



REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Debates of the House of Representatives

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**OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)**

THE HONOURABLE WADE MARK
SPEAKER

THE HONOURABLE NELA KHAN
DEPUTY SPEAKER

Friday 13th September, 2013

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CONTENTS

| | Page |
|--|-------------|
| PAPERS LAID | 393 |
| APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2014) BILL, 2013 [Second Day] | 393 |
| ADJOURNMENT | |
| [<i>Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal</i>] | 678 |
| International Day of Democracy [<i>Mr. Speaker</i>] | 678 |

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Friday, September 13, 2013*

The House met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAYERS[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**PAPERS LAID**

1. Value Added Tax (Amendment to Schedule 2) (No. 2) Order, 2013. [*The Minister of Finance and the Economy (Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai)*]
2. Value Added Tax (Amendment to Schedule 1) Order, 2013 [*Sen. The Hon. L. Howai*]
3. Value Added Tax (Amendment to Schedule 2) (No. 3) Order, 2013 [*Sen. The Hon. L. Howai*]

**APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2014)
BILL, 2013**

[Second Day]

Question proposed.

Dr. Keith Rowley (*Diego Martin West*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, let me begin by taking this opportunity to welcome you back from your trip to South Africa, and to formally acknowledge for the first time, all of the “re-re-reshuffled” Ministers. At an earlier time, Mr. Speaker, realignment referred to rotating old worn tyres, but in an effort to deceive, it now means reshuffle, but it still applies to old worn tyres.

Among the data provided in the *Review of the Economy*, is information which states that milk production has gone up by 7.1 per cent. It also states that honey production has gone up by 36.4 per cent. Based on these bare statistics alone, it is possible to conclude, Mr. Speaker, that this is the land of milk and honey. The Government would love for us to believe that, especially when we see that chicken has gone up in production by 92 per cent. It matters not to them, Mr. Speaker, that the price of chicken is \$13 a pound, and there is a poultry shortage and that the Minister is currently meeting with suppliers trying to find out, how to cope with the problem, all the while hoping that the population does not notice. I tell you this, Mr. Speaker, so that you will appreciate that the real story lies in the bigger picture, which is usually hidden from us or misrepresented to you.

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[DR. ROWLEY]

Friday, September 13, 2013

Mr. Speaker, I want to draw your attention to something that the Minister of Finance and the Economy said, which is quite surprising. Page 6, he says:

“...in the last budget, we highlighted a number of policy initiatives which we are implementing. These initiatives were not as far as advanced as I believed when I assumed office last year...”

What the Minister of Finance and the Economy is saying there, Mr. Speaker, is that he, too, when he was outside the Government, was misled by what the Government was saying it was doing and accomplishing, and it is only since he came in, that in the last year, that progress has been made. So do not feel too bad, Mr. Speaker, we are not the only ones who this Government was fooling.

Mr. Speaker, I have listened to this budget presentation, the largest budget in our nation's history, \$61 billion, but when it ended, Mr. Speaker, there was something very unsettling about it. Mr. Speaker, the PNM, in 2006, spent \$34 billion; in 2007, \$38 billion; in 2008, \$42 billion, in 2009, \$44 billion. As I recall, Mr. Speaker, the economy was buoyant and healthy then; optimism and confidence was at a peak. I recall that there was a harmonized choir of the UNC/COP singing a hymn that the PNM was spending too much; we were overheating the economy and forcing the private sector to compete for goods and labour at prices only the Government could afford. Mr. Speaker, I want to point out that in these years, the PNM spent, on average, \$43 billion a year. This Government has been spending, on average, \$53 billion a year since it arrived in office in 2010.

Moreover, Mr. Speaker, during the previous PNM administration, there were patently visible signs of development for all to see and benefit from, and even to argue about: the Hyatt Waterfront Hotel, which they all love so much now, NAPA, SAPA, the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT), a number of secondary schools, industrial parks, flyovers, new roads, these very waterfront towers in which the Parliament is located, and over there next door where there are ministerial dog fights for executive offices and designated parking spaces.

Mr. Speaker, there were also major initiatives in crime suppression, ultimately eliminating the daily kidnappings for ransom. We ordered and paid for OPVs. There was a Special Anti-Crime Unit assisted by experienced Scotland Yard officers. There was the introduction of GATE and a series of training programmes aimed at targeting and integrating youth from all walks and educational levels into the workforce away from crime and homelessness, and into a worthwhile future.

We introduced CDAP and a range of social support systems to benefit the needy; the bus service was expanded; the water taxi system was introduced; the

mass transit system was taking shape; fast ferries were purchased and operated, permanently changing the connection between Trinidad and Tobago; 20,000 housing units were at various stages of construction, from start-up to completion with new occupancies, a daily occurrence; billions were spent developing comprehensive infrastructure on Caroni lands to convert them into high-quality housing lots for former Caroni workers, as well as infrastructure for allowing farming plots to be accessed by beneficiaries who were to become self-employed farmers, instead of employees at the State, dependent on the failed sugar estate. That is what taxpayers were getting at \$43 billion a year under the PNM.

At the same time, the PNM was being accused of profligacy and wild spending, and not saving enough of our oil and gas windfall, even as we saved US \$9 billion in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, and had an additional US \$3 billion on account in the Central Bank.

10.10 a.m.

The taxpayers, at \$43 billion a year, even when they disagreed with some of the choices of their priorities, had the ability to talk about specific plans, projects and proposals that the PNM was articulating and executing. They were able to join in the national debate on the direction and progress of the development agenda, because, Mr. Speaker, we had one. Forty-three billion dollars a year, Mr. Speaker, this is what the PNM was doing with \$43 billion a year. [*Desk thumping*]

We have today the fourth largest budget of this People's Partnership come together; again, the largest in the nation's history, embarking on \$61.3 billion. Last year also ended up at \$60 billion with variations included, and the budget before us—the one before that was \$54 billion; we are talking here about \$170 billion, Mr. Speaker. This is a Government spending \$13 billion every year, over and above what the PNM did in the years when the economy was overheating and there was supposed to be overspending.

Now, Mr. Speaker, let us think about it: what you just heard was a small part of what the PNM was doing with \$43 billion per year. But what is this UNC coalition doing with \$60 billion? What are we seeing? What plans and projects could we credibly point to? What are we getting for this record-breaking expenditure which, incidentally, is closely accompanied by record-breaking borrowing and get?

Mr. Speaker, what could we debate other than to ask, what have they done with \$170 billion in 40 months? That, Mr. Speaker, is more than \$4 billion per month, on a small nation of 1.3 million people, yet there is much unhappiness,

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[DR. ROWLEY]

Friday, September 13, 2013

cynicism, despair, largely because our affairs are being very poorly managed. How is it that they are spending \$13 billion more than the PNM in the years that we were being accused by them of profligacy, and they have nothing significant to show the taxpayers for that, only a lot of talk, a lot of talk, and worse, dizzying allegations of runaway corruption at the very highest levels on a scale that boggles the mind?

Now, I am sure there will be a grand “bramble” offered in the rebuttal from the other side to excuse their complete failure as administrators. We will get their drivel as to why \$20 billion, passing through the hands of four National Security Ministers, was not enough to alleviate the crime scourge. After wholesale dismantling and cancelling everything the PNM had in train, I am sure they will do their utmost to try to spin and confuse us with bull turds and statistics, and try to blame the PNM for every aspect of their ineptitude, “bad mind’ and general misconduct.

But, Mr. Speaker, the time for that is done. The People’s Partnership honeymoon is long over and we are now in the throes of a bitter and acrimonious divorce. We are fed-up of how the experiment with their political instability has become a drag on the economy and a major distraction to all our people. It saps our confidence and irritates us on a daily basis. So now, in addition to the global headwinds we face, shaky commodity prices, weak local and foreign investments, weakness in major economies of our trading partners, the arrival of competitive shale gas; we now have the predicted instability of our collapsing coalition Government to add to all these downside risks. This is the reality, Mr. Speaker. These are the facts. That is what it is.

Mr. Speaker, in 2010, there were six issues before this country in the political debate of a snap election, within which this Government sought and obtained a handsome mandate. It is against that background that we must now examine and evaluate our current predicament. The issues on which this Government won its mandate were: one, crime; two, property tax; three, UDeCOTT and perception of corruption in a State enterprise; four, excessive expenditure; five, objection, procurement and use of Chinese over local contractors in our construction projects, and Government to Government arrangements and, six, they were concerned about internal problems in the PNM: Rowley and Manning were arguing over UDeCOTT. Compare then, Mr. Speaker, with now. On all fronts, if it was a tea party then, it is World War III now. [*Desk thumping*]

Appropriation Bill, 2013

Friday, September 13, 2013

On every count all the hope and promise of an improvement have turned out to be an illusion, a mirage. We jumped from a warm frying pan into an expensive hellfire, where political snipping, open guerrilla warfare, Cabinet instability, incompetence and corruption are the hallmarks of our new politics.

Hon. Member: Um-hmm.

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, before I go any further let me address this property tax.

Hon. Member: Yes!

Hon. Member: Um-hmm.

Hon. Member: Yes!

Dr. K. Rowley: A wise political philosopher, Benjamin Franklin, a founding father of the United States of America, had this to say, and I quote:

“One of the most exquisite follies of man is wisdom spun too thin.”

Mr. Speaker, the taxpayers and the citizens of this country are growing wiser and maturing politically—no matter how this failed Government tries to spin, rename, rebrand, reposition or just sound plain foolish, what they are reintroducing is a property tax.

Hon. Member: That is it. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. K. Rowley: The taxpayers all know it. The *Guardian* knows it; that is why having heard the Minister of Finance and the Economy make his presentation, on their own volition, the *Guardian* published, and I quote:

“Property tax back in three phases”

Hon. Member: Uh-huh.

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I want to talk to the fundamental tenet of gaining a mandate from the people. I want to talk, Mr. Speaker, about when you take public platform, print T-shirts, pound the pavements, invoke fear and hysteria in the minds of homeowners, farmers and pensioners, in what we can now confirm to have been duplicitous campaigning aimed at nothing more than a vengeful bid for power.

You offered yourself to the people based on a premise and a promise of no property tax, on the basis of competence and new politics. You have absolutely no right now to attempt to save yourselves by designing a misleading potion,

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[DR. ROWLEY]

Friday, September 13, 2013

disguise it as a healing medicine then lied to the people about its curative value. Even after the mandate was obtained, in September 2010, the leader of the pack was reaffirming, and I quote:

“Read my lips...”

Lipstick and all: [*Laughter*]

“...no new taxes, including no property tax”

Hon. Member: Um-hmm.

Dr. K. Rowley: So rooted were they in their commitment that one Minister, my friend from D’Abadie/O’Meara, he pledged that he would leave the party and the Parliament if property tax was introduced.

Hon. Member: Oh!

Dr. K. Rowley: I see he is still here.

Hon. Member: Ah!

Dr. K. Rowley: We watch in absolute astonishment now as the Prime Minister immediately contradicts her Minister of Finance and the Economy in a vain attempt to save herself and her Government by talking about going back to old land and building taxes, and their values, when the Minister of Finance and the Economy has long gone on to accepting and stating that we are at the point of new valuations to come.

10.20 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, I just want the population to know that the value that will be placed on your property has nothing to do with who you vote for or which government is in office. I also want to remind you that the property tax that faced the axe had called for a rate of 3.5 per cent on residential property, whereas the Bill that was laid in Parliament by this coalition, under the cover of Carnival 2011, this one—[*Dr. Rowley displays document*—this was laid here over the Carnival weekend—laid here. Whereas the Bill under the PNM, the law as passed under the PNM, had called for a residential percentage on your tax of 3.5 per cent, this Bill, laid in the Parliament and allowed to lapse, had called for a 7.5 per cent. [*Desk thumping*]

On my way to pick up my Carnival costume, I picked up my Bill, I raised the alarm, the Government denied it and allowed the Bill to lapse. I do not know what

she is grinning about, you know. That is betrayal of the worst kind. They allowed the Bill to lapse when the PNM sounded the alarm.

Mr. Speaker, the COP's actions today patently confirmed to all that they have once again betrayed, in a most truculent way, the mandate they were given. They falsely advertised in what was the second greatest bait and switch political fraud ever perpetrated on the people of Trinidad and Tobago; second only to the Kamla Persad-Bissessar's so-called People's Partnership, which now turns out to be seen for what it is, the ultimate sinking ship. [*Desk thumping*]

This Government squandered its mandate and the trust of the people with the section 34 misconduct, with the Prime Minister repeating over and over in July and September 2010 that her Government would not introduce property tax. The tomfoolery presented here by the Minister of Finance and the Economy deserves no less than total condemnation, and like all governments who betray the people's trust—in the name of God, go.

Mr. Speaker, if there was ever a towering monument to the irrelevance of the COP in the coalition, this is it, and the absence of political integrity of the leaders of the COP, this is it. It is shameful and it is a great enough fraud promulgated on the voters, that you should vacate your seats and go tell the same people on the same pavements and, wearing the same tee-shirts but in a different print, just saying, "Here comes the tax, we deserve the axe; we have the recall." [*Desk thumping and laughter*]

The people of Trinidad and Tobago must try and calculate the hundreds of millions of dollars left uncollected for the benefit of commercial property owners, many of whom earn millions of dollars for renting properties to the State, while the same Government is playing politics to save itself at the expense of the taxpayers.

Under the rubric of tax administration, the Minister of Finance and the Economy said, and I quote:

"...we started work on the technical infrastructure for the phased introduction of a growth-oriented tax system over the period 2014—2016."

He went on to say:

"This revised tax system will be regionally and internationally competitive;"

What will be its local characteristics, other than meshing with the return of the property tax as outlined for the same period? We do not know, and given your

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[DR. ROWLEY]

Friday, September 13, 2013

disgusting behaviour with the property tax, we have little basis to trust you. We want the policy details now and the Government's clear intention on this new tax system in writing. "We are taking no word from you." Put a document out and let the country see what you are up to. Like the property tax, which is straddling the general election of 2015, what is the Government threatening us here with?

After condemning and stopping the PNM's attempt to establish a much needed Revenue Authority, after wasting time, almost four years of it, we now hear from the Minister of Finance and the Economy, and I quote:

"...the leakage from the tax system is unacceptable."

He also mentioned, I quote:

"...strengthening the capabilities of the Board of Inland Revenue, in particular in the area of enforcement and compliance in business and individual taxpayers' assessments..."

But Minister, this is precisely what the Revenue Authority which you shut down was supposed to do. It took you three and a half years to admit it, and now you embark on some piecemeal deception—however, they will all still be foolishly saying, "Is not de same thing; dat was de PNM ting and this is we ting; dis is we own." That is what they would be saying to us.

Let us examine their stewardship; let us examine their "ting". The presentation by the Minister of Finance and the Economy on Monday which he referred to as a budget, once again demonstrated, beyond any reasonable doubt, the bankruptcy of this Government. Clearly, Mr. Speaker, they have reached the bottom of the barrel. They have stopped scraping and they have now started to dig. [*Laughter*] There seems to be no level of lowness to which this Government, this UNC cabal, will not sink in order to hoodwink the people of this country and pretend that they are a government.

Miss Hospedales: True, true!

Dr. K. Rowley: I assure you, Mr. Speaker, that you will soon find out that they are an NGO. They exist as a non-profit organization only for themselves. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, their record budgets are coming from the same people who claim that the Treasury was empty, that we are in a state of financial ruin, that the PNM mismanaged the country to failed state, that the sky was about to fall down when they came into office. The last Minister of Finance and the Economy sang this

tune until he talked the country into a recession, based on total loss of confidence. This is borne out by the fact that after the global challenges of 2009, Trinidad and Tobago on its strong foundations returned to growth, small as it was, in the year of their arrival. However, after all this “chupid talk about empty Treasury” and all the negatives they exuded, we went into full blown recession in 2011 and 2012, even as they tried to cover up and mislead us about the real situation. It took the Governor of the Central Bank to tell the country what the truth was. “They nearly eat off his head; a good ting he was about to retire.”

If anything that they were saying about “empty Treasury” was true, then where are they getting all this money from to break all these records? What has allowed them to spend so much over the past three to four years? Their dishonesty is boundless. [*Desk thumping*]

Miss Hospedales: Yes.

Hon. Member: Deception.

Dr. K. Rowley: As Bob Marley sang, “Hypocrites and parasites will come out and take a bite”, and they have taken a big bite for themselves, for their families and for their greedy cronies. [*Desk thumping*] Some are even choking on the way to the Integrity Commission right now; others are choking on the way to their criminal lawyer’s office.

Mr. Speaker, the fact is that the PNM left the economy—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 36(4).

Mr. Speaker: May I advise, and I think the hon. Leader of the Opposition is aware that we should not use a debate to impugn the good name or character of any hon. Member of this House. Do not impute improper motives to Members of this honourable House. So I will ask you to use more elegant language in terms of making reference to Members of this honourable House.

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect to the Chair which I do not challenge, the statement of fact that Members of this honourable House are on their way to the Integrity Commission is a public fact, and I impute nobody’s character. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: I am saying, apart from what you have just said, you made statements that could have been concluded that you were imputing improper motives to hon. Members of this House. I am not referring to that particular statement that you have just made. I am just saying that you are well aware, that if that is the case, you know what you have to do, bring a substantive motion.

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, while I may admit to being linguistically challenged, I reserve the right to choose my presentation without offending the Standing Orders. If you can point out to me which word is unparliamentary, I will gladly withdraw it.

10.30 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, I go on. The fact is that the PNM left the economy on such a strong footing—and by the way, Mr. Speaker, I hope I will get some injury time. The PNM left the economy on such a strong footing that it gave them the fiscal space to do their borrowing and spending, and boy have they spent. Let us look at the last six budgets including the last one that came here Monday. The last three PNM budgets 2007/2008, \$42.26 billion; 2008/2009, it was read at \$49 billion revised downwards to \$46.3 billion; 2009/2010, \$44.4 billion. In comes the friends of mine—UNC's last three budgets: 2011/2012, \$54 billion; 2012/2013, \$58.4 billion; 2013/2014, \$61.3 billion.

They have increased spending on almost everything they condemned the PNM for and on that which they were calling squandermania: GATE, CEPEP, URP, endless abuse of the social support system, you name it. You only have to listen to the MP for Chaguanas West, warm like a hops bread out the UNC oven, telling us how the social food cards are being abused, to know how they have increased the expenditure, Mr. Speaker, and that is sound economics and sound management UNC style.

Mr. Speaker, they will tell you they budgeted and did not get the work done and therefore they have saved and they have reduced the deficit; trite, utter nonsense. They are grasping at straws looking for hollow praise.

The money that you needed to spend, the Parliament approved, and if you could not do the programmes and the projects to run the economy and service the country, then that is nothing to be proud of. It is a sign of your lack of ability to implement your projects. It is a manifestation of your inability to choose between useful and wasteful. Who is fooling whom?

Mr. Speaker, let us just look at a few of the projects that this Parliament approved in the last budget with the expectation that work will proceed during fiscal year and those projects will get under way: Extension of Churchill Roosevelt Highway to Sangre Grande, zilch; construction of road from Cocorite to Chaguaramas, nothing; duelling of Rivulet Road to Point Lisas, absolutely nothing. Under the Ministry of Local Government this Parliament approved the

Appropriation Bill, 2013

Friday, September 13, 2013

construction of four administrative buildings for the corporations' headquarters: Diego Martin, Arima, Princes Town and Penal/Debe. Where are they, Mr. Speaker?

However, the Minister responsible is all over the country, shouting in a shrill voice about how many box drains he built in 2013, and he has declared 2013 as the golden year of box drains. [*Crosstalk*] They certainly got boxed into the drain in Tobago and Chaguanas West, [*Desk thumping*] and we will close the lid on October 21, and we will bury them in the next general election. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Incinerate them.

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, let me remind the public once again of the proud legacy of the PNM's economic management that they met. I do this so that the public will have no doubt—let me repeat this for those who want to laugh on the other side. I do this so the public will be in no doubt as who developed this country. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Yes. [*Crosstalk*] Every major—

Dr. K. Rowley: In 2002, PNM returned to Government and the nominal GDP was \$56.3 billion. In 2008, it was \$175 billion.

Hon. Member: “Uh-hmm.”

Dr. K. Rowley: The per capita income in 2002 was \$7,103; in 2008, it was \$21,410. [*Desk thumping*] The Government's gross official reserves in 2002 was US \$1.9 billion, by 2008 it was US \$9.38 billion. [*Desk thumping*] So when on Monday the Minister of Finance and the Economy boasted about reserves of \$9.4 billion as though the UNC could take credit for that, you met that there; that was PNM [*Inaudible*]. [*Desk thumping*]

Let me take some issue with this promise about reducing the budget to balanced budget by 2016. The Minister of Finance and the Economy— [*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: “He aint going to be there.”

Dr. K. Rowley:—is tired of hearing the population asking for a way out of the permanent deficits. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: “He back in de bank.”

Dr. K. Rowley:—which this Government is so comfortable with. So just out of the blue—listen to the Minister of Finance and the Economy: “The

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[DR. ROWLEY]

Friday, September 13, 2013

Government is successfully containing the fiscal deficit in accordance with its policy objectives and is on course to bring the fiscal accounts into balance by 2016.” Oh “chat, boy”. [*Laughter*] Sounds nice, sounds good.

But this, Mr. Speaker, is at variance with the numbers and the trends of the recent budgets and it defies all logic. The deficits on GDP for the last five years are as follows: 2009, 5.51 per cent; 2010, 2.16 per cent; 2011, 2.65 per cent; 2012, 2.29 per cent; estimated 2013, 3.92 per cent; 2014, projected 3.55 per cent, but this Minister of magic will bring it down to 0.0 per cent in the following year, 2016, without telling us what will materialize from heaven or anywhere else to contribute to this miraculous recovery.

Miss Mc Donald: Uh-hmm. Magician.

Dr. K. Rowley: This wish of the Minister of Finance and the Economy is simply a statement meant for the ears of the World Bank staffers to enable them to repeat it in their reports back to Washington, but knowingly bears no relation to any real prospects of achievement.

The Minister of Finance and the Economy knows the truth, but he prefers to tell the population Anancy stories instead, based on mythical growth figures accomplished alongside uncurbed expenditure.

As a matter of fact, our calculations of one per cent nominal GDP show progressive growth in the deficit ranging from \$1.5 billion in 2012 to \$1.6 billion in 2013, projected to \$1.93 billion in 2015 and \$2 billion in 2016. Unless something dramatically unpredictable happens, these are best case projections. Given these projections, Mr. Speaker, the only way the Government would be able to reduce the deficit to zero by 2016, is by achieving a higher nominal growth rate. However, given the projections for real GDP of 2.5 per cent growth going forward, the only way this can be done is by introducing higher inflation into the economy. But again, Mr. Speaker, this might very well be the plan after they have secured their loot out of the country. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: “Mr. Speaker, oh gawd, 36(5). [*Crosstalk*] Ah have to put up a sign here.”

Mr. Speaker: Please. Hon. Leader of the Opposition, you are implicating by your language, kind of improper motives to Members of this honourable House and I ask you to refrain from doing so. You cannot talk about Members of Parliament organizing loot. That is giving the impression that Members are corrupt. I am saying if you want to accuse any Member of corruption, bring a substantive Motion, please.

Dr. K. Rowley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that; most likely would.

Mr. Speaker, let me say a few words about waste and corruption which should be of interest to the Minister of Finance and the Economy. I know it is very difficult for the average citizen to absorb and digest the complicated large numbers of millions and billions and percentages that we speak about here in this Parliament. For those who grasp the scale of the numbers some still have difficulty believing that money could be wasted or stolen on the grand scale that we frequently highlight. Let me just give one example how the groundwork is laid for massive raiding of the Treasury, even as we are debating these very issues here in the Parliament. [*Crosstalk*]

On September 09, 2013, the very day that the budget was presented under the distraction of the budget debate and an imminent local government election, the very latest of the feeding troughs was being constructed. On that day, September 09, the National Gas Company issued, on behalf of WASA, a request for proposal. It reads as follows:

The National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited invites interested parties, sole bidders, a main contractor with sub-contractors joint venture consortium to participate in a competitive bidding process which seeks proposals for the design and build and operation and maintenance of the Beetham Water Recycling Plant together with the associated pipelines and water storage facilities.

That is the project.

10.40 a.m.

This proposal is for a water recycling plant with a minimum capacity of 11 million gallons a day, with pipelines of 14 million gallons capacity and storage facility. Something immediately jumps out at you, Mr. Speaker. What is this reference to “sole bidders” in a request for proposals to participate in a competitive bidding process?

It should also be noted that the request goes out on September 09, 2013; project briefing is scheduled for September 25; tenders close; October 28, a mere seven weeks for this \$1.5 billion project. Our investigations from reputable firms, local and international, confirm that a proper response to a request like this requires preparation of three to four months. They gave them seven weeks.

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[DR. ROWLEY]

Friday, September 13, 2013

A careful perusal of the document of invitation reveals a very loose and low level requirement to qualify to be an approved bidder, and there are other stipulations which appear to fit only a particular known company. Very minimal water plant experience is required; very minimal pipeline experience is required. Most interestingly, WASA, this billion-dollar enterprise which spawned the establishment of its own Ministry of Water Resources under the infamous Desalcott, its personnel cannot do its own tendering and evaluations. It had to get NGC to do it on behalf of WASA.

I wonder if the Cabinet knows and approves of this. And they could tell us when they enter the debate. It just so happens, Mr. Speaker, that the Chairman of WASA, Mr. Indar Maharaj, who is requesting the works is also the CEO of NGC. Let me repeat that: the Chairman of WASA who is commissioning this \$1.5 billion minimum project with seven weeks to tender, is the Chairman of WASA asking NGC where he is the CEO, to do this for WASA. Mr. Speaker, this is a classic case of himself, to himself, to herself. [*Desk thumping*] And all of this, Mr. Speaker, this kind of billion-dollar rape of our Treasury is to take place even as the Government sits stoically on the promised procurement legislation, and the pious Minister of Finance and the Economy comes here and tells us once again, procurement legislation is coming.

Mr. Speaker, when they are all finished with us, by the time they are finished and it is enacted into law, there may be no money left to procure anything. [*Desk thumping*] Some people just cannot get enough. Take note Mr. Speaker, this is the same modus operandi which was utilized when they proceeded to divvy up the lands at Invaders Bay. The Opposition and the JCC protested. It did not stop them, they proceeded anyway. It was the same thing with the award at the UWI campus; contractors can protest the secrecy and the cronyism until the cows come home. It has no effect on their behaviour, they just keep right on going with their corrupt collaborators. It is a source of frequent complaints from contractors who are left out or are severely disadvantaged in the bidding process, simply by not being given enough time to prepare and submit a bid.

It is one of the classic aspects of bid-rigging where those favoured contractors and their associates are given an inside track while those on the outside could never hope to match it. This results in the project being corruptly awarded at much higher cost to taxpayers. This cancer which is widespread throughout the Government and the state enterprise sector is what we now have to live with, in this “in your face” manner.

Mr. Speaker, I was appalled when a high-ranking Government official recently told me, quite matter-of-factly, that one of his colleagues of recent vintage is known to have stolen at least \$1 billion from programmes under his purview.

Hon. Member: Oh, my goodness.

Dr. K. Rowley: And he said to me, I am not guessing. And to convince me he said, being part the Government, he said, the Government knows it. Who am I to argue? Who am I to object? I just listened. At this rate, Mr. Speaker, It is not too difficult to calculate the exact date when the Treasury would be well and truly empty.

Today I call on the Prime Minister to immediately put a stop to this NGC/WASA incestuous scam in the same way she jumped in to put a stop to the Milshirv project where she had no business. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, this budget continues the trend of continuous upward growth of transfers and subsidies. One of the major recipients of this largesse is WASA. That is why a recent development where an attempt was made to award phase one of a three-phase \$3.6 billion contract—WASA went out and we are advised that this programme is to be funded by a multilateral agency and this means compliance with tender evaluation and award procedures. It is our information that at the end of phase one the favoured contractor did not make the cut, and there were interventions by Government's bigwigs to rectify this unusual occurrence.

Obviously, these approaches were rebuffed by the agency involved. Now that the NGC has been allowed to invite proposals for what appears to be the same scope of works as that mentioned here, I am calling on the Prime Minister to tell the country why WASA is pursuing two separate billion-dollar initiatives on wastewater at the same time. Is it because the Government has not been able to influence the award to certain contractors, it is prepared to abandon the multilateral funding approach in favour of the WASA/NGC deal which could see a repeat of funding of a billion-dollar project out of the current account, much as is happening with the San Fernando to Point Fortin highway with all the attendant difficulties of that?

There is something else which the Minister of Finance and the Economy reported which seems not to have impacted on him in the same way it has been received by an alert population. Having got nothing done under the highly touted but worrisome PPP, which is the public/private partnership during the last year, he

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[DR. ROWLEY]

Friday, September 13, 2013

now tells us that the Government is finally comfortable with the procurement arrangements and there are two projects to come. One where he says and I quote:

“The IDB will lead the process for the selection and award...to a transaction advisory service provider through a competitive and transparent bidding process.”

Something is wrong here, Mr. Speaker. Let me read that again. The Minister said:

“The IDB will lead the process for the selection and award...to a transaction advisory service provider through a competitive and transparent bidding process.”

The IDB is now awarding contracts to Trinidad and Tobago, and that—“...the International Finance Corporation..will spearhead work on the airport construction for the Piarco International Airport.”

Mr. Speaker, this is a clear indictment against the Government if what he is saying there is true, and I am concerned about that, because the bank does not award contracts. The Government awards contracts and the bank pays. This is a clear indictment. But what he is telling me is that the IDB and the IFC do not trust the Government and that the Government, as we know it, needs to be supervised as a kindergarten class.

10.50 a.m.

On the matter of wilful waste, Mr. Speaker, I want to draw your attention—if you look out the window—to a spanking multistorey—I think it is six floors of it—a customs building, owned and built by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. It has been standing there for four years empty, while this Government has been paying millions of dollars a year to rent a building at the corner of Abercromby Street, creating traffic jam, and have customs officers in there, cramped, while the new building has been standing there for three years.

Hon. Member: Ridiculous! Ridiculous!

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, there is also a new building on Tragarete Road called “One Alexandra”, where this Government has been spending \$700,000 to \$800,000 a month in rent for three years. The building is empty there, with only a few spiders inside. And the reason they have not gone into the customs building and they have not gone into the building on Tragarete Road is because the PNM built the customs building and the PNM rented the building on Tragarete Road.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: “They wasting the money.”

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, this Government's hatred of the PNM, its spite and its stupidity, knows no bounds [*Desk thumping*] and the taxpayers are paying for that.

Hon. Member: The taxpayers "suffering".

Dr. K. Rowley: It is the taxpayers who are paying for this bad mind. I tell the Minister today, as he is looking for money to pay for medicines for the health centres and the hospitals, you know where to look if you want a few tens of millions of dollars. Just occupy the customs building and occupy One Alexandra and stop paying the rent where "yuh" paying it now. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, while the PNM is in full support of the need—and I dare say the urgent need—to initiate national debate with a view to legislating campaign finance reform measures, we disagree very strongly with the Minister of Finance and the Economy's proposals that the ill-starved Constituency Development Fund is any good representation of campaign finance reform. We maintain that any funds as suggested—and I am talking here about over \$400 million worth "eh", because at \$10 million per constituency and 41 constituencies, you start with \$410 million. And the only thing that has to do with campaign and finance is MPs misappropriating it.

If that should be disbursed, Mr. Speaker, then it should be disbursed to local government bodies where the real reform should take place with respect to the revenue stream and authority levels. Given our experience and history and the role that an MP is elected to carry out, our experience with this proposal will be no different to that of India where the reports show that corruption and waste are a feature of this proposal's existence in India. God knows we have enough corruption and enough waste in this country. We do not want any Constituency Development Fund. Give it to the local government bodies to be properly managed [*Desk thumping*] for the people of the constituency.

Mr. Speaker, I turn to CAL. The Minister of Finance and the Economy implied that he has removed the fuel subsidy from CAL and this would mean cutting a cost of \$250 million for the airline. Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that the Minister of Finance and the Economy would tell us that he is cutting the fuel subsidy, but he does not tell us that in the budget he is making provision to put a quarter billion dollars, or something like that, for CAL. What is the Minister trying to do to us? And then he tells us that, as he removes the fuel subsidy, the price of tickets will not go up. Well, I presume he intends to subsidize the tickets; he is a wealthy

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[DR. ROWLEY]

Friday, September 13, 2013

man. Or worse, that CAL is going to cut back on expenses. Is it on food, on fuel, on safety, on staff? What? Tell us. When he winds up he must tell us how that fuel subsidy removal puts the taxpayers into any better position.

And since he was being upfront with us, according to his style, he could have told us that taxpayers had just serviced \$700 million worth of CAL's debt. Mr. Speaker, this is the same CAL where the Prime Minister was receiving a cheque for \$30 million—US \$5 million—from CAL's profits—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Umhm?

Dr. K. Rowley:—and as head of the Cabinet, ought to have known that CAL was losing \$800 million the very same year. [*Desk thumping*]

So I skip these CAL stories to let you know, Mr. Speaker, that nothing has changed at CAL and that we have already recreated the old “BeeWee” situations where the Minister of Finance and the Economy is funding them under the table and when he comes to report to the Parliament, he tries to “bramble” us about removing fuel subsidy while making provision to pay them huge sums of money to cover all their expenses, including fuel.

That is what it is. You cannot trust these people. They will not speak the truth. They will not come upfront. They would not tell you on the table. “Yuh reporting” to the country; tell us what is happening with our money. It is our airline! It is our money! It is our problem! Please, just tell us the truth! [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I turn to Vision 2030. I am privileged today, Mr. Speaker, to tell this House that, as Minister of Planning and Development in the second Manning administration, it was my responsibility to put together the best available talent pool for the purpose of devising a national development plan. We called it Vision 2020. I was tasked with assembling over 600 of the most qualified, experienced, diverse and willing patriots, cutting across race, colour, class, creed and political affiliation. We had to devise a road map, not for the PNM but for Trinidad and Tobago. We did that, Mr. Speaker. And even after I was relocated from that Ministry, the work was completed by my colleague, Planning Minister Camille Robinson-Regis. These CDs here, Mr. Speaker—[*Shows CDs*—they are all CDs here, a Planned Programme and Annual Review and Operations Report of Vision 2020.

Given how this reckless, “no plan, pick-up-side”, has in the most cavalier manner, dismissed and berated this national effort, it is opportune and necessary for me to advise you, Mr. Speaker, and put on *Hansard* what was involved in

creating Vision 2020, the Draft National Strategic Plan; who was involved and what it meant for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. It is important that, given what has happened so far under this Government, that this is put on record and before the national community, who are now in a position to compare the last three years of expensive drift versus plans and executions with results to show on a road map.

Mr. Speaker, I could show you three-year components—all components—2007—2010. It is there on the CD: 2007—2008, it is there; 2008—2009; and of course, the Government changed in 2010 and chaos began to reign.

The preparation of Vision 2020 was the effort of 25 persons in, what we called a multi-sector core group of the country's best, chaired by Mr. Arthur Lok Jack, serviced by four permanent secretaries: Andrew Jupiter, Ministry of Energy; Vicky Mendes Charles, Ministry of Planning and Development; Sonia Noel, Ministry of Finance; and Margaret Farray, Ministry of Social Development—permanent secretaries.

This 25-man core group—let me tell you who was there, Mr. Speaker: for banking and finance we had Dr. Ronald Ramkissoon; for gender affairs, Miss Denise Noel De Bique; commerce and industry, Mr. David O'Brien; health, Dr. Steve Medford; credit union, Mr. Trevor Alleyne; Inter-American Development Bank, Mr. William Robinson; culture, Miss Pat Bishop; investment, Mr. Clarry Benn; economics, Dr. Terrence Farrell; labour, Mr. David Abdulah; education, Dr. Rolph Balgobin; local government, Mrs. Nan Ramgoolam; energy, Mr. Robert Riley; science and technology, Prof. Clement Sankat; energy, Mr. Trevor Boopsingh; Tobago House of Assembly, Dr. Anslem London; finance—our friend—Mr. Calder Hart, “eh”; [*Laughter*] tourism, Dr. Brian Harry—*[Interruption]*

11.00 a.m.

Dr. Moonilal: Move along. Move along.

Dr. K. Rowley: Dr. Inyang Ebong-Harstrup, UNDP; Ministry of Trade and Industry, Mr. Meville Blake.

That is the only thing that caught his attention, “eh”;

This core group, this guiding group of these experts, Mr. Speaker, they oversaw 28 groups of people. Let me tell you who they were. These are what we will call the subcommittees:

The tertiary education subcommittee was chaired by Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie; culture: chaired by Mrs. Marcia Riley, vice-chair, Mr. Keith Byer;

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[DR. ROWLEY]

Friday, September 13, 2013

environment: chaired by Dr. John Agard, vice-chair Mr. Eden Shand; financial services: chaired by Mr. Selby Wilson, vice-chair Mr. Lyndon Guisseppi; international relations: Mr. Eustace Seignoret, chair and Mr. Dav-Enan Kowlessar vice-chair; governance and institutional structures: chaired by Dr. Shafeek Sultan-Khan and vice-chair Dr. Kirk Meighoo; health: chaired by Prof. Norrice Melville, vice-chair Dr. George Laquis; HIV Aids: chair Dr. Anton Cumberbatch, and the vice-chair Miss Maylene Leu Bent; law administration and legal affairs: Mr. Russell Martineau; labour and social security: chaired by David Abdulah, vice-chair Kyle Rudder; macro-economy and finance: chaired by Dr. Terrence Farrell, vice-chair Dr. Ronald Ramkissoon; national security and public safety: chaired by Major Ralph Brown and vice-chair Mr. Lance Selman; public utilities was chaired by Prof. Winston Suite, vice-chair Harjinder Atwal; regional development and sustainable communities: chair Mrs. Nan Ramgoolam, vice-chair Dr. Deborah Thomas; population was chaired by Mr. Desmond Hunte and vice-chair Dr. Jacqueline Sharpe; poverty alleviation and social services: chaired by Dr. Ralph Henry, vice-chair Mrs. Sandra Baptiste-Caruth; housing: chaired by Mr. Anthony Fifi, vice-chair Dr. Asad Mohammed; energy was chaired by Mr. Trevor Boopsingh; agriculture: chaired by Dr. Ranjit Singh, vice-chair Dr. Kusha Harracksingh; pre-primary, primary and secondary education: chaired by Dr. Carol Kellar; industry and entrepreneurship: chaired by Mr. Bernard Dulal-Whiteway, vice-chair Mr. Anthony Rahael; youth, sport and recreation: Mr. Douglas Camacho, vice-chair Mr. Deryck Murray and Mr. Ravi Lutchman; science, technology and innovation: Prof. Clement Sankat, vice-chair Mrs. Maureen Manchouck; administration of justice: Master Christie-Ann Morris-Alleyne; infrastructure: chaired by Mr. David O'Brian and vice-chair Mr. Ian Telfer; and, of course, skills development and training: chaired by Mr. Keith Crichlow and Mr. Cipriani Davis as vice-chair; tourism was chaired by Mr. Brian Harry with Mr. William Aguiton as the vice-chair.

Mr. Speaker, I took time to put that out there, and it is all here on these CDs, [*Member display CDs*] available on the net for anybody who wants to see what this country accomplished in terms of preparing a road map for development for Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] That is what they abandoned in the most cavalier of manner.

The 28 subcommittees are included in 30 pages of names of distinguished citizens of the widest range of skills and experience, representing probably the most constructive consultative—[*Crosstalk*] Mr. Speaker, I would like to hear my ears from the—

Appropriation Bill, 2013

Friday, September 13, 2013

Mr. Speaker: Yes, I would like Members to remain silent. Allow the hon. Leader of the Opposition to speak in silence, please. Continue, hon. Leader.

Dr. K. Rowley: I was saying, Mr. Speaker, the 28 subcommittees are included in 30 pages of names of distinguished citizens of the widest range of skills and experience, representing probably the most constructive consultative and cooperative effort ever to have been undertaken in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, I repeat, over 600 citizens were involved in this consultation with the national community. Of course, all of this meant absolutely nothing to the invading marauders, the philistines, who just tossed it aside. All they were concerned about was that it was a PNM initiative, it is PNM, so it had to be thrown out, lock, stock and barrel; hated, despised to be replaced by “voops”, “vaps”, “vaille-que-vaille”, missteps, mistake and Cabinet reshuffle after Cabinet reshuffle. We are being set back for years, Mr. Speaker, by the current bad experience but, like all bad dreams, this nightmare is about to come to an end.

Mr. Speaker, there will be a revised vision, but not for 2020. The PNM recognizes that new targets will have to be reset. It is against this background, that we have been working diligently and have almost completed a comprehensive review of vision 2020 documents—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal: What?

Dr. K. Rowley:—in order to hit the ground running with an updated version of—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal: When?

Dr. K. Rowley:—policy prescriptions called Vision 2030—[*Interruption, Desk thumping and laughter*]

Miss Cox: Take that! That is original. That take!

Dr. K. Rowley:—and we are heading for destination on an adjusted road map. [*Laughter*] They could laugh as much they are laughing, you know. They were laughing same way in Chaguanas and in Tobago. I heard that laugh before, you know. I heard that laugh in Scarborough on January 20. I heard that laugh in Chaguanas—when was that?

Miss McDonald: July 29.

Dr. Moonilal: That was when you lost.

Dr. K. Rowley: Laugh yourself into irrelevance. [*Desk thumping and laughter*] Mr. Speaker, what he just laughed at was the reality of PNM under new management, Vision 2030.

Miss McDonald: Yes. Yes. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. K. Rowley: We have absolutely no doubt, Mr. Speaker, that the next Government of Trinidad and Tobago will be a PNM Government, [*Desk thumping*] and we do not seek office and then proceed to practise on stage when the lights go on. “We come ready, and we ready now.” [*Desk thumping*]

Miss Cox: “We ready.”

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, it is with confidence that we can now begin to outline some of our policies and commitments, to fill the hopes of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Speaker, I go straight out to the abandoned mass transit issue. Despite the misguided attitude and indifference of some of those on the other side, many transport studies over the years have identified the need for the introduction of a commuter railway system in Trinidad—going as far back as 1967, the national transportation plan for Trinidad and Tobago.

More recently, 16 years ago, in 1996, a study by international consultants, Cansult, justified the need for a rapid rail system. Specialist consultants from India came to the same conclusions some years later. In studying traffic along the East-west Corridor and the north-south corridors, Cansult found that the number of people travelling along the East-west Corridors alone was 21,000 per hour in each direction, and predicted an increase to 28,000 by 2015. However, an update— [*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, I know that my colleagues are not doing it deliberately, but the Chambers’ acoustics are such that I am disturbed by the murmurings. I am reading. If I was not reading it would have been okay, but once I am reading I need—

Mr. Speaker: All right. Members, could you kindly allow the Leader of the Opposition to speak in silence. I would appreciate that very much and observe Standing Order 40(b) and (c), respectively. Continue, hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Dr. K. Rowley: Thank you. I know I am not being testy. Thank you very much, colleagues. In studying traffic along our main—I got passed that. However, an update by Cansult found that the traffic had increased to 30,000 persons per hour by 2007. In other words, the traffic on our main roads had increased at many times the predicted rate.

Although hundreds of thousands of our citizens face the daily grind and maddening frustration of traffic logjams every day, and face hours in cars to and from work and school, the other side appears to be unaware that the international benchmark for introduction of a mass transit system is 10,000 persons per hour. Further, once the traffic reaches 20,000 per hour, it is well established that a railway is the only effective mass transit solution, because buses simply cannot handle these traffic loads, nor do roads exist in Trinidad and Tobago, nor is there land available to construct the roads required to do that. So therefore, Mr. Speaker, we need to do it quickly and efficiently with the engineering solution of a mass transit system of a rail.

11.10 a.m.

Traffic congestion is negatively affecting the country's productivity in Trinidad, and Tobago I dare say, and we have the highest level of congestion in the region, and to meet that, Mr. Speaker, we need to get going because it is even worse now and predicts to get worse as we go along. It is reasonable to conclude that in 2013, we have more than twice the volume of traffic which any sensible country would proceed to look for a mass transit system as its solution.

Somebody on the other side must tell the parents and children who wake up at weird hours all over the country to face twice daily the certain traffic jams in every direction, tightening gridlocks on virtually every route, tell us the day, the month and the year when this problem would be solved. This problem, under the PNM, will come to an end.

In June 2008, a contract was awarded to TriniTrain Consortium for the first phase of a project to design and construct a rail system for Trinidad. That was phase one. It involved planning, identification of feasible alternatives, conceptual design engineering, preliminary engineering of the preferred solution; and phase two of the project involved detailed design and construction; and the final phase involved commissioning and operation of the system. The cost of phase one, the engineering works in toto was approximately \$500 million with the final cost of the project in the order of estimated TT \$10 billion.

To put these costs into perspective, Mr. Speaker, the cost for planning and engineering of this rail project was 5 per cent of the cost of construction, and that was well within the 10 per cent international norms. Compare this to the cost of consultancy fees and other non-construction costs for the billion-dollar Couva hospital, now being implemented by the present Government, with at least

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[DR. ROWLEY]

Friday, September 13, 2013

almost \$500 million is estimated at 50 per cent of the construction cost of the project or 10 times the percentage for engineering works on the proposed railway project.

Similar outrageous non-construction costs are expected for the dubious Penal hospital project earmarked to be given on a platter, without tender, to the infamous SNC-Lavalin, the banned company from Canada. Compare the \$10 billion cost for a national mass transit rail system with the \$7 billion price tag for the Point Fortin to San Fernando highway.

By May 2010, most of phase one of the rail project had been completed, the route alignment for both east and west line from Diego Martin to Sangre Grande and the north-south line from Port of Spain to San Fernando had been selected and designed. I want to repeat that: selected and designed; all the engineering was finished. The station locations had been identified. The preliminary designs of the railway stations and depots were completed. The land acquisition requirements had been established. The legal framework for the new railway authority had been prepared. The required rolling stock had been identified. The staff and organizational structure of the railway had been formulated. Contract document was well advanced. The maintenance requirements for the railway had been determined, and so on and so on, Mr. Speaker.

What did they replace that with, Mr. Speaker? They just threw it out.

Hon. Member: Nothing!

Dr. K. Rowley: Replace it with bad mouth and spite. A sneaky attempt was made at inviting proposals for a rail system from Port of Spain to Arima and we assume it was driven by an intention to give a friend a contract. When caught and exposed, they abandoned the idea. What has the country achieved to solve the traffic problem so far, Mr. Speaker? Zilch! Nothing! Nada! More cars, more traffic, more pressure! The problem gets worse every day.

The original project was split into segments to allow easy implementation and to spread the cost over several years. All this hapless Government had to do was to properly invite tenders for the detail, design and construction of the initial segments and to move full speed ahead. If they had done so, Mr. Speaker, by now, the initial east-west line from Port of Spain to St. Augustine and the initial north-south line from Chaguanas would have been completed and thousands of commuters would be travelling to work and school in comfort on a modern rapid railway, getting to work in minutes rather than hours. This project would have truly brought Trinidad and Tobago into the 21st Century and created the stimulus

for economic growth and diversification with new commercial and industrial developments and new employment opportunities springing up to serve the new transit system. That would have been real welcomed economic growth rather than having to cheat with random numbers.

Mr. Speaker, but like everything else, it was a PNM initiative, it had to be bad-mouthed, had to be lied about, had to be discarded, in the same way they did with the OPVs, with SAUTT, with the Wallerfield Industrial Park. They almost wrecked UTT and they abandoned the railway project with nothing put in place, spent three years blaming the PNM for every evil under the sun while willy-nilly twiddling their thumbs. Only last week, when they put cement in the sewer in the Diego Martin Girls' R.C. School, when the school opened, the sewer was clogged, school had to be closed, children had to go home and the Minister, with a big smile on his face, blamed the PNM.

Hon. Member: Shameful! Shameful!

Dr. K. Rowley: Almost four years in Government, a school is closed because of construction, maladministration and mismanagement of a repair project and you blame the PNM.

After all, Mr. Speaker, if this Government could spend billions of dollars in the Prime Minister's constituency and elsewhere on every manner of grandiose, and sometimes unnecessary projects designed primarily, driven by an intention to "fix up" her constituency, primary moving factor, if we could do that, while not denying service to those who would benefit from those projects, we are saying for the national development, we could find the effort and the will to build in this country, the badly needed mass transit system. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, upon our return to office, we will immediately approach the IDB for a review of the current situation. All existing data and engineering work will be reviewed immediately, and once the word of that review is "a go" then the PNM commits here today to giving the highest priority to building a mass transit rail system to feature a service on a backbone from Diego Martin to Sangre Grande with a southern component probably as far as La Romaine. We will seek to obtain IDB long-term concessionary funding to finance this project, which will positively change the face and circumstances of Trinidad and Tobago for the next century.

The PNM, the party of development of this country, will once again shoulder the responsibility for developing this country and this country's people. We have done it before, we will do it again! [*Desk thumping*] We eagerly look forward also

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[DR. ROWLEY]

Friday, September 13, 2013

to many economic benefits because of the high local input into the building of the route ways over the period of several years and the phased reduction of the intractable billion-dollar fuel subsidy. That will come on the completion of this here. One will go, the other will come.

Mr. Speaker, I turn to the state enterprise sector. Amazingly, suddenly the Minister of Finance and the Economy, in budget number four, has awakened to the need to raise the bar as far as the performance of state enterprise is concerned. Mr. Speaker, is this not what brought them into government? How easily they have forgotten? They have forgotten any lessons we could have learnt from UDeCOTT. They are very comfortable presiding over scandal after scandal in the state enterprise system, most of it facilitated by poor procurement practice, nepotism and cronyism.

Mr. Speaker, incidentally, NGC is sitting on billions of dollars of taxpayers' profits which they are itching to spend, whilst the Minister of Finance and the Economy is shopping around for money to borrow to fill the huge deficit hole in the budget.

11.20 a.m.

Are the owners of all that money at NGC, and I talk about the taxpayers, are they comfortable with these scatterbrained proposals and these boards—sometimes overloaded with fraudulent qualifications—spending our dividends on deals in gas pipelines in Uganda and Kenya and in shale gas plains in the United States? Because these are their published plans.

Is the Cabinet in the loop on all of these things? Does the Cabinet understand what is happening and approve these things? Then again, the Cabinet itself needs supervision.

Hon. Member: “Uh hmm.”

Dr. K. Rowley: We could wake up one morning and hear that the \$10 billion or \$15 billion in the NGC account has gone and that they are all gone and that their names were not what they said they were. Mr. Speaker, mark my words, the state enterprise sector has been left unattended and plundered but the PNM will rectify the situation, as it will with several other issues that languish under this irresponsible Government.

Mr. Speaker, under Housing and Urban Renewal, permit me a comment. As part of the solution to the social, economic and intractable crime and chronic unemployment issues, the PNM commits to an immediate return to the urban

renewal programme in east Port of Spain. This plan was initiated with the purchase of over \$50 million worth of dilapidated, private commercial properties in 2006, as well as other residential properties, acquired under the provisions of the Slum Clearance and Housing Act.

There is a professionally designed Cabinet-approved layout of a three-phase programme of 2007. I know, Mr. Speaker, because I was the Minister who took it to Cabinet. It is there, approved by the Cabinet. And as far as I know, it takes a Cabinet decision to cancel a previous Cabinet decision. This Government must tell us if this Cabinet took a decision to cancel that Cabinet decision of 2007, for that urban renewal programme which was underway.

It was commenced with the construction of the now occupied Clifton Heights residence, of which I am very proud, and which you, Mr. Speaker, would love to be a residence of that community. Funding for this initiative has been denied in this and previous budgets of this Government, eliminating any hope for a productive job creation and renewal of the capital city as an economic engine and a decent place for people to live.

The Prime Minister went there recently, Mr. Speaker, and the residents met with her in a hall or somewhere and she told us after that they told her they wanted jobs. Well we do not want the Government to solve that problem by giving them \$69 make-work jobs. We want the Government to fund the urban renewal project and create productive jobs. [*Desk thumping*]

Let them observe their dignity and do a hard day's work for a hard day's pay. Let them mix concrete, let them lift steel, let them build buildings and let the hundreds of millions of dollars, at the end of expenditure, result in buildings being there for them to live in and for the city to come alive again, and that the city be renewed. That is why it is called urban renewal. So the PNM will execute this programme with all necessary funding for eventual completion, Port of Spain and environs, to the benefit of the residents of east Port of Spain, and for the national community, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*].

The Minister of Finance and the Economy mentioned that the Government was about to sign, when he spoke, the Government was about to sign an agreement with the Government of Venezuela for the Loran-Manatee field. That was on the ninth he spoke, and it was to be done on the 11th. I hope it was done because, Mr. Speaker, that is something that the entire country should exhale on; it is something we have been working on since 2003. It started when the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and Venezuela began discussions—and for, just to put it

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[DR. ROWLEY]

Friday, September 13, 2013

on the record because I know, I know, I hear murmurs of misrepresentation, because when the Minister spoke I heard the Prime Minister telling him “ten years dey eh do nutten”.

Let me tell you what happened in ten years, Mr. Speaker. In 2003 the Government of Trinidad and Tobago began discussions on the unitization of cross-border hydrocarbon reservoirs with the signing by the Ministers of Energy of Trinidad and Tobago and Venezuela. It is called a memorandum of understanding on unitization of cross-border hydrocarbon reservoirs. In 2007 work had progressed to the point where a framework unitization treaty on unitization of cross-border hydrocarbon reservoirs was signed by Prime Minister, Patrick Manning of Trinidad and Tobago, and President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela. So all those who want to take credit for it now, unless you are Patrick Manning or Hugo Chavez, just stand aside.

Hon. Members: “Hah”. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: One dead and one [*Inaudible*]

Dr. K. Rowley:—in 2011 the process continued and the Ministry of Energy of the two countries signed the unitization agreement for the exploitation and development of hydrocarbons in the particular field, and of course we were told that on September 11, which was I think two days ago, the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs of Trinidad and Tobago and Venezuela would have signed and I have indication that it was done. I simply want to congratulate all who were involved; those who were involved now and those who started in 2003. I want to congratulate all because we stand to benefit.

That field has 10 billion tcf of gas of which just under three billion belongs to us but the other seven, our LNG plants have a claim on it for economic purposes and if that gas comes to our plants at Point Fortin, even though it is in Venezuelan territory, it is an increase in the resources available to Trinidad and Tobago. So this is a development of which the country can be proud and feel happy about.

Mr. Speaker, I simply want to say—another factor which received absolutely no mention, in fact, Mr. Speaker, I think I should not advance without talking about some signs of crisis or, some might say, concerns, in the energy sector which the country should keep under close observation. Mr. Speaker, Methanex,

the largest producer and trader in methanol has relocated its Chilean plant due to gas shortages; not to Trinidad and Tobago, where they are well-established, but to the USA. We should take note of that.

And then, further, two major companies, already established in Trinidad, at Point Lisas, are known to be currently expanding operations and production facilities based on natural gas in the USA and Mexico. We must take note of that. One potential investor, driven away by the actions of the Government, has taken its investment to Colombia and Canada leaving only contact with its litigation experts in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, given the potential for financial outflows from the Exchequer, the Minister of Finance and the Economy and the Government, that should be telling all of us what the trend is here. We are asking the Government: what is the status of the two arbitrations? The one between Proman—that European group with Proman AG Limited and the other one between the Government and Sural. *[Interruption]* I would like the Government's spokesperson responsible to tell the population what is the status of those two arbitrations. We are accustomed to getting updates on arbitrations where the Government thinks it has points to score. These are very important developments and the population should be informed.

Mr. Speaker, these arbitrations, which we call the carryings-on, do nothing good for our international image as we seek to attract other foreign investors. Will other natural gas companies follow the Methanex example? What is the future market for natural gas in Trinidad and Tobago? Jumping around the momentarily lucrative spot market may put smiles on our faces—that may happen now—but the fickleness of such a place is known to create frowns at very short notice.

We cannot base our natural gas export market on spot market good luck. The biggest incentive for exploration activities is a projective, viable, sustainable and profitable market for new gas; not fiscal tampering and reliance on spot market sales only. Mr. Speaker, the budget presentation by the Minister of Finance and the Economy is best characterized in these areas by what was not said rather than what was said.

The Minister revealed that there had been a decline in gas production since 2010 but has not quantified that decline nor indicated the impact that the decline has had or is having.

11.30 a.m.

We want to know what impact it is having on Government's revenue for the energy sector. We want to know what impact it is having on the erosion of the

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[DR. ROWLEY]

Friday, September 13, 2013

image of Trinidad and Tobago as a preferred destination for gas intensive industries. We want to know the impact it is having on the effect of future investment in the gas intensive industry. Instead, he has identified only the cause for this decline as maintenance work being conducted by the natural gas suppliers. This is not the complete story as there are other factors over which the Government and the NGC had control that contributed to the shortage of gas to the end users.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister went on to indicate that the solution lies in the issue of new licences including—he also talked about the granting of new fiscal incentives. What was not said was that with the best will in the world and with substantial new discoveries being found, increase in the production of natural gas will only be realized in production five to seven years from today. This fact must be viewed against the background of the rapidly declining gas reserves. Such reserves, in 2002, stood at 20 trillion cubic feet. They were there proven, possible and probable. They were estimated then at 14 trillion cubic feet.

In 2011, the proven declined to just over 13 trillion cubic feet, with probable and possible around 12 trillion cubic feet. We have got to get these numbers up. These figures of decline with no new production coming into place, create what is being denied by the Government: the country has a problem and we must own up and face up to it and try to fix it.

In simple terms, for Trinidad and Tobago to maintain its position as a worldwide source of gas intensive products, including LNG, every year 1.5 trillion cubic feet of gas will have to be found. This simple fact has not received any acknowledgement by the present Government. Instead, an impression has been created, both in the 2014 Budget Speech and by the Prime Minister herself in 2012, with the so-called discovery of crude oil by Petrotrin when she “ups” and announced: “The people can expect better times ahead” and that “the oil find reaffirms that God is a ‘Trini’ . We have just found the Jubilee Field.”

There was light, sweet crude that was supposed to be flowing from the shallow sources in nine months—

Mr. Imbert: Long time.

Dr. K. Rowley: Press conference, chairman, Minister. Where is it?

Mr. Imbert: “In de ground.” [*Laughter*]

Dr. K. Rowley: The Prime Minister, in a nationwide broadcast, promised not to waste this windfall from the Jubilee Field. Maybe it came, was wasted or stolen so fast that the rest of us did not even notice.

The other factor that received absolutely no mention and which supports the view expressed in this submission is the clear absence of any new projects based on natural gas. After successive coalition government budgets, which ritualistically announced new and immediate projects, they have finally given up. So we take note. CARISAL Project, disappeared.

Miss Cox: That is right.

Dr. K. Rowley: SABIC, grand announcement, disappeared. AUM coming, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, where is it? In limbo somewhere? Certainly other major projects have been announced but no report on the status has followed, nor can the Government indicate the source of gas to support these projects in the time frame proposed.

There is the other important factor that will deepen this crisis and that is, many of the existing long-term contracts for the gas-intensive plants have either come to an end or are coming to an end. They include a major consumption of gas, namely, Train 1 of Atlantic LNG. We anticipate serious difficulties in the negotiations for the renewal of these contracts, based on the current shortage that now exists and the pricing difficulties in light of some of the factors identified in the Minister's address.

This unhappy situation in the energy sector, the most important sector in our economy, has arisen because of the absence of any articulated policy or any vision projected by this Government. The PNM will, in due course, be unveiling its own policy, strategies and specific actions to be taken, not only to halt this decline but to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago will once more be regarded as a preferred destination for investment. [*Desk thumping*]

That policy will:

1. treat with the improvement of the credibility of the country within the international investing community;
2. engage both producers and the end users of natural gas and labour in dialogue of how best this sector can be enhanced leading to consolidation and expansion;
3. review the role of state enterprises that are now involved in the energy sector.

I talk here about the National Energy Company (NEC), the National Gas Company (NGC), the National Petroleum Company (NP) and Petrotrin. This

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[DR. ROWLEY]

Friday, September 13, 2013

review will lead to an appropriate restructuring to ensure that the State's involvement with the energy sector recognizes the current dynamics of this sector and adjust ourselves to get the best advantage of the current circumstances of the 21st Century.

4. We will revisit how best the Union Industrial Estate in La Brea can be utilized in bringing to the south-western peninsula the benefits it was designed to bring there.

We take careful note of the fact and strongly reject the idea that the Government has removed industrial development from the study of the south-western peninsula, with all the negative connotations that this surreptitious action holds against the people of La Brea, Vessigny and environs.

5. We will develop a strategy—we are in the process of doing that—and we will outline the mechanism whereby Trinidad and Tobago's experience and expertise in the energy sector can be exported to a selected developing world in the early stages of their development in energy.

We had started that. It was allowed to lapse in Africa. We will pick it up and take it to success. And, of course, we will reintroduce the one stop shop, the working one stop shop, the Standing Committee on Energy, which will provide timely responses to any new projects, challenges or problems as they arise in the energy sector.

The policy, strategies and actions will form part of the PNM's commitment to the population to ensure that this sector recovers from its crisis situation and becomes the buoyant and sustainable sector it has been and can become again.

Mr. Speaker, I turn to Clico and the CL Financial issue. This Government claimed that they had solved the CL Financial problem over a year ago. In fact, the last Minister of Finance, on his way out, I think it was his last speech as Minister of Finance, boasted that his major achievement was providing a solution to the Clico crisis. However, when a question was raised to the current Minister in the Senate a few months ago, regarding what were the outstanding matters remaining to bring this Clico crisis to an end, I took note that the Minister of Finance and the economy refused to provide an answer. In fact, he dodged the question until the Session expired and the question lapsed. I am calling on him now to answer that question in this House when he winds up or if his colleague can answer before. The question is still very valid.

We now have some understanding as to why the Minister chose not to answer the question. You see, Mr. Speaker, they have come up with a plan that involves holding back certain assets of the Clico shareholders and selling off the rest of the company's assets to supposedly pay off the debt incurred during the bailout. This figure is widely reported to be around \$23 billion.

11.40 a.m.

Remember when they were praising themselves in 2010? They were accusing the PNM of scandalous behaviour in bailing out at \$10 billion. They had two Ministers who are now out there, who had promised to do it under \$5 billion or to not do it at all. One called it a Ponzi scheme for which there should be no response, “take yuh loss and go”, that was a Government Minister. So it was scrapped. We are now hearing from \$20 billion—from \$10 billion to \$15 billion to \$20 billion; we are now hearing about \$23 billion. So what, Mr. Speaker, what we have here is the Government planning to sell off Republic Bank shares, Methanol Holdings, et cetera, and any other profitable enterprises under the CLF umbrella, to raise money to pay off the debt. That is how they plan to bring down our debt-to-GDP ratio which has risen sharply under their watch. But once again, we do not trust them; it might very well be that.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Hah!

Dr. K. Rowley: Do not trust them. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: At all.

Dr. Rambachan: Who trusted you—[*Inaudible*]

Dr. K. Rowley: What guarantee is there, Mr. Speaker, that once they get their hands on this cash, they will not choose to spend it on more feeding troughs and general election desperation gimmicks? Furthermore, while the plan involves giving around \$1.7 billion in assets, including part of Angostura Holdings to the CLF shareholders, it still leaves the Government with a shortfall of \$3.1 billion. So taxpayers are asking, how could you be giving back assets when you still have not recovered all the money put out in the bailout? How could this make sense?

It also appears to be a clear violation of the 2009 memorandum of understanding, which stated that the shareholders were not to receive a single red cent until all of the money was recovered. Who are they trying to please here, Mr. Speaker? Is it that they are trying to fulfil their initial misguided prophecy that the taxpayers will not get back the money that they put in the bailout?

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[DR. ROWLEY]

Friday, September 13, 2013

Government spokespersons have insisted that there will be a clause in the plan that effectively bars Mr. Duprey and other CLF players from benefitting from this arrangement. We wait to see that. We know that the Minister took this plan to the Cabinet and they began dragging their feet and their boots on it. They refused to provide full support for it because of the perception that they would be giving back too much to their benefactor. So what did they do? They went out and hired the very expensive firm called Freshfields to do a review of the plan and report back in 45 days. That was reported in the *Express* on August 30.

So at the end of this period, after paying handsomely, Freshfields are supposed to tell them that the plan is a good one, excellent one, fantastic one and should be implemented as soon as possible. What they may not tell us is that Freshfields was already a consultant on the restructuring of Clico. So they had a hand in developing the plan and they are supposed to evaluate and approve the plan with great fanfare. Again, more deceit from the UNC cabal.

The plan is to come out with Freshfields' report and pretend that it was an independent assessment from an international reputable firm that recommended the course of action, and that is the one they wanted to take in the first place, Mr. Speaker. So we will get the stamp of Freshfields, they will hold it up and say it is authorized, it is recommended and we are simply following the recommendation.

Mr. Speaker, agriculture sees the Minister talking about agriculture and food production. The last PNM Government in its quest to provide the nation with workers with new skill sets, established two major institutions of learning, the UTT and COSTAATT. This was meant to improve our human capital and to strengthen our competitiveness and to improve the workforce to make it more varied and of higher quality. They tried to close down UTT, Mr. Speaker, but they did not succeed. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: [*Laughs*] "Oh gawd."

Dr. K. Rowley: He laughed. The Prime Minister is on record saying that they will put UTT under UWI. That is a fact. [*Crosstalk*] But in the meantime, now that our index position has fallen from 84 to 92; in 2008, we were at 73; we fell to 84. We have now fallen to 92. I wonder if this has anything to do with the Minister of Finance and the Economy telling us about term limits for the Prime Minister and the right of recall for legislators. I could not make the connection at all— [*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: When?

