we are still standing here, well in your case, sitting here listening to Members on the other side trying to justify the unjustifiable.

I might as well say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is a recording. Because I am sure that the *Hansard* reflect, I have said this at least on one occasion in this Parliament and it might be two or three. Definitely, the laptop programme as implemented by People's Partnership government or the UNC or whichever acronym you would like to use, was an abysmal failure. It bears repeating, it was a total failure, an abysmal failure.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it might appear that the idea of giving a laptop to every single child is a very good one and maybe in a different scenario with a different implementer with a different kind of government, not one as averse to work as the one that preceded us, it might have been a good idea. But it was not.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, laptops were provided to every single child who entered Form 1 in the secondary schools. This was done in the total absence of all of the infrastructural needs, all of the paraphilia needed to make the laptop initiative work. So you give students laptops that you intend "to use as a teaching learning tool in the instructional phase". But they cannot even plug the laptops into the classroom. There are no sockets on the wall, there are no charging pads, fine. So maybe the laptop carries enough power to last for a few hours, so that they can be used in class. But you have no Wi-Fi, because the schools do not have the bandwidth so then what. So, then what?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you end up paying for very expensive toys and worse than that you end up paying for very expensive low quality toys. And this again is a recording. I know this, because up at St. Clair, where the Ministry used to be

before we moved down to St. Vincent Street, we had rooms where, like elephants after safari, these laptops came to die, and they came to die by the hundreds. Because the laptops purchased were of such poor quality that within months many of them ceased working, they were not fixable, they could not be upgraded, they were virtually obsolete before they were purchased. And we spent hundreds of millions of dollars, hundreds of millions of taxpayers' dollars to purchase this, to purchase toys that lasted a couple of months and then were sent to the Ministry to die.

But, again and again, Mr. Deputy Speaker we are hearing about the efficacy of this mythological perfect laptop programme by the People's Partnership, it is tiring. [*Desk thumping*] It is a misrepresentation and a tired and lazy one at that.

What are we doing differently, Mr. Deputy Speaker? We intend to make the laptops school property. We intend to ensure that they are secured; we intend to ensure that the students have access to them but it is done in a very supervised manner.

Now, the Member made a critique, and logically on paper you can view as legitimate. Perhaps this is just an extension of the computer labs, you are simply replacing PCs with laptops. This is what he said. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the real intent here is to move to something called a "smart classroom". Now one of the interesting things about us as Ministers is that instead of staying in the office all the time, we tend to go around visiting schools to get to see what happens in the classroom in the instructional phase. And I have visited some schools, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that do not have a high history of achievement, and I have seen corporate Trinidad in some cases, make investments in classrooms providing for example, smart boards and seeing the interest level in the students, in terms of just their reaction to the presence of these technological paraphernalia in the classroom. And that is the way we ought to go that is the way we want to go. That is the way we will go when we can afford it. Until then let us call this the poor man's smart classroom until we get to the wealthier smart classroom.

It is a process but it is much better to spend taxpayers' dollars for very expensive equipment when that equipment can be managed and when we can be assured that it can be used as a teaching learning tool in the classroom in the instructional phase that then justifies \$50 million in expenditure, which is quite different from what was envisaged by the former regime and we will ensure that this thing is managed properly.

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The Member also spoke about e-learning and I suppose as a derivative of that e-books and that was a way—the previous regime was considering going. And I am no Luddite, Minister Garcia is not a Luddite, we understand the importance of technology, we understand the importance of innovation in the classroom, and we are in favour of e-learning.

But the Member for Chaguanas East, Mr. Deputy Speaker, may not be aware that there are other considerations here, particularly at a time when we face financial constraints. When we did the cost benefit analysis of the e-books, for example, which we were really going towards, compared to the hard copy books, the cost of the e-books and the cost of the actual books were the same.

Mr. Karim: Economies of scale.

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: Economies of scale, they were the same and then when you added the platform which will be required to run the e-books, the e-books were far more expensive than the actual text books.

Now, is that going to be a final determining factor in our saying that as an education system we will not go towards e-books? No. Technology advances quickly and as it does, the cost goes down and at some time in the not too distant future in the very soon future it will become feasible and that is the way the Ministry will be going. But at this point, at this juncture, given the financial situation we face right now, it is at this particular point a bridge too far. And I trust that the Member is reasonable enough to understand that.

The Member talked about school construction, and this remains particularly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a very sore point for myself, for Minister Garcia and for the entire Ministry. We have the dubious situation, circumstance, of having before us now, not 70-something, not 80-something, but 100, but 107 incomplete schools. One hundred and seven, the number is frightening. One hundred and seven schools, strewn all over this nation in various stages of incompleteness.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is a staggering number. It is a frightening number, and if you understand the circumstances around many of these schools. Because each of these schools constitutes a separate story, a different story. It is to some extent a national calamity. Now how this possible, how is this possible in a nation where as a Minister for the last two and a half years, I understand how these projects are organized.

No Minister just willy-nilly decides to build whatever he wants wherever he wants. There is a system of planning where you go literally before the Ministry of Planning and Development, they vet your plans as to the feasibility, the sense of it

the importance of it, the cost of it and you go through a bit of a gauntlet before you decide that you can build school A in community A and that is how it is done.

How is it that in a reasonable Government in this country we end up in a situation where we have all of these incomplete schools, many of which were started without any kind of identifiable source of funding, literally being built out of the Consolidated Fund, and that might have seemed a wise thing when things were good. But when things were not so good, how then you fund the completion of the schools?

So, it is an amusing and interesting kind of hypocrisy that Members on the opposing side stand up here every single week and ask about Sonny Ladoo and ask about Egypt Oasis, and ask about, and ask about, and ask about, knowing fully well that many of these contracts were given out willy-nilly as though they were sharing out packs of nuts, and that the payments that should have been made on schedule were not made.

So that you might see a school that is 99 per cent complete, or 98 per cent complete, or 75 per cent complete, but the entire payment still has to be made. And where, in a Ministry of Education that used to take \$5 million to build an ECCE centre, which literally if you have seen them, and I am sure everyone in this nation has seen them. It is a house, it is really a—maybe the size of a decent house that use to cost \$5 million under the previous regime that same structure cost \$14 million, cost \$17 million, schools costing hundreds of millions of dollars as though we are building mini university campuses.

And we have to find the resources in the midst of a difficult economic period to pay for all of this. But the Members opposite are oblivious in entirety as to why we cannot finish this school, and why we cannot finish that school and why we cannot finish the other school. It is a particularly galling type of hypocrisy. [*Desk thumping*]

And we should not stand for it. Either as a nation, as a Parliament or as a Ministry. They know exactly why we cannot pay for it. They know exactly why those structures are out there unfinished. And if one contemplates that a single secondary school \$200 million to construct and none of the warrants have been paid and we have 107 schools of varying levels to be built, you have an idea of the astronomical cost that one must contemplate to pay for these schools. Yet, we hear a hypocritical jeremiad every week as to schools that are incomplete. It is ridiculous and insulting.

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Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member talked about clinical supervision and I appreciated and I like to give credit where credit is due as he well knows. His explanation of the stages of this mechanism. Now you erred, Member for Chaguanas East in suggesting that the Minister said this was something new. He never said that. It is a revamping, or a reintroduction, or a re-strengthening of something that has been in existence ad infinitum. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is tremendously important. If we as a nation understand education as it should be, there are some things that are tremendously important, more so than others. I will stand here and I will argue with anyone as to the importance of technology in the classroom and any educator who has any understanding of pedagogy and the intricacies of teaching and learning will have no problem with that. But even that pales next to the significance of good, old-fashioned fundamental teaching and learning, in terms of the education of students.

And I am frank. We used to be a nation that in two years, just two years, produced a fully qualified primary school teacher out of teachers' colleges, training colleges. We had two of them up until the recent past, one at Corinth which I attended half a million years ago, and one at Valsayn. And in two years we produced fully competent, I would suggest, world class teachers. I mean, many of them had in service experience before, but you were refined at the teachers college after two years.

Now, we are training teachers after four years and there is a question mark before the Ministry as to the comparative quality of both, which I really do not want to get into. But what I will say is that teaching is a job where stagnation is death. Stagnation is a lack of education, where to be a real educator you must always up-skill. You must always refine your tools, you must always have that kind of feedback by others in the profession, even your peers, which many teachers do access. So, if it is that the Ministry can go back to something that fundamentally worked in the past which is clinical supervision, it is not new, it is revamped, it is rehashed, but it is tremendously important because the quality of the teacher [*Desk thumping*] directly impacts on the quality of the student. So you know I am not talking nonsense, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So, I just wanted to clear that up.

The Member talked about— [*Interruption*] Yeah.

7.00 p.m.

Mr. Singh: I agree with you fully what you said. So, as Minister, what are you doing to drill that down into the schools, that continuous process of upgrading skills and monitoring?

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: Well, it is very good question. Thank you, Member of Chaguanas West. What we are doing is trying to ensure that this is re-stamped as a culture within our schools. Everything the Minister talked about—school-based management, clinical supervision—is really about fostering a cultural change in our schools, getting teachers back into that culture of continuously up-scaling, ensuring their competencies are in line with the needs of the profession. Now, it is not the case that it has stopped happening. We have teachers, hundreds of them every year, who get involved in the DipEd programmes, so this is continuous. But what we are really focusing on now is not just the pedagogy or the psychology of teaching, it is the classroom management aspect of it, which is tremendously important and which is from just an anecdotal observation, a fault line at the moment. So it is tremendously important.

The Member talked about school supervision, and the fact that as a normal part of their job, they should be visiting schools, and that is absolutely correct. But the mode and mechanism by which that happens is something that could have been and was addressed. There is a difference between being reactive and being proactive. There is a difference between going to a school after there is a problem, and intervening in a school to prevent a problem, or understanding that there is a problem that can be ameliorated. So, it is not just supervisors doing their job. It is also the philosophy by which they operate we have been trying to address. So much so, Minister Garcia keeps making the point that we have had a decline in terms of indiscipline at schools.

Now, what the public would see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as the information as what is in front of their eyes suggests differently, because we seem to always have these fantastic cases of indiscipline via video on Facebook that we all see. What we have done very successfully, so far, is to not try to paint every school with a very broad brush, but to look at those schools that require a more meaningful targeted intervention and to use curriculum and supervision together, along with student support services, to target those schools and to make the kind of meaningful interventions in them that can ensure that the school situations are improved. So, it is not just doing your normal duties, it is understanding a different way in which you can perform your duties that functions best to the continued development of our schools.

I was very pleased that the Member talked about the PISA and PERS—well PISA, I would add PERS—these international tests that speak to where our nation stands in terms of the broader educational landscape worldwide. I am constantly amused to hear talk of Singapore and what I concede, both from the Members for

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Naparima and Chaguanas East, and what I concede is the obvious fact, that in terms of education, Singapore is one the standard bearers in terms of quality in the world. Of course there are cultural, political and historical reasons that explain that, that we do not get into. So it is not a fair comparison. You are literally comparing apples to oranges in a very different kind of society, but we could debate that offline. [*Crosstalk*] And yes, I probably read that book already. I read books for a living. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, please. We are going fine.

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, in terms of these international tests—and we have participated in PISA every year since we have been in Government—what we have noted is that as a Ministry, as a nation, we cannot be legitimately pleased with where we are. Compared to best practice nations in the world, we have a lot of work to do, but in terms of a nation of our size, our wealth, our economic status, our social status and our political status, we are doing very well on one hand. And also very important to mention, that in terms of our performance every year, we have been trending upwards. [*Desk thumping*] So it is clear that something has been happening positively in education.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member talked about the student monitoring system that we have implemented in schools, and he referred to his own particular and personal experience in school, and that was a normal part of the every week or every day performance of the schools and I can relate. Not too long ago I was a primary school teacher, and we did have the weekly test, the monthly test, constant ongoing evaluation. But the Member must understand, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that because that happened to me in my school, and that happened with him in his school, did not mean it was the norm across the board. That might have been down to the peculiar leadership of the principal in the school. I cannot say for sure that that was a policy decision by the Ministry to be implemented in every school.

What we have done is to ensure that we monitor every single student, or what we are ensuring now, is that we will be monitoring every single student at the primary school level, and that is tremendously important. Minister Garcia referred to looking at the Standard 1 level. I would add a little more detail to that. One of the very good things about the Ministry of Education is that, when it comes to the collection of data, the Ministry is tremendously efficient. Members of Parliament on both sides have been asking me, for example, for data requests, and whereas maybe in some Ministries it might be difficult to get it, in the Ministry of Education that data is at hand. It is organized. You could get it basically in a

matter of minutes and it can be tremendously helpful. The data collected by the Ministry for years suggest a direct correlation between the performance of students in Standard 1 and the performance of students in Standard 5, meaning, literally, those students who performed poorly in Standard 1, are often the same students who perform poorly in Standard 5 and vice-versa. Those who perform well in Standard 1 are often the ones who perform well in Standard 5; direct correlation. There is a connection there.

Now, logically, one can say well, the typical primary school teacher knows in a classroom which students are not performing well, and should remediate—should make a meaningful intervention. Unfortunately, it has been the history of this nation, that that simple mental construction I just mentioned, does not necessarily happen in the school, in the classroom. We have to make sure it happens, because the figure that Minister Garcia quoted, is a very dire figure.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when I sat Common Entrance aeons ago, there would have been something like 20-something thousand students sitting the exam in that year. Maybe sometimes 28,000 students. Now, as a nation, we scrape to meet 19,000 students doing that exam. Those two figures tell their own stories, not for this debate, but at a telling discrepancy there. If out of the 19,000 students who do that exam, 2,300—and the question was not asked, but I will answer it because it is important. This is not an institute thing. It is not a one year thing. It is not an anomaly. This is a pattern over years. It was a pattern that was masked by the CAC because the CAC marks were all tremendously similar, regardless of the supposed academic performance of the students. You had a lesser number. But if you disaggregated the CAC marks, what you would see, every year, is something like 2,300, 2,400, 2,200, a remarkably similar number of students who score under 30 per cent in reading and language. If you have only 19,000 students doing the SEA exam, and out of that 19,000, 2,000-plus cannot display the requisite competencies in maths—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, your initial 30 minutes has expired. You have an additional 15. You care to avail yourself?

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: Yes, Sir. Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: Out of that 19,000, some 2,000 cannot display the required competencies in maths, reading and language. That is an issue of great national concern. Mr. Deputy Speaker, if on the other hand, as we have implemented, and we are supervising, we can identify those students at Standard 1

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that have had problems transitioning from the infants to the middle school, and we can make a meaningful intervention at Standard 1—not wait till they reach Standard 4 or Standard 5 to give them a bevy of lessons that will do nothing—but make a meaningful intervention at the Standard 1 level where we can diagnose whatever problems are ailing them, and then make that intervention there, then that augurs well for the academic development of that student, but also in a spiralling effect for the entire nation, because there are other concerns in our schools where this kind of monitoring is tremendously important.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are secondary schools in Trinidad, where the Ministry every year sends a cohort of 175 students, but when you check that cadre five years later when they are doing CSEC, you have 20 students sitting the exams. There are a number of schools that have that phenomenon, and you ask yourself, where have these children vanished to? Well, some of them would have been transferred and they are easy to track because they are still in the system. Some of them have literally vanished. They have not disappeared from the landscape, they vanished from the education system, and then you ask yourself, what are they doing? And that is a whole different debate. We need to know what our children are doing at the primary level, at the secondary level, and the Ministry has a right,—no in fact, has a responsibility to monitor our children and to ensure that the education that we provide adds value to their lives.

And that is something we have been doing at the Ministry. We have been changing the template for how we view the academic success of students. The Minister did not mention that, but I would put it in as a caveat or as a lagniappe. We have been reassessing the way we view our schools. We live in a country where we have this old paradigm. You have prestige schools, you have government schools. The prestige schools are the denominational schools generally, and the government schools, well state schools, and there is historical and traditionally a difference in quality in terms of them.

We at the Ministry did a study, I think in the first year that we came in, where we asked a researcher to look at that paradigm and see if we could slice it a different way, and he did something interesting. He went to the schools and he evaluated them in terms of whether they added value to the lives of students. You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if a student comes into a school as an 85 percentile performer, and they go from Form 1 to Form 5 and they are still an 85 percentile performer, I could argue with you that maybe the school has not added that much value to the educational life of that student. But if the student enters a school as a 30 percentile student and then leaves as a 60 percentile student, then great value

has been added to that student. And when we look at our schools, both government and denominational, in terms of that paradigm, whether they add value or not to the educational lives of our students, and we look at a hierarchy of schools, it looks a little different from what you will expect, and sometimes those prestige schools, do not add as much value as we think, and sometimes the government schools that we castigate, often add great value to the lives of our students.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, so as I said, I did not plan to talk education. I did not really want to talk education, but the Member for Chaguanas East, I would assist him. Since his colleague, the Member for Caroni East is not here to confuse us all, I will assist him in clearing up that fog, that mental fog he has in terms of how education is functioning and has functioned. [*Desk thumping*] As I always say, teachers teach—[*Crosstalk*—and regardless of where you are, once you are a teacher, as he would know, once you are a teacher, you are always a teacher. Teachers teach. [*Crosstalk*] So I will allow the Member to sit and marinate on what I have just said, and see if his perception of the system will be transformed in any way.

But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just want to spend a few minutes talking about the constituency, which was really my initial plan, but it is always good to help a friend. [*Laughter*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would have stood on my legs in this Parliament a number of times and talked about the fact that I represent a constituency that for the majority of its history, has been underdeveloped, has been almost literally forgotten.

The Member for Oropouche East—was it him? So, forgettable, I am not sure if it was him—might have mentioned something about me turning a sod yesterday, and a picture of me smiling in the newspapers as though smiling is a sin. [*Crosstalk*] I do not know. Well, you see, unlike Members opposite, development makes me happy. So, I am happy to smile for development in my constituency. [*Desk thumping*] Maybe other things tickled their imagination and make them smile; development makes me smile.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, my constituency in 2015 was one where, the mundane things—the water, the roads—were still mountains that seemed too far in the future, still pressing issues. So, I am happy to report that after two and a half years—of course, we have not done everything, we have not fixed everything, we have not paved everything, but we have come a long way, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

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Mr. Deputy Speaker, the day after I won in Moruga/Tableland, I got out my bed and I went down to La Lune with a guy who decided he would do some community service—he would fix a very septic drain in the community. We did not fix the entire drain, but I got him to, basically, clear a waterway that had not been cleared for a number of years, and the really sad thing—and this is not meant to be facetious in any way—that on that day I had already surpassed the person I replaced in terms of output in the constituency just by doing that. And that is not meant to be insulting, it is not meant to be facetious, it is meant to be factual. That is true.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, since that day, we have come a long way. We are now, after the age—and no barb intended at my colleague, the Member for Chaguanas West—after the age of water for all, where in Moruga there was water for almost none, I have had the pleasure this week of seeing WASA drop pipes, seeing WASA drop materials at a place called Marac at the bottom of Moruga, which the Member for Laventille West would know quite a bit about. [*Desk thumping*] Where, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when I went during the campaign—this is a recording, I have said it before—when I got there during the campaign, they had not had water for three months.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are significant parts of that community that still do not have any lines in the ground. Within the next month and a half they would have lines in the ground [*Desk thumping*] for the first time in their history, and it is not just there alone. Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is a place called Coruscant in Tableland, we are going to do the same thing. [*Desk thumping*] There is a place called Sixth Company, we are going to do the same thing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is a dam in Moruga called the Trinity Dam that supplies the water to Mourga that is so underdeveloped, that you wonder how they get water from there to anywhere. We are going to ensure that the equipment is put in within the next month or two so that a miracle will happen in Mourga, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and that miracle is, whereas the villagers now, living in my constituency, in majority, are very happy to get water once a week; and whereas if there is a problem at any of those plants and the pump breaks down for an hour—any village, any said village can lose their supply of water for that week—when we are done in a matter of three or four months, the people of that constituency will get water two, three, four, five times a week, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] And it will not cost us a billion dollars, and we will really have this thing, this mythological thing that happened before for everybody else, except us,

called water for all, and that water plan mirrors the plan for the roads, it mirrors the plan to bring economic development, because the Moruga/Tableland constituency is an agricultural-based constituency. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence.

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: But in the last generation, Mr. Deputy Speaker, whereas when I was a child, you had thriving citrus plantations, you had thriving cocoa and coffee, there was sugarcane and there was a variety of agricultural output from Moruga, it waned. But as I said yesterday, in front of the cameras there, we are on the verge of a renaissance in terms of agriculture. We have the hill rice which is well known now, not just in Trinidad, but region wide, worldwide. We have the scorpion pepper. We have world-class pineapples from Tableland. What we have lacked was something to provide that drive, that impetus, to ensure that the farmers, the persons who do the bulk of the work get to make the kind of profit, get to have the kinds of lives and livelihoods that they deserve, and that agro-processing plant that we turned the sod for in the mud yesterday is going to be a transformative thing. [*Desk thumping*] And whereas the Member for Chaguanas East wrings his hands and laments at the closing down of the NESC in Moruga, I will suggest to you that there was only one student enrolled—

Mr. Karim: That is your fault.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, again, address the Chair.

Hon. Dr. L. Francis: Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Chaguanas East.

Hon. Dr. L. Francis:—there are plans to ensure that that plant comes back into use, and that the training of young people in my community continues. So the Member need not even lament for me. I will take care of my business. I am very good at that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, a very rural community, a very rural constituency—a sleeping giant, lots of economic potential lying in abeyance is going to come to life, is going to start to produce, is going to start to contribute in a serious way to the overall development of this nation. Many regimes have come, many regimes have gone—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, you have two more minutes.

Hon. Dr. L. Francis:—but I am very proud to be a member of this PNM regime, [*Desk thumping*] which is the first in the history of this nation to prioritize

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rural development, [*Desk thumping*] which is the first in the history of this nation to prioritize development in terms of Moruga/Tableland, [*Desk thumping*] and which is the first in the history of this nation to treat rural people as though they are no less than any other community.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the people of my constituency, at the end of this five-year period will have more in five years than they have gotten in 50 years, and for that I thank this Prime Minister, I thank this Cabinet and I thank this PNM Government. Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Christine Newallo-Hosein (*Cumuto/Manzanilla*): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That was a tiresome moment. [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, I read an inspirational slogan that was posted on a Tim Harford article. This was an inspirational—

Dr. Francis: That is an insult.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member. Member for Moruga/Tableland, you just had your opportunity, please.

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And this was the inspirational slogan. And although it is inspirational, I had to turn it down a little bit, and it says: judge the value of what you have by what you had to give up to get it. I must say that the people of Trinidad and Tobago, after September 2015, realized the value of the People's Partnership and our Prime Minister, Kamla Persad-Bissessar, and what they did in giving up the People's Partnership, and now they are trying to figure out how to get us back in.

And so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have to really respond to what the Member for Moruga/Tableland indicated. The Member indicated that the former Minister of Tertiary Education, the Member for Chaguanas East, proposes to be an expert. I want to say that if it is anybody who is an expert at tertiary education, it is our former Minister [*Desk thumping*] the honourable Member for Chaguanas East, because it was under the People's Partnership and the astute leadership of Kamla Persad-Bissessar and under the guidance of the former Minister, that this country experienced a surge in intellectual understanding of how to move forward as a nation, [*Desk thumping*] so much so that many persons were very disappointed as to what has been happening now, and very, very excited for the People's Partnership or the UNC, I should say, to come back into power so that we can implement many of the initiatives that had been put in place.

Could you imagine, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that this country, little Trinidad and Tobago, teaching pilots? Could you imagine Trinidad and Tobago? [*Desk thumping*] You know, you have so many wonderful initiatives that were coined. You have from cutting cane to flying plane. [*Desk thumping*] You have from red tape to red carpet. [*Desk thumping*] You have so many things that the People's Partnership, under the astute leadership of Kamla Persad-Bissessar, implemented to ensure that this country was on the map of the world, and we were attracting foreign direct investment by the millions and the billions which, of course, you know what has happened, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Everyone has run away. Everyone. [*Laughter*] What would have taken a normal person three days to set up a business now takes months to set up business.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Arouca/Maloney, please. [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: Months, because we know about democracy. We know about democracy. [*Desk thumping*] And so, in five years, five short years, we were able to turn around the economy and the direction of this country, moving it away from the dependency of oil and gas and putting in place the initiatives to move away into a non-gas and oil sector to increase and to develop our economy. I mean, after how many years of PNM rule, that five years of Government, we were able to achieve so much, only to see ourselves go back, go back and that one is very sad.

I heard the Member for Moruga/Tableland speak about smart classrooms, and I wonder if the Minister understood what smart classrooms were. Because in dealing with smart classrooms as the former Minister had indicated, you know, we are speaking about the industrial—and the Member for Siparia spoke about the Industrial Revolution. When you remove the Industrial Revolution, you have removed “smart” in a classroom, because the way the world is going today, if we are not on par in our classrooms from the kindergarten, then we are going to find ourselves way back and left behind, and that would be very sad for our nation and for our children who are the future of our country.

7.30 p.m.

You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for Moruga/Tableland spoke about school construction—I think today we asked a question on the 70 schools, and then, of course, the Member for Moruga/Tableland said, it is not 70-something, you know, it is 107 stages of incompleteness, [*Desk thumping*] and I was like, “wow”, 107, we built so much? And he said across the country. “Oh my goodness.” I could not help but wonder if the junior Minister speaks to his senior

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Minister, the hon. Minister of Education, the Member for Arima, that in fact that all these incomplete construction throughout the country is in fact the evidence that we have started, we have done so much work. [*Desk thumping*] And if it is that is the case then why is it you are not completing it? What is the excuse in not completing it, I thought we did nothing? So I think that, you know, the Member said that there was no intention to speak, and perhaps maybe the Member should not have spoken because the Member indicated that we did do a lot. And had we been in office still we certainly would have completed those schools and built more. [*Desk thumping*] The wonderful thing about the People's Partnership under Kamla Persad-Bissessar—because they want to blame Kamla for everything, so I am going to blame Kamla too—if Kamla was in Government, I am telling you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you would have had development in every single constituency [*Desk thumping*] from Trinidad and Tobago. And you know why, because we have proof, the proof is in the data.

We have a highway in Diego Martin that was started under the PNM that was never completed, but under the People's Partnership it was completed. [*Desk thumping*] We had a highway going up to Arima that was started under the PNM but it was never completed, but it was completed under the People's Partnership. We had the Valencia that was not even thought about, that was completed, a bypass. We have the highway going to Point Fortin that was under the PNM 50-odd years ago under Dr. Eric Williams, that was started and would have been completed already had Kamla Persad-Bissessar still been in Government. So, one of the things that, you know, really behoves me is we speak about all these wonderful things that the Government said that they are doing, but, you know, in my area, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have some serious concerns especially with schools. Do you know two days, and I was there, I walked into the school because I took some little tokens for the students to sit SEA, and as I walked in the principal said, "MP, we are having an emergency meeting, there are bugs in the school and we have to shut down the school now"; two days before SEA, two days. So we have the school closed as I speak. We have Biche RC—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, Members, there is a certain procedure if you want to make a comment, but other than that I will not recognize and tolerate those discussions across the floor. Proceed.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you, Sir. We have Biche RC School, I had to go and give the students in the back, in the yard of the RC Church, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in a hot area the students are seated trying to, you know, do their last-minute revision. You know, Biche RC. You know, the Member for

Moruga/Tableland speaks about, you know, rural areas and they were dismissed, you know, and after 50 years we are going to get something. After 50 years they got something under us, under the People's Partnership. [*Desk thumping*] We have Sangre Chiquito Presbyterian School shut down. The students are using an activity centre. And so at the end of the day I ask the question, all this money that was saved, why is it that the schools—if we are speaking about the future of our nation, why are the schools not being completed and why these problems are still existing?

So I am a little bit concerned. I wonder if really and truly if the Ministers do in fact go to work and understand, and are kept abreast of what is happening, or if they are awake; I do not know. You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Government speaks about, and I heard the Minister of Social Development and Family Services spoke on the presentation on Tuesday, spoke about the Government maintaining a social safety net, and I was like: What! We are not in the same planet. Could you imagine that? So I asked if it is that the Government is maintaining the social safety net, what happened to the baby grant, why was it shut down? Because that was definitely a social safety net. What about the URP social to assist mothers of cerebral palsy children who have been left to suffer? That is a safety net that has not been maintained. What about the persons who have been indiscriminately removed from the food card grant? [*Crosstalk*] You know, I am not taking them on, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am speaking to you. So what has happened to them? They have been removed out of the social safety net? I understand, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the Ministry is about to disband the disability unit, so what is going to happen now? I mean, and it is really very concerning, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You know, the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services has asked for a further allocation of \$23 million, and I ask, you know, what—we have been told that the funding is required to meet expenditure for the Senior Citizens' Grant, you know, and I am asking, what are the critical services of the Ministry that has suffered, have suffered financial setbacks to the extent that they have been unable to dispense social services to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago? Not just the senior citizens, you know.

As a matter of fact, I do have concerns about the senior citizens, because you have removed the word pension, you have brought in a grant—as a matter of fact, a senior citizen came to me, and he said, I have been told I am not getting my pension unless I redo the form on this new form, which has the word grant on it. And I ask the question: Is it that the Government has intentions of changing it? Because, you know, if you have to understand—if I have to go by the Oxford English Dictionary, which defines a pension as:

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“A regular payment made by the state to people of or above the official retirement age...”

—versus a grant, which is:

“A sum of money given by a government or other organization for a particular purpose.”

So is it that the Government has intentions of removing this pension in time to come, and so the question must be answered. We have a number of persons to date attaining the age of 65, who successfully applied for old age payment and are still awaiting payment. How many are pending? Maybe if a visit by a social worker, or a provision of a particular document to complete the process which will result in the approval and ultimate payment. How many persons are outstanding? Are there enough social workers to visit the various homes and to do the necessary checks and balances? Therefore, there are so many questions that need to be answered, which the Government does not enjoy doing. As a matter of fact, sometimes I am afraid to ask a question, I feel as though I would be beaten up on this side, you know, and that is very wrong. Because, you see, at the end of the day the Government speaks about transparency and accountability, but yet they are not transparent and accountable when they come inside of here. [*Desk thumping*]

The reason we ask the questions is because our constituents ask us, and if they ask us it is our responsibility and our duty to come here and to present the questions to the Government and the Government has to respond to us. But when the Government does not respond to us and wants to be, you know, behave like a “bad john”, you know, it is wrong. It is wrong, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because at the end of the day it is not to the Opposition they are accounting to, you know, it is the people of Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] that they are accounting to. So, I asked a question, and the question was, you know, I see that you are giving—and I have no problem with it. I have absolutely no problem with it. You are giving—how much million?—\$20 million for access roads to agricultural access roads to Tobago, and I have no problem with that, but we have a need as well. And I want to know what is being done in my particular—in my constituency, because my constituency is the food basket of Trinidad, and therefore if we do not have proper access roads you are going to have problems in terms of people just, you know, moving away from agriculture. If that is going to happen, our food import bill would increase, and if our food import bill increases then we have more foreign exchange going out. And therefore, I would have thought that the priority, seeing that the Member for Moruga/Tableland spoke

about priority, I thought the priority would be to ensure that there were proper access agricultural roads in Trinidad, as well as Tobago. Not just one side, because we did not do it one-sided. We took care of all our citizens, Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

So it is imperative for the Government to justify and to put in place the necessary allocation, for not just my constituency of Cumuto/Manzanilla, because there are so many constituencies on this side that have heavy investment into agriculture, we have Naparima and Princes Town, you know, just to name a few. So, therefore, you know, in addition to the repeated requests for agricultural access roads, we have the need for the implementation of drainage systems to mitigate against flooding. You have again—and again I have nothing here with what is being allocated to Tobago, but you have Self-Help being put in place to help with the flooding of homes and homes that might have been damaged or destroyed because of flooding, and what is happening here in Trinidad? What is happening here? You know, and all we are asking for that there be equity in the system. There must be equity, and you cannot get vex if I ask for equity. You cannot be angry if I ask for equity. [*Desk thumping*] So I do not expect anybody to stand up and give me any attitude when they come to rebut me, at all.

You speak about—if it is you put the drainage in place to mitigate against the flooding then therefore you would not have to spend so much moneys to assist persons who are flooded. But if you put the proper drainage in place, if you do the necessary dredging of the rivers; if you do all this when it is in the dry season like we did [*Desk thumping*] when we did it. The type of flooding that we experience throughout the years had been mitigated because of the fact that we had been proactive, you know, but this Government always reacts. They always react, and that is not good, you know, you must have proper planning. Again, the Member for Moruga/Tableland indicated, we prioritize, we prioritize, you know; what it is you are prioritizing, honestly? [*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: How to suffer people.

