



REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

# Debates of the House of Representatives

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## OFFICIAL REPORT (HANSARD)

THE HONOURABLE BRIDGID ANNISSETTE-GEORGE  
SPEAKER

THE HONOURABLE ESMOND FORDE  
DEPUTY SPEAKER

**Monday 9th October, 2017**

**CLERK OF THE HOUSE: JACQUI SAMPSON-MEIGUEL**

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## CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
LEAVE OF ABSENCE ... ..	235
MOTOR VEHICLES AND ROAD TRAFFIC (AMDT.) (NO. 2) BILL, 2017 [ <i>Hon. F. Al-Rawi</i> ]	
First Reading ... ..	235
APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2018) BILL, 2017 [Third Day]	
Second Reading ... ..	235
... ..	371
ADJOURNMENT	
[ <i>Hon. C. Robinson-Regis</i> ] ... ..	372



*Leave of Absence**Monday, October 09, 2017***HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES***Monday, October 09, 2017*

The House met at 10.00 a.m.

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

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Members, Miss Marlene McDonald, MP, Member for Port of Spain South, has asked to be excused from today's sitting of the House. The leave which the Member seeks is granted.

**MOTOR VEHICLES AND ROAD TRAFFIC (AMDT.)  
(NO. 2) BILL, 2017**

Bill to amend the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act, Chap. 48:50 [*The Attorney General*]; read the first time.

**APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2018) BILL, 2017**

[Third Day]

*Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question* [October 06, 2017]:

That the Bill be now read a second time.

*Question again proposed.*

**Madam Speaker:** The Members who have already contributed are as follows, one, hon. Colm Imbert, MP; hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC, MP; hon. Stuart Young, MP; Miss Ramona Ramdial, MP; hon. Dr. Lovell Francis, MP; Dr. Lackram Bodoie, MP; hon. Darryl Smith, MP; hon. Anthony Garcia, MP.

Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West. [*Desk thumping*]

**The Minister of Social Development and Family Services (Hon. Cherrie-Ann Crichlow-Cockburn):** Thank you. Madam Speaker, I rise in support of the national budget presented by the Minister of Finance, and to share the Government's priorities and perspectives with respect to social development in fiscal 2018. At this point, Madam Speaker, I am compelled to express special thanks to the Minister of Finance on behalf of myself, the more than 170,000 social services grant recipients, and, I dare say, the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, for delivering a budget that leaves us with hope for a better tomorrow and the faith in our destiny. [*Desk thumping*]

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[HON. C. CRICHLLOW-COCKBURN]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

Madam Speaker, it is easy to be magnanimous and dole out money left, right and centre when there is plenty. I imagine it is also easy to be profligate in times of plenty, as was evidenced from 2010 to 2015, but it takes creativity, strength and determination to chart the course for a country that has been left almost bankrupt. It also takes dedication and the love for country to allow oneself to be assailed by those who know better, those who should know better, and those who ravaged the country for personal and partisan gain and not respond in like manner. [*Desk thumping*] Prior to the budget presentation throughout Trinidad and Tobago, the man in the street, the academics, the technocrats, people all over were predicting a budget of doom and gloom. People also opined that we will have to “suck salt” after this budget, the “we” here being Trinidad and Tobago’s lower and middle income earners. Instead, we have been presented with balance and equity, and the burden of adjustment to be shared by all, and, more so, those that can most afford. [*Desk thumping*]

This budget that focuses on “Changing the Paradigm: Putting the Economy on a Sustainable Path” has clearly taken the wind out of our detractors. I listened to the Leader of the Opposition and Members on the opposite bench on Friday and their contributions were somewhat lacklustre. There was no fire. There was no believability. There was very little substance. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, allow me to quote from an article by Keith Subero in today’s *Express*, entitled, “Kamla about ‘power’, not ‘politics’”, and he states:

“Beyond the gallerying for television, Mrs. Persad-Bissessar on Friday left us with nothing memorable or elevating.” [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, we may ask ourselves, why? Why contributions in that manner? It is because deep down the Members on the opposite bench realize that this Government has done wonderfully well with the hand that we have been dealt, and it is also going to put Trinidad and Tobago’s economy on a sustainable path.

Madam Speaker, times are challenging and there are difficult decisions to be made, but there are two critical positive factors that work in Trinidad and Tobago’s interest. First, the PNM’s base philosophy, which is about caring for people; all people, Madam Speaker, not for supporters, not for family, not for friends, all people, [*Desk thumping*] and protecting the vulnerable in society. And, secondly, the Government has an excellent, rational and workable development plan in Vision 2030. Citizens are therefore assured that this Government will not be operating by “vaps” or with knee-jerk reactions, but in a planned and strategic manner. Madam Speaker, on Friday I noted the Leader of the Opposition in her contribution would have indicated that nothing has been put in place to mitigate

the effects of the current economic situation. Madam Speaker, I want to inform this august House and the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago that the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, mindful of its mandate, and in the face of the hon. Prime Minister's expressed concern for Government's response to the impact of the economic downturn on the most vulnerable in society, took steps that have resulted in the development of a National Social Mitigation Plan.

Madam Speaker, we sought to ensure that we had input, buy-in and ownership from this plan from the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and, to this end, we conducted four national social dialogues in north-east Trinidad, central Trinidad, south Trinidad and in Tobago. We also had conducted outreach service within the rural community. Focus group sessions were held with the youths, with civil society. Interviews were undertaken with social sector experts and questionnaires were administered to social sector ministries, regional corporations and professional associations. This means, Madam Speaker, that we had the widest range possible of contributions to the input in the National Social Mitigation Plan.

Madam Speaker, the data collected was reported on in two working papers, compilation of the national strategic plan for Trinidad and one for Tobago. And, Madam Speaker, the findings in these working papers suggested that not just the people, but institutions, budgets and whole sectors had been impacted by the economic downturn. And we also found that the heaviest burdens were being placed on the poor and indigent, the middle class, the elderly, single parents, persons with disabilities, women, children and the unemployed. The Ministry then engaged the Centre for Health Economics under the leadership of Professor Karl Theodore to develop the plan, and they were guided in the development of this plan by the two working papers and the lessons learned from the Thailand experience.

Madam Speaker, in the late 1990s, after a significant financial crisis and economic downturn, Thailand implemented a comprehensive social sector programme that successfully mitigated the adverse social impacts of that crisis, particularly in the labour and social welfare sectors, and Thailand's plan focused on mitigating short-term impacts and overcoming them in the long term. Madam Speaker, our National Social Mitigation Plan, appropriately themed, Building Resilience to Secure our Nation, seeks to equip persons affected by the downturn with the resources and tools needed to cope with short-term consequences and to overcome them in the long term. The plan therefore targets those in vulnerable social economic positions, retrenched workers, the unemployed, lower income earners, our youth, persons with disabilities, and poor individuals and families,

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[HON. C. CRICHLAW-COCKBURN]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

and it has three main objectives, one, strengthening the social protection system, promoting community and civil society action, and enhancing productivity and innovation.

Madam Speaker, as we implement the National Social Mitigation Plan, we will conduct a comprehensive review of our priority social programmes, across Ministries with a view to restructuring them for greater impact, increased efficiency, effectiveness and relevance. We will also undertake a review of our legislative and policy frameworks to determine the need for any amendments or new legislation. A comprehensive assessment of the disability sector will also be done so as to identify what is available and whether there are any gaps. We will also introduce a component in the social programmes to engender a transformation in values, attitudes and behaviours that are necessary for appropriate socio-cultural values. Madam Speaker, and, of course, we will implement a package of short-term relief measures that will provide immediate assistance to the persons most affected by the downturn and including those recently retrenched.

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to inform this House that the Ministry has secured Cabinet approval for the National Social Mitigation Plan, and has commenced the examination of the priority areas for action, and the development of appropriate action plans. Implementation of this plan will be on a phased basis with \$2 million being expended in 2018. And I dare say, Madam Speaker, that this National Social Mitigation Plan is positioned to achieve its objectives given its thrust on human capital development, sustainability, empowerment, and continuous improvement.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services core responsibility is the delivery of social services, inclusive of income support and the maintenance of a safety net that protects our poor and other vulnerable citizens from the impact of poverty; it improves their lives and livelihoods and strengthens resilience. Madam Speaker, so I was somewhat disappointed when the Member for Couva North on Friday made reference to the safety net and stated that a number of grants were no longer available. Madam Speaker, there is nothing further from the truth. All of the grants that were in existence in 2017 continue into fiscal 2018. [*Desk thumping*] Today, I am extremely pleased to inform this House and the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago that despite our dire economic situation, this Government has maintained its social safety network. [*Desk thumping*] This is great news, Madam Speaker, for the 168,345 individuals and families who receive the senior citizens' pension, the disability assistance grant, and the public assistance grant.



Madam Speaker, these three programmes received a total allocation of \$4.4 billion, or approximately 96.5 per cent of our Ministry's total allocation for recurrent expenditure. Madam Speaker, if nothing else, this is testimony to this Government's philosophy of caring for the vulnerable and putting people first. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, this welcome decision places an even greater responsibility on our Ministry to improve targeting and service delivery, and a reduction in expenditure. So we must ensure that only those who are eligible receive benefits. Steps must also be taken to provide support required to bring beneficiaries to self-sustainability and graduation out of programmes. This has started and will continue to be done in 2018.

Madam Speaker, even as we address the issue of poverty, we are guided by Government's national strategic framework, which effectively mandates the development of more cost-effective strategies in the delivery of our services. The need to do as much, or more with less, forces us to improve our targeting mechanisms, and to ensure that improved efficiencies and value for money underpin all of our systems, programmes and initiatives. The Ministry remains committed to breaking the cycles of poverty and dependency in Trinidad and Tobago, and will continue to do so in 2018 through, one, the development of a national poverty reduction strategy in collaboration with the UNDP. This activity will entail the conduct of stakeholder consultations in the 14 municipal corporations. Robust evidence-based policy and programme design are of critical importance and cannot be overemphasized. And I indicate here, Madam Speaker, that the SLC 2014, because of its shortfalls, effectively hampered progress on the poverty reduction strategy and the regional poverty profiles. But those problems and shortcomings have been identified, and we therefore expect that the SLC 2018, will guide developments in this area.

Madam Speaker, the effective administration of social protection grants via the provision of 13 social service grants, including general assistance grants, dietary grants, educational assistance grants, rental assistance, funeral grants, continued in 2017, with 1,035 persons being beneficiaries of these grants. There were also 377 families benefitting from minor house repair, house wiring and sanitary plumbing grants to a cost of \$7.4 million. Madam Speaker, this budget speaks in terms of changing paradigms, and the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services' understanding and bracing of the need for a shift in the paradigm, and the ability to effectively do was most evident in the aftermath of Tropical Storm Bret when we secured approval for a change in the payment process for general assistance grants that resulted in the faster processing of applications and payments. I am pleased to advise that the Ministry was able to

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[HON. C. CRICHLow-COCKBURN]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

make its first set of payments within two weeks, and that cheques were delivered to recipients, the 1,643 of them within their communities, Madam Speaker, [*Desk thumping*] and this helped to ensure a return to normalcy and to bring restoration in the shortest possible time.

Madam Speaker, the recipients were very, very appreciative of this and commended the Ministry on many occasions for its timely payments. This, Madam Speaker, is evidence of our caring for and putting people first. Madam Speaker, the Member for Couva North also indicated that food cards are not available. Madam Speaker, there is nothing further from the truth. The Ministry continues to provide food support to persons who are eligible, and this is done via the debit card and a cheque system. And the Members of this House will recall last year, I would have informed this honourable House that in the interest of reducing expenditure and being more cost-effective, it was required of us to utilize cheque payment for some recipients.

So, Madam Speaker, I say to this House, and to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago who may have been misinformed, that despite reports to the contrary, the Ministry continues to provide food support to our poor and vulnerable and those affected by natural or manmade disasters. I also want to remind the population that food support is intended to be short-term assistance for the poor and vulnerable families who are unable to meet their nutritional requirements due to limited income. Eligibility is determined by the administration of a means test that applies to four variables, net income, education, asset and housing, with net income being the major variable. Madam Speaker, food card or food support was never intended for distribution by MPs to their supporters to be used as an election ploy, or to be retained indefinitely. [*Desk thumping*] And now more than ever our economic circumstances require that we employ the most effective targeting and allocation mechanisms.

The Ministry has therefore been ensuring that the means test is applied in every instance, that there are reviews and recertification exercise as mandated by our policies, and over the last two years, Madam Speaker, this has resulted in the removal of approximately 18,900 recipients who had either died, migrated, failed to provide requested information, or their income situation had improved and they would no longer qualify. Madam Speaker, no food cards were taken back from anyone. And, I dare say, Madam Speaker, these activities resulted in savings of approximately \$159.6 million for redistribution. And this was seen in 2017, when 6,810 new beneficiaries received food support, and as at September, 2017, 27,435 individuals and families were receiving food support.

Madam Speaker, Vision 2030 reminds us that effective governance serves as a catalyst for social transformation, and the key to this transformation is improving service delivery and pursuing service excellence. The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services has long recognized the critical importance of efficient and effective service delivery, and has implemented several initiatives towards this end. First and most importantly, Madam Speaker, the people we serve must be aware of our benefits and services, the eligibility criteria, and how and where they can be accessed. Feedback from the public during our general consultations and outreach programmes, and from counsellors and community groups suggested that there was a high level of ignorance of the system and misinformation in the public domain. And so, during 2017 the Ministry responded by embarking on a series of public information, education and sensitization sessions throughout Trinidad.

Madam Speaker, for ease of convenience we did it within the constituencies, and we have covered all constituencies in Trinidad, and we will be going to Tobago within 2018, and we will be doing a second rounds within communities in those 39 constituencies in Trinidad. Because the aim is, Madam Speaker, that the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago must have an increased knowledge and awareness about the Ministry's products and services, and we in the Ministry must be able to improve our targeting through the identification of poor, vulnerable, and other at-risk groups. But, Madam Speaker, having an excellent suite of benefits and an informed public cannot by themselves bring about the required change. The Ministry's service must be timely and of a high quality, and this is only achievable when the persons who deliver the service are well trained, knowledgeable, and have the right skills and attitude. Mindful of this, Madam Speaker, and of the theme two of Vision 2030, which speaks to delivering service excellence, the Ministry has embarked on an extensive training and retraining exercise in client care for all of our staff, the priority objective being to produce sustained culture change and a customer-centric approach by staff. [*Desk thumping*]

Since the programme's inception in March 2017, 660 members of staff from all levels have been trained. During 2018, we will be implementing, monitoring and evaluation, and audit exercises; we are going to be deploying feedback boxes so we can get feedback from the public. We will also adopt the mystery shopper approach so that we can get even more feedback. And we emphasize, Madam Speaker, it cannot be emphasized enough, that we continue to train and retrain members of the public and the staff of the Ministry. Madam Speaker, the current configuration of our social service delivery system represents a silo approach, and

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[HON. C. CRICHLLOW-COCKBURN]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

this can result in double-dipping, timewasting, inefficiencies, frustrations and persons in need not being able to successfully access available benefits and services. These circumstances, Madam Speaker, demand significant change, and so the Ministry has begun moving towards and will fully embrace the adoption of an integrated approach to service delivery in 2018.

Madam Speaker, in 2016 I informed this honourable House and the country that the Ministry's bankers has deemed our debit card obsolete, its continued use, high risk, and had therefore stopped issuing new cards. We are going to be implementing a new, more secure debit card before the end of the first quarter. This provides us with an opportunity to assess all current food card recipients, and we expect by the end of that exercise only those who are eligible for food support will be in receipt of a debit card. Madam Speaker, regrettably, the developmental component of the food support, which was called "rise up", was never fully implemented. This resulted in few people graduating out of the programme. The Ministry will be vigorously implementing our new developmental component, which is called, Social Transformation and Empowerment Programme, Uplifting People, or STEP UP. This will be done over the next three years, Madam Speaker, and this developmental component is intended to steer beneficiaries on a path of resilience and reduce dependency on social assistance.

They will be provided with opportunities to become gainfully employed. We will enrol them in adult educational programmes, and we will seek to enhance their communication skills, and also provide them with funding for microenterprises via the SEED grant. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, and in this vein I am particularly heartened by Government's plans to include CEPEP in agriculture, because this presents an opportunity for our clients and others to, while earning income, also develop agricultural skills that will equip them to produce food for their family's consumption and/or to supplement their income. So, I thank the Minister of Finance for that. [*Desk thumping*]

Another major change that occurred in 2017, Madam Speaker, was the incorporation into social welfare of the food support. Madam Speaker, the Ministry initiated a transitioning exercise overseen by an internal change management team to ensure that the process was seamless. And I report, Madam Speaker, that the initial challenges have been overcome, and members of staff are now on board. So the public of Trinidad and Tobago, when they enter one of the Ministry's regional offices can now go to any one of the customer reps and not only apply for senior citizens' pension or disability grant, but can also apply right there for food support. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, at present each division within the Ministry administered their own, and sometimes a different means test. This was not in keeping with best practice, this is not in the interest of improved service delivery. So, Madam Speaker, we have developed a standardized means test, and that means test will now determine the eligibility for all programmes and grants offered by the Ministry. This will ensure more effective targeting for all programmes and grants to those most in need.

Madam Speaker, I dare say that this means test, this standard means test, can become a universal means test across all Ministries in keeping with the approach that will be adopted under the National Social Mitigation Plan.

**10.30 a.m.**

We have also instituted a single intake form. At present, members of the public who seek to access grants of the Ministry have to make separate applications for each grant. That is time consuming; it can lead to frustration, it can also lead to double dipping and wastage. So we have developed a single intake form, and that form can be utilized for all and every grant. It also affords the Ministry the opportunity to do a holistic assessment of each applicant, and this will also facilitate the timely approval of grants.

It is beyond imagination that the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services has functioned all of these years without an integrated management system. It is not surprising, therefore, that we had problems with managing our grant portfolio, keeping administrative costs down, and our data at times is questionable. And given our shift to an integrated approach, this can only be achieved if there is an integrated IT system. And so, Madam Speaker, in 2018 the Ministry will commence implementation of an integrated IT system. This system is expected to result in reduced administrative costs, linking of clients to case management records, reduction in duplications, effective management of our grant portfolio, the elimination of double dipping and it will also facilitate the monitoring, evaluation and auditing of programmes.