Dr. K. Rowley:—in his budget speech.

Mr. Imbert: When he said that?

Dr. K. Rowley: I do not know. I could not make the connection between a Minister of Finance and the Economy talking about the budget, fiscal, monetary inflow/outflow and he took time out to tell us about his support for term limits for the Prime Minister. I wonder if he is telling the Prime Minister something. [*Laughter and crosstalk*]

I simply want to mention that the Government has talked about distributing land in Tucker Valley. This Government has made a career of giving away State lands for election purposes.

Miss Cox: Yes!

Dr. K. Rowley: We are putting the Government on notice. Those of us who represent people in the north-west peninsula, and look at the map of Trinidad and you will see it. I represent Diego Martin West and under no circumstances will the Government be allowed to give away land in the north-western peninsula as any election gimmick. [*Crosstalk*]

Miss Cox: A hundred acres.

Dr. K. Rowley: We saw them in Chaguanas shamelessly handing out on their political platform in their political office, land that was prepared by the PNM Government to be properly distributed to former Caroni workers—using it for election purposes. A Minister of Housing in England went to jail for that, but here in Trinidad and Tobago, the Prime Minister and colleagues are in pictures in the papers and the candidate giving out land. Well, the people of the north-western peninsula from Maraval to Diego Martin to Carenage to Port of Spain to Arima will not countenance that. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: That is right. That is fair.

Dr. K. Rowley: I point out to the Minister of Finance and the Economy because maybe he does not know, he is relatively new. This Minister of Finance and the Economy is telling us about eight large farms to be built. I want to point out to him that the first thing this Government did in the large farm category was to close down the large farm in Chaguaramas. That was the more successful one. The Government closed it down. Now, we are hearing that they are building new ones elsewhere and the land from that farm is now to be given away. When it goes in the private sector, we the people of the western peninsula whose water

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[DR. ROWLEY]

Friday, September 13, 2013

supply comes from the aquifer in Chaguaramas, all the way from Carenage up through Glencoe into Goodwood Park, our water supply is the aquifer in Chaguaramas. Now that the Government is threatening to put private large-scale or other farmers there to use chemicals unsupervised, we are putting the Government on notice that that threatens our water supply, and we will hold the Government accountable for any pollution of that aquifer, which could damage the supply to the people of the north-western peninsula.

And that is coming at a time when right now there is a shortage of water in the Diego Martin Valley, development has outstripped supply and those who were getting water five days a week, getting it three days a week now. Those who were getting it three days a week, getting it one day a week in the high areas and some of the higher areas getting no days a week at all. So this threat to the aquifer of Chaguaramas will not pass unnoticed.

Miss Cox: Water for all.

Dr. K. Rowley: As the Government proceeds to talk about leasing of land in Chaguaramas—[*Interruption*]

Miss Cox: Water for all.

Dr. K. Rowley:—we ask the Government that any lands to be leased to the private sector in Chaguaramas, large, medium or small, local or foreign, that covenants be placed on those leases, and that the covenants should restrict any use away from agriculture to any other activity; that it ensures that any reversion comes to the State, and that any breach by the lessee, the land reverts to the State at first option; and it provides the Government with the first right to acquire any commercial interest or shareholding in any company so formed to hold lands so granted in Tucker Valley. And, of course, Mr. Speaker, in that area in particular, that there be rigorous enforcement of the Town and Country and the EMA requirements. [*Desk thumping*]

11.50 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, removal of VAT on 7,000 food items. The Minister goes to this item—again, he is new, relatively new—and listen to the Minister. He said:

“...lower food prices a matter which was...”

Hon. Member: Goat farm.

Dr. K. Rowley: Who said goat farm here? He is there?

Miss Cox: D’Abadie.

Dr. K. Rowley: Well, “the goat safe”. [*Laughter*]

Hon. Member: Tobago.

Dr. K. Rowley: Goats are safe in Tobago. [*Crosstalk and laughter*] Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Members, Members, please, please, allow the hon. Leader of the Opposition to speak in silence, please.

Dr. K. Rowley: Apparently, Mr. Speaker, motives do not only come from this side “eh”. [*Laughter*] Mr. Speaker, the Minister said:

“...lower food prices, a matter which was impacted this year by the removal of VAT on food and by the Government’s drive for food security.”

Is this Minister serious? I do not know where he does his shopping, but it is certainly not where my wife and other wives all over Trinidad and Tobago shop, otherwise they will be telling him that the prices creep up even while “dey standing by de shelf”. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Imbert: “You doh go no grocery.”

Dr. K. Rowley: The ill-advised decision by his Government to remove VAT on thousands of imported food items for short-term political relief was another costly “vaps” taken by this Government in 2012. It was then severely criticized by stakeholders in the supermarket industry, consumer groups and even the chairman of the Prices Council. Instead of seeking to simulate and expand local agricultural production on a sustainable basis, this Government introduced a measure which only had the effect of increasing the consumption of imported processed food items with the only beneficiary being the supermarkets which only adjusted their prices. In the face of this history, the Minister comes here to trumpet that this unmitigated disaster is another successful outcome of inspiration by the UNC Government. We have not forgotten you, and we will not forget you.

Mr. Speaker, national security, law and order: this is a matter of great concern to every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago. An absence of law and order affects us all and, therefore, knows no political or other boundaries. In recognition of this fact, we remain entirely supportive of a non-partisan approach on these matters. Our citizens and visitors cannot be allowed to be sitting ducks in the face of this Government’s inability to articulate and successfully implement an effective crime plan. This failure exacerbated by the Government’s reckless and wanton dismantling of our national security systems has denied us the protection that citizens deserve.

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[DR. ROWLEY]

Friday, September 13, 2013

Mr. Speaker, knowledge of the existence of this blanket had a positive psychological effect on the drug-and-gun-runners of this world. It had deterred some of them, forcing them to go elsewhere. These arrangements did not come cheaply. They cost the taxpayers of this country millions of dollars.

In the face of persistent failure and creeping hopelessness on the part of the authorities, in an attempt to prevent the sight of hundreds of gory crime scenes; the spectre of hundreds of young people falling victims to the dangers set up by drug merchants; and large sections of our society unsettled and cringing in fear, the PNM, yet again, approached the Government to engage in bipartisan collaborative discussions. These meetings with the Government and the PNM's delivery of very specific short, medium and long-term positions, which form part of the PNM's larger policy positions in this area, have gone reasonably well, thus far, and we expect at least some positive outcomes.

The Government has budgeted \$6.497 billion this year, following approximately \$15 billion already allocated since it assumed office. However, Mr. Speaker, in the absence of any effective sustainable plan, that is tantamount to throwing good money after the problem without influencing it towards a successful outcome.

The PNM had a national security blanket in place, which was developed after a detailed examination of the country's needs and circumstances. These came on the advice of national security stakeholders and experts guided by clear policy directions of the then PNM government. They are still valid, Mr. Speaker. It focused on:

- (1) protecting the nation's borders by the deployment of land, air and marine assets;
- (2) tightening the noose around the necks of the white-collar criminals by the establishment of strong institutions, including the establishment of a revenue authority, which will be helpful in tracking illicit gain;
- (3) deployment of a specialized anti-crime unit for information gathering and engaging the best features of anti-gang interdiction, and this agency had the additional ability to train personnel across the national security platform in modern crime detection and prevention; and
- (4) the establishment of new communities through urban renewal.

Mr. Speaker, we constructed police stations. This Government embarked on a policy of closing down police stations. They practised 21st Century policing until

a new Minister said, “that is nonsense”, and they changed to something else. We have not heard which century that is yet. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, the police service is the primary agency for dealing with crime prevention and detection in Trinidad and Tobago. There is no substitute for good police work. As such, we believe that this society owes not only a debt of gratitude to this institution, but also that we exert best efforts to ensure that their working conditions and general welfare are taken seriously.

Mr. Speaker, we all must be concerned about the work/life balance of police officers and other law enforcement personnel, given that they function in highly stressful and difficult environments. Given also that they are exposed to the risk of loss of life and limb on a daily basis; given that in some circumstances they are called upon to function or to work for periods of six continuous months of 24 hours off and 24 hours on duty, we acknowledge the recommendations of the President on the subject of improved benefits for officers and their families and would support any immediate appropriate parliamentary action in this regard.

We propose a substantial increase in the strength of municipal police bodies across the country by 100 officers in the short term in each municipal region to achieve greater saturation of foot and local mobile patrols. These officers will be expected to protect our schools, our hospitals, our local buildings, our parks, entertainment and recreational areas and our streets.

Mr. Speaker, the PNM recommends an immediate abolition of the cumbersome arrangements for the appointment of a commissioner of police; we recommend a strengthening of the Police Complaints Authority; and we recommend the establishment of a parliamentary standing committee on law and order and national security. We also recommend and put to the Government, as part of our collaboration in this matter of crime prevention and national security, that we move post-haste to enact legislation on witness tampering, and we are discussing the use of anonymous witness evidence.

Mr. Speaker, Tobago: Unfortunately, it appears as though the Minister of Finance and the Economy is boasting about Tobago receiving \$3.309 billion or 5.3 per cent of the budget. What he tried to sweep under the carpet is the fact that the allocation of the Tobago House of Assembly is really \$2.458 billion. This sleight of hand is to be observed that the Minister knows that the share of the national budget actually allocated to the Assembly is at its minimum, and it is commensurate neither with Tobago’s well-established development needs nor

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[DR. ROWLEY]

Friday, September 13, 2013

with the grand 8 per cent that was cynically and surreptitiously proposed as part of their failed attempt to seduce Tobagonians in the last election. They have forgotten that. They moved from 8 per cent to 3.5 per cent.

While we acknowledge that the Minister of Finance and the Economy has finally begun to listen to the THA with respect to incentives at Cove Estate, allocations to major projects and others are woefully short. Given the well-known human resource capacity constraints in Tobago, the Assembly requested some \$6 million to finance its programme for young persons in their scholarship development. They got \$1 million.

12.00 noon

Mr. Speaker, despite all the rhetoric, an appropriate share of the budget for Tobago, the allocation to housing seems to be zero. Tobago has a need for 6,000 houses in their programme; they get \$28 million. The Trinidad allocation I think is—that will do 24 houses, I am told. “Yeah”. Trinidad’s allocation will do 2,000 additional houses. Now, Mr. Speaker, that cannot be fair. The Shaw Park Complex requires—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have two more minutes.

Dr. K. Rowley: The Shaw Park Complex requires—*[Interruption]*

Hon. Member: “He ent geh no injury time?”

Dr. K. Rowley:—\$75 million, they were offered \$8 million. Surely that could not complete it.

Mr. Speaker, as I close in my final two minutes, I simply want to say that the biggest problem facing this country today is the Government of Trinidad and Tobago—*[Interruption]*

Hon. Member: “Yup!” *[Desk thumping]*

Dr. K. Rowley:—and we need a Government that we can trust. The level of trust in Government has never been lower in this country, *[Desk thumping]* and this is the greatest gift of the People’s Partnership to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

This Government has failed and will convince no one with its self-serving, incredulous rhetoric what this budget represents. They have muddied the waters in which the new PNM Government will have to swim after the next general election. *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. Member: “Dey ha to put on fins.”

Dr. K. Rowley: But given our unwavering commitment, guided by our dedication and our basic adherence to moral and spiritual values, the PNM will steer the good ship T&T, to the safe harbour of bright future. [*Desk thumping*] We stay the course. We stay the course, Mr. Speaker. We the PNM give the people of Trinidad and Tobago hope, and we, Mr. Speaker, keep hope alive. I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Minister of Sport, Member of Parliament for D’Abadie O’Meara. [*Continuous desk thumping*]

The Minister of Sport (Hon. Anil Roberts): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In two hours the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the People’s National Movement has shown the policy of the PNM over the last 52 years: when you vote PNM, and you vote strongly for PNM, they ignore you. I talked to my people from Tobago who have voted resoundingly for the PNM and got an entire two minutes out of a two-hour presentation; there goes the PNM policy [*Desk thumping*] of caring and voting.

But how frightening it is today, Mr. Speaker, when we come, three and a half years into the Opposition Leader’s term as Leader of the Opposition and for the first time in his many contributions—because he sets a record, he contributes very well on nearly every issue. I think he is only surpassed by the other leader upstairs, a Senator who shall not be named here. But it is so frightening that after all these contributions we finally hear that the Member for Diego Martin West has a policy and a vision for Trinidad and Tobago that is exactly the same as the Member for San Fernando East, that was rejected on May 24, 2010.

He has stated here that when he gets back into power, because he seems to be trying to court Chaguanas West and the ILP, probably changing from their “win alone, lose alone” philosophy, I do not know, because that is the only way he could possibly think of winning, because while Chaguanas West is behind and Diego Martin West is trying to play friends, he must also remember when the ILP did well in Chaguanas West, the PNM lost 400 per cent of their previous voters. [*Desk thumping*] So you must worry about that while trying to cast aspersions on this side. But it is frightening to know that every policy of the former Prime Minister, the Member for San Fernando East, will be the policy in the future if, God forbid, we wake up and get very silly and vote for the Member for Diego Martin West to be a Prime Minister.

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. A. ROBERTS]

Friday, September 13, 2013

Every single policy he stated here—I was waiting to hear a different vision because he disagreed since 2003, August, with the Member for San Fernando East. He disagreed when he went to him to complain about Calder Hart; he disagreed with him when he was fired; he disagreed with him when he became Leader of the Opposition, but yet he cannot make a comment that the chair stays empty for a very long time—but he is talking about the Partnership. So it is very interesting.

The Member used the term “loot” to refer to Members on this side. To loot, when he was discussing planning, and his very chairman who he supports from his People’s National Movement, John Rahael, his good friend—and he has said so on record here—when he was Minister of Planning and Development, somehow forgot about the rules of Town and Country, somehow ignored all the planning rules, and somehow his friend got permission to go up in the sky, and he is talking about “loot”.

Well, he might be an expert, but these Members on this side have discussed in the budget presented by the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy, that the value for money that has become the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, not as the PNM said—and all they always do when they refer to development they refer to Port of Spain: “this waterfront tower”. They say that with a straight face. Yes, it is built, but it was budgeted at \$2.8 billion and finished at \$4.2 billion, what about the \$1.4 billion overrun? They just ignore that.

Hon. Member: They forget that.

Hon. A. Roberts: They talk about the Customs and Excise, the very building that led the Leader of the Opposition now to fall out with the then Prime Minister over Calder Hart. When Calder Hart had the audacity to try to meet with the former Minister at that time to discuss contractors, and he was appalled; that same building, that is overrun. He called NAPA and SAPA, 350 per cent overrun; budgeted at \$300 million and finished at \$900 million, and he is calling that.

Hon. Member: Shame!

Dr. Moonilal: Praising that.

Hon. A. Roberts: Praising that—and as if it does not exist, and saying that the people are very educated. Yes, they are, and they will not forget that, and seeing that the PNM of the future is exactly the PNM of the old, he has just committed himself to not only remain in the Opposition, but reduce his number of seats on that side [*Desk thumping*] from 11 to probably zero.

Appropriation Bill, 2013

Friday, September 13, 2013

Vision 2020 was a brilliant plan, and we heard the number of experts and great citizens who gave contributions to that plan; nobody ever disputed that. That plan, that document, the words written on that paper were brilliant. They spoke about pillars, about poverty reduction, crime reduction, diversification of the economy, education; all of that is brilliant, was brilliant and will forever be brilliant. There is one problem. The PNM never implemented one thing in that Vision 2020. [*Desk thumping*]

“They use it, hold it up, call it,” and then ignored it, because [*Crosstalk*] the very people who made the plan—you see when the Leader of the Opposition—and I must commend him because he wanted to skip out that name, but he was honest today and he called the name. You see, the one problem was that name, the name “Calder Hart” was the one of the 25 that caused the problem with Vision 2020, because after all the geniuses, all the brilliant plans, the former Prime Minister and the PNM put Calder Hart to implement it, and that is why we hear the word “loot”.

We hear the word “loot” because we read the Uff enquiry report that tells us about the Tarouba Stadium, \$1.1 billion; it still needs another \$185 million to finish; that is PNM brilliance. That is Calder Hart’s brilliance! It was described as a disgrace on the face of Trinidad and Tobago, and we are hearing that the new PNM is coming back with the old Calder Hart, the old Uthara Rao, [*Desk thumping*] the old Garcia, the old Lok Jack, the same Montiel, the same policies of this Vision 2020.

I am deeply disappointed, Member for Diego Martin West. I thought you were coming with something fresh. He called out all of those who contributed to the Vision 2020, but you know, Mr. Speaker, he forgot to mention who contributed to the Vision 2030.

Hon. Member: Oh!

Hon. A. Roberts: Was it Hinds? Was it Al-Rawi? Was it—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Please!

Hon. A. Roberts: Was it the Member for Arouca/Maloney? I did not know because he listed Vision 2020, which was not his, it was the very person, the Member for San Fernando East, who he fought against, who fired him, he brings it back, boasts of the Member for San Fernando East’s work, and then in his Vision 2030 does not tell us who created this 2030 vision.

Hon. Member: La Brea.

Appropriation Bill, 2013

Friday, September 13, 2013

Hon. A. Roberts: Was it the Member for La Brea? Does it include smelter? Imagine this Member stands here and discusses an aquifer in Chaguaramas. Very good, sounds good. This Government is environmentally conscious; you see that we have banned trawling to preserve our fisheries. You see a moratorium on hunting coming to preserve our wildlife, and so on. You see a lot of environmentally conscious legislation, so I am happy that the Member for Diego Martin West knows about aquifer. So he has a problem with farmers growing nice food to eat on an aquifer, but he is okay with Vision 2020, building smelter on aquifer. [*Laughter*] So you build smelter on aquifer, that is okay, but “doh grow cassava and sweet potato because you will humbug the aquifer”. [*Desk thumping*] I have a problem with his logic.

Hon. Member: He does not have any.

Hon. A. Roberts: The Member for Diego Martin West told us about his policy 2020 and 2030. As I repeat, brilliant policies! I have read them from word to word, page to page, from front to back, very good. The problem was, not implemented at all by any Ministry; maybe the Member for Diego Martin West was attempting to, but every time he got going he got moved, shuffled—“he talkin bout reshuffle”, but I think he got more shuffle than all of us put together, until he was fired by bmobile also.

Hon. Member: “He get shovel.” [*Laughter*]

Hon. A. Roberts: So this Vision 2020, and now 2030, very nice. There is one problem: who is going to implement it, if God forbid, the red comes in through their friendship and courting of the Member for Chaguanas West? “I know Chaguanas West ent going red, but them could try.” But who is going to implement it? The very PNM who cannot stay awake to say “no” on something they disagree with? [*Laughter*] “They fall asleep in the Senate,” yet they want to come and run Ministries. “They fall asleep”, they cannot even say no, and then their PRO coming to say, “Well, we intended to.” If you cannot even get together to say “no” in the Senate, how can you run an economy of \$61 billion? When each of you fall asleep, the country will be sleepy.

Dr. Moonilal: Hong Wing coffee.

Hon. A. Roberts: They always say, “People’s Partnership have no plan.” We have no plan, we have no plan, we have no plan. They have a plan: 2020, 2030, 2050, 3040, “all kinda ting”. Well look at the plan, simple. “I doh know if they cyah read, but every year we come here and we give them plan, for example,

Appropriation Bill, 2013

Friday, September 13, 2013

‘Sustaining Growth, Securing Prosperity’, and it printed nice.” Nice! Nice paper and so on. Right. [*Crosstalk*] Squatter, please. [*Laughter*] Three-year *Public Sector Investment Programme, 2014—2016*—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: “Yeah! Yeah! Yeah!” Please. Please. Please. Please! Please! Please! Member!

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Thank you, Standing Order 36(5).

Mr. Speaker: I would like to appeal—all I can do is to appeal to Members to allow the Member who is speaking to speak in silence. And I also ask the Member who is on his legs, do not engage in that kind of crosstalk that could offend the Standing Order. So I advise you accordingly.

Hon. A. Roberts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I humbly apologize, but my Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Diego Martin West, quoted from Bob Marley, let me quote from Bob Marley too: “Who the cap fit let them wear it”. [*Desk thumping*]

So, *Three-year Public Sector Investment Programme, 2014—2016*—come on, you all got a whole bag, it is rather heavy. I saw the Member for Laventille West was a gentleman and helped some of the female Members of Parliament carry it out, but read it. You did not help the ladies?

Hon. Member: Three-year Public Sector—

Hon. A. Roberts: *Three-year Public Sector Investment Programme*—so if you read it you will see the plan, and you get this each and so on. But maybe for the PNM, this does not work because it does not have a fancy slogan, so I am going to call this for members of the media, “Vision 2016” [*Member holds up document*], so the PNM could read it and understand.

Vision 2016: So have the plan, read it and you will see that the plan is coming to fruition, because when we came into this House in June, after May 24, 2010, the PNM said, when the former Minister was reading his budget they said, “We are heading for devaluation”. Remember the Member for Diego Martin West went up on the hills of Laventille and said: “We heading for devaluation. “We heading for the precipice”. We have fallen off the slippery slope. We are blacklisted. We will be going to the IMF.” “All ah dat now dey ent saying”, what they are seeing are four consecutive quarters of growth [*Desk thumping*] and the economy creating jobs, investment growing, “and people starting to get money in dey pocket”.

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. A. ROBERTS]

Friday, September 13, 2013

12.15 p.m.

“But no more IMF talk, no more devaluation, no more collapse. Dey trying to find friend now. Dey do not know that while they may be trying to court friend from Chaguaramas, as the Member for Diego Martin West said, “that the members of the north-west corridor, the north-west, the PNM will not allow any land to be distributed.” De PNM would not be dey; green coming too. So I doh know what dey feel is really going on in the politics.”

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: You will see.

Hon. A. Roberts: “Yes, we will see; green coming Point Fortin too. On the highway coming down green, with only paint, but is all right.” [*Laughter*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: You will see.

Hon. A. Roberts: Let me just correct the record, because unfortunately for my Leader of the Opposition he does better when he is reading. “He lost his time, two hours gone. Tobago get two; win 12 seats and get two minutes. Dey eh even get 10 seconds per seat—not even 10 seconds per seat. Tobago, an important jewel in the diversification of the Trinidad and Tobago economy. A man from Tobago; a leader from Tobago who is being rebranded to be a Prime Minister give Tobago 10 seconds per seat, but dat is what happens. De people of Laventille and Port of Spain South could tell you dat when yuh vote PNM without change, your infrastructure is the worst in the entire country, because the PNM philosophy is once you show us love and we have your vote for life, we ignore you and we allow others to move forward.”

So let me just correct the Member for Diego Martin West. He said that in 2009 when the PNM was there, he stated that the PNM—and the media could correct me, *Hansard* could correct me—the PNM left US \$9 billion in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund and foreign exchange reserves were \$3 billion. Well, unfortunately, he read it back to front because in 2009 the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund would have been \$3 billion and the foreign reserves would have been \$9 billion. [*Interruption*]

“No, very good point, because if you want to be Prime Minister and you do not understand maths, you might go in de Heritage and Stabilisation, take it out thinking yuh dealing with foreign reserves. [*Laughter and desk thumping*] So you have to understand what is going on. This is a very serious ting.” You sat there and prepared for a whole week to come and mislead. Children are listening and they want to know the difference between the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund and

foreign reserves and so on, and you are misleading them. But the truth is the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, which was \$3 billion back in PNM 2010, is now US \$5 billion, [*Desk thumping*] and the foreign exchange reserve, which was back then at \$3 billion, is now \$9.4 billion; so we just correct that here. [*Interruption*] Unfortunately, yes, one by one—

The Member for Diego Martin West made heavy work—came here well-researched, well-prepared—and he stated that the Prime Minister announced after post-Cabinet that in nine months the Jubilee Field would be producing, and so on and so forth, and that you cannot trust this Government because nothing happened. Mr. Speaker, the Jubilee Field, nine months and two weeks after the Prime Minister's statement, started producing and as we speak today it produces 800 barrels a day—[*Desk thumping*]*—800 barrels a day from three wells. One of the wells, S895 could be one of the highest producing wells in Trinmar. [Desk thumping]*

The Leader of the Opposition, a Prime Minister in waiting, trying to rebrand and unfortunately not working, comes to the Parliament and misleads. I am not saying he intended to, but I would suggest that if you have four days to prepare and you come with false information that your preparation was not good. I will leave it like that, Mr. Speaker. I think you would be happy with that, rather than me going further to really describe it as it is.

He made heavy weather of this budget being the biggest budget ever, and PNM back in 2007 was \$42 billion and \$43 billion, and so on. Anybody who does A' level economics would understand that the purchasing power parity of a dollar, especially in inflationary times—which included the high inflationary periods of the People's National Movement, when inflation reached about 15 per cent—that the purchasing power and the value of a dollar diminishes. So to make a superficial comparison on a macro scale to state \$61 billion is bigger than \$43 billion is myopic at best, puerile and really untrue.

One has to understand and factor in, in a scientific manner, what is the real value increase in the budget. But more importantly, one must see the serious differences that are occurring. The budget deficits are decreasing slowly but surely, from a high of the PNM of 7.6 per cent, last year's budget's projected deficit was 4.6 per cent of GDP and projected now to go to 3.6 per cent. Through the performance of the Ministries and the economy, the reduction in the deficit was actually greater than the numbers projected. This means that as stated by the Ministers of Finance of the People's Partnership Government, we are heading towards a balanced budget position in 2016.

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. A. ROBERTS]

Friday, September 13, 2013

We are seeing growth of 1.8 per cent, and to the people of Trinidad and Tobago what this means is that we are creating sustainable jobs for people to earn a living and a proper wage to feed their families. This is an incredible achievement over the last three years. The Leader of the Opposition went into none of these, but came here to just play politics. *[Interruption]* “We going to dat; let meh fast-forward.”

You know, sometimes it is amazing. “The Leader of the Opposition I think in his rebranding exercise they have really taught him to speak and not show emotion in yuh face when yuh know what yuh saying is not true, because he says things with a straight face.” If you did not know, if the facts were not available, you would believe that what the Member for Diego Martin West was telling you was God’s honest truth.

For example, he spoke about corruption. “Dis Government is the most corrupt,” way, way, way, he went on, and could not cite one example of corruption. “I cannot go through and bore you, Mr. Speaker, with all, but I can remind you of Calder Hart giving his family \$369 million contract when the company just register three weeks before and so on, and then going under oath and saying he eh know dem people, but is really he brother-in-law. Ah could tell yuh bout dat. Ah could tell yuh about de PNM Minister, former Minister in de Ministry of Finance, telling Ken Julien, ‘Do not invest in Bamboo Networks,’ written and signed—former Minister Christine Sahadeo—because Bamboo Networks failed every possible element of a due diligence, and somehow when she was removed, \$31 million jump out ah de Treasury and went with Ken Julien to Bamboo Networks and has disappeared. I could tell you about that.”

“I could tell you about Uthara Rao being an Executive CEO and writing de chairman to give—*[Interruption]* Yes, again, but you all talking corruption, but you have said nothing. “But is facts; you need to be reminded, because you sit there as if you just come out of a pew *[Desk thumping]* and you say you talking corruption—corruption, corruption, corruption. Anybody could say de word, but who can give concrete examples? Uthara Rao writes himself as Executive Chairman to the CEO—he is also de CEO—recommending a raise for de CEO, and the CEO write back and say, ‘Yes, recommend it,’ so he pay himself and come back. *[Laughter]* Dey forget dat, Mr. Speaker. Dey forget—himself to himself. He write himself to give himself a raise and then vice versa. So he increase two salary.”

There were bills for a bathroom for the EMBD office, for refurbishment of the EMBD office in Valpark. “In Valpark de bathrooms are for everybody. There was

no bathroom in de EMBD office, but he had bills for the refurbishment.” Uthara Rao had \$28 million of car rentals from a firm which was his firm, but had no cars. [*Laughter*] And they are talking about corruption with a straight face. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Moonilal: Unbelievable!

Hon. A. Roberts: “John Rahael and Guillen get outline approval from a former Minister to build up high in a Renaissance Towers, when de codicil says do not go up above three floors. And he is talking about corruption? De same John Rahael in Tobago buys land, sells land to the THA for \$12 million and then lease it back to dem for 99 years at \$1.2 million a month, and get \$26 million on top ah dat to help them look for money.” And he is talking about corruption?

“De aquatic centre in Couva is being built at \$194 million, VAT inclusive, and is already out of de ground coming up. It is five days, it is on schedule, on budget. [*Desk thumping*] Dey wanted to build a pool—one pool yuh have down dey in the aquatic centre, two 50-metre by 25, a 25 metre by 20 metre deep diving well, water park, play park for \$194 million. Ah’s get excited, yes; leh meh swim slower. Ah swimming like Dillon Carter right now. Leh meh slow down. Ah running like Jehue. [*Laughter*]

In Tobago dey want to build one pool at 54 metres—ah doh know who or where a pool is good 54.9 metres, because I in swimming and I doh know that—for \$250 million, and they coming to talk about corruption?”

They did not talk about the world GTL plant. “De country lost how much billion dollars—\$11 billion in a world GTL plant under de PNM, and dey coming to talk about corruption? Dey want to discuss dat; call Malcolm Jones, discuss dat. Ah doh want to keep going on, on dat corruption, but ah cyar take it. But one thing ah could tell yuh, is not rebranding is acting classes, because the Member for Diego Martin West say all ah dis with a straight face.”

Hon. Member: He could make it to Hollywood.

Hon. A. Roberts: Oh my goodness. Then he went on to property tax, and his statement is, “Property tax by any other name is a property tax”. That is brilliant, but there is one problem: “de people of Trinidad and Tobago a little bit more intelligent than that.” A property tax by the name, the two words, “property tax” was never an issue or a problem. In fact, people are excited to pay their land and building taxes. The issue was in the implementation by the People’s National Movement; they had a process of valuing people’s properties which raised

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. A. ROBERTS]

Friday, September 13, 2013

people's property values to extremely high levels, which would have led to an increase in them paying property tax of 7,000 per cent, in some areas, higher than what they were paying. "So de name is not whether is property tax, land and building tax, equipment tax, Diego Martin West tax, Renaissance tax, is not de point. De point is that the unfair system of valuation that was going to be implemented by the PNM will never raise its head again. When dey come and check how much toilet yuh have, how much tile yuh have, if yuh have three toilet and two air-condition they start to jack up your valuation and the tax becomes unfair. So do not come here and pretend that a tax by a tax is everything, is de same ting, and this Government fought against property tax and now we putting property tax."

What we fought against was the unfair, unfair, unmitigated, terrible—I wanted to use a stronger word—unfair process by which people's properties were being valued, and therefore they would have to pay an inordinate increase in tax; whatever you name it. This Government has stated, industrial tax, July 01 next year for all the big industries and so on, for heavy industries, would deal with that. The system will then move on to commercial properties—after consultation—with a fair valuation, and whether it is 3 per cent, 5 per cent, 6 per cent for residential, eventually in 2017, it will ensure that it is similar, if not exactly, the same as you paid under your land and building taxes. "So if yuh paid \$300, it will be \$300." You will not move from \$300 to \$7,000, like what the PNM was trying to do, and that is the issue. "So do not play semantics with a very technical issue, and claim on de name, property tax is back." What is back is a fair tax, not an inappropriate, unfair, unjustified tax of the People's National Movement.

12.30 p.m.

Dr. Rowley: It is so fair it took four years to come.

Hon. A. Roberts: Talking about that, "It so fair it took four years to come". Unfortunately, every time we deal with matters of economics, appropriation Bills and so on, the Member for Diego Martin West is left wanting. Again, he stated here that the Government's coffers, the tax collection diminished and lost hundreds of millions of dollars because of no property tax.

On the surface that sounds very intelligent because if you multiply by the number of residents in industrial and commercial and so at "X" tax, if "yuh" say "yuh" could have gotten \$300 million a year in that tax, then you have lost, by three years, \$900 million; very good. But, you see, there is a different side, with economics "yuh" always have to flip the coin because if I am not taxed I have

extra money in my pocket. What will I do with that money? I may invest it and create returns and therefore the tax that I end up paying is higher than the property tax. The opportunity cost of not paying the tax may include and increase the investment in the domestic economy and provide the Government with greater revenues.

The Member for Diego Martin West did not mention that at all. He just simplified, “like is a early childhood budget presentation and said yuh doh collect, yuh get zero. It does not work like that. This is from a man who would like to be Prime Minister. [*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: When?

Hon. A. Roberts: Please, people on TV, please. “In de words of de young people, rest meh with dat idea.” [*Crosstalk*]

Now it is amazing, with a straight face, the Member for Diego Martin West talked about all of us going to the Integrity Commission. Well, I am sure he has advance knowledge and is informed because “we doh meet with de chairman at his house to drink tea.” So I would not know. But if it is so we would find out and we would deal with it, but one person who knows about integrity matters is the Member for Diego Martin West having spent most of his career there, and furthermore I “doh” know how he could talk about Integrity Commission. The last time I checked I never see my name in the newspapers for failing to file the declaration with the Integrity Commission, but I saw the Member for Diego Martin West. I hope that you have filed. [*Crosstalk*] Yes, last year in the newspapers, big and bold. I hope you have filed your declarations and so on and have provided the information because you are talking about loot.

I ask the question in this Parliament because you like to ask questions. How does a man who works nowhere buy a X6 BMW? “I doh know. I jus asking because on an MP’s salary yuh cyar buy dat.”

Mr. Speaker: Do not use this debate to impute or imply, in any way, motives that are not honourable to Members of this House. If you want to raise a matter with the Member for Diego Martin West about a car, you bring a substantive Motion. Do not use the budget debate to impugn the character of any hon. Member of this honourable House. Continue, please.

Hon. A. Roberts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was just doing some simple mathematics. I move on.

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. A. ROBERTS]

Friday, September 13, 2013

The Member for Diego Martin West says—and you see, you must not judge others by your own yardstick because he has always been a PNM and will do nothing and would never leave PNM. After he lost badly in 1996, after he was fired by phone, by bMobile and so on, he can do nothing but stay there; no matter how he is disrespected, how he is thrown away, discarded, he needs the balisier. But do not judge the People’s Partnership by your standards that you have become accustomed to; rubbing shoulders with Calder Hart and Mustapha Abdul Hamid—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: “Oh gawd.”

Hon. A. Roberts:—and these people. Do not judge us. He is stating that a \$10 million fund to help people in your constituencies will be fraught with corruption. Maybe so in the PNM constituencies, but when we go to our offices and we meet people—because my father happens to be his constituent, lives right there within 35 seconds, just a little bit more time Tobago got in this budget than it would take to get from the Member for Diego Martin West’s office to “my fadder house”.

Somehow on Tuesday and Saturday when the People’s Partnership MPs go to their offices, on average between 115 to 165 people come to see us. Not one day—I have lived there since 1980, the hon. Member became a Senator in 1987 and a Member of Parliament in 1991—never have I seen a line outside to see him, and the office is small. If you have 100 people coming you would see them.

So maybe he does not know what the people need, but when we meet our constituents, the people need—when they come and a retaining wall “falling down”, and “dey” house, you know, with rain, may come down; when you have a drain that is clogged and causing flooding and so on, it could damage their property or when there are holes in the pavement and so on, we have to, through a whole long process, go and write to the corporation, “hope de corporation take yuh on, and if is a CEO who doh like yuh and de system”, and they do budget and then “yuh” have to go to Finance and nothing gets done.

Eventually, you may serve about 10 per cent of these small issues. But if a Member of Parliament has \$10 million and “tanty comes and says, listen de bridge crossing dat drain has broken down, I cannot get to my house”, the Member of Parliament can put out an invitation in the newspapers for contractors from “de” area, give them the scope of works, they tender on it, three contractors, five contractors, however many, and you have a committee there in your office of your office manager and so on and you award the contract and the work gets done

immediately. Then at the end of the year “yuh subject to all the auditing, all the processes that exist in de Government”, but you will be able to serve people better.

So to hear a “want to be” Prime Minister saying that he “doh” want to serve people, I understand that because I have never seen him sitting down rapping with the people, talking and hearing their problems. Anybody who goes to an MP’s office will know that that \$10 million fund should be \$20 million, for all MPs including PNM MPs, even though they are afraid of themselves because they are talking about corruption in “dey own thing”. [*Crosstalk*]

Well, population, beware, the number one policy of the possible PNM-led Government of the Member for Diego Martin West—you have heard it here for about the third time—is the rapid rail system.

Hon. Member: The return of the rapid rail.

Hon. A. Roberts: The return of the rapid rail, the RRR policy. The return of the “racket” rapid rail policy. And here it is the Member for Diego Martin West sat here and said, listen the first thing the PNM Government would do is start back that rapid rail.

Hon. Member: The “racket” rapid rail.

Hon. A. Roberts: Now, let me refresh your memories, Mr. Speaker and Members. The Member for Diego Martin West quoted quite eloquently, well researched, but by somebody who did not know—in the words of the Member for Diego Martin North/East—the true facts. He quoted and stated that for decades because there are 20,000 commuters and so on rapid rail was coming. He quoted a 2007 survey that said rapid rail is necessary; a feasibility study he quoted from. Very good. There is one problem. A Government in which he sat gave out a contract of \$475 million which has ballooned to \$501 million, \$545 million for that very same feasibility study that they had in “dey hand already”. So he has come to this Parliament and admitted that the PNM Government misappropriated or spent money to the tune of \$545 million for information that existed already. [*Interruption*]

Miss Mc Donald: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 36(5).

Hon. Member: Nonsense.

Miss Mc Donald: That is imputing improper motives.

Hon. A. Roberts: Imputing? It is facts.

Mr. Speaker: I do not think in the context, in which he is making the point that it is. Continue.

Hon. A. Roberts: Maybe, you see, some people sit in this House and maybe they sleep, but the former Minister of Works and Member for Diego Martin North/East, when they brought—in the furore of the JCC and local contractors and when they were saying they wanted local content, they did not have an opportunity to get in and be involved in this rapid rail, in this very House, at another place, the Member for Diego Martin North/East got up—and it is on *Hansard*—and said, it is sour grapes. The local contractors did not get through and it is only sour grapes, and that the feasibility study had been done. Well, we learned that it has been done. We got evidence here today that before phase one of the rapid rail was awarded a feasibility study which was quoted from, ad nauseam, by the Member for Diego Martin West, existed.

Then, subsequently, in this very Parliament—[*Crosstalk*] you had already. You are paying for something—\$545 million—that you had already because the Member for Diego Martin North/East, when questioned—there was a question put in this House about the rapid rail phase one which went to TriniTrain consortium which included Bouygues Batiment, a company called Daneco, which is Dane Harford who seems to be very vociferous about gymnastics and all sorts of things, a Chinese railway company, this consortium won the phase one. When asked what was this phase one, the Member for Diego Martin North/East said, the feasibility study. Now, the Member for Diego Martin West is quoting from a feasibility study that existed pre-\$545 million.

Hon. Member: They had it before.

Hon. A. Roberts: They had it before, and now they are saying that if they ever come back into power “they going down de road with dis rapid rail”.

Now, the Member for Diego Martin West in his big analysis of the rapid rail and why it is necessary did not answer a few questions. One: are Trinbagonians the ones who like to “park up dey car and take public transport? Or do we like to gallery with we x6 and so on and look good driving down de road”. I do not know, we will have to see because how many people—to find out if \$23 billion is feasible—will actually use it? What would be the cost of a person to use? How much would the Government have to subsidize? How many maxi operators will be put out of work because of the rapid rail system? They already have a Calder Hart car park in town where no cars are parked. “Is only la diablesse and dey say that men does hide dey buck dey because it empty. People doh park dey cars in it.”

So in order for rapid rail to work you have to have huge car parks from Sangre Grande, Valencia, D'Abadie/O'Meara, Arima “come down de road. People have to take dey nice ride, wit dey nice tunes, who like to listen to dey soca music and they may not have music. Will they have music on de rapid rail? We doh know. But Trinbagonians like to bounce dey head and going down driving dey car.” They have done none of this, but they come here to say if they ever get back into Government they will continue the corruption of the rapid rail, displace people and spend \$23 billion without [*Desk thumping*] any investigation.

Well, I am sure Bouygues friends, Batiment, Daneco, Dane Harford and others will be happy to hear that and would be pushing for PNM, and we will have to check the campaign finance to see if they will be funding, if that is a method to get finance for elections. Because if you say you are going with a \$23 billion and people must remember—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: People will be lining up.

Hon. A. Roberts:—that after the contract was awarded Bombardier—you all remember that name? Bombardier put out full page advertisements saying the process was flawed, that they did not consider the dual propulsion system because somebody from high told them that that is not industry standard. They sent out full page ads to say that they used the dual propulsion system for two years, which is industry standard in Europe and therefore, they could not understand why somebody from on high would say “doh” use the dual propulsion.

Therefore, Bombardier came down and TriniTrain came up and Bombardier was very upset, but remember the only person who can stop a contract and send out for tender is the Prime Minister—as our Prime Minister has done when media have questioned. She “retender”, no problem, go back out and tender competitively; “nothing wrong with that”. That is what checks and balances are there for.

But remember the former Prime Minister went on a flight when he wanted to buy his plane. What make of plane did he fly about on? Bombardier. Okay. So he could not really speak up if he wanted to, and this is what the PNM is saying, the number one policy “dey” coming back. No wonder the Member is talking about loot. That will be the PNM’s philosophy for election 2015—loot again.

Now, interestingly, the Member for Diego Martin West, I do not know if he consulted with the Member for Diego Martin North/East because on this same rapid rail he stated and I quote, the designs were complete. In May 2010 he said when this Government came in the designs were complete. Staff was selected. People were ready to implement.

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. A. ROBERTS]

Friday, September 13, 2013

Mr. Speaker, if a feasibility study was just awarded in 2009, and completed late 2009—2010, how could designs be completed so fast for a \$23 billion rapid rail? [*Crosstalk*] “You going to build a little house for \$300,000, designs might take 2—3 months.” This Member is saying that designs were complete—feasibility—you know what, Mr. Speaker, a feasibility study is to say, “yuh go out and check and see where de thing could pass, soil test, what design. Yuh going on de ground. Yuh going up in de air. Yuh going through tunnel.” How many people? What sort of cost? What sort of energy? How many people would use it? How many maxi taxis out? This is the feasibility study.

12.45 p.m.

Then the Member for Diego Martin West is saying, six months after that or less, that all the designs were complete. But then he contradicted himself three minutes later, where he said: “We—this People’s Partnership—with our vindictive selves, we only squash the rapid rail because it was a PNM thing. Not because \$23 billion was too ridiculous; not because \$545 million for a feasibility study which did not say anything was totally ludicrous; not because we found it had no value for money, because you do not know who would use it, how much it would cost; not because of those economic reasons, but only because it was a PNM thing and he said we shut it down, all we had to do at that time was tender out for designs. I thought the designs were complete. He is rather confused. Rather confused the Member for Diego Martin West.

Dr. Rowley: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. A. Roberts: I did not interrupt you, have some respect. Your rebranding is not working. I did not interrupt you.

Dr. Moonilal: He wasted Rohan Sinanan—

Hon. A. Roberts: Yeah. The Member for Diego Martin West had the audacity and unmitigated gall to describe the Tamana In tech Park as a PNM brilliant strategy where \$1.5 billion disappeared. Anybody who walked up there in 2010—when we walked to go and see if we could start some auto sport, if you could have seen \$20 million in work, you saw a lot. A total of \$1.5 billion under Ken Julien and with a straight face the Member for Diego Martin West calls that a superlative achievement of the People’s National Movement.

This Minister, when he became Minister of Trade, Industry and Investment [*Points to Mr. Cadiz*] had a bill, with contractors running him down, of \$150

Appropriation Bill, 2013

Friday, September 13, 2013

million still to pay off and a billion dollars to pay off, and the Member for Diego Martin West—[*Crosstalk*] claims that as a brilliant policy in implementation—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the Minister of Sport has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. A. Roberts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I need about three more hours to respond to the Member for Diego Martin West and all the fallacies, and falsehoods and—let me continue. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. McLeod: Vote on another extension.

Hon. A. Roberts: Please do. The Member for Diego Martin West stated, when this Government and the people of Trinidad and Tobago were celebrating the signing of the cross border agreement with Venezuela that will bring great—not only the collaboration between the two countries, but revenue to our country for generations to come and our Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, the Hon. Kevin Ramnarine and the People's Partnership had brought it to fruition and signed it, [*Desk thumping*] you know what the Member for Diego Martin West had the audacity to do? He say: "Is dem idea, PNM idea from 2003." So, therefore tell them that they did it.

The PNM had many great ideas, great plans, Vision 20/20, they implement none. For example, let me just give you an analogy of the argument that the Member for Diego Martin West is using. Our Minister, Kevin Ramnarine brings it, gets in there, negotiates and signs it for Trinidad and Tobago, but PNM want to take credit because in 2003 somebody discussed it could have cross-border negotiations. Well, when I was born in 1969 I came out of two lawyers and they always wanted me to be a lawyer. We planned for me to be a lawyer. I even started law school, but I am not a lawyer now. So I do not know what is the problem now. I cannot stand up here and say give me congratulations for having wanted to be a lawyer. [*Laughter*] The PNM want "pips" for having wanted to be a good government. You have not been. You have been found wanting, you are voted out and you will never come back. [*Desk thumping*] "Ohh my goodness, I doh understand that logic".

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. A. ROBERTS]

Friday, September 13, 2013

Now with a straight face, the Member for Diego Martin West called agriculture—and I saw the former Minister, Arnold Piggott was in the gallery—

Miss Mc Donald: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: Yes, yes, yes. Member, do not refer to members in the gallery, please.

Hon. A. Roberts: Ohhh.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Withdrawn.

Hon. A. Roberts: Withdrawn.

Miss Mc Donald: Standing Orders—

Mr. Speaker: I do not need any help from you, Miss Mc Donald. [*Laughter*] Continue, hon. Member.

Hon. A. Roberts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Agriculture: The former Minister in the PNM—first and foremost, the PNM in all those big budgets, \$42 billion, \$47 billion, \$54 billion—whether it was \$42 billion or \$54 billion they always ignored agriculture. The maximum allocation to agriculture was \$400 million under the PNM.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: “Da is true”.

Hon. A. Roberts: We put \$1.2 billion, and they have the audacity—[*Desk thumping*] to say that we do not care about agriculture. Furthermore, when you talk about vindictiveness which the Member said that we are—acrimony and vindictiveness now and discussion and arguments, the very PNM, former Minister of Agriculture, because the Member for Diego Martin West fell out with the Member for San Fernando East, in April 2010 the PNM was building a fish depot, a fish market in Carenage which is in the constituency of Diego Martin West, and because he fell out with the Member for San Fernando East, Arnold Piggott stopped the project and they come here to talk about vindictiveness.

Miss Mc Donald: Mr. Speaker, I stand on Standing Order 36(5).

Mr. Speaker: No, overruled. Continue. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. A. Roberts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I commend the Ministry of Sport for our all-encompassing healthy lifestyle in conjunction with the Ministry of Health getting people out to the recreational grounds to do activities and get fit and lose weight and so on, because the Member for Port of Spain South is obviously becoming fitter. She jumps up very quickly. [*Laughter and crosstalk*]

Miss Mc Donald: He fixed no grounds in my constituency.

Mr. Sharma: Which ground you using?

Hon. A. Roberts: So the PNM, stopped “dey” own fish depot in their own Member’s constituency. Who can remember, those of you—I am the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara touching Arima, who can remember—the days of the PNM when the former Member, Penelope Beckles was the MP and she fell out of favour. “Not a road; not a pot hole in Arima,” and the PNM was there and they have the audacity to come here and talk about vindictiveness. “Not a road”. The Member for Arima had to make the former Minister of Works and Infrastructure fix a bridge, 40 years in Mt. Pleasant.

Biche High School, “dey is lagahoo and douen” and so on. Yes, they could call people, our citizens that, but the school was opened for our children down in Biche under this Government. [*Desk thumping*] It is amazing that the Member for Diego Martin West talked about planning—Town and Country Planning—and following procedures, yet he went on to try and build a goat farm in Tobago without requisite planning.

Mr. Speaker: Member, Member, please, I have made the point clear, do not impute improper motives to Members of this House. Bring a substantive Motion. Move on, please.

Hon. A. Roberts: Moving right along, Mr. Speaker. The arrogance of the Member for Diego Martin West, the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy says that “Tobago has received \$3.2 billion or \$3.3 billion, about 5.9 per cent of the total allocation.” But you know the PNM arrogance today we hear it. Because \$800 million of that comes from other Ministries of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago the PNM say, minus that, “it doh count because it doh come from the PNM”. Understand this, so if in the Ministry of Sport as an example, for our recreational grounds, in conjunction with the THA they have recognized four recreational grounds for upgrade at an average of \$3.5 million, when the Minister of Sport of the People’s Partnership who is the Government for Trinidad and Tobago completes those recreation grounds according to the PNM: “Da is work that doh count”.

Hon. Member: “Doh worry about dat”.

Hon. A. Roberts: “Doh worry about dat. That is not money because they doh come from the PNM.” Such abject arrogance! To the people of Tobago, the

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. A. ROBERTS]

Friday, September 13, 2013

Government of Trinidad and Tobago will work in conjunction with the THA to give you services above and beyond what you got from the PNM Central Government.

Mr. Speaker, I now move on to my contribution. [*Laughter*] I had to respond in detail—a brief rebuttal. Let me move quickly and first of all commend the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy and the People’s Partnership Government—[*Desk thumping*—for the presentation of a budget which shows and which unfortunately for those want-to-be politicians who when it have a race an electoral race—they “doh” put up a candidate, namely the leader of the MSJ, Mr. David Abdullah or St. Joseph—I hope he can find a candidate—who stated that this Government will be so irresponsible, we will come like the PNM of old and because there is an election, come, forget all the macroeconomic principles, forget the growth strategy, forget sustainable jobs, forget all of that and just give goodies, goodies, goodies. I hope the media will ask him where are the goodies, because this Government is about a plan taking Trinidad and Tobago, keeping the economy strong, growing and providing a sustainable future for our citizens. The budget is doing that. Not only have we done that but the openness and collaborative approach of the Minister, and “doh” take my words for it because I am biased. I am a Member of the Government and I am totally biased. But let us take the words of Mr. Norman Sabga, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of ANSA McAL Group of Companies who said:

“We generally view the Minister’s openness with the public in the lead up to the Budget on matters expected to be contained therein as a positive and hope this trend of collaboration continues...” [*Desk thumping*]

That comes from Mr. Norman A. Sabga, Chairman and Chief Executive ANSA McAL, and is printed in the Ernst and Young Analysis of the Budget.

Now reporting on performance: The reporting of performance by the hon. Minister is unprecedented. Many sectors of the society have always said in budgets, please try to account for what you have done, what you said you would do last year and what you have done this year. The PNM brought budget after budget and regurgitated the same thing, Mamoral Dam, Mamoral Dam, this dam and nothing done and never reported anything. This oncology centre, oncology centre, nothing. But this Minister has given an analysis of what happened, what he wanted to do, what happened, what did not happen in the last fiscal period and he must be commended for such. [*Desk thumping*] And he was commended for such

by Gerry Brooks the CEO of ANSA McAL and also the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce, who stated:

“The Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce is generally pleased that the Minister of Finance has delivered a National Budget in a concise manner.

We commend him on listing the achievements and we are happy that he incorporated a report on the progress of government initiatives over the past year...”

Furthermore, when you say and you talk about performance—you see the PNM they talk, they talk a good game, talk, real talk, but then they do nothing. Vision 2020, good talk, not implemented; they hold it now and add on 10 years and call it 2030 and hope to come here to talk and not implement. That will never happen. But in this Ernst and Young analysis they will say fiscal measures from last year’s budget, what were implemented and what were not.

The Minister of Finance and the Economy, in the petroleum tax reform he enacted the Finance Act, 2013—so it was enacted—the following measures: Harmonization of supplemental petroleum; introduction of special SPT; establishment of uplift of 40 per cent; enacted. In other words, done. The fuel subsidy—reduction of the fuel subsidy, enacted in Legal Notice No. 354, 2012. The exemption on sale of newly constructed houses, enacted in Finance Act, 2013. Tax exemption, so all of these—yes pain, performance hurts those who just talk, so look at it here and you can read it, all the performance and the indicators of goals from the budget 2012/2013 as done by this Government. They talk, we deliver. [*Desk thumping*] All the macroeconomic indicators are sound. The Hon. Member for Diego Martin West stayed clear of those because to say the truth hurts, he had to present a picture of doom and gloom, and cannot be honest so he had to look and pick and deal. He could not deal with the actual facts presented by the Minister of Finance and the Economy.

1.00 p.m.

We have had four consecutive quarters of growth. “All yuh could pound de table, yuh know. All yuh eh understand how hard dat was to do!” [*Desk thumping*] Four! “Doh fall asleep like de PNM in de Senate, yuh know!” Wake up, my colleagues!

Previously, under the PNM, they finished off their term before they were booted out of office by the people of Trinidad and Tobago with six consecutive quarters of negative growth. [*Desk thumping*] And “dey” had a Central Bank Governor, who is out now, who said—”he look out his window and doh see a recession. Me eh know what—anyway, leh meh move on, yes.”

Hon. Member: “Which window was dat?”

Hon. A. Roberts: The deficit spending has been reduced—has been reduced—and we are moving towards balanced budget, 2016. Inflation, at 5.6 per cent. Under the PNM it averaged 9.8 per cent and peaked at 14.8 per cent. Inflation—food price inflation, under the PNM, with their \$400 million paltry allocation to agriculture, was a whopping 34 per cent! It has dropped—34 per cent food price inflation under the PNM. It has dropped to single digits. [*Desk thumping*] But the Member for Diego Martin West would not tell you that. “He doh like dat.”

Full employment at 5.0 per cent and the Minister of Finance and the Economy has said—and we have started to shift labour resources from the CEPEP and URP with skills training and talent identification into the more sustainable jobs in the private sector. [*Desk thumping*] That process is ongoing and will ensure our citizens a more sustainable future.

Non-oil revenue: I say this one with pride because for the last few decades, as long as I could understand English, I have been hearing the economists, the professors stating, “We must diversify the economy; we must diversify the economy; oil and gas will eventually go and we must diversify”. Non-oil energy sector, projected revenue 2013—2014, \$33 billion. [*Desk thumping*] What does this mean? The oil projected revenue, \$23 billion—that is our other sectors: manufacturing, our IT section, sport tourism, tourism, all of these other sectors are contributing in higher proportions to our revenue streams, and that means that the future for Trinidad and Tobago is getting that much more secure rather than depending on oil and gas only.

Now, I do not like to compare Trinidad and Tobago to our Caribbean neighbours. Because of our God-given gifts of oil and gas—natural resources—it is sometimes unfair. However, when you factor in our gift of oil and gas and our curse of the PNM, it equates, and therefore I can compare. So when you have oil and gas, and PNM policies that have led to the CL Financial debacle, in which the Minister of Finance who sat here before, was a shareholder; sat down in a meeting with two other shareholders and put this country in a noose under the guise of an MoU to bail out—that the PNM was going to bail out CL Financial, and for the Member for Diego Martin West to claim that somebody on this side said that they would only spend \$5 billion or \$10 billion is disingenuous.

When we came into Government, the Government was already bound through the former Minister of Finance, through Andre Montiel and Duprey, who sat in a

meeting with the then unfortunate Central Bank Governor, and created an MoU which ensured that the taxpayers would have to foot the bill to pull out a company that could have presented systemic risk to the entire economy of Trinidad and Tobago. And then the MoU stated, after the Government bailout, all of the assets of the company that the PNM Minister signed, would go back to the very people who brought us into this situation.

This Government, under the Minister of Finance and the Economy, has ensured that this will not happen; that the taxpayers will recoup their money that was utilized for the bailout of CL Financial, and I give this Government kudos for bringing that \$24 billion situation down to a rest. Due to that increase in expenditure because of the incompetence of the PNM, the debt-to-GDP ratio went up from 24.4 per cent in 2008 to 44.5 per cent now, and the Member for Diego Martin West says that we, the Government, have been spending wildly and therefore the debt-to-GDP ratio has gone up. What he failed to say was the truth. The truth is that the debt-to-GDP ratio, the bulk of that increase, was due to the CL Financial bailout which the PNM put this country in, and had to go across to the debt profile of Trinidad and Tobago.

Do not take my word for it, because the Member for Diego Martin West attempts to speak and bring facts that do not exist. The Clico resolution presented by Ernst & Young, of which there are many notable executives: Wade George, tax director; Gregory Hannays, tax director and so on—the Clico resolution, this is what they say about it, not the Minister of Sport and Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara or the People's Partnership—independent people:

“We are nearing the fifth anniversary of the collapse of the CL Financial empire. The impact of this event on the local economy cannot be underestimated. The total cost of Government's bailout at the end of 2012 is reported to approach \$19.7 billion, representing some 13.5% of total GDP. In this regard, the country's public sector debt to GDP ratio has increased from 24.4% in 2008 to 44.5% in 2012. Commenting on this increase in debt levels, Kester Thompson, Richard Cassie and Joseph Cotton conclude that:

‘Unlike the experience of most countries in the region, the main impetus for the rise in the debt was the Government's bailout to CLICO rather than borrowing for debt financing. Whilst Government intervention helped to prevent a systematic crisis, the fiscal cost of the bailout was significant.’”

So do not come here and suggest that the debt to GDP has gone up because we are spending, and corrupt and all that. The debt to GDP went up because you had a

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. A. ROBERTS]

Friday, September 13, 2013

Minister of Finance who did not disclose that she was an owner, sat down with two other owners and sold out the country for \$24 billion [*Desk thumping*] and we have to clean it up! And we have to clean it up! We have cleaned it up. All of those who have a deposit of \$75,000 and under have gotten their money; the CL instrument has been floated on the Stock Exchange and, of course, the First Citizens divestment has brought revenue to Trinidad and Tobago. So prudent financial management, moving this economy forward in a meaningful way, getting value for money for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Interruption*]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: They talk, we deliver.

Hon. A. Roberts: They talk, we deliver, exactly! [*Desk thumping*] And in this, the Member for Diego Martin West has the audacity to talk about CL Financial, when one of his main advisors and the PRO of the PNM was a director of CIB. Why does he not get some more information from that Senator to discuss what this Government has to do when there was mismanagement in the private sector which included his PRO—current PRO of the PNM? Let him give him an update on what decisions were taken at CIB to cause its collapse.

You sit as a director, collapse a small bank, and you want to sit in the seat of the Government in charge of the Treasury? Or in the words of a great PNM former Senator, “de Chezry?” [*Laughter*] I think not. If you cannot manage small, “doh come big.”

Hon. Member: Very profound. [*Laughter*]

Hon. A. Roberts: This Government has settled—imagine the PNM talking about meeting with labour; they love labour; they like labour; they want to join and hug up. [*Minister laughs*] This Government has settled 68 [*Desk thumping*] wage negotiations that were left undone, unsettled, by the PNM!

In this last fiscal package, \$1.8 billion went to the people and workers of Trinidad and Tobago! [*Desk thumping*] We settled wage negotiations from 2008—2011 that the PNM left. “Dey doh like labour; dey didn’t like labour; dey didn’t negotiate. Dey left everyting undone. This Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise; this Minister of Finance and the Economy, have settled 68. Dat means money in de pockets of our people.”

It leads me to believe “dat de PNM doh like people, and dey stand up here and talk about dey want to meet wit labour? Meet wit labour to tell dem what? Dat yuh doh like dem? Yuh could send dem a text.”

Appropriation Bill, 2013

Friday, September 13, 2013

Furthermore, the balance of payments, we have heard in this Parliament, no foreign direct investment, no plan. Well, foreign direct investment, 2011, US \$1.8 billion; 2012, \$2.5 billion and projected to reach \$3.5 billion. What does this mean? Jobs, jobs, jobs, for our people, an economy moving in the right direction despite global hard—shocks after shocks; hard times. But this economy is in safe hands, moving from negative growth to positive growth and job creation.

With a straight face, the Member for Diego Martin West spoke about procurement legislation. PNM came into power December 24, 2001 on moral and spiritual values because of questions of procurement. They remained in power from December 25, 2001—May 23, 2010—no procurement legislation! Nothing! They did a White Paper and a Green Paper, then “hand” it to Calder Hart who said, “Ay, doh put dat nowhere”, and throw it away, and now they have the audacity here to talk about us.

We are in Government three years, we brought legislation; we put it before the House; [*Desk thumping*] we called a joint select committee; “de PNM say dey not comin; we still went through with Minister of Planning to bring it, and it is right here now to come back”. In three years, procurement legislation, [*Desk thumping*] and the PNM of Calder Hart, Ken Julien, Arthur Lok Jack, Utharo Rao, Garcia, Mustapha Abdul-Hamid, all of them have the audacity to talk about procurement legislation. Shame!

Hon. Member: What a shame.

Hon. A. Roberts: This Government has performed, not only in Port of Spain. “We doh need a Ministry of Rural Development like the Member for Diego Martin West.” The Member for Diego Martin West needs a Ministry of Diego Martin West “because dey doh see him”. But this Government just read out some of “dem”: provided 70,000 laptops to children who the Member for Diego Martin West described as “duncey-head” children; established the Children’s Life Fund, eighteen lives saved; children getting close to \$1 million to save their lives.

“Yuh know what de PNM, which dey bringin back?—Remember dey said today dey comin back wit de same ting? Yuh know what dey bringin back? Jerry Narace wit \$60,000!”

Mr. Sharma: Shame!

Hon. A. Roberts: “Sir, Sir, my child needs a liver transplant. In Argentina it is costing \$1.2 million. “Take \$60,000. That is the Government policy. That is all

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. A. ROBERTS]

Friday, September 13, 2013

we do.” That is what they coming back with. “So do not put God out yuh thoughts and vote red, yuh know, because what is green would eventually turn yellow when it ripe.”

So understand, COSTATT, UTT—“ah cyar even—in sport, leh meh just say in sport—ah cyar even get to talk sports, but leh me just say, despite all de misinformation from the PNM saying this Minister doh like sport and so on”, from fiscal 2002—2007, the then PNM Minister was the hon. Roger Boynes. He gave to sporting activities, donations to sporting bodies and to the people, \$100 million over that five-year period. Very good, Roger Boynes; well done. Unfortunately for Roger Boynes, in two years, 2011—2013 that this Minister has been there, we have given to sporting bodies and communities across Trinidad and Tobago—in two years—\$176 million. [*Desk thumping*]

The PNM five years was \$100 million, in two years, the Partnership, \$176 million. Yet they have their PNM people on radio saying, what? “De Minister is de Minister ah swimming.” Yes, ask “de people out dere.” In every single sport; in the Elite Athlete Programme this year, we have given over \$8 million to athletes, including \$300,000 to Jehue Gordon, our World Championship Medalist, [*Desk thumping*] Dillon Carter, \$200,000—over \$8 million! Under the PNM it was down by \$4 million.

Gary Hunt, the former Minister of Sport, in the NPI vote, used to send back to the Treasury \$5 million for giving out sports day trophies and awards to people across the country. This Minister did not give back nutten. He came with a mid-term review and get an extra 23 to help people.” Over 1,700 community groups and organizations [*Desk thumping*] get help across—for their sport day, family day, trophies, medals, equipment, People’s Partnership is the Government for de whole country, not de Government for Port of Spain only”. [*Desk thumping*]

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

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, this sitting is suspended for lunch. We shall resume at 2.15 p.m.

1.15 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

2.15 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. NiLeung Hypolite (Laventille West): Thank you kindly, Mr. Speaker. Let me first start by extending to the people of the Diego Martin region my sympathy for what they are going through at this point in time.

Mr. Speaker, it is this Government that promised that flooding will be a thing of the past—[*Interruption*]

Miss Mc Donald: That is it.

Mr. N. Hypolite:—but what is taking place at this point in time, is Diego Martin and the region of Diego Martin being flooded out. Let me also extend my condolence to the people who would have lost their loved ones over the three years, and even before that, because it is this Government that said crime and murders will be a thing of the past, and on a daily basis you are seeing more and more persons being murdered.

Mr. Speaker, let me also apologize to the people of Trinidad and Tobago for the traffic situation they are faced with on a daily basis because again, it is this Governemnt that said traffic will be a thing of the past. And, of course, Mr. Speaker, I wish also to apologize to the people of the Ministry of Sport because one would have expected to hear the Minister of Sport go deeper into the issues, the policies of the Ministry of Sport. I was expecting that, but rather I think we need to rename him the Minister of macoeconomics. [*Desk thumping and laughter*]

Mr. Imbers: Maco. Maco He is a maco.

Mr. N. Hypolite: Mr. Speaker, before I go deeper into my contribution, I just want to respnd to a number of matters raised by the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara. He said that the fishing depot in Diego Martin—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Roberts: No, Carenage.

Mr. N. Hypolite:—in Carenage was closed down. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Roberts: April 10.

Mr. Hypolite: April 10.

Mr. Roberts: 2010.

Mr. Hypolite: 2010.

Mr. Roberts: PNM.

Mr. Hypolite: PNM.

Mr. Roberts: Yes. [*Laughter*]

Mr. N. Hypolite: But you know what, Mr. Speaker, it is this Government, it is this UNC-led Government, who in 2011, 2012, 2013 and we are going into 2014, that would have done absolutely nothing to see that fishing depot continued. Absolutely nothing! So we laugh because under Arnold Piggott it was stopped—Arnold Piggott being a member of the People’s National Movement, a proud member of the People’s National Movement—but in 2011, 2012, 2013 and we are entering 2014, not a single piece of work was done on that fishing depot.

Mr. Speaker, all we would have heard from the Member throughout his entire contribution was Calder Hart, Uthara Rao—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Rowley: Ken Julien.

Mr. N. Hypolite:—Ken Julien, and 90 per cent the Member for Diego Martin West. Ninety per cent of his contribution was based on the Member for Diego Martin West. We heard—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Rowley: And my goat.