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: How to suffer people. You know, and then of course you have to have mechanisms in place to deal with the issue of praedial larceny. We still have that issue. And not just praedial larceny in agriculture, you know, I mean, just coming out of the way, you have increased home invasions now where people are being, you know, attacked in their own homes. This is a serious situation. I know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you are having problems hearing me, but I—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: On both sides, please, silence. Continue, Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you, Sir. Mr. Deputy Speaker, you have, you know, the Marper Farm, would you believe it was the first time in how many years that the Marper Farm became like a mini agricultural, you know, site where you could come and get the necessary fruit trees and different trees. People could have come and purchased. The Prime Minister came. As a matter of fact, the Prime Minister came in my own constituency, I was not even invited. I thought maybe it was a norm. So the thing about it is that, you know, what is being done to revitalize this farm in the interest of the nation's food security and reduction of the food import bill? Instead what they do, shut it down; shut it down, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You know, and, therefore, I beg to differ with the Member for Moruga/Tableland when he spoke about, when he indicated that the Government, you know, has prioritized. Definitely they have not prioritized. You know, so I just had to stand up and say that.

In the Ministry of Education, while I was going through my area handing out, distributing the tokens, you know what I was told, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that a lot of the schools had no cleaning items. They had no bleach. They had nothing to clean, and, therefore, they said that bills were outstanding from since 2016, and yet we saw for janitorial services how much millions were paid in the budget that was read recently to clear off those bills, and yet they come back for \$42 million more to still clear off bills and they still do not have any cleaning and other related janitorial services taking place in the schools. So, I mean, what is really happening? And the reason why we have an SFC is to ask these questions, is to enquire of the Government what is it you intend to do with the variation and the supplementation that you are asking for, and we cannot get answers, we cannot. And so it is very wrong, and I think it is very crucial and critical for us to receive the understanding as to what and how the moneys are to be spent. So that at the end of the day the people will know what to expect, but the people after two and a half years, they have not seen anything, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They have not experienced any growth. They have not seen any difference in their quality of life. As a matter of fact, their quality of life has diminished significantly. Again, I will say that there are increased home invasions. People are scared to go outside. You are scared in your homes. So at the end of the day, you know, it is a serious thing.

You know, I would like to see if it is that the moneys that I asked for outstanding payments for goods since 2016, then do not let the schools shut down. Do not let the schools be disrupted, you know, make sure that the priorities are

put in place. And just as I conclude, because I had to stand up and give a rebuttal to the Member for Moruga/Tableland, so I am not going to stay long. But I just want to say that they come again with the “Kamla blame game”, and they speak about the land for Sandal’s was bought by the Government from Clico. Now, \$3.8 billion in cash from Clico from September 2015, and lands in Tobago, it means therefore that the Government that Kamla Persad-Bissessar led, she did an excellent job [*Desk thumping*] in managing the relationship with CL Financial Group, which this Government has obtained as their \$186 million. And therefore, you know why I am saying that, because it was not under the Kamla Persad-Bissessar administration that everything collapsed with CL, it was under the PNM Government, and it was under Kamla Persad-Bissessar that saved what was happening and turned it around. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence.

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: I remember, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I remember because I was around at that time, I remember hearing that there was a certain Minister in pyjamas and curlers who went in the middle of the night to pull out their money from CL Financial. So it could not be under the People’s Partnership that the CL Clico collapsed. It could not be. And further to that, you know, the Minister of Finance in giving his presentation today said, categorically, I never said that we are going to have the property tax taken back two years. When in the House here [*Desk thumping*] the Minister changed a waiver to 2016 in the House of Representatives committee stage, when it was initially 2018 in the original Bill. And you know what, he still come back today and still have it at 2018, which was agreed to in the House, you say it is at 2017.

So, therefore, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is really concerning. You know, the people do not even believe what the Government says. [*Desk thumping*] They do not. They do not. Nothing. And so, you know, as I wrap up—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, just one second. Leader of the House.

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very kindly, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 15(5), I beg to move that the House do continue to sit until the conclusion of the business before it.

Question put and agreed to.

STANDING FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT (ADOPTION)

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, continue.

Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You know, when we were in Government, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I remember something that our Government did, and it was really for job creation. We had a number of returning scholars, and we have observed it in the past, and these scholarship winners when they returned were not getting jobs that were equivalent to their qualifications, and so the Government under Kamla Persad-Bissessar took a decision that we are going to put in place a moratorium where they would get two years to go to study, to work for two years. So they would not have to return, and what would happen, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you return and you did not get a job that is equivalent to your qualifications, in fact the Government and the State could lose you legally. In other words, within that period of time if you do not get a job you can in fact walk away from your scholarship and not return any moneys to the State.

And so we found that it was happening quite too often and we wanted to plug that gap. So what we did is that we allowed persons to—we gave them two years, and what we were putting in place for a number of our returning scholarship winners, particularly doctors, and so forth, that when they came back qualified, and hopefully some of them would have gotten jobs where they would have been able to practise, that they would have had ready and waiting jobs through the children's hospital, through the Teaching Hospital in San Fernando, through the various places, the institutions that we had established was to really assist with the job creation. As I am speaking about job creation, I remember just today we were asking the hon. Prime Minister, what is the policy, what are your plans, you know, when you speak with all these persons, particularly InterHealth Canada. What is it that you are going to do? Are you going to ensure that our doctors, our nurses, you know, the various services that we have that they will employed? And the hon. Prime Minister—"oh my goodness", I could only think about what it is his former boss said, you know, a raging something, but whatever.

You know, at the end of the day, I would tell you what it is we did, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I would tell you what it is we did, and we did this, any company that came into Trinidad and Tobago to sign any agreement, it was on the condition that a significant number of jobs, highly qualified jobs would be made available to our local people. That was an understanding, and it was a part of the memorandum. And therefore, for the Prime Minister to make a statement to say that, you know, he "doh" know, I "doh" know what will happen; it is as policy decision. We took a policy decision, and therefore what we were in fact doing is

that when the companies were moving on that you would have had local persons who would have been experts to take over the running of the company eventually, and that meant that you would have a better quality of life, you would have had a higher standard of living, you would have had a higher and a wider margin of middle-class persons. Instead, we have a dwindling middle-class, we would have more a higher working poor than a middle-class. So, a lot of negatives have come into the country under this Government.

You know, when our political leader, and when you have our Member for Oropouche East make a statement that, you know, this Government has crashed the economy, we do not mean it with any exaggeration, we mean it honestly, because how and what we left behind is certainly not what is happening today. And a lot of people are crying out for help. They are crying out to be assisted in many ways. And so when we come here, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is to get answers. It is to help this Government, because at the end of the day we want to be able to help the Government to achieve what is best for the nation of Trinidad and Tobago, but they do not want our help. They come and they insult us and they say all manner of things about us, and so we take it. What can we do, we take it, but we do not meet anybody on the pavement, I could tell you about that. [*Desk thumping*] So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have made my points, and I do not want to delay the House any longer. I wish to say thank you for the opportunity. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am very privileged to be in this Chamber, and I thank you all for welcoming me here tonight. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have listened intently to all the contributions. I have been here for the last 10 hours, and I am very anxious, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to make my exit because in the 10 hours I have been here, Marper Farm has closed down, and I cannot imagine if I spend a longer time here what else will disappear. I listened to my friend on the other side and it was a complete abuse of the facts. As my friend herself recognized, last year when our hon. Prime Minister visited south-east Trinidad, he visited Marper Farm. I stood right here, recently, in response to a question on citrus greening and I said, in August last year, unfortunately, we had to destroy about 200,000 citrus plants, including those at Marper Farm. And unless my friend has not been visiting her constituency, she should know that the flagship Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries project in her constituency is Marper Farm.

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In fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Marper Farm is the flagship propagating station in the country, and I have said, I have said, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have said going back to 2016, towards the end of 2015 into 2016, when I went around to the Ministries propagating station I found in the St. Augustine nurseries, the most horrible conditions, including the abuse of a prestigious 200 acre site. I went there on the back of numerous complaints from farmers around the country that they could not access planting material from St. Augustine nurseries. I went to the propagating station in La Pastora, I saw positives and negatives, and when I went to Marper Farm, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I said if it was one thing I credited the last administration for was reopening Marper Farm. And we subsequently built on what had been done on the great work that had been done in Plum Mitán, and we have actually expanded Marper Farm to the point that the rest of the country can rely on Marper Farm for planting materials to the exclusion of the other non-performing propagating stations. So it is a flagship project very much alive, and unless it was closed between 10.00 a.m. and 7.58 p.m. today, it is in existence, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we got so many quotable quotes from my friend from Cumuto/Manzanilla, including a statement that people do not believe anything the Government says, but would her constituents believe what she has just told this country, a flagship propagating station shut down in her constituency? Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me address this issue of access roads, and let me share some information with my friend from Cumuto/Manzanilla, because she said, why do you not do like we did? But let me tell you what you did. Let me give you one example, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Let us go back to July 2015, and this is something that troubles me every time we come to this Parliament for the annual budget, because I have one more, one more. I faced it in the 2015/2016, 2016/2017, 2017/2018, I have one more year to deal with this issue.

8.00 p.m.

In July 2015, the EMBD board approved the borrowing of \$400 million to repair 10 access roads—\$400 million, July 2015. I do not know if you recall, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that would be about a month after the election was announced. At a time when no state enterprise or nobody, Government is virtually shut down in the hands of the public service, and this board meets to approve the borrowing of \$400 million. And the \$400 million is disbursed over a 10-day period just before the election date. In that 10-day period before the election date, the entire \$400 million is paid out to six contractors—10 roads. Every year when the

Minister of Finance prepares the annual budget statement, this Ministry which I have the privilege to lead, must pay \$100 million towards that loan plus interest. You know what \$100 million could do with access roads?

We have been making use of what we have for access roads. We have been averaging at a maximum \$800,000 per kilometre of roads. If I had that \$400 million in any of these fiscal years, we would have been able to do 500 kilometres of roads, including the ones in Cumuto/Manzanilla. [*Desk thumping*] But that is something that I am saddled with, and we have paid it out in three fiscal years already, the final \$100 million to be paid, plus, plus interest on average of \$9 million a year. I am pleading with the Minister of Finance, when we get out of that hole that the EMBD dug for us under that administration—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members. Members, I would like to hear the discourse of the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, and I will tolerate no disturbance. Proceed.

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: When we have those funds available, then we would be able to spend it on the access roads that need repairs. I want the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla and all the Members on that side to go to those roads, those 10 roads. They are all bordered by two-acre Caroni sites, and I will tell you, not one two-acre plot on the left or right side of those roads have agricultural production on it.

When you go to Toco, starting up in Matelot and you come right down through Toco, Matelot, Toco come right down and go straight to Marac with the agricultural producing areas in this country, that \$400 million—but they did not care. And what was Toco/Sangre Grande? It was a UNC held constituency. Cumuto/Manzanilla, UNC; Mayaro, UNC; Moruga, UNC; Princes Town, UNC, and not a centre, not a road, not an access road was repaired with any of that \$400 million. And that is a legacy that I have to deal with, and I am very happy to deal with it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member is talking about the development of Cumuto/Manzanilla. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Oropouche East, are you in the Chamber?

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: Well, Cumuto/Manzanilla for five years, 2010 to 2015—in fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in case you do not know, there has only been one instance in which that area was held by the PNM or represented by the PNM, and that was the period when Hardeo Harridath, the man with the golden

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voice, represented that area which was called Nariva. That was the only area. For the last five years, 2010 to 2015, not only did Cumuto/Manzanilla have a UNC MP, but a UNC Government, part of the constituency under a UNC-held regional corporation in the Rio Claro/Mayaro Regional Corporation, and part held by a UNC corporation in Sangre Grande.

So if there was ever a moment—if there was ever a moment—for the development of Matelot to Moruga into Princes Town, and if there was ever a moment for the development of Cumuto/Manzanilla, it was 2010 to 2015 and it was not done. It was not done. And we have not neglected our responsibility for Cumuto/Manzanilla, and towards the end I will tell you what we have done in Cumuto/Manzanilla.

I would not bother with the baby grant. I think one of my colleagues will deal with it and dismiss it, because nothing was ever put in place for the baby grant. This is a ghost grant. Nothing was ever put in place for it, and every so often we waste our time talking about this grant. Let me get to the meat of the matter.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have before us a Bill that seeks to supplement the allocation to the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. The purpose of that Bill is to provide out of a supplementation of just over \$200 million, an increase in two categories in the allocation of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. The first is under Head 77, Recurrent Expenditure. Under the Agriculture Incentive Programme, the Minister of Finance proposes to increase the allocation to the Agriculture Incentive Programme by \$31 million, and that is to cover claims made by farmers in this fiscal year, and perhaps claims which have continued from previous fiscal years. That is the first thing.

The second thing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister of Finance proposes to supplement the Sub-Head “Relief of Flood Damage”, by \$7 million, and this is to fund the claims submitted by farmers for the loss of crops as a result of excessive rainfall and consequential flooding during the month of October 2017.

And I have said before the Standing Finance Committee that even though we have listed the period October 2017, there would have been claims made for previous periods that fall to be settled in this increase.

Let me tell you about the Agricultural Incentive Programme. The programme is meant to support the development of agriculture and to support the work of the farmers. But let me talk about some key elements in relation to both the incentive and the flood damage.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it was last year June that this country had to deal with Tropical Storm Bret, and my colleague, the Member for Mayaro would know, it was a few days before Bret hit Trinidad, that we were together with the Minister of Works and Transport on the southeast coast, and we saw the development of the weather system and a few days later Bret passed through.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as Bret passed through, the first area I visited was the area of Orange Grove where we have, in addition to Tabaquite and some of the other areas, Orange Grove, where we have some of the hardest working and most productive farmers in the country. When I visited the farmers in Orange Grove, I was surprised that some of the better farmers—having gone to their farms, I was surprised to see that some of the farms were under water. Substantial parts of the farms were not, but sufficient areas were under water to cause me to ask them, you know, as good productive farmers, what happened here? And it was a series of factors.

Recently I have heard a lot of talk about we are not de-silting and we are not cleaning drains and we are not cleaning rivers and so on, and it will flood, but that is not the only cause of flood. If you were around for Bret, and if you were around for the floods of October 2017, you ought to have known that a significant contributing factor was the excessive rainfall, the unusually heavy rainfall. When rain falls some of it will run off, but when you deal with agriculture, just the rain falling and splashing mud onto the plants, and just the rain falling and destroying the flowers will be a setback to the farmers.

But the farmers also made an important point to me which I have not forgotten and, that is, if you do not have land tenure, if you do not have a lease on the land, you become demotivated and you cannot continuously invest in the development of your plot. I have said on several occasions agriculture is the only form of business enterprise in this country where the farmers are expected to take on excessive risks. The farmers are at risk with the weather. The farmers are at risk with pests and diseases, for example the locusts. We used to have locusts every eight years, every 18 years, every 13 years, different cycles. Now we are dealing with locust damage every year. We never anticipated citrus greening coming to Trinidad and wiping out or the potential to wipe out. We never anticipated the Giant African snail. The sweet potato farmers in central Trinidad who were doing very well never anticipated and never provided for the sweet potato weevil, but the farmers have to deal with that.

Most importantly, the farmers become itinerant farmers. On the East-West Corridor, as you would know, farmers move from site to site. They do not have tenure. Sometimes further up in the east, up in Valencia, in Tattoo Trace, some of the

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most productive farmers producing and exporting melongene and pimento, and they are using National Quarries land, and they are at the mercy of National Quarries. So if you do not have tenure, if you do not have—every other business, every other investor—and I always use the example of oil and gas. No oil and gas company comes into Trinidad to make an investment without securing the long-term rights and the long-term contracts. But the fact is, and let us face it, successive governments have not been able to deal with the issue of land tenure.

The farmers when I went out for Bret told me that they have the skills and they have the wherewithal to deal with weather issues on their farms, but they just have reached the point where they are not spending money, because they have heard over and over that the leases are coming. When we talk about flood damage and we talk about the ways in which we are going to mitigate the risks of flood, land tenure becomes a significant component of what we do to encourage our farmers to invest in their land.

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Madam Speaker, at this hour of the night I do not want to go too far back in history. But I listened, and you know with agriculture in particular it is unfortunate, none of the Ministers—there were three Ministers responsible for various aspects of agriculture, but they are no longer in this House or in the other House, and none of them are accountable and none of them are there to talk about what they did. So let me talk about what they did.

I did not invent the concept. Every time I am asked what is going on in agriculture, what are you doing for agriculture, I have said over and over my number one priority is to deal with land tenure. I do not have to go back very far. It was the first statement—the first statement that the then Minister Vasant Bharath made in the Budget debate of 2010. He placed on the record and he said coming out of the consultations he has had, the first and probably the most ticklish is the area of land tenure. Land tenure has created the most controversy, and created a lot of debate, because without land tenure, a farmer cannot access the incentives, nor preferential loans from the ADB that the Ministry has to offer. So that Minister knew that, and at that time that Minister had control over the agriculture and the land. Later on, the Ministry would split. And what happened?

He talks about, “I have already taken 100 Cabinet notes regarding lands to”—but, Madam Speaker, beyond that 100, even if that 100 went to Cabinet, between 2010 and 2015—and all of you are Members of Parliament and you know that very few, if any, of your constituents received a lease for state land between 2010

and 2015. I am not talking about the Caroni, I will come to the Caroni two-acres. The fact is that it was not done, and many of them have suffered on account of that. But Minister Bharath, in his first opportunity to speak on agriculture, lays the foundation for dealing with land tenure, and it was not dealt with.

If we do not deal with it, then we will continue to have problems with motivation, and problems with production in this country.

Madam Speaker, then we go to the then Minister of State who would eventually be the Minister of Lands and Marine Resources, Mr. Jairam Seemungal. This is from Tuesday, October 09, 2012, speaking again in his budget contribution of 2012. In dealing with these incentives and in dealing with the flood damage, all of us could get caught up in the cliché. It sounds very good you know. I listened to all my colleagues talk. It sounds very good, you know, on paper, but when you get down to the brass tacks, and in agriculture more than anything else it impacts every one of your 41 constituencies. On your visits from your constituents you must encounter at least four or five people coming to talk about land, to talk about something relating to agriculture. So it matters to all if us and I guess it is for that reason you have welcomed me in your Chamber to speak tonight.

But, Madam Speaker, in the context of incentives for agriculture, the then Minister, Jairam Seemungal, fell into the trap right away. One minute into his contribution he promised to lower the food import bill by 50 per cent, and set a target of two years to reduce the bill by \$2 billion, and I heard food import bill from the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla. I am on record, Madam Speaker. I spoke earlier today at the University of the West Indies on the issue of food security, and I said that the food import bill is made up of a number of things that you must be familiar with as policymakers. The food import bill is made up of things over which you have no control.

In fact, Mr. Seemungal goes on later in his contribution, and then Minister Bharath talks about reducing the amount of wheat flour we consume, and replacing wheat in 30 per cent of the flour we consume. Madam Speaker, that is a cliché. That would not happen. The amount of land that we must plant in order to produce cassava, to produce flour to replace wheat is something that is impractical and inconceivable unless we go down to Guyana, and not even in Guyana they are doing that. Then you have the cost factor.

So the idea of reducing the food import bill we have to understand, Trinidad and Tobago is going to be an importer of wheat, because we are a country that consumes wheat flour, that consumes significant amounts of rice and that consumes a

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significant amount of chicken. We are going to be importing wheat. We are going to be importing cooking oil. We are not going to produce coconut oil or any other oil as a substitute. We are going to import that. We are going to import rice, because the idea—in fact, in this contribution the then Minister had to be corrected, because he said we are consuming 39,000 kilograms of rice a year, and Member Gopeesingh had to say no, you mean tonnes. A big difference, but the fact is we do not have the land and the capacity to displace imported rice. In the context of the agriculture incentive, we are not going to be self-sufficient in rice.

For people, especially policymakers, who make these public pronouncements, they are not doing justice to agriculture. They are not doing justice to our farmers, and they are not making the appropriate policy decisions. You know what I found very interesting? While talking about the cassava and wanting to grow enough cassava to produce flour to displace 30 per cent of the wheat, you had a moratorium on hunting. So the country was overrun with agouti. The number one enemy of cassava is the agouti. If you do not cull and control the population—*[Interruption]* cull, cull—I will use a different word when I come to buffalypso just now. If you do not control the population—the farmers are the ones who suffer at the hands of agouti, green parrot, macaw, manico. But if you get around a little more, then you will understand exactly what is going on in agriculture and exactly what is going on in this country.

Then we have this payment to young farmers. Just like that, out of nowhere, a \$30,000 grant being given to young people in farming. In the first year 3,851 applicants, and \$19.1 million spent on this grant. What has happened? Where are the 3,851 people who were given the \$30,000 grant? What happened to them? Because that is what we do, it sounds good, we spend money.

Then they talk about cocoa. And having spoken about cocoa in 2012, in 2014 in one line in the Finance Act, the Cocoa and Coffee Industry Board, 60 years in existence, just disappeared. And then turn around, by the time we came in, in September 2015, complaining about rotting cocoa and nowhere to sell the cocoa. Well, without thinking, because you did not know what was happening in this country, and you did not consult with the people who know. I come from a rural community as you know. I grow up around cocoa and coffee.

Dr. Moonilal: In Canada?

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: The Cocoa and Coffee Industry Board is an important part of the lives of people from Matelot to Marac, but you were not paying attention to those places. So when you removed the Cocoa and Coffee Industry Board, what you did was that you removed the system in the country

where we assured the world of the quality of cocoa that we were selling. You removed that. You removed the expertise that was available, and most important, you removed an important mechanism for a farmer to bring a bucket or two buckets of wet cocoa, sell it, be paid, and for the person, the purchasing agent to go to the Cocoa and Coffee Industry Board and get paid and also deliver the beans.

Farmers were not exporting. Farmers have never—up until 2015 we have never as a country had to export our beans on our own. The Cocoa and Coffee Industry Board did that. As a replacement, a Cocoa Development Company of Trinidad and Tobago was created, a board appointed—and it is easy, Madam Speaker, in the context of the agriculture incentives, it is easy to cut a ribbon and open a plaque and say we form the Cocoa Development Company, and all of that. But behind it was nothing. It was just a board, no staff; nothing, no policy, no mechanism to deal with the issue of quality of cocoa, which had been the most important thing that we could offer the world in relation to cocoa.

Then there is this issue of buffalypso and livestock, and I will make two comments about that. The first is, I acknowledge in relation to livestock, Mon Jaloux—as my friend, the Member for Couva South, knows very well— Mon Jaloux used to be the livestock farm under Caroni (1975) Limited, where we had buffalypso. A decision obviously was taken by the last administration to improve Mon Jaloux, to establish a forage bank in Mon Jaloux, a fancy way of saying to grow grass so farmers could come and access grass for their animals, particularly in the dry season. I must say it was a very good project, a project that we have continued, and we have grown the project. But you spent \$11 million on buildings in Mon Jaloux, beautiful buildings; in fact better washrooms than the Hyatt.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, your original 30 minutes are now spent. You are entitled to 15 more minutes. You may proceed.

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, much obliged. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal: Tell us what you are going to do now.

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: You will get your time.

Madam Speaker, I was grateful for the lavish toilets in Mon Jaloux and the tiling and everything. The only thing with that is that nobody managed to install the electricity to the facility. So for two or three years when we came in, Mon

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Jaloux had no electricity. The manager sat in the guard booth because he got a connection from a nearby house, and Mon Jaloux, with all the great intentions, had no electricity and no activity.

Go there now. You will see as part of the reorganization and the use of the spaces that we have, you will see staff. You will see the Ministry has moved staff to Mon Jaloux. You will see activities. You will see the farmers around very productive, some of the most productive farmers. You would see a massive pond, once covered by debris and grass and vine and all sorts of things, it took us about six months to clean the pond. That is what we did.

Then you had this fancy project to create 20-acre—well, if you could not give out the Caroni two-acre, you could never have achieved this 20-acre plot. Good idea, recognizing that farmers need a substantial plot. The good producing farmers, the productive farmers in this country could handle 100 acres of land easily. I am on record as saying the mega farms are a waste of time, whose ever idea it was, I am on record as saying this country needs mega farmers and we have them, and we must find ways to get the substantial acreage in the hands of the farmers—the serious farmers—and to remove these people who pretend to be farmers so they could grab land.

So, Madam Speaker, it is easy in the context of agriculture incentives and in flood damage to just talk all these things, but at some stage you have to implement it. You have to get it done. In relation to the agriculture incentive, notwithstanding what is allocated now, I am on record, I have said to the Parliament before that the agriculture incentives, they have had their run, but at no point—for 15 years we have spent over \$500 million in agriculture incentives, nobody has tracked the performance of the incentives.

We undertook substantial work through Dr. Gobin Seepersad from the University of the West Indies. He submitted his report last year. The Ministry has reviewed it, we have been back and forth, we have been looking at it and out of that work came in the last budget the new agriculture incentive, up to \$100,000, and an allocation of \$20 million. What does that intend to do? That literally separates the sheep from the goats.

When we find people who are serious in agriculture—as I have gone around and I told the Minister of Finance—when you go around to these farmers, you see, for example in the context of the weather patterns and climate change, you see farmers who are doing well, but they need an area where they could do

protected farming. And they would not cover two acres with sheds in one year, but over a period of time, they will move their production into a covered area. The incentive is intended to cover that.

8.30 p.m.

We have farmers—we talk about the packing houses and so on. Madam Speaker, if you go around you will ask yourself from time to time: Where are the washroom facilities on these farms? So we thought that the farmers, and if go Mon Jaloux you will see some of the farmers doing it, a farmer with \$100,000 would be able to construct a washroom with a septic tank, an area where the farmer could do the post-harvest work on the produce, to grade and to sort and do some packaging, and also a secured area where they could store. And we believe, based on the estimates, that \$100,000 could cover that that will transform the lives of these farmers. They would not be at the mercy of the middlemen handling the primary production because it is at the risk of spoiling, and they would be able to extract an additional value.

We believe, Madam Speaker, that there are specific things, for example, the dairy farmers, the dairy farmers who need to cool their milk down quickly. We believe that farmers who are in production, some farmers who want assistance with research, with creating a brand, with accessing packaging, these are the farmers who are going to be able to access this new incentive based on our determination on their production, their productivity, their capacity and their ability to create products for local consumption competing with the imports and also for exports.

Madam Speaker, the fisheries sector. A lot of money has gone into fisheries. My friend, the Member from Couva North, knows well. Many of you have interest on the coast line. We have 65 landing sites in this country. We have a new facility about to be completed in Carenage. We have Moruga in the design stage. But, Madam Speaker, we have in this country legislation that is 102 years old dealing with fisheries. The legislation, fisheries, such an important international and local activity, and the legislation contains nine clauses. Do you believe that, Member for Chaguanas West?—nine clauses. So no matter what policy and no matter what we do in terms of physical facilities, we do not have the enforcement mechanism to deal with the trawlers. That is why every Government has failed on the issue of trawlers. We have to negotiate with the trawlers because there is no provision in law to deal with the trawlers on the basis of international agreements that we have signed on to.

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And, Madam Speaker, for the last two and a half years, I personally have committed a lot of professional time to work on the draft Bill. We have reached the stage where we are going out for the final consultation on June 11th; we have three consultations. I am saying that we have drawn—the FAO was engaged on this project for new legislation in 1992. Do you believe that?—1992. The Bill is not small. I prefer small, short legislation. This is 168 clauses because it is forward looking. It deals with all of our commitments and obligations in terms of international fisheries.

We export US \$40 million a year, but there are risks now particularly with the EU, and the new measures introduced by the United States and this legislation is vital.

And I will close, Madam Speaker. My colleague the Member from Tabaquite is not here. Every year he asks me that question about the \$40 million we spend on wages and salaries in livestock. And I have said over and over, we have talked a lot about buffalypso. We have talked a lot about these farms, these substantial farms. Those of you—your constituents are saying to you from time to time, “I have gone to the Ministry’s farm and I have asked for breeding stock, and I see other people getting and I cannot access it”. And the fact is that the Ministry cannot continue to manage these farms that do not benefit the public. The services that private livestock farmers want in this country are the services of vets, veterinary technicians, farm hands, qualified people, and we need to stop feeding our animals in the Ministry where we cannot account for it at the end of day, and we need to put our focus on developing the livestock farms through private enterprise. And that is where we are about to go, Madam Speaker.

I am happy to be here. I am happy to make my contribution. I am happy to receive the \$38 million on behalf of the farmers of this country that will benefit, not Tobago, the 39 of you, and I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Mayaro. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Rushton Paray (Mayaro): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to join this debate this evening as we debate an Act to supplement and vary the appropriation of the sum, the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2018) Act, 2017.

Now, Madam Speaker, before I get into the gist of my contribution, it is important that I respond a bit to my colleague the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. As you may be well aware that we do share some common

space in Mayaro there. And having listened to the hon. Minister, I must say that much of what he has said, I have some sympathy for him in terms of the challenges that he is experiencing, having been shadowing the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries for some time.

And his conversation really speaks to the challenge that we found ourselves in agriculture over many, many, many years. So, I will sympathize with the challenges that he is experiencing as the line Minister, and what I did not hear this evening is: What is the way forward? I have heard every single challenge, but very little solutions to take the challenges forward.

Madam Speaker, I want to address one or two little points that the hon. Minister has made, and he referenced this situation with the EMBD and this \$400 million loan that was taken to build 10 roads. But, Madam Speaker, it is not 10 roads like 10 traces, it is 10 components of a network through the Caroni lands. So to the man on the street it may sound like it is just 10 little roads to go down a side street, but it is really a network of roads that run straight through the Caroni property stretching from Couva, Chaguanas, Caroni and so on, and what is unique about this whole conversation is that the EMBD certified the roads. So certification was given, the job was done, it was cleared and payments made.

Now, what the hon. Minister, in shaping the conversation, while the hon. Minister did not say it, that there may have been some untoward activities bordering on corruption in it, but he did not say that, but it was framed that way. And, Madam Speaker, if there was, I will dare wonder why it is that those very same contractors who built those roads, are the same ones getting million-dollar contracts under this administration. [*Desk thumping*] So, if there was something wrong, well then we should not be giving them any work, and this has come up in a lot of debates so far in continuing with these contractors. So, Madam Speaker, I want to leave that particular issue with the EMBD right there.

Madam Speaker, my colleague, the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, referred to the Marper Farms, which is in her constituency, and obviously the hon. Minister came and he painted a different picture about how beautiful and wonderful this farm is that is in her constituency. But what is worth noting, and I bear no bones with the hon. Prime Minister, but what was instructive is that he visited—the hon. Prime Minister visited the Marper Farms, and shortly after that visit, it may have been coincidence, you know, the hon. Prime Minister said it was a very beautiful farm, it is a lovely farm, and shortly after that, all the contracts were refused to be renewed. Why? After you had the hon. Prime Minister come

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and talk about how well kept and well designed—I mean, he was there playing with the animals, the children and so on, only to have the contracts stopped shortly afterwards.

Madam Speaker, and somewhere in the conversation, all of a sudden the whole conversation about diseases on the farm came up, and based on that, the Marper Farms have taken a downswing based on that. So it is just instructive that this has happened shortly after the visit of the hon. Prime Minister.

And taking that into consideration with the whole conversation around diseases, it is instructive that, you know, the St. Augustine nurseries as well, have been afflicted with this disease, but it is very strange that the conversation around diseased plants in these oranges, it came up just when the conversation about houses to be built in this area as well. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Madam Speaker, to the man on the street who is listening in, it will really, you know, put them in a position to think well, “ay”, how come; why? You know, we know how electioneering processes happen, and, you know, I thought that it was instructive that this conversation around diseases on these plants, all of a sudden, comes up at this particular time. But, Madam Speaker, that is how it is, we will continue to fight for the man on the street, the farmers as we know best, and we will do what we have to do as a loyal Opposition.

I had to laugh when the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries poked a little fun about the issue of substituting wheat for cassava. And, you know, I got the feeling, you know, that his view is that the cassava could not work or is not a good option to mix the wheat to make your flour. But yet, we had the hon. Prime Minister, at some point in time, was championing the whole issue of cassava, having given advice to an audience of how to maintain and clean and cut up the cassava and so on.

So, you know, the hon. Minister really made some points there, and as I said in my opening, I understand the challenges because I have been shadowing the Ministry, I have seen it and I know that it is a historical problem, but I just needed to touch those four areas before I start my contribution.

So, Madam Speaker, 32 months have gone in this administration, and Trinidad and Tobago is in a real state of paralysis, paralysis that was brought on by a political campaign in 2015 that used fake news, empty promises, character assassinations, all in a “pelau” of untruths and duplicity. [*Desk thumping*] And that is what this country has not been able to get itself out. They have not been able to bootstrap its way up since 2015.