IGovTT has already been engaged to procure and manage implementation of the ISEMS project at a cost of \$331,147. Ten million dollars has been allocated in this budget for this project which will be implemented on a phased basis, the first phase being due for completion by the end of fiscal 2018. This allocation signals Government's understanding of the critical importance of having an integrated IT system to the success of service delivery excellence within the Ministry.

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[HON. C. CRICHLAW-COCKBURN]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

The Ministry is mindful that achievement of the objectives of the integrated approach will also require changes to some structures, some systems, policies and procedures. In 2018, the Ministry will therefore embark on a restructuring exercise which will entail a review and maybe revision of programmes and rationalization of some existing units. Some units may become obsolete, for example TCCTP, which has now been integrated into the Social Welfare Unit. Some units will increase in size and structure, as has already happened with the Social Welfare Unit, and we may have the introduction of new units such as our Social Support and Empowerment Unit, which is one of the mechanisms for the introduction of the integrated model within the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services and across Ministries.

Madam Speaker, I also want to give the public the assurance, however, that this restructuring exercise, we do not anticipate increases in our total staff complement as a result of it, because we are very mindful of the need to operate within our budget allocation and to not increase costs.

Madam Speaker, other initiatives that we have implemented in the interest of promoting service delivery excellence, is the direct method of payment. I am pleased to inform this House and the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago that 2,700 senior citizen pensioners were paid via direct deposit in August, and this month for the very first time, we were able to pay 2,500 recipients of the Disability Assistance Grant and Public Assistance Grant via direct deposit to their bank accounts. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, we will also be removing the life certificate process. We have already signed the MOU with the Registrar General's office. They will be providing us with information on deaths, and so we expect as of January 2018 our senior citizens will no longer have to come to the Ministry's office to certify that they are still alive. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I turn now to the socially displaced. Despite implementation of numerous initiatives over the years, the issue of street dwellers continued to be a major problem. If ever there is need for a shift in paradigm, it is in this area. The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services recognized that this problem does not require just a new creative approach, but also a collaborative effort across Ministries and the private sector, and so we convened a meeting.

This meeting was attended by the Ministers of Rural and Local Development, the Minister of Health, the Minister of Social Development and Family Services—it escapes me now, but there were four key Ministers attending that

session—and the Minister of National Security. At that meeting we also invited all mayors. Unfortunately, the mayor of Chaguanas chose not to attend, but all other mayors attended. We also had the private sector represented by DOMA.

At the end of that meeting, it was decided that we would establish a working committee. That working committee met over a 15-week period, at the end of which, they produced a report, and I dare say that was an excellent and comprehensive report. Some of the findings in that report included the fact that the current legislation only provides for the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service and Health personnel removing street dwellers. The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services cannot involuntarily remove street dwellers. It is only if they voluntarily agree to be removed, and very little of them do so. It was also established that 30 per cent of the persons on the street have mental health issues, and the accommodation at the St. Ann's Hospital and the other hospitals is inadequate to accommodate them. It was also found that the current care options available to street dwellers are inadequate and the standards of delivery require improvements.

There is an urgent need for reliable data. Despite doing numerous head counts, at the end of it all, we are unable in a definitive way to say what is the total population of street dwellers. There are no assessment centres at present. There is an absence of health service delivery mechanism except for the mentally ill. There is a lack of employment opportunities for those who have been rehabilitated, and very importantly, the Socially Displaced Persons Act, No. 59 of 2000, a major piece of legislation to deal with street dwellers, was never proclaimed. There is also the non-existence of dedicated transitional housing.

Madam Speaker, having made these findings, the committee then looked at how we approach this, and what are the recommendations going forward. The recommendations made by that committee represent a major change in thinking and approach. They have recommended a four-step continuum of care, the first step of which is engagement. One of the major changes, even in this first step, is that they are going to adopt the reform of local government approach, in that, the local government, the corporations, are going to be responsible, together with the Ministry of Health, for removal of street dwellers. This is important because we need the members of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service to be treating with the Minister's crime plan so we can utilize the municipal police to treat with street dwellers.

We have also looked at the Socially Displaced Persons Act. While the Act could be improved, given our current circumstances it is felt that it is sufficient for us to start during this phase to utilize that Act. So we are liaising with the Ministry of the

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[HON. C. CRICHLLOW-COCKBURN]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

Attorney General to have that Act proclaimed as quickly as possible. We will also together look at it in terms of any necessary amendments and bring that on to Parliament later on.

We then looked at the second level which is temporary care. This speaks to developing care facilities and assessment centres. The committee has identified a parcel of land at the corner of Piccadilly Street and South Quay for construction of an assessment centre and shelter. But we recognize that that is probably going to take us two to three years, so in the short-term we have identified a building on Independence Square that is currently being assessed to determine whether it is structurally sound and whether it can be retrofitted to be utilized as an assessment centre in the short-term. The devolution of responsibility for oversight of these centres would be again to the regional corporations. We are also looking at the possibility of having centres within communities, so that the corporations in the respective areas will be responsible for treating with the socially displaced within their communities. Of course, we are going to contract the NGOs to provide services at these centres.

Then we look at the issue of primary care. The provision of mental health and general medical care is key to the success of this exercise. We are working very closely with the Ministry of Health to have dedicated health personnel to work in these centres. Rehabilitation will also include skills training and employment placement. Madam Speaker, we have identified our facility New Horizons in Piparo, and we are going to be transferring it to the Ministry of Health so that it can be better utilized to treat with those persons who have mental health issues.

We then come to the issue of advanced care. We can take the street dwellers off the street, we can treat them, we can rehabilitate them, but if at the end of that exercise there is nowhere for them to live, they will return to the streets. So to avoid that we are looking at the issue of transitional housing upon the completion of rehabilitation. We will be liaising with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development because we would need to revisit our social housing facility.

I expect that the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, after having listened to that continuum of care that we are going to provide to our socially displaced, will agree with us that we are going to be very much closer to dealing effectively with the issue of street dwelling in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry is of the firm view that the private sector has a key role to play in street dwelling. To this end, we met with the representatives of DOMA and they indicated that some members of the private sector are willing to support Government plans. A similar meeting will be held in other cities and



municipal corporations. I am pleased to inform this august House that Cabinet has accepted the working committee's report and agreed to the implementation of the recommendations. And so in 2018 you can expect that we will commence implementation of the recommendations, including the acquisition of land, the establishment of a centre on Independence Square, the identification of suitable buildings for regional centres and proclamation of the SDP Act, 2000.

I now look at the issue of ageing. The Ministry continued to cater to the needs of the elderly population in the form of income support and opportunities for them to pursue an active lifestyle and contribute to the development of the nation. This Government is ever mindful of protecting and caring for the vulnerable in society, and so we have ensured that the increase in licence fee for private hospitals are not applicable to homes for the aged, thereby ensuring that the elderly do not experience any added financial pressure.

The family is one of the most important institutions in our society, and can be the heartbeat of a productive society. A draft national parenting policy that aims to improve parenting practices in Trinidad and Tobago has been laid in Parliament, and during the first quarter of fiscal 2018 it will be the basis of national consultations. During 2017, we continued to provide counselling to couples and families in order to reduce family dysfunction, violence, abuse and to mitigate suicide. To this end, 3,684 clients received counselling and 2,401 received advice and information.

Madam Speaker, in our support of persons with disabilities, we have been seeking to review the national policy on persons with disabilities, and to this end we held four stakeholder consultations. The views there were varied and divergent and it has affected our ability to finalize the document. As a result, a decision was made to have an independent committee comprised of representatives from CODO, academia, the disability sector and civil society to review and finalize the second draft of this national policy, and we expect that it should be finalized by the first quarter of 2018.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry is seeking to partner with the Ministry of Health to establish assessment and therapeutic centres in communities within the 14 regional corporations, to facilitate greater and easier access for persons with disabilities. It is impossible for this Government to be able to put centres within all communities, and so we are looking at health centres and hospitals in the first instance to have these community facilities.

Significant strides have been made, Madam Speaker, towards the development of a national register for persons with disabilities and we have been doing that in collaboration with UNDP. We have also provided assisted devices to our clients to improve their quality of life, and to this end we spent \$1.6 million to provide 44 persons with prostheses.

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[HON. C. CRICHLow-COCKBURN]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

Madam Speaker, over 1,500 clients are currently serviced by ELDAMO with the bus service and this has increased their mobility and participation in the society. Discussions are ongoing with PTSC as we strive to provide a more relevant and efficient bus service. The Government clearly articulated at the commencement of its term that civil society engagement is a key success factor for sustainable development. The Ministry therefore partners and is greatly assisted by civil society in its delivery of services to the displaced, elderly and persons with disabilities. In fiscal 2017, 24 NGOs received a total of \$43,632,513 to support their work and to facilitate delivery of specialized services for persons with disabilities in their care. We also provided one-off grants to 20 NGOs to assist in the execution of social development projects with funds totalling \$463,786, and one-off grants of under \$10,000 were distributed to 110 organizations amounting to \$744,801.

In fiscal 2018, Madam Speaker, we will continue to work with civil society to build capacity within the community for effective service delivery and to equip them to adequately undertake their mandate. Greater attention will also be given to addressing issues of accountability and value for money in the provision of subventions to civil society.

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West, your original 45 minutes are now spent. You are entitled to a further 10 minutes.

**Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will utilize my remaining 10 minutes to speak to my constituents in Lopinot/Bon Air West. I take this opportunity to thank each and every constituent of Lopinot/Bon Air West for their support, for their assistance, for their patience and understanding during the last two years. I also thank them for coming out to our MEL sessions and contributing, letting us be aware of what their concerns are, what their issues are and also providing advice and ideas for moving Lopinot/Bon Air West and this Government forward.

Madam Speaker, the main campaign promise I made—and I made very few—was the provision of water in taps to the homeowners in Windy Hill and Edna Hill. I am very pleased to indicate that WASA, who has been working against all odds to make this a reality, has indicated that water would be in Windy Hill and Edna Hill by November of this year. [*Desk thumping*] Granted that water will be on a phased basis, but I am sure the residents of those two areas will be extremely happy to at last be provided with tap borne water in their homes.

The residents of Mc David Trace in Surrey Village, Lopinot, I also am pleased to inform them that the intake has been completed within Mc David Trace, and they are also going to be provided with water from that intake, and these are the people of lower Lopinot, Soap Hill, Mc David Trace. They are now going to be serviced

by the intake that has been constructed in Mc David Trace. This is no mean achievement because these projects were not on WASA's strategic plan, but having spoken to them and explaining the situation, the people at WASA rose to the occasion, and we are now in a position where this Government can provide these residents with a reliable pipe borne supply of water. [*Desk thumping*]

I also want to inform constituents that the Minister of Works and Transport has indicated that the works identified during his tour of the constituency would commence this year. This is good news I am sure for residents of Victory Heights in Arima, Paradise in Tacarigua, Five Rivers, La Resource, La Florissante, Thomas Trace in Arouca, and Lopinot. Constituents, your patience will pay off because we are going to commence these projects in 2018.

Government's plans as articulated in the budget are also very welcome. Madam Speaker, on any given office day, at least 70 per cent of my constituents come to me seeking assistance in securing housing. So the fact that we anticipate an additional 1,000 houses being produced through our collaboration with the private sector is very welcome for my constituents. [*Desk thumping*] There are also a number of them who at this point in time may not be able to afford a mortgage, so the issue of rent-to-own and rental is very, very welcome and will make those constituents extremely happy. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, as I close I want to thank the staff of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, for without them we would not have been able to achieve all that we have over the last two years. We would not have been able to make the shifts in paradigm that we have made that have effectively improved efficiency and effectiveness in the Ministry. It is all due to their dedication. I also want to thank the staff of the Lopinot/Bon Air West constituency office and, of course, all of the public servants that would have contributed to the preparation of the national budget.

As I close, I want to assure the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago that the social safety net is intact and is in very good hands. For this Government to interfere with their benefits, it would have to be that water is more than flour, and water is not more than flour now. The Prime Minister has indicated that we will not travel on the road to the IMF, so they can rest assured that they will continue to receive all of the grants, all of the benefits at the 2017 level.

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

**Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan** (*Tabaquite*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and I am very, very happy to join in this debate today.

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[DR. RAMBACHAN]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

I begin my contribution today by congratulating the Member of Parliament for Siparia and the Opposition Leader, [*Desk thumping*] for her vibrant contribution which she made to the debate, and for her visionary statement and detailed analysis of Government's decisions and Government's performance. In fact, the Leader of the Opposition was able to expose the shallowness and emptiness of the PNM Government, and the nation has been witnessing in her own words what are crises in national security, tourism—especially in Tobago—a lack of investment in projects which could catapult the diversification thrust and also crises in health and food production.

It is very interesting to me, therefore, that this morning the hon. Member who just spoke, the hon. Minister of Social Development and Family Services, began with a quotation from an article in the *Trinidad Express* by Keith Subero, a journalist. But she chose a particular line in the article but forgot to read the very beginning of the article. The article says, and I quote him:

“Opposition Leader Kamla Persad-Bissessar’s budget presentation on Friday was simply outstanding. [*Desk thumping*]

In her lengthy performance she shone,...

When I read the totality of this article, what I discern is that Keith Subero who once used to publish under here that he was an advocate of the PNM, he has stopped doing that, [*Desk thumping*] but it is an article in which he expresses deep fears about the rise of Kamla Persad-Bissessar once more, to such an extent that he goes and he quotes Machiavelli, he quotes Moses, but he quotes also a third century Indian philosopher Kautilya, who wrote that the remnants of an enemy can become active like a disease of fire, and that one should never ignore an enemy knowing him to be weak. He becomes dangerous in due course like the spark of fire in a haystack. [*Desk thumping*]

Everything in this Keith Subero article shows a deep fear of what is now perceived by the population as the rejuvenation and rise of Kamla Persad-Bissessar and the UNC, because we have demonstrated in the last 24 months of being in Opposition that we are capable of rising to the task of governing this country once again in the interest of prosperity for all the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, the question for me in this debate is not about the expenditures of the People's Partnership. In fact, I discern that something interesting is happening in the country with the PNM, in that, what they are trying to do is create a narrative and a conversation about the spending of the UNC and

the People's Partnership, in order to avoid focus upon their incompetence and the way they are spending money. [*Desk thumping*] It is not going to happen, because the people are seeing through that and the people are saying, like I say today, that I am not here to debate the past, I am here to debate how to create a future of prosperity for Trinidad and Tobago.

So I have several questions which I want to ask of myself as I proceed with my contribution in terms of this budget. The basic one is, does the budget address the concerns of the people? I ask this because good governance for me is governance that effectively and efficiently addresses and solves the concerns and problems of the people. And what are the people's concerns?

Walk the streets of Trinidad and Tobago today, walk it over the last 12 months in particular and you are going to see people asking the following questions. One, can I feed myself and my family on a sustainable basis? Can I do that? Secondly, can I adequately shelter myself and my family? Thirdly, would I have access to proper health care and affordable health care at that? Fourthly, would I be the beneficiary of a reliable and affordable public transport system? And perhaps above all, would I be safe in terms of my personal security, and also security with respect to my job? These are the concerns of the people and this is what we are here to debate. Does the budget create a future that will give these assurances to the people of Trinidad and Tobago? [*Laughter*]

Madam Speaker, my view is that this is not so—this is not so, because what the Government has shown in the last 24 months is that there is a deficit in terms of the capacity to move ideas into implementable projects. The Government has therefore been failing miserably in terms of improving the quality of life of citizens thereby.

Madam Speaker, do people feel safe? Let us just take one. Do people feel safe? Government says it is about savings jobs; a very noble objective, you know, a very noble objective, because if you do not have a job you cannot feed your family, you cannot pay your mortgage, you become a dependent of the State. We do not want to have people becoming dependents of the State.

**11.00 a.m.**

They say they have to save jobs, but to save jobs you have to generate revenue and you have to generate income, and to do that you have to make sure that businesses are flourishing in the country, whether they be small business enterprises or whether it would be big business. We have already seen under this PNM the close-down of ArcelorMittal and almost 2,000 people directly and indirectly going out of jobs.

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[DR. RAMBACHAN]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

I drove through Fyzabad yesterday, Fyzabad yesterday, and three small groceries that I knew there were closed, were closed. So something is happening to small business already, already—[*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. Member:** It was Sunday. [*Laughter*]

**Dr. S. Rambachan:**—and that they are feeling the pinch and they are closed.

**Mr. Lee:** PNM logic.

**Madam Speaker:** Order.

**Dr. S. Rambachan:** Madam Speaker, how long can you sustain deficit budgeting?—\$12 million last year, another \$7 billion, another \$4 billion and so on—how long are you going to sustain that? You have to find the way to generate income and so on. But, you have to do that by attracting local investment and by attracting foreign investments. And one of the questions I want to ask today early in my contribution is, why has been there such a low level of foreign direct investment in the country, outside of the energy sector in particular? Why?

Madam Speaker, recently, I met a businessman who came to Trinidad and this man is a magnate, a business magnate who was looking for investments, and he does not handle anything less than US \$15 million in terms of investment. And he came to this country on a brief holiday and I met him and he asked me, he says, you know, “What is there in your country for me to invest?” And before I could answer, he said “You know, your country is a place I would have difficulty investing,” and I said “Why?” He said “Firstly, the bureaucracy of doing business in your country. The bureaucracy is stifling. Secondly, you have a productivity problem in your country, a serious productivity problem. Thirdly, the crime and personal security for any foreign investor coming here is an issue, and also you have very strong trade unions.”

And he gave very strong arguments as to what would dissuade him from investing in this country. And I ask the Government a question today: What are you doing to convince people that these factors that they identify as deterring them as detriments to their investing in this country, what are we doing in order to alleviate those fears and to improve the climate for investment?—not only for foreign direct investment, but also for local people who seem to have lost confidence in the economy and are either parking up or engaging in capital flight.

Madam Speaker, so people’s jobs are under threat. The Government is saying that there is a moratorium until December. What happens after December? What happens after December if you are unable to raise the kind of revenue?

Madam Speaker, the hon. Minister who comes from Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, he said in a statement he made on Friday at a public meeting at Piggott's Corner, he said, "I think that you should all give a PNM Government a round of applause because" what he said, "what we have done is introduce a royalty tax of 12.5 per cent on the value of gas extracted from Trinidad and Tobago grounds. And I think you should give PNM a round of applause for that," he said, because "unlike the past, we have not come to tax the small man and the middle class that are already there carrying their part of the burden."