Mr. N. Hypolite: Yes! Ninety per cent about the Member for Diego Martin West and his goat, but we heard absolutely nothing, Mr. Speaker, about the Malabar F.C. Club, nothing about boxing—[*Interruption*]

Miss Hospedales: Tell us about that.

Mr. N. Hypolite:—nothing about football, basketball, the Hoop of Life, nothing along that line, only about Calder Hart, Uthara Rao and the Member for Diego Martin West.

Mr. Speaker, when we look at the budget figures for the past couple years, we would see that 2000-2001 there was a \$13.6 billion budget; 2001-2002, a \$15.8 billion budget;—both under the United National Congress administration—2002-2003, \$20 billion, PNM; 2003-2004, \$22.3 billion, PNM; 2004-2005, \$27.9 billion, PNM; 2005-2006, \$34.1 billion, PNM; 2006-2007, \$38 billion, PNM; 2007-2008, \$42.2 billion, PNM; 2008-2009, \$49.4 billion, PNM; 2009-2010, \$44.3 billion, PNM; all adding up to \$278.2 billion, People’s National Movement. Mr. Speaker, 2010-2011, we would have seen under the People’s Partnership, the UNC-led Government, a \$49 billion budget; 2011-2012, a \$54.6 billion budget; 2012-2013, \$58.4 billion budget, all adding up to some \$22.3 billion, when you also include this budget of \$61 billion.

The People’s National Movement would have worked with an average of some \$35 billion over our eight years of governance. This UNC-led Government will be working with an average of \$56 billion over their four years of

governance. And what would we have seen under the People's National Movement, Mr. Speaker? We would have seen development taking place in this country because we had a vision and we continue to have a vision, a vision of which the Member for Diego Martin West, the Opposition Leader, the Leader of the People's National Movement would have started to articulate to the people of Trinidad and Tobago in his response.

Mr. Speaker, between 2002 to 2010, we would have seen the construction, the opening of NAPA, the southern academy, Hyatt—this same financial towers that we are—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Roberts: You say that already.

Mr. N. Hypolite:—in at this point time.

Mr. Roberts: “All yuh say that already.”

Mr. N. Hypolite: We would have seen the construction of three community centres in Mayaro. So say, thanks, Member for Mayaro and stop talking across the floor. You would have seen, Mr. Speaker, over 20,000 houses being built in this country, the increase in old age pension, the birth of CEPEP, the Government campus, Aranguez overpass, the Uriah Butler Interchange.

Mr. Speaker, we have to remind the people of Trinidad and Tobago of the things that would have taken place in this country from 2002 to 2010, because this Government tends to put in the minds of the people that the People's National Movement administration would have done absolutely nothing.

Mr. Speaker, we would have seen the commencement of the reduction in crime from 2008, the water taxis, the increase in buses, free education from nursery to tertiary. Let us not forget the early childhood centres, the customs and excise complex, the police stations that would have been built, social services. Mr. Speaker, you have seen development taking place. It is only under the People's National Movement administration that you can see development taking place in this country. [*Desk thumping*] This Government has a tendency of fooling the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

The People's National Movement in 2009 would have spoken about property tax, and by all means, a number of persons throughout the country decided that they did not want this property tax, and they voted the People's National Movement out of office in 2010. It was the Member for St. Augustine who walked up and down Trinidad and Tobago talking about no property tax; he is against property tax; property tax is a no, no. Property tax, property tax, property tax.

Miss Hospedales: Axe the tax.

Mr. N. Hypolite: Axe the tax. And it was in 2011, Mr. Speaker, that we saw the property tax coming back. It came back and this is exactly what transpired. This is exactly what transpired. Whereby an individual would have been paying some 3.5 per cent on the rental value of their property, under this Government's tax system that was laid in this House in 2011—it came just around Carnival time—they would have been paying 7.5 per cent of the market value, and this, Mr. Speaker—again I want to remind the people of Trinidad and Tobago what would have happened then if they had continued. And thanks to the same Member for Diego Martin West who stopped it, and he stopped it by voicing his dissatisfaction of this system.

A monthly rental value of \$1,500 under the PNM tax system, that individual would have paid \$486 a year. Under this Government's tax system in 2011, that same individual would have had to pay some \$1,215. Monthly value of \$3,000, that individual would have had to pay \$972. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Indarsingh: Where you get that from?

Mr. N. Hypolite: Go and do some research. Under this Government, their 2011 tax system, that person would have had to pay some \$2,430. And if the monthly value would have been \$5,000, then under the PNM property tax system, \$1,620. Under this UNC-led Government, they would have had to pay \$4,050.

Mr. Speaker, thanks to the same Member of whom the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara spent his entire contribution speaking about, the Member for Diego Martin West, it came to an end and the people of Trinidad and Tobago were saved having to pay this exorbitant amount of property taxes.

2.30 p.m.

But the thing about it, Mr. Speaker, is when you go through this year's budget, the budget speaks about the implementation of the land and building taxes to commence July 2014, and it was the Prime Minister who, after the presentation of the budget, indicated to the people of Trinidad and Tobago that it will not be a property tax, it will be an industrial tax, and after the industrial tax, we will then move to a commercial tax and then to agriculture and residential taxes.

Mr. Speaker, whether it be industrial tax, commercial tax, land and building taxes, at the end of the day, we are talking about property tax. And again, it is this same Government who said no taxes. In fact, they went a stage further, they said "no new taxes". The tax is back. [*Desk thumping*] The tax is back. [*Desk*

thumping] And guess what, Mr. Speaker? They have not indicated to the people of Trinidad and Tobago exactly how this tax system will be affecting their pockets; have not said that at all! We wait to see how this tax system will be working out.

Mr. Speaker, when you go through the budget statement, you heard absolutely nothing about the youth of Trinidad and Tobago; you heard absolutely nothing. It is our young people, Mr. Speaker, who are dying every day. It is our young people who we need to concentrate on, who we need to invest in—our young people, our youth. Absolutely nothing in the budget except to say that they just barely made mention of CCC, MYLAT, MYPART, cadet force, just barely made mention of those organizations. Those organizations that concentrate on our young people are organizations that we need to put a lot more concentration on and invest in so as to make sure that our young people do not become another statistic of this country. Mr. Speaker, we need to invest in our young people.

We look at the rapid rail system. The Member for Diego Martin West made mention that one of the things that the People's National Movement administration will be looking at is the rapid rail system. I spoke about the rapid rail system before. I spoke about it before. The rapid rail system was advanced to that level whereby we had identified exactly where the various lines would be running, exactly where the hubs would be. We would have identified with the cars for the rail. We had done extensive work with respect to the rapid rail system. A lot of work, a lot of work was done with respect to the rapid rail system.

But the thing about it, Mr. Speaker, is that we had a comprehensive plan with respect to transportation for this country. We did not only look at the rapid rail system, we also looked at the fast ferries, we looked at the water taxi, we looked at even how to merge the maxis and the taxis, all right, with the entire plan for national transportation for Trinidad and Tobago. So we had a national transportation plan in place.

We looked at the highways and just to put on record once again, we had looked at the San Fernando to Mayaro freeway; we looked at the San Fernando to Point Fortin through La Brea highway; the Wallerfield to Manzanilla highway; the Caroni to Piarco highway; the Port of Spain to Chaguaramas causeway and the Curepe to Princes Town/Rio Claro highway. We had a comprehensive development plan for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and as such, I do not see any reason this Government could not have gone forward with a number of programmes and policies that we would have laid in this House, in Cabinet, for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[MR. HYPOLITE]

Friday, September 13, 2013

Mr. Speaker, let us talk about growth poles because the issue of growth poles is something that would have been made mention of since 2010. I want to speak about the growth poles as I also speak about east Port of Spain and I speak also about urban renewal. In 2010, we heard about growth poles; in 2011, we heard again in the budget, growth poles; in 2012, growth poles; in 2013, growth poles, and again, Mr. Speaker, we have not seen anything of significance taking place with respect to the whole question of growth poles.

But, Mr. Speaker, it is under, again, the People's National Movement administration that we would have put together a company, a special purpose company, by the name of the East Port of Spain Development Company Limited to look at the development of east Port of Spain. Mr. Speaker, a comprehensive plan would have been put together. Consultation with at least 19 communities would have been held. I just want to make mention of one particular project; one particular project and I want to look at the project that was put down for the Beetham.

This project, if continued from where it had stopped in 2010, would have seen development taking place in and around the Beetham community. I want to make mention of the scope of works of that particular project on the Beetham. We had what was called the park-and-ride transportation hub. That was a project designed for the parking of vehicles and the shuttling of persons from that hub to Port of Spain. It would have created employment for the people in the Beetham and around.

Mr. Speaker, the Sports and Cultural Complex, which would have included playing fields and sporting facilities to international standard, spectator facilities, cultural complex with community rooms, performing and practice facilities, indoor sports hall, retail concourse including food court for the community of the Beetham. Residential accommodation: upgrade existing housing in Beetham Phase Four, replacement housing for residents of Phase Five and parts of Phase Four in low-rise medium density units, temporary relocation housing sites. This, Mr. Speaker, is just one project that we were looking at for that particular community. In addition to that, we also looked at drains, recreation facilities, community infrastructure works, all under that special purpose company known as the East Port of Spain Development Company Limited.

Mr. Speaker, right now we have the Ministry of Local Government and there are a couple of questions that we need to ask with respect to that particular Ministry. When you look at that particular Ministry—the Ministry of the Local

Appropriation Bill, 2013

Friday, September 13, 2013

Government—Mr. Speaker, we are speaking about local government transformation, we are speaking about proportional representation, but here it is you have the Ministry of Local Government in 2013 having an expenditure of \$1.926 billion, but in 2014, a decrease by some \$21 million to \$1.905 billion. When you go deeper into the Draft Estimates of Expenditure for fiscal 2014, you would also see, Mr. Speaker, that also in the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, a decrease—sorry, the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development—*[Interruption]* All right, you would have seen a decrease in their development programme from \$4 million to \$1 million, and you ask yourself the question: what or why that decrease, whereby we are supposed to be spending more time concentrating on our young people?

2.45 p.m.

When you look at the draft estimates of development for local government, when you also look at proportional representation, I just want to look at the region of Siparia. In the region of Siparia you have an electorate of some 68,875; in the region of San Juan/Laventille, you have an electorate of 133,521; but when, Mr. Speaker, you look at the development programme, you will see for Siparia an increase from \$17,693,000 to \$28,850,000, an increase of some \$9 million; but Mr. Speaker, that is to service some 68,875 persons. A corporation such as that of the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation that has 133,521 you would have seen an increase—and I have to say thanks to them because last budget there was a decrease, this one we have an increase from \$15.3 million, up to \$18 million, an increase of approximately \$3 million. But it is an increase of \$3 million to service some 133,000 persons, almost twice the amount that Siparia has and Siparia had a \$9 million increase.

Mr. Speaker, one needs to ask the question: How are we to look at proportional representation in the whole context of equity? In the whole context of equity, okay? Mr. Speaker, we need to have those things answered.

When you look at all 14 regions, you would see Port of Spain City Corporation—no increases, no decreases—\$20.6 million in 2013, same thing, more or less, in 2014. Arima, \$11.5 million, 2013; \$17 million in 2014. The number of persons in the Arima Borough is 26,910. So here it is in the Borough of Arima, you have 26,910 persons—*[Interruption]* and they get an increase of \$6 million but in San Juan/Laventille you have 133,000 and only \$3 million.

Mr. Roberts: Thanks to the Member for giving way. Would you have information on the square kilometres or square miles of each corporation?

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[MR. HYPOLITE]

Friday, September 13, 2013

Because that may impact, rather than just the population figures, the area that the corporations have to service.

Mr. N. Hypolite: We are also looking at development. We are talking about development. We are talking about 133,000 persons living in an area. They have houses to take care of, roads to take care of, drainage, garbage removal, versus 26,000 persons. And when you look at the Borough of Arima with 26,000 persons with the same houses to take care of, roads to take of, drainage to take care of; why? Outside of that, it is more or less bush. You can get CEPEP to go and cut that bush for them. “Yeah?” Let CEPEP go and cut the bush. So I probably need to get some more clarification on that, Mr. Speaker, not forgetting that proportional representation was never part of this Government’s policy/plan, especially when they went through all of the various consultations, as they said that they did.

Mr. Speaker, let us talk a little bit about housing. I want to speak a little bit about housing because it is this Government that said that they will be building some 6,000 houses every year. I want to quote from the *Newsday* of September 05, 2010, and it says:

“We are looking at constructing over 6,000 units in the next year...”

And this, Mr. Speaker was the Minister of Housing and the Environment, at that point in time, Roodal Moonilal, speaking to the *Newsday*:

“The Government plans to construct over 6,000 housing units throughout the country in the upcoming year...”

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development has a very important unit inside there called HDC. And HDC is responsible for providing low income houses for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. They are also responsible for assisting the various needy persons with a grant to repair their homes, whether it is roof, what have you, what have you not.

When, Mr. Speaker, we look at the *Social Sector Investment Programme* and even when we look at the public sector programme, we would see, Mr. Speaker, that—and I want to go to page 77, more specifically page 77 of the *Public Sector Investment Programme 2014*—where it states that: “In fiscal 2013, two hundred and fifty (250) home improvement subsidies were disbursed at a cost of \$18 million.”; but it also states that the disbursement is supposed to be \$50,000 per person. My calculation tells me that when you multiply \$50,000 by 250 persons you will come up with \$12.5 million. Question: if \$18 million was disbursed in that same year, where is the difference—the \$5.5 million? Where has that gone to? I will like some clarification on that one.

Also, if we turn to page 78, item 230, it speaks of a maximum of \$15,000 per household for the housing grant. It also speaks of some 1,157 persons being given this grant. It also says that: In fiscal 2013, \$25.0 million in the form of one thousand, one hundred and fifty-seven (1,157) grants were disbursed.” My calculation also tells me that \$15,000 by 1,157 will give you a figure of \$17.355 million. And I ask the question again, the \$7.645 million, where did that money go? Because I am certain we could have gotten some 509 additional persons being given this grant so as to benefit from the Government and what the Government has to offer to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the question: Where are all these houses, these 6,000-plus houses that the Government promised the people of Trinidad and Tobago? When will they start? In fact, it is sad to note that under the *Social Sector Investment Programme 2014*, page 62 it states that: “The Corporation’s target is 6,500 houses annually, which leaves a shortfall of 7,500”—houses—”a year.”

There are over 150,000 persons, whose names are on a database, seeking housing, but yet we are being told that there is a shortfall of some 7,500 houses; as a shortfall. If that is the case, I would like to get some clarification, once again, from the Minister of Housing and Urban Development, as to how he intends to solve this problem.

He has a shortfall of 7,500 houses and he intends to build 6,000 houses every year, which means therefore that this fiscal year 2013/2014, the people of Trinidad and Tobago expect to see some 13,500 houses built. Failing that, we will be in a worse off position and then we will need the People’s National Movement to come and solve the problem for you all, of which we will be doing that very, very soon. [*Crosstalk and desk thumping*] Very, very soon.

Hon. Member: Very soon.

Mr. N. Hypolite: Mr. Speaker, I am hearing this whole question of cable cars; a cable car running from Picton down to the Central Market. I ask the question: What is the thinking of the Government at this point in time? You see, Mr. Speaker, when we speak about urban renewal and growth poles and stuff like that, we have to bear in mind that the People’s National Movement had, and we still do have, a comprehensive development plan for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

When we look at the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation, Mr. Speaker, they have a strategic plan for the development of that corporation. I do not think

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[MR. HYPOLITE]

Friday, September 13, 2013

that the Ministry of Local Government, I do not think the Minister of Local Government, I am also certain that the Member for Moruga/Tableland will also agree with me, because he was also one of the members of the Princes Town Corporation that would have been asked to put together comprehensive development programmes for their regions.

This is San Juan/Laventille. There is one for Port of Spain; there is supposed to be one for Siparia; one for Couva; one for Princes Town; one for Point Fortin; one for Diego Martin; it is here. It is the same way that we have a comprehensive—a document much thicker than this—for the rapid rail.

Hon. Member: What about the “Su?”

Mr. N. Hypolite: And we have one for the “Su” because he probably needs to be sued. [*Laughter and crosstalk*] Mr. Speaker, we also have one for the upgrade, the development of Port of Spain and if you look at this particular document you would have seen, you know, transformation for the entire Port of Spain region.

Mr. Speaker, the People’s National Movement has always been, and will continue to stand up for development for this country; meaningful development, meaningful development, Mr. Speaker.

3.00 p.m.

I also want to make mention of another programme that was brought—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Laventille West has expired.

Motion made: That the hon. Member’s speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Miss M. Mc Donald*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. N. Hypolite: Thank you kindly, Mr. Speaker. Thank you kindly Madam Chief Whip and all Members on both sides.

Mr. Roberts: “Yuh going good.”

Mr. N. Hypolite: Mr. Speaker, I was speaking about development, and it was brought to my attention, quite recently, about this company called Trinidad Dry Dock Company Limited, which would have put forward a proposal and they are waiting now on the Government to do the necessary memorandum of agreement, so as to create employment and to create development, just off Sea Lots, that will

assist the people of Sea Lots, Beetham, Laventille and the greater east Port of Spain, in terms of socio-economics, employment, putting moneys in these individuals' pockets so that we can see some kind of movement taking place within our economy.

Mr. Speaker, what is this? This is a multimillion-dollar project that has three key sectors:

1. dry docking facilities;
2. a marine industrial park;
3. residential and commercial centre.

I am asking the Government to take a very serious look at this project. Instead of trying to put a cable car to run from Picton down to the Central Market; look at this project, this Trinidad Dry Dock project, that will create employment for over 13,000 persons. Again, we are looking at east Port of Spain; that will also create immediately, employment for some 2,500 persons when the construction sector starts. What is this project? You are looking at 900 hotel rooms, a mega shopping mall. Mr. Speaker, if we are looking at urban renewal, we have to look at it from a very comprehensive point of view. I am also saying that, while we are looking at all of that, we need to look at east Port of Spain being part of Port of Spain South, part of Port of Spain North/St. Ann's East, Laventille West and Laventille East/Morvant.

Mr. Speaker, the people of that particular zone are people of Trinidad and Tobago also.

Miss Cox: Correct. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. N. Hypolite: And what I would have noticed is that prior to 2010, the Cabinet would have approved some \$300 million for rapid development throughout the Laventille community. And between that time and now, we have not heard anything about that \$300 million. Not only have we not heard anything about that \$300 million, but we would have also not seen anything, any kind of major development, taking place in those communities.

Let me talk a bit about Laventille West directly. Laventille West, of which Beetham is part of the constituency, has been asking for the completion of their community centre which, when we left in 2010, was 85 per cent completed. That was in 2010. In 2011, 2012, 2013, the Minister would have visited that site at least on two occasions.

Mr. Peters: Three.

Mr. N. Hypolite: Thank you kindly, on three occasions and has done absolutely nothing in trying to push for that community centre to be completed. Nonetheless, you are reading in the budget documents where community centres are being handed over—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Peters: Would the Member give way for a minute?

Mr. N. Hypolite: Community centres are being opened. No! I want the community centre on the Beetham to be completed. When the community centre on the Beetham is completed then I will be honour—*[Interruption]*

Miss Mc Donald: Give way.

Mr. N. Hypolite: Then I will gladly—*[Crosstalk and interruption]* I am speaking to you, Mr. Speaker, and I am being interrupted, but the thing about it, under the People's National Movement, three community centres would have been opened in Mayaro, three—*[Interruption]*

Miss Mc Donald: Three in Siparia.

Mr. N. Hypolite:—and I cannot get one in Laventille West. Not one. *[Interruption]*

Miss Cox: Me neither. Me neither. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. N. Hypolite: Mr. Speaker, he toured all of the community centres in Laventille, all—*[Interruption]*

Miss Cox: And did nothing.

Mr. N. Hypolite:—and did absolutely nothing thereafter. All of the community centres remain the same and they asked for simple things; simple, simple things. *[Crosstalk]*

Under the former Minister of Community Development, the Member for Port of Spain South, we saw a plan—

Miss Cox: “Dey come to mamaguy people.”

Mr. N. Hypolite:—for the development, for the upgrade of community centres. We saw where community centres were being built. We saw where community centres were being air-conditioned, painted, upgraded, accordingly.

Miss Mc Donald: Elevators.

Appropriation Bill, 2013

Friday, September 13, 2013

Mr. N. Hypolite: At this point in time, nothing for the East-West Corridor, east Port of Spain; nothing at all, absolutely nothing.

Mr. Speaker, let us talk a bit about roads. I remember sitting here in this House when the Minister of Local Government came and he said: “Give to me five roads, you will get it done.”

Hon. Member: “Hmm.”

Mr. N. Hypolite: Mr. Speaker, those—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Roberts: He said it like that?

Mr. N. Hypolite: Yes, he said it like that: “Give to me five roads, you would get it done.” Mr. Speaker, by the next week, the five roads were handed in.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: The next day.

Mr. N. Hypolite: Not one road, not one.

Miss Cox: “Ah give 10 right. Da is why yuh give none.”

Mr. N. Hypolite: Is it because it is the People’s National Movement—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Sharma: Yes.

Miss Cox: Yes, it is.

Mr. N. Hypolite:—and as such they do not care about the people who would have voted for the People’s National Movement? They made a wise choice, by all means, but why are they not assisting? Why are they not giving to the people of Diego Martin, Laventille, Point Fortin, Arouca, La Brea? Why?

Mr. Speaker, I submitted, for every time they changed the Minister of Works and Infrastructure I will submit a list of roads that I would like to get done in Laventille, a list. Over 158 roads I would have given every time a Minister is changed.

Miss Cox: “How much yuh geh paved?”

Mr. N. Hypolite: I got a letter from the PURE unit, which falls under the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, indicating to me that only one road was approved for paving between 2012 and 2013.

Miss Cox: Shame! Shame!

Mr. N. Hypolite: I would tell you what road is that, Mr. Speaker, the Beecham Coco Road, which runs from the Lady Young down into Belmont and that road was approved in 2010.

Miss Cox: Correct.

Mr. N. Hypolite: It was in the budget for 2011.

I could find a document coming from the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure telling me that I would have received the approval of six roads in 2010/2011 for \$5.9 million, when other constituencies like in Caroni East and in Siparia got \$119 million worth of road repairs. We only got six roads for \$5.9 million. That same road was on that list since 2010, we only got it approved then. Drainage, the same thing. The same thing when it comes to drainage.

Mr. Speaker, recreation grounds, the same thing. But then, the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara indicated to me that I will get my recreation grounds completed, not so?

Mr. Roberts: Of course.

Mr. N. Hypolite: He said I would get my recreation grounds completed.

Miss Cox: “Dey get dat last year, yuh know.

Mr. Sharma: He did not say when.

Mr. N. Hypolite: Mr. Speaker, the same thing that was said to me last year. The same thing that was said last year. I heard—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Sharma: At least he is consistent.

Mr. N. Hypolite: I heard the Member for Fyzabad saying that he is consistent.

Mr. Roberts: “Doh let Fyzabad talk fuh me eh.”

Mr. N. Hypolite: Mr. Speaker, I just want to also share with the Member for Fyzabad, who is now the new Minister of Tourism, that in 2008, I made mention that we can look at Laventille as a tourism hub.

Mr. Sharma: Let us talk. Let us talk.

Mr. N. Hypolite: Mr. Speaker, it was in the 2010 budget that the Member for Tunapuna also agreed with me and a document was passed over to him.

Mr. Sharma: “Yuh giving meh a copy?”

Mr. N. Hypolite: It can create employment for the people of Laventille, sustainable employment and as such, we can move away from this \$69 URP.

As I made mention of URP, I am seeing where in 2012, under the URP Social Direct Construct Phase One—I do not know what that is but that is what I am reading from and it is an official document from the Office of the Prime Minister, Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Unemployment Relief Programme (URP) Division 2011/2012, Head Office, where some \$3.3 million worth of contracted cost, grand total \$3.3 million. What was that about? I am seeing, of course, Carlsen Field, \$3.3 million, we are talking about URP. Laventille, I do not see URP teams, gangs however you want to classify it now. I do not see that, but I am seeing where, in 2012, \$3.3 million would have been spent on construction work, wherever that work was: Carlsen Field, Chaguanas, Bagatelle, Febeau Village, Toco, La Brea, La Pastora, La Pastora, Bagatelle, Febeau Village, Sea Lots, Marabella, excellent. But then, we are also seeing road paving, same thing: Office of the Prime Minister, Republic of Trinidad and Tobago Unemployment Relief Programme, Head Office, URP Social—road pavings, Phase One.

Miss Cox: “Leh meh hear wey.”

Mr. N. Hypolite: Seecharan Trace—

Miss Cox: “De same Seecharan Trace?”

Mr. N. Hypolite: Bissessar Street—Seecharan—Nelson Road Extension, Freeport.

3.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I want to repeat. This is URP social road pavings, Seecharan Trace, down central; Bissessar Street, central; Nelson Road, Freeport; Gail Trace, Palmiste; John Trace, somewhere in central; Haniff Trace—[*Interruption*] “eh”?

Mr. Roberts: “Dey have a John Trace in Diego too.”

Mr. N. Hypolite: No, it all states here constituency, Caroni Central, Caroni Central, Caroni Central, Caroni Central; all Caroni Central.

Hon. Member: All?

Mr. N. Hypolite: All. Some \$4.1 million, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Rowley: URP social?

Mr. N. Hypolite: Some \$4.1 million dollars—

Dr. Rowley: URP social?

Mr. N. Hypolite:—you have URP social paving roads, and all in Caroni Central, every single one in Caroni Central.

Dr. Rowley: Who is the Minister?

Mr. N. Hypolite: The Member for Caroni Central. The Member for Caroni Central! And you know what, Mr. Speaker? I have been trying to get a little room—

Miss Cox: Food card MP.

Dr. Rowley: “Dais Minister of food card.”

Mr. N. Hypolite:—for a little old lady 105 years old, of which that same Member promised.

Miss Cox: He went?

Mr. N. Hypolite: He went with cameras and promised that lady to fix that room. It is a room.

Miss Cox: “He make dem break down de room.”

Mr. N. Hypolite: I figure I will have to go to the Minister of Tourism to get that room fixed for that lady.

Mr. Sharma: Done! Done! Done!

Mr. N. Hypolite: I think I will have to do that. All right? You know what also, Mr. Speaker—

Mrs. Mc Intosh: And make it a heritage site. [*Laughter*]

Mr. N. Hypolite: We are three weeks into this new school term, three weeks and—

Miss Cox: School grant.

Mr. N. Hypolite:—the Ministry of the People and Social Development promised to give each one of us on this side, 50—

Miss Cox: Grants. We filled out the forms.

Mr. N. Hypolite:—fifty grants, not one—

Dr. Rowley: Zero we get.

Appropriation Bill, 2013

Friday, September 13, 2013

Mr. N. Hypolite:—fifty grants. Mr. Speaker, I called—

Miss Cox: And they give their own people.

Mr. N. Hypolite:—around the constituency. I got a list of 50 persons—

Miss Cox: “Buh school open ah ready.”

Mr. N. Hypolite: I submitted that list of 50 persons before school reopened and as I am speaking here now, not one single one. I asked myself: Is that a set-up?

Hon. Member: No!

Mr. N. Hypolite: Is that a set-up, Mr. Speaker? Because not one and they—I personally would have called the office, the Ministry—personally called the Ministry, [*Crosstalk*] I personally called, all right, and they told me that they can only use that card to purchase school supplies—

Miss Cox: No problem.

Mr. N. Hypolite:—school books. Mr. Speaker, we are into three weeks already but—

Mr. Roberts: “De” second page is Caroni Central, too—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. N. Hypolite:—when I look at this list all “yuh seeing” is Caroni Central, Caroni Central, Caroni Central. [*Mr. Hypolite turns some pages*] Ah, I am seeing two Diego Martin North/East—

Mr. Roberts: Ah, yeah.

Mr. N. Hypolite: Yeah.

Mr. Roberts: Any D’Abadie/O’Meara?

Mr. N. Hypolite: Out of 16 projects—and this one, Mr. Speaker, is URP social—box drain, retaining wall. URP social doing box drains and retaining walls.

Miss Cox: Only in certain areas.

Mr. N. Hypolite: Two point four million dollars—

Dr. Rowley: “Not ah dollar in Diego Martin—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. N. Hypolite:—out of 16 projects, you have two Diego Martin/North East, one—Member for Port of Spain South, you got one.

Miss Mc Donald: One?

Appropriation Bill, 2013

Friday, September 13, 2013

Mr. N. Hypolite: Yeah. Police mounted branch.

Hon. Member: More than me.

Mr. N. Hypolite: Police mounted branch. [*Interruption*]

Miss Cox: “Wat dem doing dey?”

Mr. N. Hypolite: Mr. Speaker, this is what we are getting and I am only hoping that when the Member for Caroni Central stands to speak, that he will explain all these things.

I will continue with Laventille. Mr. Speaker, the schools in the constituency of Laventille West, we are having a lot of problems with our schools. Laventille Girls’ is infested with bats, with pigeons and the toilets need repair. St. Barbs Government has been asking for a water pump. They would have written to the Ministry. They would have written to EFCL; a water pump. I am pleading at this point in time, if I need to go down on my knees—

Hon. Member: “He say he fix all.”

Mr. Roberts: Go down. Go down.

Mr. N. Hypolite:—Minister of Education, please give to our young people what they need—

Mr. Imbert: Wicked man.

Hon. Member: “Dey right.”

Mr. N. Hypolite:—a water pump. Escallier school needs repairs badly and they would have written to the Minister. And the Minister also toured I must say, you know, he toured all those schools with me, and also indicated to them that they all are supposed to get some stipend. Am I correct? A stipend to assist with the administration of the school, Minister—

Dr. Gopeesingh: It is a grant.

Mr. N. Hypolite:—a grant? “Dey still waiting on dat grant.”

Dr. Gopeesingh: “No, dat coming in this fiscal year.”

Mr. N. Hypolite: “Dey” still waiting on that grant. The same way, Mr. Speaker, that most of the schools are still waiting on the school boards.

Hon. Member: Is true. “Wha happen to de school boards in true?”

Dr. Gopeesingh: Mr. Speaker, Laventille West—

Appropriation Bill, 2013

Friday, September 13, 2013

Mr. Imbert: “Whey de book grant.

Mr. N. Hypolite: Ah?

Mr. Imbert: But they promised people the book grant.

Mr. N. Hypolite: They promised book grant.

Hon. Member: They start already.

Mr. N. Hypolite: Constituents of Laventille West are people too. [*Desk thumping*] For the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, there is a gas station known as the St. Barbs gas station which was approved for upgrade. I am also asking him to look into that.

What do we need in Laventille? The people in Laventille need resources. We need resources.

Mr. Peters: “How long all yuh know dat?”

Mr. N. Hypolite: We need—

Mrs. Mc Intosh: “Yeah, buh all yuh here now”—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. N. Hypolite: And the Member for Mayaro is asking how long we know that?

Miss Cox: You had “de” answers, yeah.

Mr. N. Hypolite: I say again, just to remind the Member for Mayaro and maybe he needs to sing a song the next time he goes on a stage—

Mr. Imbert: “He is ah wicked fella.”

Mr. N. Hypolite:—about development.

Mr. Peters: And I will.

Mr. N. Hypolite: It was only under the People’s National Movement administration would we have seen development taking place in this country. [*Desk thumping*]

Miss Cox: That is right. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. N. Hypolite: Mr. Speaker, from 1956 to now, it is development. What school did he go to? And the question is, under what administration did he go to that—

Appropriation Bill, 2013

Friday, September 13, 2013

Mr. Peters: I went in America.

Mr. N. Hypolite: He went to school in America. Congratulations! [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. Mc Intosh: “Dat is why yuh so dunce.”

Mr. N. Hypolite: But guess what, Mr. Speaker, he is right now sitting down in a building that was constructed under the People’s National Movement; this is called development. [*Crosstalk*]

Miss Cox: Yes!

Mr. N. Hypolite: Development, all right? Development, okay? The roads that he is driving on, People’s National Movement; development. [*Crosstalk*]

Miss Cox: Yankee build it?

Mr. Peters: King George. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. N. Hypolite: The Minister—

Hon. Members: “Yuh going good.”

Mr. N. Hypolite:—of Finance and the Economy indicated that—

Miss Cox: Member for Mayaro.

Mr. N. Hypolite:—a lot of work would have gotten done over the last year, and I have to agree with him. I have to agree with him. By all means, I agree with him. But he was a bit economical to the list of projects. I just want to share with him. I just want to add on a couple more. You know, he spoke about a whole lot of things that the Government would have done. I also wish for him to add on to that list, the pension that was promised to the 60-year olds; that \$3,000 pension.

Mr. Sharma: That is an old story, man. Come on “nah”.

Mr. N. Hypolite: I also want him to add on to that list the firing of the head of SAUTT, also the head of ODPM being forced out of office. I also want him to add on to that list where litter wardens at the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation were fired; the cancellation of the OPVs; the stoppage of the smelter project; the curtailment of rapid rail; [*Desk thumping*] the economy being at a standstill; the bulldozing of farmers’ crops; the Resmi Ramnarine issue; the fire truck issue; the nepotism that was taking place not only at PTSC, but in other corporations and in other Ministries and in other state boards.

Hon. Member: Call names.

Mr. N. Hypolite: Mr. Speaker, he failed to put on his list the wastage of money on the people's band. Remember that band? The people's band? That carnival day where they spent—I wonder if the Member for Mayaro will—Member for Mayaro, can you remind me of how much money you spent on that band, where it only had about three persons jumping through the streets?

Hon. Member: Free.

Mr. N. Hypolite: Three persons jumping through the streets—

Hon. Member: “Yuh” could have gone free.

Mr. N. Hypolite:—free of charge. How much money you spent?

Mr. Peters: At least “ah” try to do something.

Mr. N. Hypolite: How much money you spent? Ten million dollars? Was it \$10 million you spent on the band? I do not know. I am asking.

Miss Cox: Member for Mayaro?

Mr. N. Hypolite: Mr. Speaker, he failed to put on that list also the disrespect from the Minister of Arts and Multiculturalism to panmen and calypsonians. I am talking about the list—

Miss Cox: Which one?

Mr. N. Hypolite:—that the Minister of Finance and the Economy did not complete.

Miss Cox: Which one? [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. N. Hypolite: Mr. Speaker, let us not forget the state of emergency. Let us not forget also, the 8,000 persons that were locked up because of that—

Dr. Rowley: Without evidence.

Mr. N. Hypolite:—without evidence because of that state of emergency.

The People's National Movement still believes—not only do we believe, but we also have a vision for the development of this country. Whether it is called Vision 20:20 and it is amended to Vision 20:30, the People's National Movement has a vision for development of this country.

Miss Cox: Yes. Yes.

Mr. N. Hypolite: Mr. Speaker, and we intend to fulfil our vision with good governance. Whether it is now in 2013 or by 2015, it is our intention to see this country develop. As I said before—again, for the Member for Mayaro—it was

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[MR. HYPOLITE]

Friday, September 13, 2013

only under the People's National Movement administration that you can see, that you can find development taking place in this country.

Miss Cox: Correct! [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. N. Hypolite: Mr. Speaker, the People's National Movement would have already sat down—somebody said that the Member for Diego Martin West was not doing any work. Let me indicate and put on the record of this Parliament, that the Member for Diego Martin West has spent the past three years doing a lot of work for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, so as to make sure that when the next election is called, and the People's National Movement wins, that this country—[*Laughter*] can move forward with good governance. [*Desk thumping*] And as such we would have sat down and looked at our energy sector. We would have looked at our “maco”—macro economy—

Hon. Members: “Maco?” [*Laughter and crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: “Maco” boy. [*Laughter*]

Hon. Member: I agree.

Hon. Member: He look at “de maco” economy.

Mr. Peters: Next you will look at “de lagahoo economy”. [*Laughter*]

Mr. N. Hypolite: Then I would look at “de Gypsy foolishness”. [*Crosstalk*]

Miss Cox: Little green boy, take “dat”.

Mr. N. Hypolite: Mr. Speaker, we have looked at the social service. We have looked at the education. We have looked at health, infrastructure governance—

Mr. Speaker: You have 15 seconds. [*Laughter*]

Mr. N. Hypolite: Mr. Speaker, we have looked at crime. We have looked at good governance.

Miss Cox: Very good. You did well.

Mr. N. Hypolite: In my last five seconds, I will say again for the —what? Little black boy?

Hon. Members: Little green boy.

Mr. N. Hypolite: I will say that it is only under the People's National Movement that you can find development taking place in Trinidad and Tobago.

I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education, Member of Parliament for Caroni East. [*Desk thumping*]

3.30 p.m.

The Minister of Education (Hon. Dr. Tim Gopeesingh): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Members. Mr. Speaker, as I rise to contribute to this 2014 budget debate, I rise with a great degree of pride to be associated with a Government, that within three years, we have been able to deliver so much to the people of Trinidad and Tobago that no other government, within even a five-year period, has been able to deliver to the people [*Desk thumping*] which we delivered in our time.

Let me just, first of all, congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy, Sen. Larry Howai and his other two Ministers in the Ministry of Finance and the Economy: Sen. Vasant Bharath and Mr. Rudy Indarsingh and, at the same time, congratulate the former Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston Dookeran, for bringing us to where we are today in the financial scenario [*Desk thumping*] of a Government that is stable; a Government that has been moving and accelerating our growth and increasing our prosperity for our people.

Mr. Speaker, all I would want to speak about, in the financial aspect of this, before I move on to the education things, is to state that we feel comfortable with our macroeconomic fundamentals existing in our society at the moment where our exchange rate has been stable; our inflation rate is less than 7 per cent; our GDP has grown by 1.5 per cent this year and it is expected to grow to about 2.5 per cent next year; and our foreign reserves are close to about TT \$94 billion. This augurs well for our continued financial growth and, therefore, economic development as a people and as a country.

Mr. Speaker, as Minister of Education, a duty that has been entrusted to me by the hon. Prime Minister and my colleagues, I feel very privileged to have been part of the movement of a reengineering process, of a paradigm shift in education, and a new transformation in our education programme, that after three years, seems to be on the right path.

We all know that education and health are the two fundamental pillars of any civilized and developed society, and the fundamental pillars of our economic development, given that knowledge, information and human capital development are key assets for advanced nations and, in this key context, the People's Partnership has given, over the last three years, tremendous thrust and financial

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. DR. T. GOPEESINGH]

Friday, September 13, 2013

support to the education sector from early childhood, primary, secondary, post-secondary, graduate and post graduate levels at university.

Mr. Speaker, in our People's Partnership's manifesto, Prosperity for All—*[Manifesto in hand]*—this is our manifesto, Mr. Speaker, 2010—the manifesto of the People's Partnership for a united people to achieve sustainable development for Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Speaker, our Government has been committed to providing a process of people-centred development and, to achieve our mission, we built our politics and our polity on seven interconnected pillars which contribute to the cornerstone of our strategy for sustainable development of Trinidad and Tobago, namely, people-centred development, poverty eradication, infrastructure and information technology, national and personal security, a more diversified knowledge intensive economy, good governance and foreign policy.

The Ministry of Education, by and large, has tremendous responsibility in moving with a number of these interconnected pillars. That side has been saying, from time to time, that we do not have a plan. Mr. Speaker, nothing could be clearer than the plan that we have in our People's Partnership manifesto *[Desk thumping]* that we have been moving with, and this has been our guiding light and principle in our movement forward in terms of the development of our country. The Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Science and Technology and the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training have a key role to play in people-centred development, poverty eradication and a diversified knowledge and intensive economy, and also information technology and the movement forward.

So, by all intents and purposes, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training and the Ministry of Science and Technology have key roles to play in our development. And as for people-centred development, we pledge that the optimum contribution of each and every citizen is crucial. In a knowledge-driven economy, a strong basic education system and significant participation in tertiary education makes it a decisive difference. This is our pledge in our People's Partnership manifesto, Mr. Speaker. And, as well, we say, accordingly, we commit to making human development a central thrust through the education system, and to support life-long learning skills and skill building.

Pillar five of our manifesto states:

“A more Diversified, Knowledge Intensive Economy—Building on the Native Genius of Our People

In a world in which innovation is the decisive competitive advantage, human initiative and creative capacity represent an enormous asset.”

Mr. Speaker, in that context, the hon. Prime Minister has, over the last three years, ensured that the largest expenditure from the budget has gone to education—I believe it was about \$8 billion in 2011, about \$9.1 billion in 2012, around the same thing in 2013 and it is projected to be \$9.8 billion in 2014. This incorporates both the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training.

Mr. Speaker, the question of expenditure on education is so critical, that we in Trinidad and Tobago are very fortunate that our Government and our Prime Minister has ensured that close to between 18 to 20 per cent of our annual expenditure goes to education, and it is equivalent to almost 6 per cent of our GDP. Many other developed countries worldwide fall less than that. We have surpassed many developed countries like the United States, England, United Kingdom, Australia and Canada, in terms of our expenditure on education. I believe the people of Trinidad and Tobago and the students, particularly, are seeing the rewards of the expenditure on education.

Mr. Speaker, it was the legendary South American freedom fighter, Simon Bolivar, who underscored the importance of education to any government when he said, and I quote:

“The first duty of a government is to give education to the people. No other investment yields as great a return as the investment in education. An educated citizenry is the foundation of every community and the future of every economy”.

These words ring true centuries later, Mr. Speaker, and our hon. Prime Minister and our People’s Partnership Government have embraced that philosophy. The hon. Prime Minister embraced that philosophy when she served as Minister of Education between 1997—2001.

Mr. Speaker, another quote goes on to say:

“If a man empties his purse into his head no man can take it away from him. An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest.

A Budget should therefore be a choice—not necessarily an easy choice but the right choice and that is:

“The choice to take the responsible prudent path to fiscal stability, economic growth and opportunity.”

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. DR. T. GOPEESINGH]

Friday, September 13, 2013

These were the words of the American scientist and philosopher, Benjamin Franklin.

Mr. Speaker, our education system, within the last three years, has moved very swiftly in fulfilling the needs of our children in Trinidad and Tobago. The first aspect which the Prime Minister promised the population is that she would give every child entering a secondary school, Form 1, a laptop. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, “Infrastructure for Human Connectivity and Backbone of the Knowledge Economy has been another pledge, and I quote from our document:

“In order to be a competitive nation in the global knowledge economy we will link our diversification strategy to the creation of knowledge industries...achieved by installing basic, technology-driven infrastructure...”—integrate broadband Internet coverage, integrate Internet enabled education throughout the school system.

We pledged in our manifesto as well, Mr. Speaker:

“The connected classroom will be central to educational transformation, as well as teacher education. Connectivity technologies will be tapped to link teachers with teachers, teachers with students and students with students.”

Mr. Speaker, yesterday the hon. Prime Minister and myself visited—I had the honour to be with the hon. Prime Minister when she visited St. James Secondary School to distribute the fourth set of laptops in four years, Mr. Speaker, and I want to quote from the hon. Prime Minister’s speech yesterday. [*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, could we, could we—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, on both sides, there is a commentary, running commentary taking place, and I am getting difficulty in listening to the hon. Member, as well as the Hansard reporter. So any Member who would like to speak, I would ask you to retire behind the Chair. Continue hon. Minister of Education.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I want to quote the hon. Prime Minister on the issue of the laptop initiative of this People’s Partnership, and I quote from yesterday’s speech:

“The world and economies have changed—became more interconnected and globalised by the age of technology and the Internet. I knew that the only way to ensure that our citizens keep up and ensure they were globally competitive and relevant in this new age, was to be on par with these amazing technological advancements.”

Appropriation Bill, 2013

Friday, September 13, 2013

I continue to quote from the hon. Prime Minister's speech yesterday:

“And so, I implemented a policy of the free laptops for all students entering secondary schools. I am confident that this will go down in our nation's history as one of our greatest and most progressive policies in education.

It comes at a time when, like the rest of the developing world, our country faces many concerns when it comes to”—other situations of—”poverty rates”—et cetera.

“Undoubtedly, this programme can significantly improve our education system and socio-economic status of our citizens.”

And I continue to quote, last paragraph:

“The systematic approach to improving access to the Internet is also geared at ensuring that families in all areas of Trinidad and Tobago have access to the Internet and the wide berth of knowledge and resources it brings.”

And my colleague, the Member of Parliament for Toco/Sangre Grande, Minister of Science and Technology, has been moving and working assiduously to ensure broadband connectivity across the country. I continue to speak from the Prime Minister's speech:

“It is hoped that this will impact on alleviating the illiteracy rates of parents, and grandparents, as well as allow people in these families to become computer-literate...”

Mr. Speaker, by the end of this month, this People's Partnership Government would have given out close to 68,500 laptops to students [*Desk thumping*] and an additional 4,000 to teachers. The Prime Minister went on, to quote:

“The returns on this investment will be invaluable to our nation as, by 2015, approximately 90,850 students will emerge from secondary schools equipped with computing and information technology skills thereby increasing their competitiveness in an information-led global economy.”

And just in the first year, we rose by 16 points on the international benchmarking scale, as far as science and technology is concerned. [*Desk thumping*]

3.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, such has been the success of our programme that St. Lucia asked the hon. Prime Minister to assist in implementing a similar programme in their country. We signed a memorandum of understanding with the St. Lucian

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. DR. T. GOPEESINGH]

Friday, September 13, 2013

Government, and we are assisting them in developing their programme with our technology.

Mr. Sharma: Excellent work that you are doing. Excellent work!

Hon. Member: Well done. Well done.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: So we have purchased 3,200 computers for them which they are paying for, Mr. Speaker, but we are lending them the technical assistance to get their programme on the way for Form 4 students in their country.

Mr. Sharma: Very good.

Hon. Member: Excellent.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Mr. Speaker, we have trained 8,671 teachers in digital literacy, 4,000 laptops have been given to our secondary school teachers, 469 laptops to our primary school principals, 138 laptops to our secondary school principals, 52 laptops to our school supervisors, and within the next six weeks we will complete the distribution of audiovisual equipment to all primary schools, comprising 555 in smart televisions, 500 interactive multimedia projectors, and 500 radio CD players. We have ensured that the electrical systems to connect with these will be working, and we have a warranty for five years for these at an approximate cost of \$12.9 million.

Mr. Speaker, this year schools will now benefit as well from improved Wi-Fi connectivity and Education Content Delivery Solution, increased Internet connectivity of up to 50 megabytes for secondary schools and 25 megabytes for primary schools. Mr. Speaker, such is the success of our IT programme in our schools. We have now 126 computer laboratories in our secondary schools out of the 134, we are currently working to ensure that the other eight are commissioned as quickly as possible; 295 computer laboratories in our primary schools and the remaining primary schools will be outfitted with laboratories during this academic year.

We have provided Internet service to 128 secondary schools and 272 primary schools to date, and this service will complement the use of the laptops and laboratories and expose our nation, teachers and students to an unlimited repository of resources and information. We have also recruited and staffed—124 ICT technicians are assigned to our secondary schools throughout the country, and these IT technicians provide repair services to an average of three primary schools and maintain all the ICT equipment that we have implemented, and we will continue to implement in the near future.

Mr. Speaker, at a result of our IT push at a national level, more students are doing IT at the CSEC level, and more students are doing IT at the CAPE level [*Desk thumping*] and getting increased performance, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Member: Well done.

Hon. Member: Well done, my brother.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Mr. Speaker, there have been a lot of criticism and comments about the effectiveness and the efficiency of the introduction of our IT programme for the last three years, and the Ministry of Education, not impervious to all these comments and criticisms emanating from a wide cross-section of the country and in the editorials, we have been doing analyses and year-to-year surveys of the efficacy and the effectiveness of the introduction of these programmes.

Mr. Speaker, we conducted surveys in the school population amongst principals, the teachers, parents, et cetera, and I want to quote:

From the inception of the eCAL programme it was noted that teachers used the laptops for the conduct of research, preparation of assignments and as a teaching and learning tool.

And the data—I want to give what the data on the analyses gave. They revealed:

That there was an overall increase in the use of Microsoft productivity tools by teachers. Word-processing usage in the classroom increased from 92 per cent in 2010 to 95 per cent in 2012. Microsoft Excel usage in the classroom increased from 55 per cent in 2010 to 58 per cent in 2012. PowerPoint usage in the classroom increased from 66 per cent in 2010 to 73 per cent in 2012. Graphics and pictures in preparing lesson usage in the classroom increased from 59 per cent in 2010 to 63 per cent in 2012. Web page design usage increased to 23 per cent.

The surveys showed that students' perception of their ability to use Microsoft tools and browse the Internet had gradually increased over the years and this has translated into increased usage in these areas.

What about usage in the classroom? Mr. Speaker, there as well has been tremendous increase in use. Word-processing usage in the classroom increased from 39 per cent in 2010 to 89 per cent in 2012. Microsoft Excel, from 8 per cent in 2010 to 46 in 2012; PowerPoint, from 11 per cent in 2010 to 65 per cent, and graphics and pictures also increased, Mr. Speaker.

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. DR. T. GOPEESINGH]

Friday, September 13, 2013

Usage in the home: Mr. Speaker, 85,000 laptops will be given. Multiplied by four—a father and a mother and two siblings, or possibly five—we would be touching the lives of close to about—4 x 85,000 is 340, 5 x 85,000 is about 425,000 people, Mr. Speaker. In this country, between 350,000 or 345,000 to 425,000 will be computer literate by the end of our distribution [*Desk thumping*] after five years of our laptop programme, Mr. Speaker.

And at the home, usage in the home: word processing, Microsoft Excel, PowerPoint, graphics, preparation of homework, increased from 65 per cent in 2010 to 80 per cent in 2012. With respect to the inclusion of ICT into the curriculum, the percentage of teachers that use ICT in their core subject areas increased over the period in English, physical education, visual and performing arts, mathematics, Spanish, social studies, technology education. And, so, Mr. Speaker, all around there have been widespread improvements in the information communication technology skills of our students, our teachers and our families at home, Mr. Speaker.

So the one move and the one promise that the hon. Prime Minister made in her manifesto—just one of those—has caused significant improvements in our society in terms of technology education and literacy in IT, Mr. Speaker. Tremendous! [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, we are a Government that promised that, the hon. Prime Minister promised it in her manifesto, and we have delivered and are continuing to deliver, Mr. Speaker. We are continuing to fulfil our promise.

And we have not stopped there, Mr. Speaker; we will continue to work assiduously in ICT. We have now the procurement process for the provision of schools connectivity programme, a programme which will result in the commissioning of a comprehensive ICT solution for all of the Ministries, corporate sites and schools, with broadband Internet access, integrated security surveillance, wireless local area network, and an education content delivery management system. So the Ministry of Education's holistic programme for ICT in education is not only limited to infrastructure and hardware, but includes the implementation of e-Learning resources and educational software.

The Ministry has embarked upon the implementation of an e-Learning resource dubbed "IT online" which will be used as a teaching aid for the delivery of the CSEC Forms 4 and 5 IT curriculum at all secondary schools.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Education has also executed a memorandum of understanding recently with the Intel Corporation to implement a

comprehensive—continue to implement our comprehensive ICT education programme.

Mr. Speaker, I recently attended a World Education Forum in February in London, and there were 102 Ministers of Education at that forum, and two things that came out of that: ICT and student-centred development. Any country, every country in the world has to adopt ICT in education. If you do not, you would be left behind; and the other one, the focus must be student-centred development.

Of course, we all know the other areas of accessibility and equity and teacher training and development are other components of the education system, but these two important things stand to the forefront, and Trinidad and Tobago can boast that we are on parallel with many countries around the world: Uruguay, which has given over a million laptops, Argentina is now giving 3 million laptops, Russia has given 3,000 schools in their country laptops and, Mr. Speaker, we are at the forefront, and we are the avant-garde of education, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: That is right.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: And just this one area alone, Mr. Speaker.

Another one of the Ministry's transformational initiatives include the development of a national educational portal, and this portal will connect students, teachers, parents and other stakeholders to an online repository of administrative and educational services and information through the use of a best of breed Internet channels and user-friendly interfaces. Information such as our curriculum and other learning resources will be made available on that portal.

The portal will also include a learning management system and this will provide collaboration amongst students and teachers and amongst peers, enhanced capability of the Government to design, plan, test and implement appropriate curriculum material for full adoption in the education system; a structured content, material, repository and knowledge base and a capability for parents and teachers to monitor the progress of students.

This portal, the educational portal, will also offer services. For example, currently all SEA students can register online for their examinations, students' continuous assessment components scores are also captured online, and the Ministry of Education envisages that by the end of October 2013, citizens now can submit online job applications to become teachers in our nation's schools, and every one of our teachers will now be included on an e-Teachers Registry, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Member: Good work.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Mr. Speaker, I now turn to another important area. There has been a tremendous pressure on the Ministry of Education in terms of infrastructure, and there are a lot of comments emanating particularly at the beginning of the school term when unfortunately, some of our schools are not open—and it is not for the lack of trying, our best efforts are there. I want to publicly compliment the members of the Board and all the workers from the Education Facilities Company Limited, and all our members of staff from the Ministry of Education as well as our teachers, our heads of departments, our deans, our principals, our supervisors throughout the country, Mr. Speaker, for the tremendous work they had been doing. We know that they have been operating sometimes in conditions which are not as necessarily satisfactory as we would like. But we must understand and appreciate that when I speak—when the Member for Diego Martin West was speaking he said, “we always say that we”—and he tried to chastise the Minister of Education for speaking, saying that we inherited this from the PNM, but it is a fact, Mr. Speaker.

We inherited—for nine years I wonder what it is they did—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Nothing.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh:—in infrastructural decay as far as our school system is concerned. My understanding, they built five primary schools and 22 early childhood education centres in nine years, Mr. Speaker, but I will come to that. And they started about six to seven secondary schools, they started in 2007. But we inherited that, Mr. Speaker. We inherited almost 100 schools in this country that are more than 100 years old, and 200 schools that are more than 50 years old, and you could understand and imagine what sort of infrastructural decay there has been.

So, Mr. Speaker, we have had to move assiduously to work comprehensively to restore some degree of infrastructural changes that would be synonymous with a healthy environment for our children to participate in the learning process.

Hon. Member: We inherited Haji too.

4.00 p.m.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Mr. Speaker, we inherited the Haji Construction issue in the early childhood education centres. I have a report here. That was a Korean company that came into Trinidad with the last administration and said that

they were going to build early childhood education centres. They promised that they would build 600 early childhood education centres by 2012. They built 22 in nine years, and Haji is the construction company that took \$60 million of the people's money of Trinidad and Tobago, and went away with it. They had not completed one of the 24 schools which they were supposed to build. Not one was completed, and most of them were not even started, and \$60 million of Trinidad and Tobago dollars left this country. "Where de money gone?"

Contractors keep quarrelling every day and crying, because they spent time and money in those schools, in the ECCE centres to start some work, but Haji went with their money. So we had to work with them, we had to move with them, let them complete the schools for us. Those that were not even started and they had contracts, we allowed them. In three years we built 32 early childhood education centres. I have them today.

When this Opposition says that we do not do anything for them, we forget them; in their constituencies we do not do anything; that is tremendous nonsense. They try to give the population the impression that we only want to focus on central and south Trinidad, but that is a lie. Sorry, that is an unmitigated falsified veracity. [*Laughter*] [*Crosstalk*] My colleague says it is a terminal inexactitude. It is a false impression they are trying to give to this country, that we do not care for all the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Let me read the numbers of ECCE centres that we have built across the country, Mr. Speaker. It is important that we put it on the parliamentary record: Maloney ECCE Centre, where is that, not their constituency? St. Augustine, Roystonia, Maraval, not Diego Martin North/East? Oropune Gardens, Caura Royal Road, Valencia, Clarke Rochard, Bon Air, Malabar, La Horquetta, Carlsen Field, Harmony Hall, Golconda, Retrench, Wellington, Edinburgh South, Egypt, Point Fortin, Raghunanan, St. Mary's, Morvant, Maraj Hill, Aranguez, Lisas Gardens, Union Hall, Phoenix Park—I am giving you the 32 schools that we completed, the 32 ECCE centres. Lower Cumuto, Milton, Cushe, and we just opened a few days ago Madras, Mount Hope and Phoenix Park.

Hon. Member: All over the country.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Mr. Speaker, all over the country; all over the country we opened schools. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Hypolite: Port of Spain South, Port of Spain North, Laventille West.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Before they say anything, that this is not true, I have the photographs of all the completed schools, the 32 that we have built in Trinidad. This is Oropune; this is La Joya.

Hon. Member: Hold them up high.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Valencia ECCE. This is the picture of the completed schools. [*Dr. Gopeesingh displays photographs*] [*Crosstalk*] Maharaj Hill Early Childhood School, look how beautiful this classroom is, Mr. Speaker.

Miss Hospedales: That was built by us; we just failed to open it.

Hon. Member: “Dat build under your nose.”

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Look how lovely this building is; look how lovely this is. Colleagues, I will pass it on for you to see yourselves. [*Crosstalk*] Aranguez ECCE; Malabar ECCE, Mr. Speaker, La Horquetta ECCE. They are so beautiful for our children; look at this. Clarke Rochard; Egypt Trace; this is Egypt Trace ECCE, Point Fortin. Edinburgh South ECCE; look at it; look at the nice desks and chairs in them for our lovely little children. [*Crosstalk*] Raghunanan Road ECCE; look at it, Mr. Speaker. Bon Air West Government Early Childhood and Education Centre, look it here. The pictures are there to tell a thousand words. Retrench ECCE, Union Hall—here they are—Carlsen Field; Harmony Hall. There they are, Mr. Speaker. Wellington Road; Phoenix Park; Lower Cumuto, here they are; Madras ECCE Centre, and look at the beautiful surrounding, lovely for the children to play in. They have play parks outside the ECCE centres. Mount Hope ECCE, there it is. Those are the ECCE centres, 32 built in three years. They built 22 in nine years. [*Desk thumping*]

We move to primary schools, Mr. Speaker. In our three years we built 14 primary schools—three years, we built 14 so far.

Miss Hospedales: Completed. That is what you did.

Hon. Member: Not built, completed.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: I forgot to say that by December we will complete another 20 early childhood education centres, [*Desk thumping*] and in a month’s time we will start another 26 under the IDB phase 2.

Mr. Sharma: Very good, very good.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: So by June next year we would have completed 80 new ECCE centres throughout Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: “How many you met?”

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Fourteen—none, we met none. You built 22 in nine years. We will build 80 in three and a half years. [*Desk thumping*]

The primary schools we have completed—we have constructed—you remember the hon. Prime Minister promised since 2001 the St. Barbara's Spiritual Baptist School? We built that for them in less than six months. [*Desk thumping*] St. Barbara's Spiritual Shouter Baptist Primary School; Balmain Presbyterian Primary School; Lengua Presbyterian; [*Crosstalk*] Palo Seco Government Primary. Where is Palo Seco, not deep down south in La Brea? [*Crosstalk*] Arima; Penal Rock Road; Tulsa Trace SDMS Primary School; Mount Pleasant Government Primary School; Riversdale Presbyterian Primary Schools. We built that in seven weeks in Riversdale. Seven weeks we built that at a cost of \$6 million.

Do you know what we inherited from the last regime? Their secondary schools which they started for three years, and they could not reach 20 or 30 per cent in the construction, the cost of those were close to \$200 million for one. We are building secondary schools now for about \$110 million, \$120 million, a reduction of close to \$80 million on a secondary school. [*Desk thumping*] Their primary schools were costing \$40 million, none of our schools have cost more than \$23 million so far. We built one or two with less than \$7 million for them. Mount Pleasant Government Primary; Riversdale; Tunapuna Government Primary; Enterprise Government Primary.

Minister Stephen Cadiz and myself went to Enterprise. We have not formally opened it as yet; a beautiful school for our state-of-the-art school. Eckel Village Primary; Monkey Town—I had the honour and pleasure of opening that with my brother, my colleague, the Member for Oropouche East, recently. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*] It took them eight years—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for Fyzabad.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Febeau Village—we promised the people in Febeau Village that we would build a new school for them when we went there, and the people doubted whether we would do it. We built that school for the people in Febeau Village in less than nine months. Is that a heartland, what they say, central and south school? That is Febeau Village in Laventille—Febeau Village in Laventille. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, let me speak about the secondary schools. Biche High School we completed in our first year, [*Desk thumping*] which was left closed for almost 10 years. The Member for Diego Martin North/East must be reminded that he called

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. DR. T. GOPEESINGH]

Friday, September 13, 2013

the children “douens” and “lagahoos” in the Biche area. We completed Marabella South Secondary. The Member for Pointe-a-Pierre would know that we finished Marabella South Secondary. He went there with us, the hon. Prime Minister, for the formal opening.

They are criticizing, Mr. Speaker. In Diego Martin they took me on a tour and they said, “Minister, we want you to build some blocks for us.” I went to the Diego Martin North Secondary School and built 14 pre-engineered classrooms for them in less than five months. [*Desk thumping*] We opened that on February 28, 2013. In less than five months we made that. We did Aranguez—who is the MP there? Aranguez North Secondary phase one and two were completed, and this month, September, when school opened, we opened a new secondary school, the Couva West Secondary School; a new one.

Mr. Sharma: Well done; well done.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: We have problems with Pleasantville but we are working on that. So we have under construction now 17 primary schools throughout the country. [*Crosstalk*] Fanny Village; Belmont Government Primary; Paramin Government Primary. [*Crosstalk*]

Miss Hospedales: Misrepresenting the truth.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Diego Martin North/East; Belmont is in one of their constituencies; New Grant Government Primary; Barrackpore; Cap-de-Ville Government Primary.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: You have not started it yet.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Well, I said we are going to be building them. [*Crosstalk*] We have issued the contracts. Manzanilla Government Primary; Rousillac; Lower Cumuto; Curepe Presbyterian; Kanhai Presbyterian; Rio Claro Presbyterian; Egypt Village Government Primary School; Lower Morvant Government Primary School and Union Presbyterian. Those are the schools we are building. Are they in UNC constituencies alone or People’s Partnership? They are in almost every constituency of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Where are the secondary schools we are completing? Pleasantville; Barataria North; St. Joseph; Mount Hope; Carapichaima; Princes Town; Shiva Boys; Parvati Girls’, et cetera. We have 17 blocks to complete—administrative and science blocks to complete in 17 schools. That is the depth and strength of the

People's Partnership Government in terms of creating jobs and employment and getting contractors to the job. Thousands and thousands of people employed in the construction sector in our school programme.

Mr. Speaker, they speak about repairs and maintenance. This is the book—a file that I have of close to 850 infrastructural projects, repairs and maintenance done throughout Trinidad and Tobago schools. [*Dr. Gopeesingh displays green bound document*] There are 2,200 projects in 850 schools over a three-year period, costing close to \$500 million, utilizing more than 550 small contractors, medium sized contractors and large contractors.

My colleagues on the other side always speak about our doing things throughout the country and leaving them out. Just now I heard the Member for Laventille West say “we eh doing anything for him”. We did 52 repair projects in Laventille West schools at a cost of \$5.097 million.

Mr. Sharma: Tell him, tell him!

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: ECCE centres: Chinapoo ECCE, we did repair work for 14,000. [*Mr. Hypolite raises hand*] Hold on, you had your time. Primary schools: Chinapoo Government Primary belongs to you? So Chinapoo, Chinapoo, Chinapoo; Escalier, Escalier, Escalier, Escalier—four times; Excel Composite, Excel Composite, Excel Composite—three times repairs; Laventille Boys', Laventille Boys', Laventille Boys', Laventille Boys', Laventille Boys, five times, Mr. Speaker. Laventille Girls', Laventille Girls', Laventille Girls', seven times we did repair work for them in Laventille Girls'. It is here; it is here. We have the name of the contractor; we have the cost of it.

Mr. Hypolite: What were the repairs?

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Our Lady of Upper Laventille RC Primary, five times; St. Barb's Government Primary, twice; Morvant/Laventille Secondary School; Morvant/Laventille Secondary, seven times, and Morvant/Laventille. Twenty times we did work at Morvant/Laventille Secondary. [*Desk thumping*] The pages are here.

Hon. Member: “Oh, good.”

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Mr. Speaker, \$5.097 million in repair work for Laventille West alone. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Okay, Members, please.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Let me go to the other one, Mr. Speaker. I find Port of Spain easy here—Port of Spain North, we spent \$9.353 million in infrastructure repairs

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. DR. T. GOPEESINGH]

Friday, September 13, 2013

and maintenance in their schools. We did 79 repair jobs in the schools in Port of Spain North. That is important for them to know. You all try to spread lies—spread untruths about this People’s Partnership Government; we do not do things for you all in the different constituencies. [*Crosstalk*]

I was waiting for the opportunity. I wanted the opportunity to tell the country what we have been doing for all the people in Trinidad and Tobago, [*Desk thumping*] for all the children, and for all the schools. This is a Government that does not discriminate. When it comes to education, the heart of the Prime Minister is with the children, and I as Minister of Education am just an extension of the hon. Prime Minister’s vision and thrust in education. When I hear these perpetrated untruths over a period of time, it hurts my heart, when the facts are here. That is why I brought this book today.

Mr. Speaker, \$9.353 million: Harpe Place ECCE, \$23,000; Belmont Boys’ RC Primary—one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, 10 times; ten times we repaired the school. They were in government for nine years, they would not even build a new school for themselves in their own constituency. What a shame and disgrace.

Mr. Sharma: What a shame!

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: “They want to accuse this Government of not doing anything, and he talking about a water pump—talking about a water pump just now.

Mr. Sharma: Shame!

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Shameful, Mr. Speaker. Belmont Government School; Gloster Lodge Moravian School; Melville Memorial—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Minister of Education. Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Minister of Education and the Member of Parliament for Caroni East has expired.

Motion made: That the hon. Member’s speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Hon. W. Peters*]

Question put and agreed to.

4.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: You may continue, hon. Minister.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you colleagues, for allowing me the extension of time.