Madam Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago has lost its position, its reputation, its stature, in both the international and regional arenas. And the recent challenges, fumbblings that we had at our foreign relations level, it has really put us in a very bad state in terms of our international position.

Madam Speaker, in 32 months Trinidad and Tobago is but a glimmer of the star which we once were. In 2015, this administration, they rode into Government on a high horse full of promises and expectation. Thirty-two months later, \$115 billion spent and we have very little to show for it. Madam Speaker, you have to look hard to find what would have been done with this \$150 billion.

So, we come here today to give another \$230 million on top of that, and we have no choice other than to sit as when you go cinema in the balcony and to watch the slashing and burning of an additional \$800 million in our developmental capital to continue perpetuating this administration's empty vision while crashing this gem of a country that we call Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, it is impossible, or rather, it is important that we must take a look at Trinidad and Tobago in the wider world. And I just want to pinpoint briefly that at the end of 2017 the world, the global economy was on an upswing. It was doing better than forecasted. It was due primarily to an upswing in global investments, manufacturing and trade as well. And this spread throughout the Euro zone, Latin America and right here in the Caribbean as well.

Madam Speaker, our tourism dependent economy in the Caribbean here, there was an estimated growth of 2.2 per cent in 2017. Commodity exporters, those islands that export commodities, growth was projected at 1.4 per cent up from minus 3.3 per cent in 2016.

So, Madam Speaker, if we as a country are sitting in a global connected climate, why did everybody move forward and we have not moved at all? So something, something in terms of the policy direction of this administration has stagnated us.

As I reflect on the economic environment globally and regionally, it is easy for one to summarize that we ought to have benefited from a strong global economy. But that has not been the case. You know, there is an old saying, you know, "You never look a gift horse in its mouth." Well, I think a strong and robust Caribbean and a world economics was really a gift for this administration to tune their policy to ensure that they ride the wave of development going forward. But, again, after 32 months, they have failed in most, if not all, the economic sectors of growth and development. [*Desk thumping*]

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Madam Speaker, with respect to growth in our twin-island Republic, although there was significant increase in the energy sector, the non-energy sector continues to undergo tremendous declines and stagnation in some areas; construction, manufacturing, distribution. And what is unique about these three areas, compared to the energy sector, the energy sector has a very low amount of job opportunities, whereas the other three areas mentioned that falls in the non-energy sector, they are the highest employers. So, when you have these areas being stagnated, you find that you now have problems in terms of a ramping up of the unemployment rate in this country.

Our country's balance of payment as well has a current negative position of over \$600 million. I know this Government started in 2015 with the concept of diversification, the conversation around diversification, alternative food import arrangements and so on, but still we are still importing more than we are exporting, and that is something that we have to address. Our net official reserves as at the end of December 2017, we are at \$8.3 billion which is just around nine months of cover.

Madam Speaker, in Minister of Finance's contribution today he did speak heavily in terms of the prowess and the return of a strengthening of our energy sector. And in the supplementation today there is \$100 million that is being transferred to the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries. And over the last two years, in this House, I have had to sit here and listen about how the UNC and the People's Partnership did nothing to develop the energy sector from 2010 to 2015. And I take a particular interest in this because I have worked in the sector for some time and I was aware of a lot of the issues in the sector as well.

Madam Speaker, if you would allow me to take just two minutes to just describe what is called a time event horizon in the energy sector. It takes about six to seven years for an energy project to go from the point of—you decide point A is where the gas or oil is until the drilling and exploration starts, and the gas or oil comes up to the wellhead. It takes about six to seven years for that horizon to happen.

Madam Speaker, this administration has been in office for a little under two years and a half, and if it takes six to seven years for a horizon then I could stand here and say that they had nothing to do with Juniper, [*Desk thumping*] nothing to do with Juniper. They had nothing to do with TROC, and they have nothing to do with Sercan either.

So it is very unfair, it is absolutely unfair to say that nothing that the Partnership did between in 2010 and 2015 is benefiting this country, and that is how you work the maths, Madam Speaker. I mean, there were a number of issues inside of that as well, whether accelerated capital depreciation was a good thing or a bad thing. What I can tell you is that that was a standard feature of contracts all over the world with all energy companies during that period because the time was very tough for these energy companies, and you wanted to incentivize them as much as you can. So nothing was strange with that.

And mind you, Madam Speaker, if there was not a collapse of the oil price down to \$22 a barrel, we would never be having this conversation about accelerated capital depreciation. You know why?—because the energy companies would have still been making a decent profit, so that the country would have gotten its taxes and royalties and so on.

So, I just wanted to clear that issue because the horizon is what is important, and I can tell you for those three things, that extra 750 million cubic feet of gas that we are getting today has its nexus from the decisions made by the UNC [*Desk thumping*] the People's Partnership in 2011/2012.

Madam Speaker, with respect to GDP which was mentioned by the hon. Minister of Finance, there is an interesting article written by Anthony Wilson in the *Trinidad Express* on May 01, 2018, and if I can read it a bit:

“Minister of Finance Colm Imbert sent out two news releases; one dealing with rating agency S&P affirming its investment grade rating for the country and the other his ministry's upward revision of the projection of economic growth for T&T to between 1.5 per cent and 1.8 per cent.”

What Anthony Wilson did, Madam Speaker, he lamented that these two statements were issued within 10 minutes of each other, and that he claimed was worrying and problematic as well, because it reflected poorly on the state of the country's collection and dissemination of accurate data. And because of that, there was the view that there may be an intrusion of politics in the forecast.

So that type of data out in the international arena and, you know, people who want to look at doing business with us here in Trinidad, if there is the feeling that the political arm interferes with economic data, then how are our business partners going to trust us when they ask for our economic data? So that is where it becomes very, very tricky.

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Madam Speaker, as we mention the Standard & Poor's rating, now the man on the street, most people do not understand what these rating agencies do. And in this particular instance, while we were not downgraded from our investment grade, what Standard & Poor's said is that, "Listen, I am watching 'all yuh' closely, and if you all do not perform better, we will downgrade you all to a negative status within 12 to 24 months".

But what the Minister of Finance did or attempted to do was to lay blame on poor energy numbers. And hon. Sen. Khan—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 55(1)(b).

Madam Speaker: I will allow a little leeway, but remember this ground has been covered. So, I will allow you a little leeway.

Mr. R. Paray: Sure. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just wanted to make the point with the Standard & Poor's, that because the data, the incorrect data that was sent was not the reason why we were put on this negative outlook. And how this system works, is when these technocrats come down, what creates that position is the conversation with the Minister of Finance and his technocrats. And if they cannot convince these technocrats from Standard & Poor's that our policy is strong, then they are not convinced. They are going to put us on this watch list. So, Madam Speaker, when—[*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I would like to hear the contribution. I am sure that somebody else, when they get up to respond, will then say whatever you all would like to say. Please, continue.

Mr. R. Paray: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yes, so Standard & Poor's their conversation really is: What you are doing for your non-energy sector? That is what they will ask because they have been observing the energy sector, I mean, they have not been asleep, right?—so they know what is happening. But we have to convince them that our policy direction in the non-energy sector is what is going to reposition Trinidad and Tobago to be a strong, strong economy, and clearly the Government led by the Minister of Finance was not able to do that.

Madam Speaker, the hon. Minister of Finance spoke about the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund being the highest it has ever been at US \$5.9 billion. And the hon. Minister stopped short of saying openly that he is the cause for that, you know, that good policy and good decision-making has caused that. But what the Minister did not say is that—how much money has been deposited in the HSF in the last two and a half years. There was no mention about that.

So, how did this fund grow? Madam Speaker, there is a portion of the fund which sits in US equity, and for the last two quarters the American stock market has what you call a bull run which means that stocks have been gaining momentum and adding value. So 95 per cent of the value of that increase of the HSF has come from the equity market. So there is nothing to do with good policy or good decision-making by this administration [*Desk thumping*] that would have strengthened our position on the HSF. So, I just wanted to deal with that.

Madam Speaker, if we were to look at Trinidad and Tobago and this being a mid-year review, and as my colleague the Member for Caroni Central said earlier on, it is really a midterm review for this administration, and it may be important that we take long look at some of the promises that have been made and let us see how well, in fairness to the Government, how well they have performed in some of the areas.

In my opening conversation, Madam Speaker, I talked about the world developed, pushed forward, because trade and investments was really the key driver in the world economy. So, I am of the view that trade and industry is a critical component of our economy today to drive especially the non-energy sector. We need to pay specific attention to all the arms of trade and industry and strengthen it where necessary. But it is instructive, Madam Speaker, that in the supplementation and variation, trade and industry did not receive 1 cent in that variation.

So, I was a bit concerned that taking note of the importance of trade and industry, and all the arms that fell under it, I felt some sort of push in terms of the variation; the supplementation should have been very, very important to put into the system today.

9.00 p.m.

So, Madam Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about the Eximbank. The Eximbank has been bandied about for the last couple months since the budget speech last October. And this \$100 million fund, which is supposed to be the saviour for our manufacturers, and perhaps a saviour for the country in terms of its diversification drive. But, Madam Speaker, it is instructive that this fund was cut and pasted quickly over the last six or seven days, just in time to check off a box today in the mid-year review. So, I have a few questions to ask. And, Madam Speaker, as you know I run a few businesses. I do sit in a network of business people in the country, and from my understanding of the requirement for US currency in this country, we require approximately one and a half billion dollars,

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US currency, throughout the year. Now, let us assume that out of that \$1.5 billion, the manufacturers only require 10 per cent of that. We are just using an estimate. That is a US \$150 million. Madam Speaker, before the horse even leave the gate, we done short by \$50 million right there. Let us assume only 20 manufacturers qualify for that fund, you end up with every manufacturer accessing, if there is an equity position, US \$5 million, which gives each one of them a little under US \$500,000 a month.

Now, Madam Speaker, the manufacturers who have to be competitive to really drive our economic return, I do not feel US \$450,000 a month is enough for these guys. So, I question whether enough thought went into this whole issue around the Eximbank. So, the questions that are being asked right now are: Which manufacturers will get access? And in what quantum? And then, who gets priority? And these are real questions that they are asking. Madam Speaker, what is preventing a manufacturer from drawing down in the Eximbank fund and then going back to the office and calling the commercial bank and say, look, I want more money? So, what are we doing to prevent double dipping? What are we doing to prevent double dipping in both the Eximbank and the commercial bank? Have we put anything in place to prevent that?

Madam Speaker, will the fund be available to existing manufacturers, or would new companies be allowed to tap into the fund? If the fund is available to existing companies, would they have to meet a minimum export level in order to get access to the funds? Madam Speaker, will those manufacturers who are using indigenous raw material be given preference over those who have to import material to make their goods? Madam Speaker, would exporters who are in the manufacturing sectors which are carded for the diversification drive, those who are fitting the diversification drive, would they be given preference to this fund? And, Madam Speaker, these are all real questions that I do not think have been answered either in the public domain. It was not mentioned today by the hon. Minister of Finance, and perhaps in his wrapping up he may mention some of that.

Madam Speaker, as we stay with the Eximbank for a couple minutes, the fund has been given to the bank, or it is going to be given to the bank. But, normally a bank would be able to push through an additional 25 per cent over their capitalization as an acceptable risk. The question is: Has the Eximbank been capitalized to manage that? Madam Speaker, what about the bank's HR capacity? Do they have the financial and technical expertise?

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Mayaro, your original 30 minutes are now spent. You are entitled to 15 more minutes, if you wish. And before you continue, I just want to say to the Minister of Finance, I know while you are making your mental notes during everybody's contributions, for your response, but sometimes your mental notes are audible, and I would ask you to please contain them. Member for Mayaro.

Mr. R. Paray: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was just asking whether the Eximbank may have the financial and technical expertise in their HR allocation to really manage the forex business. Does the Eximbank possess the IT systems, and I mentioned this, because, as I said I did not see allocations in the 2018 budget neither allocations in terms of the variation and the appropriation this time around that would speak to those issues. And as far as I understand, these were issues when conversations around ramping up the Eximbank months ago, those were some of the challenges that they were facing, and I have to find out whether these issues were addressed at the end of the day.

Madam Speaker, the Chamber of Industry and Commerce, basically I read that their position was that if the Government was to liberalize the foreign exchange market, there will not be a need to put a system in place for preferential treatment.

Another issue that was raised by the Finance Minister, he spoke about the low inflation rate that we are experiencing in this country. And again, the Minister boasted in a way as if it was a policy, you know, good planning, good job by this administration that has us in a low inflation rate position. But, Madam Speaker, the inflation rate is low because nobody buying anything. Nobody buying anything. [*Desk thumping*] They have imposed a suite of taxes upon the citizens of this country, and it has backfired, Madam Speaker. Logically, the Minister of Finance spoke today about how much revenue that they have collecting. They have collected more revenue than planned in a number of areas. But if that was so, why are we dipping into the IDF? Why? It means that these revenue generation systems have failed. They have not been able to collect the revenue that they were hoping for. So, the systems have failed. The policies that they have put in place have failed.

Madam Speaker, the mere fact that the IDF had to be harvested—I will not use the word “raided”—but harvested to fill the gap in Recurrent Expenditure, it means that their revenue generation measures have failed. Madam Speaker, in our situation here in Trinidad and Tobago, low inflation is a signal of economic problems, because it is associated with the weakness in our economy right now.

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Madam Speaker, unemployment is high, consumer confidence is low, people and businesses are less willing today to make investments and to spend non-consumption. It is not by any miraculous policy decision inflation is low. It is because confidence has been sucked out of this economy and nobody wants to part with their money right now. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, in the few minutes that I have left, I want to just talk a bit about my constituency, and a bit how development and IDF can work to ramp up our GDP capability in this country, and Mayaro is poised. If somebody only pays attention to Mayaro we can do a lot for Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, I want to speak about our Galeota port facility. The Galeota port facility has a Phase II component where the harbour is to be dredged to allow for deep hauled vessels. If the Phase II—Galeota point is an active economic zone already, compared to what we want to do at Toco and so on, I am not saying we should not do it, but Galeota is already an economic zone. If we were to dredge and get Phase II going, you know what happens? Our port in Galeota will be able to accommodate Panamax Class II shipping vessels coming across the Panama Canal. And we could start a whole new maritime sector in Galeota Point. We can create jobs in terms of chandelling, welding, repairs, navigation; just the supporting of these vessels. And, the uniqueness about Trinidad is that we are the last jolt of land that any vessel coming through the Panama Canal, there is an opportunity to touch base in Trinidad before they head to Europe, or head to Africa.

So, Madam Speaker, when we are looking to take money from our IDF, I mean, there are so many competing areas, but I can tell you Galeota point is an active economic zone, and it is waiting to get that sort of investment to help move Trinidad and Tobago forward.

Madam Speaker, our tourism sector. Our tourism sector. Mayaro is so well suited for development for years. All the other tourism areas have gotten heavy investments, Maracas being one of them. When you look at the fact that we have 17 miles of beaches, we have a natural eco-tourism zone in terms of our swamp, our rivers. We have two FIFA class sporting grounds for international sport matches. We have a mix of industries. We have, you know, restaurants, hotels. We have agriculture. There is so much in terms of community tourism, in terms of what you call the, a, b, c's, the abiotic, biotic, cultural components of tourism. All it really needs is a bit of focus, and I remember earlier on in my tenureship as the MP, I asked a question: Why are funds not being given for tourism in Mayaro? And I was told that the funds go to the regional corporation, and for the last two years the regional corporation has not received any funding under the tourism Head.

So, Madam Speaker, if we were to be serious on how we can drive our local economic development, that is just but two areas; two areas, that if we spend some time and energy we can drive a new platform for development in that constituency, tourism could be a new platform for entrepreneurship for small business, we can sap up quite a bit of the young unemployed people that we have, and the beauty about geo-tourism, or community tourism, you do not need MBAs. It is a product where the market comes to the product. The product does not have to go to the market, so you do not have to ship it, and you do not need to have MBAs to sell your product. We are a beautiful people. We are a fun-loving people, and community tourism, that can allow us to learn to train our people in the whole area of services so we can then attract an international market. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Madam Speaker, thank you very much for the opportunity to bring this short contribution this evening to this House, and I continue to wish the Government well. I have no intention to see them fail, because when they fail we all fail. I just want them to make the right decisions going forward. I thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is now 9.13 p.m., and we have been here since 10.00 a.m. this morning, and I think, based on what I had said, all 18 Members on the Opposition side are prepared to speak here tonight. So, we have a long time again to go.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: All the 18 being here.

Mr. D. Lee: Well, do not worry, they are coming back in. They are coming back in. Madam Speaker, the last time I spoke here on a sort of appropriation Bill was in the budget in October, and I said to you I am having a conversation with you, Madam Speaker. And again tonight at 9.14 I want to have another conversation with you, Madam Speaker. So, I will not take on the other side at this point in time.

Madam Speaker, I came this morning anticipating good news by the Minister of Finance. I think the whole country, when they woke up this morning, was anticipating very good news based on what the Minister of Finance would have said the day before. And I listened to his presentation, just under 55 minutes, and at 9.14 p.m. I am depressed after listening to him. I am jaded, I am depressed, and as a patriot of this country, and a taxpayer, and a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, I really was hoping that the Minister of Finance would have given me hope that after spending 30 months as Minister of Finance to this country, that he could really come here today and give the country hope that something is really turning in this country. [*Desk thumping*]

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Because, after listening to him, he started to turn the corner, but is as if when he started to turn the corner he was on a roundabout, because he kept going round and around the roundabout. Because, he has not given, after just under 55 minutes, any sort of hope for this country. He spoke of numbers, and I was able, given the length of time we have been here, I have been able to look at the *ParlView*, and they were able to take notes of what he actually said. And, the Minister of Finance opened his presentation when he said, when the People's National Movement entered Government two and a half years ago they committed to deal with two major issues. One, repairing the damage to Trinidad and Tobago's fiscal accounts, which had deteriorated due to the drastic decrease in oil prices as well as the production of oil and gas. And two, reversing the persistent decline in the economy which has been plaguing Trinidad for many years. These were his two major arguments when he presented his midterm or mid-year review, however he wants to call it, Madam Speaker.

And, I want to start off before I get into my contribution of thanking and really complimenting all our speakers on this side of the bench, [*Desk thumping*] starting off from the Opposition Leader who gave a brilliant response to the Member for Diego Martin North/East and all other speakers on this side. And we have many more great contributors to come here tonight. So the night is very, very young. I listened to the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West and it is as if I was listening to his contribution back in the budget in October. It was a total regurgitation of what he said in that budget presentation; nothing new. And I want to tell him that he should have come with a prepared speech like the Member for Siparia who was able to give a clinical—

Mr. Hinds: Prepared speech.

Mr. D. Lee: Whether it was prepared or not, the Minister of Finance had his prepared speech. [*Interruption*] Madam Speaker, I am having a conversation with you at 9.17 p.m. After listening to the Minister of Finance, and I am hoping that all his Members would have listened to him. When I looked at their faces, and the ones that presented or debated here tonight and today, they were depressed. They were depressed just as I was depressed.

Because when you listen to the Member for St. Joseph, the Member for St. Joseph is the Minister of Health, he talked everything under the sun about his Ministry and what he would achieved, and very good stuff he would have mentioned. But, you know, the one thing I was hoping that he would have said, is that based on what the Minister of Finance said about turning the corner, he would have come and said to us here tonight, or today, that the hospitals would

have gotten the medicine that is so critically needed for the patients of Trinidad and Tobago. He would have been able to tell us that the doctors would have been able to stop bringing their own medication, like Tylenol and Excedrin and surgical gloves to assist the patients, and to do their work in these hospitals. Because they said they are turning the corner.

So, I was flabbergasted when the Minister of Health could not even state one thing that they were really doing for the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago. He talked about building a block in the Port of Spain hospital. They talked about that for the last 30 months, so nothing new. I listened to the Member for Arima, and I also listened to the Member for Moruga/Tableland. I was really hoping that the Minister of Education would have been happy now that him hearing—

Hon. Member: His hearing.

Mr. D. Lee: He is hearing tonight, today, that the economy is turning by the Minister of Finance. And he would have been able—the Minister of Education would have been able to come and tell us of all the different schools that he would be repairing from tomorrow. Nothing of the fact. [*Desk thumping*] Because there are so many schools that are in dire need of repairs, simple repairs, that we have been asking questions, literally, let us say for the last two months. Every session, every sitting we have here we asked them about certain schools in different constituencies, and his famous excuse is that, we have financial constraints. So, I was very heartened when the Minister of Finance came here today at around 11.00 a.m., and told us that the economy is turning, and he gave some very nice indicators. His estimates indicate projected growth of 2 per cent in 2018—and I hope I have it right—2.2 per cent in 2019, and 2.5 per cent in 2020. If these numbers are good, and honest, and truthful, and correct, the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago should have some hope.

But, where did he get these numbers? Because we met, some Members of the Opposition met with Standard & Poor's, I think was in early April, and they were not hopeful to this country. And it reflected in the outcome, or their results of how they graded us a couple weeks later, where they gave us a negative outlook.

Madam Speaker: Okay, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, I think the Standard & Poor's issue has been flogged, so—

Mr. D. Lee: Well—

Madam Speaker:—I, I. I am saying now that this is tedious repetition, and unless you are bring something very new, I would ask you to continue.

Mr. D. Lee: Well—

Madam Speaker: I would ask you to go on to the other point.

Mr. D. Lee: All right. Thank you, Madam Speaker. Well, I do not think anybody went into the meeting with Standard & Poor's that we had with the Opposition. But, I am guided, Madam Speaker. Okay.

But, when you look at these indicators that the Minister of Finance presented here this afternoon, it is very suspect. Madam Speaker, if one was to listen to the TTMA president last night on television, he talked about the manufacturers not seeing a turnaround in this economy. So I really do not understand, and maybe the Minister of Finance in his wind up, could explain to us, in a more thorough way what he means by the economy is turning.

Mr. Hinds: Has turned.

Mr. D. Lee: Has turned. He said it has turned, sorry. Now, Madam Speaker, without running afoul of being tedious repetition, I listened to the Minister of Finance this morning, and he based the entire, according to him, has turned, the economy has turned based on all the good work that the People's Partnership did in the last five years, based on projects that are now bearing fruits.

Madam Speaker, when the Minister of Finance took up his portfolio, back in September 2015, there were two things that really he talked about to drive this economy, that is, increasing oil production and increasing gas production. And, most of the speakers talked about gas production, but I want to spend a little time on oil production, without running afoul. Based on the Juniper project, not only did it increase the gas production, but because of the Juniper—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 55(1)(b), he is running afoul.

Mr. D. Lee: Of what?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: A previous Standing Order was invoked already. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: I believe a Standing Order was invoked.

Mr. D. Lee: Yes.

Madam Speaker: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, seeing that you yourself have identified the fine line that you have to walk, I will give you a bit of leeway, but I also think that you yourself can use your own measure to stop yourself, because you have identified it. Okay?

Mr. D. Lee: Correct.

Madam Speaker: Continue.

Mr. D. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for some leeway. *[Interruption]* Madam Speaker, I am being disturbed by the Member for Laventille. *[Interruption]* Yes, but double 10 has not arrived as yet.

So, Madam Speaker, when we looked at fiscal measures that the Minister of Finance has talked about over the last 30 months in the energy sector, they have not produced one fiscal measure as far as the energy sector is concerned. They talked about deep water bid rounds, they have not done that to date. They have not put anything in place about deep water bid round. They talked about the Angelin project, we started that Angelin project. We were the ones that negotiated that Angelin project. *[Desk thumping]* And you know the funny thing about that Angelin project—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 55(1)(b).

Mr. D. Lee: We did not talk about—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: You did.

Mr. D. Lee: No, no, no, no.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: You talked about the Angelin project; we are waiting for TROC now.

Mr. D. Lee: No, I “ain’t” talking about TROC.

Hon. Member: Truck, car, van, everything. *[Crosstalk]*

Madam Speaker: Member, again, I hope it is a new dimension so I am going to give you a “lil” leeway, but, again, be guided. As you said, it is late in the day and we have plenty people to talk. Please continue.

Mr. D. Lee: Madam Speaker, you know what they could not do about the Angelin project, like what we did in the Juniper project? We were able to build the fabrication rig in—*[Interruption]*—and the Angelin project, they were not able to negotiate it and bp took it to Mexico because they did not give them the assurance that they had the confidence. *[Desk thumping]* And we lost work, we lost jobs, we lost hundreds of jobs for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, I know I am not going to run afoul of this one, the Dragon Field; the Dragon Field and the Loran Manatee. Back in December 2016 we had the Congo line in Venezuela. I do not know if you remember that? And when they

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came back, when the Government of the day came back to here, they based everything about the gas from—I want to say the Dragon Field would be able to take Trinidad to new heights. And when we challenged them about the Dragon Field and the relationship with the Venezuelan Government, they said we were unpatriotic; we should not go there.

Madam Speaker, today, we have not had any clarity about that Dragon Field and the gas projects. [*Desk thumping*] They came back here in the 30 months and they talked about the Loran Manatee fields. To date we have not had any clarity. And you know what is the ironic thing, Madam Speaker? The American Government are pulling out of Venezuela. So, these two projects, the Dragon Field and the Loran Manatee are in jeopardy, and I am telling you it would not come to fruition under their watch. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: So it is not in jeopardy?

Hon. Member: The dragon cannot dance.

Mr. D. Lee: The only dragon could dance Mr. Karim is the Chinee dragon, and I will tell them about that.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: You are going to tell us about the Chinee dragon?
[*Laughter*]

Mr. D. Lee: Madam Speaker, I am being disturbed again by my good friend. [*Laughter*] I good, you know. I good with this now, you know. I am a pro at this now. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I have not heard about what the Minister of Finance is really doing to really take this country forward. You know, we came here on Tuesday, we talked about variations, and in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries there was a virement—a supplementation of \$100 million for fuel subsidy. And this is something that the country was waiting to understand, whether or not gas prices would have—the Minister of Finance would have raised gas prices here today. And we were heartened that he did not do it. But the question I would like to ask, based on what is happening with the price of oil, would that price hike, and we anticipate, would it come in the next budget in October for the people of Trinidad and Tobago? This is something that we would like to know.

9.30 p.m.

Madam Speaker, this Government has not launched any new fiscal measures in the past two years under their tenureship. Companies like EOG, bp and Shell are investing a result of confidence created by the PP Government. When the Prime

Minister returned and they talked about it from Houston in 2017, he said he earned \$10 billion in FDIs for this nation, and FDI is something that has gone away from this country in the last 30 months. I do not know if they could really state what significant FDIs that they have created and generated and brought to this country in the last 30 months.

Hon. Members: None.

Mr. D. Lee: I have not heard—if it was such a big figure he would have mentioned it today, he would have mentioned it today. [*Desk thumping*] I heard the Minister of Trade and Industry at some point in time in this House, she talked about—

Dr. Rambachan: Tootsie roll.

Mr. D. Lee: Yeah, some bubblegum factory or something like that, Madam Speaker. But the FDIs are non-existent in this country under their watch for the last 30 months. Under the PP Government, billions of dollars flowed in this country through FDIs—[*Desk thumping*] and it was a great foreign earner for the country. We are not seeing it here.

Madam Speaker, I thought I would have heard from the Minister of Finance today about easing, given that we have turned the corner, he would have talked about the supply of foreign exchange in the country and the business people, like all of us, would have been able to get an ease in the foreign exchange.

Madam Speaker, I want to turn a little bit on Petrotrin. You see, they talk that we squandered money and he mentioned about Petrotrin and being—

Madam Speaker: Member, he, they?

Mr. D. Lee: The Minister of Finance.

Madam Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. D. Lee: I mean no disrespect.

Hon. Members: That is not true.

Mr. Hinds: Throw him out.

Mr. D. Lee: So, Madam Speaker, Petrotrin. Petrotrin is something—we consider it a crown jewel for the country. Given what is happening with Petrotrin as we speak today, there is a lot of uncertainty that is happening in Petrotrin. We have a company—Petrotrin in our energy state oil company, and we do not even have a president or acting president who is running and taking care of the day to

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day activities of Petrotrin. They talked about—they like to cast blame on us that we waste and squandered money. I want to remind them about Malcom Jones and WTG—[*Desk thumping*—At least \$3 billion was squandered and they like to forget about that. They “doh” like to talk about it, but I will remind them every occasion, every chance I get, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Padarath: That is their legacy.

Mr. D. Lee: That is their legacy. Madam Speaker, I thought the Minister would have come here today and talk about the Petrotrin debt and balloon payments that are due in 2019 and 2022 respectively, because these is a debt of \$850 million and \$750 million, respectively. I thought he would have come here and given us the comfort that, because we have turned the country, we would not have to worry about these balloon payments.

Madam Speaker, I thought he would have come and talk about the gas master plan, and where we are going with that. I have not heard anything about that today in his presentation.

He mentioned in his opening—in his debate, Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member.

Mr. D. Lee: The hon. Member, sorry, about royalties payments. And he is estimating royalties, and I quote:

Royalties are excluding Petrotrin expected to reach \$2 billion this year.

Madam Speaker, I think if my memory serves me right, that it was only on December 31st, that the whole royalty situation was passed and so forth or put into law. Madam Speaker, for the last two years every revenue estimate that this Minister of Finance has given this country, he has never met those expectations. He came here in 2015/2016 budget and he talked about the VAT and the revenue that would have been achieved by decreasing VAT to 12½ per cent. He never met that revenue expectation. He talked about the online tax that he instilled and put on the people. He never met that revenue figure. So I do not have hope that these revenue generation figures that he has given us here today would be met. But, Madam Speaker, we wait at the end of the year.

Madam Speaker, I thought the Minister of Finance would have come here and talk about renewable energy. We heard nothing about renewable energy. And this is something as simple as in the environment where you had the street lighting programme that T&TEC was asking for much more money for the street lighting

programme. I thought we would have come here today and heard him talk about using solar lighting to save the country, and the gas that can be saved by doing solar lighting, street lighting. We heard nothing about that.

Madam Speaker, I thought he would have come here, the Minister of Finance, would have talked about the employment in the energy sector. I just want to remind you and the country, of the unemployment, the layoffs in the energy sector in the last 30 months. In June 2017, Atlantic LNG, approximately 50 permanent workers or 7 per cent of their work force were sent home. On March 2016, ArcelorMittal, 644 employees sent home.

Mr. Hinds: Roget.

Mr. D. Lee: March 2017, Methanol Holdings Trinidad Limited, a hundred workers were sent home.

Mr. Hinds: Roget.

Mr. D. Lee: So, Madam Speaker, there has been a loss of jobs in the energy sector throughout. So after listening to the Minister of Finance for just under 55 minutes, I am not any comfortable that the country has turned the corner as what the Minister of Finance is saying.

Mr. Imbert: I never said the corner boy, “dais” Dookeran.

Mr. D. Lee: All right. So, Madam Speaker, I really hope that in his wind up the Minister of Finance could really add some clarity and give the country some hope that good things are happening under his watch and really hope that we can look forward to something good coming out of this midterm review, Madam Speaker. And with those few words, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Barry Padarath (*Princes Town*): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to be able to contribute to the debate on:

A Bill to supplement and vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2018) Act, 2017.

Madam, when we look at the presentation by the Member for Diego Martin North/East earlier today, it can be best described in one word.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Excellent.

Mr. B. Padarath: Anti-climatic. You see, Madam Speaker, the hon. Minister of Finance has placed in the public domain a script, a narrative. He placed in the public domain a lot of expectations from the population. I am very happy to be

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able to contribute at this time. Why? Because it gave me opportunity to listen to the contribution of others but also to gauge public reaction and the reaction of stakeholders who study the economy of Trinidad and Tobago and look as well at the international impacts, in terms of outward shocks and inward shocks on our local economy.

Madam Speaker, we were still waiting like many others to share in the good news. And, Madam, if I were to share with you some of the names that I have been able to gauge with respect to Twitter, the social media platforms, the micro-work platforms, these were some of the names that have come up who have given their reactions to the presentation by the Minister and the Member for Diego Martin North/East.

Madam, these are not the words of the Member of Siparia only; these are not the words of the Member for Princes Town or the Members who spoke on this side. But these are the words of persons from the industries who are the stakeholders, but also, who represent the voice of the Manufacturing Association, of economists, of university lecturers, and Madam, of also former Ministers of Finance in a PNM administration. The names were: Vaalmikki Arjoon, doctor, economist; Roger Hosein, economist; Indera Sagewan-Alli, economist; Dr. Marlene Attzs, lecturer at the UWI; Marla Dukharan—

Hon. Members: “Oooh!”

Mr. B. Padarath:—head of TTMA; Mr. Alcazar [*Laughter*] and one Mariano Browne—

Madam Speaker: Order! Order!

Mr. B. Padarath: Former Minister of Finance, under a People’s National Movement who had the foresight and vision to serve under a better Prime Minister, Prime Minister Manning. He did not want to be among this band of merry men as the Member for Siparia described them. But, Madam Speaker, some very startling statistics have found its way into the public domain over the last few hours and I ask myself, did these reactions exist before the Minister presented the mid-year review?