Well, are you not taxing the small man and the middle man? Come on. Everything in that budget is about tax, tax and tax, and the Government has introduced several new taxes which are placing the lives of people in jeopardy and also their future, in terms of the five concerns I read. Everything will increase in costs. Fifty per cent increase in diesel fuel is no small increase. That is why you have the maxi-taxis and the fishermen and everyone else making the noise that they are making. Thirty per cent corporation tax.

Madam Speaker, you are also applying that to that small businesses so they now have to pay 5 per cent more also. What are they going to do when they cannot absorb it? They are going to send people home, they are going to cut back in other ways and you are going to be affecting the economy worse. And then let us not forget, the Government has already signalled that the RIC is working on the increases in WASA rates and T&TEC rates. So tell me, which small man are you not affecting?

Madam Speaker, the Opposition Leader in her response made a very brilliant intervention when she pointed out that if the rich man has to spend \$5 more and the poor man has to spend \$5 more because of these taxes, they both have to spend the same amount, so you cannot tell me you are not taxing and you are not impoverishing the middle class and the poorer classes in this country. [*Desk thumping*] You are impoverishing them. And the people are going to be further impoverished because of what is happening to the debt ratio in the country. Look at the *Review of the Economy* and you will see with what is happening to the debt ratio.

When you increase the debt in a country through borrowing, what you do is you increase the liability upon every citizen, the money has to come from somewhere to pay the debt, and either you tax them or you get it somehow out of them. Madam Speaker, the debt in 2015 when we left office was \$76 million; today it is \$93.7 million, a rise of 22.5 per cent or if you look at it another way, in the last two years it has gone from 45.4 per cent of GDP to 60.5 per cent of GDP, which means that in those two years the Government has increased the debt to GDP by 33 per cent, 33½ per cent. That is a lot of increase that has taken place.

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[DR. RAMBACHAN]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

And I therefore have to ask, again, the question: Where are you going to get the money to pay these debts if you are not increasing your foreign direct investment, if you are not increasing your revenue base? Where are you going to get it? And the Government is not showing where it is going to come from. Okay. So you say you have a sale of assets, that is a one-time affair and that is going to be done and over with.

Madam Speaker, what we are seeing, what we are seeing is that the Government's performance and management of the economy can only be described as poor, poor, poor management of the economy. But had they really managed and had they really done their work that they should have done, we would not have had \$12.6 billion in deficit last year.

Madam Speaker, do you know how inefficient the Government has been in collection?—I will show you from the figures in the revenue document that is here. VAT was estimated to be \$7.8 billion, they only realized \$6.4 billion, a shortfall of \$1.4 billion in VAT collections.

Excise duties, they expected to collect \$987.5 million; all they collected was \$691.9 million, a drop of almost \$300 million. Motor vehicle taxes were estimated to \$414 million; they only collected \$245 million. Madam Speaker, here is a very interesting one: cigarettes, they estimated that they will collect on taxes and so on \$400 million they collected \$227 million.

Madam Speaker, it is not necessarily that smoking is going down and alcoholic consumption is going down, you know; beer consumption has risen because the excise duties on beer has risen. But what I think is that the Ministry of National Security and the Customs and Excise department should get on the job to see the level of smuggling that is taking place into the country [*Desk thumping*] that is denying the Government the collection of the moneys that we are supposed to collect, and they are smuggling. And the ports of Cedros, the port of Orange Valley, the port of Carli Bay, Moruga, in the same places that they are smuggling and have human trafficking taking place, it is time that the people do their jobs. And Minister of National Security, if necessary, rotate the people down at Cedros so that you have new people on the job and not the same people you have all the time who the people are speaking about as not doing the job.

So that people entrusted to do a job are not doing the job and we are losing. That shows inefficiency in the way that you are managing national security in the country [*Desk thumping*] to allow that kind of smuggling to take place in the country.



Because I want to tell you something, West Indian Tobacco did not lose money. In fact, West Indian Tobacco reported profit before tax of \$502.8 million for nine months ended September 30<sup>th</sup> and the chairman Mr. Anthony Phillip he said that was 5.2 per cent over 2015. So it is not that people are smoking less, but it is that more illegal cigarettes perhaps are coming into the country, and that is why I am saying you have not closed the ports and you are not doing your job, because in addition to smuggling, what else is going on around the country that we do not know of? You want to blame the People's Partnership, well the People's Partnership did bring boats and leave it in your hands in the country [*Desk thumping*] so that you can manage and look at the ports and the seas.

Madam Speaker, because of the inefficiency, the inefficiency of the Government and the declining economic activity, citizens now have to bear additional burdens. Do you really believe that companies will absorb the additional taxation without resorting to lay-offs and higher prices; are we fools to believe that? You know, Madam Speaker, there is a tradition in a lot of debates where people quote Latin and they quote French and so on, there is a Hindi statement when you are a child growing up, it is still very prevalent, it says, "Ullu ka pattha". And "Ullu ka pattha" means son of an owl, but it is really used to say, to describe someone who cannot get anything done and who is foolish. Madam Speaker, we are not foolish enough to think and we are not "Ullu ka pattha" to think that [*Desk thumping*] that the citizens will not have to bear all of this burden that is taking place in the country.

Madam Speaker, you know, I do not want to forget something that—it is something that I saw in the *Draft Estimates of Development* on page 124, Item 228 under Sea Transport. There is a figure there under Dredging of Government Shipping Service Basin to accommodate to *Super Fast Galicia*, of \$49 million in 2017, but nothing was spent. But then there is a figure, Mr. Prime Minister, of \$28 million placed in for 2018. And I am wondering and I want to ask the question: Why are we placing \$28 million to dredge the basin for the *Super Fast Galicia*; or is it that somehow, that somehow there has been a decision already—

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** You have to quote the page, the exact words.

**Dr. S. Rambachan:** It is, page here, look it is here in the book, page 124, line 828, it is here, line Item 828, dredging of Government Shipping Service Basin to accommodate *Super Fast Galicia*, 2017, \$49 million; 2018, \$28 million; \$28 million placed there in the 2018 estimates. [*Crosstalk*] Yeah, 2018. All I want to ask the question is this: Is it that the *Ocean Flower 2* also required dredging? [*Desk thumping*]

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[DR. RAMBACHAN]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

You know, I was very pleased that the Prime Minister himself, the Prime Minister himself acknowledged that we are paying about US \$6,000 or US \$5,000 more a day than we should have paid for those boats that are running there now. And that shows you—why they did not go and renegotiate that rate now, if it is that you are overpaying? Why did you not go in the interest of Trinidad and Tobago and say to them, you are overcharging us and therefore, [*Desk thumping*] let us renegotiate. Just like you said you went and renegotiated with Mitsubishi and so on and so forth; US \$5,000 a day by 360 days is a lot of money in this hard “guava season” in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance has repeatedly said that despite his raising of the fuel prices no one has rioted. And, you know what is unfortunate is that the hon. Minister has interpreted this to mean that people are in agreement with his draconian taxes. I wish to differ, I wish to differ. I believe that what has really happened is that the actions of this Government has destroyed the hopes and aspirations of the people to such an extent [*Desk thumping*] that they are in a state of stupor. And when hope disappears sometimes people also lose the will to fight back.

**Hon. Member:** Correct.

**Dr. S. Rambachan:** You see, hopelessness often leads to depression. Hopelessness often leads to suicidal tendencies, to anger and to violence. And I surmise, is this the reason why we have become such a violent society, a more and more angry society, is it because of the hopelessness that is being created by the policies and lack of economic programmes to carry this country to prosperity by the current PNM Government? Madam Speaker, when hope disappears people lose the will to fight back. But you know, there will come a time when the people will be moved to fight back, and the establishment will be the subject of the attack. Be warned, Mr. Minister of Finance, do not take the people’s seeming indifference for granted. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, let us look at what is the reality in this country. There is a labour force in this country of 645,300 persons; that is the Central Statistical Office’s statistics. Madam Speaker, what I am going to tell you now is going to shock you, it is going to shock you. It is going to shock you so deeply that you are going to wonder what are the possibilities for social disorder in this country if something is not done very soon to put people at a level at which they could survive.

Seventy-seven per cent—494,775 of the labour force—they earn less than \$6,000 a month. Madam Speaker, I pause, you know, 77 per cent—494,775 according to those statistics—earn less than \$6,000 a month. This means if you take the minimum wage, and it was this Government that raised, on this side, Kamla

Persad-Bissessar, raised the minimum wage three times—nine, 12, 15, two times. That means that there are people if they are earning the minimum wage, all they are earning is \$600 a week or \$2,400 a month; there are salaries that low, and lower.

Madam Speaker, you know what?—only 23 per cent, therefore, of the labour force earn above \$6,000 a month; 9.2 per cent earn between six to \$8,000; 9.3 between eight to \$11,000; 4.8 per cent earn above \$11,000 a month; and between \$11,000 and \$15,000, just about 2 per cent.

Madam Speaker, what does this say? It says that the majority of the labour force are low-income earners and the theory of the disappearing middle class is real. And what it is also showing is that when the hon. Minister of Finance and the hon. Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister—the Minister of everything—when they say that they are not taxing the poor people, what you are really doing is that you are pushing the middle class lower and lower out of existence, [*Desk thumping*] and when the middle class cannot contribute to economic activity and spend money in a country, you are going to have a terrible downward spiral in the economic activity in the country and you are going to deepen the recession in the country.

Madam Speaker, the poor therefore, in my view, when the Minister of Finance, in his budget speech, and when he spoke Friday night also, when he wanted to make people feel that he is sharing the burden of adjustment, what he was doing is creating an illusion that he is taking more from the rich and less from the poor. The poor really amounts to your 77 per cent earning less than \$6,000 a month; that is the working population.

In 1962 it was said that colonialism was gone and that a nation was born and that we were a free people with independence. In 2017, we are once more being robbed of our independence by the spectre of poverty which will engulf the majority of people, that is, if strategies which will result in a prosperous nation are not introduced. The real colonial master is now poverty, poverty, and it comes in the person of the Minister of Finance and his colleagues. And, Minister, this analysis is neither sterile nor academic. It is based on facts. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Madam Speaker, what will be the impact of the 49 per cent, almost 50 per cent, increase in diesel fuel? Every aspect of commercial activity will be affected by this increase. Perhaps only the 2.8 per cent of people earning above \$15,000 a month will be able to withstand the shock. And the result of such inequities in income, the potential loss of jobs, the rise in the cost of living that is now

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[DR. RAMBACHAN]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

inevitable will see an upsurge in criminal activity and deteriorating social status. Madam Speaker, none of us want that, none of us what that. [*Desk thumping*] And I want to, on behalf of our party, I want to say categorically that we will support the Government and support legislation that deals with criminal activity in the country, but you must bring good legislation.

And, Madam Speaker, on the 28<sup>th</sup> of September, 2017 that assurance was given in letter to Dr. Keith Rowley Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago by the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar; it was given. [*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. Member:** When he said, “We did not reply”. [*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. Member:** “Yuh cyar” find it. [*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. Member:** Go and give it to Ian Alleyne.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** You probably cannot find it here.

**Dr. S. Rambachan:** No. I read it in here, it is just that I cannot find it now, but I read it in here, where we said we will support legislation, we will support legislation. I will ask somebody to find it and I will read it later now, but it is there, it is there in the letter.

Madam Speaker, the Government has proven itself of be insufficient in the fight against crime, insufficient. It is almost like Schultz in that comedy/drama that says, “I hear nothing, I see nothing and therefore, I do nothing”. [*Desk thumping*] *Hogan’s Heroes*. Look it here.

As indicated on many occasions previously, the Opposition will support legislation that is in the best interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago in that it is constitutional and which provides the necessary protections and safeguards to prevent abuse of fundamental rights and the exercise of arbitrary powers. [*Desk thumping*]

You cannot have a more comprehensive statement of commitment on the part of the Opposition and that is a statement of patriotism and that is a statement of cooperation, and that is a statement that we will engage in diplomacy with the Government in order to ensure that the rights of citizens are protected in this country and that crime is removed from the face of Trinidad and Tobago, and that has come under the signature of the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

What the Members of the PNM want to hear is that we say, “we aint supporting you, we aint supporting you”. No. No. No. We are in this together and we know the value of unity in fighting crime together [*Desk thumping*] in the country.

Madam Speaker, therefore, at this stage I do not think anyone can take any comfort in the new announcement made by the Minister of National Security, who has not proven capable and up to the task. In a country in which, according to the Minister of Finance when he spoke here, said that the per capita income is still approximately US \$17,000, only 10.3 per cent, Mr. Minister of Finance, earn over \$9,000 a month and this why at a personal level and I repeat, a personal level, I have very great difficulty with people proposing devaluation. I, my personal position is that the poor will not be able to withstand the burden of a devaluation in the country which imports and depends for, at least, about 80 per cent of what it requires.

Listen, I have heard the arguments of the manufacturers in terms of export competitiveness, but the manufacturers are not talking about how they can improve their internal efficiencies and become competitive. You just do not improve your competitiveness by devaluing the dollar, you have to deal with internal efficiencies also, and that is a matter of management in their companies. I have heard the arguments of economists and their urge to devalue; I have heard the demand and supply argument, the dollar will slip because we just do not have the wherewithal to earn the foreign exchange to support a very strong appetite for foreign goods and services. However, we can do better in the matter of foreign exchange if we do certain things.

The Government should be examining the sources of capital flight in the country at this moment; the Government should be examining whether the values of goods being imported are being over-invoiced, that should be done. You can go on the Net and find out whether, in fact, people are over-invoicing their goods, you must look carefully. And this is why the Minister, the current Minister of Trade and Industry is a failure. [*Desk thumping*] The current Minister of Trade and Industry should be looking at goods and services which can be substituted. And to all those high-paid people she has around her must be looking at alternative sources of supply of raw materials into the country that can do the same job and save foreign exchange.

The Government should be looking at the workings of the parallel market for US dollars and the leakage that this is causing in terms of foreign exchange not being acquired by formal financial institutions. We should implement serious programmes in tourism as agriculture as part of the diversification thrust. And I will come to tourism to show you who destroyed tourism especially in Tobago and I will ask whether it is the Les Coteaux “jumbie” that has done that. [*Desk thumping*]

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[DR. RAMBACHAN]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

We should be encouraging savings in Trinidad and Tobago in US dollars by our diaspora; we should be funding entrepreneurs who can be part of the import substitution strategy, Madam Speaker; we should be encouraging people not to go to the US for holidays, but go to soft countries, go to the Caribbean, use more EC dollars, save on US dollars.

Madam Speaker, and Mr. Prime Minister, I was looking through all the lists of loans that exist in the country at this point in time and you have some loans there that are as high as 10 per cent interest rate and so on still. Why is it that we have not gone about restructuring those loans at this stage and restructuring them in such a way that we get the benefit of the lower interest rates that are available in the country at this point in time? Are they so tied up that we cannot deal with that and we cannot engage in restructuring?

Madam Speaker, we should consider launching a citizen-driven economic restraint strategy which will involve savings in US dollars. So there are many things that we can do besides simply devaluating the dollar, because what will happen to that 77 per cent who are getting under \$6,000 a month, how will they live, Madam Speaker, how will they live? We are in this together.

And when the former Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition, said in the letter that we are in it to support you on crime, laws that are constitutional and defend the rights of citizens, this too is part of our strategy and commitment. So do not try to paint us as unpatriotic as you are trying to do, we are nationalists, [*Desk thumping*] and if we are not nationalists I would not be standing here and providing all of these ideas this morning to deal with this situation in this country, because we said that we are going to come here in this budget debate and contribute to national development through our ideas. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, the Government has suggested that it is on the path of diversification and have identified sport, leisure tourism, agriculture, yachting, creative industries, amongst others. We have to ask ourselves certain questions: Why, for example, is our agricultural production floundering, why? Why is it? The Government says it want to double agricultural production. There is a vast difference between how the Government is approaching agriculture and how the former Prime Minister approached agriculture. Vision comes from your language, your language projects your first vision.

And one of the things, the first things, that the former Prime Minister did when she named her Ministry, she had a Ministry of Food Production. [*Desk thumping*] That is a vast difference to saying Ministry of Agriculture because you are focusing the mind of the country that we need to become self-sufficient in

food and that we need to produce enough to process. Our problem might not be that we cannot produce, you know, we need also to process because a lot of our food that we import is processed food, but can we encourage our people to eat more local foods in terms of more healthy foods that we are producing?

Madam Speaker, why can Costa Rican farmers produce three to four times more the amount of tomatoes on one acre of land than Trinidad and Tobago? That is happening. The technology is there, but what is the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries doing to import the technology? What are they doing? Let me give you an example. They say they want to cut the food import bill. If you cut the food import bill then you have to cut the bill on soya and corn because those are the two of the major ingredients into growing chicken in the country. Right?

Madam Speaker, for how long in this country has the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries been trying to grow corn? Everything is an experiment for the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries; everything is an experiment, an experiment, an experiment. What are those high-paid research officers, I am not attacking the public servants, but, you see, the time has come in this country to call a spade a spade. The time has come in this country to tell people get down and do your work, get down and do your work. And what are the research officers doing? Why is it, what has happened to the agreement under the memorandum of understanding established by the former Prime Minister when she visited Brazil and got Embrapa and the Brazilian Government to agree through Caricom to set up a model farm in Trinidad in order to help produce even a brand of soya that would grow in our soils here in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Is it that when the PNM comes into office the people who are dealing with all, say, "Boy, now is time to relax, now is time to relax". That is the difference between a working government and a government that does not work. [*Desk thumping*] And the PNM has to deal with that, they have to deal with that. That is where part of the productivity is.

Madam Speaker, what is the University of the West Indies doing in terms of research and development? What are they doing in terms of research and development? Oh, they are boasting on today's paper about the genes. Well, the genes existed way before the university came about under the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture in cocoa. They existed way before that.

But what has the university done in order to work with the cocoa farmers and cocoa producers in order to develop quality chocolates? What has the Ministry of Trade and Industry done to take those fledgling chocolate manufacturers down in

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[DR. RAMBACHAN]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

Gran Couva, and otherwise, the Montserrat Cooperative and to go out there as the Minister of Trade and Industry and find a firm out there somewhere who are expert at chocolate manufacturing and bring them to lend their technology so that we cannot just export cocoa beans, but export chocolate. [*Desk thumping*]

I am told by the cocoa farmers, and by a young man called Tranel Ghany down there, a young man in his mid-twenties. He said to me, they are exporting a cocoa bean for about US \$5,000 a container when we could export chocolate for about 20 to 30 times that; that is produced in that area.