I was just speaking about—this is Port of South, now: Port of Spain South, \$8.676 million in repairs and maintenance at the schools. Forty-nine projects, the schools are as follows: Bethlehem Girls' RC; Eastern Boys' Government Primary; Eastern Girls' Government Primary; Gaines Normal AME; Mucurapo Boys' RC; Nelson Street Boys' RC—about nine times—St. Crispin's AC Primary.

Mr. Speaker, then I can come to Diego Martin East. We are building a new school in Paramin. We are building a new school in Belmont and Diego Martin—“look Diego Martin right here”, \$2.687 million in Diego Martin West and Diego Martin—the other one. Mr. Speaker, I think I have done my job in showing to the national population—“look, Diego Martin Central, \$7.2 million in infrastructure work, repairs and maintenance.”

Mr. Speaker, this book is the truth, this is the gospel. Almost 850 schools have been repaired.

Mr. Sharma: Well said, man, well said.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: This summer vacation that just went there, we had requests for 400 schools to be repaired. We cannot do all 400 schools in eight weeks, Mr. Speaker. We did 212 projects; 196 were completed and within this last week here we did another eight; today, I understand, two more. There would be very few schools that would remain closed over another one or two days.

This is a Herculean and a mammoth task that had been undertaken by the Education and Facilities Company Limited in conjunction with the Ministry of Education and, of course, with my guidance and support. Mr. Speaker, everything speaks for itself; I do not need to go any further as far as infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has mandated the Minister of Education to bring about universal early childhood education, which means that 34,000 children, ages three and four, must be housed in an early childhood education centre under a formal system. We are making continuous strides towards establishing this. We have 200 early childhood education centres housing close to about 10,000 of these students in the formal system. We are building—we will complete 80 more so we would house another 80 by 60 students, that will be another 4,800; so that would be 17,000 students.

We are now in a partnership with the private sector under a different type of approach where we pay for the children to go to school—where we give them support; some do not need any support. Seventy-eight of them have decided to come together with the Ministry of Education. The Attorney General is looking

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. DR. T. GOPEESINGH]

Friday, September 13, 2013

now at signing the memorandum of understanding. So, 80 by 60 students add another 4,800. And, of course, if God allows us to, we will possibly look at building another 50 early childhood education centres before 2015.

Mr. Speaker, well, working with the private sector and with us, we will be able to house close to 34,000 children under a formal system of early childhood education. That is a reality, that is a dream and we will work towards ensuring that. If we complete that, Trinidad and Tobago will be one of the first countries in the world to establish universal early childhood education. In that process, as well, we are training 3,000 early childhood education teachers. We have trained about 1,200 already with the assistance of my colleague, Minister Karim, in the six tertiary learning institutions in Trinidad and Tobago: UWI, UTT, Roytec, COSTAATT, USC, all these institutions—CREDI—helping us to train.

So, as the general population is hearing, if people need to have their children in a profession, the early childhood education profession, as a teacher, it is worth taking up because we have trained about 1,200 already and we need another 1,800.

Mr. Speaker, such was the work of the Ministry of Education that at one of the world education forums it was considered that Trinidad and Tobago is at the avant-garde of education; it is to the forefront; we are leaders in education worldwide and we were given an award and a recognition for the tremendous work that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is doing as far as education is concerned.

We were given an award with six other countries around the world. One of them is the Afghanistan Minister of Education. The Afghanistan Minister of Education was able to get 10 million children back into schools, in a war-torn country, in two years. He was able to get 40 per cent of that population as young girls going back into school, and for that he was awarded for his recognition in the field of education.

I had the honour and privilege of standing at his side and being honoured for the work that Trinidad and Tobago is doing in education. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, we promised in the manifesto that we would undergo curriculum reform. It is right here: curriculum reform; creative writing; creativity; innovation and so on; moral, values, ethics.

Mr. Speaker, we have concluded the curriculum reform for the primary schools; we have completed it for the early childhood education centres. I must give praise to the last administration for their work on the curriculum of the early

childhood education. We did not have to do much more work on it and that was a job well done. So, we are continuing that work on the curriculum for the ECCE. But we are moving swiftly now to change the curriculum for the secondary schools because we want to look at the compulsory subjects in Forms 1 to 3 and what is happening there.

So we have been able to deliver another promise that we made in the People's Partnership manifesto of curriculum reform. We delivered on IT, we fulfilled our promise. [*Desk thumping*] We are delivering on universal early childhood education. We continue to fulfil our promise. We told the population we would do curriculum reform, we continue to fulfil our promise.

Mr. Speaker, the improvement in literacy and numeracy: in three years, in the SEA examinations, we have had incremental improvement in the academic performance of our students. Now, less than 8 per cent of our students get less than 30 per cent, up from 13 per cent or 14 per cent at one time, now to 8 per cent. More than 72 per cent of our students in SEA get more than 50 per cent, up from about 52 per cent now to 72 per cent. More students are excelling. The primary schools now, we met 125 primary schools underperforming. Now, 100 of these have been taken to the other level and another hundred have moved from the middle level to the excelling level. That is the growth in the education system at primary school. [*Desk thumping*]

Literacy and numeracy: we are registered with other countries for benchmarking; 46 other countries. Trinidad and Tobago stands out as the country that has had its best development in improvements in literacy amongst the 40-something countries. We moved up by 36 points and for students in Standard 3 we were able to show that they had a six-month added advantage now in terms of their ability to read. That is the work that the Ministry is doing.

Numeracy continues to present a problem at CXC. What about CAPE? Ninety-three per cent of our students do well at CAPE: Grades I to V; about 66 per cent get Grade I to III, moved it from 87 per cent to 93 per cent. So, our 3,500 students who write the CAPE examinations are doing well. As a result they are doing better and better, Cabinet has had to increase—the Prime Minister and the Government—the number of scholarships from year to year.

In 2009, 266 scholarships were given: 65 open, 201 additional. In 2010, 329—an increase of 63—57 open, 272 additional; in 2011, 73 open, 281 additional: 354. So every year—from 266 to 329 to 354. In 2012, we gave 372 scholarships:

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. DR. T. GOPEESINGH]

Friday, September 13, 2013

70 open and 302 additional. It seems as though this year we would have to give over 400 scholarships; more close to 430 scholarships this year from the CAPE examinations.

So, we have moved the number of scholarships from 266 in 2009 now to 430 in 2013. So we have given close to 1,500 scholarships in our four years since we have been in office; open, close to about 250 and the rest additional. That is the work of the People's Partnership Government in terms of education.

Mr. Speaker, there is the issue of teacher training and development. Time would be insufficient for me to go through the amount of training that we have done for teachers, but we pledged in our manifesto, again, teacher training and hear what we said:

“We will strengthen quality in...learning by ensuring that teachers are trained, educated and certified at all levels of the system from pre-school up. Our aim is to further professionalise the Teaching Service.

...work with the union on professional upgrade and professional standards...”

That is in the People's Partnership manifesto; teacher training and development.

It also said:

“In keeping with the philosophical underpinnings of diversity in teaching/learning, teacher education to support a curriculum for transformation will be strengthened. We will work with higher educational institutions to strengthen teaching quality and relevance in the secondary and primary system.”

Mr. Speaker, we have moved now to a situation where in our primary schools there are only about 40 teachers now, out of the close to 7,500, who do not have a teacher's diploma or a bachelor of education degree in our primary schools. That is the amount of work that we have done. We gave more scholarships over the last three years, supported by the Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training, so that now all our teachers in the primary schools will have a major degree of certification; either a teacher's diploma or a Bachelor of Education, and we continue to do more and more.

Mr. Speaker, we have embedded ICT into the practice to facilitate student-directed learning. The pathway had to be designed for the integration of the United Nations, UNESCO, ICT competency standards for teachers into the curriculum design of all courses in light of its student-centered approach to teaching and learning.

Additionally, recommendations obtained from the baseline survey of teacher performance, parent and student attitudes and achievements, were also considered in the construction of the teacher ICT professional development plan. For three years we have been training more and more teachers, Mr. Speaker, and this is just a list—about eight pages—of the different modules where we have trained teachers over a period of time.

We have trained them in classroom management, critical literacy; assessment strategies, pedagogy; children's right; developing writing skills; developing reading comprehension skills; data driven instructions; strategies for transforming schools; infusing financial literacy in the classroom; technology education; technical theatre; teaching of geometry; investigative and resource-rich approaches; clinical supervision for heads of departments and secondary schools; hundreds and hundreds of teachers.

Here has the figures: digital literacy, 5,198; 1,218 primary and 3,278 secondary and so on. A lot of this was done by the National Energy Skills Centre and also professionals in various aspects; thousands and thousands. Training in fusion of information communication technology; training of principals, vice-principals, curriculum officers, et cetera; strategies for working with special-needs children in inclusive environments; data-driven instructions; strategies for transforming schools; anger management; critical incident stress management; mentoring, time management, conflict resolution; development of math skills; solving word problems; and so on. The work speaks for itself; too numerous for me to mention in this short period of time. Thousands of our teachers have been trained over a period of time between 2010—2013, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: You have 15 more minutes.

4.30 p.m.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Yeah. Sure. Thank you. I want to move on to a few other areas under the Ministry of Education. When we came into office in June 2010, we went through a research project at the Ministry to look at all the shelves of all the reports and task force reports and so on at the Ministry of Education because a number of them would have been very relevant. We found a lot to be relevant and from that we were able to develop in six months a strategy development plan by December 2010.

Subsequent to that we developed a strategic plan 2011—2015 and we had identified 16 prioritized areas with a rollover from 2012—2016, 2013—2017. The

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. DR. T. GOPEESINGH]

Friday, September 13, 2013

16 prioritized areas were the laptop initiative, universal early childhood education, special needs, the movement of the SEA date to May and that has shown to be very successful. We had a lot of resistance and the children's performance—Minister De Coteau was with me at that time and he gave tremendous help in that. [*Desk thumping*] I want to thank Minister De Coteau for his work during the two years that we were together. [*Crosstalk*] Curriculum reform, improvement in literacy and numeracy, improved academic performance—which I spoke about—teacher training and development, curriculum vocational qualification, institutional strengthening and organizational restructuring, school based management, human resource information system, career guidance, communication, and parenting.

These are the 16 prioritized areas that we gave to ourselves. Mr. Speaker, these arose from the promises that we made in the People's Partnership manifesto and we are fulfilling every one of them. [*Desk thumping*] I believe that we would have completed most of these before the end of May 2015 when our five years of office ends.

Special needs: special needs is one of the most difficult situations for us as educators nationally to see our unfortunate children with varying types of disabilities and needing special attention. We estimate that to be 30 per cent of the general student population. And so 30 per cent of our birth rate of 17,000 on an annual basis—Minister of Health will confirm that, around there—it means that about 5,100 of our students do have some form of special needs: whether it is attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, whether it is dyslexia, or autism, or emotional or behavioural or psychological abnormalities, whether it is visual problem or hearing problem or whether it is neurologic problem like cerebral palsy, Down's syndrome, we have about 30 per cent of our students.

We are working assiduously to bring into Cabinet a Note on the development of a national comprehensive policy dealing with special needs, Mr. Speaker, but while we do that we are not leaving out our students. We have 12 Government and 12 private centres which are looking after students with special needs. We are taking care of about 3,000 of our population. We give a lot of incentives and financial support to the private institutions, but we are also working to bring about improvement on that.

Mr. Speaker, Cabinet passed a Note recently for the Ministry of Education to bring on 732 human resource personnel in various aspects in the Student Support Services Division, and they included a number of guidance counsellors, guidance officers, school social workers, behavioural, educational and clinical psychologists, interpreters and assistants and all of that.

So every secondary school will now have a guidance counsellor and a school social worker and also every secondary school will have two health and safety officers or safety officers in our secondary schools. Mr. Speaker, incrementally we are moving, I would say, rapidly from year to year in fulfilling the promises that we made to our population.

The CVQs: with the world of work that the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development has to deal with and how we fulfil the labour market, Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development and Minister of Science and Technology and Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training and myself speak from time to time and work from time to time to understand and appreciate what is our labour market need. There is a study continuing, but we do have an understanding and an appreciation of where we are.

So we are now trying to work to provide the type of students to fill the labour market needs by improving curriculum vocational qualification for these students and tech/voc education. Tech/voc education is compulsory up to Form 3 in our secondary schools. We have moved from 43 schools that were doing CVQ subjects to 102 secondary schools doing CVQs.

So we are now moving with the rest of the world who are now determining that tech/voc education is one of the ways to go because not all students are academically gifted and some students can improve their own performance in taking part in other areas.

Mr. Speaker, the curriculum in primary schools: the continuous assessment component has been found to be very successful. There was a lot of hue and cry about the implementation, but the area of creative writing has improved by 12 per cent. Language arts has improved by 10 per cent and the introduction of physical education, visual and performing arts, citizenry development, character development, morals, values, ethics, agri-science, health and family life education, all these things have now been introduced in a formal manner in our primary schools where students will be tested, to a small extent, because what was not examined in the past, was not tested—I mean, what was not examined or tested was not taught. But all these things are now taught in our primary schools.

So it is in keeping with our objectives of what education is, it is the realization of the fullest potential of our children. It is the realization that children must be able to be integrated into society. Children must achieve their fullest potential. They must grow up to be mature and happy and they must be physically fit and well nutritioned.

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. DR. T. GOPEESINGH]

Friday, September 13, 2013

Mr. Speaker these are some of the outputs we need for our students in education and this is what we are doing by changing the curriculum, which we have done in the primary schools.

We continue to improve our organizational structure within the Ministry of Education. We have strategic executive team meetings on a weekly basis, sometimes every two weeks. We have made sure that we have institutional strengthening where we have tried to fill the vacancies and create positions where we can move together as one team.

I want to compliment and thank all the Ministry of Education staff and personnel for the tremendous amount of work that they have been doing beyond the call of duty. Some of our personnel work on weekends and on public holidays, and I could call anyone of my Ministry of Education personnel, at any time, and we get them responding to us, Mr. Speaker. I am indeed very grateful to be able to be privileged, to be part of the system of moving the education process forward.

Mr. Speaker, the school-based management: we are now in the process of going to Cabinet to formalize the local school boards and pretty shortly what the Member spoke about, the local school boards, will be implemented and therefore our school-based management will comprise principals, vice-principals, head of department, dean, school safety officers, guidance counsellors, members of the local school boards, parent teachers association, et cetera. So in that way, moving together, they will all help to reduce the amount and the incidence of these dysfunctional behaviours in our schools and improve the infrastructure and a number of other areas.

Mr. Speaker, we have about 16,000 teachers, 3,000 public servants and about 1,500 contract workers within the Ministry of Education. I am pleased to state that by June of this year gone we were able to pay all the teachers their back pay amounting to over \$500 million. And thanks to the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development, the Minister of Finance and the Economy and the Minister of Public Administration for working together to ensure—some of them had outstanding matters from 2006 and they were all happy. To a tremendous extent, they feel very pleased about having their situations taken care of in terms of their back pay and their increased remuneration.

Mr. Speaker, there is a little aberrance and aberrant behaviours from time to time, but generally we have a well-motivated school population of teachers; principals are there. I have met about five times with secondary school principals, about four times with primary school principals. I meet with the 18

Appropriation Bill, 2013

Friday, September 13, 2013

denominational boards. I meet with the National Parent Teachers' Association and all the associations—principals of primary schools, secondary schools, et cetera, a wide array of stakeholders. We meet from time to time and give suggestions—most important the school boards. I have the total buy-in of the school boards and we are working very well together.

Career guidance: we had 42,000 of our students last year assisted by the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training, his Ministry as well. We had 42,000 of our Form 3, Form 5, and Form 6 students undergoing career guidance, where they would have been exposed to about six tertiary learning institutions, professions that they train people for; over 100 different professions, not necessarily medicine, or law, or accountancy, or engineering, or teaching; many more, environment, a whole heap. They were exposed so that they could choose their subjects and choose the professions that they want to go into.

We had the buy-in of about 50 different business organizations throughout Trinidad who assisted us in terms of the career guidance. That had been a tremendous success and there was never in history of the education system that we had career guidance like that, Mr. Speaker, never in the history, and this augurs well for the students being able to choose their professions in the future.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the parents for working with their children and bringing their children to a level and encouraging their children, encouraging them, meeting with the principals, going to the schools. I want to encourage more and more of that.

I want to ask absent fathers to be there with their children, to make sure their children get their education because education is the passport to life, and a sound education, particularly for young girls will benefit tremendously all the nation, the entire region and internationally as well. Young women will be able to take care of themselves. We all know that progress comes particularly when young girls and young women are more and more educated.

Mr. Speaker, these are just some of the things that we are doing at the Ministry of Education and there are others. We spent \$124 million for textbooks recently. We had to go back to Cabinet to get increased payments because the cost of the textbooks rose which we were unaware of and some of the textbooks had to be imported from abroad. It was the first time that the local printers, it was about four large printers—Minister Cadiz when he was Minister of Trade and Industry, he had indicated to me that these printers wanted jobs. So these publishers used the printers locally to the maximum when these books were produced.

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. DR. T. GOPEESINGH]

Friday, September 13, 2013

We spend about \$1.2 million per day on the school feeding programme, about \$236 million per year, and it is getting better and better.

The school grants: we gave almost \$700,000 to \$1.5 million for each of our secondary schools for them to use in a manner that befits the use and for improvement in the school. We are now giving \$158 per student in the primary school. So primary schools where there are 400 students we will give about—400 multiplied by \$158 is about \$63,000. So primary schools are now getting their grants. The secondary schools are getting their grants. We are looking to see whether we can increase some of these grants.

Security: we spent about \$220 million in school security; janitorial, about \$100 million; schools transportation, about \$50 million across the country. So that we continue to work with the PTSC and the transportation system to bring our students from rural areas back into the schools in an appropriate manner.

So, Mr. Speaker, in closing, I am very privileged and pleased to be a part of a distinguished team of Members of Parliament and Ministers of Government and members of a People's Partnership team where we continue to deliver and deliver, and we continue to fulfil our promises as pledged in our People's Partnership manifesto. I have the privilege of moving in education and I am pleased to be associated with it and to pledge my total support for all the quarter million children, all our 16,000 teachers and our more than 300,000—400,000 parents.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Prime Minister's life has been with children. She is dedicated to the education profession, [*Desk thumping*] and I want to continue to work to ensure that all our children—all our children of Trinidad and Tobago are taken care of in an equitable manner and the best of education that anyone can hope for their children. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Before we suspend for tea, may I remind hon. Members that I have been advised that there is an agreement that the next speaker would be the hon. Minister of Arts and Multiculturalism. So when we would have resumed at 5.15 p.m., the next speaker would be hon. Minister of Arts and Multiculturalism. This sitting is now suspended until 5.15 p.m.

4.44 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.15 p.m. *Sitting resumed.*

The Minister of Arts and Multiculturalism (Hon. Dr. Lincoln Douglas): Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. It is an honour for me to rise here in support of the Motion moved by the—[*Interruption and crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Speak behind my Chair. Continue, hon. Member.

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was saying it is an honour for me to rise here and speak in support of the budget presented by the Minister of Finance and the Economy and to give him the support for presenting a wonderful budget to this nation of Trinidad and Tobago.

I want to thank our hon. Prime Minister for making it possible for all of us to be here and to talk today about the value of this Government and this budget to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, our traditions have not helped us to grasp the real value of arts and culture informing citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. All great art that is universal, that is enduring, that is lasting comes from a place of what we would call real love and commitment for country and ability to serve humanity—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Sharma: Well said, well said.

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: And such as the—all the great writers of our poetry and our religious texts, they point us to this very fact that our writers from India, Africa, Asia and all of these, all of these streams that converge in Trinidad and Tobago, they remind us that in order to survive as a culture—*[Interruption]*

Hon. Member: Brilliant philosopher.

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas:—we must evolve a way of living that is meaningful for everybody, and that is the purpose, that is the meaning of culture to all of us. When I say culture, Mr. Speaker—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Indarsingh: Speak to Port of Spain South.

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas:—it involves all the rituals that celebrate the way we grow up in Trinidad and Tobago, the clothes we wear, the drama, music, dance, architecture; all of these things represent our culture.

Hon. Member: Point out your outfit.

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: But when I ask—*[Interruption]* You like this outfit? But when we talk about these things, the similarity with all of these things has to do with those things that are visible, but culture takes us way beyond what is visible. Some people say it is kind of like an iceberg, when you look at it. You know an iceberg is a huge piece of ice floating out in the ocean. The first time you see it, all you see is like 10 per cent of it above the water, but the real substance of the iceberg is below the water, the real 90 per cent. So it is with culture, more than what is visible, more than the clothes and the music and the dance that we do

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. DR. L. DOUGLAS]

Friday, September 13, 2013

from time to time have to do with our belief system: the way we live; the way we treat each other; the way we talk to our children; the way we help them to understand what it means to work hard; our understanding of the world; how we came to live here; what is the purpose of our existence; what is the project that we are involved in on this little space that we have here called Trinidad and Tobago. And that is the real force of culture.

The countries that understand this, they know that they have to invest in supporting a kind of culture that would produce citizens for our country. When I say citizens, Mr. Speaker, I am talking about people who are committed to a value-based way of life that supports the development of their country, and art and culture gives us the opportunity to create these systems. They are passed on from generation to generation, what we called cultural transmission. And that is the purpose of culture, to pass on the value systems that we hold dear, that make us the kind of people that we ought to be in the world.

Mr. Speaker, no serious country can consider development without a studied commitment to culture. As I have said before, culture is a way of life and the development of culture and the arts require a serious country. The recent World Economic Forum which was held in New Orleans and the recent UNESCO Convention on Culture and Development in New York reminded us clearly that culture and development go hand in hand.

What is development? Earlier on we had the Member for Laventille West talking about, “is only the PNM that could bring development to this country” and I was chiding him on the side about: what is development? He did not proffer any meaningful definition of development, but I suppose he was going with the brainwash definition of development which has to do with a form of technology. As we have heard mentioned before by the Leader of the Opposition, when he placed great emphasis on buildings and structures, all his conversations about development were based on structures all over Trinidad and Tobago. But we know that you could build good structures and your people are still fighting each other, as is demonstrated in the stronghold of the PNM.

So buildings and technology do not necessarily development make. What we are talking about is a way of life. How can we create a way of life that is harmonious and peaceful? Did we ever concentrate on that? Where is the Member for Laventille West, Mr. Speaker? In his theory and talking about PNM-style development, did he ever think that development had to do with people having a more meaningful and a better way of life? No, he went on to talk about this building “all yuh in”.

So, Mr. Speaker, I am trying to make the point here that culture really has to do with that way of living that is meaningful, that is peaceful, and in that sense culture and development go hand in hand. In my Ministry, the Ministry of Arts and Multiculturalism, we accept that responsibility. We accept the responsibility that it is the culture of Trinidad and Tobago that will heal all our social pathologies. We accept the responsibility that it is the culture of Trinidad and Tobago that will bring real social integration; that it is the culture of Trinidad and Tobago that will be responsible for transmitting to our future generation all the values that we hold dear. And so when we speak from the Ministry of Arts and Multiculturalism we recognize that a whole lot has to be invested in culture.

Mr. Speaker, it is citizens that we want, people who are committed to their country, who would do their duty to passionately engage in respecting others. Because it is only as we passionately engage in respecting others that we can eliminate crime, violence and all the destructive behaviour from our country. My Ministry is dedicated to nurturing those values of citizenship through art and culture, such as love for your neighbour, respect for different religions, respect for humanity, respect for the Constitution and law, respect for those institutions that promote order, that promote respect for women, children, respect for the handicapped and respect for the environment which we have disrespected for too long and right now it is threatening us. This is the purpose of our culture—to bring these kinds of values to our people.

I am taking a lot of time to say these things, Mr. Speaker because, until we grasp the reality that we have to focus on our culture, on building a way of life that is meaningful to all—if we miss this we will miss the boat completely and we will try everything else to solve crime, to encourage work and thrift and labour and it will not happen because we have placed the emphasis in the wrong place. So we are committed to doing these things so that Trinidad and Tobago will be seen as a city on the hill that all can see, that all will look to. Indeed, we have that capacity and we have that potential.

The Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago has designated arts and culture as one of the seven sectors to propel the economic diversification of our energy-based economy. The Ministry of Arts and Multiculturalism has been given the mandate and we passionately hold as our remit the development of Trinidad and Tobago through culture and the creative industry. Government policy embraces the arts as part of its framework for development which is based on the premise that a nation cannot seek its development exclusively in political, economic and industrial matters. We believe that arts and culture has the capacity

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. DR. L. DOUGLAS]

Friday, September 13, 2013

to support a culture of harmony and peace, to foster creativity for nation building and sustainable growth and provide meaningful investment opportunities for the private sector.

Mr. Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago is a signatory to the objectives of UNESCO. UNESCO's Medium-Term Strategy for 2008—2013 says that:

“UNESCO will also promote the potential of dialogue based on music and the arts as a vector for the strengthening of mutual understanding and interaction as well as for building a culture of peace and respect for cultural diversity...”

Art is a part of life and everyone consumes a significant amount of art and culture. When you go to the cinema or you admire beauty, or you make pretty lights and put it on your house or you read a nice book or you watch TV, we are all consuming art and culture hence, investment in artistic and cultural activities is central to a balanced intellectual, emotional, psychological development of individuals in our society. The direct impact of arts and culture on national development includes:

1. Cultivating social cohesion amid cultural diversity;
2. Fostering creativity and ingenuity;
3. Promoting sustainable development.

Mr. Speaker, I have alluded to the role of my Ministry in my opening remarks with regard to the following: the importance of arts and culture to individual development, nationhood, crime alleviation and economic development. An update on the implementation of the initiatives highlighted in the budget speech 2012, I will do shortly, and then I will give an insight into the future, what the Ministry intends to do based on the allocation in our budget.

Before going further, I want to clarify a few things. I take this opportunity to inform my Members and the nation of our service to the people based on the last budget and what we had planned to do in service to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. And as we say, people could “ole talk” but service beat “ole talk” anytime.

Mr. Sharma: That is right.

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: Right. Mr. Speaker, the UNESCO objectives that I have already stated point out the importance of an art culture to social coherence and

individual development, and as I had stated in my opening remarks our achievements during the past year include, first of all:

- Policy development;
- The policy framework for multiculturalism;
- The national cultural policy;
- The grants and subvention policy.

The Ministry of Arts and Multiculturalism, we held four consultations on the Draft National Cultural Policy and Multicultural Policy. These consultations were held in October, Trinidad; and Tobago in November; the documents were placed on the Ministry's website. People had the opportunity to respond to them. We had a consultation in Tobago and the policies of multiculturalism and culture were redrafted, they were submitted to the Cabinet in the second half of last year. And multiculturalism in a summarized statement, Mr. Speaker, reminds us that we are working on building a nation where all expressions of culture can be welcome, manifestations can be nurtured and can produce a society that respects all religion, ethnicity, race, creed, gender, whatever.

That is what the multicultural policy is about. It is not about dividing people or differentiating people, but it is about bringing people together. There is a form of multiculturalism that really isolates people. In the older times multiculturalism started off with the idea—first it started with apartheid where you have separate people, and one group is considered more important, more enlightened than the other. We “doh” want that. Then they went on to talk about separate but equal. All right, we might be equal but you are so different that we should not get together at all. That is the separate but equal doctrine.

Then when people started to feel guilty about that, they said all right, let us get together and make one big happy family. It does not matter whether you are so or whether you are so, just boil everything down and make one big glue of everybody. It is called like the melting pot theory. We “doh” want that because I like you just the way you are.

Mr. Sharma: I like you, too. [*Laughter*]

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: And then we have the integration theory. You know, when bigger countries like Australia, Canada and Germany were receiving immigrants from all over the world or trying to integrate indigenous people into

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. DR. L. DOUGLAS]

Friday, September 13, 2013

mainstream society, they created a kind of doctrine where the dominant group holds the power over the society and so they are bringing people into the dominance and they called that a policy of multiculturalism. “We doh want that either in Trinidad and Tobago because we doh have no dominant group here.” What we are aiming for is a unity in diversity. How about that?

5.30 p.m.

Hon. Member: That is right.

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

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: What we are aiming for is like a kind of salad bowl where every contribution is what makes the whole thing look nice and taste good, a kind of mosaic. All the colours are meaningful.

Hon. Member: And healthy.

Mr. Sharma: It is also healthy.

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: And healthy. All the colours are meaningful. When you look at it—or what we are aiming for is like an orchestra where you have different instruments in the orchestra, but when they play together, you hear something wonderful.

Hon. Member: Symphony, symphony.

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: That is what we are aiming for in Trinidad and Tobago, where you could bring your chord and you could bring your colour, and you could bring your music and your food and your way of dress, and I could learn from you; you could learn from me; we could learn from each other and we could create something so beautiful that will astonish the world.

Mr. Sharma: Yeah, man. Yeah. Well said. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: That is what we are aiming for here in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Sharma: “Ah want to play in dat orchestra.”

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: So, Mr. Speaker, the budget this year, we continue— [*Interruption*] We could go home now after that. The budget this year continues to talk about all the various aspects of what we are doing in Trinidad and Tobago. Take for instance Carnival, Mr. Speaker, which is a significant part of the life of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We know, for instance—and this Ministry dedicates almost over \$100 million to the development of Carnival.

Appropriation Bill, 2013

Friday, September 13, 2013

Well, we understand that from the tourism figures—the World Travel and Tourism Council figures—tourism as a whole in 2004, from the statistics that we have collected, there were 33,771 jobs created by Carnival alone;—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Beautiful.

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas:—contributes \$4.2 billion, 48 per cent of the GDP. Carnival visitors spend more and distribute around more. We had 40,455 visitors here—arrivals to this country. The average length of stay was 16 days; average spent was TT \$306; \$12,379,000 casual spending, and we could go on about airline tickets and hotel guests and food and merchandize and clothes.

What we are saying is that these are not trivial investments. We understand that arts and culture can deliver to this country in two ways: first of all to the quality of life, in the sense of happiness and contentment that you feel. No wonder why some studies have rated Trinidadians as being the third happiest people in the world. [*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Yeah.

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: Well, “I doh know if is Carnival, yuh know”, but I am sure it contributes significantly.

But apart from that, we are clear that it can contribute economically—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Khan: They happy because the PNM in Opposition.

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: [*Laughter*] We are clear that it can contribute economically. Some people say in the most liberal statistics, they say there are 230 Carnivals all over the world and these were spawned by Trinidad and Tobago. At the very, very conservative end, there are 85 that we clearly—and counting every day. We know that this is a huge opportunity for our people to move their cultural products and their trade to the rest of the world, and this Ministry supports the development of Carnival, both as an opportunity for our people to, you know, integrate and to create social harmony, but also a significant opportunity to create jobs, industry, creativity and so forth, for the development of this nation.

But we go on. This Ministry is committed to protecting our cultural heritage: The “Remember When Institute”; the Evolution of the steel pan exhibit—I will tell you about that just now; our independence exhibit; the promulgation of the national inventories of the intangible cultural heritage and world cultural heritage and natural heritage; Port of Spain as a museum city.

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. DR. L. DOUGLAS]

Friday, September 13, 2013

The “Remember When Institute” exhibition and web page, you guys can go on it and look at it and see the continued digitizing of audio recordings, documents, and these are housed on this site. Calypso music that we have in Trinidad and Tobago is the second recorded music in the world—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: The largest.

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas:—and there are huge collections of music all over the world, of calypso music. And we want to pay tribute, and keep our prayers going for Slinger Francisco, the Mighty Sparrow, who we all know is going through a real difficult time right now. But Sparrow, Beginner, Atila the Hun, all these fellas were touring the world long before everybody. This is the heritage of Trinidad and Tobago and we seek to secure that heritage.

Thus far, 3,321 recordings have been digitized. We are documenting all of these recordings, putting them in a secure place that people could access them later on. We are digitizing over 2,000 photographs so far—historical photographs—and archiving them; of the culture of Trinidad and Tobago.

And so, Mr. Speaker, the Ministry has also developed the National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Remember at the beginning when I was talking about culture, I talked about what we see, as our clothes, our wear, our buildings, our architecture, et cetera. Those are our tangible cultural heritage, the ones that we can see.

Our intangible cultural heritage are the ones that we cannot see; the stories that we tell; the ideas that we have in our head; the folk ways of being; the things that you see in *Cote Ce Cote La*, you know, all those things that make us who we are, that we do not see. But if you take them away you know that something significant is missing in your life; the stories of La Diabliesse and Soucoyant. These are our intangible cultural heritage and they are worth something to us. Why? Because they carry stories of a people, of their existence, of their passage of time on this space here that we call Trinidad and Tobago. We are in the process; we have just trained a whole bunch of people throughout the country to begin storing and securing the intangible cultural heritage of Trinidad and Tobago.

The Ministry also developed another project called “We’re Trinbagonian Campaign”, which focuses on assisting and supporting the idea of what it means to—and it is also part of the intangible cultural heritage, supporting the idea of what it means to be a Trinidadian; what it means to be a citizen of this small country that is so great. I always tell people, “You know, this is a small country

Appropriation Bill, 2013

Friday, September 13, 2013

but it packs a punch”. I tell them, you know, “We just have 1.3 million people and India has about 1.3 billion people and we did better than them at the Olympics, I think.

But that is how this country is. We have had success stories in any sphere that you could think about, whether it is education, art, literature, music, cooking, flower show. We have won all these things in international—beauty. And so we try to secure those cultural legacies because they belong to our people and they belong to our children.

We have convened—in fiscal 2013 a committee was convened to develop the inventory based on more than 487 nominations we received, and they are secured at the Cultural Division of the Ministry.

The National Museum and the Art Gallery of Trinidad and Tobago—we continue to participate with all of these organizations to make sure that our cultural heritage is secure: the Division of Community Development; the Ministry of Tourism; Citizens for Conservation; International Council on Monuments and Sites; Faculty of Humanities and Education at the University of the West Indies; the National Youth Council of Trinidad and Tobago, and the list goes on and on. Our goal is to collaborate, to participate, work with others to secure what it means to be a Trinidadian and the inventory of Trinidad and Tobago.

Members of the public can access these digitized photos via the division’s web page—our culture division’s web page—and if you are interested, it is www.culture.gov.tt/rememberwheninstitute. Okay?

In terms of cultural industries, the cultural industries are our opportunity to use creativity; knowledge-based industry to create a source of income for our people, and we have had lots of work going on in creating a lot of these projects. One of our projects was the Mentoring of the Masters; Music School in the Panyard; Artiste in Residence Programme; Pan Camps; Cultural Camps.

The programme called Mentoring of the Masters facilitates knowledge transfer. So we take masters who have developed their craft in any particular area and we align them with an apprentice and so they can pass on their knowledge. A total of 75 beneficiaries participated in this programme. We have five mentors: Mr. Krishna Persad in dance, Mr. Rodney Ramjit in Ramleela, Mr. Errol Ince in music, Dr. Kim Johnson in film and Mr. Zeno Constance in theatre. And over 75 young people were able to work closely with these masters and to pass on a lot of those skills.

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. DR. L. DOUGLAS]

Friday, September 13, 2013

We expanded the Music School in the Panyard Programme to a larger, more ambitious music school in the community. The first cycle of Music School in the Panyard started in June 2012 for four months and it ended in October 2012. In 2013, the programme was rebranded Music Schools in the Community and started in June 2013. The 2013 version conducted at panyards included: Skiffle Bunch, Potential Symphony, Exodus, Casablanca Steel Foundation, Sangre Grande Cordettes, Couva Joylanders, and more than 400 individuals participated in that.

The Artiste in Residence Programme which is part of the Music School in the Panyard, we had noted musical icons participating in the programme that include: Leston Paul; Roy Cape and Pelham Goddard.

The Ministry launched Pan Camps as an opportunity to bring and to support the development and the learning of the steel band. In 2013 the Ministry expanded its vacation camp programme from nine to 53—53 cultural camps—and these included everything that you could think about, including things like: hair weaving, pan playing, drum making, drum playing, you know, whatever they were. They were developed by members of the community who had a skill they wanted to pass on and so, over that period of time, 1,600 young people over the summer benefited from this programme: the Development of the competencies of the Visual and Performing Arts and the Promotion of Cultural Diversity. And so the Ministry continues to participate with our community.

But we understand, Mr. Speaker, that in order to really develop the arts and culture, you have to pay specific attention to research. We find that a lot of people prefer to continue at a folk level. The folk level is what we do naturally. It is based on our natural gifts and abilities and we function at a certain level. To take our craft to another level requires research and so we have implemented a number of research. Cultural mapping: this is a toolkit that was designed and developed to provide baseline survey, needs assessment, gap analysis, cultural sector. We have a consultant, Dr. Susan Burke. She was awarded a contract to implement and carry out the exercise. Work has commenced.

Approximately 400 field interviews were conducted during phase I of the project. These were respondents. They came from various fields: design, music, theatre, art, literary arts, film. The next phase we are working on right now has to do with evaluation and reporting and the development of GIS information so that we could know where things are and what is needed and how to implement it.

The work of the Ministry continues in the support of our artists and the cultural sector to move to the next level. We know we are good in Trinidad.

Appropriation Bill, 2013

Friday, September 13, 2013

Everybody says we have talent coming out of our hands; [*Interruption*] coming out of our heads, our eyes, our ears, everywhere you turn.

I was just being interviewed this week by some people from *Forbes Magazine* and they were just so blown away that everywhere they walked it was just like, you know, art and culture is coming out of this country. But we need to do more than that. We need to find ways that our artists can plug into the international circuit and find support for the work that they are doing so that they could take it to a real professional level.

So the Ministry launched the National Registry of Artists and Cultural Workers. The registry was launched in February of 2011 and to date a total of 91 individuals and organizations and cultural projects have been registered. The National Registry would become pivotal to the policy of grants and subventions, since all groups and individuals requesting grant funding from the Ministry will be required to register with the National Registry.

5.45 p.m.

What is it? It is a database complete with a website for online application and access to the data. Artistes can register, cultural workers, cultural organizations. It certifies cultural works and cultural workers and entertainers so that they can receive funding at a discount, or the funders can receive a—Its certification is used by the Board of Inland Revenue to validate the claims from corporate citizens with relation to the arts and culture allowance and the production company allowance of the Corporation Tax Act.

It is also used by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to validate applications by nationals for the Caribbean Single Market and Economy's freedom of movement certificate. So, artistes who are travelling to and fro through the Caribbean, they would need this certification and this is provided by the National Registry of Artists and Cultural Workers. Plans are in train to have this certification supported. It is also recognized in Europe and in other parts of the world. And so, it is a major advantage for all our artistes to be registered so that they could receive the kind of support that they need, and the Ministry continues with that work.

We continue to support the development of film, the Trinidad and Tobago Community Short Film Festival which took place in 2012. The Ministry is partnering with the Trinidad and Tobago Film Company to produce the Trinidad and Tobago Community Short Film Festival. We had a number of groups participating: Bombassa from Barataria, Karatel Youth Creations from Vistabella,

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. DR. L. DOUGLAS]

Friday, September 13, 2013

Prizgar Lands Kelly Village Cultural Performers, San Fernando School of the Arts, South East Port of Spain Cultural Workshop. Group members were trained in the areas of scriptwriting, videography, acting, film editing. The winning group was Karatel Youth Creations and they were awarded equipment and prize money to continue the work of filming.

In the area of cultural exchange, Mr. Speaker, you will know that Trinidad and Tobago has signed a number of cultural agreements with a whole host of countries around the world, and we continue to develop these relationships with countries we have signed these arrangements and agreements with.

The National Steel Symphony Orchestra continues to be our frontline organization for representing Trinidad and Tobago internationally. The National Steel Symphony Orchestra, Mr. Speaker, is a steel band side that represents the highest level of pan playing. All of their pans are the G-Pans, all of the players read music and they play all kinds of music. So, the National Steel Symphony Orchestra continues to represent us. This year they went to Martinique at the Aime Cesaire Festival in Martinique in January, and they were received at a gala concert in Martinique—the delegation. I was there. In July, they also went to Barbados. They visited Nigeria.

Miss Cox: “And you were there too, ain’t.”

Mr. Sharma: You were missing.

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: The Ministry facilitated the visitation of a delegation of 30 persons from Nigeria to the Carnival of 2013, headed by the Minister of Tourism, Culture and National Orientation, Chief Edem Duke, and there were also people from Kenya, Uganda, Liberia on the west coast of Africa. Once again we have received requests from countries in West Africa and Europe for participation in our Carnival here because they are trying to institute it in their countries. Nigeria alone has just started four Carnivals. They are just asking for another one in Lagos. They have one in Calabar, one in Abuja, one in the Cross River State of Port Harcourt—[*Interruption*]

Miss Cox: You going and support them?

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: Ah? You want to come?

Miss Cox: Where you get that outfit?

Hon. Member: Abuja. Abuja. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: So Trinidad—and you have to understand that Nigeria alone has 170 million people. When we were in Nigeria, November last year, we

played for the international school there and for the Minister of the Federal Capital of Nigeria, Abuja, and he immediately says, “I want this in all of the schools.” Nigeria has hundreds of thousands of schools.

Hon. Member: As easy as that.

Miss Cox: [*Inaudible*] [*Laughter*]

Dr. Khan: “He say come, he go show you where he get it.” [*Laughter*]

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: Ladies and gentlemen, I am on a serious matter here. Mr. Speaker, I am talking about the power of Trinidad and Tobago culture and its impact around the world, and 25 musicians there, in Nigeria, and the prime or the main Minister of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, of Abuja, says he wants this in schools. I said, “Nigeria has hundreds of thousands of schools; 170 million people.” I put to this country and to this Parliament and to this nation, that we could survive on pan alone.

Mr. Sharma: Well done!

Mr. Samuel: Yes.

Mr. Sharma: See if you get a little tassa in there too, “nah”.

Mr. Samuel: Create it and become a big industry.

Mr. Sharma: Minister, see if you get a little tassa there.

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: And tassa. This year we have had visits also from China. The Zhejiang Opera Theatre from China came in March. They performed free to the public at NAPA, SAPA, Mason Hall Secondary School in Tobago. We also had the visit of Mewasi Dance Group from India, from Gujarat State, and they performed in March and performed free to the public. As we speak right now, we have a group of 42 people in China performing at the Beijing Cultural Festival.

We had over 100 people performing at Carifesta and they were the life of the party over there. The delegation comprised of over 100 practitioners from Trinidad and Tobago at the participating festival which was in Paramaribo, Surname or P-a-r-a-m-a-r-i-b-o as they say, from August 16 to 23. The art forms represented included music, literary arts, graphic designs, visual arts, fashion, film, animation, culinary arts, dance, theatre, and Tobago was represented.

The evolution of the steel pan exhibit also comprised the centrepiece of the country’s booth and was a major drawing card. Most of you are familiar with the

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. DR. L. DOUGLAS]

Friday, September 13, 2013

steel pan exhibit. It was in the airport for a long time; those three circular things. It was there when Keshorn Walcott came in. That is the steel pan exhibit and it was quite a stir at Carifesta. The contingent was well received and individual members have begun to receive offers from other Caribbean countries for their service. Of course, Donna, Member for Laventille East, I was there.

Mr. Speaker, a fascinating and true to our commitment in our manifesto, the Ministry is already working on the establishment of festival villages throughout Trinidad and Tobago. The Ministry of Arts and Multiculturalism has developed a proposal for the establishment of six of these festival cities: in Felicity, Arouca, Bonasse Village in Cedros, Laventille, Princes Town, Sangre Grande. These facilities will be used to host community Carnival, heritage festivals, exhibitions, workshops, inter-cultural exchanges. Something that is significant to all of us is the training of industry professionals or personnel. How can we proceed or move forward without proper training of our personnel? So we are in the business of providing access to and support the training of art administrators, curators, tutors and other technical personnel involved in the Ministry.

Earlier this year, we signed a contract with the DeVos Institute from the Kennedy Center, Washington DC, USA; developed a three-day session for cultural organizations. Approximately 70 individuals from 22 national organizations participated; all those organizations that receive subventions and grant funding from the Ministry of Arts and Multiculturalism. Emphasis was placed on effective fund raising, programming, business planning, project development, audience development, and we received a resounding applause for the great work that was done by the DeVos Institute and the Ministry of Arts and Multiculturalism.

Later on this year and probably into next year, we will be developing a trade show, an expo, that will give all stakeholders the opportunity to display their business products and services. A consultant has already been engaged to assist with the development of this project. The Ministry proposes Trinidad and Tobago interactive music expo—you could call it TIME if you want, and we propose that this will happen in the early part of 2014. The music expo is designed to upgrade the professional and promotional capacity of artistes and assist in securing international contracts.

Even as I speak here, I had a young man visiting my office this week, who recently received a multimillion dollar contract from Universal Records, right here from Trinidad and Tobago, KMC—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Samuel: Yes, he did.

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas:—and is doing extremely, extremely well, and the Ministry continues to give him our support.

We are developing partnerships, both locally, nationally, internationally. We are aware that we have to work with all the various Ministries. We have to work with the Ministry of Tourism Development for—the Member here from Fyzabad—doing the international marketing and bringing people—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Sharma: You bring tassa.

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas:—to participate with our cultural products. We are aware that we have to work with the Ministry of Trade and Industry, because in the Ministry of Trade and Industry we have the creative TT sector, we have the Trinidad and Tobago Film Company, the fashion industry and so forth. So we continue to work with other Ministries. We continue to work with the Ministry of National Diversity as we support the development of citizen, national—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Samuel: Patriotism

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas:—patriotism and social integration.

We continue to work with all the various, not only our Ministry colleagues, but partnerships with the private sector as we encourage them to provide more and more funding for the support of the arts. We do believe that the arts and culture are significant parts of our salvation and development here.

The Ministry is in the process of establishing, as we continue to fulfil our mandate to move Trinidad and Tobago culture—you see, I have said on various occasions that we produce far more culture and art, and cultural manifestation in Trinidad and Tobago than we can consume. We do not have the scale of the economy. A couple Sundays ago, I was walking out, I was on Ariapita Avenue, and there was pan on the streets and there was a whole street full of people.

Mr. Sharma: Very good.

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: There was T20 Cricket and that was like a Carnival itself going on. There was best village happening at Queen's Hall or SAPA or NAPA, and there was a whole lot of people there. On any given day, we are producing so much art and so much culture, that we cannot consume all of that ourselves. So it is important that we find ways to move our cultural products out and get them to the places where people need them the most so that we can make more and more of an income here.

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. DR. L. DOUGLAS]

Friday, September 13, 2013

And this has been our commitment. If you read the manifesto, page 48 I think it is, it tells us of extending and developing and moving of our cultural products through the use of the overseas missions. And so the Ministry is in the process of establishing the Trinidad and Tobago Institute for Cultural Co-operation. The institute will drive the demand for local cultural products, services and practitioners through the strategic use of cultural agreements and exchanges, and the development of a sustained presence on the continents of Asia, Africa, Europe, North and South America. It will focus primarily in the first stages on the development of the steel pan, with resources being deployed to develop markets for artists in music, dance, visual arts, festival arts and fashion.

The institute will use the following strategies on these continents where it is located: there will be a targeted focus on the promotion of the steel pan, the staging of moving exhibitions, management of promotional tours, delivery of workshops, development of strategic media presence. Some of you might see just now on the television—earlier this year we had a collaborative project with Tempo, the cable channel, and the *New Jersey Star* which is a newspaper on some kind of show they had up there.

We provided from our Ministry the prize which was participation here in Trinidad and Tobago. They stayed at the Hilton; they participated in tours around the country—the winner of that—and they stayed in Tobago. And they produced a wonderful documentary of the people participating in Trinidad and Tobago. That did not really cost us that much, but it was real great international collaboration that allowed people all over the world to see what is going on here in Trinidad and Tobago. So we will continue that.

I mentioned earlier that we were developing decentralized spaces, and you just have to look in our manifesto—I am saying all of this to say that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, the People's Partnership, has been delivering on our promises—

6.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Appropriation Bill, 2013

Friday, September 13, 2013

Mr. Sharma: Take an hour for me!

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: Thanks to my colleagues and to others who have allowed me to present the Ministry's vision.

I started talking about decentralized spaces. All this is in our manifesto for those who say we are just about talk, I am proving that delivery beats old talk. [Crosstalk] Hello? [Laughter]

Mr. Samuel: It does!

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: We continue to deliver. We continue to deliver in the area of calypso and in the enhancement project. The Ministry conceptualized and funded a number of projects, calypso project, around the enhancement of calypso aimed at increasing audiences for the calypso product. We supported the Klassic Russo Calypso Tent and to their credit, they did this without the direct involvement of the Ministry; we just supported them. Attention was placed on developing collaboration with TUCO targeting the judging system. We are working on developing the judging system for calypso competition.

So, Mr. Speaker, there are so many things that we do at the Ministry of Arts and Multiculturalism, all committed to developing a cultural framework that represents the people of Trinidad and Tobago and developing the art form. If you listen carefully, you would see that I am outlining about five areas that we are working comprehensively in.

First, we were talking about developing a Ministry with the capacity to deliver to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Understand, Mr. Speaker, that in previous administrations, the Ministry of Arts and Multiculturalism or the Ministry of Culture and Gender Affairs or Community Development or whatever it was in those incarnations, was used as a kind of washing ground for money and people who like to give their friends things.

Hon. Member: Ohhhh!

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: Right. If you remember the past evaluation of \$400 million and there were about 20 statements of error that were committed in terms of the distribution of the resources of that Ministry, you know, and some people have been accusing me of not giving them things, and when you read that report, it is just astounding about the way that money was used to support friends, families and the least of which was going to any constructive development of arts and culture in Trinidad and Tobago.

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. DR. L. DOUGLAS]

Friday, September 13, 2013

What we are presenting here is a constructive approach to the development of arts and culture for the quality of life of our citizens and for the economic development of our people. We are saying, first of all, we really need to structure our Ministry so that it has the capacity to deliver. Secondly, we need to work with developing artists and we need to develop our artistic products so that it will be quality products that the world can buy into and accept. Thirdly, we need to develop cultural spaces where people can present and perform and hone their skills; and finally, we need to develop the industry which has to do with the networks, the connections, the skills, the systems, the infrastructure for sustaining a cultural industry. That is what the Ministry of Arts and Multiculturalism is working on. We continue to do that.

Financial and technical support for thought leaders: this is what we call a new vision competitive award where significant people can win an award to do great exploits in the area of arts and culture. These projects must have the potential to contribute significantly to the GDP or employment in the future if supported in the present. Three projects were funded in 2013: the Caribbean Music Group for a film production called “Pan We Are the World”—and filming has commenced on that; Trinitunes.com for a website development—and the website is being upgraded and expanded; and KMP Music Lab for a reality TV series called “Building the Beats”; soon you will see this on TV, reality TV. The real goal there was to encourage and to demonstrate to new artistes what it takes to really make good music, and the recipients of these were Mr. Roger Boothman, Mr. Leroy Wilson for the Pan 2000 for steel pan.

You will also notice that this year, we had Hugh Masekela in Trinidad, this is a three-time world renowned trumpeter, Mr. Speaker, and he participated with the Siparia Deltones in making a fantastic album. He is already predicting that this could win a Grammy award in the area of world music or Caribbean music or tropical music—a fantastic album of an international jazz player and a steel pan side in Trinidad and Tobago. And the Ministry continues to participate and support these things.

We are really focused on research and development, monitoring and evaluation, communication. We have also refocused our grant distribution policy. We have rewritten our policy and that will be made known and public to Trinidad and Tobago so people could understand what they are getting into. We are also developing the 51 per cent policy. Soon, Mr. Speaker, you will find we are having dialogue, conversations, about what it means to create local music and having

Appropriation Bill, 2013

Friday, September 13, 2013

local content on our media so that our people can concentrate in putting their products out there. The Ministry will engage in this dialogue very shortly with the national community.

We continue to work feverishly in bringing steel pan to where it should be in Trinidad and Tobago as the home of steel pan, and we are working with Pan Trinbago to develop the pan headquarters, the pan-making factory, the pan-chroming factory, pan school, so that all of this would seal and cement Trinidad and Tobago as the home of steel pan, and if you want quality pan, quality players—

Mr. Samuel: “Top ah the line.”

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas:—“top ah the line”, Trinidad is the place to be and we are working on branding Trinidad and Tobago in that regard.

So, Mr. Speaker, I could go on and on about the things we are doing at the Ministry—

Miss Cox: “Is all right.”

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas:—and I suspect our colleagues here are almost overwhelmed by—*[Interruption]*

Hon. Member: Those on your side.

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas:—by the level of delivery. *[Desk thumping]* They are overwhelmed. Right now, you feel like “yuh drinking water from ah fire hose”—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Samuel: Yeah. *[Laughter and desk thumping]*

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas:—because there is just so much delivery but, as we say, delivery beats old talk.

Hon. Member: “Do not swallow eh!” *[Laughter]*

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: But I am just reminding us that the UNESCO medium-term strategy for 2013, it reminds us that what we are doing is promoting the potential of dialogue based on music and the arts as a vector for the strengthening of mutual understanding and interaction, as well as building a culture of peace and respect for cultural diversity.

What we are talking about, Mr. Speaker, is the importance of arts and culture for all aspects of development. We have done so much in so little time, not only

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. DR. L. DOUGLAS]

Friday, September 13, 2013

from this Ministry but here we have a list that the Government has constructed. As we say “they talk and people continue to talk, we deliver”. [*Desk thumping*] Right?

As it is mentioned here before, 70,000 laptops, all Form 1 students; we have established the Children’s Life Fund; we have increased minimum wage, we have increased old age pension; provision of free public transport; establishment of COSTAATT campus in Sangre Grande; launched the UTT education campus in Tobago. As a matter of fact, even at UTT, you can now receive a certificate in pan tuning—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Samuel: Fantastic!

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: I was there at the first graduation of about 15 to 20 scholars, and these people are in high demand all around the world. The commencement of work on the children’s hospital in Couva; completing the Chancery Lane teaching hospital in San Fernando; we have launched the Land for the Landless Programme. Fascinating! Distribution of 4,000 leases to former Caroni employees.

Even in my own constituency, Mr. Speaker, when I went in there, I promised the people that we would work on land regularization, education. We will work on cultural and sporting facilities, and it is going on, all over. I have a list here, a whole—I asked my staff to prepare a list of things that have been done in my constituency, it goes on and on. If I start to read this, I would finish tomorrow.

Miss Cox: Spare us. [*Laughter*]

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: Tomorrow!

Mr. De Coteau: Read some of it.

Mr. Samuel: Read some! Read some!

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: “I’ll tell yuh!” Here it goes.

Mr. Roberts: “They talk; we deliver.”

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: We have delivered, Mr. Speaker, I am checking here: in Tacarigua, Arima, Arouca, Five Rivers, Cane Farm, Lopinot—all of these areas—roads!

Mr. Samuel: Yes, yes, yes! [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: “It have places that did not have roads before. It have places that you did not even think that you coulda build ah road.”

Appropriation Bill, 2013

Friday, September 13, 2013

Mr. Samuel: Yeah.

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: “Like if yuh going up Surrey Village, McDavid Street. It had ah road going down so and going nowhere sort of, you know”—

Mr. Samuel: “Yuh bring it to somewhere.”

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas:—drain; road.” [*Laughter*] “Then Layne Street off the old road, people live there, “dey tell me, ‘Minister if you could put ah road here’, well”—

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: What? What?

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: “It have ah road there. [*Laughter*] Ah come back, I was shock, I did not even know yuh coulda put ah road there.” We have projects that I could—you know, it had a fella there before me from the previous administration—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Samuel: He could not put a road there.

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas:—and I did not know what really was going on, because I live in my constituency, right, I grew up there—and we have George Boyce Park, Lopinot Park, Crown Street Park, Limpet Park, all of these have lights.

Mr. Samuel: Sinanan Park.

Miss Hospedales: Crown Street Park had lights before.

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: “Eh?” “They didn’t ha no lights before.”

Mr. Samuel: No, no, no.

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: I did not even think that—I mean, my impression from the previous people is that lights could not be put there but all of “ah sudden ah seeing bright lights and people playing in the night”. Mr. Speaker, all of this is delivery.

Mr. Indarsingh: Who was that person before?

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: [*Laughter*] All of this is delivery. Areas that were flooding, you know. My constituency, Lopinot/Bon Air West there, was a major area of flooding and we have worked on that flooding system, and I am still praying, you know, “I doh wanna talk too fast”, but it has reduced significantly, infrastructural development: the fixing of drains, roads, rivers, bridges and we continue to do that. Developing of Lopinot—listen nah, Mr. Speaker, it goes on

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. DR. L. DOUGLAS]

Friday, September 13, 2013

because while “they talk, we deliver”. [*Desk thumping*] I could go on and on but I just want to remind, Mr. Speaker, about the importance of arts and culture to our society.

Most countries like ours have trouble with national cohesion. Countries that are bigger than ours, they continue to have dysfunctional youth, subcultures, significant problem. Whether you are talking about in Ireland where you have bloody conflicts between the Basque nationalists or even in Canada with the Quebecois or Corsican nationalists in France or even in China where we go in there, Tibetan nationalists. These are countries that are struggling with diversity and complexity—or Rwanda or Burundi or even up in the former Yugoslavia where the country desecrated into Serbs and Croats and Montenegrins and Slovenes and Kosovars and Albanians and Muslims against each other. These are significant challenges and one of the most significant things that we can do as a nation is to bring our people together.

Mr. Samuel: Together! Yes, yes. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: Bring our people together in strong cords that bind us together that cannot be broken. So we continue to support the international declarations and conventions that highlight the importance of participation in cultural and artistic life for the promotion of harmonious economic and national development. How much more time do I have, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: You have about 16 more minutes.

Mr. Samuel: “Or, yuh doing well, man.”

Mr. Roberts: You talk, talk!

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: These conventions, they derived from The Universal Declaration of Human Rights which I have mentioned to give us a little bit of clarity. Everyone has to be—in Article 22, it says:

“Everyone”—is—”a member of society”—they are—”entitled to”—the—
”...realization...of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.”

In Article 26:

“Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations...”

6.15 p.m.

All of this, Mr. Speaker; the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which we subscribe; and so the Ministry understands all of this; we are for liberty. This Government recognizes all of this. We are for freedom; that is what we are about, and we will continue to do so. Mr. Speaker, we have done so much in so little time, but we must do more.

I want to remind us, Professor Lewis once said, you know at the University of Mona, he said: “We are building a nation; we are building a West Indian nation; we are building a nation”. He reminded them that they were different islands, different colour skin/complexion; they might worship at different churches, mandirs, mosques, but their purpose was to promote, not to promote differences, it was to make a nation. What Sir Arthur Lewis said was: “What makes a German? Is it his industriousness? What makes a Frenchman? Is it his art or culture, the way he takes pride in his language? What makes an Englishman? Is it his political sense? These are just stereotypes. Stereotypes may be wrong, but sometimes they are based on a core of facts.”

We are trying to find out—what makes us Trinidadian?

Hon. Member: “Trinbagonian.”

Mr. Samuel: “Who we are.”

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: What makes us who we are? Trinidadians and Tobagonians—*[Interruption]*

Hon. Member: “Trinbagonians.”

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas:—that gives us a place to belong so that we can protect, live, have a sense of national pride, have a sense of appreciation of our country, committed to the next generation. What gives us our distinctive cultural practices, a way to respect and to live for each other? I want to skip ahead, Mr. Speaker—*[Interruption]*

Hon. Member: “Doh skip.”

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: And wind up.

Hon. Member: “Doh skip.”

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas:—to talk about the importance of arts and culture to economic development. I have already talked about the arts, the importance of arts and culture for our way of life. Mr. Speaker, I am talking about this because

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. DR. L. DOUGLAS]

Friday, September 13, 2013

developed countries, all developed countries show that they understand the value of arts and culture and that arts and culture must support, and go hand in hand with industrial and national commerce.

I want to give an example of this, Mr. Speaker. Last year—and I want to take New Orleans as an example, Mr. Speaker—I was in New Orleans for the World Economic Forum—[*Interruption*]

Miss Mc Donald: I would like to see your travel things since you [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Member: “He travel by bus.”

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: Do not be a hater. Please. [*Laughter*]

Miss Mc Donald: No, no. I am a lover. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: Take the case of New Orleans, Mr. Speaker. Mayor Landrieu, who is the mayor of New Orleans, I had the privilege of meeting with all the mayors from around the United States at a conference on World Cultural Economic Forum held in partnership with the New Orleans mayor, Mr. Mitch Landrieu, and there were also other countries that were there too.

New Orleans, Mr. Speaker, has a population of 369,250 people. They only have a square mile area of 169.42. On August 29, 2005, we all know what happened, Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans, flooded approximately 80 per cent of the city, yet by 2012, more than US \$760 million was spent in New Orleans on events; over \$1 billion in pay, in salaries to cultural sector workers. Imagine what we can do with a population of 1.3 million people if we focus on developing our cultural industry. And so the Ministry continues to put forward all its ongoing initiatives to develop.

One of the significant areas that we are working on has to do with the development of the arts sector project; the development of the arts industry and personnel. This would include the national arts council. We have already put forward a project for the development of a national arts council. It will be a core body of expert with the relevant competencies and experience to guide the advancement of cultural and creative development. It will be managed by the funding, people who are experienced so that talent can emerge from all sectors. We have put out, Mr. Speaker, a request for \$30 million to support the development of this arts council.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to end, right, but I want to reestablish the point we are making here, that some people “does” talk but we deliver and nothing beats

Appropriation Bill, 2013

Friday, September 13, 2013

delivery. For years the Ministry of Arts and Culture was treated as a side show and culture was treated as a supplement to national development.

This Government is bringing it front and centre—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Member: From where?

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas:—has made it part of our development policy. From wherever you all had it; “in the back some way, yuh know”. [*Laughter*] Today I speak without fear—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Samuel: Well said.

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas:—I denounce destructive and divisive, dastardly ideas that use discrimination practices in religion; I denounce the idea of discrimination as dogma, prejudice, as principle and race as religion. These things are divisive and they do not bring any development to our country. The Ministry of Arts and Multiculturalism, we believe that culture and the arts must count for more than political machinations.

We have no doubt that the creative and cultural sector can be the driver for the achievement of the Government’s overall objective for a secure, prosperous and sustainable nation. As I always say, the cultural industry is our best opportunity to engage the most amount of people, from the widest backgrounds, in the shortest time, for the least investment, with the highest returns. More than oil or gas, the natural resource that we have, of infinite supply, is our people and our culture.

Mr. Speaker, I have accounted for our stewardship; how we spent our funds last year; I have outlined the facts and given evidence, the absolute necessity to support the arts and culture—[*Interruption*]*—*Mr. Speaker, the future, the fate of this country, depends on what we do about our culture and what we do with arts. Make no mistake, we have no choice but to dig deeply into our souls and summon the will to engage with youths, the artists, culture, the cultural community, to give this country a real glorious future. And I have no doubt that our Government, People’s Partnership Government, is committed, and has committed to the investment in arts and culture in the development of our country through the arts and culture. And so I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Arouca/Maloney. [*Desk thumping*]

Miss Alicia Hospedales (Arouca/Maloney): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I thank you for this opportunity to speak, in this debate on the

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[MISS HOSPEDALES]

Friday, September 13, 2013

Appropriation (Financial Year 2014) Bill, 2013. I also would like to commend our political leader and Member for Diego Martin West, as well as my colleague for Laventille West, on their in-depth analysis of the 2014 budget. Mr. Speaker, for yet another year Members on this side are going to expose the Government and expose the Government's deception and the deception that they have perpetrated upon the population of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West indicated that they are building a way of life that is meaningful to all; and I would like to ask him: How does he define all? Are they really building a way of life for all? How does he define—a-l-l? Mr. Speaker, he also said that they are serious about nation building and I will ask him: Is that really true?

Hon. Member: Yes.

Miss A. Hospedales: Are you really serious about nation building? And Mr. Speaker, for the 2013 Budget, the Minister, the then, the current Minister of Finance and the Economy said: they were stimulating growth and generating prosperity. And this year he said that they are sustaining growth and securing prosperity. Mr. Speaker, do they really care about the economy? Do they really care about sustaining growth? Do they really care about prosperity for this nation, or securing prosperity for this nation? Mr. Speaker, the answer to this is no and I will establish why I am saying no, as I move on in the debate.

Mr. Speaker, the most applicable, you know—he said their theme is sustaining growth and securing prosperity—and I will say the most applicable theme for this budget is raping the Treasury and creating economic instability. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker—[*Desk thumping and interruption*]

Hon. Member: That is going deep.

Miss A. Hospedales: Yes, that is going deep; that is going very deep. Mr. Speaker, the Member for Caroni East boasted that his Government is moving towards accelerating growth and prosperity—you know they speak with all these nice words—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Yes.

Miss A. Hospedales: Growth and prosperity for the country and, Mr. Speaker, I am asking again: Is this really so? Mr. Speaker, even the Auditor General—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: “Um hmm.”

Miss A. Hospedales: In the report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts for the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, for this country, for the financial year 2012 the Auditor General expressed grave concern over the lack of Government's transparency and accountability in spending taxpayers' money. And let us look at some of the highlights or some of the concerns expressed by the Auditor General, Mr. Speaker.

For the Ministry of Health alone, a total value of unrepresented cheques amounting to \$223,462,901.64 was not verified since the reconciliation of monthly abstract payments and the list of unpaid cheques as at September 30, 2012, were not made available for verification, Mr. Speaker. There was no way to verify the payments because the cheques used to pay the suppliers, et cetera, were not produced for audit examination. Mr. Speaker, \$223,462,901.64 is a lot of money that is unaccounted for; it was not verified.

Mr. Speaker, unrepresented cheques amounting to \$20,905,610.24 for the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs were not produced for audit examination; \$31,736,207.58 unrepresented cheques were not disclosed by the Ministry of Sport. Mr. Speaker, this is cause for concern and you know—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: It is.