Madam, when I looked at the reactions, they all expressed concern, criticism and they dissected, they cut up the Minister left, right and center. They revealed, because they looked at chronology of the PNM’s pattern as it relates to debt to GDP since they have come into office. Madam, under the UNC when we left in 2015 we were at 43 per cent. These economists all in a unanimous voice have said the PNM’s figure is 65 per cent.

Madam, when we heard that the Minister of Finance was going to tell us what was the condition of the economy, we were hoping to hear about the returns of VAT; absolutely no mention. Madam Speaker, the manufacturing sector has hinged a lot of their investment portfolios, hoping, especially with small and medium size businesses that we would have seen a lot of VAT returns being addressed by the Member of Diego Martin North/East. No such thing has existed and no such thing continues to exist because of the failure by the Minister of Finance today to provide any comprehensive plan as it relates to VAT returns.

And, Madam, when you juxtapose that and you raise the issue of the manufacturing sector, you look at 2015 to 2018. This is not the UNC or the Member for Siparia or the Member for Oropouche East or the Member for Princes Town saying this. The President of the Manufacturers Association before the Minister presented the mid-year review, and after the Minister presented the mid-year review had this to say. And I know the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre alluded to the fact that Mr. Alcazar indicated that he had no trust and he had no confidence, that the measures presented by the Minister today would inspire confidence in the manufacturing sector.

Madam, 8.7 per cent is what the manufacturing sector has been decreased by since the Minister of Finance has taken office in 2015. I heard a big song and dance from the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries and the hon. Minister spent most of his contribution telling us what the UNC did not do.

Mr. Hinds: Do not turn your back on the Speaker.

Mr. B. Padarath: The hon. Minister did not say, Madam, what his Government was intending on doing. But I understand very well why the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries was very selective and cherry-picked the information that he wanted to place in the public domain with respect to the Parliament. He went left, right, up and down, from Tableland to Mayaro, from Sangre Grande to Oropouche telling us all the woes of the agricultural sector.

Madam, do you know from 2015 to 2018 the Agricultural Society of Trinidad and Tobago has put out a figure today that the agricultural sector has declined by 17 per cent under the People's National Movement since coming into office.

Hon. Member: "Woo", shame, shame.

Mr. B. Padarath: Madam, I want to raise the Standard & Poor's report but on a totally different matter. I want to raise the issue of capital flight and that was something that was raised in the Standard & Poor's report. [*Crosstalk*] Listen, I

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can school any one of you, anytime, anyplace, anywhere on any topic. [*Desk thumping*] I do not need your help and I do not need your validation.

Madam, when you look at the capital flight figures that have been presented in the Standard & Poor's report, there is a concern expressed by Standard & Poor's that in our local banks we are only getting 1 per cent in terms of our investment. [*Crosstalk*] And their concern that because international commercial banks are providing—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Members, I know that the Member for Princes Town has the ability to throw his voice. I would like you all to cooperate in keeping your volumes down so he would not have to throw his voice too fast and too far at me, please.

Mr. B. Padarath: Thank you, Madam. Back to the issue of the Standard & Poor's report as it relates to capital flight. And I made the point that they expressed in that report that while local commercial banks were providing 1 per cent interest rates, they were concerned that you were seeing the movement of investor confidence in Trinidad and Tobago, local investor confidence, because they are now placing moneys abroad because they are getting higher yields and higher returns with 4 per cent and up.

Madam, the issue of the information that was provided to Standard & Poor's by the Government has been well expressed and there is just one element I would like to add. And that is an element that many this evening, since the Minister's speech has also echoed, and that is if you are getting varying positions from different Members of Government and the Minister is admitting that it is a mistake, then how do you expect international bodies—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: I will ask you to go on because as you quite rightly said, that point has been dealt with.

Mr. B. Padarath: Thank you, Madam. I will move on from that point and I would like to raise the issue of some of the concerns when you look at world economies, as it relates to whether or not you are going to see a change in the paradigm in terms of advancing a stagnated economy and taking it forward. And what are some of the elements that they looked at, Madam.

And, Madam, we all know that GDP is very important and that has been raised. But when you look at GDP growth it is driven by four components. You look at personal consumption, you look at retail sales, business investment, you look at construction, and inventory sales. That is how you know if a country or economy is turning around.

Madam, you know where you are and you will know if you are approaching a blind spot, that if you have shut down and you are projecting a false economy, you know, Madam, I heard just yesterday the hon. Prime Minister, while distributing some houses in Valsayn, the hon. Prime Minister had said, "What is wrong if oil and gas prices are going up. People can smile? People cannot expect better."

Madam, do you know where people expected better today, where people wanted to have their smiles today, they wanted to have it in their pockets and they wanted to have it in their homes. They wanted their grocery bills to go down; they wanted to feel safer in their country. They wanted to see the prosperity trickle down. Madam Speaker, the oil and gas prices going up will amount to nothing, absolutely nothing if it does not affect the everyday man, woman and child. And the point that the hon. Prime Minister and the Minister is missing in this is that if things are looking so rosy and so well, then they must tell us how the people of Trinidad and Tobago are going to benefit.

You know, Madam, if we are to stop the hemorrhaging and the leakage of tax collection, we have to also look to see some of the other areas as I have indicated in terms of other world economies, how they measure whether or not they are turning around. And if they are not turning around they look at international benchmarks and I will identify seven international benchmarks by the international world economies that have put forward this particular theory and we can see how in Trinidad and Tobago it is applicable. They say:

To measure the stagnation of your economy, if you are not seeing growth and there is no turnaround, you have to look at the higher unemployment.

And in every sector we have seen the CSO statistics provide 36,000 jobs lost in Trinidad and Tobago. You look at contracting industries, closure of businesses, downsizing, insolvency and bankruptcy.

Madam, we have not only seen this in the private sector, we have also seen this in the public sector. One of the other elements is Government resorting to desperate measures and this is identified by the world economies in terms of measuring whether or not you are turning around your economy or you remain stagnant. And it said:

Government resorting to desperate measures will raid facilities.

And when we look at the facilities like the HSF and the IDF, you see this pattern also developing right here in Trinidad and Tobago. Madam, they speak about high outward migration. And I believe it was the Member for Mayaro, if I am not mistaken,

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who spoke about young professionals who are looking at migrating because they cannot find sustainable employment right here in Trinidad and Tobago. Another sign, when a country is not turning around its economy and stagnation continues.

Madam, they speak about increasing yields on government and corporate bonds. We have seen much of that. They speak about widening balances of payments. Again, much of that. Depreciating currency. The US dollar to Trinidad and Tobago right now on the black market sometimes go for nine dollars and \$10. In the commercial banks they sometimes go beyond \$7. And therefore, this is another element that is telling us that we are not turning around anything because these are the international benchmarks that are being used by world economies to measure any growth.

Madam, I would also like to go to the issue of some of the figures as it relates to growth while the People's Partnership was in Government. In 2012, we were at 1.2 per cent; 2013, 1 per cent; 2014, 0.3; 2015 1.6. Coming to the PNM, 2016 the economy contracted by minus 6 per cent. In 2017, by minus 3.2 per cent.

I think many persons have spoken about the incentives provided by the People's Partnership attributed that to the reason why we are seeing an upsurge in the commodity of oil and gas right now being translated into revenue. But, Madam Speaker, again these are not the words of the Member for Siparia, the Member for Caroni Central or myself. I want to quote from an article, Thursday, April 05, 2018, that says this:

“At a public meeting on March 22 the”—Minister of Finance—“indicated that the economy was recovering. Where is the recovery? It's not in non-energy exports growth which are being squeezed for foreign exchange.

It's not in the labour market as recent statistics indicate a rise in the unemployment rate. It's not in the foreign exchange market it queues continue a reserves decline. It's not in the fiscal position, as to the best of my knowledge that is still in sharp deficit. It's not in the current account balance, as imports exceed exports in value. And foreign direct investment inflows”—have not—“increased.

There has been some firming in oil prices, above that projected by the Finance Minister in the budget...The only measure of increased economic activity is the growth in gas production because of the improvements and investment made in that sector due to the UNC incentives.”

Madam, these are the words of former Minister of Finance in a PNM administration—former Minister Mariano Browne in the Ministry of Finance. Those were their words and therefore no wonder when we look and we survey the economic landscape post-the presentation by the Member for Diego Martin North/East, no wonder they are in the same position as they started prior to his presentation and that is one of concern, one of skepticism and one of disbelief.

Madam Speaker, one of the areas that we must look at in terms of whether we are attracting foreign direct investment in Trinidad and Tobago is the ease of doing business. And we look at the year on year figures and what foreign direct investment Government has been able to attract. And we saw that in 2016, GDP in this country fell at its lowest in the nation's history under a PNM administration. And the Trading Economics website who did a study of Trinidad and Tobago, year on year, and with respect to GDP, also look at foreign direct investment. And, Madam, do you know in 2014, under a People's Partnership, Kamla Persad-Bissessar administration, we saw the highest levels of foreign direct investment coming into Trinidad and Tobago.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, 55(1)(b), Pointe-a-Pierre exhausted that issue of foreign direct investment.

Madam Speaker: Member for Princes Town, could you please go on to your next point.

Mr. B. Padarath: Thank you, Madam. Madam, when look at the ease of doing business that no one has mentioned here today, when we look at the ease of doing business in terms of bringing in foreign direct investment, we see that in 2013/2014 an international index ranking, Trinidad and Tobago moved up the ranking to number 66. Do you know where we are today under this administration led by Prime Minister Dr. Keith Rowley and the Minister of Finance, the Member for Diego Martin North/East? We are now at the position number 104. That is where we have reached in terms of the ease of doing business. Under a People's Partnership administration we had identified seven economic zones and I want to give you an example of one of the projects that we have pursued in order to bring significant growth and development to the press areas, like La Brea.

When you look at the area of shipbuilding at the port in La Brea, we were at the point, Madam, of finalizing negotiations when we left government, when the Chinese Eximbank for a loan and that would have provided a moratorium that would have seem us repaying that loan in five years' time post-the port.

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Madam, do you know with respect to those seven economic zones, when this Government came into power, total shutdown, and today when La Brea is in an economic stagnation, when there is high unemployment riddled with crime, they have no one but themselves to blame. Because they do not advance good ideas, good projects and good policy and they throw good money only behind bad projects. That is their history; that is their DNA. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I would like to turn to some issues that have been identified in the Auditor General's Report that we have been provided with. And before I go there I would like to just raise, very differently, from any other Member who has spoken about the issue of headline inflation. When you measure headline inflation the way that the hon. Minister of Finance has and the media caught him out and I must congratulate the media for calling out the Minister of Finance to explain what he meant. And when we realized that it was based on the supply and demand and that the demand was low for those products and that is what drove inflation down, it led me to something. I said let me look to see what were the countries around the world that were experiencing, because the Minister of Finance gave us an example. He said Nigeria, where they experienced oil and gas production, let us look at those countries and they too also have low inflation rates.

But what the hon. Minister did not tell us, Madam, what the hon. Minister did not tell us is that when there are other countries that are going through the same economic stagnation with similar economies to Trinidad and Tobago, that falls in the same pool and have been caught in the same bucket as Trinidad and Tobago. And I want to share some of those countries with you, Madam Speaker, and the deception by the Member for Diego Martin North/East when he spoke earlier today.

Madam, we are now in the same category with Ghana; we are in the same category as Solomon Islands, Brunei, Mali, Chad, FYR, Macedonia. And when you look again, they attributed to economic stagnation, no growth and they also indicated, which was interesting, is that they did not depend on the data provided by their own Government. Just like we do not depend on the data provided by the Member for Diego Martin North/East. [*Desk thumping*] And, Madam, the entire credibility of the Minister of Finance today is on the line, because the only person who believes, "Oh happy day, how great thou art" is the Minister himself who has crafted a narrative in the public domain that we spent out all the money, that we left the Treasury dry, but the Minister by his own admission today tells a different story and now the Minister's own issues—

Madam Speaker: Move on to the next point. That has also been articulated a lot.

Mr. B. Padarath: Thank you, Madam. Credibility issues. Credibility issues.

Madam, I would like to turn to the issues that I raise with respect to the Auditor General's Report. If you turn to page 72 of the Auditor General's Report and I found something very interesting, the Member for Arima had to say. I thought it was almost laughable. When the Minister is not talking about jockey shorts and sabotage and so on, Madam, the hon. Minister had this to say. Minister Garcia said that our approach, the People's Partnership approach to ICT and IT was a very *vaille-que-vaille*, haphazard approach.

Mr. Garcia: That is correct.

Mr. B. Padarath: Let us look at the approach of the People's National Movement according to the Auditor General's Report, when you look at page 72, a whole chapter that has been prepared, Madam, Chapter 5 I believe that it is, that deals with ICT and IT. And, Madam, I want you to hear what the Auditor General's Report has to say about the People's National Movement and its approach to IT. It said, the Auditor General, IT auditor assessment focus on four areas on page 72.

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It says, the Auditor General, IT Audit Assessment focused on four areas, on page 72:

Information gathering to determine the nature of ICT resources of Ministries and Departments and whether they were being used efficiently and effectively in achieving organization goals and objectives as well as identifying whether opportunities for integration and collaboration among Ministries and Departments were being effectively utilized.

2. Review of the IT planning fiscal and environmental security business continuity compliance with relative IT statutes.
3. Following upon the status of the implementation of recommendations on IT governance by IMPAC as stated in the report.
4. Follow up on the status of implementation of recommendations on IT general controls at selected Ministries and Departments as stated in the Report of the Auditor General on the 2016 Public Accounts.

So, we have seen that the Auditor General says very clearly that IT is very important. There must be cohesion, of course, among Government Ministries, Government Departments, state enterprises. But, the Auditor General also tells us

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who provided information to them. And the Auditor General laments, on page 73 of the Report, Chapter 5, that the Ministry of Planning and Development provided no information, no data.

Madam Speaker: Could you just bring this information to the relevance of today's debate, please?

Mr. B. Padarath: Sure, Madam. Madam, I am referring to the issues identified by the Minister of Education, as it relates to our approach in IT in terms of cohesion and transferring the IT capabilities into greater service delivery to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Nothing from the Ministry of Planning and Development—identified in the Auditor General's Report, it laments that the lack of cohesion between the Ministry of Public Administration and the Ministry of Planning and Development—who provided absolutely nothing. You know, this is a Minister who comes here and tells us, people do not read reports: "When the Member for Caroni Central was here, he never used to read reports". I wonder if the Member for Arouca/Maloney read the memo from the Auditor General, requesting this information, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I am having great difficulty in tying this to the debate. I am really having great difficulty. I do not recall the point that you are trying to develop, which you are ascribing to the Minister of Education.

Mr. B. Padarath: Madam Speaker, the Minister of Education spoke earlier about the People's Partnership competence in using IT to bring about cohesiveness in terms of service delivery, and, therefore, this is the very area of concern that has been identified in the Auditor General's Report.

Madam Speaker: To the Ministry of Education?

Mr. B. Padarath: Madam, I am getting to that.

Madam Speaker: Please get to that.

Mr. B. Padarath:—because there are several Ministries—

Madam Speaker: If you are talking—please get to the Ministry of Education.

Mr. B. Padarath: Madam, one of the areas that is identified in the Report—when the Minister of Finance spoke, he spoke about the property tax and the collection of those revenues. Madam, do you know when you look at the Report, it says that the Valuations Division of the Ministry of Finance provided no information, no data. Therefore, how is there supposed to be cohesiveness? This is the 2017 Report—

Hon. Member: For what year?

Mr. B. Padarath: Also, the Ministry of National Security, while we have seen so many increases in homicides and murders and serious crimes, you see no information provided by the TTPS, the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force, the Prison Service, Fire—

Madam Speaker: Member, I asked you to leave that point, because I have given you a lot of leeway. I am not seeing the relevance and I ask you to go on to your next point, please.

Mr. B. Padarath: Sure, Madam. I want to also look at an area that was not dealt with by any of our Members, and that has to do with some of the data, with respect to the \$2 million being transferred to Self-Help. We know the woes associated with Self-Help right now. We have heard some of the challenges with respect to Government appointing a CEO who is an administrative officer, who does not hold the rank and the qualifications to hold that position, and therefore, that person being the chief accounting officer in the Ministry—we are deeply concerned about that.

That transfer, we are told, will be dealt with to alleviate flooding, to assist homes that have been affected, and so on. Madam Speaker, I want us to throw our minds back to persons who applied for that Self-Help grant, right here in Trinidad and Tobago in the 2017 period. These were the areas that were affected and these were the applications that were made from constituencies across the board here: we saw the Guanapo area with respect to the Guanapo River, Barrackpore, Penal, Caroni, Woodland, El Carmen, St. Helena, Carapo, Flanagin Town, Couva, Tunapuna, Trantrail Road, Pluck Road, Bagmania. These were some of the areas and we see, as I said, \$2 million being transferred to Self-Help.

But when we experienced—and I do not begrudge Tobago with respect to the transfer that they are getting. But, what is happening with Trinidad—and I want us to pay close attention to some information. I asked a question in the Parliament recently, of how many Self-Help grants were given out for the period 2017. When I list all those areas that were affected by the floods—we had a debate in this House and I was accused of all manner of things when I said, the Prime Minister came in days late, without a Crix, without a Sardine, without a Panadol. But, I want to reveal the statistics of the Self-Help grants that have been distributed. So while Tobago gets additional funding, I want you to hear the constituencies that were most affected by those floods; how many grants they got in 2017. But the admission of the Minister of Community Development, Culture and Arts, by the Member for St. Ann's East—

Madam Speaker: Member, again, as far as I recall, the \$2 million that you started talking about is for grants to be made. Okay? So I do not see the relevance with what was made prior to what is being dealt with in the Appropriation Bill. So unless you can show me that, I will ask you to not develop that argument where you are going.

Mr. B. Padarath: Madam, the point is the disparity, in terms of the grants that are being provided between Trinidad and the grants that are being provided in Tobago. That is it. Because one of our Members spoke about equity. There must be equity across the board. If people are suffering in our country—you know, Madam, I saw in my own constituency—and maybe when others see it, then they will appreciate. I saw a three-week old baby floating in a styrofoam cooler, because for miles—

Madam Speaker: Member, what is that to do with what we are debating? The grants you are speaking about, the comparison with grants for Tobago, we are not dealing with grants for Tobago. The \$2 million was under Self-Help.

Mr. B. Padarath: Yes, and that is grants.

Madam Speaker: Yes. But where are you seeing grants for Tobago?

Mr. B. Padarath: That is under Self-Help for Tobago.

Madam Speaker: I have not seen any Self-Help for Tobago.

Mr. B. Padarath: Yes, Madam, the Self-Help Commission.

Madam Speaker: There was \$2 million under Self-Help for grants.

Mr. B. Padarath: For Tobago. For Tobago.

Madam Speaker: Okay. So that, please. I am not seeing the point you are trying to develop. I will ask you to go on to your next point.

Mr. B. Padarath: Madam, these are the statistics that I will provide: Caroni Central, one; Couva North, one; Couva South, one; Cumuto/Manzanilla, one; Princes Town, one; Naparima, three; Pointe-a-Pierre, one; Tabaquite, one; St. Augustine, one; Caroni East, zero; Oropouche East, zero; Oropouche West, zero. That is the point I wanted to make, Madam Speaker. We are seeing transfers at the OPM for \$10 million; THA for \$100 million; Education, \$150 million; Public Admin, \$20.8; Public Utilities, \$169.2; Works, \$62.5 million; Housing, \$11.2 million.

Madam, we are in the month of May. The rainy season is upon us and we see that the Ministry of Works and Transport is getting a transfer of \$62.5 million. Madam, my constituency was one of those that was severely affected by the floods in October 2017, likewise the Member for Naparima, I believe the Member for Oropouche East, the Member for Oropouche West and the Member for Siparia as well, Madam—

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Princes Town, your original speaking time has expired. You are entitled to 15 more minutes if you wish to complete.

Mr. B. Padarath: Thank you, Madam. Madam, and therefore we see \$62.5 million being transferred to the Ministry of Works and Transport and we are in the month of May. Rivers have not been desilted, water courses have not been cleared, and therefore, what we are expecting is more flooding as we approach the rainy season. And therefore, Madam Speaker, one would have thought that the Minister of Works and Transport, if not the Minister of Finance, would have given us a clear, comprehensive plan today, when he spoke to this Parliament about what was going to be the work schedule going forward to ensure that these transfers will alleviate the suffering of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, you know, I heard the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West speak about the Member for Siparia saying that she had a prepared text in response—the hon. Member, that is—to the Member for Diego Martin North/East. I want to inform the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, that the Member for Siparia can deal with any one of you anytime, anyplace, anywhere, with or without any speech. [*Desk thumping*] And therefore, the Member for Siparia—I really want to congratulate her for a sterling performance. Because, Madam, what she reflected was the pulse of the population at this time. She gave us the macroeconomic indicators, but also she gave us what was the pulse of the population, what were the expectations, most importantly, in terms of how these raw figures were going to affect our pockets and how it was going to affect our homes.

Madam Speaker, I know the hon. Minister also spoke about the Revenue Authority. The hon. Minister has been speaking about the Revenue Authority for the past 2.5 years. For the past two budgets we have heard about the Revenue Authority delivered on October 05, 2015, and then again in 2016. The Minister said it is expected that an Authority will be in place by the end of the new fiscal year. So when the Member for Siparia tells you “PNM” means “promises never materialize” you can really understand that, because again, they have no plan with

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respect to the economy in terms of advancing—bringing new revenue-generating streams, or putting forward any new ideas with respect to institutions locally, that would change the landscape of our economic sector.

Madam Speaker, in the few minutes I have remaining, I would like to speak about reviewing the presentation by the hon. Minister of Finance. The Minister claims that the IMF is assisting them in fiscal transparency. It then appears very strange that the Minister's presentation today—that the IMF's very projections of 0.2 per cent growth in 2018 and 2019, were ignored by the very Minister, to claims of 2 per cent economic growth. You know, Madam, when I look at the microwork platforms today—I saw one of the main challenges, especially by media personnel, was that they did not know which figure, really, to believe from the hon. Minister, and again, it comes back to the issue of credibility. The Minister has promised to give us the raw data, which we still have not gotten. We are operating in a vacuum right now.

Many have spoken, but not in the context of how we can use informatics. I know that the Member for Diego Martin North/East, in the budget presentation, spoke about the business operation initiative, and again, the whole ICT and IT thrust. The Member for Siparia—and I know the Minister of Education, the Member for Arima, has taken issue with this, about the Member for Siparia—speaking about the IT, the fourth industrial revolution. Madam Speaker, when I heard the Member for St. Joseph speak about the number of hospitals that we, the Partnership, had initiated and that they were following through, I thought that the hon. Minister would have told us how they were using microwork platforms, informatics—which is 21st Century technology—to bring about growth and development in the health sector. We heard absolutely nothing about that.

And therefore, if we are serious in Parliament, I know that the World Economic Forum, in 2017, spoke about artificial intelligence and the importance of ICT and IT to our local industries in terms of revolutionizing—bringing growth. Madam, do you know that the top 10 countries in the world, who have the highest economies in the world—that many of the changes that they were able—to be brought about in terms of turning around their economy, had to do with those informatics and those microwork platforms?

The Minister alluded to it in the budget presentation. As far as we are aware, up to this point today—nothing. He said nothing about the hardware; he said nothing about the environment and the conditions; he said nothing about reviewing the legislation that governs this area, where you can empower those in those industries. And I know, because the Member for Siparia has been

articulating this issue, and she understands the needs of young people and she understands the needs of our society. They are running scared, because they know very well, that is the attraction of going towards the young people, to show them that there are sustainable plans for growth and development, but more importantly, for creating sustainable jobs.

Madam, I am very passionate about microwork platforms. You know why? Because we started it in the People's Partnership—and I was really hoping that the Member for Diego Martin North/East would have provided some information today, as one of the main thrusts to tell us, listen, that is one of the areas we have seen growth in. You know, the Minister of Finance could not say there was any growth in that sector. And, do you know why he could not say there was any growth in that sector? Because they again, have done nothing to advance those sectors. Therefore, when you do not understand the industries, you do not put forward these plans for microwork platforms, for informatics, and integrate it into your health sector, in your education sector, in your social sector. It will come back to what the Auditor General's Report is saying—there is no cohesion, so therefore, nothing is happening. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam, one last point on the IT industry. The Auditor General's Report tells us that 53 per cent of all contracted workers, in the public service, are in the area of IT. Again, nothing about IT and sustainability and how we are attracting, and dealing, and treating with those, and integrating them into our public service. Imagine, 53 per cent of contracted workers in the area of IT—and they go unregulated? Madam Speaker, it is an area that we need to place a lot of focus on. But again, you know, I always say I do my homework before I come and I stand, and I speak here. But today, it was clearly evident that none of these Ministers have the capacity, the competence, or have done their homework, in their respective Ministries. So when they come, they tell you the rhetoric; they tell you the fluff.

But that is why I was proud of the Member for Siparia, that she was able to provide a proper balance of a plan going forward. She identified the issues in the economy, the false figures provided by the Member for Diego Martin North/East. But most importantly, she provided a comprehensive plan going forward, by identifying specific industries for growth, development and job creation.

Why can you not tell us today how many jobs you have created? Why? Two-and-a-half years going on to three years, you still cannot tell us how many jobs you have created? You cannot tell us what is happening with the Central Statistical Office? You cannot tell us what is happening with the health sector?

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You cannot tell us, with all these children—and I really, again, want to congratulate the Member for Siparia, because I am seeing an increase in the amount of children begging and pleading for assistance. And today, I repeat the call of the Member for Siparia, to bring the legislation, the Children’s Life Fund legislation, to the Parliament for us to amend.

If we are seeing a rosy picture, as the Minister of Finance has told us, then let it trickle down to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. You know, Madam, this is a Government where over \$60 million in the past two-and-a-half years, have gone to the wives and families of Government Ministers. That is undisputable, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] That is undisputable.

Madam Speaker: Member—

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(4), 48(6), 48(1).

Hon. Member: Forty-eight the whole thing.

Mr. B. Padarath: In rent.

Madam Speaker: Member, I would ask you to retract that, please.

Mr. B. Padarath: Madam, I will retract, but it is true.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(1), 48(4) and 48(6).

Madam Speaker: Member, I did not ask you whether you took ownership. I asked you to retract.

Mr. B. Padarath: Sure, Madam, I retract.

Madam Speaker: Thank you very much.

Mr. B. Padarath: Madam, we have given a clear indication of what our priorities were when we were in government—and that was empowering people, making sure people were at the centre of our development. That was the mantra for the Member for Siparia. Madam, by their own actions today, and by the information all of our Members have provided—the statistics, what the others in the industry are saying—and I come back to that point, just as I started, I will end. It is not only the Member for Siparia, the Member for Princes Town and the Opposition Bench saying this, but all the stakeholders in the industry have given you a failing grade, and you have shown your sleight of hand today, that you are incompetent and you cannot deal with managing the affairs of Trinidad and Tobago in a comprehensive, coherent and efficient manner.

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

Madam Speaker: The Member for Naparima.

Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. As I said before, as one gets to the autumn of one's lifespan—

Hon. Member: “Is licks”.

Mr. R. Charles:—with months left for the allotted three-score and 10, one is focused on what is important. There is nothing like mortality to focus one's thoughts on what matters. And that is why, coming in Parliament, one is extremely disappointed in terms of the information that is presented by the other side. For example, Madam Speaker, it is hard to sit and hear the hon. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, come out again in his contribution, on providing information about pounds leaking out of the OPM—he said it earlier today—and leakages of foreign exchange, without providing evidence to give us a factual basis for the assertions he made. It is difficult to sit and hear information that cannot be substantiated. And I refer to *Hansard*, January 11, 2016. I was new to Parliament at the time. And I quote from the hon. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, when he said, and I quote:

“What did we come across when we”—

Sorry, this was the Attorney General, the Member for San Fernando West, and he was saying in *Hansard*—and it is the 11th of January, 2016:

“What did we come across? Ghost employees; officers who turn up for a couple of hours per week; persons entirely unqualified for positions, persons who did not possess technical skills;”—et cetera.

He was followed later in the debate by the representative for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, the hon. Attorney Young, who indicated, and I quote:

“The Attorney General, whom I have the greatest pleasure of working with, when we went into our Ministry there were over 372 short-term employees, as he referred to. When an investigation began, we found ghost gangs in the attorney section and in the IT sections; attorneys-at-law that no one could identify.”—et cetera.

Madam Speaker, that was my initiation to the parliamentary debate in 2016, in January. So the question arises: Two-and-a-half years after, what has happened to these allegations?

Hon. Members: Ask the police.

Mr. R. Charles: What police action has been taken on the matter?

Madam Speaker: Member, I would like you to quickly tie what you are saying there into this debate.

Mr. R. Charles: I was responding to his assertion about money leakage.

Madam Speaker: Member—[*Crosstalk*] Member, Member, that was not in response to money leakages. Okay? And therefore, either you tie it into the context of this debate or move on, please.

Mr. R. Charles: I will. Thank you very much. It was with respect to allegations of corruption on our side and I just wanted to verify that these things are made. So I will move on. But, one of the important things that I expected to hear today was the question of the diversification of the economy. That is significant, because all that we heard early today was the fact that any improvements in the economy were on the basis of two factors: action taken by us on this side with respect to Juniper and gas compression, et cetera, which I would not detain my contribution on, and the other point was the geopolitical exogenous factors with Iran and in the Middle East. Those were the two factors.

The little improvement that we are seeing is not based on any action taken by those opposite. And therefore, it is important for us to get out of this cyclical trap where oil prices rise and we have no control over them, and gas production which, given the fact that most of our reserves are in deep water horizons, it would be difficult for us to easily get access to oil. So, it becomes important for us to diversify this economy. And even in today's papers there was an article in the *Guardian*:

“BG 3” by—well, it is Ms. Suzanne Sheppard, but she was saying:

“Diversification has been bandied about for decades. From as far back as the first decade after T&T gained Independence from Britain, the danger of heavy dependence on a single sector had been identified but nothing was done.”

And she went on to say:

“Finance Minister Colm Imbert has addressed it in all of his budgetary presentations to date but the country is yet to achieve lift off.”

And we all know that unless we diversify this economy, unless we move what Lloyd Best would call the onshore sector, unless we develop that to be independently sustainably capable of growing, we will always be at the mercy of external factors.

Now, the reason why I talk about diversification—and I will be going into how a country like Singapore deals with diversification—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker—

Mr. R. Charles:—to show how our approach—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis:—Standing Order 55(1)(b). Singapore has been beaten to death. Poor place. [*Laughter*]

Mr. R. Charles: No, Madam.

Madam Speaker: Member, I am going to give you a little leeway. On diversification we have heard a lot, so I expect that you have some different slant.

Mr. R. Charles: Yes, a lot different. Madam Speaker, if in Singapore we had a mid-year review, this is how it will take place—and I use that to provide an external assessment monitoring of what we heard today. Right? In Singapore, the Prime Minister is paid, for example, a salary of \$1.4 million a year. But Singapore Ministers have the opportunity to get a higher monthly salary once they perform and meet four national bonus indicators. So, that is how they assess their mid-year and annual review. Ministers get a basic salary and when the review is completed, such as we did today, they would get a bonus based on performance. And these are based on four indicators—

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(1). This is a mid-year review for Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Member: It is a recommendation.

Madam Speaker: I am going to give you a little leeway.

Mr. R. Charles: Yes, thanks.

Madam Speaker: I do not see the relevance as yet, but I am going to give you a little leeway.

Mr. R. Charles: I appreciate it. And the four indicators—and we could see if we apply those indicators to what we were told today, why we are in the position that we are in. The bonus indicators are Real Income Growth—so this is a Real Income Growth of 20 percentile. So, the second area is Real Median Income Growth. The third area is Real GDP Growth Rate, and the fourth area is Unemployment Rate Reduction. So, there are four areas—Ministers are judged in these areas and the bonuses are accorded in three areas—no bonus, if the Minister performs poorly and all four national bonus indicators are not met.

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So if we came today, the Minister would be saying, “I have achieved Unemployment Rate Reduction of X. We have had, during my tenure, a GDP growth rate of Y”. He would have said, “Real Median Income Growth Rates have increased by Z”. So here you get an idea when you have, what we call, private sector inputs into public policy and public monitoring assessment. [*Desk thumping*]

Option two, Average Bonus: The Minister performs well, and the National Bonus targets are met.

Madam Speaker: Member, from what you are saying, that system is not a system that operates here.

Mr. R. Charles: Right.

Madam Speaker: Okay? So, that I really cannot see the relevance in it, I will ask you to move on. That system does not operate here.