**11.30 a.m.**

Madam Speaker, we need to move therefore from experimentation. Everything in this country is an experiment. We need to move—I am fed up of it—from experimentation by making an instantaneous leap into the world of production. [*Desk thumping*] We need to move where everything is on hold, and everything is a dialogue, to a state of doing, and making it happen. That is why I used the Indian term, “Ullu ka pattha”, “we must stop being foolish” in this country. We need a cultural revolution in this country. That is the paradigm we need, a cultural revolution, a shift in attitudes. The Minister speaks of a new paradigm. Mr. Minister, a new paradigm is a function of having purposeful objectives in your country—to work with, purposeful objectives, Mr. Minister.

You know, Margaret Thatcher, as she worked tirelessly to change the fortunes of Great Britain, once said:

“Prosperity comes not from grand conferences of economists but by countless acts of personal self-confidence and self-reliance.”

And unless this country is united around a purposeful set of objectives, unless this country is imbued with a firm resolve, and unless the Government can articulate the strategy in which people have faith, nothing will change.

Madam Speaker, the problem is that the Government cannot inspire, and has not been inspiring the population. [*Desk thumping*] And that is the leadership deficit that exists in the current Government. The Ministers in the PNM have not demonstrated the intellectual prowess, some say vision, as well as the management skills to make a difference. So, Madam Speaker, what are the new paradigms around purposeful objectives? I would say that they are not your typical social and economic objectives. I would say what we need in this country—and this UNC, what we would have done, is that we would have created a commitment, through the dynamic leadership that was given to this country between 2000 and 2015 by Kamla Persad-Bissessar. [*Desk thumping*]



We made a commitment from all and sundry that acknowledges that we are all in this together, and the willingness to share the burden and make the sacrifices. We would have gotten people to commit to that. This requires a leadership that is capable of inspiring right action. What you need is a commitment to use more locally produced products and services, saving foreign exchange. The food producers must be supported by the Ministry of Agriculture, Lands and Fisheries. You must have a commitment to kill the bureaucracy and quicken the pace of decision-making. Public service attitudes to getting things done more speedily must change.

Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister keeps heckling me across, and says the Tabaquite initiative. Yes, I am a developer, and I have been a developer, in this country, of houses since 1983, back in business with my father since 1966. [*Desk thumping*] And I wrote the Minister of Finance, and I wrote the hon. Prime Minister, and I am happy to say that they acceded to some of the things that I said, and that they listened. And one of what I said is that, in the rural districts because of that 77 per cent who cannot buy a house or own a house, you must be able to give them an opportunity to stop paying rent, stop being renters, and have a rental vision, and now have an ownership vision, and allow people to build four apartments on a 5,000 square foot of land. So that they can buy an apartment in one of those buildings and pay back a mortgage using the 2 per cent mortgage at about \$2,500 to \$2,600 a month. The same money they are now paying in rent. And he calls it a Tabaquite initiative, and I am happy to accept it as a Tabaquite initiative.

**Hon. Member:** Well done. Well done.

**Dr. S. Rambachan:** I want to say, Madam Speaker, that it is not going to work unless you do something about Town and Country Planning and the approval process. I know the Prime Minister says he has taken a committee to do that.

But, Mr. Prime Minister, people at Town and Country Planning take two months before they give you a reply when you submit a plan. Two months. They have it put up on a thing in San Fernando. Then, when they give you a reply, if there is a problem, it takes another two months before you fix it. Four months gone. One month, at least, at the CMOH department, one month at the regional corporation, six months before a house starts in this country, and you want to advance construction. The big projects are not the only things that are going to advance construction. What is going to advance construction and improve the quality of life, and put small contactors to work, is to reduce and kill that

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[DR. RAMBACHAN]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

bureaucracy that is killing the housing construction in the country. [*Desk thumping*] And we need to do something about it. That is the difference with a government of action that was the People's Partnership, and a government of inaction, that is the PNM Government. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, you need to have a commitment to change the service culture and boost tourism as a foreign exchange earner and a source of job, especially in Tobago, where the siesta-work attitude must be banished. Madam Speaker, let us take tourism as an area of diversification, the Government is speaking of diversification. Who destroyed tourism in Tobago? Who destroyed it? The Les Coteaux "jumbie"? Who turned around the Calcutta ship and said you did not want the Calcutta ship there, that your hotels are now empty? Who is responsible for delivering quality service to visitors? Tobago has to take responsibility. Go to the THA documents and you will see that every year under transport, tourism and culture, up to \$162 million are allocated by the THA. So multiply that by eight years or six years and you have a billion dollars. A billion dollars spent by the THA, and today the hotels are empty and business properties are being sold out and so on.

I wrote on the blogs that the Government should intervene and support those businesses in Tobago. I wrote that on the blog, and I am happy to see that the Government has initiated that. We stand for the protection of business and private enterprise, because without private enterprise we cannot run this country. [*Desk thumping*] The Government cannot do it, and therefore the facilitating environment—when people like those small business operators in Tobago, when the banks are coming down on their backs, I would even suggest that the Government consider buying some shares into those businesses so that they could be run. You talked about small and medium-sized enterprises, let us take Agricultural Development Bank, you want to expand agriculture, Agricultural Development Bank is lending money and so on, but small business also needs management. Why is it instead of lending them all the money the ADB does not go into a joint venture with them so that they can lift them off the ground as incubators, and once they are flowing then you can let them buy back the shares. You have to think in alternative ways to develop while you secure the existing businesses and grow new businesses in the country.

Madam Speaker, we talked about—for THA, THA in my view is making a joke of public sector money, you know. And I am saying this, I have no fear of saying this: the THA has to be examined very carefully. You cannot spend \$160 million a year in culture, transport and tourism, and you are not getting benefits for Tobago, you know. The taxpayers are paying for that. It is coming from the coffers of Trinidad and Tobago, and they have to answer in Tobago as to why this has happened.

**Hon. Member:** They have no accounts for the Auditor General for how many years.

**Dr. S. Rambachan:** Yes. Madam Speaker, the accounts for the Auditor General, that has to be submitted. When it is submitted, it is so long after.

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Member, your original 55 minutes—45 minutes are now spent, you are entitled to 10 more minutes. You may proceed if you wish.

**Dr. S. Rambachan:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, we talked about the fashion industry. The fashion industry. “Yeah.” We talked about the fashion industry. This is a fashion conscious society, you know. A fashion conscious society. You know, what we have to do if you really think about it, is encourage more fashion presentations in the country. You see, fashion is not about importing fashion, you know. Fashion is about adding value to the cloth that you import, so you spend much less money in what you import, save foreign exchange, but you add the value here. And we have very, very good designers in this country. Very, very good designers in this country. Adding value, and that is what we should be asking all the way along.

Madam Speaker, the issue of diversification has to be answered with the following question: How are we positioning Trinidad and Tobago to be a relevant economy in the emerging world? I do not think that the Government has asked that question. Secondly, what it is that the world needs? And I think this is the more important question. What it is that the world needs which Trinidad and Tobago can offer or Trinidad and Tobago can produce? What it is the world needs? Thirdly, what strategic alliances can be forged utilizing our resource base and the technology available by foreign partners to maximize export capacity? Sometimes the answer to your problem is in the question that you ask, and those questions are not being asked by the planners in the country. Madam Speaker, how are we differentiating even that which we produce now? Take tourism for example, what do we keep advertising? We keep advertising a destination while everybody is advertising a destination. Madam Speaker, we should be advertising an experience. [*Desk thumping*] What is the experience we are marketing? What is the experience we are marketing? We have to market an experience for our people.

Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance, in my closing few minutes, is hedging his bets on an increase in energy prices and an upsurge in energy sector. He is hedging his bet on the collection of Clico funds, he is hedging his bet on the sale of assets. Madam Speaker, we have seen that he predicted \$52 for a barrel of

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[DR. RAMBACHAN]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

oil and \$3.25 for gas. The oil has gone down below \$50, so there is thus dubious to start. The matter of collection of Clico funds, that is a one-time affair. And if it is not collected, what will be your position? But if it is collected, perhaps it will close the fiscal deficit for this year. But what would happen thereafter? What will happen the next years? Unless you have a sustainable base of revenue that you are generating into the country.

Madam Speaker, I go back to one thing. Education is one of our global strengths. That is what we are known for. Can we diversify by attracting a medical school in Trinidad? Can we do that? What other downstream products can we produce out of methanol rather than to export it? Madam Speaker, we have the private sector, and we need the private sector to invest, but they will not invest if they continue to have a low level of confidence in the economy, and on the other hand, if they continue to be as risk-averse as they are. But I want to take up the matter of confidence. Business confidence is an outcome of confidence in the Government of the day, in the administration, and people have lost confidence in this Government. Why are people packing up their capital? Why is there capital flight? Why are so many people wanting to migrate? And let us really deal with business closures.

Madam Speaker, in terms of collection of revenue, the Government predicted that it will collect taxes on income and profits in 2017. I am not talking about 2018, eh, 2017, of \$16,135,802,000. I want to take one item. Collection of individual taxes—income taxes and so on. They estimated that they would have collected \$7,034,307,000. Madam Speaker, you know how much they estimated they collected? Six billion four hundred and three million three hundred and thirty-nine thousand. A fall of \$631,000,000 in the collection of income taxes, Madam Opposition Leader. What does this reflect? Is it that people are not returning their income taxes? Or is it that the level of unemployment is much higher than is reported, and that the taxes to be collected are not being collected? What is the truth? So it seems to me that more people have lost their jobs and the income tax that is to be paid by companies is not being paid.

Online purchases: you said you would collect \$70 million, you only collected \$23.8 million for the year. So, in so many cases the Government is failing. Missing their targets.

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** Missed their targets.

**Dr. S. Rambachan:** Missed their targets. Every target they have missed.

Madam Speaker, the objective of this Government is really the retention of political power. And if this means that they have to blame Kamla or Mala, then so be it. That is what they will do. So be it. So be it. The people will reject this very soon. Only sycophants are going to believe you after a while, but the people are going to reject it. The people are not going to listen to this diatribe for very long again. The people are fed up. The people are, at this time, to ask us not to debate the past but to create the future of prosperity for all of us.

Madam Speaker, I want to know, from the Minister of Finance, whether the credit unions and also the Unit Trust Corporation are subject to the 30 per cent tax. I want to know whether they are also subject to the 30 per cent tax. Because we have seen hundreds of thousands of people who have invested in credit unions and have invested in Unit Trust. Unit Trust was supposed to be the saving institution, the financial prosperity growing instruments for a number of poor people. Madam Speaker, in 1990—I believe it was about there—I placed some money in Unit Trust. I was able to use it when it grew to educate my daughter in London. So I know the value of Unit Trust. Are you placing a tax also on Unit Trust? Are you placing a tax on Unit Trust? Give you a quick answer?

**Mr. Imbert:** No.

**Dr. S. Rambachan:** No, thank you. So that is good. So that those people at Unit Trust—but you did not say that in your budget presentation. So, maybe by my raising it now I have saved the incomes of hundreds of thousands of people's dollars. [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*]. We have saved it, Madam Opposition Leader. We have stood again for the benefit of the poor man in the country. The Opposition is doing its job. [*Desk thumping*] The Opposition is showing the influence, and we want to assure all those people out there that the time is going to come soon again when we would put prosperity back into your hands.

Madam Speaker, also credit unions. I heard nothing in the budget about credit unions. Credit unions are important source of income for people. When people cannot get money borrowed in the bank, it is to the credit unions they go. And if they cannot go to the credit unions they would have had to go to those moneylenders, and money sharks, and so on, the one who charge 35 per cent interest, Madam Speaker. So we should be doing everything as a Government to grow the credit union sector and to strengthen the credit union sector so it can assist those people who find themselves now at the mercy of the banks where they cannot even open an account in the bank, the amount of things that the bank ask them to get to open an account.

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[DR. RAMBACHAN]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

Madam Speaker, this Government has failed also to implement its PSIP. It has failed miserably to implement its PSIP. [*Desk thumping*] Had I had the time I would go into the figures to show you exactly how much they have not implemented—

**Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:** They failed to implement their fiscal measures as well.

**Dr. S. Rambachan:** Yes, as well. What are they doing? What did you do with the \$9 billion you collected in oil taxes? What did you do with it? Where has the money gone? You used to ask us where the money gone, now tell us where the money gone. At least we know and we can show you, schools and hospitals [*Desk thumping*] and we can show you highways, and we can show you all kinds of things that were done in the country. We have physical, visible evidence of what we did in this country and how people prospered under a People's Partnership Government. What have you got to show?

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Nothing.

**Dr. S. Rambachan:** What have you got the show? So, blame Kamla. Continue to blame Kamla. Continue to blame the PP, but that conversation as of this moment is over. The conversation is now, what can you do or what have you done for the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago? [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I want to say, that people are in distress in this country. They are in distress. And I do hope and pray that the Government is not taking the people for granted, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I want to tell the Government to break this analysis paralysis mode which has become a cultural characteristic of the PNM Government. I want to tell them to remove the disincentives to development in an era in which they may not be able to give additional incentives.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Tabaquite, your speaking time is now spent.

**Dr. S. Rambachan:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

**The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Randall Mitchell):** Madam Speaker, I want to thank for recognizing me, and I also want to thank you for the opportunity to join and contribute to this debate on the Appropriation Bill, 2017.

Madam Speaker, this is my third budget debate, 2017. [*Interruption*] This is my third budget debate and, along with my colleagues, I would like the opportunity to congratulate the Minister of Finance and his team [*Desk thumping*] for his presentation of a very responsible 2018 budget. Madam Speaker, I also would like to extend my gratitude to the Minister of Planning and Development for her close

and diligent work [*Desk thumping*] throughout the financial year, in assisting the Ministry of Finance, in planning and coming up with this budget. I think it is appropriate at this time, coming after the Member for Tabaquite, to speak to the status of the private developers applying for certificates of income tax exemptions for the construction of low cost housing. These developers would have expressed significant confidence in this Government in partnering in the construction of low-cost housing in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, I have four developers, and I would like to congratulate them: Lange Holdings Limited of Montrose Place, Lange Park, Chaguanas; West Hills Development Limited; Caribbean Housing Limited; and Madam Speaker, Mr. Surujrattan Rambachan, our colleague right here. So, Madam Speaker, at least 24 persons in this House are expressing confidence in this Government, and the Member for Tabaquite is one of them, Madam Speaker. [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, may I also remind the Member for Tabaquite that the PP ran five deficit budgets. Madam Speaker, the Member for Tabaquite was not concerned at that point in time. It did not seem so. May I remind that when the UNC came into office, in their first year of office they sent home almost 5,000 contract workers. [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Member:** Ten.

**Hon. R. Mitchell:** Ten thousand by December. The Member for Tabaquite was not concerned about that.

Madam Speaker, concerning the Keith Subero article, the Member for Tabaquite needs to acquaint himself with wit and satire [*Desk thumping*] and other literary devices. And speaking of experiments, the biggest experiment, the biggest failed experiment that this country has seen, was the PP Government between 2010 and 2015. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, we now have to steady the ship. I must also express on behalf of the people of San Fernando East, to really thank the hon. Prime Minister for his strength and fortitude in leading this Government and this country at this time. [*Desk thumping*] And, Madam Speaker, as I speak about the constituency of San Fernando East, I also have to signal that it is truly an honour to represent a noble and decent people that make up the constituency of San Fernando East. [*Desk thumping*]

And, Madam Speaker, in this budget year there are three projects, and I must in particular express my gratitude to the respective Ministers. Madam Speaker, I must say thank you to the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, for taking charge of the golf club and the staff club at St. Madeleine, which is located in San Fernando East. This facility once belonged to Caroni, and was not available to the general public. It was just available to the managers of Caroni (1975) Limited. Madam Speaker, I

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[HON. R. MITCHELL]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

remember back in the day, not everybody could use the facility, and as a young person I would travel to that vicinity, and run in and jump in the pool, and of course be thrown out. So now, Madam Speaker, I want to say that my wish is that this initiative of the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs can now allow for young people of San Fernando East, of Princes Town, of Moruga, they can now be exposed to the game of golf, they can now be exposed to tennis, they can now be exposed to swimming.

And, Madam Speaker, I have noticed that the Leader of the Opposition takes strong objection to the game of golf, and she spoke quite disparagingly about this initiative. But, Madam Speaker, while at the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications, I came across a document. It was a MoU between the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development and CEPEP Company Limited, and that MoU was signed in 2014, and it was for the development and maintenance of this facility. And, Madam Speaker, I wonder if the Member for Siparia knows that CEPEP spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to maintain that facility so that one of her Ministers and his friends could learn to play the game of golf to the exclusion of all others—*[Interruption]*

**Dr. Francis:** Who was that Minister? Who is that? Who is that? Name them.

**Hon. R. Mitchell:** The Minister is a constituent. *[Laughter]* Madam Speaker, I also want to thank the Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts. I want to thank the Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts for coming into the constituency and doing some improvement works to the Pleasantville Community Centre, as well as to construct the new Tarodale Community Centre.

Madam Speaker, let me now turn to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, and report on the activities of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development over the course of the year. Madam Speaker, it is useful to restate that the Ministry carries out the national housing policy, and is mandated to provide quality affordable housing solutions for the citizens of this country. It carries out its mandate by reference to the three pillars of affordability, accessibility, and the improvement to the standard of living and the quality of life to citizens. The Ministry of Housing is not just about building houses, like some on the other side would want you to believe. It is really about affordable shelter and the delivery of affordable housing solutions. And the Ministry has a number of programmes, whether it be the grants programme, squatter regularization, the affordable mortgage programmes, to assist all citizens, on their own, in getting them to affordable shelter.



Madam Speaker, let me turn to the Home Improvement Grant. The Home Improvement Grant, the Ministry focuses on the vulnerable citizens and offers a \$15,000 grant so that citizens can improve their standard of living. It is really geared towards the low-income earners. During fiscal 2017, as at September the 30<sup>th</sup>, 705 grants were distributed to needy low-income families for 100 per cent utilization. Madam Speaker, the programme, we have improved the efficiency in running the programme, and we have improved the time between the application and the distribution of the grant. Madam Speaker, we will continue to ensure equity in the delivery of this programme so that grants can now be distributed all across Trinidad and Tobago, and not just in the south and central regions as happened between the years 2010 to 2015.