Miss A. Hospedales:—the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West talked about the Government's stewardship, right. He mentioned that, you know, the Government, they are good stewards basically and we are saying no. All of this money, millions of dollars in terms of accountability, they did not provide the documentation necessary to give account for the money that was spent; millions of dollars; not 20, not 30, not 40 but millions of dollars.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Caroni East, he said that the way that their Government is moving is towards accelerating growth for the country, but with this type of activity taking place under their care, they are not taking the nation forward to sustaining growth and realizing prosperity. I do not understand if they understand the condition that they actually have this country in economically.

Is this the way in which the Minister of Finance and the Economy is securing prosperity for Trinidad and Tobago? Mr. Speaker, I will like to ask where is the accountability and where is the transparency of the Government? The Minister of Finance and the Economy said that they have kept the economy shielded and the previous Minister of Finance and the Economy, the Member for Tunapuna, said that they have exercised good husbanding of the economy.

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[MISS HOSPEDALES]

Friday, September 13, 2013

I really do not know what that word means, Mr. Speaker, but you know we have to guess; good husbanding of the economy. So they are saying that they are shielding the economy, exercising good husbanding of the economy but yet, all of this type of activity is taking place, where money is not being accounted for, Mr. Speaker. The people of this country—[*Interruption*—again, recognize the deception of the UNC-A; and I want to tell the people of this country, do not be fooled by the Independent Liberal Party because they are just the UNC in disguise wearing a green cloak, Mr. Speaker. [*Laughter and crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, when the Ministry of Local Government pays \$26,660,904.78 for the rental of office spaces and car park spaces and for security services at a particular location, which was not stated in the Auditor General's Report, when they pay that type of money for services, for office spaces that are not being utilized, Mr. Speaker, this is cause for concern. [*Interruption*]

6.30 p.m.

In the 2012 Auditor General's Report, Member for Tabaquite. Mr. Speaker, this is cause for concern. Is this the way the Government is securing prosperity for the country? Again, my theme, the most accurate theme for this budget is: "Raping the Treasury, Creating Economic Instability." [*Desk thumping*]

For the Ministry of Sport, the Auditor General found that, under the vote for Football World Cup 2014, a payment totalling \$11 million was seen to have been made. However, when the statement for the payment was provided, the payment actually totalled only \$5,611,933.25, a difference of \$5,388,066.75. The sum of \$5,388,066.75 could not be accounted for, Mr. Speaker. What do you call this? Again, the most applicable theme for this budget debate is: "Raping the Treasury, Creating Economic Instability."

Mr. Speaker, for the same Ministry, under the Development Fund, the Auditor General reported that the records revealed expenditure of \$64,672,790 under the Infrastructure Development Fund, but the financial statements for the fund reflected expenditure of only \$52,173,756.99, a difference of \$12,499,033.01. That is a lot of money that is not accounted for. It is not a difference of \$12 but \$12 million-plus.

Again, the Ministry of Sport, under the non-profit institutions vote, the Auditor General found payments totalling \$180,737.50; that was the Ministry's contribution to an individual's funeral arrangement. I would like the Minister of Sport to answer: Who was the one who approved this burial grant? For the first

time in my life, I actually saw a burial grant totalling \$180,737.50 from a Ministry. The only Ministry I know that gives burial grants is the Ministry of the People and Social Development for \$7,000; a burial grant of \$180,737.50.

Mr. Speaker, according to the Auditor General, what the Ministry of Sport did was contrary to the Financial Regulation 65(2), which states:

“A vote may not be applied to a purchase for which it is not intended.”

These are critical issues that must be brought to light. They are saying they are seeking to secure prosperity for Trinidad and Tobago but when this type of activity is going on in the Ministries we have to express concern. It is millions of dollars not being accounted for.

The Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara said that they are giving us value, they are giving the people of this country value for money. I would like to ask: Are the unaccounted millions really giving the people of this country value for money?

Mr. Speaker, I also want to ask him, when he got into the accident using a ministry vehicle, who paid for that? I am sure it would have been taxpayers’ money that paid for the repair of that vehicle; another set of money that would be utilized unwisely. Is that value for money? I would like to ask him. I hope that the Minister of Finance and the Economy could answer that in his closing. Is this value for money?

The Auditor General also stated for the Ministry of Education there were critical supporting documents such as the memoranda of understanding, project status reports and signed contracts required for verification of payments totalling \$10,781,552, as of August 31, 2012. These documents were not provided for examination by the auditor. As a result, the Auditor General was forced to say that there was non-compliance by the Ministry with respect to the financial instructions that were given by the Auditor General. Also, there was difficulty in determining whether there was compliance with the Comptroller of Accounts’ request for information.

In the Ministry of the People and Social Development—when you go through the Auditor General’s Report—I only extracted a few of the items—it crosses Ministries and it is really a cause for concern. If we were to add up the millions of dollars being accounted for, for every Ministry we would probably be totalling \$1 billion/\$2 billion for all you know.

In the Ministry of the People and Social Development, massive corruption and anomalies were found in a contract awarded to upgrade the Piparo Empowerment

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[MISS HOSPEDALES]

Friday, September 13, 2013

Centre. It was reported that many anomalies were found in the work done. For example, you would imagine that dining tables made out of plywood valued at \$1,000 were priced at \$11,000. That is cause for extreme—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Thomas: It was a typo?

Miss A. Hospedales: It is not even—no it is reality. It is not a typo. It is reality; \$11,000 for tables that cost \$1,000 maximum. Mr. Speaker, the contractor was fully paid for work done at the Piparo Empowerment Centre but the work is still incomplete, which includes work on the kitchen and other parts of the facility.

Mr. Speaker, what does the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara call this? He said corruption, corruption, corruption. This is cause for a lot, a lot, a lot of concern. Several construction anomalies were highlighted for work done during the Ministry of the People and Social Development’s partnership with Vision on Mission. The contractors were paid and scope of works varied, and the money paid to contractors did not match with the work that the contractors would have done and stated as completed. There were audit queries of that also.

The same is happening with projects under the URP Social Programme. Again, you know, it is a major cause for concern. Are they really sustaining our economy? Are they really seeking to secure prosperity? We have to ask that question. Are they sustaining growth? Are they securing prosperity? The answer to this is: no. Again, I go back to the most accurate theme for this budget is: “Raping the Treasury, Creating Economic Instability.” These are just a few examples of the way in which the UNC-A Government has been managing our economy.

The Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West said that they are delivering to the country. Is this what they are delivering to the country, this type of mismanagement; this type of lack of transparency? Wasting money! They are not being compliant with procurement procedures, not being transparent, not being accountable, not putting proper monitoring and evaluation procedures in place. They have been playing hide-and-seek with our money.

The Auditor General also found instances where, persons who were not authorized to sign the appropriation accounts were signing them. Cabinet approval for the granting of subventions to senior citizens’ activity centres and for the contract posts in certain ministries was not given. Those are the types of things the Auditor General found. Missing contracts in status reports to support payments for projects in various phases of construction could not be found. How

does the Minister of Finance and the Economy expect us to believe that he is sustaining growth and securing prosperity for Trinidad and Tobago, when all of these things are happening, millions of dollars, not cents, not a dollar, not \$2, not \$100, but millions of dollars totalling probably—I am sure if we add it up it would probably cross \$1 billion/\$2 billion in mismanagement of our finances? Mr. Speaker, how does he really expect us to believe that they are giving us value for money?

The Minister of Finance and the Economy wants us to believe that they are truly interested in building the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. This is another falsehood. I am saying to the people, do not believe them. We cannot believe them. Why I am saying we cannot believe them, when a government can manipulate the real gross domestic product figures to make the economy appear to be stable, it makes it difficult to believe them. We know that they have a history of falsehood and when they leave, everybody will remember them as the “falsehooders”. They will all be remembered as the “falsehooders”. [*Laughter and desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I want my constituents—[*Interruption*]

Miss Ramdial: That is not a word.

Hon. Member: “Falsehooders.”

Mr. Sharma: “Hooders.”

Miss A. Hospedales: Well, we coin words. I want my constituents and all the people across this country to remember that in 2011, the Member for Tunapuna came to this House and he told us that the real GDP was projected to be at \$88.06 billion. That is found on page 48 of the *Review of the Economy, 2011*. But when the current Minister of Finance and the Economy came in he adjusted the figure and he told us that the real gross domestic product figures were projected to have been—he told us it was not \$88.06 billion in 2011, but rather \$86.7 billion and that can be found on page 54 of the *Review of the Economy 2012*. In 2012 that is what he told us—no, no, no, the Member for Tunapuna who was the Minister of Finance then, he was wrong, it was not \$88.6 billion, it was really \$86.7. That is cause for a lot of concern.

Can we really trust them when they manipulate the real GDP figures? Even when they present GDP figures for 2012, \$87.8 billion and projected figures for 2013, \$89.2 billion, can we really trust them? They have manipulated the gross domestic product figures, the real GDP figures. They have manipulated them and we cannot trust them.

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[MISS HOSPEDALES]

Friday, September 13, 2013

Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the question: What are they really trying to hide? They hide the real GDP figures and they also hide other figures as well. I was astonished when I discovered that there were no statistics for Trinidad and Tobago reported by the Caribbean Tourism Organization on tourists—on stopover arrivals for 2011, 2012, 2013. The last time any information was provided by the UNC-A Government to the Caribbean Tourism Organization was in 2010. I was really amazed.

When I went to the website for the Caribbean Tourism Organization they have statistics from 2003 right up until 2010. So Trinidad and Tobago had tourism. There was tourism. You could have found tourist stopover arrival figures from 2003—2010 and there was also the tourist arrivals by month, a breakdown by month, for every country from 2003 right up until 2010.

For some strange reason, the figures for the Caribbean Tourism Organization for 2011, 2012 and 2013 went. For some reason or the other they are not there. They are missing. Trinidad and Tobago is missing in action.

6.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, if you go to the website you will see statistics for Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Aruba, Barbados, Bahamas, Belize, Bermuda, the British Virgin Islands, Cancun, Cayman Islands, Cuba, Curacao, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Martinique, Montserrat, Puerto Rico, St. Lucia, St Maarten, St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Mr. Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago would have been right under Suriname. There are figures for Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago would have been right under Suriname, and then after Trinidad and Tobago you would have the Virgin Islands. Trinidad and Tobago is nowhere to be found.

What does the Government really have to hide? Why are they trying to hide the tourist stopover/arrival statistics from us, and not just from us, but from the members of the Caribbean? Why are they trying to hide them? You know, it is really, really, you know, a shame to see what they are actually doing with the tourism sector. They are saying that they are boosting it, but are they really doing that? Was there really an increase in the air passenger arrivals? I would like the Minister of Finance and the Economy to tell us what is really happening with the tourism industry in Trinidad and Tobago.

Passenger arrivals on cruise ships declined. The number of cruise ships visiting Trinidad and Tobago declined. There was also a decline in the number of

yachts by 6.8 per cent for the first four months of this year, when compared with the same period last year. How can all these declines occur and yet still passenger arrivals are on the increase? This is not adding up.

I challenge the Minister of Finance and the Economy to present statistics that they have on tourist stopover/arrivals for scrutiny, not only locally but regionally and internationally as well. Mr. Speaker, this is just another example of why we cannot trust the Government. They are not transparent.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: That is right.

Miss A. Hospedales: They are not accountable. They seem to be hiding everything. Hiding all the tourists' statistics; hiding, you know, the real GDP figures or manipulating the real GDP figures. We just cannot believe them. Again, I have to reemphasize that, you know, we cannot believe the Government. On page 33 and page 18 of the Budget Statement 2014, the Minister of Finance and the Economy stated that unemployment fell. Is that really true? Is that really true, Mr. Speaker?

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Not in the rural area.

Miss A Hospedales: Just imagine not even the Central Bank could have provided the true unemployment figures. You know what they said? They said in their *Economic Bulletin* for July 2013, they could not have gauged the unemployment figures. They reported that in the absence of official labour market statistics from the Central Statistical Office, they were not able to present unemployment figures, but can only gauge what is happening through the information on retrenchment notices filed with the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development. Not even the Central Bank knows the correct unemployment figures, and what they said? The report noted that the number of retrenchment notices filed with the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development increased, it did not decrease. It increased by 19.6 per cent when compared with the same period for 2012.

Mr. Speaker, 19.6 per cent retrenchment is a sign of an increased rate of unemployment. Why are they hiding the unemployment figures? Why is the Government not being transparent? According to the Central Bank, 19.5 per cent of the total retrenchment notices came from distribution; 18.5 came from petroleum, the petroleum sector; 17.6 per cent from finance. Retrenchment—and anybody with basic understanding would understand that retrenchment equals unemployment. That is a simple solution: retrenchment equals unemployment. So why are they not telling us what the real unemployment figures are? [*Crosstalk*]

There have been several declines or contractions in various sectors and subsectors in this country, such as the contraction of petroleum chemicals—the petrochemicals subsector by 2.6 per cent. There had been a decline in the number of exploration wells, a decline by 4.3 per cent in the number of barrels of crude oil and condensate, from 20.6 million barrels produced during the period October 2011 to May 2012. The decline occurred from 20.6 million to 19.7 million barrels produced for the same period.

The Minister of Finance and the Economy said to judge them on their performance; that is what he ended—he closed his budget statement with that, judge them on their performance. Even when we take a look at the agricultural sector there is cause for concern, because again the Government failed to tell us what the true current state of the agricultural sector is. We have significant declines in the production of dasheen, eddoes, cabbage, lettuce, cauliflower, tomatoes, sweet peppers, hot peppers, bodi and rice paddy. All of these things decreased. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, you know what concerned me when I read and continued to do the research to prepare myself for this debate? The Minister of Finance and the Economy on page 37 of his budget statement indicated that they are continuing to give priority to the agricultural sector. I have to ask him, is that really true? He also said that there are efforts to enhance the national income and to ensure food security. I want to ask him, what is the current food import bill for Trinidad and Tobago? What is the current food import bill? Mr. Speaker, you know they are not telling us. They are not telling us at all. They are not disclosing the figures at all, at all, at all to us.

In 2009 it was \$4 billion; that was in 2009, it certainly cannot be the same today. The reason I am saying this; let me just give you some figures for the importation of chicken. In 2008, there would have been 11,103 metric tonnes of chicken imported; in 2009, 10,833.7 metric tonnes of chicken that would have been imported; in 2010, 19,462.3 metric tonnes of chicken were imported; in 2011, 19,948.5 metric tonnes would have been imported and in 2012, 17,545.9 metric tonnes would have been imported.

For lamb, in 2008, 5.8 metric tonnes; 2009, 11.9 metric tonnes; 2010, 151.6 metric tonnes; 2011, 19,948.5 metric tonnes; 2012, 17,545.9 metric tonnes of lamb would have been imported into this country. For beef, 3,925 metric tonnes would have been imported in 2008; in 2009, 3,544 metric tonnes; 2010, 4,969 metric tonnes; 2011, 5,416 metric tonnes; 2012, 6,750 metric tonnes. Mr. Speaker,

what you are seeing here is an increase in the importation of these things. So our food import bill could never be \$4 billion. In 2009, the numbers would have been much, much, much lower.

Cauliflower: in 2008, there was no importation; 2009, no importation; 2010, no importation; 2011, 56.1 metric tonnes; 2012, 253.6 metric tonnes. The figures are going up and up and up. So it is not logical to think that our food import bill can be the same. It is totally illogical. During January to July 2013, 218.2 metric tonnes of cauliflower have been imported. Then we have the organic cauliflower: in 2008, 2009 and 2010 there was no importation; 2011, 100.9 metric tonnes were imported; 2012, 187.5 metric tonnes. For January to July this year, 72 metric tonnes of organic cauliflower have already been imported; this is cause for concern.

Mr. Speaker, cherry tomatoes: there would have been no importation for 2008, 2009 and 2010, but in 2011, 6.9 metric tonnes would have been imported; 2011, 284.2 metric tonnes would have been imported. For January to July this year, 295.6 metric tonnes of cherry tomatoes would have been imported already.

Even the primary school child can take a look at these figures and realize that our food import bill has increased significantly. You know, even the staple import bill alone is \$649 million. Can the Minister of Finance and the Economy indicate how the Government will decrease the food import bill? Tell us when you are winding up, how does your Government intend to decrease the food import bill.

Mr. Speaker, how is it possible that the food import bill would be probably down to \$3 billion when they are going to import food from Guyana, when they talk about the establishment of these mega farms in Guyana? It is just not adding up. Is the Government really giving priority to the agricultural sector in this country? Or is it giving priority to the development of the agricultural sector in Guyana? The Government said one of its objectives for the agricultural sector is to increase food production locally. I did not know that Guyana was a part of Trinidad.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Exactly.

Miss A Hospedales: Right? I really did not know that.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: [*Inaudible*]

Miss A Hospedales: Right? I did not know that Guyana was a part of Trinidad. They said that they were going to increase the food production locally in order to reduce the food import bill. So, Mr. Speaker, how does the importation of food, again from Guyana, really help in the reduction of our food import bill, and

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[MISS HOSPEDALES]

Friday, September 13, 2013

really help the Government to achieve this objective by ensuring that there is food locally, so that the food import bill will eventually be reduced? Once again, these are just empty words.

Agricultural activists across the country such as Shiraz Khan and many others are concerned about the Government's inability to manage the agricultural sector. And not just to manage the agricultural sector, but the Government's lack of investment, you know, a greater investment in the sector so that there can be more food locally.

They have asked about, you know—queried the reason for the Government closing down or stopping the entire sugar feeds centre from selling milk to Nestlé, they have queried that. Another thing that they have been asking about is, when would they be paid the \$150 rebate for milk processing as promised by the Minister of Food Production at a post-Cabinet media briefing on July 18? This was reported in the *Newsday* on July 19. When will they pay that \$150 rebate for the milk processing, Mr. Speaker? Again, I am asking, can we really trust the Government?

Hon. Member: Yes!

Miss A Hospedales: You know, can we really trust the Government? [*Crosstalk*] They have given so many promises.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: The “falsehooders”.

Miss A Hospedales: Yes. Can we really trust the “falsehooders”? No. The answer, is no. When they manipulate the GDP figures, hide the real tourism statistics, hide the real employment figures, hide the real import bill figures, Lord! When can we really trust them, when they have failed to keep their promise to yet another group in society? Those persons who are responsible for milk production, those farmers, they have failed to own up to their promise to them, and when they failed to give account of the way in which they are spending the hard-earned taxpayers' money of this country, Mr. Speaker, when they failed to properly manage the economy, when they have bulldozed the farmlands and acres of produce, can we really trust them? Mr. Speaker, the answer is no, no; absolutely no.

7.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the presentation of the budget by the Minister of Finance and the Economy again and even read the statement. On page 20 of his budget statement he said that the full achievement of his fiscal policy

will require streamlining expenditure. He also noted that the Ministry of Public Administration is managing a programme that specifically focuses on eliminating the waste, inefficiency and duplication which exist in the social services programme.

Mr. Speaker, the first Ministry that is in need, or one of the Ministries that is in need of getting special focus, is the Ministry of the People and Social Development. I am asking for an urgent investigation into the operations of that Ministry. Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of the People and Social Development got an allocation of over \$3 billion and should be brought under scrutiny. The so-called people's arm of the Ministry is a total illusion. There is nothing different that this arm is doing to resolve citizen's problems that cannot be done across Ministries. Mr. Speaker, they are essentially a coordinating arm for direct effect walkabouts throughout the country and always within a political framework.

[MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, recently, following the crossing to the ILP of Edinburgh 500 councillor, Mr. Danan Singh, a series of walkabouts were held by the Member for Caroni Central in his own constituency. Madam Deputy Speaker, why should Ministry resources and staff be used to facilitate such walkabouts, which is disguised as a coordinating unit and an official Ministry outreach? This is cause for concern. There is clear abuse of authority and improper use of State resources and staff for campaigning in the Minister's own constituency, whilst the money allocated to the Ministry is being used for political campaigns. Madam Deputy Speaker, several other so-called outreach activities are carded for September to October.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this week, I was also called by a staff member of the people's arm indicating that they will be visiting Maloney in the next two weeks. Madam Deputy Speaker, these so-called outreach activities would be used as campaign for votes in the upcoming local government election. [*Crosstalk*] Why should State resources be used for political campaigns?

Madam Deputy Speaker, bullying tactics are used in the Ministry by senior public officials to force service delivery divisions of the Ministry into sending staff to these walkabouts. Madam Deputy Speaker, why are staff, including senior directors and public officers, being threatened with being fired if they do not comply by providing staff, resources and grants? Is this what the Minister of Finance and the Economy meant when he said, we have put jobs at the core of our agenda and protected the vulnerable? Is this what he meant? But they have not

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[MISS HOSPEDALES]

Friday, September 13, 2013

been protecting the vulnerable workers of the Ministry of the People and Social Development. Madam Deputy Speaker, I emphasize that there needs to be an investigation into the operations of the Ministry of the People and Social Development. Why is there a parallel Ministry in the Ministry? Why is there?

Member for San Fernando West, if this exercise the Minister of Finance and the Economy said is being executed by your Ministry in terms of streamlining expenditure, you know, all of these different things, Member for San Fernando West, you need to investigate these things. There needs to be an investigation into this Ministry. Why are political appointees being used to administer programmes and get grants processed for these political walkabouts in the guise of a Ministry outreach exercise? Is this the key role you play in people-centred development, Member for Caroni East?

Mr. Peters: Yes.

Miss A. Hospedales: You talk about, “we play a key role in people-centred development”, but you all are not developing the staff by causing them to be out of their offices not doing their work and really on a political campaign.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Minister of the People and Social Development can tell us why there are Ministry staff from all of the divisions working at his constituency office every single Tuesday since 2011. Why is Mr. Duane Denny, the manager of the People Issues Resolution Coordinating Unit bullying staff, and forcing them into breaking rules for processing social welfare food cards and national social development housing grants? Madam Deputy Speaker, there is need, again, for a comprehensive investigation of the Ministry of the People and Social Development’s operations because public officers should not, should not be in such a politically charged environment working, when they should be at the Ministry’s office seeing about the needs of the people who would visit those offices. Madam Deputy Speaker, all MPs offices, you can find staff who would be able to help—take the information and direct it to the relevant Ministries, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is this the way that the Government delivers?

The Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West talks about the Government delivering. Is this the type of things that they are delivering to the people of this country? Madam Deputy Speaker, when mismanagement and abuse occurs, it is our responsibility to highlight it. Since the incorporation of the people’s arm of the Ministry, there have been several very improper recruitment processes. This is another call for an investigation into the recruitment processes which have

resulted in very, very, very bad precedent being set for filling existing vacant positions. Even though these appointments were made by doing a ministerial note and obtaining the ministerial Minute—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member has expired.

Motion made: That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Mr. N. Hypolite*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Yeah man! [*Desk thumping*]

Miss A. Hospedales: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Madam Deputy Speaker, I was saying that even though the ministerial note and the ministerial minute was obtained, in terms of taking note of the type of staff that was needed, the established recruitment process was never used to make such appointments. Glaring examples of abuse and interference in the recruitment process which can be corroborated with the HR division and the Ministry include: several upward promotions of the manager of the People Issues Resolution Coordinating Unit, Mr. Duane Denny, without adhering to proper public service recruitment processes. The person, this individual worked in the Mediation Division as a social worker, and was promoted by a senior public official in the Ministry with support from the Permanent Secretary, to the position of regional manager to the TT Card programme without any shortlisting, any interview or any managerial experience. This was done much to the displeasure of senior officers in the Ministry.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this same gentleman was then promoted in the same manner—without any shortlisting, any interview, any managerial experience—to the position of manager of the People Issues Resolution Coordinating Unit in the Ministry. At a heads of division meeting held earlier this year, he was also promoted and assigned the portfolio of manager, poverty reduction programme; no shortlisting, no interview, no managerial experience.

In all of these instances, no established recruitment process of the public service was adhered to. This officer leads the walkabouts for the Direct Effect outreaches for the Minister, and uses his special place with the Minister to recruit any political staff without proper recruitment process to fill positions in the people's arm of the Ministry.

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[MISS HOSPEDALES]

Friday, September 13, 2013

Without following the required recruitment procedures, Miss Kimberly Moonessar, was promoted to the assistant manager, URP social. Mr. Asaf Ghany was made a manager and several other promotions to senior positions were made, example, manager of the newly created NGO unit was appointed without any advertisement of vacancies; no shortlisting, no interviews. In most instances, no experience, and the qualification does not match the position.

Madam Deputy Speaker, appointments of the former manager of the People Issues Resolution Coordinating Unit, Mr. Calvin James and his staff, were made without proper recruitment process. There has been abuse of the use of the short-term employment facility. Madam Deputy Speaker, this is once again, another critical area that needs investigation. There has been abuse of the use of the short-term employment facility throughout the entire Ministry to fill vacant positions in URP Social division, National Social Development Programme, People Issues Resolution Coordination Unit and the TT Card among many others.

Short-term employment expenditure now, for the month of September, is \$17 million—for the month “eh”. Madam Deputy Speaker, \$17 million for short-term employment for the month. Madam Deputy Speaker, this is not \$17, it is \$17 million. Under the PNM, short-term employment expenditure in the same Ministry, in 2009, was only \$75,000 a month; not \$17 million. Look at the big difference; from \$75,000 to \$17 million.

Programmes are not being extended by Cabinet and persons are forced or bullied to work on a month-to-month basis without being paid, in some cases creating this situation. Madam Deputy Speaker, the appointment of persons unqualified for the position, for example, Miss Claudette Ramnarine, a mother of a Minister, as a regional coordinator, for the TT Card programme in Sangre Grande is another cause for concern.

This regional coordinator has been abusing her position since her assumption of her duties there. In the issuing of food cards in that region, she instills fear in the staff members to issue cards and to do her bidding because they are threatened that their jobs would be lost. Madam Deputy Speaker, these things need to be investigated. She orders her staff to complete applications for family and friends and the officers process these applications in fear, again, of losing their job.

Economy Supermarket in Sangre Grande reported to an employee of the Ministry that an OJT—an OJT “eh” Madam Deputy Speaker—at the Sangre Grande TT Card office actually has, not just a temporary card, but a permanent food card, and the person goes to the grocery there to shop. The many

inconsistencies of this regional coordinator can be observed also in her processing of files from the Cumuto/Tamana area. A full investigation needs to be done on that particular regional unit of the TT Card.

In the entire country, there is food card abuse at only one office, and that is the Sangre Grande office and, again, there is urgent need for the operations of that regional office to be investigated by the Ministry auditors, as well as by the Auditor General.

Under the PNM, a sterilization exercise was done and proper systems of accountability were put in place to avoid political bullying and interference in the administration of grants, but a senior political official abuses and bullies and forces staff to approve grants under duress, and employees at all levels have to comply for fear of losing their jobs. Is this people-centred development, according to the Member for Caroni East? Is this people-centred development?

Madam Deputy Speaker, there are several financial anomalies and funding for projects done jointly with the Ministry and Transform Life Ministries. Investigations must be done because the books are not in order, and the Ministry is partnering with this organization, which was recently disqualified for subventions because its financial books were not in order.

7.15 p.m.

Madam Deputy Speaker, Transform Life Ministries happens to be in the constituency of Arouca/Maloney, and in the year 2012 there was a move by the Government to bring street dwellers to that particular facility, and we opposed it. The community members opposed it; I opposed it, Madam Deputy Speaker, because they did not have proper procedures in place. They did not have staff in place, they did not have the requisite things necessary to have a facility like that, and, you know, the Ministry, despite all that we would have said, still went ahead and partnered with this particular organization—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Ramadharsingh: [*Inaudible*]

Miss A. Hospedales:—to carry street dwellers there, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Dr. Ramadharsingh: What did you do for street dwellers? Nothing!

Miss A. Hospedales: There are written instructions to continue to pay officers travelling and upkeep that they are not entitled to in social welfare division and research. The posts have not been approved by CPO as travelling. Some of these persons are getting loans to purchase vehicles when they are not so entitled. One

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[MISS HOSPEDALES]

Friday, September 13, 2013

hundred and thirty thousand per person and VAT exemption, and the former Director of Human Resources complained about this improper practice and was ignored, Madam Deputy Speaker. These things need to be investigated.

Madam Deputy Speaker, recommendations were made for all officers to continue acting in the social welfare stream who do not have a certificate in social work. According to the requirements, a Social Welfare Advisor must be qualified by a certificate in social work. And, Madam Deputy Speaker, we have persons working in that Ministry who do not have the requisite qualification and have been asked to act—for instance, Indra Ramsaran, Social Welfare Supervisor I to act as Social Welfare Supervisor II, not qualified with the social work certificate; Ramdeo Bhola, Social Welfare Supervisor I to act as Social Welfare Supervisor II, does not have the social work certification; Kathy Ann Sandy, Social Welfare Advisor I to act as Social Welfare Advisor II, no social work certification; Lizz Hodge, Social Welfare Advisor I to act as Social Welfare Advisor II; Lena Quamina, Social Welfare Advisor II to act as Social Welfare Supervisor II; Chrisendaye Deonarine, Social Welfare Advisor II to act as Social Welfare Supervisor II. These workers do not have the requisite social work certification but they are promoted. Basically, they are promoted without the requisite qualification. That is a major cause for concern.

Madam Deputy Speaker, recommendations were made for officers to act who do not have a degree in psychology and sociology, and who have been identified as Troy Pollonais, Social Welfare Advisor I to act as Social Welfare Advisor II; Ramesh Maharaj, Social Welfare Advisor II to act as Social Welfare Supervisor I; Chrisendath Mahabir, Social Welfare Advisor I to act at Social Welfare Advisor.

Madam Deputy Speaker, there are many, many others. The following officers in social welfare do not have certificates in social work, but based on the instructions they are recommended to act, again, in different positions: Hafiza Hosein-Shah, Social Welfare Advisor I to act as Social Welfare Advisor II or higher based on seniority; Moses Chadee, Welfare Social Advisor II to act as Social Welfare Supervisor I; Brian Lezama, Social Welfare Advisor II to act as Social Welfare Supervisor I; Rudolph Singh, Social Welfare Advisor II to act as Social Welfare Supervisor I; Ramraj Ramlogan, Social Welfare Advisor I to act as Social Welfare Advisor II; Marcia Giroux, Social Welfare Advisor I to act as Social Welfare Advisor II; Alimoon Asgarali, Social Welfare Advisor I to act as Social Welfare Advisor II, Tosca Lopez, Social Welfare Advisor I to act as Social Welfare Advisor II; Soobharan Kowlessar, Clerk II to act as Social Welfare Advisor II; Margaret Bissram, Social Welfare Advisor I to act as Social Welfare

Advisor II. Madam Deputy Speaker, these workers are not qualified for the positions and they are promoted to higher positions; that is a cause for concern.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Ministry of the People and Social Development is in need of urgent intervention—*[Interruption]*

Dr. Ramadharsingh: Send me your resume.

Miss A. Hospedales:—and why have the requisite qualifications for these positions been abandoned? That is a question, Madam Deputy Speaker, because when you place persons who are not qualified and promote them to higher positions, what happens to those who are qualified and not allowed to apply for the positions that are available, is that they become disenfranchised, disappointed, demotivated, Madam Deputy Speaker. So that is really a cause for concern in terms of the pre-recruitment practices, the promotion practices, all the practices that are taking place in the Ministry of the People and Social Development, something is terribly wrong.

Dr. Ramadharsingh: Nothing—

Miss A. Hospedales: Madam Deputy Speaker, for yet another year, I have to talk about the Unemployment Relief Programme. For this fiscal period \$452 million was spent, or has been allocated for spending by the Unemployment Relief Programme. And, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to ask, how many construction projects were done? How many self-help projects were done? What is the total number of beautification projects completed? Where are these projects done? And if so, how many of them are done in various constituencies? Because, Madam Deputy Speaker, again, like the Member for Laventille West, I cannot find a URP gang or team working in the constituency of Arouca/Maloney. They are all ghosts, people getting paid for doing nothing, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Wow!

Miss A. Hospedales: They are all either at home or either at another job collecting salaries for work under URP, but they are doing nothing.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we called since 2010; Members on this side have been calling, asking, pleading, you know, with the Government to do something about URP; URP is unproductive right now. They are not doing anything for the communities. They are not even out there beautifying it, cutting grass, doing

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[MISS HOSPEDALES]

Friday, September 13, 2013

construction work, they are not doing anything. Where are the URP groups that are assigned by regions? Where are they, Madam Deputy Speaker? They are nowhere to be found, and that is a cause for concern.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Minister of Finance and the Economy promised last year that he was going to restructure the Unemployment Relief Programme, but we have not seen anything, we have not heard anything, we are not experiencing the manifestation of that restructuring in our constituencies, and that is cause for concern. Madam Deputy Speaker, in the *Draft Estimates of the Development Programme for 2013*, under the Head 39, the Ministry of Public Utilities, item 591, the Government has indicated that \$50 million was allocated for additional transmission infrastructure to be built to move power from Union Estate to the national grid and, Madam Deputy Speaker, last year I came to the House and I asked questions about this and up to this day we have not gotten the answers, and I am forced again to come and ask.

Madam Deputy Speaker, you know, the power that they are going to move was intended for the aluminium smelter—was intended for the aluminium smelter and other industrial development in the south-west peninsula. The removal of power from Union Estate marks the end, and that is what we emphasized last year, it marks the end of development in the south-west peninsula, Madam Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] Was that area not identified as a growth pole for development? I heard the Minister of Finance and the Economy re-emphasize that the south-west peninsula, you know, there is some identification of it as a growth pole. Was that area not identified as a growth pole—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: That is right.

Miss A. Hospedales:—so why remove the energy? Why remove the power from Union Estate into the national grid?

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like the Government, again, I am asking the questions I asked last year which we received no answers for. I would like the Government to tell us, where is the need for the power in the national grid? Over 400 megawatts are proposed for the national grid and, Madam Deputy Speaker, all of this power is going to be sent to the national grid, but Tobago only uses 40 megawatts.

Madam Deputy Speaker, how long would it take to move the power? They have not told us who is paying for the power in the meantime? How much will it cost T&TEC, the Government and taxpayers for the power they cannot sell when they transfer all of this power into the national grid? Would this have an

implication for the electricity rate? Would we be required to pay higher prices on our electricity? Madam Deputy Speaker, they need to tell us this. The Minister of Finance and the Economy needs to tell us if part of their plan is to increase the amount we pay, again, on the electricity.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would also like to ask the Minister of Finance and the Economy to tell us, what is the Postal Service Reform Project all about? What is that all about? A total of \$6 million is allocated for this purpose under Head 39 of the Development Fund for 2014—under the developmental plan for 2014.

What do they have planned for the future of TTPost? I understand that TTPost continues to struggle, Madam Deputy Speaker; month by month they are unable to make their payments to staff, or pay staff. TTPost, Madam Deputy Speaker, is in dire straits. Can the Minister tell us what is happening with TTPost, and why they are not able to meet their financial commitments? Are employees eventually going to be faced with retrenchment? Is there going to be a cut in the number of staff, Madam Deputy Speaker? The Minister has a lot of questions to answer.

He has a lot of questions to answer, and we are just asking all of these questions so that they can come and be accountable and transparent, but, you know, we know that they cannot be because they have told so many falsehoods. You know, they have really, really taken the country down a path of deception, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is really, really a sad state of affairs to have a Government that you cannot believe not one word that they speak.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to take some time just to focus a bit on the constituency of Arouca/Maloney. For three years I have written and asked and highlighted the need for the desilting of the river; the river by the Silver Bridge in Arouca that runs under the bus route, parallel to Nicholas Gardens, parallel to the Bon Air Gardens community, go down to the back of the prisons. Madam Deputy Speaker, for three years I have been appealing to the Government to desilt the river, but “not for nothing” they have, you know, heeded my cries. And I looked in the *Public Sector Investment Programme for 2014* on page 125 and saw an allocation of \$15 million has been provided to clear rivers and, Madam Deputy Speaker, I am not just asking, I am now appealing to the Government to pay special attention to that river, Madam Deputy Speaker. It runs under the Priority Bus Route, parallel to Nicholas Gardens and Bon Air Gardens.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we need the Government to take heed that river being desilted. And, Madam Deputy Speaker, there is need for extensive drainage work to be done on the drains in Hindustan Street in Arouca. Just imagine this,

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[MISS HOSPEDALES]

Friday, September 13, 2013

what happened over the last few weeks; I was called to intervene in a situation where a contractor went in to pave that road, Madam Deputy Speaker, and the residents resisted because of the fact that the curb walls, you know, for the drains had basically crumbled, and yet still the contractor insisted on paving that road, and I had to go. I went and I took photographs and did a comprehensive report and sent it to the then Minister of Local Government, the Member for Tabaquite, indicating to him that it is unacceptable for them to pave the road and not do anything about the curb walls. It would have made no sense; taxpayers' money would have gone down the drain.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, there is need for a comprehensive look at the drainage in the Hindustan area. There is a big drain that runs from north—south, from the Eastern Main Road right back down to College Avenue, where the road, the drain is actually eroding the land of residents, you know, so there is need for the Government—again, I have written, I have made—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: “Hum.” They are not taking us on.

Hon. Member: You sure right.

Miss A. Hospedales:—you know, requests through the regional corporation, but yet nothing has been done.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in the PSIP on page 130, we are told that primary schools programme will receive \$270 million to improve the quality of accommodation for students at the primary school level. I am appealing to the Minister of Education; the Dinsley Government Primary School sewer system is in a bad state. As a result, the children have not been out to school. Mr. Minister, take an extra interest in that particular school and ensure that the sewer system is fixed. Let there be a comprehensive assessment of the sewer system and ensure that it is fixed.

7.30 p.m.

The other issue, the Bon Air Government Primary School, a contract was awarded for the floor being tiled, but the contractor said that he is not going to do the work because the Educational Facilities Company has not paid him. I think you need to look into that. That school is also in need of a photocopy machine, a PA system, a multipurpose assembly hall. Just imagine during the rainy season they cannot assemble together. All the teachers in their classrooms with the children would normally have to say prayer. They do not have one prayer being

said or the pledge being said on mornings, because they do not have a PA system; they do not have one common area where they can gather. The Bon Air Government Primary School needs some attention.

The Maloney Government Primary School—a few months ago I told you about the pigeon problem in the school. Nothing has been done to date. The pigeon infestation is still in the roof of the library, and the pigeons have full reign over the entire school. Children are getting sick, the teachers as well are getting sick. You need to look into those things.

Dr. Gopeesingh: We will get it sorted out for you.

Miss A. Hospedales: Mr. Minister of Education, apart from that, we have the construction of ECCE centres. The Bon Air community is in need of an ECCE centre. We sent in the request for the construction off Jade Boulevard and it was approved. We are just looking forward to ensuring that it manifests in this fiscal year.

Apart from that, the Trincity development—there is need for an ECCE centre there. We said to you last year, take the land that was reserved for the court that we “doh” want—

Hon. Member: What? [*Laughter*]

Miss A. Hospedales: Take the land—well, negotiate with your colleague. We are saying it is either use the land for a health centre or the ECCE centre, Mr. Minister of Education.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I also saw that \$30 million would be allocated for the improvement or refurbishment and extension to secondary schools. The Bon Air Secondary School is in dire need of refurbishment, Mr. Minister of Education. The windows are missing; the doors are old. The school basically is falling apart and there is urgent need for some kind of intervention where that school is concerned.

Dr. Gopeesingh: How old is the school?

Miss A. Hospedales: The school is a nice really big pink school, but the pink is so washed out that it looks really, really dull and drab right now. So we are asking you to paint it as well.

On page 107 of the PSIP 2014 we were told that the Ministry of Sport will receive \$35 million and the Ministry of Local Government would receive for the construction of pavilions, restoration of outfields, laying of cricket turf, paving of

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[MISS HOSPEDALES]

Friday, September 13, 2013

jogging tracks, construction of change rooms and bathrooms and perimeter fencing of 42 recreational grounds. We are saying for three years again, I came and I asked. Minister, I wrote, I asked questions, I came and raised it in every single debate possible that I could remember, asking the Minister to upgrade the recreational grounds so that the residents can better utilize these facilities, but again to no avail. They have not responded. They have not responded.

Just imagine, in 2010, these grounds were approved to be upgraded and as soon as the election came they were scrapped entirely. We are saying to the Minister of Sport and the Minister of Local Government, the people of Bon Air Gardens, of Maloney, of Trincity, of Arouca are people too. [*Desk thumping*] They are people too. I am appealing on their behalf for the upgrade of these recreational facilities.

I saw \$85 million had been allocated in 2014 in the PSIP, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the construction of community centres. I am asking for the Government to give consideration, again, for the construction of the— [*Interruption*] No, Bon Air East is not in Bon Air Gardens.

Dr. Gopeesingh: It is here; I will build it for you.

Miss A. Hospedales: Okay. The areas of Trincity and Bon Air, the community centres were assigned to be constructed and approved to be constructed in 2010, but they have not to date. I am appealing to the Government to construct these facilities.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in winding up, I would like to say for yet another year the budget is riddled with words of falsehood, pretense, deception. The Minister of Finance and the Economy needs to be reminded of the views of people, about the 2014 budget. They said:

“The 2013/14 budget was not an honest statement”—according to Winford James, reported in the *Guardian* of Wednesday, September 11, 2013.

“It is just a political document”—according to Indira Sageewan-Ali, *Trinidad Guardian* again, on Wednesday, September 11, 2013.

The budget is the “Same thing over and over”. Given the current trend, we continue to be concerned that we are running into a deficit. They continue to throw money at problems without getting at the underlying root problem. Saheed Hosein, Penal/Debe Chamber of Commerce.

We have cause for concern. The Government has failed to be transparent, they have failed to give account for the money which they have been spending.

The Minister of Finance and the Economy said to judge them by their performance, and I appeal to the people of this great nation to judge them on their lack of transparency; judge them on their promises that they have failed to keep; judge them on the falsehood that they have told them; judge them on the money that they have squandered and cannot give account to the Auditor General for, and in all their judging remember that the Independent Liberal Party is the UNC dressed in a green cloak. [*Laughter*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank you.

The Minister of Health (Dr. Fuad Khan): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I feel honoured to be here this evening in the budget debate, coming right after the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West and the Member for Caroni East. I cannot believe it, that I have not heard a single Opposition Member contribute to this debate as yet. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Hypolite: You were not here?

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: The wonderful and direct contribution of the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West gave us a discourse on arts and multiculturalism, and he has to be commended, [*Desk thumping*] as too the Minister of Finance and the Economy, who has brought a budget that has shown that the growth in our country is moving in an upward direction, as compared to the years, I think, 2002 to May 2010, where we were seeing negative growth and deficit budgets. So I think we should commend the Minister of Finance and the Economy. At the end of the day, as the Member for Fyzabad always says, we have to commend also the person who put the Minister of Finance and the Economy as the Minister of Finance and the Economy, which is the hon. Prime Minister.

You see, Madam Deputy Speaker, we have been here since ten o'clock this morning listening to the contributions from the Minister of Sport, the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara, the Minister of Education, the Member for Caroni East and also the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West.

Mr. Sharma: Master stroke.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: At the end of the day, not hearing a Member of the Opposition speak so far I do hope that they would definitely give us some food for thought, if they decide to speak in this budget debate.

Mr. De Coteau: That is a googly.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: As the Minister of Health, I have asked myself: What do we expect from health? For a very long time—I have been here for about 17 years—every time that the health sector is spoken about one hears about things that we are going to do: construction, construction and construction. You see, I have decided to take a different approach today.

I want to indicate to this honourable House that we on this side of the House have begun, since 2010, what we call “service oriented systems”, and we are going to speak tonight about service-oriented medicine. When you look at the quality assessment of the Ministry of Health, which we asked for, one looks at the complaints received from the patients or the target market that utilizes the health sector, and from the complaints that one listens to, one could determine exactly what direction we have to go.

From March 2011—September 2012, we have been assessing the complaints that have been coming into the Ministry of Health, from the regional health authorities on the use of the health system. What we have found from the people who have given us the feedback, the problems have occurred with medical records, accident and emergency, wards, radiology and health centres by department. And when drilled down further, we looked at misplaced medical records, staff attitudes, delay in diagnostic reports, delay and access to services and care, long waiting times, attitudes of staff and cleanliness.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Missing machinery.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: So what we are going to look at are things that should have been assessed and dealt with by the previous regime between years—well, before we came into office. One of the most important parts of medical systems would be having proper records—having proper records. I will walk you through it, Madam Deputy Speaker. When one enters the medical system as a patient, which is what we deal with, one goes straight into the system, the accident and emergency or to a clinic or something else.

The first thing you do is go through a registration process, registration forms: age, demographic information and we go along like that and then you enter the system and you go into your treatment centre, where a doctor sees you. You get your blood pressure taken, your pulse, you may even get some blood tests done if it is a point of care systems, initial systems; you see a medical personnel—it could be a doctor or nurse—and then you are taken either for an x-ray or CT scan or something, where you get that. You get a film, an investigation or blood test. You are taken back to the centre and you move on either to a ward or outside to a clinic.

The reason I am going through this process, at every step of the way you are either taken care of by some person in the health sector, some employee in the health sector, and at each time—it could be from a security guard at the entrance to a customer service rep, to a nurse, a doctor and you keep going along like that to an x-ray technician.

Mr. Sharma: Very good thinking.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: You go to a lab technician, you go to a ward nurse, you go to an escort who carries you there, and then there is an exit to a clinic. At each step of that way, that person who is walking through that system is expecting what we term “a quality process”, a quality assessment, a quality movement, a quality feeling, a quality service, at every level.

So we have to look at that aspect of it and develop procedures and processes where quality makes a difference. So this year in the Ministry of Health—and we have been doing it in a way also—we have been looking at customer service. How does one of the employees speak to our patients who enter the system? How do they speak to the relatives? What do the relatives do? Are they treated in a nice manner? Is the security guard rough or not? Do they view them as criminals? Do they view them as people with a problem? This is what we are looking at.

We have put things in place to develop systems where quality is very important, service is extremely important, and speaking to patients and making sure they are comfortable is very important. [*Interruption*] That sounds like somebody agreeing with me. It is excellent to hear that.

People are saying right now that the quality systems in the hospitals are being upgraded. We are looking at customer service training, customer service delivery in the health sector. I have termed this year “the year of the primary healthcare and customer service system”.

7.45 p.m.

You see, Madam Deputy Speaker, when we look at the need to develop a system where one is able to get their medical reports on time, where one is able to access their medical information in every clinic without any lost files, that is a system that will develop in a manner where the patient will understand that and feel safe. They feel good. The doctor or the nurse will not have to wait a long time to get the results.

So we have developed, together with the Ministry of Science and Technology and iGovTT, what we call the health information management system. The health information management system is an electronic type of system where records,

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. DR. F. KHAN]

Friday, September 13, 2013

patient investigative reports, registration, et cetera, will develop on a system where it would be easily accessible based on a security type level.

You see, Madam Deputy Speaker, this will stop or decrease the amount of lack of medical investigations, files, as they say, that will not be accessible. Right now if you go into the various health institutions, you will find rooms and rooms of medical records—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Griffith: Turning yellow.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan:—turning yellow, turning different colours. In fact, sometimes it is so much over the years that you cannot access people's files in a timely manner that you need them.

Now I am spending a lot time on patients' files because, believe it or not, that is one of the most important parts of the whole system—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Griffith: Is records.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan:—is records. The health information management system will be such that registration processes, as well as investigative results, as well as a patient's whole history with pharmaceuticals, drug use, investigations, will be placed in a system that will be sent into what we call the cloud system of the cloud computing. [*Crosstalk*] It will also be—we are almost about 90 per cent ready to start that. [*Crosstalk*] It will be such that one could access information any part of this world—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: In real time.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan:—in real time of what has occurred to a patient as they move. This has been—what we call the digital clinics, the digital hospitals, et cetera. It is a step into what we call the future of medicine in the world. It is e-health, e-systems as it has been happening with the Member for St. Augustine in the Ministry of Legal Affairs. He has done a wonderful job on that.

Madam Deputy Speaker, looking at that, how we are going to do it in this country, we are going to have the area broken into small modules, each health centre would be a module, each hospital would be a module, each department would be a sub-module and it would go around like that, linked to a system that would be integrated, the whole thing, and the whole set of modules and sent into a cloud, accessed by—and I want people to understand, who are listening—that the security level or the security entry into that will be, as they say, delivered by people at different levels. A clerk would have a separate security level, a nurse

will have a separate level, a doctor and also technologists, et cetera, at different levels. So your medical information and your medical system will be safe. It is not going to be in the hands of every single body who could access the system.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, the health information management system, I started with that because that is going to be the nucleus, the nucleus of health care where everything revolves around. Health care can be viewed as what we call a singular sun planet, which is the Ministry of Health, surrounded by all the other planets which are systems involving care at all levels.

When that information system is put in place, at real time, at real time you would be able to tell, one, how many clinics or clinic patients a doctor or a nurse has seen; how many surgeries a doctor has done; how many cataracts have been done; how many cardiac surgeries have been done at real time. We will note the absenteeism, as well as patient information.

Now, Madam Deputy Speaker, for too long the system has been in such a way where those parameters could not have been obtained, and hence people got away with different negativity in the system. So we ended up with a lot of complaints, medical records. At the touch of a button, you could get the information and get the medical records. At the touch of a button, you can understand why a system, somebody would not have—somebody who is waiting, how much—to get a CT scan now some people say you have to wait until 2014 or sometimes 2015. Why? We would be able to see that, exactly what is going on.

So we will understand, in the public health care system, why somebody has to have all this need for outsourcing. We go back to all these parameters that have been complained of: the cleanliness of a place, the waiting times, the diagnostic reports. I will not say that we have a perfect system, but in the pathology department, we have to start looking at systems where we could get reports of patients who had surgical operations done in a timely manner in order for those patients to get the cancer treatment, which we would go into after, the oncology centre. But before we can go into treatment, we must have investigative results, and if you do not have investigative results, then you cannot go into treatment because the treatment would be flawed.

So, what we are developing would be for now we go into the medical records—we have done medical records, we are going into treatment records or as we say, investigative reports. For pathology and other reports, such as extra reports, CT scan reports, et cetera, there is a lag. There is a lag because there is a large volume of patients going for these investigations and not enough human resources—and we will speak about that.

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. DR. F. KHAN]

Friday, September 13, 2013

For this year, we are going to put in a digital type system for pathology, as well as radiology, as well as all the other aspects of it, where we have what we call a PACS; it is a patient archive computer system that could digitalize radiology and also digitalize slides, and send them to external or central specialists to give us reports in real time, which would be under a week. So we would be able to get reports on radiological CT scans, MRI, et cetera, ultrasounds and also pathology reports in real time coming back. That would take care of the waiting time period.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, what we are looking at and the Minister of Finance and the Economy has indicated, and I am moving along to something that he spoke about in the budget, called the health card system. All this information would be placed [*Crosstalk*] on the health card.

So every single person in Trinidad would eventually have a health card. How is that health card going to start off? We have the CDAP, Chronic Disease Assistance Programme. Everyone should be familiar with it. It started off as a brainchild by the UNC in 2001 by Hamza Rafeeq who was the then Minister of Health and continued with, I think it was, the Member for Diego Martin North/East and then Minister Rahael after that. But what occurred as a result of it, Madam Deputy Speaker, the CDAP drugs came on a long form, and these forms were ticked off and taken to a pharmacy who gave the pharmaceuticals and the patient went off.

This spawned a system where for 200,000 patients, you were getting 600,000 visits. How come? In an audit report we looked at it and we found out that one patient could go into a system every single day with different doctors' prescriptions and receive pharmaceuticals at all levels and take it off. Some of these pharmaceuticals for glaucoma and different medications for cardiac status, et cetera, are expensive. By doing that we were not able to have a record of where these pharmaceuticals were going. Our budget was oversubscribed; C40 was oversubscribed.

It has always been there where the card system, the patient card system, was supposed to be used at the different pharmacies, where the drugs and pharmaceuticals would be placed on these cards, and wherever you went, each pharmacy would have been, as they say, integrated into a system and connected. So when one gets pharmaceuticals in one pharmacy, they would have been able to pick it up in the other.

That system is going to be put in place utilizing a smart card with a chip. [*Desk thumping*] So by utilizing a smart card with a chip, you start off with a pilot

in the CDAP programme that would go on the pharmacies, as they are now—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: Excellent idea.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan:—but you will have now card readers. That will then be extrapolated into labs on the forms themselves, as well as doctors’ offices, emergency centres and it would continue along that line and we would eventually have what we call a national health insurance system—a national health card system, sorry, which will now spawn a national health insurance system.

Like everything else, Madam Deputy Speaker, one has to do pilot studies and creep before we start to run and walk. The health card system is there to be developed and I hope to start it running off—[*Crosstalk*] That is not PNM; you did not do it. “Yuh cyar claim that”. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: “Yuh had intention of doing it.”

Hon. Member: “Shudda wudda cudda.”

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: You see, like everything else, [*Crosstalk*] I wish when the Members of the Opposition decide to speak, they will tell us about that, if they decide to speak in this budget debate. Madam Deputy Speaker, the health card system is an innovative way of dealing with medical problems.

Mr. Sharma: It is best practice.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: It is best practice, yeah. So we will link the health card to the patient card and then the patient card to registration, so you could see how we are developing the whole system as we move on. [*Crosstalk*]

You see, Madam Deputy Speaker, we could speak today about, I could speak today about Couva children hospital. I could speak today about that. You want to hear about the Couva children hospital. “Yuh doh” want to hear about health cards and innovative procedures in medicines. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. De Coteau: No they “doh” want to hear.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: Why you all so backward? [*Interruption*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: “Talk nah man.”

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: This is forward thinking. [*Crosstalk*] Madam Deputy Speaker, I know they “doh” understand it, but they could get the *Hansard* and read it afterwards and then they will understand it.

Hon. Member: They still would not understand it.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: Madam Deputy Speaker, linked to all of this would be hospitals. You see how we are going down a trend of connectivity. Linked to all of this—we started off with the health system, we started off with the HIMS, we went into the health card system and developed that process, now we are going to develop the hospital system.

Hospitals in this country are supposed to be interlinked. They are supposed to be interlinked in such a manner where specialty services and primary care and secondary health care services are supposed to be interlinked. I am supposed to be able to send a patient into a neurosurgical department from San Fernando, but know exactly his records would be going together with him. However, sometime along the way, somebody does not write up a report properly and you do not get the full picture.

With our health card system we will be able to do that, get a full picture as it goes, then upload all the images. But we are going to develop, refurbish as I say, most of the health systems as they are being refurbished as we speak. We are in the process of refurbishing the women's hospital in North Central Regional Health Authority. The North Central Regional Health Authority is going on an accident and emergency refurbishing. We have done the elevators. We also have planned, tenders have been out and it is just to pick the contractor for a two-storey women's outpatient centre with colposcopy centres, with clinic centres and other centres in the Mount Hope area.

We also have earmarked, the possibly of a separate women's type hospital in the, as they say, southern part of the women's hospital as it is, but dealing with that we have been refurbishing major health offices around the country and we are going to build new ones—I will go into that.

However, let me go on and talk about Chancery Lane. Chancery Lane, which was basically a combined effort between the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of—UDeCott—Housing and Environment—well it used to be land and marine. We got together in the early part of the system, 2010, and we have converted Chancery Lane into a wonderful hospital system that will have administration, wards for paediatric patients, wards for maternity patients, paediatric maternity, as well as clinics and state-of-the-art investigative areas.

This, hopefully, will be opened, target date would be the end of November early December. We do hope to give that to the population of Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] and we will be having close to about—when that is

finished, we would have about a total in San Fernando, more than 750 beds as we speak. After the patients have been placed in the Chancery Lane, we are going to develop the San Fernando Hospital itself into another state-of-the-art system.

So you see, Madam Deputy Speaker, that is in progress as we speak. The San Fernando area has cardiac services and we hope to put in a cath lab there for cardiac services. That would be done in this fiscal year.

8.00 p.m.

We are also going to put in another MRI, another CT scan; in other words, making sure that the waiting time for CT scans and MRIs will be decreased, and remember I just spoke about digitalizing the reports and the films; that is how we are going to take care of the backlog.

We then go to one of the favourite topics, Point Fortin. Point Fortin, Madam Deputy Speaker, has been around since PNM time—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Yeah.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan:—has been around since PNM time. [*Crosstalk*] But as soon as we got into office in May 2010, it became the number one point of the Member for Point Fortin. I understand she knows exactly that the People's Partnership is very active in building stuff [*Desk thumping*] and she knows, and she is quite aware and she knows it will be done so that is why she has been asking for the Point Fortin hospital, and we have very good news for her, very good news.

Hon. Member: Good news, good news.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: Cabinet has recently approved a note that we could go on a government-to-government [*Desk thumping*] arrangement with the people of Austria. The people of Austria assisted us in developing the Chancery Lane hospital, so the people of Austria will be helping us develop the Point Fortin hospital. We have put in it—I cannot remember exactly, but approximately 150 beds and all the different specialties that you did not—I mean, we increased the number of specialties to make it into a complete hospital for the people of Point Fortin. But while they are waiting for that, Madam Deputy Speaker, it will be on the new site, the new site that we saw. I think it is opposite the old Dunlop factory.

While that is happening, Madam Deputy Speaker, we are going to have the Point Fortin Hospital as it is, refurbished. It is going to be refurbished in such a

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. DR. F. KHAN]

Friday, September 13, 2013

manner that you are going to have proper wards, proper beds and other investigative systems such as: Ultrasound, CT scan, et cetera, upgraded. So you are going to have an upgraded Point Fortin Hospital as it is now which you said you did not want. You want the new hospital, but you are getting that too. People of Point Fortin are going to get the new hospital.

Hon. Member: They getting everything.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: They are having it.

Hon. Member: Believe it, you will get it.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: When?

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: When? You will get it—put it this way, you will get it before 2015, the refurbished hospital. You will get part of the hospital, the new hospital before that. It will be opened in stages. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Sharma: But you only need one bed in the hospital.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: You are going to get it.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: You are sounding very convoluted.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: You find that?

Mr. De Coteau: Convoluted. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: You know, Madam Deputy Speaker, if I listen to the Member for Point Fortin—I will not listen to the Member for Point Fortin, I will give the people of Point Fortin, the People's Partnership will give them the hospital. [*Desk thumping*] We are not going to listen to her and stop the hospital.

Hon. Member: That is why you are getting none.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: You know when you listen to the Members, the Member for Point Fortin, you get the impression that, you know, she has been so hurt maybe on that side, that she does not believe anything. You know she does not believe anything anymore.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Madam Deputy Speaker, 36(5). I am not hurt by anything [*Crosstalk*] and I do not need him to tell me that I am hurt, "ah don't." I am not battered.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member, please. Member, be guided by 36(5). You may continue.

Mr. De Coteau: If you were not hurt you would not get up and talk.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. You know the truth offends.

Mr. De Coteau: You protesting vehemently.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: The truth offends.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: “Where he goin with dat?” Go back to the hospital “nah”.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: Go back to my hospital, all right.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Please address the Chair, so you would not get into crosstalk.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: Madam Deputy Speaker, I would be so guided. When am I going to start the hospital? As soon as we get the government-to-government agreement going, that is all. And we are going to get that going very soon because we have a way of doing it, because we have understood now—because I will jump to the Arima hospital. The Arima hospital has been confirmed and we got the government-to-government agreement going—[*Desk thumping*] and at the Ministry of Health we were able to iron out all the snags about government-to-government arrangements so yours will be faster. We learnt on the Arima hospital so yours will be faster. We got the Ministry of Finance and the Economy involved, they are organizing the letters for the Arima Hospital. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will be discussing with the Ambassador for China—which is their contractor, and you see all those little snags that occurred, we have learnt from them and we are going to be faster on the Point Fortin. [*Crosstalk*] We were also able to do a government to government on the Chancery Lane with the people of Austria so we understand the process. So you will get that hospital. [*Crosstalk*]

You see, Madam Deputy Speaker, we are moving forward with the hospital construction system and I know right now, right now they are waiting with bated breath for me to speak about the Couva children hospital. I am not going to do that just yet. I will keep them in suspense.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: What? [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: You see, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Member for Point Fortin has asked me to speak about it, so I will oblige her.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: What! [*Laughter*]

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: The Couva children hospital is going to be a state-of-the-art hospital, [*Desk thumping*] is going to be once again a combined effort between

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. DR. F. KHAN]

Friday, September 13, 2013

the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, UDeCOTT, together with the Ministry of Health. We have been able to bring this project, as you say, to start, by the Shanghai Corporation Group and amidst all the negative attacks—I get the feeling it is like a Biche High School right now, Madam Deputy Speaker. But at the end of the day we will be able to see and deal with all the problems that have been thrown at us and we have been assured, based on all the geotechnical studies, et cetera, that that hospital is going to be built to the specifications of international codes that will withstand major earthquakes.

Mr. Sharma: Very good, very good.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: It is going to house a children specialty area as well as adult areas. It is also going to have a burns unit and an emergency trauma type unit that will take care of any industrial accidents that occur in the Point Lisas Estate which is close by. It is going to be dealing with the children of that area: San Fernando, Couva and also specialty areas throughout the system. It is going to be a teaching hospital, so we are going to have research and development, specialty training, et cetera. There is going to be link to the University of the West Indies and we have been having discussions at the Ministry of Health with the University of the West Indies to develop what we call the specialist cadre of specialists.

Right now, how a specialist is produced—into a programme and the programme after six years, one goes directly into specialist examinations. The way the English did it, Madam Deputy Speaker, they let you go to a hospital that is recognized under recognized trainers and do your sort of apprenticeship, write your papers, do your stuff and then write your exams. I have asked the University of the West Indies to do that, utilizing all the hospitals that we have here so we could do that and produce specialists at a certain level that all they have to do is to write exams from the University of the West Indies for different specialties. In other words, what we are going to do, the shortage of specialists that we are experiencing, we will be able to get, as you say documented specialists as a result of examination. And believe it or not—and the Member for Fyzabad will love this one—we will be able to utilize our hospitals to do what we call, which we have coined, educational tourism”.

Mr. Sharma: Excellent. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: People are going to come here.

Mr. Sharma: You thinking. [*Desk thumping*]

Appropriation Bill, 2013

Saturday, September 14, 2013

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: I am thinking along the lines.

Mr. Sharma: Very well, very well.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: We are thinking progress, as you say—what was it Member for Oropouche East? We deliver and they talk.

Hon. Member: Yeah.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: That is how it goes. We deliver and they talk.

Mr. Sharma: At least we start to deliver.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: We delivering all the time.

Hon. Member: “But dey ain talking.” [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: They are not talking at all. I have not heard them speak for the whole evening.

Mr. De Coteau: Nothing with sense.

Mr. Sharma: That is their best delivery. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: Madam Deputy Speaker, as we move along, we spoke about the Arima hospital, we spoke about the children hospital in Couva, we spoke about the Chancery Lane, Point Fortin on the cards—[*Interruption*] You see—[*Interruption*]

Mr. De Coteau: Take your time, take your time.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: Sometimes I wish, Madam Deputy Speaker, when I am here delivering I have two mouths.

Dr. Moonilal: But you can do that.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: You could have that, “eh”.

Dr. Moonilal: You could do surgery. [*Laughter*]

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: “Doh tempt meh to say what ah going and say, eh.” [*Laughter*]

Hon. Member: “Yuh accustom creating lips.”

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: Madam Deputy Speaker, Sangre Grande.

Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: Good “ole” Sangre Grande. [*Desk thumping*] Sangre Grande—imagine the People’s Partnership has decided by means of the Cabinet approval, we are going to look at Sangre Grande and Mayaro/Rio Claro as a

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. DR. F. KHAN]

Friday, September 13, 2013

different type of unit. Rather than going government to government, rather than going elsewhere to look for what is happening now, we have decided to look at it and the Ministry of Health to give the contractors in Trinidad a chance and also the financial system in Trinidad a chance to see if we could come up with a system where the local contractors will get the local financing to build the Sangre Grande, and we have also earmarked a Rio Claro kind of hospital for the both areas, because of the catchment. That is going to have a state-of-the-art hospital. It is also going to be linked towards the old hospital as it is now with all the centres of excellence that we have placed in there, the blood bank, patient care, et cetera.

We are also going to have the enhanced health facility which is the enhanced clinic facility placed in the Sangre Grande hospital. That is earmarked. The Cabinet Note has been approved. I have spoken to the Minister of Finance and the Economy and we are looking at local input, full local systems for those two hospitals to see if we can build a prototype to deal with that exactly.

Now, Madam Deputy Speaker, when one builds health offices in this country one has to go design, build and equip. It has become a difficulty or a long-standing area for tendering. What we are starting to do, we are starting to have—we are going to go out for designed health centres at different levels. Let us say, A, B, C and D, depending on the need and the area that it is going to be. The system for this year, and we have earmarked a couple of health offices to be built: Chaguanas, Carenage, Palo Seco, Cedros and others. What we are going to do with these health facilities would be something of a different nature. Because the thrust for this year, Madam Deputy Speaker, will be, it is going to be primary health care. Primary health care is going to take number one place in this system rather than—it is going to be preventative as well as maintenance—preventative health care. And how are we going to do this? Each one of the health offices—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. De Coteau: Moruga?

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: Yeah, Moruga. [*Laughter*] Each one of the health offices will have to have the proper investigational facilities. It will have to have proper pharmaceutical facilities as well as extended opening hours. You see, we have found that the emergency parts of the major hospitals, they are over-subscribed, because people bypass the health offices because they feel they would not get treatment there and go straight into casualty. That is what we have the complaint of, with the long waiting times—in accident and emergency.

In accident and emergency in our hospitals, we have different levels which we call triaging where the most severe, life threatening to die, gets first treatment and

you go down the line, different levels. It is not that we are heartless, but exactly if somebody is not taken care of in the emergency right away, they could die, they get priority treatment, they have no waiting time. Those who are critical—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: Like what happened to a colleague recently.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: Yeah. Those who are critical may have to wait, if they are not exactly life and death, because there is triage in front, but those who are not critical sometimes have to wait too long. And that is where we get a lot of negativity of long waiting times coming out. I am going back to the complaints, Madam Deputy Speaker, we are dealing with how we can manage the complaints for our target market.