Mr. R. Charles: Right, I will move on, but it gives you an idea of how they assess and how we assess.

All right. In terms of their diversification strategy—and you will see again, Madam Speaker, how, when we look at an ideal situation, we could judge our performance against that. They have identified six strategies for diversification. Strategy one is to deepen and diversify international connections. And they are saying that Singapore must remain plugged into the global trade, and its people need to gain better knowledge of regional markets as the Republic embarks on the next phase of growth.

So their Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the job of that Ministry is to identify and plug into global trade to re-enforce what takes place locally. And if I am allowed—because I shadow the areas of foreign affairs and crime—I would like to relate these things to our diversification thrust, our economic growth thrust, to show why the projections like Standard & Poor’s and others—that in the medium and long terms, we are headed towards a negative rating.

10.30 p.m.

The second strategy—and it is linked to what was said by the Minister of Education and the representative of Chaguanas East—is to acquire and utilize deep skills. As their job changes, workers will constantly need new and deeper skills to cope, more modular courses to help workers reskill, and I am saying unless we do this and we think comprehensively we will have a situation where

we are doing things in a silo. We are giving money from one place and moving it to another place without that, what Lloyd Best calls, the trigonometry and the calculus of development.

Strategy three: strengthen enterprise capabilities to innovate and scale up. So while we are talking here about laptops, they are talking about boosting intellectual property regime, a more vibrant start-up echo system and a wider variety of fund raising options for high growth companies. So they are identifying high growth companies in that country, and what they are doing is providing an enabling environment—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, Standing Orders 48(1) and 55(1)(b).

Madam Speaker: Member, I have already said 48(1). Kindly, quickly tie that to what we are engaged in here.

Mr. R. Charles: Today. The fourth point is: build strong digital capabilities to continue growth in the long-term. I think I heard a number of speakers talking about the digital platform and development, and all I am saying is that that has to be placed in a context of best practices.

Develop and implement industry transformation maps; and partner one another to enable growth and innovation.

Okay. So even if we say that Singapore—and I heard it from the Member for Moruga/Tableland—Singapore is dissimilar from us; there is a different culture. I say no because there are global best practices that all countries who desire to be First World status have to be consistent with. But even if we say that that is beyond our capabilities and beyond our reach, and it seems as if I am hearing that from the other side, let us look at performance in the region. I am looking at GDP real growth rates in 2017 estimated under the Central Intelligence Agency, and when we look at the Dominican Republic it is 4.8 per cent in 2017; St. Kitts and Nevis 2.7; Antigua and Barbuda 2.7; little Grenada, 2.5. And if we talk about comprehensive development that speaks to wellness and what not, Grenada, at the last Olympics, 2016, we got a bronze medal at the Olympics and they got a silver.

Madam Speaker: Member, please, I do not think anything here is about Olympics. I want you to come back—[*Interruption*]

Mr. R. Charles: It is about development.

Madam Speaker:—to what we are dealing with here, please.

Mr. R. Charles: Okay. Can I speak about St. Lucia's growth rate in the same period and I will compare it with Trinidad? St. Lucia was 1.6 per cent; Haiti, 1 per cent. Well, I am probably not allowed to say this, but scriptures says unto whom much is given, much is expected, and we have oil, et cetera. Haiti does not have that.

So their Minister of Finance, in the absence of oil, was able to achieve a 1 per cent growth. Trinidad and Tobago, under the visionary Minister of Finance, our growth rate for the period was minus 3.2 per cent. So therefore, if we look at Singapore—and we do not like to compare because we feel in Trinidad we know everything. All wisdom arises from Balisier House and, therefore, do not look at anybody else, or any other situation, or any other context in order to assess how we are performing, what we could learn and what new scenarios we can follow.

But why is Trinidad and Tobago underperforming? And since I shadow the Ministry of National Security, I will—because investments and development, and all these things we are trying to achieve, if we intend to turn the corner, has to be related to an environment that is safe.

Foreign direct investments will not come to Trinidad if that is a problem. The cost of doing business in Trinidad will increase significantly with respect to security guards, and burglar proofs, and those sorts of things. Those are real world considerations if we are to develop and achieve our goals. It is no sense setting targets of growth, et cetera, when most of us may not be alive to enjoy it, or we have to be careful about how we live and expend significant sums of money in order to survive. But what we find when we look at the Ministry of National Security, we find a regurgitation of past ideas.

In the PNM manifesto, their 2016 budget speech, their 2017 budget speech, and in their 2018 budget speech, this PNM Government keeps highlighting joint border protection initiatives. We keep hearing it over and over and we are not in a position to say how do we achieve this border protection that we so desire and that is important for our growth and development. Madam Speaker, I will just perhaps raise the point that in terms of our borders, there is a view that we are in the process of losing our country. We are hearing that there are 40,000 Venezuelans, and this affects our development.

Madam Speaker: Member, I am really not going to allow you to get into that. If it is anything you have to say that is related to these items of expenditure here, or the general overview of the budget, fine. I am not going to let you enter into all of these matters you are embarking upon.

Mr. R. Charles: Well, Madam Speaker, would you allow the fact that today in terms of all the things that we talked about there were no performance targets set? [*Desk thumping*] Because any debate I have heard in any economic development scenario, or seminar, or in the British Parliament, et cetera, I hear about goals and targets and, therefore, if I could only discuss in terms of qualitative assumptions then I would have a difficulty because I would like to see, for example, the Minister of Finance would tell us that this movement of this money to that area would lead to so many jobs created, or so much growth in the agricultural sector, or some development in the trade sector. If you tell me about access roads, and you tell me you put five, 10, 15 and you cannot tell me that that is going to lead to increased agricultural activity in a particular area by 4 per cent, then I cannot have this discussion.

So the question arises and I ask: What are the performance targets set? I have raised the point before and we enter into open ended discussions. There is no commitment to any goal so that we in this Parliament can hold the Government to achievement targets. We cannot. So that in the United States every decision, like what was taken in terms of transferring money, would be subject to a review by what they call the Congressional Budget Office. So that when the Minister comes and tells us that he takes \$800 million from the Development Fund to put it into Recurrent Expenditure, we in Parliament would have had a document, a statement, an analysis, that tells us that the opportunity cost of this movement of money will redound to the benefit of the taxpayer. So I have to in a sense operate in a First World situation with Third World approaches and Third World information.

So that when we talk about smart goals which I have talked repeatedly in this, but they will never follow—and that is why when we talk tedious repetition we have to repeat because they are harden. [*Desk thumping*] So when we talk about specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely—but nothing the Minister of Finance said was smart. [*Desk thumping*] Nothing, and I challenge him. So I will ask and I am applying it to the Minister of National Security. I would like you to tell me decrease the murder rate by 15 per cent annually. He will ask for elements (a), (b), a budgetary Item, and we will be prepared to give him, but we will hold him to an output target of a 15 per cent reduction in murders. I would like in terms of the transfer of money from one area today, I would have wanted to know why more money was not transferred to the Ministry of National Security.

In Naparima, we have one appliance in Princes Town that will take an hour and a half to get to Marac where they are building a port to develop that area. It will take one and a half hours. Do you know what the world benchmark say? If you do not

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reach a fire in five minutes then it is best you do not go at all. So you are taking an hour and a half to get—in the United States we talk about concrete buildings. In Trinidad, we have wooden structures.

Madam Speaker: Member, I will ask you again—because there is not even a transfer to the Ministry of Nation Security—Member for Naparima, to be relevant.

Mr. R. Charles: Yes, Madam Speaker. We have the question of property tax and I was reading that they said that everybody in every country has property tax. I was reading an article yesterday that spoke about property tax being a disincentive to development because people do not spend money in order to improve their property if that would lead to an increased tax, et cetera. All right. I shadow the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, can I speak about that, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker: Member, I am not going to restrict you to speak to anything once it is relevant and, therefore—because really and truly I think people think this is a budget debate. It is not a budget debate. We are debating a particular type of report. Okay? [*Crosstalk*] So therefore, while you might shadow certain things, I would like you to confine yourself to what has—either you are rebutting something that was said here before, or it is something that is related to the report or the Bill that is before us. Thank you. And Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, just in anticipation, I do not think I need to be corrected. Member for Naparima.

Mr. R. Charles: So I will just give 10 reasons why this side will rescue Trinidad and Tobago from the decisions of that side. [*Desk thumping*] Ten reasons, and the first reason is constitutional reform. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(1). This is not about constitutional reform.

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima, again, as I told you, I am sure all the points that are of interest and are really enlightening, I am sure that you would have an opportunity to use them in your other opportunities to talk in this Parliament on relevant topics and, therefore, please, again. And now, remember I have certain powers when it comes to relevance; I really do not want to exercise that today. Thank you.

Mr. R. Charles: So I will be very brief, Madam Speaker. I thought that we had the mid-year review and my job representing 50,000 voters in Naparima was to review what the Minister said and point out the shortcomings, [*Desk thumping*]

benchmark it with international ideal best practices, but apparently that is not allowed here. So I will just briefly say two of the 10 points, and the first one that we will have—and I am saying—it is constitutional reform. We will ensure that in this House we are allowed to speak freely—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(1). This is not about constitutional reform.

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima, maybe I should ask you to look at Standing Orders and particularly Standing Orders, I believe, is 87 and 88, which may help guide you for the further period of your contribution.

Mr. R. Charles: Well, Madam Speaker, I think that it is difficult to represent the views of my constituents and, therefore, I will take it up at another place. I will reflect my views elsewhere—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Outside.

Mr. R. Charles:—outside of this House. The only thing I would like to say is that—and I have to say this, Madam Speaker, because I meet my constituents and they keep asking me why did you not raise those points that we elected you to represent, and I have to say that I have difficulty, and I end.

Madam Speaker: And I just want to tell you that there are certain innuendos in that statement that you have made. I do not really think you mean that. Okay? I can almost consider it contemptuous. So I will just ask you to withdraw that and you will have your own conversations with your constituents outside of here, and there you are free to tell them whatever you wish.

Mr. R. Charles: I withdraw it, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Thank you. Member for Couva North.

Ms. Ramona Ramdial (Couva North): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, as I listened to the Minister of Finance earlier on today try to convince the population that the economy had turned around, as a cricket enthusiast he reminded me of a batsman running down the wicket to hit a six only to turn around and see he got bowled behind his legs. [*Desk thumping*] And we want to call it terminological inexactitudes. His entire midterm presentation can be described as terminological inexactitudes.

Madam Speaker, there is a perception that the rise in the price of oil to \$70 per barrel signalled some type of turnaround in the economy and this, of course, is misleading, and it is only a temporary increase in income that would be

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experienced from this rise in oil prices to \$70. The economy has not turned around, and although we are making some relevant strides—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 44(10). Has the Member been given leave to read her speech?

Ms. R. Ramdial: What? I am not reading.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yes, you are.

Ms. R. Ramdial: No.

Madam Speaker: Okay. Member, please proceed.

Ms. R. Ramdial: [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Madam Speaker. I put it down to the hour of the night. Thank you, Madam Speaker. Now, in addition to that, the increase in the oil price has to be measured against the sharp fall in output or production, and we have seen over the past couple of years that production fell by at least 50 per cent. Price of natural gas has actually fallen in the last few months and, therefore, the economy fiscal deficit will not be reversed any time soon and neither will the current account balance.

Now, Madam Speaker, in 2013, it is reported that we exported US \$3.2 billion in non-energy exports and today this is down by US \$1.7 billion, and this area, the non-energy sector, is where we should probably be measuring time progress improving as we go ahead. With depleting reserves in both oil and gas, the medium and long-term viability of the economy rests solely on our capacity to change and to change outcomes in the non-energy sector.

Now, my colleagues earlier on would have spoken about the Eximbank and the introduction of the US \$100 million injection and I am agreeing with my colleagues on this end, that whilst it is a good measure, probably it is just a little bit or a little less than we would have anticipated in order to move forward and move the economy forward. So we are very far from the target that we are trying to achieve. It is reported that the manufacturing sector needs between US \$500 million to US \$600 million, and so we are very far off from that mark in terms of revenue generation from the non-energy sector.

Now, I want to go to Tobago issues and the THA. Now we would have come here on Tuesday, Standing Finance Committee, and we would have approved, of course, \$100 million for the Recurrent Expenditure, and we would have asked the Minister of Finance questions with respect to how many workers—and I am speaking about the \$100 million for Recurrent Expenditure and the payments that

would have been made to the Tobago Regional Health Authority workers—and we were promised by the Minister of Finance that details would have been given to us today. I asked the question: How many workers would have been impacted upon by this \$100 million payment, and the Minister said I will explain all on Thursday and so far we are yet to hear how many workers have been affected by this \$100 million payout.

In addition to that, \$20 million was asked for as a supplemental to an already \$24 million for agricultural access roads in Tobago, and I want to take a little bit of time to talk about that, Madam Speaker, because I also asked the Minister of Finance to identify where these agricultural access roads were going to be constructed in Tobago. We got no answers so far, and I hope in his winding up he is going to be able to explain. I want to also flag that there are other questions that my colleagues on this side would have asked, pertinent questions, on the variation of supplementation of appropriation in various Ministries that are all relevant that have not been answered by the Minister of Finance [*Desk thumping*] and, therefore, in his winding up I expect that to be explained.

Now, Madam Speaker, in my research and in my looking at what is happening with respect to the economy in Trinidad and Tobago, I would have made contact with many persons, and they have been saying, well yes, the Tobago House of Assembly has somewhat taken a decision to push agriculture forward in Tobago. But in pushing agriculture forward in Tobago they have not given a policy position or have not given any sort of plan with respect to what programmes they want to implement to push agriculture forward in Tobago. And you know, the Minister would come here quite blasé and, you know, general statements made about the tourism thrust and the agricultural thrust in Tobago, and I will talk about tourism a little later. But with respect to agriculture, Madam Speaker, that would mean in the budget estimates, and for the fiscal year of the 2018, \$44 million would have been given to the THA for agricultural access roads and, therefore, we want to know again where these roads are going to be constructed, and if the \$24 million that was allocated for fiscal year 2017/2018, if any roads have been constructed as yet in Tobago? [*Desk thumping*] And that is what we need to know.

You know, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West likes to come here and pontificate and say whatever he says is the truth, but I want to ask him some questions tonight, and probably through the hon. Member and the Minister of Finance can probably—you know, he likes to answer for his colleagues, so he can probably answer for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West later on.

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I also want to ask since we are on the topic of Tobago and moneys being spent, and moneys being asked for, supplemental is being asked for in the midterm review, about the \$10 million that has gone missing that was meant for Virgin Atlantic Limited. [*Desk thumping*] This is taxpayers' money, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Imbert: 48(1), Madam Speaker. There is no mention of Virgin Atlantic, or anything to do with Virgin Atlantic in this report.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Take it in context.

Mr. Imbert: Nothing in this report of Atlantic—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Member, I think you understand the point and I will ask you to move on from that point, please.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, these are public funds, these are taxpayers' moneys and, therefore, just to raise the issue and to flag to the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West that that needs to be followed. That money needs to be followed. [*Desk thumping*]

In addition to that, let me also say when we talk about tourism and we are on Tobago and the THA and the moneys that they have asked for in supplementals, let me also say that we had the recently concluded Tobago Jazz, and in trying to push tourism in Tobago we would have seen that a budget would have been given for Tobago Jazz for \$7.2 million. What we would have read and seen later on in the media was that there was an additional \$2 million that was paid, or that was requested, that was used to purchase a mixer at the last minute for one of the international artistes.

Hon. Member: What?

Ms. R. Ramdial: Two million extra. So it was a cost overrun with respect to the budget of hosting the Tobago Jazz festival. Therefore, that would have carried the cost for hosting up to \$9.2 million.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(1) if you please.

Madam Speaker: Member, in terms of what is before us, I will not allow that. Please move on to your next point.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Madam Speaker, and I will move on. So, Madam Speaker, we are talking today about how the Government intends to continue to use taxpayers' money and, of course, we have seen various requests from various Ministries. Now in addition to that, let me also say that the Member for Port of

Spain North/St. Ann's West spoke about the Sandals project, and again that is, of course, boosting the tourism thrust in Tobago for generating revenues in the non-energy sector. Now, Madam Speaker, let me make it clear that those on this side, we are not against the Sandals project. What we are asking for is for transparency and accountability—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: Madam Speaker, Sandals does not appear—48(1).

Ms. R. Ramdial: But he spoke about Sandals. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: I will allow the Sandals point because that, I will take it, is referring to something that was raised before.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Thank you. Thank you, Madam Speaker. So the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West made reference to the Sandals project, and again I would reiterate that we are not against the project, however, we demand transparency and accountability [*Desk thumping*] with respect to how we bring Sandals into Trinidad and Tobago. The Member would have spoken about it, about meeting and finally prioritizing that Sandals is definitely going to come to Tobago, and I just want to remind the Member that as much as we want to increase revenues in the non-energy sector we must also look at what is happening with our neighbouring islands, very close to us, with respect to engaging Sandals into our country. We would have seen Antigua, we would have seen the issue in Turks and Caicos and, therefore, I keep saying, as a Member of the Parliament, that I hope—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 55(1)(b). The Opposition raised that already. [*Crosstalk*]

Ms. R. Ramdial: Who raised it?

Madam Speaker: Please continue.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Overruled. Thank you, Madam Speaker. Therefore, in driving my point forward, I would like to say that we cannot turn a blind eye or a deaf ear to what has been happening to our neighbouring islands with respect to engaging Sandals into our country. Therefore, I have said it many times and I hope that the contractual arrangements that the Government is working on with Sandals is in the best interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I will give them credit for that and we wait to see how that happens, how it turns, how are we going to benefit from it with respect to tax incentives, how are we going to benefit, how is the Tobago people going to benefit in terms of being part of the entire system in terms of Sandals coming here, from the construction of the hotel, to, of course, the operation of the hotel and moving forward.

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So let us not be fooled by the Government into thinking—and you know, it comes across as though they are hoarding the project. They are hoarding the Sandals project.

They want to be the only ones to take credit for bringing Sandals and they know that that is far from the truth. [*Crosstalk*] They will get the necessary support if they are of course transparent and accountable to the Opposition and to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] That is our job. It is as simple as that. [*Crosstalk*]

11.00 p.m.

You know, and the Attorney General likes to “throw talk” but I want to tell him something, that the hon. Prime Minister is warming the seat at housing for you. [*Crosstalk*] All right, warming the seat at housing for you. Thank you, Madam Speaker. And I will move on from there.

Now, Madam Speaker, we would have seen that the Ministry of Works and Transport also came to the Parliament for moneys. They would have requested moneys for desilting \$8.5 million, if I am not mistaken, for the Drainage Division for desilting works and the purchase of equipment and they would have also asked for millions, again, also for the division of highways, if I am not mistaken, nearly \$60 million if I am not mistaken. So, Highways and Other Contracted Services, \$14 million; Traffic Management, Other Contracted Services, \$20 million; Drainage Division, \$20 million, and another \$8.5 million for Rent/Lease of Vehicles and Equipment for Drainage.

Now, Madam Speaker, I want to say and other speakers—hon. Members—have spoken about it before. I just want to say that the desilting programme and flooding in our constituencies, these are issues that have been on the forefront for the past two and a half years. Now, the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure— [*Crosstalk*] Hold on, I will explain. The Ministry of Works and Infrastructure is responsible for doing maintenance works also on major rivers and water courses and drainage. Now what is happening for the past two and a half years, and all my colleagues here can attest to that, there has been absolutely no maintenance of natural water courses and rivers.

Now, the Minister came with a plan and he spoke about 83 desilting contracts in central and a hundred and something in south and how many in north, and that the programme has been launched. I want to say that in central and in the constituency of Couva North, nothing has started as yet and the rainy season has begun. I have said it also that moneys are to be going expended and in some areas,

those projects are not going to be able to happen and not going to be able to take place, because rain has started along the major rivers and water courses. The soil is already moist so heavy equipment is not going to be able to go onto these areas to desilt and to clean the natural water courses and the rivers. And therefore, we are going to be faced with another scenario or event of intense flooding, depending on, of course, how intense the rainfall is for this particular rainy season

And it leads me also to draw the connection with the Ministry of Social Development where, earlier on, under Self-Help, we would have been informed by the Member for Princes Town that certain constituencies were given one grant under Self-Help for flooding and some constituencies, none. Under the Ministry of Social Development, last year, we had hundreds of constituents who were affected by flooding in central Trinidad, applied for grants and up to this time and this day, have not been able to receive their cheques, their compensation so that they can, of course, move forward and repair their homes and all of that. And Madam Speaker, this is the reality on the ground. So when you have the Minister of Finance and the Member for Port of Spain North coming and saying “we following the money” and “we have foreign investigators” and all that kind of thing going on. [*Crosstalk*] Madam Speaker, it was brought up in the debate.

Madam Speaker: I am not sure that the context that you are saying that you are rebutting this because you are dealing with grants and I am not sure that the context is relevant. So either quickly tie it in or please go on to your other point.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Madam Speaker, in reference to moneys being given to the—and I will go to the grants, I will make reference to the grants. In reference to moneys being given to the Self-Help Commission for Tobago where they of course are going to be given their grants for disasters that they would have experienced, I am drawing reference to those here in Trinidad, hundreds and thousands of persons who also were affected by natural disasters and flooding events who have not received their grants and therefore, the Minister of Finance and the relevant Minister of Social Development and Minister of Culture and Arts, who are responsible for the Self-Help Commission, they need to look into this and act on it as soon as possible, Madam Speaker.

Now, I also want to make reference to and go back to tourism a little bit. Now, we are talking about generating revenues in the non-energy sector and I want to say with respect to my constituency, the constituency of Couva North, there is quite a thriving area in cultural and heritage tourism and I make reference to that of the Temple in the Sea, the Indian Museum and other areas where there are tour guides and tourists coming to our country to be part and to experience that

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cultural and heritage tourism, and just not in the constituency of Couva North, but there are other areas in Trinidad, and Tobago also where they come to experience the culture and our heritage. And I think that this is such a viable area that can be improved if the necessary funding is given to improve the cultural and heritage tourism aspect.

I did not hear the Minister really say anything about it. He just spoke about Maracas Beach, if I am not mistaken, as being one of the flagship projects to attract tourists. And whilst that is all well and good and we are quite happy to see the improvements at Maracas Beach attract more tourists, there are also other areas that can be explored to push that tourism thrust. We would have also heard the Prime Minister speak about medical tourism. I did not hear the Minister of Health say anything about generating revenues with respect to medical tourism and how they intend to go about doing that. And in a midterm review, you cannot have a Minister of Finance coming here to talk about a turnaround of the economy and cannot identify one project in the non-energy sector that is actually generating revenues for us here as a country. And, Madam Speaker, this is what we need to hear and therefore, the critics out there are quite justified when, of course, they make comments [*Desk thumping*] with respect to this midterm review and previous budgets that we have experienced here in the House from the Government.

Madam Speaker, let me also talk about our transportation system a little bit that also falls under the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure but has an impact with respect to the tourism thrust and this non-energy sector that we are trying to develop. And for the past year and more, we would have seen the failure and due to the Government's ineptitude, due to the Government's incompetence, mismanagement and corruption with respect to dealing with the air bridge and the sea bridge. Madam Speaker, since in April of 2017, we would have seen the failure with respect to the termination of the contract of the *Superfast Galicia* leaving our shores, leaving the transportation system.

Madam Speaker: Member, I rule you out of order, no relevance. Please go on to your next point.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Okay, Madam Speaker. In making reference to the tourism sector and in talking about Tobago and the moneys that were of course requested by the THA, this has serious implications with respect to the air bridge and the sea bridge. Again, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West would have spoken about—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: 48(1), Madam Speaker. Sea bridge, air bridge, tourism; nothing in the report on that.

Ms. R. Ramdial: I am trying to make a point. [*Crosstalk*] Sorry.

Madam Speaker: Member, I already ruled on that and I realized that you have found a way to get back there. Please move on.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance would have spoken about the Tobago Terminal and the construction of the Tobago terminal and the \$500 million that it was going to cost to construct the new Tobago terminal which excluded the cost for land acquisition. I want to ask the question from the Minister of Finance: How much additional moneys would be for the acquiring of the land to have that project—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, Standing Order, if you please, 48(1).

Madam Speaker: Please continue.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Thank you, Madam Speaker. So I think the Minister of Finance, in his winding up, should be able to tell us, because if he has been able to quote a cost for the construction of the Tobago Terminal which is \$500 million, then he should be able to tell us about how much cost the land acquisition, and that would have, of course, be the real cost to the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago.

And the Minister alluded to the construction of this new Tobago Terminal as part of the entire tourism thrust to accommodate Sandals coming to Tobago. Again, Madam Speaker—[*Crosstalk*] Yes, he did. [*Continuous crosstalk*] Right, so he said in Tobago, to meet the demands of tourism, the airport is being modernized at a cost of \$500 million using a build-to-own partnership in 2020. So that is what was mentioned and of course, later on, would have spoken about accommodating the Sandals project.

So, Madam Speaker, we need to get the correct figures. I think that the Minister, again, as I said earlier, would have been misleading the House in terms of not giving the exact figures, the precise figures. A number of critics out there would have spoken—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(6), misleading the House. The Minister of Finance did no such thing.

Madam Speaker: Just restate what you would like to say.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will go back to my phrase of saying terminological inexactitudes the Minister of Finance spoke. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*] And therefore, Madam Speaker, again, I would like to say that the population, of course, they are not fooled by this. The critics out there have accused the Minister of Finance. [*Continuous crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Members. Member for St. Joseph, I am on my legs. Members, I recognize that we are here a long time and it is most probably taking a toll on some of us, if not all of us. There is no break but there might be a little dinner that Members can go out and you know, if they need to take a little break, they are invited to go out and return. Okay? But I ask Members please to maintain their composure even though it is late. Member for Couva North.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Minister of Finance would have also mentioned in his presentation earlier about the new projects with respect to the energy sector, speaking about Juniper and Angelin and all of these and about generating revenues, but I want to ask also what it is that is planned for the non-energy sector. How do you intend to incentivize the non-energy sector and attract foreign direct investment? [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: So that has been dealt with considerably. Okay? [*Crosstalk*] I remember the Minister of Education talking about penmanship with a purpose; I think it really works. Member for Couva North, I think that point has been dealt with considerably, I will ask you to go on to another point, please.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Now, Madam Speaker, let me also say that when we talk about generating revenues from the non-energy sector, one would have liked to hear the Minister speak about job creation also and we have been here and we have been listening to the Minister of Finance and as I said before, within the manufacturing industry, we would have heard the President of the manufacturing industry speak and say that they were not happy and they do not believe that the economy has actually turned around. And they have been asking the Minister of Finance to deal with not those businesses who are compliant within the sector but businesses that are non-compliant in order to raise revenues. So what the President of the manufacturing association would have said was that businesses that are compliant are being unnecessarily taxed.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Speaker, I will ask you to invoke—point of order. I will ask you to invoke 55(1)(b) please. We have gone there about four times. Please.

Madam Speaker: We have dealt with the manufacturing sector. We have dealt with direct investment. We have dealt with the fact that the manufacturing

sector does not accept the fact that the economy has turned around and so on, and I think at this time, I would really ask Members to deal with aspects which have not been dealt with before. Please go on to the other point.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Yes. So, Madam Speaker, in my wrapping up, I would like to—[*Crosstalk*] since I have exhausted, according to the Speaker, everything, I would like to, of course, flag—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Member, your original time is now spent. You are entitled to 15 more minutes, if you wish to complete.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Now, Madam Speaker, before I conclude, let me also say that the Minister of Finance came trying to persuade us here, and of course the population, that the economy had turned around and that we are on the path of growth and all of that. Madam Speaker, let me say that we have not been convinced on this side and neither has the majority of the population been convinced of what the Minister of Finance said earlier and therefore, we look forward to actually seeing what he spoke about in terms of revenue generation actually taking place on the ground because it is not a reality. As I said, people on the ground do not feel this particular turnaround.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Speaker, 55(1)(b).

Ms. R. Ramdial: The cost of goods and services has skyrocketed, Madam Speaker, in recent times. There are people who have lost their jobs, there has been mass unemployment. We have had the union leaders agitating also and criticizing the Government heavily for its non-action, and therefore, Madam Speaker, as a responsible Member of Parliament, I cannot go back to my constituents and say well, believe the Minister of Finance after tonight. I cannot say that because the reality on the ground is a totally different one. And the Member for Siparia, in her brilliant contribution, [*Desk thumping*] would have shown that the Government has become completely disconnected from the population, completely disconnected. And the phrase she would have used was that they have crashed the economy which is so true. It is extremely hard to get forex, small businesses are closing up—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Member, we have gone through all of that. And you know, I did not stand before because I thought you were winding up but, you know, I am not going to allow you to embark on ground that has been traversed many times before.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Thank you, Madam Speaker. My one advice, however, to the Government before I take my seat and it has been mentioned in the debate and therefore it had opened up. This thing about, you know, corruption and going after former corrupted public officials. I just want to let the Government know that they need to look within before they look on this side. Madam Speaker, thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Ayanna Webster-Roy): Madam Speaker, I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to contribute to the debate this evening. I want to take the opportunity to respond to concerns raised by my hon. colleagues on the other side when we had standing finance and both this evening.

I would first like to respond to the hon. Member for Couva North. The Member for Couva North requested the approved final budget for the Tobago Jazz Experience and wanted to verify whether or not the additional equipment that was required as a rider for the international artistes was included in that budget. I would like to assure her that the approved budget by the Executive Council is \$7.3 million and that is including all the riders and everything. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Interruptions are done in a particular way. Okay? So that if somebody wants to the invoke Standing Order 47, you know how to do that. Please continue, Tobago East.

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I did the Events Management Course at Arthur Lok Jack and one of the things that I took away from that particular programme is that return on investment—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Lee: Madam Speaker, 48(1).

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: I am responding to the hon. Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Lee: I do not want to know about Arthur Lok Jack. That is not part of the debate.

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Madam Speaker, return on investment does not always have to be dollars and cents to the person but also the impacts on the community. I could verify that communities in Tobago East where the Speyside Jazz was held, small businesses would have benefitted, guesthouses would have benefitted; [*Desk thumping*] craftsperson would have benefitted; taxi drivers would have benefitted. Madam Speaker, at Pigeon Point, the artisans down on the West of Tobago would have benefitted, taxi drivers in the West would have

benefitted, guesthouses, hotels would have benefitted. Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. Minister of Finance for considering Tobago [*Desk thumping*] and making sure that he actually shown people—[*Interruption*]

Ms. Ramdial: Would the Member give way?

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: No. I really want to thank him for making sure that he made provisions for the agricultural access roads in Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, food security is important, not only for the people of Tobago but for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and by developing our agricultural access roads, we are looking to revitalize the agricultural sector in Tobago and help to not only stabilize the agricultural sector but ensure that there is food security. My colleagues on the other side often pretend that they are the voice for the people of Tobago and they talk about the plight of Tobagonians, “we doh have food”. Well, I thought that they would have been happy that at least with the development of the access roads, we would have the opportunity to access our land to plant to ensure we have food. [*Desk thumping*] So the hypocrisy is what I cannot tolerate. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Order, order!

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Madam Speaker, I want to reassure the hon. Members opposite that the people of Tobago as well as the Tobago House of Assembly, we have been preparing for these agricultural access roads to be developed and to make full use of them.

Madam Speaker, just recently this week, three divisions in the Tobago House of Assembly would have embarked on an Agro-Based Capacity Building Training Programme. The first cohort of those persons in that training programme included a number of men and women from various communities in Tobago. Under the tutelage of Cheryl Jemmott, participants learn how to process—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Lee: Madam Speaker, 48(1), please. This is not part of the environment.

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: It is linked to the agricultural access roads, Madam Speaker, and I responding to you.

Madam Speaker: This is the last place that we should display discourtesy. Overruled. Member for Tobago East.

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Madam Speaker, the hon. Member for Couva North asked how would the agricultural access road contribute towards developing the agricultural sector; how would we benefit from it? So I am responding. Under the

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tutelage of Ms. Cheryl Jemmott, participants learn the art and the craft of harvesting and processing cassava to make farine. So that is one way that we are using the products that we grow to help to ensure food security. Not only for farine but also to make cassava flour and all of that in Tobago.

Under the URP agricultural programme in Tobago, they have started to focus heavily on cocoa. Just last week, 20,000 square metres of land that is being cultivated with cocoa was rehabilitated in the Roxborough Estate. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, Tobago's cocoa has always been sought after by chocolatiers all over the world and the Tobago Cocoa Farmers Association, I follow them quite closely online, they would have been able to harvest 150 pounds of cocoa beans and would have dried it and preparing it now for export and for use in the local market. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I would have mentioned right here already, right in the community of Louis d'Or, we have a group of young people who have now taken the Tobago cocoa and are now making artisanal chocolate, fine quality grade chocolate that is really not only for local use but also for export as well. So the agricultural access roads are giving us an opportunity to go into lands that usually will be hard to access. Our grandfathers would have used donkey and mule. Nowadays, in order to access the land, you need to use your four-wheel drive and pick-up. So the roads will help them to access those hilltop lands where the soil is rich and would be able to be cultivated. Madam Speaker, in terms of short crops, I went to Louis d'Or, I went to Goldsborough recently and I saw a number of farmers going into the hilltop lands and trying to cultivate short crops. They are producing sweet peppers, tomatoes, cabbage, lettuce, different things like that.