Madam Speaker, we thank God that our country was spared the devastating effects [*Desk thumping*] of Hurricanes Irma and Maria, and we sympathize with our Caricom neighbours. But, Madam Speaker, we did, however, experience the adverse effects of Tropical Storm Bret, and other periods of inclement weather during fiscal 2017. And, Madam Speaker, there is a \$15,000 emergency grant, the Emergency Shelter Relief Grant offered by the Ministry, that provides assistance to the affected families. It provides assistance so that immediately on receipt of the grant that low income needy and affected family can begin to start some form of repair.

Madam Speaker, during fiscal 2017, the Ministry provided 64 emergency shelter relief grants. Twenty-four grants were provided to victims of fire, 37 grants were provided to victims of natural hazards and flooding, inclement weather, et cetera, and three to persons who experienced landslips. And, Madam Speaker, on the receipt of these grants, those needy families were able to start the rebuilding process. The Ministry also provides matching home improvement and home construction subsidies through the neighbourhood upgrading programme, which is supported by an IDB loan, the loan and programme, it comes to end in December 2017. But, Madam Speaker, over the past year I am happy to report that 317 families received home improvement subsidies, and 249 families received home construction subsidies. These grants and subsidy initiatives are really geared toward low-income families. And, Madam Speaker, the grants and subsidies to the tunes of tens of millions of dollars really go a long way to improving the living conditions of these families. But more than that, they also direct the—sorry, they also impact the lives of the small contractors, the small hardwares who also benefit, and they are allowed to participate in the economy, through the application and the implementation of these grant programmes.

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[HON. R. MITCHELL]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

Madam Speaker, let me turn now to the accelerated housing programme. Our most popular programme. The accelerated housing programme is a product of PNM policy, and came into being in 2002. Back then, Madam Speaker, the PNM recognized that Government had a responsibility to assist low and middle income earners who would not otherwise have been able to purchase a home on the open market with affordable housing solutions. This Government, as with the last PNM Government, understands only too well that shelter is not simply about distributing a home to a family, but it is also a catalyst for alleviating poverty, reducing crime, empowering our citizens and improving the quality of life.

**12.00 noon**

Madam Speaker, at this point in time, I would like to say thank you, to the new man, the chairman of the HDC and the board of directors of the HDC, and I would also like to thank all the new men and women who have joined the HDC, and those who are contributing to implementing our housing programme.

Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition had quite a number of disparaging things to say about this Government's administration of the housing programme, and, Madam Speaker, allow me to take them one by one. The Member for Siparia said, not once, but a record five times, "They have not built one single house in two years". In the last month, the HDC would have sent out mass emails to everyone on the database, 174,000 of them to show what we have been doing over the past year, and, in particular, we showed the housing developments that would have been started by this administration. In Gomez Trace, in River Runs Through, in particular, in River Runs Through in Arima, and in the video they showed footage of all the units that are presently built. So, close to 174,000 people on the database now know the Member for Siparia's affinity for the untruth. [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Members:** "Oooh!"

**Dr. Khan:** 48(6).

**Madam Speaker:** If you could just restate that in another way and we can move on.

**Hon. R. Mitchell:** Madam Speaker, 174,000 persons now know that the Member for Siparia does not know what she is talking about. [*Desk thumping*] But I also had the opportunity to pull the records, the construction records, of the PP's record of building and the completion of housing units. The first three housing projects started by the PP Government was Fairfield, Oasis and Cypress Gardens.

Madam Speaker, they came into office in May 2010, and let me now read for you, the delivery record of the PP. In 2011, no housing units delivered; in 2012, no housing units delivered. In 2013, they started to get a few housing units completed in Cypress Gardens. Madam Speaker, it means that only late in their third year did they start to complete housing units. The Member for Siparia, further, does not know what she is talking about. [*Desk thumping*] The Member for Siparia also said that we terminated work at several HDC estates. This is also untrue. Not only are we continuing the construction of all the estates, we have restarted work on housing developments started pre-2010, as far back as 2005, left to rot by the PP Government.

Madam Speaker, the Member for Siparia said that eight out of 10 persons want to buy a house and not rent. I recognize that it is the dream of many persons to own their own home. Similarly, I understand that it is the dream of many persons to own their own car. But that is simply not the reality when considering the financial circumstances of many persons. Many persons are not in a financial position to own their own homes or own their own car.

Madam Speaker, the rental option is the only viable option at the time until they improve their financial circumstances. It is about safe and secure shelter and not so much about owning the home. The Member for Siparia also says that her Government is about—it believes in a home owning democracy. May I remind the Member for Siparia that the Accelerated Housing Programme was born out of PNM policy. [*Desk thumping*] So too was the Rent to Own programme, Madam Speaker, and TTMF's affordable mortgage programmes.

During their tenure in office, the People's Partnership raised the maximum household income ceiling from \$25,000 to \$45,000. So which owners or which citizens were they looking after in producing their home ownership democracy? The rich? We in the PNM believe in a right to adequate housing democracy. We believe in a right to a roof over your head democracy; whether it be a rental accommodation or outright purchase. [*Desk thumping*] The Member for Siparia said that the PNM intends to keep persons in bondage by renting. Madam Speaker, again, these housing programmes were born out of PNM policy geared towards getting persons who would not have otherwise been able to purchase a home to get a home, the Rent to Own programme, the affordable mortgage programme, Madam Speaker.

The Member for Siparia said, the return to the old model of asking non-builders to build could result in the disbandment of HDC through 1,400 public officers on the breadline. Madam Speaker, I do not even know what that means, but it sounds like scaremongering to me. The HDC still has its significant role to play in the design,

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[HON. R. MITCHELL]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

in receiving applications, in the new housing initiatives. The private sector is now being called upon simply to fund the construction. The Member for Siparia said Government is handing over the housing portfolio to individuals in the private sector. Well, Madam Speaker, Governments past and present have always hired private contractors to construct housing units in Government's housing programme. With these further incentives we now offer contractors and developers, we are asking the private sector to fund the construction, where in the past Government would have provided all the funding. The HDC will still be involved in the design, pricing and allocation of applicants to the constructed units. So it is still a partnership between the public sector and private sector.

Madam Speaker, the Member for Siparia said private developers to be registered by a new committee chaired by the PM and that reeks of political interference. Madam Speaker, the significance of this Government's new housing initiative, as the Member for Tabaquite just indicated, there is a long bureaucracy in obtaining statutory and regulatory approvals. The Prime Minister will chair a committee of all the regulatory agencies to treat with the quick processing of regulatory approvals, another misrepresentation.

Madam Speaker, let us talk about the housing construction programme over the last two years. It is necessary to put things into perspective, into context as it relates to funding of the Government's housing programme over the last two years, as compared with the PP's tenure in office. Madam Speaker, do you know that the PP's first two years in office they spent \$1.2 billion in the Development Programme in housing at the HDC alone. In 2011 they spent \$570 million. In 2012 they spent \$528 million. Over the five-year period they spent \$4.4 billion. Madam Speaker, by comparison we have had some significant reduction in revenues. We have had to spend in 2016, \$165 million and in 2017, \$231 million.

So, Madam Speaker, when they speak about performance, especially in the housing sector, one must consider the funding arrangements, but that is not to make any excuse at all because at the Ministry, and I have to thank the Permanent Secretary, members and staff of the Ministry for all adopting the motto that we must do much more now with much less. For fiscal 2017, the HDC completed work on four housing developments, in Malick, Fairfield, Victoria Keyes in Diego Martin and Exchange in Couva for a total of 1,089 housing units. [*Crosstalk*] Madam, Speaker, I am being disturbed by the Member for Caroni East.

**Madam Speaker:** The Member for Caroni East—

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Yes, Ma'am.

**Madam Speaker:**—could you kindly—[*Interruption*]

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** Take a walk.

**Madam Speaker:** Thank you very much. Member for San Fernando East.

**Hon. R. Mitchell:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. We also restarted and we were able to restart all the HDC's stalled projects; stalled between the years 2010 to 2015. [*Desk thumping*] Some of these projects have been started up to 12 years ago. We believe that these unfinished stalled developments must go to those for whom they were being built. We have resumed work on Real Springs in Valsayn; Vieux Fort, St. James; Lake View in Point Fortin; and Carlsen Field and Malabar in Arima. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, the HDC has also started work on new development in Bon Air South; Corinth; Trestrail and Moruga. The HDC now has a total of 23 developments under construction at various stages in construction with a total yield of about 2,600 housing units and that would cost to complete about \$2.7 billion. The HDC will continue to play its part to stimulate the economy and to create much needed employment for the tradesmen, unskilled workers and the local economy that it can stimulate.

Key Distributions. For fiscal 2017, we were able to distribute 1,258 housing units to deserving families, many of them going last year Christmas time in our 1,000 homes by Christmas initiative. Madam Speaker, they were much more than key distribution ceremonies. We invited members of the private sector, service providers, Flow, Digicel, as well as Courts, Standard, et cetera, to come and speak to the key recipients to assist them in getting their homes running. Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development intends to allocate and distribute an additional 500 to 700 units by December 2017.

Madam Speaker, I must also remind this honourable House that it was a PNM Government that took the policy decision to approve a 10 per cent allocation to members of the Joint Protective Services for all public housing distributions. As promised, we have restarted the Joint Protective Services Housing Committee which comprises of representatives of all the various arms of the protective services, along with members from the Ministry of National Security. The committee coordinates to ensure that members of the protective services who are most in need are able to secure safe and comfortable accommodation according to the policy. Since February 2017, the committee has convened and begun its work and for fiscal 2017, 118 members of the protective service have been allocated housing. We will continue, Madam Speaker, in fiscal 2018, to ensure that the members of the protective services receive their just allocation. [*Desk thumping*]

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[HON. R. MITCHELL]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

Madam Speaker, I turn to the issue of revenue collection. Having regard to our massive shortfall in funding at the HDC, Madam Speaker, the agency has had to turn to other sources of revenue generation. Madam Speaker, the HDC continues to work very closely with the TTMF on its mortgage caravan initiative which seeks to ensure and encourage householders who are on licences-to-occupy agreements and RTO agreements, Rent-to-Own agreements, to convert their accounts to mortgages according to the terms of their agreements.

Over fiscal 2017, Madam Speaker, the HDC has converted 843 LTO and RTO accounts. These conversions brought in \$317 million and since the start of the initiative, the HDC would have collected over \$550 million in mortgage conversions, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] And this money goes a long way in funding Government's housing programme. We will continue to step up our efforts to convert some 4,000 accounts and receive some \$2.4 billion in outstanding revenue so that we can complete our outstanding projects.

Madam Speaker, I turn now to delinquencies. It was revealed in April of this year that the HDC was owed arrears from the rental payments from tenants to the tune of \$106million. Since then, Madam Speaker, during fiscal 2017, the HDC has put some improved measures in place to reduce the occurrence of delinquent payments and notwithstanding the amounts owed to the HDC, is still being relatively high, the HDC was able to collect \$103 million on the delinquent accounts.

In fiscal 2018, the HDC will continue in its efforts to reduce the delinquency rates and ensure that tenants continue to pay their monthly rents on time. And, Madam Speaker, the HDC will continue to take its revenue collection efforts very seriously. This is the way we are going to fund our housing programme as well as our maintenance programme in the years to come.

I turn to TTF. In February 2017, the Ministry of Housing carried out a 2017 budget measure announced by the Minister of Finance to make residential mortgages more affordable to a greater number of citizens. The effect of this measure was to expand the affordable mortgages programme offered by the TTMF. In fiscal 2017, Madam Speaker, 332 persons would have been able to access the 5 per cent mortgage facility and 621 persons would have been able to access the 2 per cent mortgage facility. By comparison with the previous Government, between the entire period of 2011 to 2015, for those four years under the People's Partnership, in the 2 per cent mortgage programme for the four years cumulatively, Madam Speaker, the TTMF was only able to provide 357 loans.

Madam Speaker, you compare 357 loans over a four-year period under the PP, to 474 loans in 2016 alone under the PNM [*Desk thumping*] and 621 alone in 2017 under the PNM. Almost all of these persons accessing TTMF mortgages would have been the beneficiaries of HDC housing. And, Madam Speaker, again I am referring to the Member of Siparia indicating in her response to the budget that her Government believes in a home owning democracy. But, is it not inconsistent to say that your Government believes in a home owning democracy when the number showed that only a very small number of individuals acquired mortgages and just less persons, a small number of persons were able to get the deeds to their properties during the period 2011 to 2015.

Madam Speaker, on the same topic of revenue collection and this may be a topic of interest to the Member for Caroni East, we would have completed and launched very proudly the Victoria Keyes Housing Development in Diego Martin. Madam Speaker, if you recall, this project was started way back in 2005 and it was supposed to cost just about \$250 million to be completed for housing, for the low income persons in society.

In the end, Madam Speaker, the People's Partnership Government changed the scope of the project to incorporate a swimming pool, multi-storey car park, complete with elevators, tennis court, a club house, et cetera. The project ended up costing the taxpayer just about \$652 million, Madam Speaker, an escalation from \$250 million for low income earners, to \$652 million. So this Government took the decisions to offer the units of Victoria Keyes for sale on the open market. And in the last seven months the HDC would have realized sales to the value of \$106 million. The proceeds of the sales of these apartments now allow the HDC to complete long outstanding projects like Vieux Fort and other projects intended for the low and middle income earners.

Madam Speaker, in fiscal 2018 we will step up our efforts to have all these units sold so that we can receive all the revenue possible and very soon we will be inviting real estate agents to come in and assist the HDC in selling the units. Let me just quickly mention the HDC's debt to contractors. When I assumed in the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, I learned that the HDC was owing contractors up to \$800 million. With our significant efforts at revenue collection and revenue generation we are able now to pay all these contractors. Let me now turn to report on the Land for the Landless Programme.

The Member for Siparia spoke of the Land for the Landless Programme as being a hallmark programme of her Government. The Land for the Landless Programme was very simply a residential lot programme, very simply. It is a programme that would distribute to successful applicants, residential lots at a subsidized cost on the

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[HON. R. MITCHELL]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

condition that they construct a dwelling unit in a certain period of time. A service lots programme is not a stranger to Trinidad and Tobago. In the past, past governments would have done it very, very successfully. For example, Madam Speaker, in Union Hall, because Governments past and present recognize that there are certain persons who want a plot of land because they are so ambitious and so industrious that they would want to construct their housing units themselves.

Madam Speaker, the Land for the Landless Programme has had its genesis in 2012, up until 2015. I am not sure if the Member for Siparia knows that up until we assumed office in 2015, not one single applicant, not one single applicant had received a deed of lease for their land. Not one. Madam Speaker, shortly after I assumed office, I caused a review to be done of the programme and the committee reviewing the programme was made up of persons employed at the Ministry of Housing. And what they reported was a flawed and failed programme.

Madam Speaker, there were apparent beneficiaries in that programme signing agreements for land with no deposits having been first made. On the other hand, there were apparent beneficiaries making deposits and paying instalments without having first signed an agreement. It was a strict term of the agreement that beneficiaries were to construct a housing unit within two years. Yet, there were apparent beneficiaries with no source of income or an income so low that they could not even purchase the land. Worst of all, the state of being landless was a main criterion for selection to the programme yet the vast majority of apparent beneficiaries or their co-applicants were not subjected to titled searches to ensure landlessness. Madam Speaker, the programme was fraught with inconsistencies, there was little or no due diligence and there was a complete failure in the programmes execution.

Madam Speaker, it leaves me to believe that the real aim for this Land for the Landless Programme was really the handing out of contracts for the development of the service lots and not the allocation of lots to those who need it most, the beneficiaries. And that is the fundamental difference between the UNC and PNM. [*Desk thumping*] In programmes such as this, the contractor is the main focus of UNC policy, where on the other hand, the citizens seeking shelter opportunities is the center of PNM policy. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Madam Speaker, this year Cabinet approved the termination of that programme. However, notwithstanding the termination, Government has recognized the expectations of some 418 selected applicants who were at an advance stage in the programme and we have contacted all of them with a view to taking them forward. Madam Speaker, at the same time Cabinet also approved a new housing



programme to be implemented by the Ministry. This housing programme is called, the Aided Self Help Housing Programme which will in essence replace the Land for the Landless Programme. The fundamental difference between this programme and the last is that this one is planned all the way to the end and focuses on the beneficiary from the submission of a successful application all the way walking side by side assisting in the selection of housing designs, pre-approved plans, technical assistance in obtaining regulatory approvals assisting in the supplying of a pool of prequalified small contracts and further assistance with quality control and project management towards the completion of the housing unit.

Madam Speaker, the programme will be divided into a number of phases. We expect to be able to distribute about 1,000 lots in the first cycle and these lots will be offered to successful applicants at 30 per cent the market value to be determined by the Commissioner of Valuations. And, Madam Speaker, beneficiaries will be required to build in two to three years. The first phase would be the application phase where citizens will be invited to apply to the programme and the usual criteria would apply. You must be 21 years of age; you, your spouse or your co-applicant must not be the owner or co-owner of property in Trinidad and Tobago, et cetera.

Madam Speaker, in the second phase beneficiaries will be selected, agreements entered into, deposits made and deeds drawn up. In the third phase, beneficiaries will be educated and given a road map to housing that will show the way from deed of lease through to the submission of designs, to Town and Country and to the construction phase. Madam Speaker, they will be aided and assisted by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development through these very critical stages. In the fourth phase, the Ministry would assist the beneficiary towards the start of construction. This programme will also be available to persons who may possess land but still require some assistance from the Ministry, some technical assistance in terms of getting pre-approved housing plans, assistance in taking their approvals towards Town and Country. There will be a pool of prequalified contactors would also be made available to that applicant.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry has on offer, pre-approved housing designs with units that could cost as little as \$300,000. We expect this programme to be a significant success and we expect to do at least one more cycle of at least 500 lots. Madam Speaker, in the first cycle we will do about 1,000 lots. This programme we expect to ease the burden of someone—ease the burden and ease the demand on Government housing.

**Dr. Tewarie:** Will the Minister give way to a question? Will applicants who have applied under the Land for the Landless Programme be taken into account in this programme that you are proceeding with?

**Hon. R. Mitchell:** Madam Speaker, to answer the Member's question, all citizens would be invited to apply; [*Desk thumping*] all citizens would re-apply and, Madam Speaker, we expect to open the application period for just about one month or two months. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker, I am not giving way.