If we open our health offices 24 hours in some areas, up to 10 o'clock in some areas and 8 o'clock in some areas, we will be able to take care of that load of people—that is people who are non-emergent but emergent enough to want treatment at that hour or weekends. A health office right now, Madam Deputy Speaker, sometimes works from about 8.00 to 2.00, 8.00 to 4.00 max, let us say 8.00 to 4.00 max, and most of them are closed on weekends and closed after hours. Some are opened later, some are not. In order to open these health offices later, we have to have human resources. And in order to have human resources, where do I get them? Because our human resources in this country, they do not really want to work those hours. Most people have their own private systems to go to after hours and during the system. So we have gone and I have gotten the Cabinet Note approved by the United Nation Development Programme people, to bring in primary health care doctors and nurses from Cuba, from different parts of the world. We are going to go to Malaysia, we are going to go to Philippines, we are going to go to India, we are going to go to Uganda, and we are going to go to Nigeria, so far. And we also have a lot of nurses coming from St. Vincent and also from the other small islands who are training nurses.

The Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training, they are organizing, they have about 3,000 nurses being trained in El Dorado, I think it is, and Sangre Grande. So you see, Madam Deputy Speaker, we have taken care of the human resource. We will be opening the health offices later and I will put X-ray systems, as well as in some areas, CT scans systems.

8.15 p.m.

And when I spoke about digitalizing the radiology, we could take the pictures in the health office and beam them towards a central area for results and we will

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. DR. F. KHAN]

Friday, September 13, 2013

get back the results in the health office so the patient does not have to move to a central area. They can get their information, their treatment at that health office.

We are also going to do what they call telemedicine. The evaluation committee is finished and we just have to see exactly who gets the contract. Telemedicine is something that you could treat somebody at home; they could go on their computer and link on to a system and speak to a doctor, a nurse or a health provider, about their complaints. In fact, they could even take pictures, as you see, on a phone, and show whatever part it is—maybe a lesion or something—and diagnose right away, and say, “Okay are we going to do—do you need to come in right away or not?”

So that is the system which we are going to use, the e-health system in the telemedicine. So, hopefully, the health offices will be manned with human resources: doctors, nurses, pharmacists, as well as technicians, radiographers, ultrasonographers. On another note we are also going to have the dental process—dental movement; dental treatment at those health offices. At present, there is not much dental treatment at these health centres.

The blood bank, Madam Deputy Speaker, I tried something with it. The Friends of the Blood Bank is an NGO; they are NGO people. They used to run the blood bank system sometimes from eight to four. I have asked them to run that blood bank with their staff from four to eight the next morning and on weekends. I have been told that that system of blood transfusion has been working quite well, and it is a positive response to transfusion. I have not been getting many complaints on the transfusion part of it, so it does help. If people have to go to work and they have to go and give blood for their relatives and sit down there, and they have to be at work, it is always good to have a system working at nights or weekends so they can go and donate, or see, or look at it.

In other words, combining that whole effort of service, attitude and systems, we could then develop in this country a cadre of service-oriented medicine. You see, Madam Deputy Speaker, we could build all the hospitals that we desire; we could build all the health centres that we desire; we could build everything that we desire; we could put all the equipment inside; we could put everything inside, and if we do not have the system that talks about service and people-oriented attitudes, it will all be equal to zero, because you would not be able to develop that service-oriented medicine. We have to have service from the security guard entrance, back out to the transport area, going back home from the clinics, and this is what the whole system is going to be like.

Now, I just want to indicate that we have in this country, a high incidence of non-communicable diseases: hypertension; diabetes; cardiac problems; respiratory problems, as well as certain cancers. Why is that? We have been looking at it at the Ministry of Health to find out why this is like that, because at the end of the day when you look at the worldwide approach, for those countries that have very low incidence of these NCDs and their health budget is low also, and they have a healthy population, it stands out in all those countries that they have a low incidence of obesity, such as the Scandinavian countries. You look at the Japanese countries—low incidence. You have like less than 10—under 10 per cent, whereas in America, Mexico, Trinidad and Tobago and different places, we have an obesity rate of above 26—28, even 31 per cent of the population we are speaking about, children more so.

The Ministry of Health has looked at it. We have looked at it and looked to find out where we are going to go with the preventative aspect of it. We have had a lot of things, and what has come out of it, Madam Deputy Speaker, because of these non-communicable diseases and their complications, we have to have a high expenditure as we go down: cardiac surgery—I could call the figures, millions of dollars; dialysis that is climbing, millions of dollars; respiratory diseases; certain cancers, millions of dollars. This is what we have here in this country.

We are starting a plan and a programme of education dealing with children, et cetera, and making sure that they understand that what they eat is what they become. If you eat too much sugar, you put on weight; a lot of it. If you eat too much fat; if you eat too much of processed food; eat too much chemicals, it stimulates your mind and your brain for addiction of these foodstuffs, and the end result is putting on atheroma in your artery; weight on your system and at the same time if you have a sedentary lifestyle—because you end up feeling extremely—as they say, for want of a better word—lazy. “You doh want tuh run; yuh doh want tuh walk” because these foods—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Griffith: Sluggish.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: Sluggish. These foods cause it. But you “doh know these foods are causing it because yuh think yuh eating. Your belly is full.” But at the same time you are ending up with a lot of children with Type 2 diabetes, not idiopathic or genetic diabetes—Type 2, which is adult onset diabetes.

We have these children now in camps which the Ministry of Health is doing—sustainable camps.

Appropriation Bill, 2013

Friday, September 13, 2013

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the Member for San Juan/Barataria and Minister of Health, has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: Thank you very much to the House. [*Interruption*] "Yuh like it?"

Mr. De Coteau: Very good.

Dr. Griffith: "Yeah, yuh going good."

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: "Ah teaching you all. Ah teaching you all."

Mr. De Coteau: Very good.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: "Ah teaching you all. Ah trying to get a message across to the population, so they would listen."

Mr. De Coteau: Very good. Very good.

Mr. Sharma: "Yuh doing very good."

Mr. De Coteau: You doing well.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: You see, Madam Deputy Speaker, when you look at the non-communicable diseases, it may seem to be something that is not that important, but the world is listening. The world is going that way. And you know where it started, Madam Deputy Speaker? It started in Trinidad. It started in Trinidad where the NCDs started to be brought to the forefront.

The hon. Prime Minister, in 2011, was at the United Nations General Assembly in New York giving a speech on the non-communicable diseases and the effects. The world is taking note of it, and if you notice that Bloomberg, I think—Mayor Bloomberg in New York—has dropped the content of sugar and the sizes of sugar in the soda and the food. They have started to introduce into the meals in the schools, proper diet, proper systems, low oil, low processed foods and less soft drinks, which is soda; more fruit, less sugar. I stress on the word, sugar, because that is a very serious problem. And I want to commend the—I think it is the Chubby people. They have dropped their soft drinks to 25 per cent less in their Chubby.

Dr. Gopeesingh: In their sugar.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: In their sugar, sorry—sugar. And I hope that other people and other systems take note because we are killing ourselves by eating in that manner and causing a serious drain on the health system, and I am going to talk about dialysis now.

I had to go to Cabinet for Cabinet to pass a Note for me for this oncoming year because all the dialysis providers are overloaded, and we have to find a system where we could get our population dialyzed. And what causes the need for dialysis? Kidney failure. We have young people, kidney failure. Why? You have hypertension, high blood pressure, damaging and hitting the kidney system. You have diabetes coming on, and what I just talked about, the processed food and the processed stuff and the different chemicals damaging the children's kidneys. We have just picked that up. Why? And our obesity rate has been climbing for years. We have gone from a 15 per cent 15 years ago to a 55 per cent now in different parts of the population—overweight.

You look around and you see people, they are addicted to the foodstuff so they continue eating it, at the same time damaging their kidneys. At the same time, the high blood pressure is going out of control. Why? Weight and high blood pressure go hand in hand—increased weight, sorry. Increased weight and diabetes go hand in hand.

Now I am speaking like this today because I want the population to understand, I put it on record, that this is the problem for the future.

Mr. Samuel: That is right.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: All the health cards, all the maintenance, all the pharmaceuticals, all the dialysis, all the cardiac surgeries, the angioplasties, the bypass surgeries, could all be prevented.

Mr. Samuel: Yes.

Mr. Sharma: Or minimized.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: Or minimized, yes. And the budget that you are using for the hospital, which is the \$5 billion we use—which is—out of that, four point something is recurrent expenditure to maintain those institutions—could be used elsewhere on different things. And you yourself will live longer, healthier. It is no sense living long on dialysis, cardiac surgery, angioplasty. No sense living on that. You would be losing your limbs; you are losing your systems, your eyes, your ears, everything is lost.

Mr. Sharma: Losing your ability—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: You see, Madam Deputy Speaker, it is that important because if it is not harnessed now, we will be continuously going down a path of destruction, and this year is going to be the year of the primary health-care thrust.

In other words, right now if you are ill, you could go to a health centre and you get your blood pressure taken and whatever, because you are sick. We are going to start clinics around the country where you could go because you are well, and make sure you continue to be well. It is called wellness centres. The same way you have an executive medical profile and certain people pay a lot of money for it, you will be able to go to a health office and there will be clinics of wellness there where you could now be checked. Check yourself; check your numbers; look at it. So that is what we are going to introduce for this year, primary health-care thrust, to make sure that we are going after the preventative systems.

We are also going to do in the health offices, dental care—dental care for proper eating habits. Some people cannot eat properly because they “doh” have the proper—their teeth and the dental system are not in place. They are not functioning properly.

I just want to speak a little bit about some programmes that we want to introduce. Dr. Gopeesingh told you—I mean, the Member for Caroni East, the Minister of Education—that we have approximately 30—40 per cent people with disability, learning disorders, special children. What we have found is that if after the age of 18 months, you cannot hear for that 18-month period, then your speech, your linguistic ability, your ability to learn; your brain, everything, is not going to function. So you will end up afterwards with children who, as they say, have learning disabilities and are considered special children. Why? Because they could not hear and they could not understand the environment; they could not understand the systems; they could not understand the lettering. You did not know.

The Johns Hopkins Group and the Ministry of Health—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: What is the estimated percentage of—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: Close to about 30 per cent. The Johns Hopkins Group, we are going to put a programme in place. In fact, it is being developed as we speak, and we have a Dr. Pinder up in—right now I have her up in Johns Hopkins learning about the hearing patterns of, as they say, babies; how to determine the hearing ability of babies.

So we could now—when we discover those babies who cannot hear—put in what we call cochlear implants, so they can hear, and by putting in those cochlear implants, that will be able to take care of the hearing, and they will be able to develop and we will have less disabled, as they say, dysfunctional children where learning abilities are performed.

You see, Madam Deputy Speaker, we look at health as an overall picture; we look at health as a picture that is there. We could talk about a lot of things, about maintenance. I could talk about the oncology centre which has just started. I want to tell—as they say, the PNM tried to do it for a while, but the oncology centre has started; the contractors are there. They are cleaning the ground. It is going to be a state-of-the-art centre. We are going to look at that and make sure that cancer treatment in this country will be internationally acceptable and international best practices.

We are going to have what they call a CyberKnife, which is state-of-the-art radiotherapy units. We are going to have a cyclotron, which will produce radio pharmaceuticals for the nuclear system and that was donated by the Phoenix Gas Processers. They have donated that willingly to the people of Trinidad and Tobago for the oncology centre, and I call upon more corporate bodies to help us, and the health centre would gladly accept those types of donations.

The cancer centre, the oncology centre, will be relocated in the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, exactly where it was before, together with a satellite unit in St. James, with a linear accelerator there. So we have cancer treatment there.

You see, the only way to continue the health process is you have to think about innovative prescriptions. What are the innovative prescriptions for health care? We have been doing the same thing over and over and over, but then we have to identify the cause. The cause of most problems, believe it or not, is simple. The cause of a lot of things is simple. We have the cause: improper eating habits, as well as lack of—a sedentary lifestyle—and not eating more vegetables.

8.30 p.m.

We take care of our cancer patients, which is an expensive thing, by means of radiotherapy, chemotherapy, clinics, et cetera. We have developed in St. James, a breast cancer clinic for women with breast cancer, the reconstruction breast surgery. We are also going to start a gynaecological/oncology unit, and I expect the Member for Caroni East to assist with that because he is a top

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. DR. F. KHAN]

Friday, September 13, 2013

gynaecologist/oncologist as well as Minister of Education. He did not even smile with that one. I think he is missing doing a little of the gynaecological/oncology—
[*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: Withdrawal.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan:—like myself.

Mr. De Coteau: He has withdrawal syndrome.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: [*Member laughs*] Withdrawal. You see, Madam Deputy Speaker, we are going to put a thrust in the radiotherapy centre, developing treatment for women. You see, when a woman has a breast lump or, the possibility of cancer of the cervix and they have to wait a very long time for assessment, investigation, et cetera, it does play a part in the emotional well-being of the person and their family around them. It does, because you see health care, Madam Deputy Speaker, is an emotional thing. It is emotional. It is an emotional industry. It is an industry that deals with emotions, and if you understand people's emotions, then you will treat them better.

So we have decided to put a women's cancer centre and as they say, bring it up to a level—in St. James, so we could have rapid assessment, rapid movement, of women's problems—breast cancer, breast lumps, as well as cancer of the cervix, cancer of the ovaries, which is a very silent killer in this country—and those assessments will be taking place down there. And as I say cancer of the cervix, I want to commend the Ministry of Health for the onward progress of the HPV vaccine which we have been able to start moving forward, and that will decrease the incidence of cancer of the cervix in the next 15/20 years.

Hon. Member: Cancer in the society.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: Yes, cancer in the society.

Mr. Sharma: And it is being done for young men too?

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: Well, it could be done for young men for, as you say, genital systems and warts, et cetera, which are precursors to cancer of the penis, et cetera.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we have spoken a lot about development, let us speak a little bit about AIDS, HIV. Our HIV programmes have been so well done that what we are seeing now in this country is a decrease, believe it or not. It is said going to ground zero. It is a decrease—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: Down to zero.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: Yes, down to zero—in the number of HIV patients. The majority of patients, about 80 per cent of patients, they obtain their antiretroviral drug— [Interruption]

Mr. Samuel: Yes.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan:—and, as a result of obtaining the antiretroviral drugs, compliments of the Government, we have been able to win so far the HIV epidemic.

Mr. Samuel: Yes.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: So, that is a plus. [Desk thumping] However, what is now starting to rear its head, it is tuberculosis and HIV. We now have to look at people who are having respiratory problems, tuberculosis, which is symptom now of immunosuppressed HIV.

Mr. Samuel: Yes.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: What I have also found and I want to alert the general population to it, sometimes you may not have tuberculosis, you may have the symptoms of tuberculosis, but we are starting to look at a condition called histoplasmosis. We are going to deal with the Pan American Health Organization which is in Suriname—the French part of the organization—and together with PAHO, well CARPHA—now CARPHA that was once CAREC, et cetera, which is located in Trinidad—we are going to deal with the incidence of histoplasmosis in TB patients.

Now you see, Madam Deputy Speaker, I am sticking to what I call public health approaches, which is development of treatment systems for the total population in different large areas. We talked about HIV; we talked about histoplasmosis which could affect anybody. Somebody who has TB sitting next to you, you can get infected and it can infect a whole room in rapid action. So we have to take care of those people.

I want to spend a little time on the dengue aspect of this country, which is another public health hazard.

Hon. Member: That is important.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: It is extremely important. We have been having a—well not as much of an incidence as before, but there have been a few deaths compared to what is called the dengue haemorrhagic fever. A lot of dengue patients do not end up as they say, as a death statistic, but, however, when they do, it is a serious condition.

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. DR. F. KHAN]

Friday, September 13, 2013

We have reached a stage in the dengue epidemic incidence curve where we are on the haemorrhagic dengue Type 4 system, the haemorrhagic fever. What I am going to institute in this year—because we have now a spanking new insect vector building which was built and is ready to hand over this month, in Cunupia. That building is going to take care of most of the problems in the country, and the insect vector people are going to move there.

However, what we want to do, Madam Deputy Speaker, we want to put a thrust on dengue: cleaning your yards, cleaning your surroundings, as well as, spraying the internal part of your house. We tend to want dengue spraying around the periphery. Sometimes you get a call, “I need spraying in my area.” I would like to tell the general population that really does not work, because the amount of spray you have to do to get a concentration to kill mosquitoes, it is a lot. It might even kill you. So spraying is one part of it. Cleaning your surroundings and making sure the mosquito has nowhere to breathe is another part of it.

Dr. Gopeesingh: That is right.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: That is the most important part of it, no stagnant water around your area.

The third part of it is spraying inside of your house which is where the aedes aegypti mosquito resides. So we need to now have a thrust, and I want the population to understand, they will be coming at your door, knocking on your door; cover your bed sheets, your utensils, et cetera, and let these insect vector people, after identification, spray the internal part of your house, and in doing so we are going to kill the mosquito inside, outside, around it. We may even introduce aerial spraying for the nuisance mosquitoes. Also, we are looking at what we call the genetically modified mosquito, which is the male mosquito, which will breed with the female mosquito and produce no eggs and they would all die off eventually. It is sort of a biological warfare on the mosquitoes.

So we are going to do that on dengue, because dengue has been seen as a public health hazard to this part of the Americas. The incidence is high in Central and South America and it is going to reach here.

Miss Ramdial: Climate change.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: We have systems such as—we have to be very vigilant, and the Pan American Health Organization and the World Health Organization, we are looking at what they call the health regulations because the Ebola virus—I know it is taking place—not the Ebola virus, the MERS virus is in Saudi Arabia

right now. It has an incidence death rate of close to 60 or more per cent; one in two dies. So that means it is very high. It is a respiratory type virus we call a coronavirus, and when people go to Hajj they are opened to that virus, and then they will come back through a system into the plane, drop here and move forward. So we are increasing our surveillance and vigilance of the international health regulations, and that is what we are doing for the oncoming year also.

There is another thing too, the radiation regulations which will be the IAEA. We spoke about radiation regulations. Those radiation policies are before the LRC and they will be brought to Parliament very soon because one of the conditions of joining the IAEA with its training, et cetera, is to produce radiation regulations for a country, and that is very important for worker, labour, as well as employees and patients. We need to have our radiation policy intact and we are working and developing that radiation policy.

So we have touched on a lot of things, Madam Deputy Speaker, oncology, eating habits, et cetera. There is just one thing I want to do before we finish here. We have done the procurement legislation, et cetera. I just want to speak a bit about a couple of things. The emergency ambulance service, we have passed the authority. Now why am I looking at that? Madam Deputy Speaker, we want to know in this country, when any one of our people in our population gets into a major accident or a major problem that is life and death, we want to make sure that there is an ambulance reaching there very fast, and in that ambulance—it is not a transport device—we will have emergency medical technicians and paramedical staff who could link to a central emergency unit, to put that patient or patients, or whatever may be, in a proper system where they could be saved because there is something called the golden hour. If you do not catch that person in the golden hour, they die. It could be any one of your family, it could be us, it could be anybody who is on that road. If you do not know anybody, you would be very glad to have that system in place because you are there at the mercy of what happens.

We have to make sure and I am making sure that the emergency systems in this country are to the point of better than international best practices. We have to increase our ambulance number which is going to come on; we are going to start looking at training paramedical rather than just emergency medical technicians. So when an accident takes place, we will have an ambulance there in record time. This is what we are working towards. [*Desk thumping*] I hope to get it this year. And then, transportation in a proper manner by ambulance, by helicopter, or otherwise, towards a central area that is ready and up to date to treat that patient

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. DR. F. KHAN]

Friday, September 13, 2013

right away. So the number of fatalities will decrease because far too long, too often you hear, the patient was taken up from an accident site, went to an institution and was dead—he died. A lot of those lives could be saved if the proper emergency system is put in place.

I am looking at the idea, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I am saying it today, of having what we call a sea ambulance. One is going to be located in Cedros where the coast guard area will be, one will be located in Chaguaramas the coast area guard. We are going to train the coast guards to be paramedical people, because if a disaster takes place at sea, especially in south, we have all those oil rigs there—what you just want, a transport service? The patient will die on the transport? We are going to have sea ambulances and we are going to deal with it in such a manner as if we are looking at disasters at sea. Or, if something occurs in, let us suppose Chaguaramas or down south, that sea ambulance will go out, put the patient, stabilize the patient, move them towards a centre in San Fernando or Port of Spain rapidly through the sea itself, rather than going along the clogged roads. And this is what we have in mind.

We are looking at areas, and Cedros could welcome—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Great.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: [*Desk thumping*]—and I want to thank—there is a gentlemen there who rings me on a regular basis, Teelucksingh—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: That is the man.

Dr. K. Khan: He calls me regularly to say put this system in place, and I am going to put it in place for him. So we will have a mini hospital there, one also in Chaguaramas. I am looking at an area in Chaguaramas. We have earmarked the site so we could do those things because I think it is necessary to have those things being done. We are going to have health centres around the area, that will as you say, collaborate and assist in that movement.

I believe, Madam Deputy Speaker, there are two things if one has to take out from this talk: preventative and emergency. Everything else is secondary. Preventative medicine will prevent you from poor problems and bad problems and continuous problems of the NCDs; and emergencies will save your life when it is really necessary to be saved. You see, Madam Deputy Speaker, if you look at those two spectra, then you will understand what the whole health sector is about. The whole health sector is about two things: emotional and service.

Emotional: if it is emotional, Madam Deputy Speaker, then you are looking at making sure people are not emotionally affected. Emergency: women at child-bearing age and making sure that people with cancer get their diagnosis on time. You go to an area to get investigation, it must be done very fast. Because guess why? If you do not—the worst thing in life is not knowing, not knowing and your mind goes in all different directions as to how bad it is. When you do know, you become less stressed and less emotional.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, this is the concept that we have for next year.

We have also developed a good rapport with Colombia and I am going to do it with Martinique because they have the capacity for health care, because we tend to go up north for health care systems [*Inaudible*] but it is extremely expensive. I could get five for the price of one in these areas and we are working out with that.

So the Children's Life Fund—we will be able to utilize the Children's Life Fund more. I will be coming hopefully with amendments to the Children's Life Fund; amendments to the Pharmacy Board Act; amendments to the Food and Drugs Act to develop a system here; and also the Nurses and Midwives Registration Act to develop a different level of movement to the nurses, and the national health service with accreditation which will definitely accredit programmes and institutions. If you are not accredited by accreditation authority, then, you will be listed as non-accredited.

8.45 p.m.

I had discussions also with the Member for Diego Martin North/East, who was once a Minister of Health, and he has assisted and assured me that a constitutional majority might be needed because it is health care, we will work as a team on this one. So accreditation movement is going to come to develop a system which will be internationally accredited by the joint commission of international accreditation. So I am sending this message to the different hospitals, start getting your systems intact, and when I indicate the movement of the supply chain of a patient from entrance to exit, that is where the accreditation will take place and the programmes that are linked towards it.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it was a pleasure and I hope the members of the PNM do not—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Ramadharsingh: I wish you could go on for more.

Hon. Dr. F. Khan:—members of the PNM, there was a joke about “not hearing yuh”, Member for Arouca/Maloney, et cetera, to my good friends—[*Interruption*]

Mr. De Coteau: Yes, yes, my darlings!

Hon. Dr. F. Khan: I apologize as I end. I apologize as I end. Madam Deputy Speaker, I just want to say that service to the population is what we do well, what we have been doing in the Ministry of Health. I want to thank the staff of the Ministry of Health—the regional health authorities—for assisting me and those who have been giving us positive reinforcement, continue to do so and those others, I ask them to give us some of that positive reinforcement. Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Best friends!

Mr. De Coteau: Very good, my brother. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development (Hon. Errol McLeod): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, Members of this honourable House. When did we in the last 40 years have as profound contributions as [*Desk thumping*] we just heard from the hon. Minister of Health; profound contributions by the hon. Minister of Education [*Desk thumping*] and the hon. Minister of Arts and Multiculturalism? [*Desk thumping*]

Hon—Madam Deputy Speaker—oh, it is getting late in the night [*Laughter*]—I wish to congratulate the Minister of Finance and the Economy and his team of senior officials in the Ministry of Finance and the Economy, and of course, colleagues: the hon. Minister of State in the Ministry of Finance and the Economy and the hon. Minister of Trade, Industry and Development, for an exceptional job, Madam Deputy Speaker, in the preparation of this year's budget statement.

The Minister has provided an approach for the development of the national economy: an approach that is people centred and that takes into consideration several essential areas of focus. Now, if we might just think a little bit about the last three contributions from this side—Minister of Health, Minister of Education, Minister of Arts and Multiculturalism—we will discern in those contributions hardly a mention as to whether they got as adequate an allocation as possible to do the work that they each want to do for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

What we heard coming out is a very sensible and educated approach to making as much as we can with the little that we have been allocated.

Mr. Sharma: Well said! Well said! [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. E. McLeod: In that regard, Madam Deputy Speaker, I think that there is a lot in the offing for us here in Trinidad and Tobago. There can be little

argument, if any at all, that the education of our citizens is fundamental, the health of our nationals is vital, and the rights of workers to obtain a job which meets the decent work criteria are of great importance.

Certainly, the Finance Minister's years of expertise and training in the financial sector have been unquestionably reflected in the sound and prudent fiscal package that has been delivered to move this country forward into 2014. One might be generous enough to say that what we have been presented is not perfect. We have never had a perfect situation in this country, but I feel certain and I feel proud to say that if there had been as direct as we can an access to perfection, I think this budget presentation and the three contributions that we heard from this side earlier on have brought us as close to perfection as Trinidad and Tobago has ever seen. [*Desk thumping*]

In this regard, I would like to reaffirm that the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development is committed to doing its part to strengthen the platform for national development, and in this regard, we will continue to advocate for the adoption of the adherence to international standards of work in this country that put workers at the centre of development as enshrined in the conventions and recommendations of the International Labour Organization.

But before I go any further, Madam Deputy Speaker, let me briefly respond to two issues—only two issues—raised by the Member for Arouca/Maloney in her contribution.

Mr. Sharma: She raised so many?

Hon. E. Mc Leod: I want to compliment her on what I thought was the best contribution that she has ever made.

Mr. Sharma: What! “Yuh very kind.”

Hon. E. Mc Leod: Since I have been here anyway. Now, I think, Mr. Speaker—Madam Deputy Speaker, pardon me, I think that it could only be from not knowing, and perhaps, not appreciating at all our circumstances as a Caribbean country, not having an appreciation for the history of Trinidad and Tobago and the rest of the Caribbean, it is only from that kind of position of unknowing that we will fail to appreciate our making an investment on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago in lands in Guyana—another Caribbean entity—to grow food. “Leh me explain.”

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. E. MC LEOD]

Friday, September 13, 2013

Our earlier labour leaders, one of them from Barbados, Clement Payne and there was a Hubert Nathaniel Crichlow of then British Guyana, and I think one or two of the—I sometimes forget their names—coming out of St. Vincent.

Dr. Moonilal: Joshua.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: Joshua.

Dr. Moonilal: “Dah is history.”

Hon. E. Mc Leod: They would have met, not to consider so much the backward plight of the workers of that time, in 1926—not very long ago either—they considered the question of federation which they identified as the consolidation of a West Indian nationhood. That is how they termed it.

Hon. Member: 1926.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: 1926 at the first meeting of labour leaders—well, the first formal meeting. They were not known to be politicians of the classical sense. They were not known to possess any tertiary level education either but they understood where they had come from, they understood where they were standing at the time, and they had a vision as to where they wanted to go.

Now, 1926 was 32 years before Britain acceded to the European Common Market when people in the bigger countries in Europe were understanding the importance of coming together for their own market to facilitate trade, to come together and to develop synergy as they tried to take their countries forward. Britain from whom we would have gained our independence—the British Caribbean, the British West Indies I am talking about. I am making the point that those early labour leaders saw the necessity for us in the Caribbean—the English-speaking Caribbean—to come together to create more critical mass so that we could establish ourselves more formidably in the world, and that is before, many years before—and David Rudder did it in one of his calypsos—we discovered that the metropolitan countries do not have any love for the islands anymore.

These early labour leaders, Madam Deputy Speaker and hon. Members, determined that they had to concentrate on developing our own economy; that we must organize our own economic space, and they determined that Trinidad’s oil will fuel the engine of growth that will be necessary for the sustenance of our West Indian nationhood, as they called it.

Guyana's land mass—and I am informed that Guyana is bigger, about five times bigger than England and Wales put together—that we would use Guyana's land mass to prepare our food basket for our West Indian nation and that Jamaica's bauxite will be an important—an essential building block for what we wanted to do with our infrastructural development.

Barbados, at that time having the more efficient, one might say, sugar-producing operations, Barbados would be given the responsibility for sugar manufacture—and I do not know how many of us remember Sea Island cotton. Those smaller Caribbean islands that were known for Sea Island cotton development will be allocated the responsibility for the textile and clothing development and so on.

9.00 p.m.

I thought that I should make that point as I contribute to the educational discourse on which we were taken earlier by the Minister of Education, Minister of Health and Minister of Arts and Multiculturalism.

So it ought not to be strange to any of us. Of course there can be lots of argument because we still have some 50,000 acres of land in Trinidad that can be put to cultivation—

Dr. Gopeesingh: Former Caroni lands.

Hon. E. McLeod:—former Caroni lands, but then one might want to begin the comparison between the acidity of the land here and whatever might be more fertile in Guyana and so on, but it is important that we maintain these links. And if we appreciate Trinidad's investment in Jamaica in cement, and Barbados in cement, then it should not be difficult for us to appreciate our going to Guyana, where there is land that is calling for cultivation, so that we could better bring down our food import bill and so on, [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*] and to help the Caribbean.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to respond to the assertion made by the Member for Arouca/Maloney, that the URP is not working. Now, I want to suggest that I might be the first to say that a lot more, productively, could be done by URP, but I will not say that the URP is not working. Indeed, the many projects that we have benefited from in the constituency of Pointe-a-Pierre have largely been URP projects, [*Desk thumping*] and we do not make statements, such as had been made, to demotivate people and to push them backwards, rather than to encourage

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. E. MC LEOD]

Friday, September 13, 2013

them to be more productive in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Productivity is one of the issues that I would want to address, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker has come to the Chair.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

To say that unemployment equals retrenchment, or retrenchment equals unemployment, is to expose that we are not too au courant with what we are talking about.

Hon. Member: They do not understand it.

Hon. E. McLeod: We do not understand it. Yeah? And I should deal with our unemployment situation or, rather, our underemployment situation, and such retrenchment as we would have realized in the last year, a little bit later in my contribution.

We have no doubt, Mr. Speaker, that this will result—that is all that I have said earlier—in a stable and enabling work environment and in greater productivity.

Mr. Speaker, it might take a few moments of internalization of the profundity of a point that I wish to register here. I said it to an audience of some 4,000 representatives of the member countries of the International Labour Organization at the last ILC that I attended. I said, and it was acclaimed—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: The definition of ILC.

Hon. E. McLeod: ILC—International Labour Conference. I would not make mistakes with that, [*Laughter*] neither am I colour-blind, you see.

I said to the conference that there is no development without labour and that there is no labour without development. I would like that to be concentrated upon as we establish—as we seek to establish—the essentials of our working as assiduously as possible together if we are to maintain—do I put it that way—if we are to maintain, at least, the position that we now enjoy and, certainly, the position to which we want to aspire. And, I will come back to that too.

Early in my tenure as Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development, Mr. Speaker, I engaged the social partners—both employers' and workers' organizations—as well as my Government colleagues and I sought to dialogue on our common goals and the ways in which we could work together to achieve them. I will elaborate on this a little bit later.

When we examine what has happened to larger economies than Trinidad and Tobago, especially during the immediate period following the economic bust of 2008/2009, when we examine our own position, we are tempted to join the chorus that we hear so often that God is a Trini. We have escaped the worst consequences of that financial collapse that took place 2008/2009 and it was essentially because of our being small—1.3 million people; our being blessed with oil and gas; and what appeared, with all of our confusion from time to time, to be a relatively stable political climate.

The former administration—[*Interruption*—yes, they contributed to our development and nobody wants to deny them that, but they had a responsibility to do—

Hon. Member: Exactly.

Hon. E. McLeod:—what they were supposed to have done and what they might have done.

Hon. Member: And they had a lot of money to do it.

Hon. E. McLeod: Well, the better things that they may have done; and, as my colleague says, they had a lot of money to do it.

It was suggested—I think it was by the hon. Leader of the Opposition—that there was NAPA and SAPA and waterfront project and what else, as though this Government must also be building another NAPA, another SAPA. How many NAPAs and SAPAs do we want to have? This Government must be looking at other areas that have been denied and developed in those areas.

So it is not helping anybody, Mr. Speaker, to come here and blame us for occupying these premises that the last administration would have built. When we criticize the building of this, we suggest other areas that have been crying out for attention that could have been dealt with by the cost overruns that would have been involved with this. [*Desk thumping*]

So, I must commend the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy for placing jobs at the core of our agenda. It was suggested that nobody knows the extent of our unemployment; and it was suggested that even the Central Bank did not know. I mean, how irresponsible can we be? For the second quarter of 2012, our unemployment stood at 4.9 per cent, and I have gone on record as having said that—and you will be familiar with the position that I have always taken on that, Mr. Speaker—I am not satisfied with the western classical determination of full employment and those figures that are applied. My position is that if there is one

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. E. MC LEOD]

Friday, September 13, 2013

person unemployed then the situation is not good enough, but that is my thing. Yes? [*Interruption*] Very well. And that position of 4.9 per cent is 0.9 of a per cent better than the period of the second quarter of the year before that. Are you following me?

But we must go back to 2010 when we took office. The unemployment situation was 6.8 per cent and we brought it down to 5.8 per cent by the second quarter of 2011 and by the second quarter of 2012, as I mentioned earlier, it was 4.9 per cent. And in the budget presentation there are at least five suggestions that jobs and decent work are going to be central to our going forward. With decent work at the centre of our economic policies and job creation initiatives, some of which were presented in the budget, we will achieve the transformation of our economy and improve the livelihoods of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, I go further to say that decent work should be a central plank of our sustainable development efforts. This issue is being discussed, at present, at the level of the United Nation's and its agencies as the global community forges ahead with the crafting of the post-2015 sustainable development agenda.

As the House already knows, as an active member of the International Labour Organization and its governing body, Trinidad and Tobago has been a vocal supporter of the inclusion of decent work as a sustainable development goal and, accordingly, I put it to this honourable House that our development efforts must also include fundamental decent work initiatives; and to get there, we must have the collaboration of the social partners—labour, employer and Government—if we are all going to subscribe to the interests of Trinidad and Tobago first before we delve too much in any particular sectoral interest as important as they will be, as they must be.

9.15 p.m.

So the Finance Minister's proposals, Mr. Speaker, are made against the background of a global labour market that continues to be uncertain. There are some promising signs, although not earth shaking, of economic recovery. According to the International Labour Organization, World of Work Report 2013:

The majority of emerging and developing economies have posted positive employment gains. Global unemployment...

And this is a big ticket issue.

Global unemployment is expected to approach 208 million in 2015, up from 200 million today.

This is what the experts, on a global level, are saying.

The situation of youth—and somebody complained that we did not talk about youth. The situation of youth, of which approximately 75 million worldwide are unemployed and a large percentage are described as NEETs, meaning that they are neither in education, employment or training, and that is very worrisome. In our circumstances, such persons as are unemployed are persons who are largely unemployable, and I know that the Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training, the Minister of Education and to the extent that the Minister of Labour can be involved in such planning and strategizing, we are looking at a number of areas that need to be reorganized and new areas to be developed, and some areas that had been abandoned, to bring them back into vogue, if we are going to save our young people in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Last Thursday, at Cabinet, we approved a proposal to go with the establishment of an apprenticeship training programme in the Point Lisas area. And discussions are taking place, at this time, with Petrotrin and one or two other large employers in the economy of Trinidad and Tobago to reengage the apprenticeship training programme so that—and the proposal really is not to deal only with a craft apprenticeship programme, you know. It is to do more than that.

I came from a programme, as is perhaps well known by most of my colleagues, and at that time there were three programmes, three training programmes—well, outside of the management, the top management. There was the craft apprentice training programme. There was the student apprentice training programme. The craft apprentice was at the lower level. They would have been primary school leavers essentially or dropouts from the secondary school system.

There was the programme for the student apprentices and these were the ones whom you were training to become supervisors and engineers and to climb into the management at some stage of their development and so on. And then there was the programme for administrative-type people. At that time it was the stenographers and typists and so on.

So you had the secondary school leaver, both as the stenographer coming in to be trained and you had the male secondary school leaver coming in as engineering assistants and so on. And you had the university graduate, the engineer, the technologist, both process engineer, civil engineer, I mean, electrical and so on.

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. E. MC LEOD]

Friday, September 13, 2013

These are people with their first degree but many of them did not know anything beyond the academic work that they did so there would have been the engineer in training programme and they would have had a two-year training programme. The craft apprentice had a five-year training programme and the student technician had between three and five years of a training programme.

I am not suggesting, Mr. Speaker, as I told the Cabinet, that we go back to the thing exactly as it was then. No, no, no; the world has moved on and we would need to examine it and bring a measure of modernity to it and so on. You see, it is not just a case of training people to be craftsmen and technicians and so on. It was part of an overall programme, Mr. Speaker, that also provided the Government with an opportunity in its own planning programme.

The Government will know that in the next five years there are so many trained technicians who would now be employed as journeymen carrying that load, as other journeymen would have reached their retirement age. So that you had a supply of these people, trained to meet the purposes of the particular enterprise. And you need to go back there. As it is now, Mr. Speaker, as it is now, we do not have a number of skilled people who are available, at a call, to take up a job anywhere, you know.

This is why I emphasize that ours is more of an unemployable situation than an unemployment situation. So we need to train; you could hardly get people to train. We have had so many fallouts over the past however many years. There are so many fallouts. People are going to the YTEPP and the other programmes and some of them really are not literate, and they go just to collect the stipend. And some of them are in two and three programmes at the same time.

Hon. Member: Programme hoppers.

Hon. Mr. E. McLeod: Programme hoppers you call them. And all of that has to be examined. I mean, there is a programme that I will talk about a little later on, if I have the time, which we have to hold our hands on, because if we were to open up that programme and people were to subscribe to it, then we might find our most important industrial sector, at this time, complaining that they do not have, you know, they can hardly retain certain workers, and so on.

Canada has provinces to which they are inviting our trained people, and already many of our people are all over the Middle East, you know. Anywhere in the world where there is oil, you will find a Trinidadian.

Hon. Member: Quite true.

Hon. E. McLeod: “Yeah?”

Hon. Member: “Not cooking oil?”

Hon. E. McLeod: We are some of the best trained and developed people in the energy sector, Mr. Speaker, “buh we are running out eh.” We must work together to correct this with coherent policies and a resolve to make NEET—that is, not employed, not in any education programme and not trained—non-existent in Trinidad and Tobago.

I am pleased to report to this honourable House, Mr. Speaker, that the Trinidad and Tobago labour market can boast a more positive situation with regard to labour market recovery. We have been experiencing relatively low unemployment levels over the last three years. The recorded unemployment rate for the second quarter of 2012 was 4.9 per cent compared to the second quarter for the same period in 2011, a point I struggled to make just now.

In 2011 it was 5.8 per cent. This comes as no surprise as we have been reaping the rewards of sound, robust and informed decision making which has been positively impacting our own labour market in Trinidad and Tobago. As bad as it is, we are not as bad as many. More specifically, we have sought to build the capacity of our young people through several educational and training initiatives and the On the Job Training Programme through which they are able to gain experience—a very critical requirement to employability in today’s job market.

With regard to retrenchment, Mr. Speaker, the data that we have on retrenchment are drawn from notices filed by companies in accordance with the Retrenchment and Severance Benefits Act. For the year 2012, there were notices of 791 persons being retrenched and this number was 333 less than the previous year. That is to say, in 2011 we had a number that was 333 more than 791.

And this information will come to the Ministry of Labour first. As written in Act 32 of 1985, the Retrenchment and Severance Benefits Act, the employer, once he is going to make redundant more than three persons, I think, Mr. Speaker, he must inform the Minister of Labour and the workers, representative union and so on, and efforts must be made to reemploy or redeploy the particular person and so on. It is only in the case where you have made every effort and you did not succeed at redeployment that redundancy must take place. So that we get these numbers first and we will supply Central Bank and so on with the information that we receive.

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. E. MC LEOD]

Friday, September 13, 2013

For the period January to May 2013 we have received notices of approximately 364 persons being retrenched. And the thing is, Mr. Speaker, a number of these persons, because of their skill, because of their experience and so on, they do not remain unemployed for too long. The people who are unemployed, I think I made the point already, a skilled person—auto mechanic, electrician, brick layer, mason, carpenter—they are not unemployed “yuh know”.

The sector accounting for the greatest number of retrenchment in 2012 was the wholesale and retail trade, restaurants and hotels with 232, followed by manufacturing with 220.

9.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member has expired.

Motion made: That the hon. Member’s speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Hon. N. Baksh*]

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. E. McLeod: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. “Is ah five-year development plan ah bring here yuh know.” [*Laughter*] So I would have to truncate my contribution so as to get the more essential points in.

We have, in the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development concentrated essentially on those development pillars that are directly related to the Ministry of Labour. Pillar 1, People-Centred Development; pillar 2, Poverty Eradication and Social Justice; pillar 5, Diversified and Knowledge-Intensive Economy; and pillar 6, Good Governance.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, labour as a resource is cross-cutting and very closely intertwined with our progress as individuals and as a nation and I firmly advocate, as I said earlier, that there can be no development without labour and no labour without development. It is our responsibility, all of us, to ensure that the capital or the owner of capital does not put labour at any unfair disadvantage and that labour must also understand its importance as a contributor to the national good, as a contributor to creating the national good, and that we must understand that if we did not work together—employer, labour, government—then we might be causing each one to sink separately.

This is a position—there can be no development without labour and no labour without development—that I have reiterated nationally, regionally and internationally and I am sure that we can all appreciate what I think has well been

established as my passion for this perspective. This is also closely linked to the position that labour must be viewed as a pillar of economic development. In all that we have done at the Ministry, I wish to assure this honourable House that we have been guided by international labour standards and very valuable work undertaken by our international development partners.

Now, many people, some of them who I suspect know better, they behave and they reiterate positions that suggest that all that the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development and, perhaps, the Minister particularly, has to do is to sit in readiness for the breakdown of the collective bargaining process and as a magician he must intervene and settle these—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Hypolite: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 8(2).

Hon. E. Mc Leod: What is it?

Mr. Sharma: Go and call your Members. We have a quorum. He cannot count.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: “Yuh send yuh Members to the restroom and then yuh bawl quorum, quorum.”

Mr. Hypolite: “I did you that?”

Mr. Speaker: So we need to have some more Members here. We need one more Member. *[Members enter Chamber]* You may continue, hon. Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Sharma: That is a good TV venture.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: I was just saying to my constituency representative, I live in the constituency of La Brea, “yuh know”, Mr. Speaker. “Yeah yeah.”

Mr. Sharma: We sympathize with you.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: But quite often I tell myself: “I better run fuh dat seat yuh know.” *[Laughter]* “Oyoyoy.”

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to report—oh, I was making the point that all we needed to do was to create, as it were, an enabling environment: talk with the Minister of Finance and the Economy, talk with the hon. Prime Minister and empower such persons as we might have exercised any influence with, to get the collective bargaining process going.

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. E. MC LEOD]

Friday, September 13, 2013

It was since 2007, that the former administration denied the collective bargaining process the respect that it ought to have enjoyed. Indeed, they were not even meeting with the unions and we provided the enabling environment, in addition to the conciliators and the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development intervening directly in the process to settle wage and salary negotiations as determined by so many conventions of the International Labour Organization and to which we subscribe. We were subscribing prior to 2010, but we were subscribing only with lip service. We were not practising that which we would have preached to the wider world.

So I am pleased to report that Trinidad and Tobago continues to lead regionally and in the hemisphere on core labour matters. Our position as representative of the Caribbean, as a titular member of the governing body of the ILO, is certainly well respected in every quarter, as a result of the quality of our representation in this body, which directs the work of this international organization.

The jobs crisis in the aftermath of the global financial and economic crisis has occasioned many international discussions on labour and we have sought to be involved and to seek support where possible for Trinidad and Tobago. And I think, if I might say it myself, Trinidad and Tobago, led by the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development, at the level of the governing body of the International Labour Organization, is doing a good job on behalf of Trinidad and Tobago and the rest of the Caribbean in this regard. So we have been involved, both as a recipient and as a provider of technical assistance to other countries of the hemisphere.

Mr. Speaker, before I go any further with the work of the Ministry, as we contribute to the overall work of the Government, I thought that I might indicate some things—I mean I have spoken, this is the fourth budget debate in which I am participating. [*Crosstalk*] The Speaker said you all are disturbing his hearing.

Dr. Khan: Sorry, sorry. [*Laughter*]

Hon. E. Mc Leod: At a certain time I thought that I was disturbing them, Mr. Speaker. [*Laughter*]

Dr. Khan: You were. You were. You were disturbing me.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: This is the fourth time that I am participating in a budget debate. On the three previous occasions I did not say a word about the Pointe-a-Pierre constituency. Of course, work is being done, “eh”.

I just want to very briefly share some key areas of progress realized in the constituency of Pointe-a-Pierre. In the Pointe-a-Pierre constituency, to alleviate the effects of flooding, waterways are cleared reasonably regularly and box drains have been constructed across the constituency, particularly in those flood-prone areas such as Pranz Gardens, Diamond Village, Sum Sum Hill and Soledad and it is Soledad West, Soledad North, Soledia East, I think: “Yeah”? Diamond Village in Claxton Bay is a major thoroughfare for persons accessing the Point Lisas Industrial Estate. As a result, a significant amount of drainage work has been completed and the necessary approval has been granted for the reconstruction of the Bull Bull Bridge.

Mr. Sharma: The Bull Bull Bridge.

Mr. Baksh: The famous Bull Bull Bridge.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: Do you remember the Bull Bull Bridge, Mr. Speaker? The Bull Bull Bridge. I will not report to this House, the kinds of things that are said about the Bull Bull Bridge by some Members who are supposed to be my colleagues. “Yeah?” They say things which will be considered to be unparliamentary.

Miss Mc Donald: They have dirty minds.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: So I would just leave it at that.

Mr. Sharma: Have you been there at Bull Bull?

Miss Mc Donald: Who me?

Mr. Sharma: Bull Bull Bridge.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: That bridge has to be reconstructed. On mornings, it is only one vehicle and, perhaps, two bicycles that can go through there at one and the same time and there are businesses in the immediate community that require passage along that bridge. Now, approval has been granted for the reconstruction of that bridge in the fiscal period 2012/2013.

9.45 p.m.

I think that pre-engineering works are being done on it at this time, off-site I understand, but at the same time work is taking place on the Diamond bailey bridge, that one—and I went under that bridge, that bridge was collapsing from the underbelly of the bridge really, and I am happy that action is being taken at this time.

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. E. MC LEOD]

Friday, September 13, 2013

Previously neglected streets and roads in Marabella and Claxton Bay have been paved, making access less frustrating for residents and greatly alleviating traffic congestion.

Mr. Speaker, before the—just a month before the election in 2010, grader and backhoe and “ting” came and they dug up the place. Now, for many years vendors had been selling under “lil” makeshift, “two piece ah galvanize” and plywood and so on. As a matter of fact, one Sunday morning—and I like to go to shop—I saw somebody getting himself injured by rushing to a vendor without taking notice of a sheet of galvanize that was, you know—[*Hon. Mc Leod makes a cutting mark on his forehead*] cut here, wow! That was something else.

So the people were promised a market, a decent market and for the purposes of the election, it seemed that they hurriedly came and started to do some earthwork. It took one week to do that and they stopped. They did the same thing on the Marabella recreation ground in Battoo Avenue. Well, I used those two issues in a very effective campaign against the manner with which people have been treated by the outgoing representatives of the people in those constituencies, where they formed the majority to have been in Government. That market is now built and the vendors—sometimes you have difficulty pleasing people “eh”, Mr. Speaker. You “cyar” please all of the people all of the time, it seems.

Hon. Member: You should not try.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: They started to quarrel about not being moved from where they were, but the Mayor of San Fernando decided that we were going to, you know, just get rid of this shanty town “ting” that was there. Then people started to scamper to get their “lil” portion that they were going to sell. Endless people come into the constituency office now complaining that the room that they got to sell their goods is too small, and smaller vendors getting bigger spaces and, wow! There are some of them who have vending stalls in Chaguanas and they have it in San Fernando, and wherever, and they are coming here now, and all kinds “ah commesse”, but we are going to get it solved, because the people in that part of the country are accustomed to coming together and dealing with their problems.

For years, Mr. Speaker, residents of Seetahal Avenue in Claxton Bay have been without water, have been without a proper supply of water that is. Earlier this year, within one month of my request made to the hon. Minister of the Environment and Water Resources, proud residents of Seetahal Avenue received their pipe-borne supply of water. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Well done. Well done.

Hon. Member: “Yuh wukkin.”

Hon. E. Mc Leod: Yes, we are working. Mr. Speaker, as we debate here today, development works are taking place on the Fernandez recreation ground in Claxton Bay; the Marabella recreation ground in Battoo Avenue, Marabella; and there is another ground on which a lot of rugby is played, and that is in terrible condition. I think I am getting the assistance of Region 8, URP people to go and do some work—Flamingo ground, I think they call it.

Miss Mc Donald: You know where to find URP?

Hon. E. Mc Leod: “Um?”

Miss Mc Donald: At least you know where to find the URP.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: Yeah. URP works, you know.

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Miss Hospedales: Not for us.

Miss Mc Donald: I would like to know where to find them. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. E. Mc Leod: More recently, Mr. Speaker, the reopening of the Tarouba link road—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Oh, yes.

Hon. E. Mc Leod:—has been welcomed [*Desk thumping*] as a means of enabling better and safer access—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Members: Yes. Yes.

Hon. E. Mc Leod:—to communities in the southern area in significantly less time.

Mr. Speaker, reconstruction work on the Union Presbyterian Primary School started two months agos and is anticipated to be completed within the next 10 months. I find “dah one” is taking a “lil” bit long. [*Desk thumping*]

Of equal significance is the construction of the Mt. Pleasant Government Primary School within a record time of eight months, that is the first one [*Desk thumping*] that was done. And the expansion of the Marabella South Secondary School within 16 months, as a new state-of-the-art facility, a project that was started by the previous Government in 2007.

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. E. MC LEOD]

Friday, September 13, 2013

I want to thank very, very sincerely, the hon. Minister of Education for having concentrated [*Desk thumping*] so much effort in assisting us in the Pointe-a-Pierre constituency. This Government, and by extension this Member of Parliament for the Pointe-a-Pierre constituency, Mr. Speaker, continue to place tangible investments in improving the life of the residents of Trinidad and Tobago as high priority. I have to skip a number of my—and—yeah, five-year plan. Remember the days of the five-year plan?

Within the next month—and I must thank the Minister with responsibility for Tertiary Education and Skills Training and I must thank the Parliament too—that falls under you, Mr. Speaker. We are opening a suboffice and in that suboffice, in addition to the MP meeting with residents from the particular area, making it easier for them, we will be installing our computer literacy centre, yes, which we are establishing to provide free training and learning opportunities for constituents of Pointe-a-Pierre in the Claxton Bay area.

I now turn attention to the work of the Ministry over the past year under the four development pillars. We are enhancing the social dialogue process, Mr. Speaker. We have already established the social dialogue task force, and in the next two weeks, against the background of this budget having been presented and so on, we are going to have our first real task force meeting, at which there will be representatives of the different social partners and so on, as we begin to plot a course of collaboration and very effectively so, dealing with the issues that affect us. Trade union has an issue, I mean do you just run off and take strike action? And I could talk about strike action, Mr. Speaker, I helped to make that. [*Laughter and crosstalk*] Yes?

Hon. Member: You wrote the book.

Hon. E. McLeod: You do not just run off—you see, I do not want to embarrass anybody, but we had a strike in Trinidad Cement Limited that did not help anybody. It made worse the situation affecting the company. It affected—it frustrated people who were building a step, “a lil” back room, paving “dey” yard, price “ah” cement—and these things will happen, Mr. Speaker. Once we have the right to strike, I am going to subscribe to people having that right to strike, but you must know when [*Desk thumping*] and how to strike. [*Crosstalk*] You do not strike and imperil the job security of so many people.

TCL is back, is running, but there were 53 workers who did not go back to work, all kinds of charges against them. I am hearing now that with particular interventions, some of them have gone back to work without pay for the period

that they had been off, and that is almost a year and yet some of them against whom the company was holding hard positions, opted to take early separation, early retirement. I know that the Member for Point Fortin was particularly concerned about what was happening in Trinidad Cement Limited.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Yes.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: And I do not know that I had spent enough time explaining what was happening inside of there. There were also those who thought that the Minister should have gone to the Attorney General, and that both of them would have invoked section 65 of the Act.

Now, as bad as it was, in my own calculation, the situation had not reached the crisis point that would have nudged me to invoke section 65. Section 65 is a big thing, Mr. Speaker, and you having some background in the trade union thing, would appreciate that. There were those in the business community who were calling for the invocation of section 65.

Indeed, people spoke with my hon. Prime Minister, who spoke with me, and when I explained to the hon. Prime Minister what the situation was, I think she reposed a little more confidence in me. I am happy that I did my job as well as I have pleased so many of us, and I hope that I have pleased you too, Member for Point Fortin. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: You just have under three minutes.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: Three minutes? Mr. Speaker, I cannot deal with my legislative agenda. All right, I will tell you what—we should be coming very shortly to the Parliament with amendments to the Co-operative Societies Act, as we seek to bring into being a new Credit Union Act, and I will take the opportunity then, to give a little more insight into the reform programme for those bits of legislation that affect labour at this time. But take my word for it, Mr. Speaker, and hon. Members, we have been able to do more than the settlement of some 68 collective agreements, having been left with 75, [*Desk thumping*] and we are working assiduously to settle the others.

We have done tremendously well with the establishment of the Integrated Business Incubator System (IBIS). Penal, Siparia up and running; Sangre Grande, up and running; and improvements are taking place and so on, and next we are going to Carenage. We are going to Diego Martin. We are going to Chaguanas. We are going to Couva; San Juan, Barataria, and so on.

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. E. MC LEOD]

Friday, September 13, 2013

I met a Ministry that had become disillusioned, that did not know what was to be done because that Ministry had lacked leadership prior to 2010. I am happy to state today, that we have a Ministry that—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Who was the Minister?

Hon. E. Mc Leod: “Stretch”.

Hon. Member: Okay.

10.00 p.m.

Hon. E. Mc. Leod: We have a Ministry today, with everybody putting their hands on deck, and we are doing tremendously well, but I am not satisfied that we are doing as well as we can, not that I am any perfectionist, but I think that if there remains anything to be done, then enough has not been done, and we are going to make sure that we do all that has not yet been done. I want to thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Ann’s East. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Joanne Thomas (*St. Ann’s East*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this Bill on the 2014 budget. Mr. Speaker, before I get in, I just want to clarify something that the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre spoke about.

Mr. Mc Leod: Yes.

Mrs. J. Thomas: He wanted to clarify that the Member for Arouca/Maloney, when she cited that the URP was not working, you got up and said, as far as you know, the URP was working and, you know, you cited some of the areas where you know that it is working. One thing I could say, a lot of the Members on this side, if there are URP gangs in our area, we are unaware of where they are.

Miss Hospedales: Thanks very much. They are not working.

Mr. Sharma: Because you are not working.

Mrs. J. Thomas: And I just want to give an example. Yesterday, I was privileged to have the Member for Caroni Central, the Minister of the People and Social Development, come into my area for a walk-through. We both went and we did a walk-through, and there was one particular area—I do not know if you will recall, Member—a pavilion, and there were a lot of youths there. So when we

saw the youths, we thought that was a good opportunity to go and speak with the youths and interact with them. There were about 10 members, and there were about two young ladies. One young lady, as a matter of fact, she had on quite a very short, you know, almost like a—*[Interruption]*

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Provocative?

Mrs. J. Thomas:—yeah, a really short pants. I thought to myself—you know, because we were there like about nine o'clock in the morning, and I said, you know, this young girl is there liming with these guys at that hour of the morning. Well, of course, we did the walk through, and then the Minister had to leave to get ready for Cabinet. So I stayed back and I met with some of the persons.

Right next to the pavilion is a basketball court, and then there is Murray Street right next door there. A young guy came up to me and he said, “Madam MP, ah just want to make a request from yuh, the drains in Murray Street really need fixing and the URP gang up here not doing anything.” And I was like, so there is a URP gang up here? And he said, “The guys and the girl that you and the Minister were talking to, that is the URP gang.” I am talking about—”ah mean, the Minister can bear me out.” I am sure he was probably surprised to learn that that was a URP gang that was just sitting there on the pavilion. And, of course, when I first greeted them, I told them—I said, well, I am pleased to bring the Minister here, so I want you all to talk to him, you know, tell him some of the concerns you have, and he would tell you—I mean, they spoke to him.

I mean one of the guys who spoke to him, he was very—you know how the young people are—cool and casual. His pants, as usual, below the butt and in his white vest, you know. I was really surprised to learn that was a URP gang. So, I mean, I just want to, you know, confirm with my colleague, that the URP gangs really are not working in our areas.

Mr. McLeod: Some of them.

Mrs. J. Thomas: If it is they are working, it is only courteous—at least the management of these gangs could advise us as MPs where these gangs are located, and who are really administering the gangs; who are the managers and so on. I would just like if that can be done for us, please.

Mr. McLeod: I hear you saying that some of them are not working.

Mrs. J. Thomas: Well, I met just that one in my area. I did not realize it was a gang, and it was not working.

Appropriation Bill, 2013

Friday, September 13, 2013

Mr. Mc Leod: I responded to the blanket statement that, URP not working.

Mrs. J. Thomas: Okay, well it is not working in our areas.

Mr. Mc Leod: In region eight they are working.

Mrs. J. Thomas: Okay. So, Mr. Speaker, I just want to get into my contribution here. Mr. Speaker, it was in October 2012, when the Government approved a budget allocation of \$51.2 billion, and just over two months ago, a further \$2.8 billion supplementary was approved, and now, Mr. Speaker, we are looking at a budget allocation for 2014 of \$61.3 billion, the biggest in the history of our country.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I would not give my personal opinion of the budget, but what I want to read are the comments of some of our citizens, as stated in the *Daily Express* of Tuesday, September 10; and just a few of the comments I want to read. We have one guy who is 57 years, a broker, and his comments were:

“I listened to part of the budget while I was at work but to be honest I am not really interested in it. Budgets don’t usually differ from the past years. The people on top just treat us like toys and play with us.”

Then we have a young woman, 37 years, she is a caretaker, and she said:

“For the first time I didn’t watch the budget this year and that is because it is the same thing every year...”

Hon. Member: How she know that?

Mrs. J. Thomas: It continues:

“Whatever they say don’t bring down the price of food and that is my concern because I have three girls and a boy to maintain.”

This is a young woman of 37 years. Then we have another guy, 51 years, he is a tailor, and his comments were:

“To me they should have done more in the area of agriculture. When you feed a nation you won’t have angry people. To put money in crime does not make sense to me. Educate people instead, put the money there.”

And then, lastly, a woman, 56 years, and she cited:

“I didn’t listen or watch the budget because I don’t understand it. I usually wait until the budget is broken down in the television news or in the newspaper to see what is in it. Other than that it is too much.”

Mr. Sharma: Very good reason.

Mrs. J. Thomas: Mr. Speaker, when I look at the comments of, especially that last person, it makes me a little sad because the budget that is done, it determines how a citizen of this country lives for the next year. If they are at the point where they do not even understand, and in the case of this young woman where she is waiting for the news to break it down, you know, it is really, really, something that we should look at. You know, you tell yourself, “gone are de days, you know, when the revenues would be clearly broken out as regards the source, and how it was utilized—

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: “Very true eh.”

Mrs. J. Thomas:—and, similarly, for the expenses, it was broken down so the average man in the street can understand. I really want to appeal to the Minister of Finance and the Economy, to take these comments to heart and really work at it because, as I say, the budget determines how we the citizens live for the next year.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to focus a bit on the tourism sector. I look at the budget allocation. In 2013, an allocation of \$195.3 million was allocated for tourism, and then subsequent to that, after the supplemental—about a couple months ago—of \$8.6 million, it brought the 2013 to a total of \$203.9 million and, of course, for 2014, we are looking at something of \$246.9 million. And, Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the hon. Minister of Tourism: How was this money spent? You know, that \$203 million for 2013 because we just have like about two months again—two, three months to go.

I look at the allocations for this sector from since 2010. In 2010, we had a budget expenditure of \$140.7 million with development programmes of \$14.8 million. In 2011, \$155.3 million, development programmes of \$12.8 million. In 2012, \$170.7 million and development programmes of \$18.3 million and then, of course, expenditure in 2013, \$204.0 million and \$15.0 million for development programmes. And, of course, as I said, we are looking now for 2014 at \$246.9 million and \$16 million for development programmes.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy, in introducing the section that deals with tourism he said:

“Mr. Speaker, over the past year, we have been making steady progress with our initiatives”—for the—”tourism sector”.

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[MRS. THOMAS]

Friday, September 13, 2013

And then, of course, he went on to speak about developing the airlift and enhancing room stock. He spoke, in particular, about the introduction of JetBlue airline and the Apollo Airlines, as well as the opening of the Radisson Luxury apartments. But I ask the hon. Minister, Mr. Speaker, when you have more flights for our tourists—our foreign tourists coming in the country and, of course, you have hotels for them to stay in, what next? What do they do when they come here?

Mr. Speaker, I would just like to remind the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy of his budget statement in 2012. And he said:

“The Government is committed to building a dynamic and diverse tourism sector.”

He further went on to say:

“there is no reason why Trinidad and Tobago cannot develop a diverse and competitive tourism industry. It has some of the most unspoilt beaches, as well as the most sophisticated sporting and medical facilities in the region.”

He further went on to say:

“The fact that such a tourism sector has not been achieved to date, results from a lack of investment in time and energy.”

And, at that time, there was a reshuffle, and the outgoing Minister of Tourism, he was then the newly appointed Minister, and the Minister of Finance and the Economy commented that this particular Minister has already commenced the development and implementation of a multifaceted programme to achieve the goal of making Trinidad and Tobago, the number one location in the region for tourist arrivals.

Mr. Speaker, I want to go to the *Review of the Economy, 2013* and, of course, under “Airline Arrivals” it was highlighted that there was a 5.5 per cent increase in passenger arrivals, and then we go to “Cruise Ship Arrivals”. In the report it says:

“...the number of cruise passengers fell by 18.4 per cent to 49,275 persons in 2012...This decline reflected a 29.5 per cent drop in the number of cruise ships visiting Tobago.”

So the impact of the decrease in the cruise ship arrivals also impacted on Tobago. Then he said:

“During the four-month period to April 2013, a total of 25 cruise ships docked in Trinidad and Tobago. This reflected”—in—a 46.8 per cent decline...”

And, of course there were “fewer vessels from the corresponding period” as well, and we are looking at a 6.6 per cent less than the 30,927 passengers arriving during the first four months of 2012.

10.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, there was an article in the *Newsday* on Tuesday 20 August, 2013, when the hon. Minister launched “Our tourism: It’s all about us”, and in that launch the Minister noted that the Government was on track to receive 500,000 visitor arrivals; a target which he had set way back in December 2012, he said. And, Mr. Speaker, this target that he has set, I looked at the introduction of the JetBlue airline, the Apollo airline and then the implementation of the Radisson Hotel, and I tell—you know, has the Minister looked at the advisory that is placed for the tourists coming into our country from the three major countries?

I just want to focus on it a bit, Mr. Speaker. I looked at the advisory that is placed for US citizens coming into our country, and one of the first things of course as we would all expect, highlighted is crime. The advisory said:

“Violent crime remains high on both islands and affects local and expatriate communities...”

It is telling its citizens:

“Be particularly cautious when traveling after dark from Trinidad’s Piarco Airport as incidents have been reported in the past involving armed robbers trailing arriving passengers from the airport and accosting them in remote areas of the airport parking lot, on the highway leading from the airport to down town Port of Spain, and outside the gates of residences. Areas in the Port of Spain metro area to avoid include Laventille, Morvant, Sea Lots, the interior of the Queens Park Savannah, South Belmont, and Cocorite.”

And then the advisory from the US further goes on to say, as it relates to crime:

“Violent crimes, including assault, kidnapping for ransom, sexual assault, and murder have involved expatriate residents and tourists...”

And, you know, what is most disheartening:

“The perpetrators of many of these crimes have not been arrested.”

And it tells their citizens:

“...seek out accommodation with hardened security doors, strong locks, grilles, and alarms.”

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[MRS. THOMAS]

Friday, September 13, 2013

Mr. Speaker, this is as it relates to crime. Hear what it says, Mr. Speaker, about taking taxis:

“Taxis have also caused serious traffic accidents when they swerved suddenly across several lanes of roadway in order to pick up or discharge passengers.”

Now, this is the advisory that the US, you know, is giving to their citizens coming to Trinidad and Tobago.

And then they also gave them information on medical facilities and health information. They are saying here:

“Medical care is significantly below U.S. standards for treatment of serious injuries and illness, with limited access to supplies and medications.”

And then they go on to say:

“Physicians and nurses have been known to go on strike, causing strain on public and private medical services. Ambulance service is extremely limited in the quality of care, response time, and the availability of vehicles. Most ambulances lack standard emergency life-saving equipment.”