Madam Speaker, when we had the situation that my hon. colleague across there speaks about all the time in terms of transporting things to Tobago, they spoke about not accessing food. I was really proud to see the amount of work going into food production by young people in Tobago East. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, just yesterday, a group of young people would have started developing some lots on the way to the Kings Bay Waterfall and an NGO that is based away would have come into the community to offer them technical and other assistance because they recognize that not only would this lead to food production but it is also another way of developing the tourism sector. So by developing our access roads, we are also creating avenues whereby people could look at alternative styles of tourism in Tobago.

Agro-tourism is an area that is to be explored that could contribute towards stabilizing our economy. Also eco-tourism—just recently when I went to Kings Bay Waterfall when I visited the farmers, I saw they were able to rehabilitate some of

the pools and it is so beautiful. So not only would the access roads open up opportunities for food crop cultivation but also for us to really expand the tourism sector in Tobago.

Madam Speaker, I want to also respond to some of the concerns raised about the money that was allocated for Self-Help in Tobago. Tobagonians have been very patient in terms of accessing the grants and when in 2010 to 2015 the Opposition would have invested heavily into their own constituencies in building the starter homes and the activity centres under Self-Help, [*Desk thumping*] Tobagonians did not grudge those people. We were quite happy for them. So Madam Speaker, it is really quite hurtful to hear today that the \$2 million that has been allocated for—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Please continue, Member for Tobago East.

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, it is really quite hurtful to see my hon. colleagues and friends on the other side begrudge the people of Tobago \$2 million to help poor families, low-income families to rebuild homes that have been damaged from landslides, floods, et cetera.

Madam Speaker, not only would the money go towards helping people with their homes, but also small community projects. Right in the village of Goodwood where I live, there is an entire community that cannot access their homes during the rainy seasons properly because you have to have a bridge to go across a large ravine. I am hoping that that is one of the projects that will be approved and funded by Self-Help [*Desk thumping*] to ensure that the people of Grand Gully will be able to access their homes properly during the rainy season. So I want to thank the Minister of Community Development and thank Self-Help and thank the Minister of Finance for remembering the people of Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

11.30 p.m.

Madam Speaker, I also want to respond to some of the queries raised about the agricultural access roads. The Member for Oropouche East would have asked for the list of the roads? Okay. In 2017, we had the Richmond Road, five phases completed; Windsor Tributary Network, 10 phases were completed; Mason Hall, Easterfield, four phases were completed; the Mason Hall, Easterfield Tributary Road, six phases. We had the paving of the Richmond Road, which is an agricultural area as well; the Glamorgan Road, two phases—[*Interruption*] Sorry, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Member for Tobago East.

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We had Cow Farm Road No. 2, 10 phases were completed and then Cow Farm Road proper. We had Friendsfield Tower Road completed, Madam Speaker. In terms of clearing agricultural lands for that, we had the Mason Hall Farm Road that was cleared. In terms of river trenching for agricultural purposes, we had the trenching for the Goldsborough River; the trenching of the Upper Louis d'Or River and Richmond Point.

In 2018, some of the projects that would be completed with the funds that we have been provided, we have Mason Hall to Hope Estate, Agri Park Road. We have the Providence Road Tributary, Friendsfield Tower Road, the Richmond Point Extension, Bushy Park Extension, Cardiff Pembroke, Cardiff Phase Two, Richmond Orchard Road, Richmond Orchard Road Phase 2; Miss Mills Trace, Goodwood; Richmond Branch Road No. 3; Terry Trace, Mount St. George; Windsor Connector Road to Goodwood; Mount St. George Phase 2; Lashley Trace, Goodwood, Phase 2; Goldsborough Bay Road; Lovers Lane, Glamorgan; Fox Access Connector Road to Louis d'Or.

Madam Speaker, that is one road I am really excited about. I remember as a little girl growing up, seeing my grandfather go up into Fox to do his gardening. And now with the opening of that road, because it has already started, [*Desk thumping*] I was able to drive up there one day, a few weeks ago with the Ministry driver in Tobago and we were able to go all the way to the top of the range, Madam Speaker, and see over into Louis d'Or and I felt proud. [*Desk thumping*] Because I knew back then, in order to get his produce out from that garden and for other people to get their produce out, they would have to trek long, hard hours. And I really feel proud of the work that the THA is doing, in terms of developing the access roads.

Madam Speaker, we also have the construction to entrances in farmlands at Goldsborough and Pembroke. In terms of land clearing for 2018, we have the Richmond Farmers who would be considered, Richmond Bushy Park, the reconstruction of Edwards access road in Louis d'Or; the reconstruction of the Delaford to Windsor Road, Phase 1; and James Dial in Goodwood.

In terms of river trenching, we have the Lower Roxborough River, Phase 2; Upper Louis d'Or River; Blackrock River; Delaford, Kings Bay Waterfall and Kings Bay River Road; Upper Richmond River; Bacolet River; Upper Argyle Waterfall River; Upper Goldsborough River; Lower Crux River and Kiligwyn Beachfront. Madam Speaker, the money would be put to good use and we are actually looking forward to this work getting done in Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. Ramdial: I will come and check it.

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Member for Couva North, you do not have to worry to come and check it out. I will check it out. “Doh worry” [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, also when we had Standing Finance Committee, questions were asked about St. Michael’s and why we do not make the investments into St. Michael’s. Member for Oropouche East, you asked me the question when I was sitting there; about St. Michael’s and the investment we would have made.

Madam Speaker, in May 2015, we had the premature proclamation of the legislation and we did not have the requisite infrastructure in place. The law requires for boys and girls to be separated, based on their status as defined by the legislation. The law requires for children in conflict with the law to be placed in rehabilitation centres, and then children who are in need of care and supervision to be placed at community residences. Ninety-five per cent of the boys who were at St. Michael’s were boys who were in conflict with the law. Now, this requires that we establish a rehabilitation centre, an interim rehabilitation facility.

Because, Madam Speaker, the former Attorney General, the colleague of the Members opposite, would have taken the opportunity to bring civil matter, that is the term right, against the State. What I found very ironic is the fact that he would have been the one to proclaim the law. So we found ourselves in a situation where we had to be trying to put this facility in place to prevent further litigation and damages and the person who was bringing these claims was the person who would have actually—[*Interruption*] So, Madam Speaker, I found that quite strange. And for me, somebody new coming into politics, I just found that was just unbelievable. But we managed to do it. It would have cost us, I think, \$3 million to get the rehabilitation centre established.

However, Madam Speaker, when the YTC was designated as the rehabilitation facility, we found ourselves in a situation where we had only four boys at St. Michael’s and 90 staff on the establishment, 40 bodies in place. Four boys at St. Michael’s, 40 staff.

Madam Speaker, apart from the fact that we had a dwindling population at St. Michael’s, history would show, research would show, that St. Michael’s was in a dire state. I was looking this morning at a letter that the former AG would have sent to his colleague who was then the Minister for Gender Youth and Child Development.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: The one who went to court?

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Yes, the same one who went to court. And in his letter to his colleague, he was highlighting the fact that St. Michael's was a recipe for disaster. And that letter was coming out from the investigation into the death of a young Brandon Hargreaves, Madam Speaker.

This situation did not improve much. We would have tried at the Office of the Prime Minister for provide training for the staff at St. Michael's. We would have tried to bring in programmes at the facility. We would have tried to empower the staff, but the situation was not changing and we have a duty of care. We have a duty to provide the best possible care for children in Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker. And if we have to invest over \$900,000 per month into a facility with only four boys and the boys "still not" getting the type of care that we need them to get, because when the children go into an institution, it is for them to emerge better. Madam Speaker, it makes no sense for us to try to run a facility just for the sake of keeping people employed at that facility.

At the end of the day, we have to make the children our priority. That is the commitment that this Government makes to the children of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] And that is something that we would live up to, Madam Speaker.

So, hon. Member for Oropouche East, yes we would have invested in St. Michael's to establish a rehabilitation facility. The facility is no longer in use. The boys are now at YTC. However, whatever investment we made into the physical plant would not go to waste. There are opportunities in the future for the Government or even the church to reconsider another care option for children who are in need of care and supervision utilizing that space.

So we could look in the future and see if maybe, just maybe, that could become a model facility, in terms of caring for boys and girls who do not have loving homes to go to. And at the end of the day, what we want is not for our children to be in the situation but to be with their family and to have reintegration. So I do not think we could say that the investment at St. Michael's would have been a wasted investment because the plant could still be used in the future.

Madam Speaker, in terms of the allocation that was made again, for the community residences, et cetera, under the loan that we would have paid, we would have made arrangements for us to have our assessment centres established; most of them in the constituencies of Members opposite. But yesterday we were very fortunate to be able to open up our assessment centre in Sangre Grande, thus ensuring that children in the east of Trinidad are now able to get proper care and treatment. If they happen to be abused, they have a facility to go to within their

own space and their own community, instead of having to travel all the way to Mount Hope or even San Fernando. So we are actually putting the limited resources we have behind our actions, in terms of improving circumstances for children in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, I do not intend to be long, I just want to respond as I would have promised, at the Standing Finance Committee, to the questions that were asked. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to make an intervention, albeit at a late hour, on this matter. Madam Speaker, I pledge to work with you very closely so that we can abide by the Standing Orders and ensure that we conduct the next 45 minutes of my contribution in a very calm manner because I assure you I am alert and not tired or mentally drained.

Madam Speaker, “they start already” with 48(1). I just want to structure my contribution to indicate that it is my intention to discuss a few items raised by colleagues opposite during the debate. And I have notes to refer to, to comment on a few of the issues raised, but certainly not all, and then to look specifically at the measures and to focus on two or three measures that we are discussing, because after all, this is an instrument that allows for the adoption of a report from the Standing Finance Committee, dealing specifically with supplementing and varying the appropriation of 2018, fiscal. So that is what we intend to do.

Madam Speaker, in the build-up today, we had a lot of talk in the national community, all types of talk, hope, expectations, analysis and so on. Today the Minister of Finance came, made his presentation. A lot has been said about that. I do not really want to make generalized points about his presentation, and so on, but to raise a couple of matters.

Let me begin by also indicating that the Leader of the Opposition raised, in her comprehensive address and detailed address on this matter, several important issues which I would not get into, because it was raised already by the hon. Leader of the Opposition. But I will touch on one overriding issue.

Madam Speaker, completely tonight, with the exception I believe of the last speaker from Tobago East, and let me say to the speaker from Tobago East, we really welcome your information I think. Unless I am mistaken, this is the first speaker that has answered any questions raised in the Standing Finance Committee. [*Desk thumping*] This is the first. But I am sure as the morning progresses, others Members will have answers to give us in the debate. But I want

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to thank you for the information and to alert you that, unless I am mistaken, the Member for Oropouche West had raised the matters. But I am sure she would avail herself of the records to get the answer that you provide. As I have said, it is the first Member to really answer some questions raised in Standing Finance Committee.

The Minister of Finance, Madam Speaker, took us around for an analysis of what has been happening and spoke, not only or not specifically, or not particularly on the measures before us, but gave an overview of the economic management of the country over the last three years, more or less, and focusing on the work he had been doing and what he believed to be his progress, and so on, as it related to Clico, as it related to other issues, and so on; and looked at the economic fundamentals, looked at inflation, well, dealt with the National Investment Fund. We had a concern about that National Investment Fund, as to when it would be started, when it would be triggered, the allocation of shares per entity in that, and the access of the public towards that. The Minister touched on some of those matters.

Madam Speaker, all speakers on the opposite side, with the exception of the last speaker, I believe, spent 90 per cent of their time blaming the Opposition and blaming others, but particularly the Opposition today, on what they believe to be the problems facing the country and the genesis. In fact, it was so bad that I think the Minister of Agriculture spent 95 per cent of his time looking backwards, and then when the time came when we were expecting him to outline policy and programme, I think it was enough time. His time had come to an end, and I am sure if he had more time he would have told us what he was doing.

Madam Speaker, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West followed and yes, I have some issues to raise here. He followed and, of course, would have had critical points to make, and so on. But you know it was very instructive that the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, along with others, sought to criticize the Leader of the Opposition because the Leader of the Opposition had a prepared text, and they were wondering: but how you could have a prepared text when the Minister came today and spoke.

But, Madam Speaker, I want to remind the Government, in case they do not know, the purpose of today was to debate a report that we dealt with on Tuesday. [*Desk thumping*] So all of us would have had prepared notes, because we came today for the purpose of debating a report, which we knew before. We had 48 hours' notice. So to raise the issue that the Leader of the Opposition had a written speech, but she must have a written speech because she prepared. She prepared

and she researched and had her information. In fact, I think I would have been wrong if the leader or anybody else would stand up here and “extempo” their way around the place without being properly prepared and briefed, and so on. As I am, I came to deal with a few matters because I had knowledge of this since Tuesday. So it is not surprising, but they made some heavy weather out of that and I am sure they were doing that just for the camera.

Madam Speaker, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, as he is wont to do, and I mean as he is free to do, of course, spoke on issues of corruption and spent a considerable amount of his time there because he fancies himself as a corruption buster and as a public moralist of some kind and would speak on these matters. Again, Madam Speaker, my position with that matter is that when we were in office we built 12 police stations. You should find one and if you have evidence of corruption report it to the police station. We built 12 for you. Unless you are yourself scared of the police, I do not know why you will be, but if you are not scared of the police, you have evidence of any wrongdoing. Today we heard of something else. There was an issue raised, and I want to touch that issue.

The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West said, to the effect of, that in the Office of the Prime Minister during the tenure of the Member for Siparia, there was a foreign exchange leakage and we were paying bills abroad, and what they were about, and so on. But again, if you have information of any wrongdoing, you have a duty to go to one of the 12 police stations that we built, [*Desk thumping*] because all Governments operate that way, whether it is the Office of the Prime Minister, Foreign Affairs, in particular, and other Ministries, they pay bills and they will pay bills in Trinidad, but they will pay bills outside of Trinidad.

For example, I would give the Member an example. Today we confirmed that the United States lobbyist Arthur “Art” Collins is still on the payroll of the taxpayer. Is he being paid in pesos? Is he being paid in rupees? Is he being paid in bolivars? He is being paid in US dollars. So the Government of this day, through either the Office of the Prime Minister or somewhere, is paying the lobbyist in US dollars. So, to come here today and say the last Government leaked foreign exchange, and so on, I mean, give us a break, it is late. I would not continue with that either. He understands that well.

And there are, of course, and I will touch in a particular way, this matter/raised issue, well other issues of corruption. But, Madam Speaker, we have already heard a lot of that before, so I would not go into that.

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The issue I want to touch is an issue raised here. Now, the Member for Port-of-Spain North/St. Ann's West, we will quote him because, I mean, it resonated when he spoke because he speaks with some degree of passion, and he has convinced himself that he is right. So he speaks with this passion, that the former administration, Madam Speaker, of which we were all part, many of us on this side, he said that we contracted and recruited OAS to build a highway and it is the biggest corruption scandal, I believe, that ever hit Trinidad and Tobago, in the world. The Member corrects me, the biggest corruption scandal in the world, in the globe, on the planet, that scandal. And we had brought OAS to do the highway and a former Head of State, I believe, in Brazil had been convicted, is it Lula, in a matter related to OAS as well. He made some heavy weather out of that, as he is wont to do, Madam Speaker, on those matters.

Madam Speaker, what the Member the Port of Spain did not say, and what—I do not know. He may not know, because he was not on the compound then. He joined the Parliament, of course, a couple years ago, and would have been in some other role at the side in the corridor, and so on, assisting persons, which he is entitled to. You know what he did not tell us, Madam Speaker, is what many of us on this side knew, Madam Speaker. It is that the decision of Nidco to recruit, to offer OAS to construct a highway in Trinidad and Tobago was taken by somebody name, under the board, under NIDCO with the President named Keisha Ince appointed by the PNM. And this was done on May 25, 2010, one day after the General Election, under NIDCO. [*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker, for the record, because the Member raised the matter, I have in my hand a letter dated 25th of May, 2010—I just want to put the record because the record has to be corrected here—to the Director Central America Caribbean OAS, and this is a long name for that. We do not want to read that. It is from NIDCO and it is signed by, I believe, the President, no, Marlon Harris, Secretary Tenders Committee and they say:

We are pleased to inform you that NIDCO has concluded the evaluation of package three for the national highways submitted and has chosen OAS as the preferred respondent.

It was done. Now, I notice when the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West was talking the Member for Diego Martin North/East, already a smaller looking person, he started to slink down in his seat and go lower and lower and lower, because he understood that he was the Minister of Works when OAS was brought to Trinidad. [*Desk thumping*] So, Madam Speaker, OAS was brought to Trinidad when the People's National Movement of 2010 was in office.

Imagine, the day after—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: Madam Speaker, 48(4).

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, I am not giving way unless he has a Standing Order of which you can quote the number.

Mr. Imbert: I say 48(4).

Dr. R. Moonilal: Tell us the number and there is no need for an explanation as you know.

Mr. Imbert: Sit down.

Dr. R. Moonilal: No, no, no. I will sit down when the Speaker rise, which is the proper mode to—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: I was not the Minister of Works on the 25th of May.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, he has to say a number, he cannot give a dialogue.

Madam Speaker: Both of you all cannot be standing at the same time. Okay, so Member you have raised Standing Order 48(4)?

Mr. Imbert: Yes, I was not the Minister of Works on the 25th of May, 2010.

Dr. R. Moonilal: On what?

Madam Speaker: Under 48(4), I overrule.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, thank you for your wisdom. Madam Speaker, so that they were chosen as the preferred respondent. They were chosen on the 25th. The night of the 24th, there was a general election. It was clear that a new Government was coming into place, and they went the next day. While others on this side may have been celebrating, arranging rally to celebrate. The President did not call the Prime Minister from Siparia until Friday.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(4).

Dr. R. Moonilal: They went and sent a letter.

Mr. Imbert: Standing Order 48(4), Madam Speaker. Standing Order 48(4). [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: It is not they. It is Jack Warner.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Member, Standing Order 48(4) refers to use of offensive and insulting language, okay.

Mr. Imbert: Sorry, Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(6).

Madam Speaker: Please continue.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you, Madam Speaker. So Madam Speaker, the point I am making is that this matter of bringing OAS to the shores of Trinidad and Tobago has its roots in 2010, before May 24th, and it is an obnoxious part of our history that the day after a general election—And I am hearing about Jack Warner. Jack Warner was not made a Minister until, I believe, five days after. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, today they raise questions about this grand—what, the biggest corruption scandal in the world, when under their administration they sent a letter, obscenely. The day after a general election you invite OAS to be the preferred respondent?

Mr. Imbert: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(6).

Dr. R. Moonilal: This is shameful.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(6).

Madam Speaker: Member, I would abide with the Standing Order only with respect to a particular word that you used. Okay? In terms of describing the letter. Okay? The letter you have read, I do not think it fits that description of that word. So that if you could just withdraw that word and continue.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, I withdraw that word. I would just say that I find it improper, terribly improper, that clearly an outgoing administration, the day after, hours after, would issue a letter like this, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(6). This is clearly a breach. I was not the Minister of Works on the 25th of May, 2010.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Diego Martin North/East, I overrule you on Standing Order 48(6)—[*Interruption*]

Dr. R. Moonilal: About five times.

Madam Speaker: You are entitled, when you respond, to deal with that. Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you, very much. Madam Speaker, before he objects for the fifth time, let me move on, because I think the point is made, Madam Speaker, on that matter. So, do not, again in this House, as long as we can hear you, make reference to OAS as if it was the Partnership that selected and recruited OAS to come to Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West continued with the blame game, and so on again. Part of me actually in a strange way, maybe in a sadistic way, part of me is happy that they spend all their time blaming us because it demonstrates more and more to the population that they have no concrete achievements to tell the people of Trinidad and Tobago, if you spend all your time like this.

The Member made an interesting point. There was no devaluation in Trinidad and Tobago, and so on. But in the data we have been supplied with, in the very data, it speaks to a 6.5 per cent devaluation. I think the Member for Caroni Central agrees. It speaks to a 6.5 per cent devaluation in the dollar. So we have experienced that. And we have a black market that everybody knows about in this country. So to stand up here and say we have had no devaluation and we have stabilized and secured the dollar, it is incorrect. It is highly incorrect, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, we also heard from the Member for St. Joseph, and I want to just raise a couple issues. The Member for St. Joseph, of course, went along and started the blame game again. He continued that game. That game has no end I think, and made the point about the—and we went on, Madam Speaker, believe it or not, to the children's hospital, and so on, and spent a considerable amount of time talking about whether it is the first children hospital or the second or the last, and so on.

The point is, if you have a hospital that is prepared, the Member for Fyzabad told you there was a plan to commission it. There were persons in place, public officers, not politicians. Why, after three years, you simply cannot follow that commissioning plan and open the hospital? It is a criminal act to have people in the San Fernando Hospital waiting 18 hours for a bed, lying down on the ground, sitting on peerha and you have 200 beds at the Couva children's hospital laying idle. That is criminal, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Again.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Okay, Madam Speaker, I withdraw it. It is terribly improper, terribly improper, Madam Speaker, heartless. I go no further than heartless.

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Madam Speaker, the Member for Arima, well I do not know, spoke and as Ministers did, and I think they are allowed to in this debate, they gave their appreciation of their Ministry and the work they were doing, and so on. Between the Member, I think, for Arima and the Member for Moruga/Tableland, they spoke on the education sector. It was very striking that the Member for Moruga/Tableland exclaimed that the last administration constructed almost to the end, 107 schools, and he was bewildered that on a tiny island like this, you could spread 107 schools all over the place. Those are incomplete, not the completed schools, not what we had finished.

Madam Speaker, I do not want to spend too much time at this hour, again reminding the Member for Arima—he is not here at this hour and I cannot blame him, Madam Speaker—that the Ramai Trace school and the Princes Town Presbyterian School and other schools are still waiting for small funding, Gasparillo, to open. I think that is important. Madam Speaker, we wish him well. He indicated his policy here. He has a major focus on penmanship. I think it is good.

He told us of his early education. I think it was under British Colonial rule. And we wish him well. I think the next thing he may introduce is etiquette to teach children how to use knife and fork, and so on. We welcome that too, Madam Speaker, anything like that.

Madam Speaker, while the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West was talking, and you know, by now "I overs talk about patriotism and so on, I finish with dat long time" because I think the country understands "dat type ah ole talk, yuh know". You know while the Member was speaking and indicating to us that we—you are back? Oh good man. The Member for Arima is stumbling along and coming.

12.00 a.m

Madam Speaker, while he was speaking about Sandals and that we did not want Sandals and they choose Sandals as best in class. I heard that today. Sandals is best in class, and they like it, they see it, they buy it, that is the way. Somebody sent me a note here which I will not display Sandals to pay \$12 million to Turks and Caicos as part of corruption probe. Imagine that, a probe that involves the Premier of that Turks and Caicos territory and that is the Sandals that we talk about, as if they are clean, "holier than Thou" and when we select them, if you do not support Caribbean and local you lack—in the Caribbean, what you lack? "Caribbeaness"? Because if in Trinidad you are not patriotic, in the Caribbean you are "Caribbeaness", I guess?

So that is what we have to face. So if there are problems with Sandals, governance problems and so on, we have a duty to raise that and we raise it. [*Desk thumping*] We have no problem, the Member for Couva North say we have no problem with Sandals. If Sandals want to come here, great. Our approach would have been to invite several providers of that service and open it up, including Caribbean-based resort operators. Sandals is not the only Caribbean-based resort operator, and they could have done that, but that is their way. If they want to do it, I see it, I like it, I buy it. That is their approach. That is fine, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Indarsingh: Like the *Galleons Passage*.

Dr. Moonilal: Yes, it is like that “ting”. I understand the generator collapse now.

Madam Speaker, I want to move on, during the—just some points I want to raise that occurred during our Standing Finance Committee meeting. During the finance committee meeting several issues were raised by myself on various matters. Several issues were raised, Madam Speaker, and one I just want some clarification on because, the Member for San Fernando West had an exchange. We were discussing the Children’s Court, the Child Rehabilitation Centre and I am sure he did not mean what he said because sometimes in the heat of the moment we say something that we really do not mean that, we meant something else. And in the matter, the Member for San Fernando West was making the point, of course, concerning the Children’s Court and said and I want to quote, Madam Speaker:

“Madam Chair,”—at that time Chair—“there was an important point raised by the Member for Naparima, and...The comment specifically was that the Government was sued because”—we were idle—“I want to put on record, whilst I was being sworn in as Attorney General on the 9th of September, 2015, in the middle of the swearing in ceremony I had to take a phone call because the court had been moved by Anand Ramlogan in a particular matter to deal with the State having been found in a case”—that—“there were no child rehabilitation centres, notwithstanding that the law had been proclaimed by the Attorney General for the UNC.”—went on to say, of course, that I got this—“call from the court on an injunction basis,”—it arrived—“the moment that”—I was—“being sworn in as Attorney General...”

Now, Madam Speaker, clearly, I am not sure that the court would have been calling the Attorney General or some other officer of the Ministry—

Mr. Al-Rawi: Solicitor General.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Right, so you see how peaceful we operate. What the Member for San Fernando West really meant is that he got a call from the official of the State and in particular the Ministry of the Attorney General, who is proper to call him and not the court call you, because if the record was not corrected it could look a bit fishy that the court would be calling the Attorney General while he is taking his Oath of Office, and I know on that day, I believe the Attorney General took two Oaths of Office on that day.

Madam Speaker, the next matter that arise is a matter—I just want to spend some time dealing with because it is related to, and I know my friends opposite, you know, Standing Orders in hand and armed at 48(1) would like me to make as much reference as I could. In our notes on the matters relating to the movement of funds and I am thinking more variation than I am thinking of supplementation, at this time. A matter arose, I just want to touch it again because it was in the committee and this is the debate, so it is fundamentally a different thing.

For the Attorney General, Madam Speaker. The Attorney General is—that matter of the CL Financial, I want to put on record in the debate that the Attorney General should really consider without at all crossing the line between the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs and the constitutional independence of the Director of Public Prosecutions, the DPP. I want to ask the Attorney General to consider as he can, what other efforts can be made to bring greater transparency to the expenditure of taxpayers' moneys to the tune of over \$200 million in legal and professional fees, technical services on this CL Financial matter.

Because you know, Madam Speaker, I find it a bit unfair that in Trinidad and Tobago, Members when you are Government, Opposition and so on, we stand up here and we recite the fees of lawyers all over Trinidad and Tobago, how much money they make on the matter. In fact, I have a question I have asked while I am on that note, it is a question that I know the number, no. 210 for written answer. Today were told that we will get the answer.

Madam Speaker, today has gone, we are in tomorrow now. I have not received on my desk the answer for no. 210, and it gone. We are in Friday. I just put that at the side but the subject of that question incidentally is what led me there because that had to do with legal fees, technical, professional services and so on. So I am sure that the Government not providing the written answer today as promised will do so at the earliest opportunity that they could.

The Attorney General may have already cast his eyes on it and would have been under the impression, wrongly in this case, that it was circulated but having said that we did not receive it, but we will take care of that. What led me there is that if in our own jurisdiction we can stand in Parliament and talk, we can write, name of lawyers, how much money they get, what the brief was, “dah, dah, dah, dah, dah”. Why is it on this matter that the taxpayer that is footing the Bill of over \$200 million cannot know the identity of lawyers, legal firms—[*Desk thumping*]*—*professional service providers, local and foreign. Because we do not need to know and we cannot and we will not ask for an update on where the investigation is, what are the legal issues, who will be charged, who will not be charged? We are not interested in that at all.

We are interested as a legislature that pass approved funding. Our system of government is built on Cabinet responsibility and parliamentary accountability. It is our job here, on both sides, to scrutinize public expenditure. And you cannot have a situation, I think is untenable, where over \$200 million has been spent and we cannot know the identity of organizations and persons collecting that money. [*Desk thumping*]

Because the Members opposite, you know, I come now at midterm, halfway through the game, I come to understand what they are about. They have this mantra of following the money and that is fine. They could follow money, they could follow everything they want. That is fine, if that is their approach, that is their approach and they are entitled to be wrong. But in this case, we cannot even know where money gone, far less follow it.

So, I think it is untenable and the Attorney General ought to look at it, as I am saying, be very cautious of the issues raised because in the verbatim of the meeting we had, the Attorney General did explain himself, somewhat. He did say that there is an issue there and you cannot do that because you could be trampling on some independence, or something like that. And we take the DPP’s word that is an honourable man, and he has said we got value for money and “ting”.

While that is good at one point, we are also in an institutional relationship, not a personal relationship. You may think the DPP is a man of great honour as I do. In fact, I think we were in school together in San Fernando at some time. We have no difficulty with the personality, but we are an institutional relationship and we need to have accountability by institutions. Yeah. Because [*Desk thumping*] tomorrow might be another DPP and the Attorney General may take a position, look I do not know this DPP well at all, I cannot vouch for that, you know. So, I raise that matter.

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Madam Speaker, the next matter according to my variation and supplementation list before me— I want to get to this now. Yes, here I am, Ministry of Housing and Urban Development. We had a few exchanges on this matter, when the matter was at the finance committee. Now, I want to quote from the Minister of Finance and to indicate to the Minister of Finance that I had promised to actually in the standing committee that I would address this matter.

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche East, your original 30 minutes are now spent.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Do not say that.

Madam Speaker: You are entitled to 15 more minutes.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, something is wrong with the clock. The Minister said:

“Madam Chairman, I repeat, I certainly hope the Member”—meaning me— “will listen this time. In October 2013, the Urban Development Company Corporation engaged a \$233 million loan facility from ANSA Merchant bank to meet the cost of construction work at the Real Spring Housing Development project when he was the Minister.”

You should ask yourself where that money gone we have no idea. He went on to say, this in the Standing Finance Committee, Madam Speaker, I was bowled over when he said:

“Real Spring—borrowed by the Member for Oropouche was spent on because we inherited”—this—“half-finished project...we are a responsible Government, so despite the fact that we do not know”—where and—“what the \$233 million borrowed by Member for Oropouche East...”—they like to associate me with these things, you know, borrowed we do not know what it—“was spent on because there is no evidence of it. We are committed to repaying the loan.”

Now, I will tell the Minister of Finance, if you really meant this what you say, you should resign immediately. [*Desk thumping*] Immediately, you should resign, if you really meant this. Because you cannot, you cannot mean what you say. I think you were just posturing and so on.

Madam Speaker, I have in my hand a full list of documents which 15 minutes I cannot plough through. I will give you highlights. Because, I will give you highlights, I have read and studied it all. Memorandum: June 12th for Hafeez Karamath Limited claims issues at the Real Spring Housing Project. Hafeez

Karamath Limited did the Brian Lara stadium and Olera Heights in San Fernando. Madam Speaker, I have a next document: Home Mortgage Bank financial arrangements. I have another document here: board note from finance committee of UDeCOTT on this matter. I have a next document here, board minutes. I am not going to read everything here but let me tell you the headline news. Headline news, the project started in June 2005, Real Spring housing estate to which this matter relates, was a project of UDeCOTT, at that time the Executive Chairman of UDeCOTT, Calder Hart, was also the Chairman of the Home Mortgage Bank. UDeCOTT was building houses. The line Minister for UDeCOTT was the Member for Arouca/Maloney—

Hon. Member: “Yuh lie.”

Dr. R. Moonilal: Let us now connect the dots, Minister of Planning and Development. Madam Speaker, 2005, a loan was taken because Calder Hart, what he did, he moved money from the left hand into the right hand. They went to the Home Mortgage Bank and took \$170 million loan in 2005 to build houses in Real Spring. The time to build the houses 24 months; it was supposed to finish in 2007. So in 2007, 24 months after 2005, you are finishing more or less 400 units at Real Spring.

They took \$170 million from the Home Mortgage Bank. Do you know it was a bullet payment. Now, a bullet payment means rapid fire, a bullet payment means it is not amortized. So that what bullet payment means in case people do not know, I know a lot of businessmen know, is that you pay the principal at the end of the loan period. The loan period ends in 2012 more or less, 2005 to 2012. So we were paying interest but not the principal on that. UDeCOTT said when you sell the houses, you will get all the money and we will pay it in a bulk, \$170 million plus interest.