**Dr. Tewarie:** I just want another question clarified.

**12.30 p.m.**

**Hon. R. Mitchell:** Another programme we expect to implement over fiscal 2018 is the Home Ownership 101 Programme. This a new project. At the Ministry we believe that the road to home ownership outside the provisions of state-built housing units at the HDC could prove to be a very difficult and convoluted process. We believe that many citizens do not understand the process, or feel blocked by the bureaucracy of the regulatory agencies, as was stated by the Member for Tabaquite. They do not understand the financing process and the financial qualification criteria for mortgages.

In this light, the Ministry will produce a complete housing manual that will explain in very simple terms everything to do with housing, from dealing with real estate agents, the regulatory agencies, mortgage companies, landlord and tenant law, the cost of home ownership versus the cost of rental, et cetera. And, Madam Speaker, we intend for this manual to be very comprehensive, very popular and explain in very simple terms all matters related to housing.

Madam Speaker, I turn now to the Squatter Regularization Programme. The Squatter Regularization Programme has continued apace. The LSA has increased its capacity to process Certificates of Comfort. Certificates of Comfort have been distributed throughout the year, and at present, we have 324 certificates that await distribution. All applications for Certificates of Comfort would be processed, investigated and determined—all applications—by January 2018. The Squatter Regularization Programme is a three-stage process for those occupants of state lands in designated areas prior to 1998. The first stage is the application and receipt of a Certificate of Comfort. Government then upgrades the infrastructure to these sites to full approval. The second and third stage is the grant of a statutory lease, and then a deed of lease to the certificate holder who has satisfied all the requirements under the State Land (Regularisation of Tenure) Act, 1998.

Madam Speaker, I now have the privilege to report that since the coming into force of the Act and the Squatter Regularization Programme, this Government is now able to grant statutory leases to Certificate of Comfort holders in exchange for a premium. [*Desk thumping*] Cabinet recently approved that the premium be 25 per cent of the market value of the lands, the infrastructural cost to be borne by the Government. This premium would be charged to all Certificate of Comfort holders who have fulfilled all their requirements under the Act. The statutory lease is for a period of 30 years and persons who have received these statutory leases would have a period of 30 years to pay for their land. Madam Speaker, once the land is paid for—

**Madam Speaker:** Member for San Fernando East, your 45 minutes are now spent. You are entitled to 10 more minutes, if you wish to avail yourself. Please proceed. [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. R. Mitchell:** Madam Speaker, once the land is paid for, the beneficiaries will then be assigned a deed of lease for 199 years. Over the next fiscal year we will begin to issue these statutory leases to those qualified occupants in some 21 sites across Trinidad. We have, at present, over 1,000 leases that can be issued in the next year.

Madam Speaker, as I turn now to UDeCOTT—and the UDeCOTT, notwithstanding this country's economic challenges, has been very busy in fiscal 2017. UDeCOTT has been able to prudently manage and keep the cost down of the construction projects all over Trinidad and Tobago. My colleagues, fellow Ministers on this side, would get the opportunity to speak of all their projects that the UDeCOTT has been project managing. But just to mention, the St. Joseph, Besson Street and Maracas Police Stations, those have all been completed. The Mayaro Fire Station, the Government Campus Plaza, the Brian Lara Cricket Academy, completed, Madam Speaker. The refurbishment of the Hyatt Regency, Mount Lambert and Ackbar Trace Community Centres, that have been recently started along with Cantaro, Tarodale, Las Lomas, et cetera. Madam Speaker, work continues on the Arima Hospital and the Minister of Health will speak to that; the Point Fortin Hospital, the Diego Martin Health Centre; Chaguanas Health Centre, et cetera. And in fiscal 2018, UDeCOTT will continue to deliver these projects under cost and on time.

With respect to the SILWC, Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Committee, there was recently appointed a board at SILWC and I could give the assurance that all outstanding matters: deeds of lease, releases, outstanding payments to all of SILWC shareholders, will be settled shortly. At the Ministry, in fiscal 2018 we also intend to complete a project at 43 Independence Square. That project is a shell of a building. The

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[HON. R. MITCHELL]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

project will be refurbished and will provide a space, an incubator for entrepreneurs in the Port of Spain area and it will be managed by the board of the Eastside Plaza and the New City Mall. At East Port of Spain Development Company, that company continues to execute small to medium infrastructural upgrading projects to the communities of East Port of Spain and very soon, for fiscal 2018, we will meet with all the stakeholders in East Port of Spain to plan a next phase of infrastructural upgrading work.

So, Madam Speaker, in conclusion, the future is bright at the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development and in the housing sector. [*Desk thumping*] I see the Member for Oropouche East nodding in approval, Madam Speaker. These new programmes, aided self-help, Squatter Regularization Programme and the new initiatives for developers and traders in houses; the future is bright. And we would take the opportunity at the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development to report to the national community throughout the year on all the achievements that we have made and all the new initiatives that would be available for citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

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

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Princes Town. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Barry Padarath** (*Princes Town*): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to be able to contribute to the Financial Appropriation Bill, 2017/2018. Madam Speaker, first let me take the opportunity to congratulate my colleagues and the Leader of the Opposition for a sterling performance. [*Desk thumping*] I often like to infuse what I coin as young people's language into my contribution, and I would like to introduce two terms, the word "lit" and the word "slay".

Madam Speaker, the young people would say Mrs. Persad-Bissessar's performance, the Member for Siparia, Leader of the Opposition, was lit, in that it was spot on. It was an excellent contribution. [*Desk thumping*] And she slayed the presentation of the Member for Diego Martin North/East in that she was able to dissect every issue that continues to affect the people of Trinidad and Tobago in such a way that it resonates with the young people of our country.

Madam Speaker, in rebutting a few points of my colleague, the Member for San Fernando East, the hon. Member indicated that the MP for Siparia, Leader of the Opposition, spoke disparagingly about golf. The Member for Siparia never spoke disparagingly about golf. What she spoke disparagingly about was the waste, mismanagement and corruption [*Desk thumping*] that this Government presides over while taking bread and butter out of the mouths of our citizens. That is what she spoke about. She spoke about the vanity projects.

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

And you know, Madam Speaker, the Member for San Fernando East, I felt very embarrassed for him, having to go through a list of projects that were completed by the People's Partnership where they just had to turn keys, [*Desk thumping*] and the only project that he really oversaw was the refurbishing of the Hyatt. That is his claim to fame. Madam Speaker, I think after the Minister's dismal performance, that the Prime Minister may wish to consider changing the name from Ministry of Housing and Urban Development to Ministry of Housing and No Development. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, if I had to describe this budget presentation, for me it would be best described as a cop-out. It was a missed opportunity once again by this PNM, Rowley-led administration to put forward a real tangible, productive and innovative trajectory that would see a small-island, well-resourced economy move from old talk to sustainable development. Having spent two years in office, this administration has been characterized by the chronicles of absentee leadership, stories of poor governance and incompetence, the case of fake oil and fairy tales. I think it came as a surprise to most people in this country that the Minister of Finance's opening salvo on Monday was not "Once upon a time".

The Minister spent half of his time driving—or let me put it in a more enjoyable way for the Minister. Seeing that the Minister likes yachts, he sailed this budget presentation of over \$50 billion predicating his comments with misrepresentations of the past. This budget reflected what is known in the medical field as psychological manipulation. Instead of progressive policies, innovation for growth and the creation of contemporary revenue streams, we were presented with a balancing act of major fake news with an iota of reality.

Madam Speaker, allow me to provide a framework and context by looking at the overview of the economy. It is no secret that our economy continues to be heavily dependent on oil and gas. I think that is a point that most, if not all of my colleagues, make on both sides of the House. Those supplies from time to time experience crushing and debilitating price shocks, whether due to domestic or external pressures. It is in that context that having experienced significant revenue loss in this industry, that today we are seeking to balance the books by bringing down spending. However, as the Minister of Finance engaged in the area of financial psychological manipulation, he raised a very interesting area of a false economy.

A false economy, in economic terms, truly characterizes what this Government has engaged in. However, what did we see? We saw that the Minister of Finance attempted to utilize an area of economics that was totally misrepresented in the context that was presented to this honourable House. A false economy—a false economy is where

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[MR. PADARATH]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

spending is suppressed in critical areas to show savings or structural adjustments purposely on the books which, in fact, will actually cost you twice the amount later down the road. Madam Speaker, after throwing shade as the young people would say, the Minister attempted to reconcile government spending and government borrowing with a path to growth.

Madam Speaker, I turn to *Trinidad Express* editorial of April 29, 2017 which read the following gravity of our situation:

“Moody’s rating agency and the International Monetary Fund...produced particularly unsettling reports.

But this administration is complacency incarnate.” [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I will repeat that. The *Express* editorial says:

“...this administration is complacency incarnate.”

It goes on to say:

“For 19 months, not even the drop in annual energy revenue from \$19 billion to”—\$8 billion, as indicated by the Prime Minister—“has stirred them towards new foreign earnings, moving Moody’s also to call for ‘structural reform that enhances economic diversification’.”

Madam Speaker, the editorial goes on to say:

“Instead, choosing the easy way, the Government relies heavily on borrowing to finance deficits, debt expected to be 63 per cent of GDP by year’s end, debt servicing heading to US \$460.1 million in 2020. Not surprisingly, in its downgrade, Standard and Poors...cited ‘deterioration of the country’s debt burden and the interest burden over 2017-2020’.”

Madam Speaker, it further says:

“But the Government will keep borrowing, Moody’s expecting debt to rise to almost 70 per cent of GDP by 2019. And with the current downgrades, interest rates will rise for future borrowings. More and more debt, higher and higher debt servicing! Trinidad and Tobago is walking into the debt-trap. We will not have revenues to avoid it. Senior Lecturer of The UWI Economics, Roger Hosein, warns, ‘the outlook is dismal. Apart from BP gas projects—Angelin, Juniper and TROC’”—all of which, thanks to the People’s Partnership Government, [*Desk thumping*]—“‘where will the growth come from?’ And

The UWI Economics lecturer, Vaalmikki Arjoon says ‘we have a penchant for piling on additional debt when we face a revenue shortfall. But we are not spending all of it responsibly, to enhance productivity and revenue by boosting growth sectors and economic infrastructure’.”

Therefore, Madam Speaker, when I heard the Minister of Finance speak of the loan from the Andean Development Bank, I expected to learn that the loan, if not in part or in whole, was being utilized for development programmes or the social sector investment programme. Instead, Madam Speaker, \$2 billion down the drain in recurrent expenditure. But that is PNM logic, Madam Speaker. That is PNM economics.

So, the Minister comes and he complains about putting some in the kitty like what the People’s Partnership did when we borrowed. You see, Madam Speaker, when we borrowed, we borrowed for capital investment. We borrowed for PSIP projects. We understood also that those borrowings, if put into the HS Fund would also have returns, and they are seeing the benefits of that today. But the hon. Minister sought to complain that we were borrowing to save. Madam Speaker, those same borrowings that we saved, they are spending today. [*Desk thumping*] That is the double standards and hypocrisy. You do not live for today only. If that is this Government’s philosophy, then God help us.

Madam Speaker, the editorial went further and I quote:

“Permanent Secretary in the finance ministry, Suzette Lee Chee, also emphasised Government must look at the quality of its debt; and says, with a worsening debt to GDP ratio, ‘more and more of your revenue will be constrained for debt servicing. You have less and less to grow your economy, finance your projects’.”

Madam Speaker, is that why today we are seeing the economy being stalled and stagnant? Government does not have the vision nor the capacity to focus its attention on capital investment while looking at alternative areas of revenue for recurrent expenditure. In their 2017 report, Moody’s indicated that the Government mostly relied on one-off revenue measures, that without change to our expenditure structure where wages, subsidies and transfers account for 70 per cent of Government spending, the Government will continue to use the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund.

Madam Speaker, what has changed between then and now? Absolutely nothing. Things have gotten worse. But then the Minister tells us, “Well, that is okay. They have not rioted yet. And maybe I am doing such a grand job, that is why they are not complaining.” The editorial further indicated that:

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[MR. PADARATH]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

“The finance minister is clinging, almost for dear life to the ‘stable’ outlook given by S&P. Now he is hiring Fitch Ratings.”

The article says, and I quote:

“If Imbert wants a rosy picture, he should have worked for it over the past 19 months.” [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I want the national population and Members to listen to this statement very carefully. The article goes on to say, and I quote:

“Instead, he”—Imbert—“has presided over this country’s worst economic contraction in 33 years since 1984!” [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, this is not the UNC saying this, you know. This is not the Leader of the Opposition saying this. This is the voice of the people. This is the voice that represents the people of Trinidad and Tobago that is reflecting their views on the handling of the economy by the Member for Diego Martin North/East, the Minister of Finance.

On June 29, 2017, in this House in an answer to a question posed to the Minister, the Minister indicated that the Government had hired Fitch at a tune of over US \$80,000, over half a million Trinidad and Tobago dollars, to provide an assessment. This is the same Fitch who in a BMI report, “Economic Analysis - Deficit Financing Will Limit Private Sector Credit Growth”, published June 2017, this is what they had to say about the hon. Minister of Finance. They indicated:

“We maintain our forecast for a shortfall of”—Trinidad and Tobago dollars, \$6.2 billion—“equal to 3.6 % of GDP in”—financial year 2017. “That said, a lack of”—transparency when it comes to data—“complicates forecasting the size of T&T’s fiscal shortfall. Monthly finance data has not been provided since August 2016 and the balance sheet summaries provided in recent official publications differ from public statements made by Finance Minister Colm Imbert.”

Madam Speaker, again I ask, what has changed since then? Is it now we are paying a company to tell us what the Minister of Finance wants to hear? This is a clear case of what we say in local parlance, “spinning top in mud”.

Madam Speaker, permit me to turn to the area of the deception of alternatives and the bankruptcy of inventiveness by this Government. This budget was one of several contradictions, half-truths and repeated offences. I really meant promises.



From all quarters of the society there is an echoing chorus for the creation of alternative revenue-generating streams. This Government appears to be in the business of sound bites and catchy quips but very short on delivery and implementation.

I believe that this Government is also characterized by what many in our national community have gotten accustomed to, which is, “every year is next year”. So what they do is that the PNM, well known for “promises never materialize”, they come with the budget presentations and they say, “Well, we did not do it this year, but it is coming next year.” So every year is next year. The population has gotten so accustomed to that, that the Minister sought to spend so much time saying that 2018 will be a year of delivery, but the people of Trinidad and Tobago know quite differently, because we do not believe their words because they have no action. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, on Monday we heard repeated ideas from 2015 that saw no fruition. We heard borrowed ideas that we anticipate will also have no fruition and we saw the elimination of several ideas that apparently became stillborn.

Let us turn to a few of those; some of the ideas put forward as alternative revenue-generating streams. Madam Speaker, you will recall in 2015—and I promise you, till the last day I serve as a Member of Parliament I will remind the PNM of this promise that they made to Trinidad and Tobago. In 2015, the Prime Minister went down to South Trinidad, La Brea and Point Fortin. What was the grand plan for that part of Trinidad and Tobago? A plywood factory. Two years later, that has not materialized and nothing has happened. Another failed promise. And as my friend from Arouca/Maloney is reminding me, yes, the Prime Minister did promise the plywood factory that was not delivered.

Let us look at another idea that they spoke about. They said that they would look at the downstream sector with respect to the aluminium smelter. A big song and dance from the Minister of Finance a few months ago; absolutely no mention of it in the budget; absolutely no mention of it in any of their documents—another promise that will not materialize; another failure on the part of the Government.

Another alternative that we heard about from the Government was the area of reliable consistent data. A data industry would give us the opportunity, as an English-speaking, democratic, well-resourced country, to provide services for Latin America and the Caribbean; another area where this is another failed promise. The issue of on-line shopping. The revenue collection has shown that the Government has failed to meet the targets that they have set in the last fiscal year, garnering only TT \$23 million, yet yielding no significant results in that area, warranting another failure of an alternative.

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[MR. PADARATH]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

To make things worse—and I believe this is what has angered so many in our population, whether it is the economists or the professionals, the housewives or the country at large—is that the Finance Minister came in a vacuum with no comprehensive operations. I took a short walk while the Minister of Finance spoke because I was so baffled as to why he was putting forward policy measures that had no cohesion. I believe that the silence on the lack of success, with respect to Government’s investment with programmes like Soca on the Seas, is yet another area where they have failed. Little or no returns on this investment continue to leave the industry floundering. This is another ship that has sailed bon voyage like the *Ocean Flower*.

Last year, prior to the local government election we were advised of impending local government reform. Much of the local government campaign last year, apart from their campaign on roti, focused on empowering communities through strengthening regional corporations. The regional corporations instead have seen severe cuts. There are still no concrete plans for the devolution of power in the local government fraternity. New unimaginative alternatives saw the disastrous mistake of once more focusing internally. The screaming headline of “Tax Fuh So” on the *Trinidad Express*, October 03, 2017, said it all.

The hon. Leader of the Opposition’s comments were lit, as the young people would say. It is true they are bankrupt of the intellectual capacity [*Desk thumping*] that is needed to steer this country in the right direction. Madam Speaker, he that is good for making excuses is seldom good for anything else, [*Desk thumping*] and that is so applicable to Members opposite.

I was jolted into reality when I realized that the Minister of Finance was making contradictory policy announcements to what was announced in the past two—and what had occurred in the practice in the last two years. Let us look at the issue of utility rates. The Minister, in effect, has set the stage for the triggering of the RIC to raise water rates and electricity rates. However, the Minister spent no time after four or five Ministers of Public Utilities, in a space of just two years—the Minister spent no time dealing with the issue of productivity, efficiency and a reliable source of water, 24 hours. We are advised through your own budget documents WASA has received \$58 million less in their allocation and, therefore, the issue of efficiency, productivity and a 24-hour supply will not be addressed before or after.

The Minister focused on the increase on corporation tax to give the impression, as he says, that everyone must play their part in absorbing the burden. It is not a surprise, as several of the Chambers of Commerce have indicated, that this will be transferred onto the consumer and therefore removing the purchasing power from the consumer.

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

Madam Speaker, as the young people would say, “spoiler alert”. When you win, you really lose. Government’s only imaginative policy is to tax Play Whe and Lotto. It is called taxing your luck, Madam Speaker. The issue regarding the imposition of heavy fines on the gaming industry has had perilous and instant effects on the industry, resulting in closures and unemployment. The Government has established a joint select committee, which is very well known, to deal with matters regarding the gaming industry. But what have we seen? They have made unilateral decisions already on the industry, therefore overseeing its death, and waiting to preside over its final rites.