Mr. Speaker, this is the advisory the US is putting out to their citizens, as regards coming to Trinidad. And, you know, when you look at the Canada advisory, it is more or less the same thing; they talk about crime, but again they go on to say:

“Remain highly vigilant in Laventille and at popular tourist sites, such as Fort George, La Brea—the—(Pitch Lake) and Las Cuevas beach...”

Mr. Seemungal: “They does do that for all over the world.”

Hon. Member: Las Cuevas.

Mrs. J. Thomas: No, I know, but I am just saying, we are looking to get 500,000—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: No, it is relevant. It is very relevant.

Mrs. J. Thomas:—more visitors to come and these are some of the things we need to address, because if these advisories stay current then our expectation will not be realized.

So, Mr. Speaker, the same thing applies, you know, to the UK, they are saying things about crime, about health, you know. Mr. Speaker, one of the things I want to look at is the issue of the health. Of course we have heard the Minister of Health, you know, speak tonight and he has given us a good breakdown of the plans that he has as regards improving the health sector.

I know the Minister is working hard to try and clean up the health sector and achieve some of these plans [*Desk thumping*] you know, but it is a mountainous task, and I just want to focus a bit—because some of the things he spoke about are very, very evident, because, Mr. Speaker, I do not know how many Members here have gone to the Port of Spain hospital and seen the kind of service. And you know what will be encouraging, for persons here to just go under disguise, and as soon as you enter, the security guard is the one—he is most hostile.

Now you are going there for medical attention, you are sick, and I have had cause recently to go to the hospital with a family member. Of course, I called the Minister and asked if he can make a call so that I can get some attention, because I know what I was going to expect. And when we reached by the security guard I had to actually tell him, you know, “the doctor in the ward is expecting me, I was referred to by the Minister”, that is when he allowed me to go, and yet you saw other people there just sit down, you know, I mean people who are really sick. And if you see, I mean no kind of regard by the guard, even the customer service representative and, of course, the clerk to take the information.

But I want to give a particular example to the Minister. I had cause to call the Minister—there was a lady in St. James who needed help. She is a cancer patient, you know, really at a bad stage, she went to the St. James Hospital and, of course, they gave her documentation to go and obtain a scan at the Port of Spain General Hospital. Mr. Speaker, when she went the doctor told her that she can get an appointment in 2015. And I am talking about a lady who is in dire need of help, she has breast cancer.

Mr. Speaker, when I called the Minister to ask if he could please intervene to give me some help for this goodly lady, he told me okay to call a particular doctor, and I called the doctor and the doctor said, “well, we only have one CT scan machine, one X-ray machine, and it is about 80 years old”. Those were his exact words to me—“so what you are telling me is you want me to put this lady up and that mean I have to put somebody lower down”. So I mentioned to him the reason why I called the Minister is because I needed special attention for this woman, and then he said, okay, he will try and get some attention for her, right, so that I should call his secretary.

Then it was a couple of days after one of my cousins needed to get surgery, I went with him and, of course, the doctor there attended to him, but what the doctor is telling him is that the knife that he has there, that he has to do the surgery, that knife is supposed to be changed every three months, and that knife

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[MRS. THOMAS]

Friday, September 13, 2013

was there for at least two years. And he said, he was telling my cousin, “picture yourself cutting a chicken with a dull knife”, that is what happens when they have to do surgery.

I want to alert the Minister of Health, because remember the same type of service that our citizens will be getting is the same type of service if a visitor who comes here and takes ill and goes to the hospital, that is the kind of service that would be meted out to these visitors. I want to draw his attention to some of the doctors in the RHAs. Now I know we have doctors here, we have our hon. Member for Caroni East and of course the Member for Barataria/San Juan; we have my colleague here, the Member for Diego Martin Central, and they would know in that profession it is all about caring for the patient, but some of our doctors—and of course the Minister did mention in his contribution, to enhance the primary care they are looking to bring in physicians from other countries and so—but our doctors, they get really good compensation packages, and yet, they refuse to work the 40-hour work week that they are supposed to work in the hospitals, and they spend most of their time in their private practice. So, you see, it is like the access to good health care can only be received at their private practice and not in the hospital.

I want to alert the Minister as regards to the Medical Board of Trinidad and Tobago; when they are giving these people licences to make sure and verify what they are giving them, because as long as you are a skilled practitioner apparently you get the approval to conduct your private practice, right. Similarly, and of course, when you get your medical licence, that is what you take to the Ministry of National Security to get your work permit to work.

So there must be some serious attention placed on when licences are granted to these foreign doctors. The Medical Board has to be more stringent because Trinidad—the word out there—and having worked in the health sector for a short while, is that “Trinidad have money to give”, so everybody wants to come to Trinidad to work.

Hon. Member: America of the Caribbean.

Mrs. J. Thomas: Yes. As long as you are in the medical profession, it is in everybody, and yet when they come they do not give that service because they fall into whatever they see is the norm.

10.30 p.m.

I highlighted a lot about that health thing because I felt really concerned when I saw the advisory on health being placed for visitors coming to our country.

Appropriation Bill, 2013

Saturday, September 14, 2013

Mr. Speaker, I want to look at the north coast area, which is my area, so I have a passion for that. I refer to the Member for Toco/Sangre Grande when he was Minister of Tourism. Members here would hear me talk many a time about the Fort Abercromby and Maracas Bay facilities. The *Hansard* would show where every time I get up to make a contribution I would always bring attention to these areas. It goes back to my point when the visitors come on JetBlue and on Apollo and they stay in Radisson and in the Hyatt what happens. We must fix the facilities to encourage them to make their stay here in Trinidad and Tobago an enjoyable one.

The Minister of Tourism gave me his word: Fort Abercromby is going to be completed; Maracas, he got approval, it is going to be completed, but nothing was happening. I took it upon myself to write the Ministry and enquire: What is the status with Fort Abercromby? I just want to read into the *Hansard* the response that I received. This is signed by Yolande Selman, Acting CEO for Tourism Development Company. She said:

Dear Miss Thomas

Re. Fort Abercromby Tourist Attraction

With reference to your letter dated August 15, 2013 on the caption, we wish to advise you that with regard to the safety barriers and rails to the lookout we have completed 80 per cent of the work. However, in respect of the continuation/completion of the project we regret to inform you that funds are unavailable at this time. The Tourism Development Company Limited is pleased to continue working with your group in promoting Trinidad and Tobago, and should funds become available we will contact you.

Mr. Speaker, this letter is after I got confirmation from the Minister that he got approval from Cabinet, and yes, Fort Abercromby is going to be started.

I have been asking here about that same Fort Abercromby, but it is not just like a beach to refurbish. There is history behind Fort Abercromby. I just want to let you know that Fort Abercromby was built by the British in 1804 as part of the fortification of Trinidad. As noted in the *Caribbean Journal*, it has fallen into disrepair after years of relative neglect.

The story behind Fort Abercromby is that despite it never experienced any military action, it was noted that one night in 1805 an officer on the fort saw a large fleet approaching and sounded the alarm. The officers decided to burn the huts, spike the guns, and the entire garrison of three officers and fifty soldiers

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[MRS. THOMAS]

Friday, September 13, 2013

retreated over the hills to nearby St. Joseph. It so happened ironically, however, the fleet that they saw turned out to be that of Lord Nelson on the way to take part in the battle of Trafalgar.

I am saying that the site has history. All we need to do is fix up the site, put the history on the site and let us make this one of our tourist attractions, so for tourists coming into our country that would be one of the sites. I am not just asking this just for so. Apart from that, as I have cited before, it also would give some measure of employment to the citizens living in Las Cuevas. As you know, Las Cuevas is one of the poorest parts of our country. The citizens are all geared up and ready, waiting to get this going. Minister, in meeting with them, they will take full control of it, they will maintain it and so they will be involved in the whole management of Fort Abercromby. I do not know now with the reshuffle, with the new Minister of Tourism, if anything is happening with tourism in my constituency and in Trinidad and Tobago, far less Fort Abercromby.

I want to ask the Minister something. In his launch in the north coast on tourism, "It's All About Us", the Minister mentioned an 18-month campaign that the Ministry would be embarking on, that \$5 million was allocated for this 18-month campaign and that the contract was given to KV Marketing. All I ask the Minister: Who is KV Marketing and was this project put out for tender as regards KV Marketing being the one to get the contract?

Mr. Speaker, I want to refer again to a newspaper article in the *Daily Express*, Wednesday, September 11, 2013. Citizens of this country are really, truly concerned as regards what is to become of tourism. In the article it cited the Trinidad Hotels, Restaurants and Tourism Association:

"...stakeholders are disappointed they did not receive the US \$50 million in the 2013-2014 national budget to properly market 'Destination T&T'."

Of course, they complained about the new Tourism Minister, Chandresh Sharma's appointment. They had some concerns as regards the reshuffle in moving Mr. Cadiz, as they felt they had gotten somewhere with improving tourism in this country and they referred to it:

"When tourism is treated like the bastard child, how can it breed confidence in the banking sector or attract future investors?"

The article further says:

"Howai's budget showed a clear disregard for the tourism industry and what is required to propel it forward."

Mr. Speaker, I just want to go now to a few initiatives that were mentioned in the *Public Sector Investment Programme 2013*. Under tourism it was highlighted that the Tourism Development Company will:

“...continue its efforts to ensure Trinidad and Tobago improve its position as a world-class tourism destination.”—for which an allocation of \$17.6 million will be provided in 2013.

Some of the main activities that were highlighted that this \$17 million for use in 2013 would take care of—I just want to highlight four of them. One of the first ones is the reimbursement of 25 per cent to a maximum of \$12,500 per room, to hoteliers as an incentive for the upgrade of hotel and guest room stock in Trinidad.

Mr. Speaker, you would remember the Minister of Finance and the Economy in his presentation last year spoke about this reimbursement to hoteliers. Did any hotelier get access to this reimbursement? Was it advertised to encourage them to access this? I do not think so, but I ask the Minister when he is speaking if he could just clarify that for me, because this is an action that was supposed to fall under that \$17.6 million allocation for 2013. These are all activities that would make sure and enhance our tourist attractions, so when the tourists come they have somewhere to go.

The other initiative that was cited:

The upgrade of Ariapita Avenue into a premier destination for entertainment, dining and shopping in a safe, clean and secure environment.

I do not know when last you went to Ariapita Avenue, Mr. Speaker, but I do not know if you have seen any of this has taken place, and this is all scheduled for 2013.

Then we looked at the upgrade of beaches, sights and attractions at Maracas—which is my area—Las Cuevas—my area again—Manzanilla, Vessigny, and enhancement of the La Brea Pitch Lake. Well, Member for Talparo, you could probably say if Manzanilla Beach—and you shake your head, so that alone says nothing was done at that beach, which is cited here. All of these were supposed to take place in 2013 with this \$17.6 million allocation. I ask: did the Minister receive this allocation, and if he did, how were these funds utilized? We can clearly confirm that none of these things I am highlighting here were achieved. Where has this money gone?

I just want to tell the Minister of Finance and the Economy: he cannot fool the people, “de people not stupid”. They just feel they just say nice words

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[MRS. THOMAS]

Friday, September 13, 2013

[*Interruption*] yes, and the money, nobody is keeping track of it. I am thankful for the records like this and, of course, for my colleague, the Member for Arouca/Maloney, in her contribution when she highlighted some of the discrepancies in the Auditor General's report.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to endorse some of the initiatives highlighted in the Minister's statement for the pensions. For the pensions, some of the work that they plan to undertake: increasing survivor's benefit; reducing the vesting period for pension from five years to two years—a lot of employees would welcome this; improving portability within the public service—so if you move from one area to another, you can take your pension with you; and of course, most important, which I have seen in the newspapers where the unions are in full support of this, introducing pensions for daily-paid employees of the Government. This is something that I know unions have been lobbying for, and I too want to support this initiative as regards pension.

I want to go to my area a bit and highlight some of the outstanding projects for my area. I go firstly to the Minister of Sport. I want to remind the Minister of Sport of the refurbishing of the Bourg Mulatresse Ato Boldon Recreation Ground that is in dire need of repair. I also want to thank the hon. Minister of Public Utilities who gave us lights just recently. I just want to advise the Minister that on the Saturday following the day we put the lights on there was a big final of a football game which started at about eight o'clock in the night, so the lights came in quite handy and the members of the community were very pleased with that. A lot of the community people came out, so I just want to thank the Minister of Public Utilities. [*Interruption*]

10.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for St. Ann's East has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Mr. N. Hypolite*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: You may continue, hon. Member.

Mrs. J. Thomas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to my Members and Members on the other side.

Appropriation Bill, 2013

Saturday, September 14, 2013

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: They want to hear you.

Mrs. J. Thomas: Okay. Mr. Speaker, I am just highlighting here, so I should be through shortly.

Mr. Seemungal: “Take yuh time. Take yuh time.”

Mr. De Coteau: “Take your time, darling. Take yuh time.” [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. J. Thomas: I want to remind the Minister of Sport as well and I want it to be noted: the pavilion at the Brian Lara Recreation Ground, [*Crosstalk*] a request was made since 2010, and just Independence Day I went up to a sports there, you know, and the ground really needs some work. I see some minor works are going on and I hope it is to do the completion on that and I want to tell him if he can stay on it. Also, the pavilion, the people really, really need the pavilion because we had to put up a tent, you know. We had a stage from the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation and that is what we used. So I really want to impress upon him, you know, about this request which I made since 2010.

Miss Hospedales: Hmm, 2010.

Mrs. J. Thomas: Then, you know, just as I am about to go to the Minister of Works and Infrastructure, he walks in which is so, you know, timely.

Hon. Member: “Yeah.” [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: “He is a very good fella.” [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. J. Thomas: Yeah. So to the Minister of Works and Infrastructure, you know, Minister, you gave me your word [*Crosstalk*] about fixing the La Canoa Road in Santa Cruz and the La Hoe Road in Laventille Road, and I really, you know, would like if you could keep your commitment to me—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: “Hmm!”

Mrs. J. Thomas:—you know. [*Crosstalk*] I do not feel as much confidence as the Minister of Tourism, but I know I can rely on you to keep your word [*Laughter*] so that we could get these two roads paved.

Dr. Rambachan: Why you do not trust us?

Mrs. J. Thomas: Listen, Mr. Speaker, [*Laughter*] [*Crosstalk*] I am appealing to the Member for Tabaquite [*Crosstalk*] if he can please—[*Interruption*]

Mr. De Coteau: He is different.

Mrs. J. Thomas:—address these two areas for me. That is all I am asking for, to fix La Canoa Road and to fix La Hoe in Laventille Road because prior to you taking up office, as the Minister of Works and Infrastructure, I took Minister George and the Member for Chaguanas West.

Dr. Rambachan: Why? “Yuh doh want to call his name?”

Mrs. J. Thomas: I took him—the Member, he is now a Member—to visit the sites and it has been—both Ministers promised that I would get it, but I know it will be delivered by the Member for Tabaquite.

Hon. Member: What, the Member for Chaguanas West is false promises?
[*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: When we get in office we will do that for you.

Mr. Seemungal: “Yuh didn’t then, yuh go do that when yuh come back?”

Mrs. J. Thomas: I want to take the opportunity to just remind the Member for Baratara/San Juan about the health centre in Maracas, St. Joseph. He is fully aware of this however, I noticed in the Minister’s budget presentation Maracas/St. Joseph Health Centre was not listed, okay, as one of those to be refurbished.

So again, I take your word for it, you know that that will be addressed—
[*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal:—”Remind meh eh.”

Mr. J. Thomas:—yes, and I would remind you because what is so strange, I went to a wedding recently of a girlfriend of mine and the person she was marrying was the doctor who was working there, and he was appealing to me saying, “ah mean” things are falling on him whist he is attending to patients. It is really, really bad and he asked me to plead with you to really give that—
[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: “Doh give him de name yuh know, next thing he fire him.”

Mrs. J. Thomas:—no. So we are still at the old health centre. So I ask if—to remind the Minister of that particular health centre.

I also want to remind the Minister of Public Utilities of the lighting for Gasparillo Grounds, right. So we need that there for the people living in Gasparillo.

Could the Minister of Education—he is not here, the Member for Caroni East—he is fully aware of the needs in my constituency, in particular the early childhood centres. I have been, you know, sending him letters and he has sent a team, but we need for something to happen, especially the citizens of Maracas Bay, they really, really need that early childhood centre.

I believe the last word we have is that it was on the desk—I believe the Minister of—of the Member for Oropouche East. I believe the last they said the approval was on your desk for the grounds to be used for the early childhood centre in Maracas Bay, to get approval to use the grounds. So, I just want to appeal to the Member for Oropouche East, if you can please check your desk, if you see it, if you can please sign off on it [*Crosstalk*]*—the Maracas Bay early childhood centre. [Crosstalk] Yeah, those lands there are in Maracas Bay old road.*

So, Mr. Speaker, I would just like all of these concerns that I have raised to be addressed, and I again appeal to the Minister of Tourism, the Member for Fyzabad. I know people are not expecting, but for tourism to go forward is dependent on what he does and I need for him to just continue the work that the previous Minister has done, and let us take our tourism somewhere. Let us ensure that when we bring in all these tourists from these different countries that they can have the tourist sites to go to and, of course, those concerns that I have raised in the advisory, that those concerns be addressed. Let us return Trinidad and Tobago to a tourist resort. Let us, when we watch all these game shows, see that one of the winning prizes is to come to Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Speaker, I thank you for this honour.

The Minister of State in the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources (Hon. Ramona Ramdial): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all I would like to, of course, congratulate the Minister of Finance and the Economy for a very eloquent, clear and coherent 2014 budget. He has done all that he can within his power to continue to stabilize the economy and again to grow and to ensure the prosperity of Trinidad and Tobago.

With that in mind I want to refer to the Member for Laventille West who earlier on today spoke of the PNM's commitment to the development to Trinidad and Tobago. We need to ask ourselves what is development? Of course, we know, we are all educated in this House and we are very much aware of what development is when we refer to our country. Development is an act or a process of bringing to a more advanced state, growth, progress of a country or of an environment.

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. R. RAMDIAL]

Friday, September 13, 2013

This People's Partnership Government has seen it fit to continue to grow all sectors in Trinidad and Tobago. Of course, the Member for Laventille West, I would like to educate him here tonight, to let him know that as they continue to talk, we deliver. Some of our major achievements of the People's Partnership Government from 2010 to 2013, I would like for this to go on the record and also to edify, of course, the Opposition Members.

With respect to human development we have provided 70,000 laptops for all Form 1 students. We have established the Children's Life Fund which has saved 18 lives thus far. We have increased the minimum wage from nine dollars to \$12.50, promised by the PNM and never delivered. [*Crosstalk*] We have increased the old age pension as of September 2010 to \$3,000 per month; a provision of free public transport for students and senior citizens; the establishment of COSTAATT campus in Sangre Grande; the launch of the UTT Education Campus in Tobago; the commencement of the construction of the University of the West Indies in Debe; completed the Scarborough General Hospital, a project which languished under the PNM for many, many years.

Mr. Sharma: Correct, correct.

Hon. R. Ramdial: We continue to work on the children's hospital in Couva; the completing of the Chancery Lane Teaching Hospital in San Fernando that the Minister of Health spoke of earlier; the increased level of benefits for sickness, invalidity, special maternity, employment, injury and grants under the NIB.

We have gone on to launch the Land for the Landless Programme under the goodly Minister of Housing and Urban Development, 5,000 lots to be distributed in three years; the distribution of 4,000 leases to former Caroni employees. The PNM, they only gave out 800 from 2003 to 2010. However, 3,000 former Caroni workers, this week, received a promise of \$6.5 million as a refund for management fee in the infamous PNM UTC "sweetener" scheme. So, Mr. Speaker, as they continue to talk we even delivered on some of their own promises to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the infrastructure of Trinidad and Tobago and one which we are proud of—most proud of, and which my colleague, the Member for Oropouche West will speak of in her debate—the constructed Golconda to Debe segment of the Point Fortin highway; one of our major achievements under this People's Partnership Government. The upgrade of the Tarouba Link Road after decades of problems; the expansion of the Couva/Preysal interchange project; the constructed Kelly Village to Piarco by-pass road; the commencement of construction on the national aquatic centre, tennis centre and cycling centre.

The water supply of Trinidad and Tobago increased in 2010; they increased the percentage of the population receiving a 24 hour supply to 49 per cent from 18 per cent in 2010. We completed the Navet trunk main which led to an improved water supply for over 250,000 people. We recently completed the Seven Seas Desal project in Point Fortin—and I see that the Member for Point Fortin has vacated her seat because she probably “doh” want to hear us speak of this—but we completed the Seven Seas Desal project in Point Fortin where at least 29,000 people in La Brea and Point Fortin moved from intermittent supply to a 24/7 supply of water.

Mr. Sharma: Very good. Very good.

Hon. R. Ramdial: In Tobago we continue to develop that area also. In 2010, 23 per cent of the population received water service 24 hours a day, seven days per week. By August 2013 this level of water service was approaching 67 per cent. [*Crosstalk*]

The Diego Martin Highway is under construction and this will definitely alleviate traffic problems in Diego Martin. With respect to URP, Mr. Speaker, 34.7 kilometres of box drains constructed in 2012 to 2013. [*Desk thumping*]

Under the Ministry of Local Government, Mr. Speaker, 237 kilometres of roads were rehabilitated and paved in 2012/2013. Again, under the Ministry of Local Government, 65 bridges were completed in 2012/2013. Mr. Speaker, if this is not development, then I do not know what to call this.

With respect to the economy, a stable economy, which we now enjoy, low inflation, 5.6 per cent and 5 per cent unemployment in 2010. Four consecutive quarters of economic growth from the third quarter of 2012 to the second quarter of 2013. FDI of over US \$2.5 billion in 2012 and over 80 per cent of this is energy related.

There is a significant increase in drilling activity; eight rigs will be working offshore by end of year compared to just one in mid-2010.

We signed six deep water production sharing contracts whereas compared to the PNM, none was signed under them. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Sharma: Very good point.

Hon. R. Ramdial: First Citizens’ Initial Public Offering (IPO) has been oversubscribed three times over. We have launched the Clico Investment Fund, over 6,000 people and organizations benefit from a \$10 billion payout, and

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. R. RAMDIAL]

Friday, September 13, 2013

commenced pay out to the HCU depositors; 17,794 people benefit from a \$132 million payout. Could the PNM-led Government ever have thought of this?

11.00 p.m.

We continue, Mr. Speaker, with the economy. We have increased agricultural output and consequent decrease in food inflation from 29 per cent in 2010 to 9 per cent in 2013. We continue the improvement in the “Ease of Doing Business” and now we are ranked 76th in 2011, whereas before we were ranked 69th. And of course we have removed VAT on the 7,000 food items. So, Mr. Speaker, as the Opposition continue to talk, we will continue to deliver, from now until our second term in Government.

But, Mr. Speaker, I want to also go back to, of course, the Leader of the Opposition earlier on also who said—and he spoke of a number of things; and one of these things that he spoke of, was that of macro development and how the PNM developed our country and that the lack of the People’s Partnership macro development was plagued with persistent problems. However, in 2009 that said Member, as probably he has a short-term memory, as a back bencher I remember him saying, and it is on the *Hansard* for everyone, that he himself at that time, in 2009 as a backbencher, he pulverized his then Prime Minister and political leader, Patrick Manning, for not listening to the cries of the people on the ground, of course when it came to the construction of box drains to alleviate flooding and other simple infrastructural works that were needed on the ground. And he chastised his own government as a backbencher in 2009 for their own macro projects, one of that being this said Waterfront Project which he publicly chastised his leader for. And he went as far as to say that the then PNM Government was one of the worst and most corrupt governments that this country has ever seen. And he even compared it to that of the previous—[*Interruption*]

Miss Mc Donald: Standing Order 36(5), Mr. Speaker, I “doh” remember anything like that and I was in Parliament and I was in the Government.

Mr. Speaker: Yeah, you may not have remembered, but she is quoting. Continue, please.

Hon. R. Ramdial: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, Mr. Speaker, it is in the 2009 response that he was giving for the budget and it is on the *Hansard* for all. And as I said before, he even compared his then government to that of the previous UNC Government and labelled them the most corrupt.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think that the Leader of the Opposition was being very hypocritical today when he spoke of our macro development or lack of it, when at

that point in time in 2009 he chastised his own government for their macro developmental projects. And of course, as I said before, Mr. Speaker, if that is not hypocrisy at the highest level, well it will be by vision 2030 that he spoke of earlier on.

Mr. Speaker, I have a lot of good work to report with respect to the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources. Of course, I must start by saying that the mandate of the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources is to sustainably manage the nation's natural resources in a manner that ensures that there is a balance between economic and social development while maintaining the integrity of the environment. To achieve this mandate, Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources has under its purview a number of divisions, authorities and agencies, each charged with specific duties and responsibilities that contribute to the overall attainment of the Ministry's strategic objectives.

We continue to provide overall policy, our policy direction in terms of the National Environmental Policy, as well as the subsector policy guidance in areas including climate change, forestry, wetlands and other protected areas. Other areas are also under the purview of the Ministry and that includes: coastal and marine resources, implementation of the Green Fund, as well as the Meteorological Services. The Ministry is the focal point of all international multilateral environmental agreements also to which our country is a signatory and as such, is responsible for the adherence to all national obligations and commitments under these agreements.

Our Ministry, Mr. Speaker, is also responsible for the management of the nation's water resources which include watershed management, surface and groundwater sources. Finally, the Ministry is responsible for the provision of adequate drainage and irrigation infrastructure thereby reducing flooding and erosion, and thus facilitating economic growth and development, and a safer environment for all citizens. [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: All that flooding in Diego Martin and “yuh” talking about what “yuh” doing. All that happening in Diego Martin. Crazy.

Dr. Rambachan: Keep quiet, “nah”.

Hon. R. Ramdial: Mr. Speaker, there are three pillars identified:

- Economic development;
- Social development; and
- Environmental protection.

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. R. RAMDIAL]

Friday, September 13, 2013

Environmental protection is the major pillar of sustainable development, and of course our Ministry is charged with the responsibility of ensuring this. One of our major agencies under the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, Mr. Speaker, is that of WASA, and of course the mandate of WASA at this point in time is water security for every sector, deliver it, sustain it. The developmental pillars of WASA:

- human capital development;
- customer care;
- cost optimization; and
- revenue enhancement.

These are the pillars by which WASA operates.

The situation in May 2010 when we entered Government, with respect to WASA, was that the demand for water was greater than the production of water. So therefore there was a deficit. Of course we had other problems: aged and leaking transmission and distribution mains; deteriorating water treatment plant with low operating efficiency; minimal investment in development of new water sources of 4 per cent domestic metering coverage only; a service coverage of 18 per cent 24/7 and 89 per cent of 24/2 and a lack of an aggressive leakage management plan.

With respect to wastewater, Mr. Speaker, some of the problems we faced were low sewer coverage, 30 per cent; and minimum investment in expansion of the sewer network; a deterioration of key wastewater treatment plants in San Fernando, Arima, Scarborough and other adopted plants. We had over 200 orphan wastewater plants abandoned by private developers. And of course, we were faced with deteriorating critical sewer pipelines.

With respect to the institution of WASA, Mr. Speaker, there was overstaffing by 17 per cent and of course an operating deficit of \$1.23 billion. Over the past three years, we have been able with respect to our finance of WASA to collect— with respect to collections, our total revenue for the fiscal year 2012/2013 has been TT \$824.5 million as at July 2013. The total collections for the fiscal year 2012/2013, \$723.52 million as at July 2013. And overall, Mr. Speaker, the authority's receivables were reduced by 5.3 per cent. And we continue to upgrade, of course, the finance of WASA.

With respect to the billing efficiency and customer information system, we were able to increase that database with over 4,590 properties, which resulted in a

Appropriation Bill, 2013

Saturday, September 14, 2013

revenue gain of \$2.754 million. Savings: we were also able to save under this agency and for the financial year 2012/2013 total claims against the authority were quantified as \$8,307,392. Only 8 per cent was paid through negotiation/settlement or denial and other claims were nullified. We continue, Mr. Speaker, with sound financial management of WASA.

The economic impact of WASA has been very wide-ranging throughout Trinidad and Tobago. With respect to innovation, the authority established a previously underdeveloped open market for contractual jobs in the septic/public sewer cleaning, desludging and water and plumbing infrastructure for private homes and developments. The authority was able to offer an “All-in-One” water and wastewater infrastructure design and inspection package to Government and State buildings projects to lower time taken for approvals by WASA, which generates cost and time savings.

With respect to our customer experience, we continue to build that corporate image of WASA and of course, this is a work in progress that will continue over the years to come. Mr. Speaker, we continue to provide a reliable supply of water and of course our target is that of a 24/7 supply for all of our customers. And a new intake was developed using the Morang River at an estimated cost of \$2.2 million benefiting approximately 750 persons. Works have also commenced at another intake site at Matelot, Toco, and it is estimated that upon completion, approximately 1,000 persons would benefit under a 24/7 supply, Mr. Speaker.

The Point Fortin Desalination Plant was put into operation in July 2013 and at present the production stands at 4.6 imperial million gallons per day. And water produced by this plant is being used—*[Interruption]*

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: PNM’s project, “eh”.

Hon. R. Ramdial: And you see, Mr. Speaker, this is what, you know, we have to continue to face. They spoke of the project but we delivered the project in 2013. *[Desk thumping]* They spoke of the project but we carried out and implemented this project.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Would you give way?

Hon. R. Ramdial: Mr. Speaker, I will not give way.

Mr. Speaker: Please, please, Member please—Member please. Member for Point Fortin, I think you have to speak—*[Interruption]*

Miss Gopee-Scoon: *[Inaudible]*

Mr. Speaker: No, you have to speak tonight?

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: No.

Mr. Speaker: Well, if you are not speaking tonight, and you are speaking tomorrow, you could kindly take notes. You do not get up to argue with another person who has the right to speak.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: I go up to ask for her to give way.

Mr. Speaker: No, no, no and she is not giving way. If the Member is not giving way, you cannot get up. You first have to address me, not the Member. So hon. Member, continue, please.

Hon. R. Ramdial: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the Point Fortin Desalination plant, it was put into operation in July 2013 under this People's Partnership Government [*Desk thumping*] and at a production which stands at 4.6 million gallons per day. The water produced by this plant is being utilized to improve the supply to 12 areas: Mahaica, Clifton Hill, Point Fortin proper, New Lands, Reservoir Hill, Harriman Park, Egypt Village, Fanny Village and environs, Salazar Trace, Gonzales, Parrylands, Lot 10 and Cochrane, with an estimated total of 19,740 residents in getting an improved water supply 24/7. Two thousand, two hundred and forty customers will move from receiving water once per week, to receiving water more than five days per week. Two thousand two hundred and ninety-six persons would benefit from water supplied previously two days per week to now a minimum of three days per week, Mr. Speaker and an estimated 6,160 persons would move from a supply of two days per week to a minimum of 24/5 and up to receiving a continuous supply of 24/7.

A further 8,224 persons would benefit from receiving water four days per week, to a minimum supply of five days per week, and up to a 24/7 supply. Moreover, 820 persons who received water previously five days per week would now receive five days per week to a continuous seven days per week.

Mr. Speaker, this is the development that we spoke of and this is the development that Laventille West is referring to that they could not deliver in their term of Government which we are now delivering. So at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, this People's Partnership Government continues to deliver on all of the broken promises of the PNM and of course, our very own new ones. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, we continue with our water sector to improve: as at July 2013, 13 per cent of all WASA customers were receiving a 24/2 water supply; 3.1 per

cent getting a 24/4 service; 24.2 per cent receiving a 24/5 supply and 44.6 per cent receiving a continuous 24/7 supply.

A total of 42,764 leaks were repaired in Trinidad and Tobago from September 2013 to July 2012. [*Desk thumping*] January 2013 saw the highest number of leaks, Mr. Speaker, being repaired in Trinidad with 4,720 leaks fixed, while July 2013 saw the highest number of leaks repaired in Tobago and that number was 539 leaks in Tobago.

11.15 p.m.

A total of 47,899 trips were delivered during the period, representing a 12 per cent decrease in water trucking trips, from the previous fiscal year. A total of 10,800 deliveries were made in north Trinidad; 35,000 and more deliveries in south Trinidad and 1,710 deliveries in Tobago were completed from September 2012 to July 2013. Mr. Speaker, this is the level of service that WASA has and the obligation, the duty of care to its customers, that the previous Government could not implement through that agency.

At present, Mr. Speaker, the authority is conducting the rehabilitation of five reservoirs at a cost of \$8 million, and is expected to benefit 13,000 persons. We are also underway with six waste water projects. They are also under way with the rehabilitation and the upgrade of eight waste water treatment facilities, estimated at \$29 million and benefiting 43,744 persons.

Hon. Member: “Tell dem about Talparo—

Hon. R. Ramdial: The rehabilitation and replacement of the Scott Street sewers in San Fernando is ongoing at a cost of \$70 million to benefit 7,000 persons.

Mr. Sharma: “Doh forget de Tulip project, yuh know.”

Hon. R. Ramdial: Yes. For the fiscal year 2012/2013, an estimate of 103 kilometres of mains were installed at a cost of \$200 million in north, central and south Trinidad. Approximately 38.39 kilometres of pipelines were replaced in north, benefiting 15,000 persons; 29.32 kilometres of pipes in central, benefiting 10,498 persons; and 35 kilometres of pipes benefiting 12,670 persons in south Trinidad with the sizes ranging from 100 millimetres to 200 millimetres. Mr. Speaker, we continue with our efficiency and upgrades with two boosters, which were completed in San Juan and Biche at a total cost of \$3.4 million, benefiting at least 23,694 persons in that area.

We continue, Mr. Speaker, to also move ahead with our feasibility studies and, of course, there are two design consultancies which were completed at a cost

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. R. RAMDIAL]

Friday, September 13, 2013

of \$1.3 million for the design and implementation of water resources, hydrological database and a consultancy service for the design of 16 kilometres of 500mm pipelines from Bacolet to Cove industrial park in Tobago.

These achievements have been just over the past three years, when I speak of these achievements with respect to WASA. We have drilled three wells in Chatham and one in Wallerfield, at a cost of \$8 million and, of course, those wells would benefit 7,459 persons with water. Seven water treatment plants were refurbished in areas across Trinidad, such as Clarke Road, Moruga, Fyzabad, Toco, Valencia, Mayaro and north Oropouche at a cost of \$28 million and will benefit 145,452 persons.

Mr. Sharma: “Yuh hear dat, eh?”

Hon. R. Ramdial: One water treatment plant was contracted at La Fortune, Point Fortin, at a cost of \$7.2 million and is expected to benefit 3,500 persons. *[Interruption]* Yes, it is.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: It is not.

Hon. R. Ramdial: The Member is not aware that it has been completed.

Mr. Sharma: “She doh live there. She squatting.”

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Can you give way? Would you give way?

Hon. R. Ramdial: No, Mr. Speaker, “ah not giving way.” Nineteen pipeline projects, Mr. Speaker, were completed, resulting in over 73.8 kilometres of pipelines laid at a grand total of \$162 million, benefiting at least 66,186 persons across Trinidad and Tobago, in areas such as north-east, north-west, south-west, south-east and central Trinidad and in Tobago as well.

Mr. Sharma: Say it again. “Dey talk, we deliver.”

Hon. R. Ramdial: Exactly. They continue to talk and we will continue to deliver. *[Desk thumping]* Four boosters are being constructed, Mr. Speaker, in Cap-de-Ville, Maraval, Picton and Couva at a cost of \$23 million and that is expected to benefit 33,634 persons.

Mr. Sharma: Well done. Well done.

Hon. R. Ramdial: Two boosters are at present undergoing rehabilitation at a cost of \$6 million and that will benefit 59,000 persons in the San Fernando and St. Ann’s areas.

Hon. Member: Mmm, great.

Hon. R. Ramdial: One service reservoir is being constructed in Mayaro at a cost of \$2 million, while seven reservoirs across Trinidad are being refurbished at a cost of \$11.95 million, to benefit over 133,644 persons.

Mr. Sharma: “De whole country geh in water.”

Hon. R. Ramdial: Eleven waste water projects, including the rehabilitation and expansion of facilities under the Inter-American Development Bank are being pursued at a cost of \$141.27 million in north-east, north-west, south-west and central Trinidad. Fifteen water treatment plants are being rehabilitated and upgraded across Trinidad and Tobago at a cost of \$49 million and it will benefit over 458,151 persons.

Sixteen pipeline projects are ongoing across areas of Trinidad, with an expected 130 kilometres of pipelines to be laid at a cost of \$143 million to benefit over 78,000 persons. Two ongoing pipeline replacement projects are being done to change out over 12 kilometres of mains in Tobago at a cost of \$48 million and is expected to benefit over 1,400 persons. And of course, 129 projects were funded by the NSDP from 2012—2013, with 51 completed, 43 in progress and 38 in planning.

So, Mr. Speaker, as we continue to move ahead with WASA as an agency we, of course, move ahead with our governance and high performance enterprise of this agency also. We continue to focus on corporate governance, high-performance enterprise, human capital development—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: “Wha bout Tulip?”

Hon. R. Ramdial:—longevity of assets and others.

Mr. Sharma: One million gallons—

Hon. R. Ramdial: That also, yes. And the Member for Tabaquite is also boasting of his projects in his constituency.

Hon. Member: Me too.

Hon. R. Ramdial: Some of the projections that we have for the upcoming fiscal year 2014, Mr. Speaker, are that we will continue with our water and waste water sectors for the upcoming year. A sum of \$1.6 billion is being requested for 2013—2014 and, of course, \$374 million of this will be supported by the Inter-American Development Bank.

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. R. RAMDIAL]

Friday, September 13, 2013

The authority is aiming to complete negotiations for the 2011—2013 collective agreements with three unions and to commence negotiations for the 2014—2016 collective agreements. So it is just not 68 collective agreements that have been settled, but we have ongoing ones, and of course, it is moving very, very positively in favour of the Government.

The authority is also aggressively working towards the completion of the disaster recovery site at Freeport to ensure the availability and recoverability of services through replication and equipment staging in the event of a disaster.

Mr. Sharma: So what was the PNM doing before 2010?

Hon. R. Ramdial: Absolutely nothing.

Hon. Member: Good question.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Listen to the nonsense.

Hon. Member: Sleeping.

Hon. R. Ramdial: WASA is anticipating bulk purchasing of PVC and steel pipes and fittings at an estimated value of \$65 million, with associated “just-in-time” deliveries to benefit economies of scale and lower storage cost. WASA continues with the installation of GPS tracking with 102 vehicles left to install the GPS tracking device, which will be done in this new fiscal year.

We also continue, Mr. Speaker, to implement an online payment system which will enable customers to make credit card payments via the authority’s website. The preferred option is the implementation of a separate module of iPayment which is more cost effective than upgrading the current one-step point-of-sale application which is used to collect and process bill payments across nine of the customer service care centres.

We intend to commence the construction of the Caroni/Arena Dam Retreat Centre to provide cost savings to the authority by offsetting the high cost for the frequent rental of conference and retreat facilities.

Hon. Member: Good.

Hon. R. Ramdial: The authority is pursuing the construction of the Debe/Penal water trucking facility which includes the securing of the compound, establishing proper drainage, providing safe accommodation for workers, landscaping and easy accessibility for water trucks at the filling bays.

Mr. Speaker, we are seeking the commencement of the Beetham Clear Water Gardens project which seeks to promote public education in water reuse, water

and waste water treatment, environmental enhancement at the gateway of the biggest waste water treatment plant in the region, and the city of Port of Spain, and involves the upgrading, beautification and repair to the natural environment to create an area free of health hazards and prevent encroachments to provide and promote environmental sustainability.

So, Mr. Speaker you can clearly see that, as the PNM likes to say, we like to focus on central and south, that is not happening. We are sharing the resources equitably across the board for all areas of Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] because that is the mandate of the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources and, by extension, the Government.

Mr. Speaker, the authority also intends to construct three warehouses at Carlsen Field, two storage sheds and a new office and welfare facilities at the Freeport storage site to reduce rental and storage costs for the agency.

Mr. Sharma: “Dah is plenty work for local people.”

Hon. R. Ramdial: So, Mr. Speaker, that is with respect to WASA, which falls under the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources.

Mr. Sharma: Well done! Well done!

Hon. R. Ramdial: With respect to the drainage division, we continue with our policy initiatives for the fiscal year 2013/2014. The drainage division will continue to drive in accordance with the priority objectives of the Government to provide adequate drainage and irrigation infrastructure to facilitate growth and development and to achieve a measure of food security. And just in yesterday’s or today’s papers, if I am not mistaken, Mr. Speaker, we would have seen the article where line Minister Ganga Singh mentioned, of course, Cabinet’s approval to seek funding to go ahead with the nine-package plan for drainage for Port of Spain and environs.

Again, Mr. Speaker, we all recognize that the city of Port of Spain is our major city, and therefore we want to have our city in a very sustainable manner for growth and development, and therefore we understand the flooding problems associated with Port of Spain and environs. I mean, just today we saw what happened at Diego Martin. Therefore, this nine-package plan will roll out later this fiscal year, 2014. So, Mr. Speaker, that is some very good news for the people of Port of Spain and environs with respect to alleviating their flooding problems and their drainage problems here in the city area.

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. R. RAMDIAL]

Friday, September 13, 2013

With respect to the meteorological services division, as you know, the Met Services also falls under the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, and we have a number of initiatives that will be rolling out this fiscal year, one of them being—under the PSIP programme—the Trinidad and Tobago Meteorological Service building, which has procured a fully configurable international civil aviation organization-compliant automated weather-observing system, and following a lengthy installation-approval process with various stakeholders, it is poised to have it installed at the Piarco International Airport near the runway in the new fiscal year.

It would be the first of its kind in the Caribbean, Mr. Speaker, and it is intended to serve the needs of the aeronautical industry insofar as runway meteorological conditions are concerned for aircraft landing and taking off at the airport. So this is one such project that we are going to be implementing this year.

We have also, since 2010, completed all the requisite survey design and relevant background works associated with the construction of the new building under the Public Sector Investment Programme, and we are going to start the actual construction of the first phase in the new fiscal year for the new Met building. So, again, Mr. Speaker, this was a plan on paper that the previous PNM-led Government spoke about, that we are now going to deliver under our term of Government. So, as they continue to talk, we will continue to deliver. [*Desk thumping*]

The Green Fund Executing Unit is also a unit that falls under the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, and the major achievement since June 2010, of course, is that of grants which were made available to community groups and organizations primarily engaged in activities related to the remediation, reforestation and conservation of the environment. Thirteen activities were certified for funding by the Minister with responsibility for the environment and the total commitment from the Green Fund for these 13 activities is approximately \$149 million.

The total Green Fund portfolio of certified activities comprises remediation, which accounts for 10 per cent; reforestation, which accounts for 15 per cent; and conservation, which accounts for 75 per cent. The latter category includes activities mainly on renewable energy, waste recovery for recycling, water conservation, biodiversity protection and ecotourism. As at September 30, 2012, 213 persons, Mr. Speaker, were employed in the certified activities with a total gross remuneration of approximately \$4.7 million. So that is with respect to the Green Fund.

11.30 p.m.

With respect to the Forestry Division, which is now another unit which falls under the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, we have some major achievements which started since June 2010. The first one being that of forest regeneration and, the division has gone on and tended 450 hectares of plantations consisting mainly of pine and mixed species.

At its three nurseries, 660,000 seedlings were produced to facilitate the Forestry Regeneration Programme, the National Reforestation and Watershed Rehabilitation Programme and the private sector. Maintenance operations were conducted on 4,500 hectares of pine, teak and mixed species of plots. So, Mr. Speaker, this particular unit of forestry has been regenerating areas where forest once stood and was removed, and we have gone in there and started to regenerate those areas.

With respect to forest management, Mr. Speaker, 35 forest reserves and 11 wildlife sanctuaries were managed for optimum benefits. Silvicultural markings and improvements were conducted in 350 hectares of mixed natural forests. Teak thinnings were marked for felling and growth measurements will be taken for teak and pine in 45 or 750 hectares very soon.

With respect to forest protection, Mr. Speaker, the objectives of the Forestry Division are to protect the state's forests and wildlife resources and to reduce losses due to forest fires. Through patrols of officers and daily rated staff within the conservancies, the Forestry Division continues to protect 35 forest reserves and 11 wildlife sanctuaries.

Individual and group patrols were conducted throughout the forest reserves and other protected areas to prevent and deter wildlife offences and theft of forest produce. We have continued to, of course, engage in external fire traces during the dry season—700 kilometres of fire traces to save the forest—and during the fire seasons, 27,000 man-days of patrols will be conducted to protect the forest estate.

Mr. Speaker, we continue to protect and, of course, maintain our national parks and other protected areas. We continue our wildlife management in Trinidad and Tobago. Of course, we have watershed management which we are also responsible for, and, as a measure to control erosion on the northern range, 15,000 new check dams were constructed and a further 4,000 will be maintained.

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. R. RAMDIAL]

Friday, September 13, 2013

Watershed assessment and preparation of management plans for the northern range was done, and a hydrological research of the watersheds will be completed by September 2013.

Mr. Speaker, we have challenges associated with, of course, the Forestry Division and, by extension, the wider public of Trinidad and Tobago, and as we would all be aware in this House, we have had a serious problem over the years with the illegal hunting of our wildlife. Right now we are in talks with all stakeholders to decide whether or not we are going to reopen the hunting season this year or continue to hold off on opening and probably put a ban for the next couple of years so that our wildlife population can be rejuvenated naturally of course. So this is one of the problems we have with the illegal hunters in Trinidad and Tobago.

But whilst we talk to all stakeholders, we are also in the process of equipping the Forestry Division with the proper tools so that we can monitor and enforce properly also. So we have increased the number of vehicles for our forest rangers; we are going to increase that human resource capacity to increase the number of forest rangers who we have serving; and also to make communication networks easier, we have engaged in buying, of course, and investing in additional cell phones so our communication networks can move very efficiently amongst forest rangers on their tour of duty.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to activities of the other agencies under the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, we have, of course, the National Reforestation and Watershed Rehabilitation Programme, and under this programme—of course, it works through community groups to meet the needs to prepare, preserve and protect the nation's forests, watersheds, wetlands, flora and fauna.

Cabinet Minute No. 2936 of November, 2003, gave life to this programme as a ten-year intervention strategy. The decision was derived from the need to arrest the decline of the nation's forest capital and the deterioration of the country's watershed that have occurred largely through forest fires exacerbated by severe dry season over the years.

The major achievements of the national reforestation programme since June 2010 have been:

- 16,000 acres of forest were protected from fire damage through day-time fire watch during the dry season;

Appropriation Bill, 2013

Friday, September 13, 2013

- provision of employment opportunities—1,995 workers are employed under the ambit of the national reforestation programme by various contractors;
- 57 sites were established—53 groups in Trinidad and four in Tobago;
- maintenance works were conducted on nine parks comprising 163.4 acres;
- 200,000 mixed forest seedlings have been produced for replanting; and
- 3,000 square feet of mangrove have been introduced along the coastal wetlands at Waterloo.

Mr. Speaker, the implementation of the policies from 2012/2013—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member?

Hon. R. Ramdial: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the Member for Couva North and Minister of State in the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. R. Ramdial: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, another agency which falls under the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources is that of the Environmental Policy and Planning Division (EPPD) and this Division has the main responsibility of guiding and formulating environmental policy in keeping with Government's policy framework for sustainable development. They additionally monitor and evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of environmental policy design and implementation of environmental programmes and projects pursuant to national policy objectives, pollution control, and hazardous waste and substance management.

The major achievements of the EPPD division since June 2010, have been numerous. Of course, I will begin by speaking of the approval of the National Forestry Policy, the National Protected Areas Policy and the National Climate Change Policy. So these have been with respect to policy, their achievements since June 2010.

We have also been able under this division, Mr. Speaker, to phase out the ozone depleting substances (ODS). As you know, our ozone layer, of course, is in

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. R. RAMDIAL]

Friday, September 13, 2013

deterioration, and what is happening in response to this, the Montreal Protocol was agreed to by countries around the world and now has attained a membership of 197 countries. Of course, Trinidad and Tobago signed on to this Protocol in 1989. Some of the special measures already undertaken by Trinidad and Tobago have been a series of public awareness programmes and training programmes in good refrigeration practices for trainers and technicians in the air-conditioning and refrigeration industry.

We have also gone on and accommodated for the provision of recycling and recovery equipment in the AC sector. We continued the training of customs officers on the control and monitoring of ODS imports and exports. We encourage, where possible, the retrofitting of existing CFC-based equipment, the phasing out of the use of halons as a fire-fighting substance and a ban on all imports of CFCs and others.

Mr. Sharma: Very good work.

Hon. R. Ramdial: We have gone on also, Mr. Speaker, to continue with our carbon reduction strategy, and in collaboration with the UNDP, work has commenced on a project to develop a carbon reduction strategy in the transport, power generation and industrial sectors. The project will include the analysis of intervention options in these sectors, along with policy and legislative recommendations to this end.

Mr. Speaker, we continue, of course, to mainstream in Trinidad and Tobago, climate change into the national development framework, and we have reviewed our policy and strategy action plan. We have gone on into institutional strengthening of this and we have a demonstration project that is ongoing on carbon capture and storage and, of course, this report will be sent to Cabinet in due time.

Mr. Sharma: You doing a lot of work.

Hon. R. Ramdial: One of our major projects that this particular division will be undertaking, Mr. Speaker, is that of the greening of the bus route—and this has been a plan and, of course, a project to be implemented very soon by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago—and a decision to green the Priority Bus Route by converting the street lights and traffic lights to solar powered lights, converting the buses operating on the route to use CNG, and offering an incentive to maxi taxi operators—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: Very good.

Hon. R. Ramdial:—plying the route to convert their taxis to use CNG.

In this regard, the Cabinet appointed a multi-sectoral committee to examine the implication of greening of the Priority Bus Route. The committee has completed its mandate in fiscal 2013 and the report was approved by Cabinet, Mr. Speaker. The Ministry is currently developing an implementation plan to retrofit the buses to use CNG and install solar lighting on the bus route. So the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, together with that of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs, will be partnering with other stakeholders to ensure that the greening of the bus route happens in due time.

Hon. Member: Very good

Hon. R. Ramdial: Mr. Speaker, we have also gone on into the development of a national wildlife policy, and as I spoke to it earlier, especially with that of the illegal hunting, there was need to formulate a wildlife policy so that we can continue to conserve and protect the flora and fauna of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, as I continue, I want to speak on the EMA for a bit before I move on to my constituency of Couva North. With respect to the EMA, we have seen a lot of changes happening since June 2010, and I just want to identify and list some of the work that the EMA has been working on. Of course, it is first and foremost which is most important, the installation of the second ambient air quality monitoring station—that has been very, very important; the hazardous waste control or the Basel Convention as we know it; the Nariva Swamp Restoration, Carbon Sequestration and Livelihood Project, that is ongoing also; we are getting, of course, technical assistance from the IDB technical corporation team; we have gone on and drafted the Air Pollution Rules which is going to be laid in Parliament very soon. We started the Air Pollution Rules in 2010 and that has been completed, and, of course will be laid very soon right here in this House.

We have gone on and returned the quarrying activities to the EMA, where in 2010, Mr. Speaker, the EMA provided the Ministry of Housing and Environment with the requisite amendment to the Certificate of Environmental Clearance (Designated Activities) Order to allow quarrying activity of any size to return to the EMA's jurisdiction. In 2012, the EMA was successful in its application and all requests for proposed quarries must now apply for a Certificate of Environmental Clearance.

So, Mr. Speaker, under the PNM-led Government, it was more or less a free-for-all for want of a better phrase, but now, of course, we have a Certificate of

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. R. RAMDIAL]

Friday, September 13, 2013

Environmental Clearance coming into being, where it is that all quarry operators now need to have this particular order before they can go on and operate in the quarry sector.

11.45 p.m.

We continue, Mr. Speaker, to work on the noise pollution control rules. As we know ladies and gentlemen, in Trinidad and Tobago we have a serious problem with noise pollution. As MPs, we are all faced with complaints, especially over the weekends with loud music from bars or trucks or other vehicles and, of course, residents are saying that it has become very difficult over the years to enjoy peace of mind especially on weekends at home in urban areas and other built-up areas. So the EMA has taken the mandate to come up with some noise pollution rules and probably in the future, we will see it into being with respect to legislation in trying to regulate and control noise pollution in Trinidad and Tobago.

We have gone on, Mr. Speaker, and finalized the Beverage Containers Bill and it is going to be, of course, relaid in Parliament very soon. We have gone on and finalized the waste management rules and that will also be laid very soon in Parliament, and that deals, of course, with waste management with respect to our solid waste in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, the EMA has also been doing a lot of public awareness work in Trinidad and Tobago over the years. As you know, one of their most popular activities or annual activities is that of the Secondary Schools Eco-song Competition, where we see a lot of young people engaging in, through song and drama, ways in which we can protect our environment, and this has become very popular over the years. We have been able to increase the prizes so that more schools have become much more interested in this. We have also engaged in the EMA's Youth Ambassadors Programme, that is also very popular, and the EMA's 2012 noise campaign was also very popular and successful.

So, Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources continues to do its good work and, of course, with this new budget and the allocation which the Ministry has received, we will continue to work assiduously to continue the development of our country.

Mr. Speaker, before I end, however, I want to move on to the constituency of Couva North of which I am MP and, of course, it is really as MPs—as we all MPs in this House—we would see that the true development and true delivery is seen within the constituencies at the end of the day. I mean, we sit here, we pass

Appropriation Bill, 2013

Friday, September 13, 2013

budgets, and of course, moneys are allocated to different Ministries, but the development which emanates from these policies and budgets are really seen in the constituencies, and as MPs, I think we are very proud, and I speak for the Opposition MPs also who have gotten a piece of the pie since 2010. They have not been discriminated against too much.

Hon. Member: What?

Miss Hospedales: What pie? “Ha, ha, ha!”

Hon. R. Ramdial: Over the years, we have been able to share and allocate our resources equitably.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to Couva North, I am proud to report to the constituents that from the period 2011—2013, we have seen a lot of basic infrastructural work taking place in Couva North. For years before that, the constituency has been virtually neglected.

Mr. Partap: Rural neglect!

Hon. R. Ramdial: Yes, that is what we call rural neglect. From 2010 until now, a lot of basic infrastructural works with respect to roads, drainage works, were done in my constituency, and I want to publicly commend the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, the Ministry of Local Government, URP and other stakeholders who have come on board to make this a reality.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to drainage, we have also been able to maintain our drainage, our natural water courses most efficiently in Couva North, and we have been able to alleviate some of the flooding problems, if not all of it, because as we see in different constituencies, in different geographical locations that the causes of flooding, of course, are different. In some areas, it may be because of the topography of the land, and in other areas, it is because of the settlement and how urban growth has affected our natural water courses.

So, for example, in Couva North, I have a combination of the both. In our built-up areas, we have, of course, with all due respect, some of our constituents not adhering to the law, and of course, blocking drains and natural water courses; and in other areas, we have seen also the breakdown of maintenance—regular maintenance with respect to our roadways and under crossings, et cetera, which we are addressing, and of course, in the additional areas, we need to continuously maintain our natural water courses by having the drainage division do its work.

So it has been a combination of factors which has plagued the constituency of Couva North with respect to flooding, but however, from 2010 until now, we have

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. R. RAMDIAL]

Friday, September 13, 2013

been able to alleviate most of the flooding problems in Couva North, and for that, I am very grateful for all of the help that I have gotten from my colleagues.

With respect to other works in Couva North, we have been able to dredge and desilt some major rivers like the Carli Bay River, the Masala River, the Caparo River, the Honda River, Arena River and so forth.

With respect to the water projects in Couva North, as you know, one of our mandates is to, of course, achieve water for all in the water sector in Trinidad and Tobago, and therefore every MP—and I say every MP in this House—we have, under WASA, been allocating resources, and of course projects which would allow for such. I want to say that Couva North has not been without these projects, and we have been able to get a number of projects from 2010 until now so that we can have a reliable, safe supply of water for our constituents. Mr. Speaker, the latest upgrade to water security which, of course, took place just about three weeks ago was the commissioning of the Chase Village pipeline project where we would now have thousands of residents benefiting from a 24/7 water supply in the Chase Village area. So that has been, of course, very progressive and developmental with respect to the water sector.

With respect to the lighting of recreational grounds, I want to publicly commend the Minister of Public Utilities and Member of Parliament for Naparima. [*Desk thumping*] I have gotten three of my major recreational grounds lighted, and I know that of course he will be—the work is ongoing from his side for the constituency of Couva North. I just want to identify the Couva Recreational Ground, the Gandhi Street Recreational Ground and the Mulchan Seuchan Recreational Ground. Mr. Speaker, the Mulchan Seuchan Recreational Ground, I must speak of that, because a year ago, one of our famous personalities, Ian Alleyne, mentioned the Mulchan Seuchan Recreational Ground and the use of it by drug users and drug pushers. He had called me publicly to ask me, “well, MP, what are you going to do about the grounds? Yuh know you have unsavoury characters utilizing this ground.” I went to MP Baksh, of course, and spoke to him and within a short space of time, Mr. Speaker, this particular ground was lit up by the Ministry of Public Utilities.

However, at the end of the day, these developmental projects add to the well-being of the communities on the ground. It is all about bringing people together, bringing out the young people together in positive activities, so lighting up this Mulchan Seuchan ground in Waterloo has proven to be very very positive for the community around that area.

I want to publicly commend the Waterloo Sports Club and Cricket Association who have gone on to revamp their association and their sports group to come back now because of the lights on Mulchan Seuchan ground so that they can have some positive sporting activities for the young people in the area. So I want to publicly commend them for that, and of course, the Minister of Public Utilities.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the Ministry of the People and Social Development, we continue to get our services very efficiently, as I must say, and I want to thank the Minister of the People and Social Development for all his hard work in the constituency of Couva North.

The Ministry of Housing also with its housing mandate and Land for the Landless Programme, and of course, the Ministry of Community Development where it is that in 2011, we opened up the Waterloo Community Centre; in 2012, the Roystonia Community Centre was reopened and refurbished by the then hon. Minister Winston Peters, and in 2013, the Carapichaima Community Centre was opened by again Minister Peters. So I want to publicly thank the Minister of Community Development [*Desk thumping*] for listening to the people of Couva North and assisting us with our community centres.

Mr. Speaker, we continue to develop the constituency of Couva North and I know the constituents are very happy for the Caroni GREEN Initiative that was launched by the Ministry of Food Production, and I thank Minister Seemungal and Minister Maharaj for having this initiative started up in the Union area, where it is now that we have a huge farm where constituents can go and buy produce. They are also in the process of hiring labour from within the locality of Union and Orange Valley, and the Caroni GREEN farm initiative has been very successful thus far, and I encourage the Ministry of Food Production to continue to open up other such farms throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, one of our latest developmental projects was that under the Ministry of Health when they entered into the PPP agreement with PCS Nitrogen for the Couva lab, and I also thank the Minister of Health for ensuring that that project was delivered. [*Desk thumping*] I know that it was probably spoken of before but, of course, this Government delivered this project. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Rambachan: Look it here! [*Dr. Rambachan holds up paper*]

Hon. R. Ramdial: It is the PPP model that we engaged—[*Crosstalk*] but the Government engaged—[*Crosstalk*] Okay. Mr. Speaker, I will address you and I will continue to commend the Minister of Health for this initiative. In record

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. R. RAMDIAL]

Friday, September 13, 2013

time—I think it was less than a year, Minister?—or within a year and a half, this Couva lab was delivered to the people of Couva and environs. So now, blood samples can be taken to this lab and within 15 minutes you have the results. As you know, the central area is well-developed and well-populated and this Couva lab would serve both central and south because I know the San Fernando General Hospital will be sending its samples also to the Couva lab so that we can get results in record time. So I publicly thank the Minister of Health for that.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, the Chandernagore pavilion is being, of course, constructed under local government, and the then Minister, Minister Rambachan has very much been responsible for that project, in addition to a number of other projects under his tenure as Minister of Local Government.

Dr. Rambachan: Very good, very good!

Hon. R. Ramdial: So, Mr. Speaker, all in all, I must say that as a young MP, this Government has not failed me, it has not failed the young people of Couva North, it has not failed the people in general of Trinidad and Tobago.

When we look at the number of projects being done throughout Trinidad and Tobago, because my colleagues would get up later on in the debate and speak of their areas and what is happening, I want to say that the propaganda that this PNM Opposition spreads in its parliamentary offerings and otherwise, is something that the population of Trinidad and Tobago should not take on. I want to say that the People's Partnership Government has continued to work for the people of Trinidad and Tobago under the leadership of our Prime Minister, Kamla Persad-Bissessar. I want to say without her driving force and her motivation factor that lies within her, we would not be able to deliver to the high standard to which we do right now.

Hon. Member: True!

Miss R. Ramdial: So the leadership is very important, our leadership is very strong in the People's Partnership Government, and we are all committed as Ministers and MPs to deliver to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. So, Mr. Speaker, as they continue to talk, we will continue to deliver. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Gender, Youth and Child Development (Hon. Clifton De Coteau): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to stand before you at this midnight hour to contribute to the 2013 budget debate.

Mr. Sharma: It gives us great pleasure to listen to you.

Hon. C. De Coteau: Also, I thank the Minister of Finance and the Economy, hon. Larry Howai, ably supported by his ministerial colleagues, Minister Vasant Bharath and Minister Rudy Indarsingh, for a comprehensive, workable budget for fiscal year 2014.

Mr. Speaker, contrary to the opinion of the other side, I know that the People's Partnership Government is moving in the right direction to create a sustainable economy for all its citizens. Mr. Speaker, in my contribution, I wish to publicly thank the Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, for her faith and confidence in me and the Minister of State, the hon. Sen. Raziah Ahmed, to provide leadership of the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development.

12.00 midnight

I assure the good people of Trinidad and Tobago that we will work relentlessly to deliver quality services to all. Mr. Speaker, I thank my predecessors, the hon. Verna St. Rose and hon. Marlene Coudray, who have laid the foundation for the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development [*Desk thumping*] to effectively execute the mandate of the Ministry. However, I am sure that my colleague, Minister Coudray, will continue to advance the work of the Government in her new portfolio as Minister of Local Government, inherited from the dynamic Dr. Suruj Rambachan, the Member of Parliament for Tabaquite.

Dr. Rambachan: Thank you. Well said.

Hon. C. De Coteau: I want to compliment my dear brother, the Member of Parliament for Arima, for taking up the mantle of leadership for the Ministry of National Diversity and Social Integration. I am certain that he would do a fantastic job.

Mr. Speaker, I crave your indulgence and your permission to make my delivery by reading because newly inheriting the Ministry, my cognitive structure is not filled with all the information so that I can regurgitate.

Hon. Member: "And it kinda late too eh?" [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. De Coteau: So that I will want to read, with your permission.

Hon. Member: "Take yuh time brother."

Hon. Member: I like the use of language.

Hon. C. De Coteau: Mr. Speaker, however, I want to place on record, and while I know that I should be praising and saying some things about my

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. C. DE COTEAU]

Saturday, September 14, 2013

constituency, in my wrap up part, my conclusion; however, I would want to begin by addressing the members of the Moruga/Tableland constituency because, as I would say, they are the bedrock for me being here, and I want to let them know—
[*Interruption*]

Dr. Ramadharsingh: That it is bed time.

Hon. C. De Coteau:—and to join in the euphoria that they are engaging at the moment for what is happening in the constituency; a constituency that was neglected for many, many years. Mr. Speaker, I do not want to say “donkey” years, but it is a fact. A constituency that had over 255 landslips; a constituency that gave birth to the PNM in the La Lune area—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Since 1956.

Hon. C. De Coteau:—since then, but a constituency, especially in the Moruga part that was neglected. Mr. Speaker, Members from the other side, my learned friend, and I want to compliment, I want to place on record that during the three-year period that I have been here, I have indeed seen progress—and I compliment the Member from Laventille West for his contribution, he has grown and I compliment him; and in all sincerity—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Ramadharsingh: Not too much, not too much.

Hon. C. De Coteau:—and also my dear friend from Arouca/Maloney.

Hon. Members: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Hon. Member: That is true, that is true.

Hon. C. De Coteau: Mr. Speaker, there was some degree of euphoria—
[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: A former teacher [*Inaudible*]

Hon. C. De Coteau:—in the Moruga/Tableland constituency; why? Because in areas like Kanhai Road we are having the Kanhai Road Presbyterian School being built at the moment. In the New Grant area, we are having the New Grant Government Primary School being built, a school that has been neglected for the past 30 years, a school where the bulk of support comes for the Members of the other side, but sadly a school that was under the home of a member of the constituency; but with the People’s Partnership, and with me steering that course, because education is important, the school is now being built.

We also have to take pride in the building of the Moruga ECCE centre in the La Ruffin area. The fishing depot that is being built, landing site in La Ruffin, as well; the water project that we completed in Penal Rock Road. Again, an area that supported the former administration—

Hon. Member: “Huh!”

Hon. C. De Coteau:—but now I do not think they would garner any support in that particular area—*[Interruption]*

Hon. Member: *[Inaudible]*

Hon. C. De Coteau: Why? Because in addition to the water that they got and the road being paved and the landslip, being rehabilitated—*[Interruption]*

Hon. Member: “Point yuh living Westmoorings.”

Hon. C. De Coteau:—the Penal Rock Road ground would soon be illuminated. Thanks again to our Minister, the Member of Parliament for Naparima. Also the La Lune recreation ground is being illuminated—*[Interruption]*

Dr. Ramadharsingh: And lit up.

Hon. C. De Coteau:—and the Cunjal recreation ground. So we are indeed very, very happy in the area.

Dr. Ramadharsingh: And lit up too.