When we got into government, project collapse, Madam Speaker, I have the report from UDeCOTT here, and I will just tell you the headings because I cannot take time to tell you. This project involving Hafeez Karamath had problems with defects, it had problems with delay. There were problems with approvals, what you call statutory approvals. The builder had to get statutory approvals. They did not get that in a timely manner. They had, of course, massive delays on project. We had a dispute, they have a list of defects of these projects.

Madam Speaker, let me give some money figures on this, because I know them by heart now, well no pun intended. One hundred—the project was budgeted at first at \$134 million, a loan is taken for \$117 million. The whole

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project up to 2012, \$114 million is spent on this project that we know of but there is a major dispute with UDeCOTT and Hafeez Karamath for over payment of what we believe to be \$60 million. Hafeez Karamath pays back about \$20 million more or less, we have a dispute over 40 to \$44 million.

When this came to me, we took a decision first, our Cabinet, which this Government actually supports, housing is a matter for the HDC it is not a matter for UDeCOTT. We want to transfer the project to HDC. But, Madam Speaker, we have a problem here. Karamath admits in writing that they owe the Government money, UDeCOTT, on what is called advanced payment. So our position is “we want we money”. The contractor position is we want to finish the job. So how much do you want to finish the job? They asked us for \$50 million to finish the job. But to finish the job is valued by our data—which I have here—\$73 million. But they want \$50 million. So our position in government which we discussed as a Cabinet and so on, is that we cannot give you \$50 million if you owe us \$44 million. So we have a fight, we have to go to arbitration, we have to go to this, we have to go to that.

Madam Speaker, I took a decision based on advice from then Prime Minister and colleagues, I am not going to take taxpayers’ money and give it to someone who already owing money to the taxpayer. That is not how I could conduct business. We set it up and said let this thing work out by arbitration and litigation or whatever, but we cannot touch that like that.

But initially. Karamath wanted \$73 million to finish, but wanted advance. So we say advance out of the picture because you owing us money. We had a dispute and so on, they have they position but you know there are several documents to tell you that the contractor never disputed that they had advance payments to return, what is called unpaid advance payments, never dispute that. They dispute the figure but not that. Unpaid advance, which means they got the money but they had to return it. Okay. And they did return some, I must say.

Madam Speaker, when this is happening now, our position was that we have to negotiate a settlement because we really wanted to finish the project. Lo and behold, the government change and we had to go now—no, this is the story from this book. In 2013, Home Mortgage Bank wanted their money. The government before paid nothing because it was a bullet payment. So Home Mortgage Bank on our throat, listen you owe us \$200 million because it is interest now. We went to ANSA, this is the bank here—the ANSA Merchant Bank and, Madam Speaker, we got the loan at an interest of 1.95 per cent which is the lowest ever borrowed by a government in this country for money. We got that. We immediately gave

UDeCOTT the money to pay Home Mortgage Bank. So when you ask where the money gone, you do not know where the evidence is. Look the book here. [*Desk thumping*] And you are the Minister of Finance of all people. [*Desk thumping*] If I am an Opposition Member and could get the documents, you are the Minister of Finance and you cannot get the documents. That loan was taken to clean up the mess left by your Cabinet. [*Desk thumping*] Your Cabinet left us in that mess. So we had to take a loan from that bank to pay off Home Mortgage that was at our throat for that.

We had so problems with the SEC. We had to wait a little while. That is why 2012 turned to 2013. So I wanted to explain that was cleaning up the mess of the Cabinet that the Member for Diego Martin North/East was in, and left us with that. The project was a project that was stalled. I had often said, Madam Speaker, that under the Member for Diego Martin West, Las Alturas was not his worst project, it was not his worst project. Real Spring and others could be his worst project because he had a part to play in that too before he was fired as Minister of Housing.

Madam Speaker, lo and behold, the government changed and, of course, everything change, the Minister changed. I believe it was the Member for Port of Spain South. You were the Minister of Housing! But you were the Minister of Housing!

Ms. Mc Donald: Do not shout at me.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, the Member for Port of Spain South was the Minister of Housing.

Madam Chairman: Okay, Member for Port of Spain South, I am on my legs. Could everybody please contain themselves. Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, the Member for Port of Spain South was the Minister of Housing and we had a new man at the board as well, Ma'am. And they wanted to continue the project which they are entitled to. But, my only question today is that I am informed and I could be wrong so this is where the question I ask now: Did the Cabinet of this country approve \$150 million to finish this project while the estimate to finish was \$73 million? [*Desk thumping*] And while you already spent \$119 million on that unfinished project.

We had spent, under the former PNM administration, they spent 80 per cent of the money and three independent quantity surveyors' reports put the work finished at 44 per cent to 55 per cent. I have the reports here, three independent quantity surveyors, 44 per cent, 55 per cent finish, 80 per cent money gone. Now,

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14-\$15 million spent already. Did this Cabinet approve \$150 million to complete that? That would put us somewhere in the vicinity of almost \$380 million in all, when you put everything, for a project that was costing when it started, \$134 million.

Madam Speaker, that is something that deserves some clarification, deserves clarification. Because you see it asks another question: Did the government cut a deal with Hafeez Karamath Limited? What was the deal to finish that project? And did Karamath return the advance payments which was the subject of dispute? What happened to the advance payments that was due to UDeCOTT and to the taxpayer?

Because you see, in the UDeCOTT report there was also something interesting here. One of the reasons UDeCOTT said for the delay, and you know, it was the UDeCOTT, strange enough under the PNM that dealt with this matter in a frontal way as well. They said one of the reasons for the delay was that they suspected that money was being moved from the project in Real Spring to the Brian Lara stadium. So they were moving money from the Real Spring to the Brian Lara stadium. This is in the report.

So, Madam Speaker, the Government today owes a duty to tell this country what was the final deal with the contractor that allowed that project to finish, whether the defects that have been listed in three reports have been rectified as they give out homes. Fifty homes giving out but they make a fanfare to give out 50 units as if it is 50,000 units. We used to give away 100 units a week, a week; 100 units a week. [*Desk thumping*] Fifty homes, but it was a fanfare. The Prime Minister is now Minister of Housing and he entitled to go and pose with everybody and take picture. That is not a problem.

Madam Speaker, I leave this matter with two questions. Was this a deal with Karamath? And secondly, was a Minister of Government removed as a result of this matter? That is the question I ask. I go no further, I can go no further on that matter but to ask for clarity. You see, Madam Speaker, when we have evidence we do not just go and “bump we gum” and so on. We come with the documents in the Parliament and we put the Parliament record. If the Minister would want tonight to get photocopies of these, you can take all. You can take all, if he wants that. Although he should have access to it before he makes statements about who—about “doh know where the money gone and doh where the money gone”.

So you see, Madam Speaker, these are just some simple questions I would like to raise on this matter. They are all related to the business before the House. And, in closing, to again remind that when you take money from the Development

Programme, clearly, when we came to Parliament last year, Madam Speaker, we passed a book. I would not demonstrate the book, we know the book the Parliament passed a book. This is what we approve you know, a book. In this book it explains where the development funding money would go to. So if \$800 million is removed, clearly it will affect some projects. We have asked in the Standing Finance Committee for a list of those projects that will be affected.

It is stated, Madam Speaker, in our books that contracts have not been finalized. You know, we asked in the Standing Finance Committee which contracts could you tell us, which contracts have not been finalized? So it frees up \$800 million to go into Recurrent Expenditure. As of 24 minutes past 12 the day after this debate started, we do not know which contracts would equate to \$800 million to give the Minister of Finance that leg room to take the money and go into Recurrent Expenditure. So, I hope there are some answers that we can get. As usual, these are some issues I put on the table. I know when they rebut, they will not rebut to issues, they will rebut to me, but having said that we can deal with that as well, and the Minister of Finance is free, Madam Speaker, to parrot whatever he will. Thank you.

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Madam Speaker. Having listened to hon. Members opposite, I found it very difficult to find any reference whatsoever to the matters in the report of the finance committee, the variations of appropriation, the supplementation, or to the matters raised by myself in my presentation. And, Madam Speaker, while the Member for Oropouche East made an effort, a weak effort, to explain why the Member for Siparia had come with a written speech to respond to the presentation of the Minister of Finance, although the Member for Siparia would have had no clue as to what the Minister was about to say, what I was about to say, it was a very weak and pitiful effort because much of what the Member for Siparia said, was completely at variance with the facts as stated by myself, and I will give one example.

I had indicated, Madam Speaker, in my contribution that our debt to GDP ratio had been reduced to 55 per cent by the time the first half of fiscal 2018 was completed. And yet in the Member for Siparia's speech, the hon. Member spoke about, the crushing debt burden, whereas this Government has been able under very difficult circumstances to reduce the debt to GDP ratio. [*Desk thumping*] And that is the problem with a prepared speech, when you have no clue as to what the person introducing the Motion is going to say and you prepare a speech. A speech prepared by amateurs, I dare say. You make a fool of yourself.

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Because even if one looked at the documentation, if one looked at the Central Bank quarterly Economic Bulletin for March 2018, Madam Speaker, one would have seen that the gross public debt of Trinidad and Tobago had actually reduced in the period under question, the gross public debt. So there was very little, absolutely nothing said by the Member for Siparia that bore any relevance to the facts, the true facts, and I will come back to that in a short while.

Well, let me deal with a matter just raised by the Member for Oropouche East. The Member for Oropouche East attempted to revive, in the manner of trying to raise the dead, a highly questionable letter allegedly dated the 25th of May, 2010. Allegedly dated the 25th of May, 2010, and that letter, Madam Speaker, was produced in this honourable House several months after the general election by the new Minister of Works at the time, Mr. Jack Warner. That letter was produced months after the general election and a very weak attempt was made by that Minister to pin the award of the contract for that highly questionable and possibly corrupt contract for the Point Fortin Highway project on the previous PNM administration.

I remember that debate well, Madam Speaker, when the previous Minister of Works produced this letter some three to four months after the general election and attempted to say that it emanated from the former government and from the former Minister, myself, and when we pointed out to him that this very curious letter was dated on the 25th of May and we also pointed out to him that it is quite clear from the Constitution that Ministers go out of office when a new Prime Minister has been appointed by the President. And therefore, it was impossible for any of us on this side, myself, the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West, to have anything to do with that highly suspicious May 25, 2010, letter because we were not Ministers at the time.

12.30 a.m.

But I want to put on the record, this matter has been dealt with in this Parliament. For years, it has been debunked. It has been proven to be bogus, but let me put a fact on the record, Madam Speaker. The highly questionable award of contract to OAS for the Point Fortin Highway project at a cost of \$7.5 billion, notwithstanding an engineer's estimate of less than \$4 billion when we were in office, Madam Speaker—and one of the reasons why we did not proceed with that contract, the tenders came in before the general election, but we had an engineer's estimate of \$3.8 billion for that project. The actual tender was in the vicinity of just over \$5 billion, and we chose not to proceed with the project because of the vast disparity between the tenders, tender prices and the engineer's estimate. It

was a difference of over \$1 billion, \$1.5 billion actually, and the PNM Government, very wisely, chose not to proceed with that project, and that is why there was no award of that contract prior to the May 24, 2010, election. [*Desk thumping*] But then, the UNC comes in.

The contractor has bid in the vicinity of \$5.3 billion and, mysteriously, the UNC Government awards a contract at a cost of \$7.5 billion—\$2.2 billion more than the tender price, and that highly questionable award of contract to OAS by the UNC was done, Madam Speaker, by the UNC Cabinet, by way of Cabinet Minute No. 333 of February the 10th, 2011. And I say that without any fear of contradiction, that the award of contract for the Point Fortin Highway, to OAS of Brazil—that failed bankrupt contractor—was done by the UNC Cabinet by way of Cabinet Minute No. 333 of February the 10th, 2011. And, certainly, on February the 10th, 2011, yours truly, was not a Government Minister. [*Desk thumping*] But, the Member for Oropouche East was a Member of the Cabinet on February the 10th, 2011, who was part of that decision that resulted in Cabinet Minute No. 333 of February the 10th, 2011. [*Crosstalk*] The Member for Oropouche East was part of that Cabinet that awarded a contract to OAS at \$2 billion more than the tender [*Desk thumping*] and almost \$4 billion more than the engineer's estimate. Those are the facts, Madam Speaker. And who got the difference? If the engineer's estimate was \$3.8 billion and the UNC Cabinet of which the Member for Oropouche East was a part, awarded the contract for \$7.5 billion, who got the extra \$3.7 billion? Madam Speaker, \$3.7 billion! [*Crosstalk*] It is shameful that with these facts, because these are facts—[*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deyalsingh: Thief!

Hon. C. Imbert: As compared to the—

Dr. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, 48(4). [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Rowley: Why you do not take your seat? Take your seat. Sit down. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Moonilal: This kind of hooligan way—[*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Members, certain words that I consider unparliamentary are being exchanged on both sides. [*Crosstalk*] All right. There is no excuse or justification for unparliamentary language. Okay? So, I now say it is cancelled out, and we will resume on higher ground. Minister of Finance.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am afraid, in all the hullabaloo, I did not hear what was happening, but I can tell you, this Member of this Parliament was stating the facts, that the UNC Cabinet, of which the Member for Oropouche East

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was a part, awarded the contract for the Point Fortin Highway project, at a cost which was \$3.7 billion more than the engineer's estimate, \$3.7 billion. You see, Madam Speaker, they could run but they cannot hide, because these facts are on the record, and the question must be answered eventually, who got that extra \$3.7 billion?

And the other matter, Madam Speaker, it is a matter of record and it is in the report of the committee, that in 2013, when the Member for Oropouche East was the Minister of Housing and Urban Development, the then Government, based on a recommendation coming from that hon. Member, took out a loan for \$223 million to complete the Real Spring Housing project, and two years later in 2015, when thankfully and mercifully, they were thrown out of office, we found an abandoned, derelict and uncomplete project. And the hon. Member for Oropouche East could jump up and down. The question that must be answered, what was done with that \$223 million borrowed by the UNC Government to complete—to complete!—that was the purpose of the loan, \$223 million—to complete the Real Spring project, which was left and found abandoned when we came into office in September 2015. [*Crosstalk*] As I said, the Member could jump up and down, but those are the facts. Those are the facts, Madam Speaker.

And the Member could try to “buss mark” or whatever it is. He has no facts. The Cabinet, this particular Cabinet, was very careful, because when we are dealing with a project that was dealt with by the former Government—you have to be very careful. So, this Government engaged the services of an experienced quantity surveying firm, Welch, Morris & Associates, to do a valuation on how much it would cost to complete the Real Spring project. A full bill of quantities is a comprehensive, virtually forensic calculation of how much it would cost to complete the Real Spring project, and the cost was \$140 million.

And, Madam Speaker, why was it necessary for us to find \$140 million? Why was it necessary after the former administration, under the stewardship of the Member for Oropouche East, had borrowed \$223 million to finish it, that project—how come, two and a half years later you have to find another \$140 million to finish the project that they borrowed \$223 million for? [*Crosstalk*] And, I am being reminded that notwithstanding the fact that Welch, Morris & Associates estimated the work left to be done to complete that abandoned project, for which \$223 million went up in smoke somewhere—disappeared into the ether—we are actually doing the project for \$114 million. So, the quantity surveyor's estimate was \$140 million and our completion price is \$114 million—\$26 million less. Those are the facts, Madam Speaker. I just do not understand. I do not understand.

The OAS contract was awarded by the UNC Government in 2011, but the Member for Oropouche East comes waving some mysterious letter that appears three months after the 2010 election, after all of us “long gone” from Government, and trying to pin that questionable contract on the PNM. It is not going to happen. They tried that for five years [*Desk thumping*] and they could not get any traction because it was nonsense.

Everybody knows that the sod turning for that project was done by the UNC. I understand they spent millions of dollars in some fantastic sod turning, down in San Fernando. “Dey drink champagne, man, dey drink Johnny Walker Blue” and they celebrated the \$7.5 billion award of contract. [*Crosstalk*] And then when it was all over, they had the opportunity, because it was a clear provision in the contract—not debatable, not negotiable, not ambiguous—if the contractor went into bankruptcy or receivership, the employer could terminate the contract immediately, and the contractor went into judicial supervision in Brazil—[*Crosstalk*]—judicial supervision, same thing. Receivership, bankruptcy—it is all the same thing. The contractor went into judicial supervision in Brazil. The UNC Government could have terminated that contract immediately. That was in the contract. [*Crosstalk*]

I am being reminded that people in that OAS company have gone to jail, and instead of terminating the contract in the interest of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago—getting out of that highly questionable and possibly corrupt arrangement—what did they do? They did not exercise their right to terminate for bankruptcy and, instead, they reduced the scope of works, but did not in any significant way reduce the cost of the contract and they have saddled us with that.

But, this administration has been able to recover a billion dollars through very complex, but professionally managed litigation, in various countries of the world—recover one billion dollars—and we are using that one billion dollars that we were able to recover—this PNM administration recovered it. It was not easy. We found ourselves in courts in London and other parts of the world. We hired Queen’s Counsel, we had hired professional teams, and we were successful in the litigation. We recovered a billion dollars and we are using that billion dollars to complete the project which they left abandoned—that scandalous project—and yet the Member for Oropouche East would come and try, and pin this highly questionable matter on this PNM administration. Not a chance. Not a chance.

Now, Madam Speaker, what I realize—when I gave my introduction to this report, the adoption of this report, and I explained where the money was coming from and how we would be able to get a supplementation of \$230 million, and

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how we will meet our budget targets, thereby allowing us to achieve the variations of appropriation that we are asking this Parliament to approve by way of this report, and I explained what was happening with respect to the economy and the growth targets that we have, and the actual revenue collections—do you know what beats me, Madam Speaker? I gave actual figures—actual figures, and I think it bears repeating, Madam Speaker.

When I explained how and why we were going to be able to do these variations, and how and why we were going to be able to achieve the supplementation, I made the point that when you looked at the non-oil sector of other companies, the actual collection of revenue for the first seven months of the year, was \$1.1 billion more than projected. And I went into details and spoke about particular sectors such as, assembly industries and financial services industries. I made the point that revenue for assembly-type industries was up by \$146 million when compared to last year, and revenue for the financial sector was up by \$153 million when compared to last year and so on, and in the petrochemical sector, revenue had moved from \$371 million to \$1.2 billion when you compared the same period last year. I gave all of these facts, Madam Speaker.

I indicated that the Central Statistical Office was revising the estimate of GDP for 2017, based on better than expected gas production in the latter half of 2017, and yet I had to hear the Member for Caroni Central ask me, where I am getting the figures from? And you know what beats me, Madam Speaker, forecasts of GDP into the future are not permitted by law to be done by a Central Statistical Office. And it is shameful that the Member for Caroni Central, who was at one time marginally in charge—because they did not have an office building to go into, the staff were working out of their home, the CSO was in a total mess under the stewardship of the Member for Caroni Central—but he had some marginal responsibility for statistics.

And, Madam Speaker, the Member for Caroni Central should know, because he was a Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development, that statistical offices can only measure contemporaneous data and past data, and statistical offices are not permitted by law to do forecast of GDP into the future. So then, when this Minister of Finance, as is the custom all over the world—Ministries of Finance do predictions and forecasts for GDP, virtually in every country in the world, forecasting of GDP is done by the Ministry of Finance— but, the Member for Caroni Central wants to know, how it is that this Minister of Finance is producing forecasts into the future and projections of GDP, when that is the norm in over 100 countries in the world. And, you see, we have a problem in this country, you know. We have persons who just say things. They bear no relationship to reality. They just talk.

In the Standard & Poor's Report, the same report that they are carrying on about, Madam Speaker, the credit rating for Trinidad and Tobago for 2018. Standard & Poor's has estimated our GDP for 2018 at 1.6 per cent and our GDP for 2019 at 2 per cent. That is Standard & Poor's estimation of GDP. And yet, I have to hear old talk about where do I get my figures from—I pulled them out of a hat?—when my figures are almost the same as the figures calculated and published by Standard & Poor's in their 2018 credit rating for Trinidad and Tobago.

You see, Madam Speaker, I have to repeat. There are people in this country who just talk out of a hat. They know nothing. They just talk, and the Member for Princes Town called the names of about four or five of them. They just talk. They say things. They have no facts. They have no information. They have no data. They do not have a clue about what they are talking about—[*Crosstalk*]—but they just say things, Madam Speaker.

Dr. Tewarie: You have all the data.

Hon. C. Imbert: And, Madam Speaker, I know they are upset you know, but there is a particular individual, the name—whose name was called by the Member for Princes Town, who was the recipient of million-dollar contracts from the Member for Caroni Central, million-dollar contracts. Roger Hosein was the recipient of million-dollar contracts under the stewardship in the Ministry of Planning and Development, under the stewardship of the Member for Caroni Central—millions of dollar.

Dr. Tewarie: Madam Speaker, the Member is misleading the House.

Mr. Deyalsingh: What is the Standing Order? What Standing Order? [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Tewarie: He is misleading the House. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. C. Imbert: One of those contracts alone, was for \$2 million, that Roger Hosein was the beneficiary of, through the largess that flowed from the Ministry of Planning and Development when the Member for Caroni Central was the Minister. Say that is not true “nah”?

Dr. Tewarie: That is untrue. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. C. Imbert: Oh, come on. [*Crosstalk*] Madam Speaker, so that when—

Dr. Tewarie: It is untrue. [*Crosstalk*] He received contracts for thousands of dollars like other consultants.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni Central, I believe the Member has given way, so you can stand up.

Dr. Tewarie: Thank you very much. There were a number of people who were involved in the preparation of something called “Action 2025”, which was a plan for the country. There were economists involved from Trinidad and Tobago, and there was one economist from the IDB. They were paid by contract, and all those contracts were small contracts. Not more, in any instance, as I remember, than \$20,000. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. C. Imbert: Oh my God. Madam Speaker, I stand by what I say. [*Desk thumping*] I take responsibility for what I say. [*Desk thumping*] Roger Hosein was associated with multi-million dollar contracts—

Dr. Tewarie: That is not true.

Hon. C. Imbert:—flowing from the Ministry of Planning and Development when the Member for Caroni Central was the Minister. [*Crosstalk*] It does not matter. The fact is that, when you have somebody like that, who was a beneficiary of UNC largess, who is coming out to talk in contradiction to anything said by this PNM administration, you have to “take these people with a pinch of salt”. When you have a person like Indera Sagewan-Alli, when I was a Member of Parliament in the first Manning administration, I sat here and Indera Sagewan-Alli sat there, in the Red House. She was a UNC MP, a ULF MP. [*Crosstalk*] UNC? Well UNC, ULF, same thing. But the fact of the matter is, Madam Speaker, I looked over across the other side of the Parliament and saw Indera Sagewan-Alli as an Opposition MP, and now I have to listen to people like that talking as unbiased, neutral and dispassionate commentators. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Moonilal: What about Mariano Brown?

Hon. C. Imbert: So that, Madam Speaker, come on, I am sorry. If you are going to quote an economist who was a consultant to the UNC, if you are going to quote a former UNC MP and so on, Madam Speaker—[*Crosstalk*]—Yes—if you are going to quote those people as persons who have credibility and who are neutral and you must listen to them, because they have no bias involved in what they are saying, when you look at the reality and you see they have no facts—they just talk. They have no facts, Madam Speaker.

And, as for Mariano Browne, when we were doing the liquidation of CL Financial, Mr. Mariano Browne surfaced on the other side, Madam Speaker, working against the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, [*Crosstalk*] trying to prevent taxpayers from getting back the \$23 billion that was put into the Clico

bailout. And yes, I can say this without fear of contradiction, that with we, on this side, trying to protect and preserve the taxpayers \$23 billion—when we are there trying to deal with CL Financial, who is trying to get out of a situation and walk away with taxpayers’ assets, who do we see working on the other side against the Government and against the taxpayers of this country? Mariano Browne. And I am not ashamed to say it, and I am not afraid to say it. And you are going to come and call Mariano Browne’s name for me here tonight? “Das what you go do”? And Mala Dookeran, Ms. Bitcoin?

Look, Madam Speaker, I was very intrigued at the names listed by the hon. Member opposite. Very interested, very, very interested. Let me repeat. One got money from the UNC, one was a UNC MP, one worked against the Government and the people of Trinidad and Tobago with the CL shareholders to try and deprive the country of that \$23 billion, and one is trying to peddle cryptocurrency in Trinidad and Tobago. And I am sorry, I must listen to them? “Come better than that”. Come with somebody with credibility, please. “Come better than that, come better than that”. [*Crosstalk*] It does not matter. Come with somebody better than that. Come with somebody who has neutrality. [*Crosstalk*] Well, of course, we could always ask for Patrick Watson, a Deputy Leader of the Congress of the People, Madam Speaker. That is what we are facing in this country.

Dr. Moonilal: Who is that?

Dr. Moonilal: Patrick Watson, the former head of ISER at UWI, the former spokesman on the economy, Deputy Leader of the Congress of the People. This is what we have to deal with, Madam Speaker. If it is not COP, and it is not UNC and it is not ULF—

Hon. Members: And what about PNM?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Finance, your original 30 minutes is now spent. You are entitled to 15 more minutes if you wish.

Hon. C. Imbert: You know, Madam Speaker, you know what is so funny about all of this? When in the first two years of this administration we had to tell the population and so on, that things were not so good, things were not so bright and, you know, we have to restrain expenditure, we have to tighten our belts, we have to sacrifice and so on—the commentary coming from Members opposite is, why are you spreading doom and gloom? Why are you being so pessimistic? You have to give a message of hope. So now, we come today and we talk about facts, the economy is not turning around—it has turned around. [*Desk thumping*] The actual revenue collections, Madam Speaker, in several areas are more than projections. [*Crosstalk*]

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So, Madam Speaker, you come now, after two and a half years, they tell you, do not be so pessimistic, you are depressing people when you talk about how the Government has no revenue and you cannot balance the budget. Do not be so pessimistic. Now you come and say, the economy is turning around, revenue collection is up, royalty is up, non-oil is up, oil and gas production is up, [Crosstalk] they say, stop giving people false hope, Madam Speaker. [Crosstalk] I know I could talk louder than them, but they are getting ridiculous, Madam Speaker. [Crosstalk]

Madam Speaker: Okay, Members, it is 12.57, let us get on with this. We still have other business. Minister of Finance.

Hon. C. Imbert: So, Madam Speaker, we on this side really cannot worry with what they on that side are saying. We cannot. We really cannot worry. Now that things are looking better, they are deadly scared. We have two more budgets, Madam Speaker, two more mid-year reviews and two more budgets. So, we are now in the middle of the term and things are beginning to look better. [Desk thumping] I could imagine, panic is setting in over on that side. Panic is setting in. Because if we have reached the middle and the economy is stabilizing, and we are starting to see some sort of sustainable revenue collection, and we have two more budgets to do and two more mid-years, what is going to happen on the next occasion? What is going to happen in the budget of this year? They will all get heart attacks. You will have to call for the medics to deal with them, Madam Speaker.

Because if I dare come and report in September or October of this year or whoever the Ministry of Finance is, comes and reports that: we have actually achieved our projected economic growth of 2 per cent; we have actually achieved our budgetary target for this year; we have actually monetized the resources of the national investment fund. If I come and report that, they will get “giggery”. You will have to bring Limacol and Panadol for them, Madam Speaker. You will have to sap their heads. [Crosstalk]

1.00 a.m.

So, Madam Speaker, let me just deal with some issues here. Let me just deal with some issues, because let me tell you something, I “doh” know about them, but I have no intention, if I can help it, of remaining inside this Parliament for much longer. So that, Madam Speaker, let us deal with the matters in the report. In the report, I think we have dealt exhaustively with the \$20 million supplementation for the Tobago House of Assembly which is for access roads in

Tobago. The Member for Tobago East has read out quite a few of the roads that have to be done. [*Desk thumping*] I think we have said all that can possibly be said with the supplementation of \$30 million in the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs, which is for the DPP for matters arising from the commission of enquiry into Clico. And you know what beats me with all of that? This exercise was initiated in 2012 by Anand Ramlogan. It is in 2012 that the matters were sent to the DPP, and the DPP was authorized by the Cabinet of which the Member for Oropouche East was a part to engage accountants and engage consultants and lawyers and examine the issues arising from the commission of enquiry into Clico. [*Interruption*] Yes, Madam Speaker, and some of them were described as being extremely lazy, I remember.

But the fact is, you know what bothers me? It is like the \$223 million for Real Spring entered into by the Government in the Ministry of which the Member for Oropouche East was a part. And they say they know nothing about it. The engagement by the DPP of legal officers and accountants was done by Anand Ramlogan in 2012, and they pretend they know nothing about it. It is absurd, Madam Speaker, that we have to deal with this kind of nonsense where they are pretending they do not know about matters that they initiated.

With respect to the \$100 million for the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries; again, I think that has been beaten to death.

With respect to the \$2 million for Self-Help, the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts; I do not think there is anything else can be said that about.

With respect to the \$38 million for the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries for payments to farmers and subsidies; again, that has been exhaustively dealt with, both by the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries and also by hon. Members opposite.

With respect to the \$23 million for the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services for grants, and so on, Madam Speaker; again, that has been exhaustively dealt with.

With respect to the variation for the Judiciary, the Service Commissions, the Tax Appeal Board, the \$10 million for debt servicing for the Office of the Prime Minister, for those children's homes which we had to hustle and get retrofitted and dealt with because of the premature publication of the Children Act by the outgoing administration, and then the lawsuit that, that perverse lawsuit that came immediately after they lost the election, that has been dealt with. The \$100 million

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for the Tobago House of Assembly which is reimbursement for back pay for RHA workers has been dealt with. The \$159 million for the Ministry of Education has been dealt with, both by the Minister of Education and the Members opposite. The \$121 million for the Ministry of Health has been dealt with by the Minister of Health and the Members opposite. The \$20 million for the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications has been addressed. The \$169 million for the Ministry of Public Utilities has been dealt with. The \$122 million for the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government has been addressed. The \$62.5 million for the Ministry of Works and Transport and the \$11 million for that same loan has been addressed, Madam Speaker. All this has been exhaustively debated since 10 o'clock this morning. All of these matters have been—[*Interruption*] Yesterday, yes; 10 o'clock yesterday morning, Madam Speaker.

So that I think with all the explanations that are in here that are in this document, the Report of the Standing Finance Committee, Madam Speaker, I think we have beaten these matters to death. I do not think there is anything else to say, and, therefore, Madam Speaker, I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this House adopt the Report of the Standing Finance Committee of the House of Representatives for the Third Session (2017/2018), Eleventh Parliament on the consideration of proposals for the Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation for the fiscal year 2018.

**FINANCE (SUPPLEMENTATION AND VARIATION OF
APPROPRIATION) (FINANCIAL YEAR 2018) BILL, 2018**

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

That a Bill to supplement and vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2018) Act, 2017, be now read a second time.

Madam Speaker, we have just spent 15 hours, Madam Speaker, debating all of the matters that are the subject [*Crosstalk*] of this Bill, the Finance (Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation) (Financial Year 2018) Bill, 2018. We have discussed the movement of Heads of Expenditure in the Judiciary in the sum of \$18.1 million; Service Commissions, \$1.3 million; Tax Appeal

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Board, \$908,000; Office of the Prime Minister, \$10 million; THA, \$120 million; Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs, \$30 million; Ministry of Education, \$159 million; Ministry of Health, \$121 million; the Ministry of Public Administration, \$20.8 million; the Ministry of Public Utilities, \$169 million; the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, \$100 million, and we have also discussed \$122 million for the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government; \$62.5 million for the Ministry of Works and Transports; \$11.2 million for the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development; \$2 million for the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts; \$38 million for the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries; and \$23 million for the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, bringing up the total of \$1,009,297,635.

Madam Speaker, I think it would be an abuse of process, abuse of this House, abuse of the Members' presence—[*Interruption*] Yes, and also the other matter that has been discussed at length and beaten to death is the reduction where the money came from out of the Infrastructure Development Fund of \$796 million. As I was just saying, I think it would be an abuse of process, and I would be guilty of tedious repetition and guilty of irrelevancy if I were to spend any more time discussing all of these matters that have been discussed in the debate on the report of the Standing Finance Committee on the supplementation and variation, and therefore I have no intention of doing that, Madam Speaker, and I sincerely hope that the Members opposite also understand that we debated all of this already.

I beg to move, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*): Thank you, Madam Speaker, as I seek to join this debate on the Bill, an Act to supplement and vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2018) Act, 2017. Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance in piloting this legislation has pointed to that it would be an abuse of the Parliament based on the fact that we just dealt with the Standing Finance Committee Report, and I want to make it absolutely clear at this juncture, as we move to 10 minutes past one in the morning, that this is a separate debate [*Desk thumping*] and it has absolutely nothing to do with the matter that was previously dealt with in this particular place.