Madam Speaker, you will recall that there has been a debate on the Beverage Containers Bill. And before my friend from Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, who I know wants to get up on a Standing Order or two—[*Crosstalk*]—Madam Speaker, instead of focusing on the Beverage Containers Bill, which would have helped this country with respect to recycling and climate change, this Government has chosen to be selective by not levying on plastic bottles and beverage containers but have rendered duties—

**Mr. Young:** So as not to disappoint, Madam Speaker, 48(10). After two years it is very disappointing that he continues to read. [*Crosstalk*] I could say what I want. You will be talking soon enough.

**Madam Speaker:** This is Standing Order 44(10).

**Mr. Young:** 44(10).

**Madam Speaker:** Members, I believe this is the budget and I give some leeway in the budget contributions because of the technicalities. Okay? So that Members should not read. It is a debate, but I do give allowances for heavy reliance on their notes.

Members, I believe it is agreed that now is a convenient time for the lunch break. This House now stands suspended and shall resume at two o'clock.

**1.00 p.m.:** *Sitting suspended.*

**2.00 p.m.:** *Sitting resumed.*

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** As we resume, Member for Princes Town, you have your initial 22 minutes 45 seconds of your initial speaking time and would you like your additional 10 minutes one time?

**Mr. B. Padarath:** Yes, Sir.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Okay. Proceed.

**Mr. B. Padarath:** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, with your permission, I would like to look at the area of youth development and sport. In this year's budget presentation, a major announcement in the area of sport was the establishment of the National Sport Commission. This entity will replace the Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago. This National Sport Commission has really been placed in the public domain with more questions than answers, and I am hoping, well I had hoped that the hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs would have advanced some of the plans and policies that would be put in place with respect to the National Sport Commission.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, while we were on break I took the opportunity to look at what was happening in the arena of sports with respect to the news, and what is circulating right now on international news, ESPN and other media platforms, is the visit by the US men's team for the World Cup qualifier taking place in Trinidad and Tobago for the 2018 Olympic—*[Interruption]*

**Hon. Member:** World Cup.

**Mr. B. Padarath:** World Cup games, sorry. Not Olympics, World Cup games. That is currently taking place in the constituency of Couva South. I believe that match—the preparation is taking place in Couva South. Mr. Deputy Speaker, what is being put on the front pages and through the media is the headline “Not Road to Russia but River to Russia”, in that there are so many problems that is plaguing that Ato Bolton Stadium, exacerbated by work that is currently being conducted in that area. This is another area of poor project management and I am really hoping that the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central would take the opportunity to see what relief that he can provide in terms of relieving us of that international embarrassment that is currently taking place right now.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is my hope that the Minister and the Ministry, after two years of bacchanal, hysteria and romping, will settle down and get to work. I hope that the Minister understands that just by changing a name—you know they say a rose by another name is just a rose. I hope the Minister understands that changing the name will not just change the culture of the sport industry in Trinidad and Tobago. The Minister has indicated publicly that he is modelling the sport commission after both the UK and the Australia models, but he has failed to deal with fleshing out the target areas: specific public-private partnerships, which hon. Minister is an area which we want to hear a lot more of, long-term plans for

specific industries or areas of speciality; improved athlete programmes; legislation that is compatible with other countries we may partner with in respect to their athletes programmes; as well as a financial oversight for disbursing funds to groups, organizations and individuals. Therefore, again, there are more questions than answers, a very similar approach to what happened with the Tourism Development Company.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is no surprise that one of the most contentious issues in the area of sport for the past few months has been undoubtedly the opening of the Brian Lara stadium. It has always been the view of the Opposition that the stadium has significant question marks over its safety and priority, and Members opposite try to give the impression that Members on this side attended matches at that stadium. Nothing is further from the truth, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I will tell you why. You see, we place priority on people-centred issues and we will never put a stadium's completion over the opening of a children's hospital in this country. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, having spent an addition \$100 million, almost \$1.3 billion on the Brian Lara stadium which took 10 years under the People's National Movement to complete, I will pose several questions to the Minister which I hope he will be able to answer. Through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker:

1. Does the stadium finally have accreditation from the International Cricket Council?
2. Seeing the Minister's maths was that the opening ceremony brought in under \$700,000 in revenue after \$3 million was spent on the event, is he satisfied still that a half empty stadium and \$3 million down the drain was value for money?
3. Why was the Brian Lara stadium half empty on most nights of the matches except for the final of the recently concluded CPL?
4. What is the monthly operationalizing cost for the academy and stadium?
5. Is the social media video what I believe is circulating as of this morning with players' dressing rooms being flooded out, et cetera, for the CPL final and having to utilize the corridors?

Again, while we congratulate the TKR team, our Government was people-centred and we focused on bettering of the lives of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and that is why again, I will repeat, we advanced issues like the Couva Children's Hospital over the Brian Lara stadium.

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[MR. PADARATH]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

The Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs received an allocation of over \$3 billion and I was happy but surprised that the Minister of Finance lauded the National Aquatic Centre, the national tennis centre and the National Cycling Centre. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we on this side take paternity of those projects because it was a leader like Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, Member for Siparia, who endeavoured to bring about real diversification thrust in this country. [*Desk thumping*] Comparable to tourism, the recreation and leisure market is one the largest and fastest growing sector of the global economy. The size of the industry serves sporting activities listed under serious leisure fields and I know that Members opposite will enjoy this. They looked at areas like golf, tennis and fishing. The sport sectors have commercialized and carefully reformed over the past 30 years.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to quote from a report that was commissioned from South Africa when they looked at moving away from industrialization and using the medium of sport tourism to boost and enhance their economy. This is what the report had to say and I quote:

“The restructuring of the sector has taken the objective of profit generation... .the evolution of sport and its increasing role within the globalisation process and in the regeneration of national, regional and local identifies in the postcolonial and global age.

Sport has been used as an economic strategy and it has been observed for instance in the British context that most of the cities following this strategy of using sport for economic regeneration have been industrial cities, not normally known as major tourist destinations...

There has been a growing scepticism over the extent to which hosting mega-events potentially results in economic growth. This includes scepticism on the significant developmental impacts as compared to smaller events...”

The report goes on to say and I quote:

“Sports and sporting events have become integral components of a global political economy... The use of sport as an economic and social remedy of issues, targeted by politics, such as poverty alleviation and job creation require the careful development of skills and infrastructure in order to maintain competitiveness internationally...”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am here today about advancing ideas, policies and solutions like many of my colleagues on this side because we want to see Trinidad and Tobago do better, and therefore, as a Member of this House I take serious issue

with Members coming from the Government with policy, plans and ideas but not being able to provide us with any real tangible solutions in terms of how it is going to be operationalized and worked out. The report went on to say:

“In the United States for instance, event sport tourism generates an estimated \$27 billion a year”—and this could be found in the Travel Industry Association of America annual report—“where more than 75 million American adults...reported attending a sports event either as a spectator or as a participant...”

The report goes on further where it identifies sport tourism as such a major revenue generating stream that what you are seeing happening is that there is a psychology behind it, and the psychology behind it really is that those who participate in sport tourism really come from the middle class and upper middle class sectors that are able to spend more in that particular industry therefore injecting the much needed funds.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to turn to the area of value for money with respect to the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, and you will recall there was an issue on the front pages of this country most recently about a \$92,000 trip to Tobago by the Minister of Finance and members of the Ministry.

**Hon. Member:** Minister of Sport.

**Mr. B. Padarath:** Minister of Sport, sorry, and members of the Ministry including then Permanent Secretary in the Ministry, PS Barrow. Let us look at the area of value for money and how the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs have dealt with this issue.

Appearing before the Joint Select Committee on Public Administration and Appropriations, PS Barrow who was PS in that Ministry at that time, who had been acting in the position since January 2017, said the cost of the trip really was paid for by taxpayers but it was value for money. I would like to quote from the Joint Select Committee, Public Administration and Appropriations *Hansard* and this is what PS Barrow had to say which was corroborated by the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs. I quote:

“I do think that the persons who were required for the other meetings that they were necessary mainly because, I think, the site visit especially to the Dwight Yorke Stadium was extremely enlightening. The conditions there, I think it is extremely appalling with regard to not being able to actually use that facility and we do have a lot of events that are coming up at that particular facility,

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[MR. PADARATH]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

and I do think it was necessary for us to actually see what was really happening at that facility...we get a lot of reports in front of us and I think...you do not get that sense of urgency that...you would get if you actually go and see a location.”

She maintained that—“...pictures and...videos...”—of the state of the stadium would not have given an accurate enough depiction of existing problems at the facility.

Barrow listed problems with the infrastructure at the stadium as she sought to solidify the necessity for the delegation’s trip to Tobago saying that it was totally unusable.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs corroborated the story given by the Permanent Secretary when questioned by the media, indicating that on several occasions including that one, the Minister was keenly interested in getting a first-hand view.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, let us turn to page 160 of the *Public Sector Investment Programme*. There is a list of stadiums to be upgraded for improvement in fiscal 2018, no mention of the Dwight Yorke Stadium. However, five other stadiums in Trinidad will be upgraded at a cost of \$3 million. When divided an average of \$.6 million will be spent on each. It is noteworthy that all stadiums were built in the same financial year with the same plans and specifications. In Tobago, on page 161 of the *Public Sector Investment Programme*, Government will spend \$14.7 million on the following:

“...Shaw Park Sporting Complex, Canaan/Bon Accord Recreation Ground, Parlatuvier Sporting Facility and Richmond Recreation Ground.”

On an average, \$3.6 million will be spent on each. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is only when you look at the recurrent expenditure you see that a facility that was described as non-functional, unusable and dilapidated could not be opened to the public with an allocation for increases. And you know what, Mr. Deputy Speaker? In recurrent expenditure, when you look—if I were to borrow the persona of my colleague, the Member for Oropouche East, he would tell you when you look at what is being spent under the recurrent expenditure, it is paper clip and teabag. Nothing of substance that will add to the value of the Dwight Yorke Stadium in terms of the infrastructure, but that is value for money PNM style—\$92,000 down the drain. They came with a nancy story for the media, through the Permanent Secretary and the Minister, and there is nothing contained in the budget documents, when you look at, for the Dwight Yorke Stadium.



This Rowley-led PNM administration continues to miss the mark. You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is not about the cloth. It is about the table. The empty kitchen and dining tables in this country that cannot afford food due to high prices. [*Desk thumping*] You know, I heard my colleague the Member the Diego Martin Central gave one long list of all the medals that Trinidad and Tobago had won and attributed that to the work that he was doing, and as I sat there I started receiving messages from athletes on my phone, who indicated, “Would you please tell the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs do not call our names because he did not support us, and this Government did not support us when we were looking at representing Trinidad and Tobago internationally”.

You see they continue to miss the mark by focusing on the wrong things. Instead of focusing on tablecloths, they could have saved this country \$3 million that they have identified for the Chaguaramas Golf Course.

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would ask you to impose section 53 please.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Members, what is it?

**Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Invoke section 53, please. We are being disturbed here. I want to listen to the hon. Member for Princes Town.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Proceed.

**Mr. B. Padarath:** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Golf is a luxury sport; \$3 million dollars is being spent on the Chaguaramas upgrade. That \$3 million could have sent 10 children to university for the three years for a degree programme. It could have saved three children, lifesaving surgeries. Who likes or wants to play golf, charge them. Increase the fees, let them pay for their luxuries. Tax golf, not hardworking people in this country who are looking to make ends meet. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister of Finance is on record as saying that we must all play our part and accept part of the burden. The citizens of this country want to see the Government lead by example. It cannot be that I am eating dasheen and dhal every day, and they are jet-setting around the world. I recall under a previous People’s National Movement administration, if you look at a Ministry of Finance Circular, between the period 2006/2007, a decision taken by the then PNM Cabinet, that circular allowed for permanent secretaries, directors, et cetera, and chairmen of boards to travel first class. The sitting Prime Minister chastised the former Prime Minister, Member for Siparia, for travelling too much.

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[MR. PADARATH]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

He said that she had hotfoot. Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you look at the travel patterns of the Member for Diego Martin West, do you know that in the first year he has travelled more than the Member for Siparia as Prime Minister?

At a meeting on Piggott corner the Prime Minister Dr. Keith Rowley said that he travelled seven times in 25 months. Thank God for these publications that are gazetted when the Prime Minister travels.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member. Member, remember the Standing Order as against with regard to this place.

**Mr. B. Padarath:** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My colleague unfortunately, Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, is not here. He was so concerned about me reading, but I want to tell them I will deal with anyone of them anytime, anyplace, anywhere on any topic [*Desk thumping*] and I will expose the hypocrisy and the double standards.

In 25 months the Prime Minister has travelled 17 times and these are the destinations: Malta, Grenada, Barbados, Miami, Belize, Washington, Cuba, Guyana, Jamaica, California, Venezuela, Houston, New York, Chile, Grenada, Barbados, and the last one being California USA. But this Prime Minister has a preoccupation for bedroom slippers, duster and, as Sparrow would say, man in the bedroom. [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is the kind of leadership that we have in this country. I am asking the hon. Prime Minister whether or not you are willing to put your money where your mouth is? You know there are countries like India and Malaysia—you complain all about this travelling. Are you willing to do like India and Malaysia and ground your Ministers of Government and ensure that every Permanent Secretary, every Minister, every chairman of boards stop travelling first class. That is value for money if we must all feel the pinch of the burden.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, allow me to look at the youth and the way forward, the opportunity to look at some issues facing the youth of our country. My colleagues will deal with the issue of GATE, but I want to turn to the area of youth unemployment and sustainable job creation. With now over 300 young doctors and thousands of young professionals on the breadline, many who are sending out resumes and are not even getting a phone call or a letter of acknowledgment, what is the Government doing about creating jobs for our nation's youths? And I really want to congratulate the Member for Siparia for having the vision to speak about the digital age and the Fourth Industrial Revolution. [*Desk thumping*] You see

instead of the Member coming to speak about motorcycles, and Play Whe, and Lotto, what did she come and speak about? She spoke about the digital age, about empowering our young people through areas like informatics and microwork platforms. That is a leader with a vision; that is a leader who has plans for our country.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are several areas in which we can approach changing the paradigm and the Minister of Finance, Member for Diego Martin North/East, spoke about changing the paradigm. Is the paradigm about our young people hustling maxi-taxis? Is that the vision? Because that is what I heard as a young person. I have always maintained I am the youngest Member of Parliament in the Eleventh Parliament and I was really hoping that there would have been something of substance for the youth. I am happy today to be able to stand up in this Parliament and be the voice for the young people and say that you have failed us when it comes to any sustainable real tangible productive plan [*Desk thumping*] and I will not take riding a maxi-taxi as a tout or as a driver as any sustainable way to put Trinidad and Tobago on a sustainable path of growth and development especially in the times that we are in now.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the hon. Member for Siparia spoke about informatics. The hon. Member that is, she was responsible for the building of the Couva Children Hospital, she ensured that we focus on health care. The Member for Siparia focused on the area of health care with the Point Fortin hospital and the Arima hospital. Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you look at the industry standards across the world—and we have an opportunity right here in Trinidad and Tobago, in that, if we infuse information technology which is known as informatics in health care, what it does is that it creates jobs but it also changes the entire paradigm of how we do things, and we are starting at a good point, Member for St. Joseph, with these new facilities that these informatics can now look at diagnosis, they can now look at medical reports, they can now enhance medical tourism, they can now look at 3D X-rays, et cetera. That is the way of the world.

When the hon. Member for Siparia spoke about her vision for microwork platforms, it was that she understood that the Fourth Industrial Revolution had to deal with the digital age, and that is why she focused so much by ensuring that every child coming out of the SEA got a laptop because that is where their future is. [*Desk thumping*] You know the Member for Diego Martin North/East spoke about the business development incentive as though it was something new. That industry has been existing in Trinidad and Tobago for a long while. When you

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[MR. PADARATH]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

look at that industry what has been hampering its progress and its growth is the lack of investment, and that is why we focused a lot on ICTs and broadband width in Trinidad and Tobago during our five-year tenure, as well as putting in place the infrastructure that deals with the area of information technology.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I recall a front page *Express* where half of the Cabinet is on a bus riding from San Fernando to Port of Spain, and that was their plan for information technology. The hon. Member for Siparia came in this Parliament and she stood in defence of the young people and she spoke about microwork platforms, where you can now look at the areas of finance, the areas of medicine, the areas in information technology, the areas of science. The Member for Caroni Central in his wisdom in assisting the partnership in putting forward its manifesto in 2015, spoke about research and development areas. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will see many of the Latin American countries, those are the areas that they are looking in because they understand that a lot of these international conglomerates and these transnational companies, they are putting a lot of focus on research and development. He spoke about research and development institutes that would what—what it would do is that it would place the focus on getting the new areas of expertise looked at, that we would also open up new markets and also create new revenue generating streams for Trinidad and Tobago.

The hon. Member for Caroni Central—and I am sure he will flesh out this as the Member for Siparia spoke as well. When we had the concept for the Chaguaramas peninsula is that we understood that the nightlife in Trinidad and Tobago was an area which was an untapped resource. The Member for Barataria/San Juan always speak about that. Those areas are untapped resources and that is why we focused also in sport tourism leisure and the creative arts. You know I really want to take the opportunity to thank members in the creative arts industry for the past two days who really know good things when they see it, like a tablecloth jacket. [*Desk thumping*] I really want to thank people like Peter Elias and several other local designers who have offered their assistance in advancing the creative industries in this country.

But you know, when you look at the creative industry index this Government has paid the least amount of emphasis and focus in terms of financing, that you will be able to advance areas like fashion and film and so on. There has been absolutely little or absolutely no mention of these particular areas and these are the areas that the Member for Siparia try to advance, the microwork platforms, the informatics, the “innocentive”, those particular areas that will change the face of finance economy, science and information technology in our country.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if with your permission, I would like to look at the area of community development, culture and the arts. I was at pain to listen to the Minister of Finance on this particular Ministry and topic. It was almost as if the Minister of Finance has conceded that the Government has given up on this particular industry. When I look at the budget documents of 2017/2018 it tells a very telling tale of no new plans, no new initiatives and no new incentives. When you look at the PSIP, the *Public Sector Investment Programme* on page 236, all you see is rehashed projects with no vision for them. What is even more curious is that after spending an additional \$2 million on NAPA in 2017, the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts in the PSIP has budgeted an additional \$2 million for 2018, and I heard the Member for San Fernando West—  
[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member, the displaying of your reading material. You are not quoting from it.