Hon. C. De Coteau: Mr. Speaker, in addition to the 35 points made by the Member for Couva North, I want to place on record that whilst she would have identified some major achievements under the heading of: people, infrastructure and economy, I want to place on record—*[Interruption]*

Hon. Member: “Look at all yuh” *[Inaudible]*

Hon. C. De Coteau:—the achievement of the People’ Partnership Government in the area of something that would be qualitative, where we were able to bring to the attention of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, a consciousness—*[Interruption]*

Hon. Member: Correct!

Hon. C. De Coteau:—of the importance of our heritage sites.

Hon. Member: Very good!

Hon. C. De Coteau: And, Mr. Speaker, with your permission again, I want to quote from yesterday's *Guardian*, page 16 where the headline says:

“Conservationists sad to see de Coteau go”—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Members: “Oh.”

Hon. C. De Coteau: But that is not so much important as they are sad to see—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Members: “Oh.”

Hon. C. De Coteau: What they said:

“He was a minister who was more proactive than any other member of government—[*Desk thumping*—in 25 years in support of the conservation and preservation of our national heritage.

Christine Miller, a founding member of CFC, described de Coteau as ‘the first minister with an understanding for what Citizens for Conservation is about and a genuine interest in heritage administration.’”—[*Desk thumping and interruption*]

Hon. Member: Very good reply.

Hon. C. De Coteau: The People's Partnership. It is the People's Partnership—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Good writing skills.

Hon. C. De Coteau:—not De Coteau, the People's Partnership. We have been able to place on the records 411 sites of interest. We have been able to bring to the consciousness of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, the Banwari site, one of the oldest pieces of heritage we could find, the skeletal remains, and you would know, Mr. Speaker, we even found bones, 300 BC, under the Parliament, right. We have been able to bring about that kind of history. We have been able to give respect to our first people—[*Desk thumping and interruption*—members of the Carib Community of Santa Rosa, we gave them 25 acres of land, and you know what is sad? Even Chief Bharath, at one time, represented the last administration as a local Government representative.

Hon. Member: Shame.

Hon. C. De Coteau: Nothing to be ashamed of but the point is, it shows that sometimes you are there and you are neglected. We gave respect to them. We

gave respect to the Warao, our first people in the south. We are working in terms—I know Minister Pastor Samuel, Member of Parliament for Arima, would be working towards getting some lands for them as well.

We, the People's Partnership was able, for the first time, to have a reenactment of the arrival of our East Indian brothers and sisters—[*Desk thumping*]—on Nelson Island. We allow the people to know, understand and appreciate the importance of Nelson Island. And then to continue, we also, in collaboration with the people—suppression of African people, anti-suppression movement led by Harvey Borris, we partnered with them to have the reenactment, what we call the journey of the African people—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: And he is a PNM.

Hon. C. De Coteau:—and they say we discriminate and we do not like people, and we do not collaborate. We believe and we appreciate unity in diversity. Mr. Speaker, I am happy to be in the Gender, Youth and Child Development Ministry.

Dr. Gopeesingh: “Yuh feel at home.”

Hon. C. De Coteau: Well, as an educator for 40-plus years, moulding the minds of young people and interfacing with young people and others, I feel very, very competent—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: “Yuh look young too.”

Hon. C. De Coteau:—Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development was established only two years ago by our Prime Minister. Since its inception, the Ministry has been contributing significantly to the Government's social transformation goals. The Ministry's work is guided by the corporate strategic plan and a national strategic plan for child development.

This gives lie to the criticism that the Government is coming up with projects without clear strategic direction and plans. I must add that in the case of the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development, there is a popular Jamaican saying “we lil, buh we ah tall.” And just like the Ministry of National Diversity and Social Integration, “we lil, they talking buh we delivering, we delivering” and this particular Ministry, mark my words, would grow tall and we will deliver.

The Ministry's vision is quite clear. It is a people-centred proactive institution that guarantees standards of excellence achieved by all stakeholders to promote

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. C. DE COTEAU]

Saturday, September 14, 2013

and protect the rights of all citizens, in particular children and young people, while improving the overall human development status of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

I am excited to report, Mr. Speaker, that the Ministry has hit the mark again, for the fiscal year 2013. We have delivered on several robust projects and initiatives that have contributed to the country's growth path of development. Mr. Speaker, my friends on the Opposition, I do not want to say they are not keeping abreast with the work being done by the Government, to improve the lives of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Member: Do not be too hard on them.

Hon. C. De Coteau: I know they are keeping abreast but, Mr. Speaker, somewhere along the line, this imaginary line, when people cross it, they either get on a "kind a" Pontius Pilate mentality or they get some kind of political amnesia that they forget—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Ramadharsingh: Or just pure sleepiness.

Hon. C. De Coteau: They just forget the things of the past—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Political "tabanca."

Hon. C. De Coteau:—they forget everything and they seem to have a new rebirth, a new rebirth of, sometimes criticism, a new rebirth of not totally understanding, but it really shocks me. A new rebirth, sometimes of behaviour not really conducive to their age,—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: "Heh."

Hon. C. De Coteau:—a new rebirth, of sometimes that I would call disrespect; a new rebirth, sometimes when we are speaking, Mr. Speaker, people have to be chided; a new rebirth where people, not all of them on that side, steups, frown, disrespectful—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Ramadharsingh: Badly behaved.

Hon. C. De Coteau: I am saying this in the light because I am in the Gender, Youth and Child Development Ministry where we have to set the example—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Ramadharsingh: Are you going to revolutionize that Ministry, Sir?

Hon. C. De Coteau:—609 youths, if you want to call it, from the age four to 29, we have to set the example. In teaching you know what they call it? The hidden curriculum. Sometimes our behavior, it impacts on them. On the ground most of the trauma they have is one of disrespect—”oh, de fella disrespect meh and da’is why ah had to do him dat. But sometimes we could grow very, very disrespectful, but let me eh go down dat road, Mr. Speaker.”

Mr. Speaker, we have a lot of success in all ministries. We heard the Member for Couva North talking about the successes of her particular Ministry. We heard the eloquent contribution by the Minister of Health as to where he wants to go. The Minister of Finance and the Economy has blazed the trail in his Budget Statement by listing key achievements of the Government geared towards growing the economy; and other colleagues who came before me and would continue after, would add to the list of achievements of the Government through the works completed by the respective ministries.

I too would like to add the achievements of this particular Ministry. It is in this vein, I am happy to share a few of the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development’s achievements for fiscal year 2013. [*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Very good.

Hon. C. De Coteau: What are the achievements? The draft national policy on gender and development is before Cabinet and it is being reviewed—I want to say because from time to time they say “where the gender policy?”—the gender policy is before Cabinet and it is being reviewed—[*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Get it right.

Hon. C. De Coteau:—to ensure that the concerns and needs of all stakeholders are identified, acknowledged and addressed to ensure relevance. [*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Finally.

Hon. C. De Coteau: Promoting gender mainstreaming: the Gender Affairs Division recently conducted three one-day training workshops for personnel in all Government ministries and agencies. Gender focal points are being targeted for further strengthening in various sectors to ensure their capacity to conduct gender analysis, gender budgeting and ensure that all Government’s policies, plans and programmes are gender-sensitive, thereby facilitating equality and equity for all.

12.15 a.m.

The Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development has trained over 450 key stakeholders on the Children Act, 2012, to ensure the effective implementation of the Act and to prepare citizens for the full proclamation of the Act.

The Revised National Youth Policy, 2012—2017 was approved by Cabinet in November 2012 and launched in May 2013. The policy is currently being rolled out throughout Trinidad and Tobago and speaks to all young people finding a voice, a purpose, a place and a plan—finding a voice, a purpose, a place and a plan for our beloved country. Regardless of their socio-economic status, geographical location and physical ability, we have to find a purpose, a place and a plan, so no discriminatory thing. Nothing discriminatory about that, my brother Laventille West.

The Ministry has also continued collaboration with other Ministries regarding several matters.

- Revising the legal age of marriage in T&T—the Ministry has consulted with key stakeholders on this issue and the information has been forwarded to the Ministry of Legal Affairs for consideration.
- Raising the age of compulsory schooling from 12 to 16—the Ministry of Education has been approached regarding this issue.
- Appointment of the children’s attorney in the Office of the Attorney General—the Ministry has approached the Ministry of the Attorney General on this matter and it is receiving the necessary attention. The qualifications and guidelines for the appointment of the children’s attorney are clearly outlined in Part 12 of the Children Act, No. 12 of 2012.
- Programme achievements continued for 2013—programmes developed and implemented by the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development seek to empower citizens to meet their personal goals, live productive lives and contribute to the overall development of our society—live productive lives and contribute to the overall development of the society.

Some key achievements of our flagship programmes are:

- gender development; and

- the engagement of 164 women in the Women in Harmony Programme at six community centres.

This developmental programme targets women between the ages of 26 and 45 years who are the sole breadwinners of their household and addresses the issue of unemployment among women by offering them opportunities for training in the areas of elderly care and agriculture landscaping and also personal development modules, thus empowering them to increase their earning potential to better provide for their families. We are all, as MPs—we know they come in: “I am a single parent.” Here we are giving them that opportunity.

- the personal development of approximately 155 men to face gender-related challenges through their involvement in the Defining Masculine Excellence Programme.

Now, some of these programmes might be new to some of you but I want to assure you, with our presence and our style of leadership, all of Trinidad and Tobago would know about it and if you want it in your respective community, you bring it to our attention and we would have it implemented for you.

This programme is open to males age 14 and above and comprises 16 modules which address topics such as self-esteem, father and son bonding, men and their life partners, masculinity in the workplace, and it covers over nine full-day sessions. This fiscal year, four cycles were conducted in areas including Port of Spain and San Fernando and we would be going to some of the outlying districts in the future such as Marac, parts of Moruga, Barrackpore, Toco and the outlying areas.

Further, a total of 191 men and boys from ages 13 to 70 benefited from the 2013 cycle of the food preparation, fine dining and home management programme, which includes motivational seminars, professional and personal development.

The Ministry also runs programmes that target the nation’s youth and provide them with opportunities for empowerment. One such example is the annual National Youth Awards, which was most recently held on August 24, 2013. The award celebrated the myriad accomplishments of our youth population. Ninety-five nominations for youth excellence were submitted and of these, 46 youths were awarded first, second and third places in categories including agriculture, leadership, entrepreneurship, personal triumph and volunteerism in the community.

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. C. DE COTEAU]

Saturday, September 14, 2013

Mr. Speaker, I know my colleagues in the Opposition area would say: “da is we own. We do it.” But every time I hear them saying: “da is we own. We do it.” I say: “yes”. What does it remind you of? It reminds me of some deadbeat fathers. You help with the procreation and it happens and “then yuh gone.” You did nothing then and when the child grows up, you say: “da my own.”

Dr. Ramadharsingh: My child.

Hon. C. De Coteau: “Da my child. I is yuh fadda.” But where were you all the time?

Dr. Ramadharsingh: Criticizing.

Hon. C. De Coteau: Where were you all the time? You were nowhere around. You conceptualized it, yes. How many persons are there and saying: “Gyurl ah go build yuh ah house, ah go marrid yuh, ah go buy ah car fuh yuh”? You talk about it. You do nothing about it and then someone comes and takes her. “And then yuh say she was mine, she not good. She bad.” That is reality. We are not reinventing the wheel. They have done some good things. They conceptualized some very good things but then they left them there.

Hon. Member: “Dey cyah do nutten.”

Hon. C. De Coteau: And if we are making it a reality—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Sharma: They could not fertilize it.

Hon. C. De Coteau:—do not, do not—yes, that is true. They could not fertilize it. “Do not vex with us. Do not vex with us” for making your dreams a reality. And now that it has become a reality, you want to distance yourself from it at times. We are making your dreams a reality so you should embrace it and feel good about it.

For instance, you are making some good suggestions about the crime situation. So, that when we embrace your ideas and we begin to implement them and we have a decrease in crime, and Trinidad and Tobago becomes a better place, you can boast and say it was your idea. But you could have the idea but we have to make it a reality.

It is the same thing in my constituency, Mr. Speaker, where they went in. They are going in on the 23rd in my constituency again. They go with a lot of promises. That is good. “Sugar-coated lips, honey-coated, shopping, making promises. Hear de thing—” *[Interruption]*

Dr. Ramadharsingh: “Bring down the sun and the moon.”

Hon. C. De Coteau: They are going into constituencies, Mr. Speaker, if you would permit me—*[Interruption]*

Hon. Member: The PNM again.

Hon. C. De Coteau:—they are saying: “I am going to give you food cards. I am going to give you”—in one case I think they promised a car.

Mr. Indarsingh: What?

Hon. C. De Coteau: Yesterday a meeting was held near to the St. Mary’s Recreation Ground; a ground that was neglected. They are going to get a pavilion now; and they bad-mouthed the MP and they start to promise.

Dr. Ramadharsingh: How sad.

Hon. C. De Coteau: And the lady—one person asked: “So when are we going to get these things?” “Well, when we get back into power.” “Hmm. Dey say well listen, we have the reality with De Coteau dey now so we go stick with Coteau.” That is reality. A lot of people are going around making promises but when you try to get down to it, “when boy”, when? “When cock get teeth” which means to say never, never. Right.

Dr. Ramadharsingh: I would expand on that point when I speak.

Hon. C. De Coteau: And then you all would sing—*[Interruption]*

Dr. Ramadharsingh: You cannot say I—*[Inaudible]* *[Laughter]*

Hon. C. De Coteau: No, no, no, I would not go that area at all. I would not go into that area.

Mr. Speaker, for the second year, the Ministry hosted the 2013 vacation camps for youths.

Dr. Ramadharsingh: Very good camp.

Hon. C. De Coteau: Camps for youths between ages 12 to 17. The Camp Footprints for children ages 3 to 11. The Ministry invested approximately \$1.3 million into shaping young minds and developing the holistic youth and child. The theme of this year’s vacation camp was Respect Me, Respect You. Respect Me Respect You. Many times you have to ask for that kind of respect here. I cringe at times.

Dr. Ramadharsingh: Tell the Opposition that.

Hon. C. De Coteau: Respect Me, Respect You. Over 2,500 children and teenagers were enrolled and attended the camps which commenced July 29 and ran for four weeks until August 16. Granted it has been the best kept secret, but I want to alert the public, you are going to hear about—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Ramadharsingh: Expand it.

Hon. C. De Coteau: Expand it, yes.

One of the community-based initiatives that the Ministry hosts to promote youth development is the Gatekeepers Programme. This Gatekeepers Programme was managed by the Toco Foundation. It specifically targets youth at risk. My brother from Laventille West, the hon. Member for Laventille West, asked about these programmes. Youth at risk in communities—and it is designed to build responsible young men and assist them to approach governance from the standpoint of social action to become the leaders who can affect positive change in their communities; youth at risk.

It has been implemented over the past year in Covigne Road, Diego Martin and Upper and Lower Santa Cruz. Offices have been established in both communities. I am pleased to announce that the Gatekeepers Programme has received Cabinet approval to continue into its second year and furthermore has been approved to be introduced into the communities of Carapo, Arima, Marabella and San Fernando.

The Ministry continues to address the need for building youth self-sufficiency through its Youth Development Apprenticeship Centres (YDACs). These two centres, we have Presto Praesto and Chatham, commenced their enrolment process in June 2013 for their new intake. In its goal to modernize the programme, the Ministry has begun refurbishment works on the centres to ensure the necessary infrastructural upgrades to support the needs of the trainees. These centres provide, not only skills training but seek also to provide a holistic approach to the personal development and empowerment of the young men.

There is a particular dramatist, Stephen Edwards, he has a production where he takes these same young people at risk—

Hon. Member: That is right— from Arima, Santa Rosa.

Hon. C. De Coteau: Yes, he takes these same young people at risk. He works with them through drama and their whole life has changed around because basically, teaching respect, giving respect.

Appropriation Bill, 2013

Friday, September 13, 2013

Then the volunteerism programme. I like the idea of the volunteerism, because from time to time I say it, our new alphabet in Trinidad and Tobago, in Trinbago, is A for apple, B for bat, C for yourself. That is the new alphabet. What we are saying with this new—people “doh like to volunteer to do anything.

Dr. Ramadharsingh: I would expand on that.

Hon. C. De Coteau: When you volunteer in something and you do something, the first thing “dey say: ‘ah wonder weh he getting outta dat boy?’” We spend nights upon nights here working hard, all of us working hard. Constituents come to your office with light bills and so on and “we pay it “fuh dem. And kill dem dead, they believe that we have some fund that we get from Parliament or from somebody to give to dem.” They do not appreciate that it is our own money that we dip into our pockets and give to them. They never appreciate it. They cannot believe that level of honesty—*[Interruption]*

Dr. Ramadharsingh: That is right.

Hon. C. De Coteau:—and empathy that we have for them, that we share for them. We give it to them “and then they still go and mauvaise langue us.” They bad-mouth us. Ask any MP, whether on this side or that side, it is a given. The same people, some of the same people, who you are charitable towards—am I correct Member for Port of Spain South?—they turn ‘round and when you hear the bitterness, the aloes that come out from their mouth. “You hear dey saying: ‘you see me’”. What am I doing in this thing? They do not appreciate, they cannot appreciate, they cannot understand and it is a malaise that goes through our whole society.

Dr. Khan: Point at the PNM.

Hon. C. De Coteau: No, no, I would not point at them because they are victims of it just as we are.

Hon. Member: They cultivated it.

Hon. C. De Coteau: And that is why the volunteerism is so important. There is now a fourth phase of implementation/registration. Thus far, over 100 individuals have registered as volunteers. Twenty-five youth organizations have registered for volunteer projects under the theme: “Side by Side we Stand—Building Better Communities”. Ten NGOs have enlisted for providing spaces for the volunteers, volunteerism.

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. C. DE COTEAU]

Saturday, September 14, 2013

12.30 a.m.

Most of us who came through the system—I remember the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre saying as a young man he went and camped on Nelson Island then. The Minister of Justice spoke in terms of youth camps and all these things. We have to get back our young people into these kinds of organizations, because of the non-existence of these organizations, “ah fella sit down on de block as dey say, de devil find work for idle hands to do, and they are very intelligent, and they begin to plan, up de road versus down de road; this side ah de” bridge versus de other side”. But if they have something constructive to do, you would eliminate this thing. They will be able to sublimate their energies into something constructive to help build the nation, to help build themselves.

What we have—the Adolescent Intervention Programme was held in the final term of the academic year, targeting students who have completed the SEA and are making the transition into secondary school. It is really remarkable that I am making this statement at the time when my colleague, the Member for Caroni East comes in. I talk in terms of the SEA.

[Dr. Gopeesingh enters the Chamber]

Hon. Member: “Yuh walk in de Chamber.”

Hon. C. De Coteau: The focus on helping children cope with issues such as bullying, time management, conflict management and life skills. Now, I always have a fight with those words “time management”. I always say that time is always there. I know that Dr. Rambachan, the Member for Tabaquite might query this. Time management, I always say is management of self. The time is always there you have to manage yourself to fit into the time. Think about it. So I “doh go” with things like time management and problem, I say challenges.

Then also a memorandum of understanding that has been signed between the Children’s Authority of Trinidad and Tobago for the establishment of a child assessment centre at the Eric Williams Medical Complex. Then we have child development. In June 2013, Cabinet approved the organizational structure of the Children’s Authority of Trinidad and Tobago. The structure includes 225 positions and will enable the authority to pursue its work, thus facilitating the proclamation of the Children Act, 2012. The Children’s Authority of Trinidad and Tobago has commenced its advertisement of the vacant positions.

The Respect Me Respect You initiative is a programme aimed at addressing various types of bullying within the school, home, workplace, and communities

Appropriation Bill, 2013

Friday, September 13, 2013

through a rights-based approach. Mr. Speaker, I am not going to say about bullying here you know, but sometimes I sit and making some analysis and say, wait, wait wait, “dis coming down to bullying sometimes, “yuh know”.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Right here.

Hon. C. De Coteau: Right here in the Chamber. Mr. Speaker, you must really look at that and see if we have bullying in the Chamber at times, a subtle form of bullying at times.

I compliment one young man from my constituency Jerome— Jeremiah, who is a young calypsonian, the youth—

Dr. Gopeesingh: Youth.

Hon. C. De Coteau:—calypsonian, and his programme, he is spearheading one of the—

Dr. Gopeesingh: Campaign.

Hon. C. De Coteau:—campaigns, right. Jeremiah Rodriguez, very brilliant little fellow.

So we have this rights approach. In the long term, the initiative is to create caring environment and to reduce if not prevent bullying in its various forms. So we have the cyberbullying and we have all kinds of bullying now, you know. Thus far, over 40 key stakeholders have been trained as trainers for this initiative, and will be key in the programme implementation and public sensitization carded for fiscal year 2014.

Research shows that the role parents play in child development and by extension community development is crucial. It is in this light that the Ministry has prioritized the establishment of a parenting programme. This programme will roll out—it commenced in June 2013, and its first session being held in Marabella targeting men in the community through a personal development workshop; the men.

Mr. Speaker, despite the numerous challenges faced by the Ministry since its inception, it continues to press forward, learning from each of the obstacles it overcomes, to succeed as an even stronger entity. We continue to drive the work of the Ministry forward with the interest of the people, all children, youth and adults, male and female at the heart of our purpose.

We have recognized that the proactive approach is needed to truly address societal needs. It is well known that problems must be attacked from the root and

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. C. DE COTEAU]

Saturday, September 14, 2013

not only by its branches. The Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development not only adopts the strategic approach of putting interventions in place to alleviate social pressures, but simultaneously addresses root causes. “Yuh cyar only want to trim de branch, yuh know. We going down to de root.”

In keeping with the goal of ensuring that all citizens’ rights are upheld, the Ministry continues to develop much needed policies to guide the progress of the citizenry, specifically in guiding the development and implementation of initiatives pertaining to gender, youth and child issues on a national level.

We seek to ensure that everyone—be the Ministries, governmental agencies, non-governmental or civil society organizations—is all on the same page. We want all of them on board. Once they are on board, we would address the challenges that we have, all the Ministries. Nobody has proprietorship right in a particular Ministry to say, this is my turf. “I alone doing dat.” That cannot happen. It must be a collaborative effort, the same kind of collaboration that we are showing now with Members of the Opposition, and our goodselves to get that crime down. Is not “ah”, I want to win and you will lose and—we “cyar” score points. We cannot afford to score those points so.

What are all our projections for fiscal year 2013/2014 under child development, with specific regard to safeguarding our children. The Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development will focus on the following: the National Child Policy which will provide long-term guidance, and set the framework to provide adequate and suitable legislation, interventions and infrastructure that would ensure the rights of the child and coordinate the guiding principles on children’s issues; the National Early Childhood Development Nursery Policy will set the standards and guidelines for providing quality care to children aged zero to six, with special focus on the children who are currently not covered under the ECCE system. It will also provide the foundation for the regulatory framework for nurseries in Trinidad and Tobago.

The National Child Protection Policy, a national strategic framework for child protection which aims specifically to provide a framework of principles, standards and guidelines on safeguarding children, against abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence.

Mr. Speaker, our young children are exposed to too many forms of violence. You read of it in the newspapers and you cringe. This policy will be the foundation underpinning an integrated approach to delivering children services, and crystalizing a set of guiding principles for child protection practices that put children’s best interest first.

[MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Further, the national guidelines of children in disaster and emergency situations are being developed to establish the standards for ensuring child protection in emergencies and disasters. Madam Deputy Speaker, it will encompass strategies aimed at protecting children from and responding to violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect and at strengthening children's psychosocial well-being, and development during and after a disaster or emergency. I am sure that my colleague, the Member for Caroni Central, will develop some more on that—

Dr. Ramadharsingh: Of course, when I speak I will develop that point.

Hon. C. De Coteau:—where his Ministry would take that baton and carry it.

Dr. Ramadharsingh: When I speak after you.

Hon. C. De Coteau: As aforementioned—I think he is just putting some fear in your hearts that we will be going until two or three o'clock. [*Laughter*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, as aforementioned, the Ministry has prioritized its intentions to affect parenting on a national level. In so doing, in addition to the continued roll out of the parenting programme, the development of national parenting policy is also crucial. Parents are essential to the provision of safe, nurturing and stimulating environments for children as they grow and mature. And as they say, parents are always the first teacher, but I know the Minister of Education knows that only too well, and in another forum he would say that.

As such, the policy seeks to establish a sustainable framework for the delivery of more comprehensive and cohesive parental support services at the level of the home, school and community. It will, therefore, also inform the development and delivery of evidence-based programmes that identify and address parenting concerns and guide, and monitor evaluation of the current and new parenting programmes towards the same.

What we have to understand, Madam Deputy Speaker, is that no one particular Ministry could really effect the change that we want. You know in the African proverb what they say—

Hon. Member: It takes a whole village.

Hon. C. De Coteau:—it takes a whole village, and in this case, it is the ministerial village. We all have to work together—

Dr. Ramadharsingh: Multidimensional.

Hon. C. De Coteau:—multidimensional—to get the change that we need.

The Ministry also recognizes that at times it is necessary to move children from their homes because of child-safety concerns. We have to move them out. Sometimes when you go in a school and you see little children behaving like adults, again, sometimes it is because of the home situation. Mommy and daddy or mommy and uncle or whosoever, “yuh feel de child sleeping” and they are indulging in big-people behaviour, and then the child goes to school and wants to demonstrate—*[Interruption]*

Dr. Gopeesingh: Imitate.

Hon. C. De Coteau:—imitate what he would have seen or she would have seen. So because of this safety concern—

Hon. Member: “Da’is true ting.”

Hon. C. De Coteau:—as a result, serious parent/child conflict or to treat serious physical or behavioural health conditions which cannot be addressed within the family, they do not have the wherewithal to address some of the challenges. These special circumstances demand the necessity for the national policy for children in alternative care. So while we are moving them from the parent’s home, we have to look at that national policy how we deal with children in alternate care. My colleague is saying he is on page 29 out of his 140 pages. *[Laughter]* Well, I believe in précising.

Dr. Ramadharsingh: Give us a synopsis. *[Laughter]*

Hon. C. De Coteau: This policy will be directed towards supporting efforts to keep children within or return them to their family of origin. And where this is either not possible or in the best interest of the child, to identify and provide the most suitable forms of alternative child care under conditions that promote the child’s full and harmonious development. The important thing is that we have to take care of this child—full and harmonious development. You know that the most impressionable years—*[Interruption]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: The speaking time of the hon. Member for Moruga/Tableland and Minister of Gender, Youth and Child Development has expired.

Motion made: That the hon. Member’s speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. *[Hon. W. Peters]*

Questions put and greed to.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member, you may continue.

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

Hon. C. De Coteau: Thank you.

Dr. Ramadharsingh: Thirty minutes again.

Hon. C. De Coteau: Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to thank my colleagues for enduring this and I am certain it is edifying to them. Most of them are grandparents and they will look on their—because I always say I am glad that they are enduring, because we always have the four E's. We start off with the “E” for enthusiasm; “E” we begin to endure; the other “E” you exist and then the other final “E”, take your exit. [*Laughter*] So we are at the point of enduring, then they would exist and then they would—[*Laughter and crosstalk*] so they are trying to get me to get to the last “E”.

Hon. Member: Thirty minutes for the exit. [*Laughter*]

12.45 a.m.

Hon. C. De Coteau: Madam Deputy Speaker, the continuation of the Respect me-Respect you initiative in the fiscal year 2013/2014 will involve a nationwide sensitivity and awareness campaign. So I want to alert you now, that there will be this nationwide sensitivity campaign, respect me-respect you, utilizing multimedia approaches and community outreach workshops.

Dr. Ramadharsingh: This is what I thought.

Hon. C. De Coteau: You understand me?

Mr. Sharma: Perfect.

Hon. C. De Coteau: The establishment of the national children's registry, which will act as a mechanism to further facilitate child protection—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Ramadharsingh: Cabinet has approved that.

Hon. C. De Coteau: Yes. The registry will be a Government database that collects and holds information of all children—that is persons under the age of 18—and will transform children services through adequate and sustained support for more effective and early detection. [*Desk thumping*] It will also provide an effective mechanism for information sharing; better and quicker communication among key practitioners across the sectors of education, health, social services, justice and national security.

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. C. DE COTEAU]

Saturday, September 14, 2013

The outfitting and opening of the child assessment centre at the Eric Williams Medical Complex. To this end, the Ministry is committed to recognizing and acknowledging and upholding the rights of the child, and facilitating the consequent development of national initiatives that promote child development. The establishment of such policies and frameworks are crucial to building an enabling environment that will ensure that the adults, our children of today, will become healthy, secure and responsible members of society who are capable and equipped to contribute even further to national development.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the first seven years of a child are the most impressionable years—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: The most important—

Hon. C. De Coteau:—and the most important—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: —for intellectual development.

Hon. C. De Coteau:—and, as my colleague says, for intellectual development; impressionable and most important. Sometimes when you see a particular child behaving in a particular way, and you go back into the child's history or even into your own history, then you might have a greater understanding of why you are behaving so as an adult.

Miss Hospedales: Oh, that is why you behave like that. [*Laughter*]

Hon. C. De Coteau: Publicly sharing my appreciation of you. [*Laughter*]

Hon. Members: Whamm.

Hon. C. De Coteau: In this way, Madam Deputy Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Ramadharsingh: Yes. [*Laughter*]

Hon. C. De Coteau:—the Ministry has embarked on a long-term plan to build a stable foundation to realizing its vision. Madam Deputy Speaker, I know my colleagues are trying to propel me into an accelerated completion, but I will not be caught in that. It is a new ministry where I am. I happen to be the first man in that Ministry, and let me take my time. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

Dr. Ramadharsingh: Email the rest. [*Laughter and crosstalk*]

Hon. C. De Coteau: Madam Deputy Speaker, the youth development fiscal year 2013/2014—and I know this might interest my—[*Interruption*]

Miss Mc Donald: Thank you Minister. Through you, Madam Deputy Speaker, Minister could you just proffer an explanation for personal edification, as to what is gender budgeting and gender mainstreaming that the Minister spoke about in the budget, please? Thank you.

Hon. C. De Coteau: Madam Deputy Speaker, the gender budgeting would bring me to one of the points where we are going to have the women city in the Port of Spain area, and also the development of one in south, where in the budgeting there will be equity and equality, and that the budget—[*Interruption and Crosstalk*] Madam Deputy Speaker, time permitted, I would really like to address this and I would talk to my colleague, but it is interesting.

So that the youth development programme is estimated—there are approximately 450,566 young people [*Laughter*] between the ages of 12 and 29 in Trinidad and Tobago, representing 34.2 per cent of the national population with males 104,420 outnumbering females. The females are 85,302, so we have a ratio of 51 per cent male and 49 per cent female. These figures, as quoted in the revised youth policy, demonstrate the importance for issues faced by our youth—one-third of our population—to be identified and effectively and purposefully addressed.

Madam Deputy Speaker, so that we will have this revised national youth policy; we will also have the national youth commission; we will also have the national youth volunteerism programme; the national youth employment strategy; the continuation of the gatekeepers programme; we will also have the youth development—reengineering of the youth development and apprenticeship centres. Again, at Presto Praesto and Chatham, we will be looking particularly at youth in especially difficult circumstances. We will have:

- the integrated planning and programming implemented in order to reduce risk factors;
- the establishment of police youth clubs in all high risk communities;
- the development of second chance programmes for school dropouts;
- accessible health services to support community health; and
- the establishment of an inter-sectorial committee to provide leadership for the development of programmes dealing with youth in especially challenging circumstances.

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. C. DE COTEAU]

Saturday, September 14, 2013

We will also have the gender development for, again, the women in harmony; non-traditional skills training for women—again, the defining masculine excellence and food preparation, fine dining and home management. We will have gender responsive budgeting. We will also have the gender training awareness and sensitization programmes, and a host of other programmes, and we will be collaborating with the non-governmental organizations.

Madam Deputy Speaker, based on the information shared, it goes to show without saying, that this is a serious Government with a clear vision and plan to transform our society. We are building institutions through establishing a policy framework for development. For those who want to say this Government has nothing in place for the youth of our nation, the track record of the Ministry, this particular Ministry, speaks for itself about Government delivering, serving and serving the population. We are not neglecting the social sector; we are not neglecting our youth; we are not neglecting our children; we are not neglecting our families.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I listened to the sounds made by my colleagues, and I am in total agreement with them. There is no appreciation by our constituents for us staying so late in the night because when we get sick, some other person will come and replace us. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Deputy Speaker, I have learnt—and that is why I cannot be a hunter—that when I lose one night’s rest, it takes me about two or three nights to catch up on that.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish if the particular committee will think about our health because we champion the cause of everybody in this Chamber and we do not champion our own cause. [*Desk thumping*] If we ask for an increase in salary that will help us to go and pay the doctors, “dey say dey vex; whe dey want that for” [*Desk thumping*] and when we stay up late in the night, “yuh know wha dey tell yuh? Allyuh really dottish yuh know boy.” But in trying to deliver, in trying to do something that would redound to our constituents, here we are at this lovely hour. In my constituency and in Mayaro, they used to talk about “douens, lagahoo, lajablesse” and all these things, what are we?

Hon. Member: And “soucouyant” too.

Hon. C. De Coteau: Are we political “soucouyant” and “lajablesse” now? Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to graciously thank you and ask you please, let us preserve our health because what we are indulging in is not really—this Herculean parliamentary task is not healthy to us. [*Desk thumping*] I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Appropriation Bill, 2013

Friday, September 13, 2013

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member for La Horquetta/Talparo and Minister of Land and Marine Resources.

Hon. Member: What!

The Minister of Land and Marine Resources (Hon. Jairam Seemungal): Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to contribute to this debate at this wee hour of the morning. Madam Deputy Speaker, in this my maiden speech as the Minister of Land and Marine Resources, let me at the onset take the opportunity to thank the hon. Prime Minister for having the confidence in me to place me as a Member of her Cabinet.

Let me also take the opportunity to congratulate the Minister of Finance and the Economy, the hon. Larry Howai and Minister Rudranath Indarsingh, the Member for Couva South and Minister Vasant Bharath, for a very well presented budget in this year 2013. This budget, Madam Deputy Speaker, can stand out as one of the best budgets this country has ever seen. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, let me also, at the onset, deal with a few matters from my constituency first, since as a Member of Parliament, I am elected to serve, first of all, my constituency and then any other matter that is deposed upon me.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the constituency of La Horquetta/Talparo—[*Interruption*] Madam Deputy Speaker, may I, please?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Members.

Hon. J. Seemungal: Madam Deputy Speaker, the constituency of La Horquetta, as we are aware, has been one that was under the control of the People's National Movement, and one that has been in Opposition on a couple occasions, so it has been one that has been neglected of funds, and one in which the development of all the infrastructure in that constituency was at a dilapidated state.

As a matter of fact, Madam Deputy Speaker, in taking office as the Member of Parliament in 2010, that constituency had five years—seven years prior to that, under the government of the People's National Movement and, Madam Deputy Speaker, not one recreation ground in the entire constituency had lighting fixtures on them; not one of the recreation grounds in that constituency was outfitted for the young men and women to ply their sporting activities and to come out at nights on recreation grounds for fun and even take part in sporting activities.

Under the PNM, Madam Deputy Speaker, every single recreation ground was allowed to run down to a dilapidated state. I congratulate publicly and put on *Hansard* this People's Partnership Government has today outfitted five recreation grounds in the

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. J. SEEMUNGAL]

Saturday, September 14, 2013

constituency of La Horquetta/Talparo with lighting fixtures: the Phase II Recreation Ground in La Horquetta, Brazil Recreation Ground, the Las Lomas Recreation Ground, the Talparo Recreation Ground and the Carr Road Recreation Ground.

1.00 a.m.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I make this point to show that under their watch nothing happened; “it was a set of promise and promise and promise that we did this and we could do that”, and nothing happened tangibly to the constituency. Madam Deputy Speaker, this constituency, and it is sad to say, was one that throughout the constituency there were persons living in various areas that have never seen pipe-borne water until now.

In Talparo, for instance, Madam Deputy Speaker, going up to Mundo Nuevo, a village which is over 200 years old, there are persons living; their grandparents grew up there, their parents grew up there and some of them are in their 30s and 40s and have never seen pipe-borne water. The nearest water supply, Madam Deputy Speaker, was at the river or the nearest well or running ravine.

Mr. Sharma: Marlene used to go by that river.

Hon. J. Seemungal: And under this People’s Partnership Government—
[*Interruption*]

Miss Mc Donald: “Doh leh meh tell yuh something here this hour.
[*Laughter*]

Hon. J. Seemungal:—the area of Talparo and now in the village of Mundo Nuevo to the end of the Mundo Nuevo Main Road have a ready supply of water seven days a week, 24 hours a day. [*Desk thumping*] That is delivery, Madam Deputy Speaker. That is delivery under—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Unhealthy. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. J. Seemungal: Would you all like for me to give way?

Hon. Member: Yes.

Mr. Indarsingh: What point you want to make there?

Hon. J. Seemungal: Madam Deputy Speaker, that is delivering under the People’s Partnership Government, and every project that I heard here this afternoon by our Members, the other side kept saying that was their idea, and that

was their idea, and that was their idea, and that was their plan, and their plan and their plan, and I am sure all their plans are in cupboards, all their plans are on shelves gathering dust and maybe rotting away by now, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, Todds Road is an area, the constituency, again, a village over 100 years old, has never seen pipe-borne water in its entire life, and today every single street on Todds Road and the entire length of Todds Road [*Desk thumping*] has pipe-borne water, at least one day for the week, and very soon WASA is moving to upgrade that to three to four days a week.

In Mamoral, that is an area that is shared between myself and the Member for Tabaquite. The Mamoral Dam has been talked about and bandied about for years and years, and that is the only means of bringing water to Mamoral and those areas. Without the Mamoral Dam, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Mamoral Road to the last village of Miani, not Miami you know, Miani Village, has water; pipelines are in that area so they will be receiving water at least one day a week in that area, Madam Deputy Speaker. That was the type and the extent of the neglect that Government placed on their own. It was not a constituency that was in Opposition, it was a constituency that was in Government for five years to my coming into office.

Dr. Rambachan: The community centre.

Hon. J. Seemungal: Madam Deputy Speaker, all the other infrastructure throughout the constituency was in a severe dilapidated state. In Talparo there is a community centre that was built by the Member for Mayaro, and it is a state-of-the-art community centre in a village which I am sure many of them on the other side did not even know exists.

Recently, the Member for Tabaquite, under the Self-Help Programme commissioned a brand new community activity centre in the Wallerfield area, and the people in Wallerfield are so overwhelmed—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Rambachan: Jacob Hill.

Hon. J. Seemungal:—by that small facility in Jacob Hill. At least they have somewhere they can congregate: they can have activities, they can have weddings, they can have birthday parties; they have children coming there in the afternoon. As a matter of fact, I was told that a boxing class started in that centre just last night.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this is the type of delivery that this Government is doing and it is not being told about, and they on the other side keep branding that

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. J. SEEMUNGAL]

Saturday, September 14, 2013

we are doing nothing, nothing coming out of us and we are just there in waiting for them to come into office. But I tell you, Madam Deputy Speaker, they will never see the light of day coming into office in this Parliament and sitting on this side, after how they have treated people, their own people, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Bus service: the entire constituency is now serviced by PTSC buses, and I must congratulate the Minister of Transport. You can take a bus now from Tamana to Chaguanas; prior to 2010 you had to travel to Sangre Grande to Arima to Curepe, from Curepe to Chaguanas and back, and that trip alone was costing over \$40, now you can travel from Tamana to Chaguanas at \$4 a trip. It means that children from Tamana can decide if they want to go to Presentation College, and I think I saw the student with the President's Award coming from Presentation College this year.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, this Government has opened opportunities for people who live in rural communities that they can now venture into different areas and make choices with their lives, Madam Deputy Speaker, and that is the type of delivery that this Government will continue to do and continue to build upon.

Dr. Rambachan: [*Inaudible*] pushed it down in 1968 and they never build it back.

Hon. J. Seemungal: Madam Deputy Speaker, and very soon—because I know some of my constituents, most of my constituents are up looking at this budget debate as well [*Laughter*—and very soon the Minister of Works has said that the paving of the Mundo Nuevo Road will commence from the school to Miani Village. He has commenced the paving of Todds Road from the Caparo Valley Road to one kilometre inside where the infrastructure has been completed.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, in the constituency, all around, work has commenced. We are not waiting for election to start doing work in the constituency. From day one, 2010, works had started with respect to upgrading the various parts of the constituencies, and not only my constituency, all over Trinidad, and including Tobago.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, let me on behalf of my constituents, thank all the Ministers who have delivered: the Early Childhood Centre in La Horquetta, [*Desk thumping*] in Wallerfield as well; all the Ministers who have delivered, delivered

to the people and my constituents of La Horquetta/Talparo, something they did not have the opportunity under the previous seven years prior to us coming into office.

Mr. Indarsingh: Discriminatory PNM.

Hon. J. Seemungal: Madam Deputy Speaker, coming from being a Minister of State in the Ministry of Food Production, I can also speak a bit about the Ministry of Food Production and the agriculture sector, and to place on record some of the activities that we have done in the Ministry of Food Production by way of becoming a food-secure nation.

Madam Deputy Speaker, throughout the world, food security is seen as the foremost and most important aspect of a country's building, and food security to feed their nation is also felt as being of very high priority, and this Government, this Government for the very first time, in any Government prior to now, has placed food security as one of its top priorities within its allocations. This year we have been allocated upper \$1.2 billion; it is one of the largest allocations to food and to the Ministry of Food Production.

Madam Deputy Speaker, there are many countries as well which have pledged their support to food security in the Caribbean, and in particular Trinidad and Tobago. For the very first time, earlier this year, the Chinese Government has invited the entire Caribbean, including the Latin America and South American countries to a Food Security Forum, where food security for the Caribbean, Latin America, South America and China was discussed over a three-day period. And during that session, the Government of Argentina came forward and pledged its support to the Caribbean with respect to food security: Belize, Brazil, and the Government of Guyana as well.

Madam Deputy Speaker, let me place on record what has happened in the agricultural sector over the period 2013. There has been tremendous expansion of the agricultural sector during the period of 2013. The expansion of the sector amounts to some 5.1 per cent in 2013. The contribution to the GDP in 2009 was some \$345.9 million; in 2013 the contribution amounted to some \$610.8 million, an increase of 77 per cent. Cassava: there was an increase, Madam Deputy Speaker, of some 15.2 per cent; yam, 57.2 per cent; sweet potato, 58.7 per cent; melongene, 27.2 per cent; watermelon, 25.4 per cent; ochro, 25.4 per cent—
[Interruption]

Hon. Member: “Zaboca.”

Hon. J. Seemungal:—pumpkin, 15.8 per cent; cucumber, 13.9 per cent and pawpaw, 5.9 per cent. Madam Deputy Speaker, these are some of the commodities I would like to place on *Hansard* so that we know where the agricultural sector was and where it is going.

In the livestock industry, poultry production has increased by 92.4 per cent from 17.3 million kilogrammes to some 33.3 million kilogrammes. Milk production has increased by some 7.1 per cent as well, and honey production has increased from 44,000 litres to 60,000 litres, an increase by 36.4 per cent.

Madam Deputy Speaker, when one looks at the inflation index with respect to agriculture and food prices, there was a decrease from 22 per cent in 2010 to 9.6 per cent in May of 2013. This is the first time, Madam Deputy Speaker, that the index with respect to food inflation has dropped to single digits, and that is the work that this Government has started in 2010 and continued on to 2013, and it is all geared to a master plan of food security and feeding our nation.

1.15 a.m.

Madam Deputy Speaker, let me turn specifically to some of the projects that we undertook in the Ministry that have started bearing fruit and that will continue to bear fruit over the next two years, with the aim of reducing our food import bill and to move closer to a food secure nation.

Rice in this country is one of the most important staples constituting a regular part of our daily diet for all ethnic groups. Local production in 2010 accounted for less than 5 per cent of the demand, a shortfall of some 31 tonnes which amount to just over \$100 million. Most of the country's rice supply is therefore hinged on the availability of rice on the international market at a price over which this country has no control.

Taking this into consideration and the fact that it is necessary to have stability with respect to our main staples, this Government has ventured into a vigorous rice revitalization programme. Eleven officers in the initial stage were sent to Guyana for technical training with a view to learning what the Guyanese have done with respect to their rice industry.

To date, in 2013, we have moved from a production of 500 acres to some 4,750 acres. This will yield approximately 17,000 kilograms of paddy by September of this year. What we essentially set out to do with the rice industry is not to have a state-owned or a state-managed industry, but it is one that we had discussion with all the stakeholders, including the rice farmers and all the

technical institutions. A decision was made that it is necessary to have a private sector/public sector run industry. We have invited various stakeholders and various persons to invest within the rice sector. To date, 13 rice harvesters have been brought into this country, and each of them at a value of some TT \$1.3 million. That is the confidence that the private sector has started showing with respect to the rice industry.

We also had discussion with various millers, and by next year two state-of-the-art mills will be set up by the private sector, both amounting to some TT \$160 million in investment. When these mills come on stream, they will run the entire industry on a private sector basis. The mills will be producing parboiled rice and all the other quality rice that can be matched and replaced on the local shelves.

How this industry is expected to operate is that the miller will own, apart from some of the farmers, most of the essential equipment that are necessary for the rice industry. In other words, they will own rice harvesters, rice planters, land levellers, harrows and tractors, and they will also be importing the seeds that are necessary to produce high quality grain. They will venture into a partnership arrangement with the farmers, and similar to the poultry industry, they have indicated that they will be venturing into contract farming with respect to the rice.

By next year we expect to find another 5,000 acres which we will be bringing into rice production. With 10,000 acres of rice, we will be able to produce some 44,000 tonnes of paddy, and 44,000 tonnes of paddy will give us approximately 33,000 tonnes of rice. This country's consumption, according to the CSO report, is that we consume approximately 28,000. So, in essence, we will have some rice that we can export or keep for a day that we are unable to produce sufficiently. That is the approach that we have taken with respect to that industry and many of the other industries as well. We are venturing into a private sector/public sector relationship. When we enter into these types of relationships, the State will not be burdened with investing and finding money on a regular basis for the continuing of the industry.

Right now, the State is subsidizing paddy up to \$3 a kilogram, and these millers have indicated that they will be purchasing paddy on the world market price. Over the last couple of years, paddy on the world market price stands at \$3.17. It means that there would not be—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: For what?

Hon. J. Seemungal:—\$3.17 per kg. It means that the State, the Government, will then be in a position to remove its subsidy and the private sector take up the

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. J. SEEMUNGAL]

Saturday, September 14, 2013

burden of that subsidy. That is one of the industries that we have started creating in the Ministry of Food Production.

Another area that we are paying very, very close attention to and we have started most of the groundwork for it, is the revitalizing of the livestock industry and the dairy industry. My friend from Point Fortin is not here. One of our first initiatives was to rehabilitate some of the breeding units around the country. Our first rehabilitation was done in the constituency of Point Fortin, in the Chatham breeding unit, where we went in and we fixed over all the infrastructure, including the pens to hold some of the small ruminants and dairy.

We are going into Rio Claro to complete a breeding unit there. We are going into Centeno where we have one, and we are going to expand that unit, and we are going into the Aripo livestock station where we are going into having an expanded unit. I have said Mayaro as well. So we are putting in four different locations, breeding units for the expansion of the ruminant industry.

What we propose is that apart from having the Government station or institution house these animals for breeding, we are also going to venture into a private sector relationship whereby animals will be issued to private farmers, and private farmers will then be guided under the Ministry of Food Production, animal health vets and also officers, to bring these animals up and keep them in a healthy state, so they can reproduce, and in reproducing, they can then return two or three of the animals to the State so we could start other farmers by way of the expansion of the small ruminant industry.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in order to assist this industry as well and taking into consideration that feed price is one of the highest expense that the farmer in the livestock industry faces, we have ventured into establishing two forage banks or feed banks that will be able to supply to the local livestock farmers, feed at a very reasonable and subsidized price.

We have started the infrastructure at Mon Jaloux in the constituency of Caroni East, outfitting some 350 acres of land. We have started rehabilitating the entire acreage with an aim of planting grass to make it available for farmers. This year we have sold some 50 tonnes of grass to farmers on a pilot project, and by next year—which was just about 20 or 30 acres of the land. By the end of this year into the dry season of next year, we intend to move that to some 400 or 500 tonnes of grass from that station.

This was the first year milk prices remained stable during the dry season, because of the availability of this grass to the farmers. It also allowed them to

raise their profit during the dry season, so that they have savings with respect to the feed that they were purchasing with the supplementation of the grass. Grass is just one of the commodities for this feed bank. We will also be moving into the formulation of silage and other feeds that could be used to supplement the high cost of feed for livestock.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we expect to create some 2,500 fixed jobs and, additionally, it will create some 300 or so temporary employment for persons wishing to venture into this industry.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Speaker, fish is another area that we have started looking at as a means of increasing our local production of fresh fish and meat. Tilapia is one of the fish that has been spoken about by every single government, every single Ministry and every single head of the fish department. Tilapia is one of the fish that has the highest protein content, and it is one of the fish that we have worked out with the School Feeding Programme that they will be willing to introduce in school feeding for children, but it is a very complicated industry to establish. We came up with a very innovative solution to move this tilapia industry forward.

What we have decided to do is to establish a state-of-the-art fish processing plant. With the fish processing plant, there will be a ready market for the tilapia fish, once it is produced by our local farmers. This fish processing plant is expected to cost some \$10 million. A site has been identified and plans are on the way to complete this fish processing plant by July of 2014. In the meantime, what we have started doing, we have started training farmers who are interested in rearing fish, tilapia in particular. There are two types of training taking place. One, where you train farmers to grow this fish in tanks and a controlled environment, and the other method is to rear this fish in open clay ponds.

1.30 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, today we have trained over 60 farmers who are interested and we have another batch of 126 persons who are also interested in venturing into tilapia farming. On hearing that the Ministry of Agriculture will be establishing the fish processing plant a lot of the farmers have started establishing small ponds—small trial ponds—in their holdings with an aim of learning this type of industry for when the fish processing plant is set up. This plant is expected to process some 60,000 tonnes of fish. The agriculture sector is a very dynamic one where we need to find different synergies, different scenarios to fit different types of industries.

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. J. SEEMUNGAL]

Saturday, September 14, 2013

So, Mr. Speaker, another type of industry that we are paying very close attention to is the honey industry. This country has won two prestigious prizes from the European Union, in Europe, in respect to having the best quality of honey, but unfortunately after winning those two prizes four years ago we were banned for not having the honey tested and certified for entering into the United Kingdom. Since that, Mr. Speaker, we have started talks with Brazil and we have started putting the infrastructure in place to establish a state-of-the-art testing facility for honey and its related products.

Honey, from 2010, has increased by some 100 per cent. This year we harvested of upper 60,000 litres of honey and we expect that this industry will grow. This occurred because the Ministry was, vigorously over the last few years, training young people to venture into this type of industry and we are still having final discussions with the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources to have access to some of the forestry and the forested areas where farmers, with respect to bee keeping, can venture into to ply their trade.

So, Mr. Speaker, this is a very fruitful industry. Thus far, it has created employment for over 600 young people and it has also created supplement income for a lot of persons who like, and who took a liking for this industry.

Mr. Speaker, for far too long persons have tried and failed with respect to food processing. [*Crosstalk*] This Government has taken a vigorous approach with respect to food processing in an aim to having a steady supply of food for our nation.

If one looks at the food import bill of just under \$4 billion, we can establish that there is a ready market in this country of \$4 billion for the purchase of food; and that is a food import bill and not one in which—it does not take into consideration the food that is grown locally and sold in the wholesale market.

So if one looks at that food import bill of just under \$4 billion we can satisfy ourselves that this market is available for local commodities. But the problem is that processors of food require the raw material in a timely manner, and they require it in a certain amount on a constant basis, and thus far we are unable to produce the quantity that they require in the format that they require and in the time frame that they require it. Let me give you an example.

A company like Subway for instance, they require about one million pounds of tomatoes a week. It means that we must have a supplier who is able to supply them with that one million pounds of tomatoes. They require the tomatoes also of

a certain quality and they require the tomatoes to be certified free of insecticides and other dangerous chemicals because they are used in the raw form for their industry. It is easier for Subway to import this tomato from Miami because they can call on Miami and have them deliver that tomato at their doorstep at 4.00 p.m. on Thursday for their intake on Thursday night for Friday morning.

Looking at that scenario, we have started reorganizing NAMDEVCO and expanding its operation to fit into that type of scenario. That is where the commodity—we have also introduced a commodity stabilization project. This commodity stabilization project is to cater for the amount of the various industries with respect to their requirement with the various types of fresh fruits and vegetables that they require.

In other words, Mr. Speaker, Subway wants one million pounds of tomatoes a week, we must have one million pounds of tomatoes in storage, catering not for this week, but we must cater for this week and next week. So that Subway can be satisfied that they can call on NAMDEVCO rather than calling on Miami and they will have the tomatoes delivered to their door on Thursday evening and have it ready for their shops on Friday.

That is how we intend to have all the other fresh fruits and vegetables, catering for our local processors.

Hon. Member: “Why yuh doh grow [*Inaudible*]...sada roti”—[*Interruption*]

Hon. J. Seemungal:—and will help [*Crosstalk*] to ensure that we cut into that \$4 billion food import bill.

Hon. Member: Very good point.

Hon. J. Seemungal: Mr. Speaker, with this in mind there will be in construction, over the next year, five more packing houses. We have started one in Brechin Castle and we are going to designate these packing houses for different commodities and that is to ensure that we have a quality product coming out of these packing houses. The one in Piarco, for instance, will be designated for fresh fruits; the one at Brechin Castle would be designated for root crops; the one in Tabaquite, for instance, for fresh vegetables, and one is to be established in Wallerfield and two others. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Hypolite: What about TTABA?

Hon. J. Seemungal: I will answer “yuh” just now. I will answer “yuh”. Mr. Speaker, this being so, the Government has decided to invest into their institution.

Appropriation Bill, 2013
[HON. J. SEEMUNGAL]

Saturday, September 14, 2013

NAMDEVCO is a Government institution with a Government board run by employees of the State, and by investing into their institution and organization, and expanding the organization we will ensure that we have control over what is happening.

My colleague from Laventille West wants to find out what is the status with TTABA.

Mr. Sharma: “He want a Subway right now.”

Hon. J. Seemungal: He wants to find out the status of TTABA. TTABA, my friend, is an organization that was set up as an NGO. An NGO means that you can establish a small company or small firm as an NGO on yourself [*Crosstalk*] and it is not under the control or the purview of the State. TTABA was funded under the PNM administration close to \$300 million.

Mr. Sharma: He looking for Subway now.

Hon. J. Seemungal: A sum of \$300 million in subvention was given to TTABA. And when we came into office and recognizing that this is an institution, not of the State but of private sector, and we had no control of what the subvention would be used for—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Minister of Land and Marine Resources has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Member’s speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Mr. R. Indarsingh*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: You may continue, hon. Minister.

Hon. J. Seemungal: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my colleagues, most of them who are awake, and thank you to the ones who are awake on the other side as well.

So, we are coming back to my point on TTABA. Recognizing that it is an institution that we had no control over for the subvention that we are giving them, the Ministry of Food Production has decided to cease funding with respect to this NGO, and because of that \$300 million, we expect would have been spent on creating systems where they can fund themselves. So we allowed them this \$300 million for a certain time. We understand that they are in the process of ensuring

that they can survive as a private NGO and private business as well. So that is your answer with respect to TTABA. It is not a State-owned agency. A lot of people feel that TTABA was a State-owned agency, but it is an NGO and as a matter of fact, in their constitution I recall that it is an NGO not for the purpose of making profit, but it is an NGO for spending funds for the establishment of a certain industry.

Mr. Indarsingh: The PNM diverted money into TTABA; simple as that.

Hon. J. Seemungal: Mr. Speaker, there are other programmes that the Ministry of Food Production ventured into. Praedial larceny we recognized was a very stigmatic part of the food production, and with this in mind the Ministry of Food Production has established a praedial larceny squad from the Ministry, and we have held an MoU on joint relationship with the Ministry of National Security to bring some 200 officers within the system as praedial larceny officers designated primarily for praedial larceny within the next two months. These officers are in training and within the next two months they will be brought into the system to help alleviate the praedial larceny with respect to farmers.

Mr. Speaker, we had a pilot project in Carlsen Field area in the constituency of Caroni Central [*Crosstalk*] yes—that is a dairy area—and the success of the praedial larceny squad located in Caroni Central has borne tremendous fruits thus far. We were told that not even one fowl was lost since the coming into being of the praedial larceny squad.

Mr. Indarsingh: Tell the Member for Laventille West where Carlsen Field is. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Ramadharsingh: A man who work Laventille for 20 years—

Hon. J. Seemungal: Mr. Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Ramadharsingh: A man who work Laventille for 20 years— [*Inaudible*] as a community development [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: Member for Caroni Central, I do not I think it is time for you to speak. [*Laughter*]

Hon. J. Seemungal: I would not take long—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: “Thank yuh.”

Mr. Indarsingh: You are winding up. You are winding up.

Hon. J. Seemungal: I am winding up—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: “Dat is the best part of yuh speech.”

Hon. J. Seemungal: “Ah winding up, Mr. Speaker. [*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: “No yuh winding down.” [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: “Winding up?” [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. J. Seemungal: Mr. Speaker, just a couple more. We recognise also in the Ministry of Food Production that it is important to sensitize the national community that eating local and putting your local foods on your table is very vital towards an expansion [*Crosstalk*] of the industry. You see, we need to bring people—and my friend from Fyzabad asked what about avocado? It is important—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: Zaboca.

Hon. J. Seemungal:—zaboca, all right. It is important to educate the national public, especially the young ones who only know about, mainly know about apple and grapes. You ask them what is an orange, they might pick up a yellow apple and bring it for you.

1.45 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, it is essential to also educate them as well. With this in mind, we have launched a national campaign called “Putting T&T on your table”. And if you all observe on CNMG as well, there is a little cooking programme using local foods and local fruits and vegetables to help teach and highlight to the parents and the young adults who are looking on how to use these local fruits and vegetables. And incidentally, Member for Fyzabad, the “avocado choka” or “zaboca choka” was prepared.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Guacamole.

Hon. J. Seemungal: Guacamole.

Mr. Sharma: Is that served with bread or roti?

Hon. J. Seemungal: And it is served with anything.

Mr. Indarsingh: With Crix biscuits.

Hon. J. Seemungal: Mr. Speaker, we also recognize there must be some stability in the agriculture sector as well, and this is why we continue with the large farm—we do not “lick up” every single thing you know. We continued with the Large Farm Programme. As a matter of fact, we built on the large farm idea that was started under the previous administration. We expanded the idea and we

expand it now into a programme, but this programme, Mr. Speaker, with the large farm is to help bring some stability within the agriculture sector. For instance, some farms are designated as large farms for livestock, small ruminants only; Some are designated for dairy production only; some are also designated large farms for rice production; and some are for root crop production. So, various farms have been identified for many of the commodities to add some stability. It is not intended that these farms will be competing with the local farmers.

Mr. Sharma: Good point, good point.

Hon. J. Seemungal: Mr. Speaker, one of the things that I will be looking for, as the new Minister of Land and Marine Resources, is a piece of land to build a central wholesale market, because the market at Macoya is fast becoming too small for the amount of farmers coming into the system. And south—there is a market deep in south, in Debe, a wholesale market and the farmers around the central area—where a lot more young farmers are coming into the system—have been clamouring to have a wholesale market somewhere nearer to them.

Mr. Sharma: Caroni Central.

Hon. J. Seemungal: So we are looking—I will be looking to find a piece of land to build a wholesale market in that area, Mr. Speaker. [*Crosstalk*]

We also expanded on the infrastructure development programme at the Ministry, and just to place on the *Hansard*, from the period 2008—2010 we have moved the amount of agriculture access roads being constructed from 10 kilometres for the end of the period 2013 to 157 kilometres. [*Desk thumping*] The maintenance programme, we expanded that programme from 47 kilometres to 459 kilometres. [*Desk thumping*] And with respect to ponds, Mr. Speaker, we moved the Pond Programme on land and now expanding it on State land and now we have expanded it to private land as well, so private farmers who are interested in having their pond established by the Ministry can now apply to have a pond dug by the Ministry. We have moved that programme from 93 ponds in 2008 to 594 ponds in 2013.

Mr. Speaker, let me just—before I wrap up, just clarify—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Partap: You have 15 more minutes you know.

Hon. J. Seemungal: I have plenty time?

Mr. Partap: Fifteen more minutes.

Hon. J. Seemungal: Right. Mr. Speaker, I just want to clarify an issue raised by the Member for Diego Martin West with respect to the—*[Interruption]*

Miss Mc Donald: *[Inaudible and laughter]*

Hon. J. Seemungal:—with respect to the Carenage Fishing Depot. Mr. Speaker, this Carenage Fishing Depot is a project raised by the Member for Diego Martin West on several occasions in this Parliament. As a matter of fact, the Minister of Food Production had cause to come and answer a Motion that was raised by him with respect to that same Carenage Fishing Depot. But let me put again on *Hansard* the transition of that fishing depot from where it came from and what it is now.

That fishing depot was contracted under the People's National Movement. It was started under you all, and when it started under you all it was stopped under you all as well, because there was an issue with respect to the land. I speak to it with respect to the contractor. I am happy to report today, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Food Production and the Member for Diego Martin West, we visited the site and we came up with a plan of exactly what we will do to complete the project. Today, the project is 90 per cent completed.

Mr. Sharma: Well done, well done. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Indarsingh: No discrimination.

Hon. J. Seemungal: There is no discrimination with respect to any of the deliveries within this People's Partnership Government.

Mr. Indarsingh: "Anything dey ask for dey does get."

Miss Thomas: *[Inaudible]*

Hon. J. Seemungal: "Wha dey want?"

Mr. Peters: "Boy, this hour of the morning. Boy go on." *[Laughter]*

Hon. J. Seemungal: When your turn comes we will—wrap up.

Mr. Indarsingh: Anything they want they does get. Anything they request.

Hon. J. Seemungal: So, Mr. Speaker, we have also renovated many of the fishing depots around. We have also renovated most of the docking facilities—*[Interruption]*

Miss Thomas: The Agriculture Society of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. J. Seemungal: You want to know about the agriculture society?

Appropriation Bill, 2013

Friday, September 13, 2013

Miss Thomas: Yes.

Hon. J. Seemungal: I could talk about that for an hour, you know. “You wha meh go?”

Mr. Peters: Boy go ahead and talk about—[*Inaudible*]

Hon. J. Seemungal: “File a Motion on da one, we will answer da one.” We do not have enough time for that here. But you could file a Motion and we will answer that. File a question, file a question. So, Mr. Speaker, in wrapping up let me say that the Ministry of—this country, farmers and this country’s consumers are far better off under the People’s Partnership Government than under the PNM administration. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: Better agriculture.

Hon. J. Seemungal: There is a lot more food coming into the system. There are a lot more fresh vegetables that you can choose from, and the price of the vegetables—locally grown—and the price of the vegetables today is far cheaper than two, three and four years ago.

Mr. Speaker—

Mrs. Seepersad-Bachan: Healthier lifestyle.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Inflation on food is low.

Hon. J. Seemungal: That is correct. It is the first time it is in single digit.

Mr. Indarsingh: Under the PNM it was 25 and 30 per cent.

Hon. J. Seemungal: Mr. Speaker, we expect that the Minister of Education with his School Feeding Programme will benefit from the healthier foods and healthier fruits coming into the system. [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Speaker, with these few words—

Hon. Member: No not few, many words. [*Laughter*]

Hon. J. Seemungal: With these many words, I would like to wrap up at this point so that we can come back here on Monday and—[*Crosstalk and laughter*] Leader of Government Business, can I continue on Monday or just continue?

Dr. Moonilal: Continue.

Hon. J. Seemungal: Continue. Very good. So, Mr. Speaker, with these few words I thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Adjournment

Saturday, September 14, 2013

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal) May I begin my own contribution now? [*Laughter*] Mr. Speaker, I feel robbed that my friend could not take his time. But at this moment, Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House do now adjourn to Monday September 16, 2013, at 10.00 a.m., and on that day we will continue debate on an “Act to provide for the Service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending September 30, 2014”. Mr. Speaker, I do beg to move.

International Day of Democracy

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, before putting the question for the adjournment, I wish to seek your indulgence for a few moments. I wish to remind you that the International Day of Democracy will be observed on Sunday September 15, 2013. It was at the 2007 United Nations General Assembly that governments were encouraged to strengthen national programmes regarding the promotion and consolidation of democracy. It was also at that Assembly that the decision was taken to observe the International Day of Democracy on September 15 each year. This day is intended to provide the opportunity for all citizens to pause and examine the ways in which democratic principles are applied in our nation.

Hon. Members, the Inter Parliamentary Union of which our Parliament is a member has chosen for this year’s observance the theme: “Strengthening Voices for Democracy”. As one author writes, “Democracy is not perfect, but strengthened voices make it better.” It therefore requires the voices of the people to be heard and it requires that we as parliamentarians listen. In the strengthening of voices for democracy, determination and perseverance are demanded. Respect for opposing views, a total rejection of all forms of violence and indeed the belief in dialogue is encouraged.

Unlike many other nations of the world, Trinidad and Tobago can boast of having endeavoured since our independence to adhere to the tenets of democracy. While the observance of democracy day allows us the opportunity to applaud our successes thus far, it is also an occasion on which as a people we can reflect on shortcomings in our institutions and governing systems and seek to devise strategies to improve our democracy.

I therefore urge all Members of this honourable House together with the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago to celebrate this privilege of being a democratic

International Day of Democracy

Saturday, September 14, 2013

nation. I particularly ask you, as elected representatives to educate your constituents about Parliament, to continue to generate awareness among young people and to encourage your constituents to participate whenever possible in the processes of democratic governance.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 1.58 a.m.