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Madam Speaker, it also indicates in clause 2 that a further issue from the Consolidated Fund in the sum of \$213 million is authorized for meeting the expenditure for the service of the financial year ending September 30, 2018, and appropriated in respect of the Heads of Expenditure set out in Part I of the Schedule to this Act, and it outlines the respective Heads to be increased in the first column, Heads of Expenditure, and in the second column the amount of increase. Madam Speaker, under Head 78, it focuses on the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services as it relates to \$23 million, and I hope that the Minister of Finance will fulfil his duty and responsibility in the service of Trinidad and Tobago to ensure that the overall sum of \$1,009,297,635 is properly accounted for under the [*Desk thumping*] respective Ministries based on their commitment of ensuring that all the expenditure that he has alluded to will be properly accounted for.

Madam Speaker, I hope that the Minister of Finance can probably, for my benefit, provide some information as he winds up in this particular debate in relation to what is the policy position, or is there a new policy position at the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. Madam Speaker, I say this because \$23 million has been allocated in relation to the increase in expenditure, and over the last month, or so, constituents have been coming to the office of Couva South and they have indicated to me that applications for old age pension, and in other instances where persons have been in receipt of their old age pension, they have indicated to me, Madam Speaker, that they are now being told by officers of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services that they are no longer in receipt of their old age pension. And I ask the question, Madam Speaker, and I hope, as I said, that if there is a new policy at the Ministry, if there is a new means test by which all applicants for social welfare grants, and also the whole question, or the very important issue of the old age pension is now being subjected to, what I would call a means test, and it is no longer one of where, if the individual is in receipt of income less than \$5,000 per month, if he or she will qualify for the old age pension grant.

Because, Madam Speaker, as I said, I am being told by constituents, and I seek clarification and I seek guidance from the Minister of Finance as it relates to this particular issue, because, as I said, I am being told that the gross income—
[*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Member, as we have said, as you yourself have said, okay, and I am now saying that this is tedious repetition. You have said, as you have said, okay, [*Laughter*] so you yourself have said. Please go on to your next point.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, whilst I have listened to you, I am merely seeking clarification as it relates on this very important issue whether there is a new policy at the Ministry. [*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Member, as I said, I have just ruled that you go on to your next point. That point has been clearly articulated and repeated, because you yourself have said, as you have said. Please go on to your next point.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, I am guided in relation to Head number 78. In relation to the Ministry of Works and Transport, the allocation or the increase of expenditure which relates to \$62,500,000, I again will seek the clarification of the Minister of Finance as it relates to whether the constituents of Couva South will stand to benefit from the works that will be pursued through this allocation in relation to what it is intended for, and whether it will see the cleaning of the Couva river, [*Desk thumping*] whether it will see the completion of the roadway leading to the Captain Watson bridge, or whether it will lead also to the rehabilitation of the Couva Main Road from Isaac junction to Savonetta junction, which is in a total state of disrepair based on the fact that no road rehabilitation has been pursued by the Ministry of Works and Transport in this particular jurisdiction of Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, as it relates to the Ministry of Public Utilities, there is an allocation of \$169,272,692, and it is important that this money is properly expended as it relates to the provision of public lighting and the provision of public lighting in the respective streets of the constituency of Couva South, and also to ensure that it is properly utilized for the repairs of the grounds that have been lit by the public lighting department of the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission. I say so because over the last two and a half years, Madam Speaker, there have been a number of requests that I have made to the Minister of Public Utilities to have grounds, for example, where bulbs that are blown, for example, at the Caldrac ground, in the constituency of Couva South where the Caldrac Cricket Club plays premiere division one cricket. And also the Calcutta Sports Club is another club, Madam Speaker, that plays national league cricket, and the talent and the ability of matches to be played, from what we would call night cricket competitions under the purview of the Trinidad and Tobago Cricket Board, is suffering tremendously—[*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Member, I believe you were under the Ministry of Public Utilities and I believe you are under lighting. Keep it to lighting, please. I just want to, for the purposes of us setting some context for this debate, I would like to

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remind Members that we are guided by Standing Order 87(2), okay, so that we are strictly confined to the matters which additional expenditure is required for. All right? So, please, keep within those confines. Continue.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Guided, Madam Speaker. As I said, I was seeking to indicate that there were two clubs engaged in, what I would call—referred to cricket that falls under the jurisdiction of the Trinidad and Tobago Cricket Board, and they are involved in a number of night competitions. They host a number of teams that visit the constituency of Couva South. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: So, Member, as I said, we are confined strictly—I am hearing you talking about cricket clubs under the cricket board. Please get back to what is under the Ministry—well, if it is the Ministry of Public Utilities that you are dealing with. Please get back to the matters—strictly the matters—that we are requiring the additional funding for.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Those on the other side seem to have not had what we would call, sporting days, [*Desk thumping*] so they do not probably understand what I am speaking about.

Madam Speaker: It would not be those who do not properly understand. I have made a ruling, and again sometimes I do not think we understand the imputation in what we are saying. I have made a ruling, please keep—if you are talking about the Ministry of Public Utilities, what this money is required for. It has nothing to do with my sporting understanding.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, I am merely making a case as it relates to representing clubs in the constituency of Couva South [*Desk thumping*] in the context of ensuring that these grounds are properly lit in relation to the increased expenditure of \$169,272,692, in the context of the responsibility of the Ministry of Public Utilities through T&TEC, the public lighting programme, Madam Speaker. As I said, I have written to the Minister of Public Utilities seeking the lighting on these two grounds, in particular, to be remedied over the last two years and it has not been forthcoming, and I guess I am seeking to highlight this in the context of the increased allocation to the Ministry Public Utilities.

Also, Madam Speaker, as we go forward, I hope that from the point of view of also the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries that the agricultural incentive programme, we will ensure that the cost of the subsidy that is due to the farmers, this one-off subsidy will be done in such a manner or it will be disbursed in such a manner, Madam Speaker, that it really meets the criteria of what we would call openness and transparency in the operations of those on the other side from the point of view of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

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Madam Speaker, from the decrease in the Ministry of Finance of \$796,297,635, the Minister of Finance, he has a responsibility in ensuring that the movement of moneys, or the disbursement of moneys to the respective Ministries is done in a timely manner and is done in a decisive manner so that it does not obstruct or hinder the business of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker, and in that regard, that the constituents, specifically of Couva South, who may benefit from the increased allocations in the service Ministries or the delivery Ministries, will be able to benefit from what is allocated. So, Madam Speaker, I thank you for allowing me to intervene at this particular point in time. [*Desk thumping*]

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

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 87(2), I now beg to move that the Bill be now read a third time and passed.

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

Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.

Madam Speaker: Leader of the House.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 1.27 a.m.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTION

The following question was asked by Ms. Ramona Ramdial (Couva North) earlier in the proceedings:

Official Tourism Travel Undertaken (Details of)

202. Ms. Ramona Ramdial (Couva North) asked the Minister of Tourism:

- A. Could the Minister indicate the destinations, purpose and cost of all official travel undertaken by the Minister for the period September 2015 to March 31, 2018 and by whom?
- B. Could the Minister state:
- i. the names of the Ministry officials/tourism stakeholders who accompanied her to the Berlin Tourism Conference; and
 - ii. the cost of travel for each person?

The following reply was circulated to Members of the House:

- a. During the period September 2015 to March 31, 2018, the Minister of Tourism represented Trinidad and Tobago at nine meetings/ trade shows and conferences, with a view to highlighting Trinidad & Tobago's attributes, promoting the niches which are being pursued by the destination, attracting investment in the tourism sector and increasing arrivals. The report on overseas travel by the Minister of Tourism over the period September 2015 to March 31, 2018, which details destination, purpose and cost of all official travel is attached at Appendix I.
- b. The International Tourism Bourse (ITB), held in Berlin is an annual tradeshow which attracts the major players in the global travel industry. It presents a forum for networking between destination marketers and the European travel trade and media. Attendance at ITB allowed Trinidad and Tobago to stay abreast of the latest development in the travel industry, gain insight and awareness of the market trends and challenges and be able to interface with key travel and tourism personnel, tour operators, airlines and other special interest operators serving Trinidad and Tobago.
 - i. The Minister of Tourism led the Trinidad and Tobago delegation to the ITB which was held in Berlin, Germany over the period March 7-11, 2018. The delegation comprised the following persons:
 - Ms. Carla Cupid - Senior Promotions Officer
 - Ms. Bridget Beckles - Corporate Communication Officer
 - ii. The cost of travel of the delegation to ITB was as follows:
 - Hon. Shamfa Cudjoe - Minister of Tourism - \$106,924.05
 - Ms. Carla Cupid - Senior Promotions Officer - \$ 50,512.85
 - Ms. Bridget Beckles - Corporate Communication Officer- \$ 50,512.85

Report on Overseas Travel by the Minister of Tourism
For the period September 2015-March 2018

Date	Meeting and Destination	Delegation	Cost	Purpose
October 20-23, 2015	Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO) State of the Industry Conference - Curacao	Minister of Tourism Mrs. Samdai Rampersad – AG. Deputy Permanent Secretary Mrs. Kathy-Ann Thompson Ag. Research Officer II	\$79,055.00	The State of the Industry Conference serves as a forum for tourism stakeholders and executives to discuss ways to enhance the competitiveness and sustainability of Caribbean Tourism Attendance allowed member states to benefit from information exchange on the successes and pitfalls of national, regional and international tourism initiatives. A Meeting of Tourism Ministers and Commissioners was also held during the SOTIC, Trinidad and Tobago, is a member country of the Caribbean Tourism Organization

March 9-12, 2016	International Tourism Bourse (ITB) Trade Show and Convention, Berlin Germany	Minister of Tourism Mr. Edwards C. Lee Tang Tourism Co-Ordinator	\$154,177.00	Attendance at ITB allowed Trinidad and Tobago to stay abreast of the latest developments in the travel industry, gain insight and awareness of the market trends and challenges. Attendance also permitted interaction with key travel and tourism personnel, tour operators, airlines and other special interest operators serving Trinidad and Tobago.
June 1-4, 2016	Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO) Caribbean Week in New York	Minister of Tourism Mr. Cliff Hamilton – Senior Technical Adviser	\$52,011.00	Attendance at the CTO's Caribbean Week provided investment networking opportunities with venture capitalists, investors and Caribbean ministers, as well as, outreach to the regional diaspora through sharing of the unique selling proposition of Trinidad and Tobago. A Meeting of Tourism Ministers and Commissioners was also held during the CTO's Caribbean Week.
January 31-February 2, 2017	Caribbean Travel Marketplace of the Caribbean Hotel and Business	Minister of Tourism Ms. Ethlyn John – Deputy Permanent Secretary (AG.)	\$52,018.00	Attendance at the Business Meetings and Caribbean travel marketplace enabled the Ministry to keep abreast of tourism investment developments in the region and promote the destination.

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	Association and The Business meetings of the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO) – The Bahamas			Current information on investment trends in the sector gained from participation was instructive in the development of the Trinidad and Tobago Tourism Regulatory and Licensing Authority.
March 11-14, 2017	Caribbean Tourism Organization's High Level Engagement Meetings in Brussels, Belgium, March 11-14, 2017.	Minister of Tourism. Mrs. Kafi Johnson Licorish – Research Officer I	\$136,997.00	Attendance allowed the Minister the opportunity to engage in high level discussion with senior members and officials of the European Parliament, European Commission, Directorate General, CARIFORUM Ambassadors and other key stakeholders to mitigate impacts on the region. Participation also allowed the Ministry to benefit from the updates, discussions and networking with the EU and regional counterpart.
October 23-27, 2017	Florida Caribbean Cruise Association (FCCA) Cruise Conference and	Minister of Tourism Mrs. Simone Medina	\$114,926.00	Participation at the FCCA Cruise Conference and Tradeshow provided the Ministry with the opportunity to continue discussions with Cruise Line Executives to encourage increased cruise calls to the

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	Tradeshaw, Merida, Mexico	Director, Research and Planning (Ag.)		destination and further the development of the cruise sector in Trinidad and Tobago.
November 6-8, 2017	World Travel Market (WTM) – London, United Kingdom	Minister of Tourism Ms. Carla Cupid – Senior Promotions Officer Ms. Bridget Beckles Corporate Communication Officer	\$142,804.00	Attendance at WTM allowed for opportunities to promote Trinidad and Tobago to the “world”; learn from industry leaders, discuss trends, issues and innovations in the travel industry, network and conduct business.
March 7-11, 2018	International Tourism Bourse (ITB) Tradeshaw and Convention, Berlin, Germany	Minister of Tourism Ms. Carla Cupid – Senior Promotions Officer Ms. Bridget Beckles – Corporate Communication Officer	\$207,950.00	Attendance at ITB allowed Trinidad and Tobago to stay abreast of the latest development in the travel industry, gain insight and awareness of the market trends and challenges interface with key travel and tourism personnel, tour operators, airlines and other special interest operators serving Trinidad and Tobago.

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March 21-22, 2018	XXIV American Congress Ministers and High-Level Authorities of Tourism, Georgetown, Guyana.	Inter- of and of	Minister of Tourism Ms. Siddiqua Mondol- Tourism Advisor I	\$31,300.00	Attendance at the Congress provided an important platform for the exchange of experiences and practices, mechanisms to support technical studies, strengthen communication between government agencies and the private sector, considerations for technical cooperation proposals, and support to member states in their efforts to develop the tourism sector.
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The following question was asked by Dr. Lackram Bodoie (Fyzabad) earlier in the proceedings:

**San Fernando General Hospital
(Contracts awarded)**

208. Dr. Lackram Bodoie (Fyzabad) asked the Minister of Health:

Could the Minister provide the following:

- a) a list of contracts awarded for infrastructural repair works at the San Fernando General Hospital from September 8, 2015 to date;
- b) the value of each contract; and
- c) a status update of each project?

The following reply was circulated to Members of the House:

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- a) a list of contracts awarded for infrastructural repair works at the San Fernando General Hospital from September 8, 2015 to date;

The list of contracts awarded for infrastructural repair works at the San Fernando General Hospital from September 8, 2015 to date are as follows:

Letter of Award date	Contractor	Contract Description
11-Apr-16	Engineering Consultants (ENCO)	The Provision of Electrical Engineering Consultancy and Project Management Services for the Electrical Upgrade of the SFGH
05-Jul-16	B&J General Contractors	Upgrade Works at the Mortuary, SFGH
10-Aug-16	Alfa Tech Services Ltd.	Minor Refurbishment Works to Accommodate a Temporary Labour Ward, San Fernando General Hospital
20-Feb-17	Ladnek Contracting Services Ltd.	Remodelling of Observation Bay, San Fernando General Hospital
07-Apr-17	CAG2K Industrial Services Ltd.	The Conversion of the Old Ward 14 to House the Dialysis Unit, San Fernando General Hospital.

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06-Jun-17	Pioneer Construction (2000) Ltd.	San Fernando General Hospital Kitchen Restoration and Refurbishment
03-Jul-17	General Earth Movers Limited	Repair Work to the Eastern Carpark at the San Fernando General Hospital
07-Aug-17	Alfa Tech Services Ltd.	Tender for the Refurbishment of Former Accounts Department to Accommodate Physiotherapy Department, SFGH
18-Jan-18	TLM Co. Ltd.	Labour Ward Roofing (Including NICU), San Fernando General Hospital

- a) the value of each contract awarded for infrastructural repair works at the San Fernando General Hospital from September 8, 2015 to date are as follows:

Letter of Award date	Contractor	Cost of Contract (VE)
11-Apr-16	Engineering Consultants (ENCO)	\$937,511.00
05-Jul-16	B&J General Contractors	\$743,336.00
10-Aug-16	Alfa Tech Services Ltd.	\$450,440.00

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20-Feb-17	Ladnek Contracting Services Ltd.	\$1,828,131.25
07-Apr-17	CAG2K Industrial Services Ltd.	\$2,170,721.10
06-Jun-17	Pioneer Construction (2000) Ltd.	\$1,722,477.00
03-Jul-17	General Earth Movers Limited	\$560,750.00
07-Aug-17	Alfa Tech Services Ltd.	\$1,060,557.00
18-Jan-18	TLM Co. Ltd.	\$3,973,273.00
	Total	\$13,447,196.35

- b) a status update of each project awarded for infrastructural repair works at the San Fernando General Hospital from September 8, 2015 to date are as follows:

Letter of Award date	Contractor	Status
11-Apr-16	Engineering Consultants (ENCO)	75% Completed
05-Jul-16	B&J General Contractors	Completed on August 2017
10-Aug-16	Alfa Tech Services Ltd.	Completed on October 2017
20-Feb-17	Ladnek Contracting Services Ltd.	Completed on March 2018

07-Apr-17	CAG2K Industrial Services Ltd.	78% Completed
06-Jun-17	Pioneer Construction (2000) Ltd.	50% Completed
03-Jul-17	General Earth Movers Limited	Completed on December 2017
07-Aug-17	Alfa Tech Services Ltd.	10% Completed
18-Jan-18	TLM Co. Ltd.	20% Completed

The following question was asked by Dr. Roodal Moonilal (Oropouche East) earlier in the proceedings:

**CEPEP Contractors
(Details of)**

214. Dr. Roodal Moonilal (Oropouche East) asked the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government:

Could the Minister:

- a) list the names of all new CEPEP contractors selected from December 1, 2017 to date;
- b) the names of Directors of each company; and
- c) the constituency within which each contractor operates?

The following reply was circulated to Members of the House:

Table 1, below captures the names of all new CEPEP contractors selected from December 1, 2017 to date, the names of the Directors for each company and the constituency within which each contractor operates.

TABLE I
NEW CEPEP CONTRACTORS FROM DECEMBER 1, 2017 TO DATE

	Contracting Company's Name	Constituency	Managing Director's Name	Other Directors
1	Amre Contracting and General Services Company	Arima	Erma Samaroo Crichlow	Jameson Samaroo
2	Bad Lad Trinidad Ltd	Arima	Clotilda Thora Harris	Leslie Harris
3	Cyreson Limited	Arima	Cyrielle Casimire	Donna Casimire
4	Kijal's Enterprises Ltd	Arima	Ann Maria Fermin	Roger Fermin, Isiah Fermin
5	Nineteen64 Maintenance Ltd	Arima	Donna Pereira	Marilyn La-Foucade
6	Alexa Investments Ltd	Arouca/Maloney	Darcia Williams	Sulange Williams
7	DSB Construction Limited	Arouca/Maloney	Curt St Bernard	Keith St Bernard
8	Grass Barbers Company Limited	Arouca/Maloney	Shelley Johnson	Caleb Johnson, Danae Johnson
9	Junior Williams General Contracting Limited	Arouca/Maloney	Reynold Williams	Natalie Williams
10	Indar Singh Services Limited	Caroni Central	Anthony Roach	Dalip Singh

TABLE I
NEW CEPEP CONTRACTORS FROM DECEMBER 1, 2017 TO DATE

	Contracting Company's Name	Constituency	Managing Director's Name	Other Directors
11	Green Velvet Construction & Landscaping Ltd	Caroni Central	Micheal Julien	Camille Mc Farlane Julien
12	Enterprise Achievers Co. Ltd	Chaguanas East	Irvin Isles	Brian Isles
13	Navcon Engineering Services Ltd	Chaguanas West	Sunil Ramadhar	Suresh Ramkissoon
14	S. Mahabir & Sons Services Ltd	Chaguanas West	Dhanmattie Mahabir	Rajmati Mahabir, Jeewan Mahabir, Eswar Mahabir
15	RG General Construction & Maintenance Company Ltd	Couva South	Roland Gokool	Aashad Hosein
16	XAL Transport & General Contracting Services Ltd	Couva South	Liston Aberdeen	Annette Aberdeen, Xochete Aberdeen
17	DASO Company Limited	Cumuto/Manzanilla	June Pantin	Akilah Blabisi Wilson, Ayodale Adana Wilson-Charles
18	Ecorific & General Construction Co. Ltd	Cumuto/Manzanilla	Neerala Singh	Saheed Mohammed

TABLE I
NEW CEPEP CONTRACTORS FROM DECEMBER 1, 2017 TO DATE

	Contracting Company's Name	Constituency	Managing Director's Name	Other Directors
19	A - Heng Enterprises Ltd	D'Abadie/O'Meara	Anne Elizabeth Henry-Gray	Sade Akeela Gray
20	Gillian Lewis Construction Limited	D'Abadie/O'Meara	Gillian Lewis	Amanda Mc David, Ashley Calderon
21	Languaigne Cleaning and Maintenance Services Limited	D'Abadie/O'Meara	Desmond J Languaigne	Elizabeth Languaigne, Camille Portillo
22	Le Mark Enterprise Limited	D'Abadie/O'Meara	Bernice Awai	Simone Awai
23	Biovi Services Ltd	Diego Martin Central	Adlai J M Robinson	Sonia Robinson
24	Cgrass Maintenance Services Ltd	Diego Martin Central	Andre Adlai Robinson	Nicholas Joseph
25	Cutting Edge Limited	Diego Martin Central	Adrian Chandler	Ava Chandler, Christian Chandler
26	Workshed Construction Company Ltd	Diego Martin Central	Lisa Richards-Cole	Nicole Richards, Alphius Bergin

TABLE I
NEW CEPEP CONTRACTORS FROM DECEMBER 1, 2017 TO DATE

	Contracting Company's Name	Constituency	Managing Director's Name	Other Directors
27	Buy Brown Construction and Supplies	Diego Martin North/East	Onnasis P. Rodriguez	Jillian Rodriguez
28	D and Dee's Construction Ltd	Diego Martin North/East	Don George	Kim George-Lewis, Shanna George
29	D's Landscaping Services Limited	Diego Martin North/East	Daleon Kyron Williams	Amy Bhagwandeem, Emilia George
30	Slamma & Sons Construction Co. Ltd	Diego Martin North/East	Bradley Lucio	Jerome Lawrence
31	Breeze Maintenance Services Ltd	Diego Martin West	Roy Orr	Zachary Nimblett
32	Galavision Industrial Services Limited	Diego Martin West	Curtis Nimblett	Marlene Nimblett, Michael Thomas
33	Maybrosis Construction Maintenance Company Limited	Diego Martin West	Phillip A Maynard	Keron Maynard
34	Tunnel General Contractors Ltd	Diego Martin West	Dante Thaddeus Pantin	Nevillita Sobers

TABLE I
NEW CEPEP CONTRACTORS FROM DECEMBER 1, 2017 TO DATE

	Contracting Company's Name	Constituency	Managing Director's Name	Other Directors
35	Proactif Contracting Services Limited	Diego Martin West	Robert Cezair	Diana Zamore
36	(DCS) Dios Contracting Ltd	Fyzabad	Marilyn Lewis-Tobias	Tenielle Tobias, Tishelle Tobias
37	LAG General Contracting Services Ltd	Fyzabad	Leroy Gene Porther	Gary Porther, Audrey Porther
38	Demario & Sisters Exclusive Ltd	La Brea	Delano Kydd	Shelly Ann Noel-Kyod, Winston Peter Noel
39	Edwin Noel Contractor Company Limited	La Brea	Carol M Noel	Edwin Noel
40	Jus Camron Best Limited	La Brea	Gemma Best	Devon Charles, Moriette Lewis
41	Jennifer Wellington Charles Enterprises Limited	La Horquetta/Talparo	Jennifer Wellington Charles	Alex Jabari Jonan Charles

TABLE I
NEW CEPEP CONTRACTORS FROM DECEMBER 1, 2017 TO DATE

	Contracting Company's Name	Constituency	Managing Director's Name	Other Directors
42	Lynette's Landscaping Enterprises Co Ltd	La Horquetta/Talparo	Lynette Joseph Sandiford	Wilbert Joseph
43	Sphinx Construction Limited	La Horquetta/Talparo	Phillip Watts	Dale Baboolal, Avenelle Alleyne
44	Yeshuah Enterprise Ltd	La Horquetta/Talparo	Roland Keith Pereira	Cherry Ann Jennings Pereira, Joshua Pereira, Arianna Jennings
45	Caystruction Services Ltd	Laventille East/Morvant	Negus Benoit	Randell Forde
46	God Fortune Company Limited	Laventille East/Morvant	Deon Gay	Quincy Calliste
47	Successive Contracting & Maintenance Ltd	Laventille East/Morvant	Michelle Philip	Lyndon Des Vignes
48	D Sherrif's Angels Construction and Maintenance Limited	Laventille West	Leric Joseph	Beverly Joseph

TABLE I
NEW CEPEP CONTRACTORS FROM DECEMBER 1, 2017 TO DATE

	Contracting Company's Name	Constituency	Managing Director's Name	Other Directors
49	J Craigwell Maintenance and Construction Services Limited	Laventille West	Josanne Craigwell	Alkim Mc Donald, Joanna Alleyne
50	Cantamond Enterprises Ltd	Lopinot/Bonair West	Donna Maria Thomas	Daren Thomas
51	L.M.K. Landscape & Maintenance Company Ltd	Lopinot/Bonair West	Laurie Murray	Abigail Murray, Tenika Kelly
52	Mujami Enterprises Ltd	Lopinot/Bonair West	Wayne Gomez	Miriam Libert, Muhaymin Libert
53	Reduscar Community Cleaners Ltd	Lopinot/Bonair West	Paul Guerra	Corinne Celestine, Bernadette Cielto
54	Rupert Gillead Contracting Services Limited	Mayaro	Rupert Gillead	Felicia Gillead
55	Who Does it All? General Contractors Ltd	Mayaro	Karen Wilson	Abigail Whiskey, Yasmine Khan, Giselle Lakhan
56	Bernard and Angel Maintenance Services Limited	Moruga/Tableland	Angela Knutt	Anisa Knutt

TABLE I
NEW CEPEP CONTRACTORS FROM DECEMBER 1, 2017 TO DATE

	Contracting Company's Name	Constituency	Managing Director's Name	Other Directors
57	Crevordor's General Works Limited	Moruga/Tableland	Crevordor Piper	Perlene Forbes, Jennifer Forbes
58	Eldon and Sammy's Construction Services Limited	Moruga/Tableland	Eldon Mendoza	Debbie Alexander
59	Natko General Contracting Limited	Moruga/Tableland	Nkomo Toussaint	Nathaniel Malchan, Venese Toussaint-Malchan
60	Hughelen General Contractor Ltd	Naparima	Richard Thompson	Lystra Helen Lashley
61	Davavin Company Limited	Oropouche West	Alvin Reeves	Deborah Hayes, Joy Haynes
62	Ramnarine Logistics, Contractors & Supplies Ltd	Oropouche West	Ramdeo Ramnarine	Christiana Reena Ramnarine
63	ER&R Carrington General Contractors Co Ltd	Point Fortin	Roger Carrington	Reynold Carrington
64	GR and MR Contractors Ltd	Point Fortin	Gerald Smith	Roamatie Smith

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NEW CEPEP CONTRACTORS FROM DECEMBER 1, 2017 TO DATE

	Contracting Company's Name	Constituency	Managing Director's Name	Other Directors
65	Cdaelteque Co Ltd	Point Fortin	Cherry A.L. Herbert	Dean Garib
66	R&M General Contracting Services Ltd	Point Fortin	Raymond Johnson	Michelle B Thomas
67	Tip Top Construction Limited	Point Fortin	Ezekiel Juba	Esther Agard-Juba
68	Caves Contractors Ltd	Point Fortin	Wilfred Cave	Anne Marie Bailey-Cave, Jean Cave Alexander, Deborah Alexander
69	C.J. Maintenance Co. Ltd	Pointe-a-Pierre	Curlis Jones	Natasha Jones
70	Joeteck Contracting Limited	Pointe-a-Pierre	Richard Joseph	Hindford Webster Joseph
71	Super Klean Services Limited	Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West	David Pierre	Sean Serrano, Nicholas Pierre, Nigel Walcott
72	Long Yard General Maintenance Ltd (LGM Ltd)	Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West	Carl Clarke	Nigel Bellot, Collis Browne

TABLE I
NEW CEPEP CONTRACTORS FROM DECEMBER 1, 2017 TO DATE

	Contracting Company's Name	Constituency	Managing Director's Name	Other Directors
73	B & S Construction Company Limited	Princes Town	Leon Bengochea	Michael Bengochea
74	MPH Services Limited	Princes Town	Alston Hodge	Fitzroy Mitchell, Curtis Green
75	Bartley's Original Ltd	Princes Town	Natalie Francois	Ronel Bartley
76	Granger Go Green Maintenance Services Ltd	San Fernando East	Lynette Granger	Melissa Granger
77	L'Jaysan Maintenance and Construction Company Ltd	San Fernando East	Larry Alexander	Sandrine Alexander
78	Samarai Maintenance Company Ltd	San Fernando East	Shaka Daniel Joseph	Jehan Smith Joseph
79	Hari Construction and Environmental Co Ltd	San Fernando West	Joel M Lalchan	Aleem Kahrin
80	Marlon Rennie Construction & Environmental Services Ltd	San Fernando West	Marlon Rennie	Krystal Kholay-Rennie

TABLE I
NEW CEPEP CONTRACTORS FROM DECEMBER 1, 2017 TO DATE

	Contracting Company's Name	Constituency	Managing Director's Name	Other Directors
81	Most High Contractors Limited	San Fernando West	Debbie Calliste	Troy Calliste, Amanda Calliste, Debbie-Ann Calliste
82	Nissi General Contractors Limited	San Fernando West	Marva Manswell Joseph	Denice Joseph, Roxanne Rousseau Alves, Michael Manswell
83	Cervern's Contractor & Construction Services Ltd	San Juan/Barataria	Kimberly Parris	Bellamine Antoine
84	Etco Environmental Co. Ltd	San Juan/Barataria	Ethrine Wilson-Trotman	Danielle Dionne Roberts
85	Beckles Environmental Services Limited	St. Ann's East	Brian Beckles	Juliet John
86	Clutch Construction Co. Ltd	St. Ann's East	Sherwin Patterson	Alphonso Patterson
87	Kennat Ltd	St. Ann's East	Kendell Perouse	Janice Perouse
88	Phyllis & Lisa Environmental Co Ltd	St. Ann's East	Phyllis Mitchell	Lisa Charles

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NEW CEPEP CONTRACTORS FROM DECEMBER 1, 2017 TO DATE

	Contracting Company's Name	Constituency	Managing Director's Name	Other Directors
89	Ivanto General Contractors Limited	St. Augustine	Sharficul Hosein	Zorida Hosein, Melissa Jagroop
90	Vision on Mission Enterprise Limited	St. Augustine	Wayne Chance	Giselle Chance, Fitzroy Frederick, Ronald Forde, Anjanie Benjamin, John Rougier, Liselle Guerin
91	Craftmaster Limited	St. Joseph	Natasha Mahadeo John	Ira Gangoo Morrison
92	Nu Wave Automotive Limited	St. Joseph	Michael Sealey	Alana Douglas
93	SPCY Events & Maintenance Ltd	St. Joseph	David Yhip	Suzette Yhip
94	Timpaul Construction & Maintenance Ltd	St. Joseph	Sandra De Freitas	Chad De Freitas
95	Figgi landscaping & Industrial Co. Ltd	Tabaquite	Marvin Figaro	Joseph Alexander

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NEW CEPEP CONTRACTORS FROM DECEMBER 1, 2017 TO DATE

96	Trinbago Landscaper Maintenance & Beautification Ltd	Tabaquite	Curtis Shade	Petra Charles
97	GRV General Contractors Ltd	Toco/Sangre Grande	Kenwyn James	Kyle Charles
98	Kerry-Ann Construction and Maintenance	Toco/Sangre Grande	Catherine Trotman	Emil Toussaint
99	Los Caballeros Company Limited	Toco/Sangre Grande	Kerwin Charles	Marsha Lyons
100	Lynthom Company Limited	Toco/Sangre Grande	Lynette Thomas	Giselle Gilmore, Gail Ann Thomas
101	Mac & J Landscaping Ltd	Toco/Sangre Grande	Jady Mc Farlane	Finnessah Pablo
102	Sampson's Environmental Co. Ltd	Toco/Sangre Grande	Junior Sampson	Candice Sampson, Krystal-Ann Sampson, Joanne Williams Sampson
103	Toco Helping Hands	Toco/Sangre Grande	Shirnel Edwards Williams	Germaine Locario, Josanne Randon
104	KFS Co Ltd	Tunapuna	Keith Salina	Chris Bereaux, Irene McKenna

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*Written Answers to Question**Friday, May 11, 2018***NEW CEPEP CONTRACTORS FROM DECEMBER 1, 2017 TO DATE**

105	Scanterbury Ecological Maintenance and Services Limited	Tunapuna	Janelle Scanterbury	Sean Guevara, Shango Alamu
106	Sieusankar Maraj Services Ltd	Tunapuna	Sieusankar Maraj	Jeewan Dookram
107	W&L Aberdeen Woodwork & Construction & Landscaping Ltd	Tunapuna	Wilmoth Aberdeen	Loetta Aberdeen