**Mr. B. Padarath:** Sure. My apologies, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I heard the hon. Member for San Fernando West in a previous debate, he chastised the Member for Oropouche East and he said it is as though that they come here and they do not read their documents. Well I am wondering whether or not the Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts has read her documents. You see, when you look at page 236 of the *Public Sector Investment Programme* it would be as though—it was so shocking to me especially at a time when our country is going through some much financial strife, when people cannot get food, when you cannot put books in the bookbags of children, et cetera.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will tell you what is contained on page 236 of the PSIP under Community Development, Culture and the Arts. Two million dollars will be spent for what? The upgrade of a VIP kitchenette. That is the plans that they have for community development, culture and arts at NAPA—\$2 million to upgrade a VIP kitchenette. That is the vision. That is the vision they have for the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts. Who is going to NAPA to use the VIP kitchenette? It is the big boys and the big girls enjoying the champagne and the caviar. It is not trickling down to the industry with respect to the—  
[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Silence.

**Mr. B. Padarath:**—community development, culture and the arts.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Silence.

**Mr. B. Padarath:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, while there has been a focus on the big boy syndrome of champagne and caviar, I ask—there is no mention of the Carnival industry under the PSIP, the development programme or even the recurrent expenditure. It is almost as though just as much as the Carnival industry has given up on the Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts, that she too has given up on them, after now she is now in arbitration.

**2.30 p.m.**

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there has been no mention of the Ramleela Centre. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister came to this Parliament and she indicated that there will be a policy with respect to funding and that they will indicate which particular areas will be focused on. It is as though this is another Minister of Government operating in a vacuum. [*Desk thumping*] It is as though there is no cohesion. They do not sit in the same Cabinet. They do not speak to each other because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, two years later and there is no policy. No policy and that same operating in a vacuum is what has cost the honourable— [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member, you have two more minutes.

**Mr. B. Padarath:** Original time, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** No. Complete time.

**Mr. B. Padarath:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, you know it was another man in another place who spoke about draining the swamp. And whether or not it is the swamp and soon thereafter, a Member of this House spoke about building houses on lagoon and the whole country eventually became a lagoon thereafter. But I want to say, whether it is the swamp, whether it is the lagoon or whether it is the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago, the Prime Minister must act. The Minister of Finance quoted a prolific calypsonian when he said: “We can make it if we try”. I want to quote another calypsonian and that calypsonian’s lyrics reminded me so much of this Government. When Denise Plummer sang “Nah Leaving”, a verse that reminds me of the Members on that side, she said: with “bobol and scandal they boastful and proud”, but they “nah leaving”.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I urge my colleagues to eat some humble pie. [*Desk thumping*] The country already understands you are not working, so at least if you are not working, allow people “tuh like yuh nah, oh gosh man”, but, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they are shameless. Mr. Deputy Speaker, they have no plans, no policies, no ideas, and two years later, it is all about fluff, it is all about rhetoric; it is all

about bobol and scandal, and I assure you, as night follows day, Kamla Persad-Bissessar will return as the Prime Minister of this country to take us out of the abyss that the PNM has placed us—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member.

**Mr. B. Padarath:** I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** I recognize the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara.

**Brig. Gen. Ancil Antoine (D’Abadie/O’Meara):** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this debate on the Appropriation Bill, 2018. I would like to congratulate the Minister of Finance [*Crosstalk*] for an excellent budget statement—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member. Member for Couva South, please. Every time you utter, I am hearing you up at this end. Please, do not continue with it. Proceed, Member.

**Brig. Gen. A. Antoine:** Yes, I would like to congratulate the Minister of Finance for an excellent budget statement [*Desk thumping*] “Changing the Paradigm: Putting the Economy on a Sustainable Path”.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to thank the staff of D’Abadie/O’Meara parliamentary office for the hard work they have done over the last two years in supporting me [*Desk thumping*] and in particular, I would like to thank my former Research Officer, Ms. Rona Rogers, for an excellent contribution to the success of the office. I would like to wish her all the best in her future endeavours.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, changing the paradigm. Trinidad and Tobago is at a crossroad when we have to change the paradigm. Maybe it will have to change the “Trini” image that we have in the Caribbean and in the diaspora. I remember, 33 years ago on my honeymoon—yes, actually Friday was my anniversary and instead of spending it with my other half, I spent it at Parliament here for the entire day. [*Laughter*] But on my honeymoon in Grenada, I had cause to rent a vehicle and unlike in the United States, when you rent vehicles, it comes with a full tank of gas. At the end of the day, “they tell you to refill dey gas” or you have to pay price at exorbitant prices for it to be refilled. In Grenada, the gas tank was empty so I drove up to the gas station and told the guy “Full meh up”, and he turn and he say, “You from Trinidad, nah”. I say, “Yes. What make you ask that?” He say, “Only ah Trini go come here and say full up meh tank. You know wa’ is de price ah gas in Grenada?” And that is way we view things in Trinidad and Tobago.

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[BRIG. GEN. A. ANTOINE]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

We have the lowest price of gas maybe in the hemisphere, being subsidized. And, we have put forward an image in terms of being Trinidadians. But the Finance Minister has given us a wake-up call that we need to examine a whole number of things. We need to examine our culture, the way we do things, the way we do business and that would have to be to help us on our way and a path to sustainability. We have to make some adjustments. We have to make some lifestyle changes. We have to take on the principle of thrift and we have to start to plan for the future.

In the budget statement, it may mean that we have to take another look at property ownership. As citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, maybe in our planning for the future, we may have to look to own a rental—or sorry, own an apartment first and then use that apartment later on when our budgets, our salaries get greater to own a single unit. Because a lot of the people who come to my office, they are interested in owning a single unit upfront. So maybe we have to look at the way we view ownership of property.

We obviously have to prioritize our spending. You know, when I was a little boy growing up—and that was quite a long time ago—Christmas time was the time you saw apples and grapes. It was also a time we saw Cydrax and Peardrax. It used to come in a gallon bottle in those days. [*Laughter*] And I think my parents bought it simply because after Christmas, they would take that bottle, that Cydrax bottle and Peardrax bottle, and then we would buy petrol to light the coal pot and so forth. But around Christmas time, we would never choose Peardrax and Cydrax over sorrel and ginger beer. It was there but our choice was for the local stuff. And maybe, we have to go back again looking at how we spend our hard-earned money in terms of what we consume.

I see now that we are having four-lane highways and maybe it is time that the Minister of Works and Transport looks at maybe instituting HOV lanes—higher occupancy vehicle lanes going into Port of Spain where people who have three or more persons in their vehicles can use that lane, and then maybe we could think about carpooling so that all of us, not going to Port of Spain, one person driving his car and you know, adding to the traffic jams we have on mornings. So, in terms of adjusting we have to look at a different way at how we do business.

My colleague from Moruga/Tableland, in giving us a little view of the economy over the years, said that we have a rollercoaster history in terms of the economy. We have had our highs and we have had our lows. I tend to say that we have had mountaintop experiences and valley experiences. There are times when



we are on the mountaintop, when the price of oil and natural gas was very high so we can afford all sorts of things. But then we go into the valley experience where, like now, things get hard and we have to adjust. So we go through “ah” bust and boom experience.

And the People’s National Movement, Mr. Deputy Speaker, has always been realistic in how we approach and how we train or how we tell the people of Trinidad and Tobago how they must deal in terms of their situations. Not so for our friends on the opposite side, the Opposition. I tried hard listening to the Member for Siparia and the other Members from the other side to try and put my mind around the contributions and the approach to the budget and the only thing that I could come up with is a book I read during school by a guy name George Orwell called *Animal Farm*. I am sure that you all may be familiar with *Animal Farm*. And in *Animal Farm*, the animals came to governance of the farm and there are a lot of lessons to be learnt from the book *Animal Farm* but I just want to use two of the slogans that were used by the animals. One slogan they started off with is: all animals are equal. Another slogan was: four legs good, two legs bad.

But then along came an animal named Napoleon, and Napoleon, during the course of the book, changed things. Changed the way things happened in *Animal Farm*. And at the end of the book, believe it or not, the slogan was changed from all animals are equal to all animals are equal but some are more equal than others.

**Hon. Member:** UNC— [*Inaudible*]

**Brig. Gen. A. Antoine:** “Da’ is UNC?” And then they change from four legs good, two legs bad into four legs good, two legs better. [*Laughter*] And you know, trying to get my mind around those on the other side, I looked at their history over the years. They all came out of the NAR from 1986 and by 1988, some of them had left in Club 88. Not all left at that point in time. I think the Members for Caroni Central stayed and for Chaguanas West, they stayed in the NAR, you know, and they squeezed the NAR dry. [*Laughter*] They did not follow the hon. Basdeo Panday into Club 88 and to ULF.

**Hon. Member:** What did Siparia do? [*Laughter*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Silence.

**Brig. Gen. A. Antoine:** Sookram remained as well. Because the hon. Basdeo Panday was a labour leader and it is instructive to see his prodigy, the Member for Couva South—[*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Members.

**Brig. Gen. A. Antoine:** And his position vis à vis the Opposition Bench, Couva South. But they did not follow immediately. But lo and behold, after the ULF and the UNC came about, they eventually followed. They eventually joined the UNC and the UNC morphed or evolved into the People's Partnership. By then, they had pulled on some others—my friend from St. Augustine, I am not seeing him here today, joined, and you know, sometimes I am worried about my friend from St. Augustine. When I came into this honourable House two years ago, he was way up upon the other side close to your position, Mr. Deputy Speaker, [*Crosstalk*] like me. [*Laughter*] Now, I always down on this side, I might have been in the front and in the back now but I was always down on this side.

And you know, I have seen him shift down to this other end and he was the leader of a particular unit, Congress of the People, and now there is a leadership struggle going on with them and I am not hearing anything. And sometimes I worry that when I look at him and I do not see him across there, I might see him across by the media table just staring at me from over on that side over there. [*Laughter*] The way things are going with him, you know, how he just keep shifting to this other end.

But again, I am trying to put my mind around those on the other side, and they keep shifting the goal post. Whilst the People's National Movement, we deal with our mountaintop and valley experiences and we try to keep the population on a steady keel, and now that we are in a valley experience, we are telling them, look, time has come to tighten your belts. Time has come to revisit how you perceive things, you know. Time has come that the price of oil, the price of natural gas is not what it used to be. So therefore, we have to put in some austerity measures, we have to do some adjustments in the way we spend our money, and as I said maybe, the time has come for us to re-examine property ownership, and do not go as a young man, a young woman who is now starting a family, to own a large single unit house. Maybe the time has come to get through rent-to-own, an apartment, and later on, you can sell that apartment and get your dream house. Time has come for us to change how we look at things.

But those on the other side, they came into power, into governance during a hill-top experience, and all they did was spend, spend, spend. Spend, spend, spend. They, you know, were anti-taxation. The Member for St. Augustine had the "Axe the Tax" and I keep trying to figure what is their philosophy, what changed among those on the other side from the days of NAR and Club 88 to ULF to now. Is it because of Napoleon? Is it because somebody came into their midst and changed their way of thinking that now they are about four legs good and two

legs better? All animals are equal but some are more equal than others? What changed on the other side that they are resisting calls by the hon. Finance Minister to the population to adjust because the price of oil and the price of natural gas is not what it used to be? Because speaker after speaker comes here and they do not seem to want to tell the population that we need to have a reality check.

My friend from San Fernando had to point out to the Member for Tabaquite because we both got examples of two different articles. The same article by Keith Subero. Both the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West and Tabaquite read the same article and had two different perspectives and the wit and satire of Mr. Keith Subero was lost on Tabaquite. They made comparison but it was the Member for Siparia who had a list of spending by our Government and made comparisons, because she spent a lot of her time trying to justify the spending that they had during their time in Government. A time, again, of spend, spend, spend; a time of great schemes.

A highway to Point Fortin that was to be built from recurrent expenditure that we now have to fix to see it to completion. A plan by the Member for Chaguanas West to take water from the Beetham to La Brea at over \$400 million; LifeSport, \$420 million. And the Member for Tabaquite was very good at using a lot of buzzwords: hopelessness, stupor, patriotism. They like to talk about patriotism, but patriotism when they have money in the hill experience. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have to contend with a changing economy, an economy when things are not what it used to be and as a result, we have to educate the population that look, we have to have some adjustments.

I heard the Member for Princes Town speak about airfare and that this present government should make changes in terms of their travel but I was a Member of the Cabinet when a circular was given by the Minister of Finance to review all air travel arrangements in respect of official travel overseas and I hope that the Deputy Speaker will allow me to quote from the document I have here: Circular Memorandum Number 1 dated March 14, 2016. It says:

I wish to inform you that Cabinet by Minute No. 109, Second Session, dated October 15, 2015, approved revised air travel arrangement in respect of official overseas travel. These arrangements are to be applied with immediate effect.

Cabinet undertook a review of the current air travel arrangement in respect of official overseas travel in light of the fact that more classes of air travel are now available on many major airlines which if utilized by the appropriate public officers may facilitate the reduction in public expenditure.

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[BRIG. GEN. A. ANTOINE]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

And it went on to speak about the revised of classes of travel: first-class travel: the holders of public office; executive category listed in Appendix 1 shall be entitled to first-class travel; business-class travel, holders of office in executive category as listed in Appendix 2 shall be entitled to business-class travel. And it went to premium economy class travel, economy class travel. So a circular memorandum was sent out by this Government to all public officials reviewing the air travel. So I just want to lay to rest what was brought up by the Member for Princes Town in terms of the official travel and this Government took a position to revise the air travel arrangements so that would reduce the cost of air travel in terms of officials going aboard. [*Desk thumping*]

You know, and I find it is really disingenuous for the Member for Princes Town to get up and say that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago should ban travel by Government officials. If we have to do the business of Trinidad and Tobago, especially in a time of recession, especially in a time when the oil prices are not as it was in the past, we have to travel aboard. We have to go and see about Government business. So to say just to ban travel is very irresponsible of the Member for Princes Town. So I hope that will lay to rest his position in terms of official travel.

I am the representative for D'Abadie/O'Meara and D'Abadie/O'Meara is a constituency along the East-West Corridor. We lie to the south of Arima and we are bordered also by La Horquetta, Maloney and Lopinot/Bon Air. In terms of demographics, D'Abadie/O'Meara is a constituency with all types of religion and races and in terms of the communities that we have in D'Abadie/O'Meara, they go along a pendulum. From gated communities, we have like The Crossings, Signature Gardens, Ascot to a number of middle-income communities in Malabar, in D'Abadie, as Emerald Gardens, Galaxy Gardens, but we also have a number of squatter communities down in Carapo and in D'Abadie in a place called Unity.

D'Abadie/O'Meara, my constituents, has a lot of fears based on the budget and fears mainly because of the removal of the subsidy on fuel prices and they expect—typical Trinidadians—that the taxi drivers would raise, maxi-taxi fares would raise, the food prices would rise as well. There will be an increase in the cost in terms of recreational things like boat rides and bus rides and so forth. And as the MP, my responsibility and the responsibility of the Government is to let them know that, look, we have changing times and because of the changing times, we have to make some adjustments and they understand that.

And there are other areas that they have concerns about. In terms of education, we are seeing that the Government is spending \$7.29 billion on education, yet in D'Abadie/O'Meara, we have a shortage of school places at the primary level.

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

Now, in my constituency, there are a lot of denominational schools and a lot of the residents are not able to get places in schools because the denominational authorities give preference to their citizens, if you want to say that, before they allow others into their school. So a lot of people, a lot of constituents come to me, at the beginning of the school term to try to get places in the schools. In terms of the Government schools, they will say that you are not in the catchment area and because you are not in the catchment area, they cannot deal with you. So this is an appeal to some of the denominational schools, in particular, for instance, the Pentecostals, who do not have any primary schools or and maybe a secondary school down in central that it is time they partner with the Government in terms of increasing the amount of schools available to constituents in the East-West Corridor.

But there are also other concerns by constituents in terms of education, especially when we are spending \$7.2 billion on education and this appeals to the principals and the teachers. I know presently I heard the Minister of Education on radio this morning speaking about an incident that took place in a school in the southern area that he is dealing with. But I also want to look at the situation where there is a demand for places at the primary level and of course, at the secondary entry level with the SEA, there is a demand for places in terms of prestige schools and other types of schools.

But at the end of the secondary period, what we are see coming out of the secondary schools an incident that is drawing the attention of the Minister of Education right now is one in which we are seeing quite a number of dropouts from the secondary school system. But not only dropouts, we are seeing citizens coming out who are untrainable and some of them are unemployable, and this is not something that is the—and that is why I am saying to the teachers and the principals, et cetera, this is not something that is a government problem. This is not something that is a government problem and successive governments will have problems with this, but there is a high dropout rate. We are producing young men and young women who are unskilled, untrainable and unemployable except for the criminal class in our midst.

I had a teacher in Trinity College named Ms. Charlene Ogle—

**Hon. Member:** Me too, me too.

**Brig. Gen. A. Antoine:** “Yuh know Ms. Charlene Ogle?” Excellent lady. God rest her soul because she passed away sometime last year. When we were in the third form, Ms. Ogle sometime pulled a number of us in a classroom together.

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[BRIG. GEN. A. ANTOINE]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

**3.00p.m.**

It was a Friday afternoon, I would never forget that, and she asked each one of us: “Tell me, what you are all going to do when you leave school?” Because that would have been in '69, going on to '70, the Black Power era, as the case may be. And she asked: “what are you all going to do when you leave school?” Well, at that age I had not given it any thought whatsoever, as to what I planned to do when I leave school, and she said: “Look,” and she called a number of, let us put it this way, the “one percenters”, the children of the “one percenters” in the school at the time, and she said: “So and so, when he leaves school is going to inherit his father’s business.” And she called a next one and said: “So and so father owns so and so and so and his business is fixed for the rest of his life.”

And she called out a number of them who were our classmates and at that point in time we were not thinking so far ahead. She said: “What are you all going to do when you leave school? You. What does your father do? And you, what does your father do?” And when you look at it, our parents did not have the means to really look after us when we left school. And she said: “All right, Monday is a holiday, when you come back Tuesday I want each one of you all to come and tell me what are your plans for the future.”

I went home and I had some serious discussions mentally and plus with my parents and I was able to come back and give Ms. Ogle an answer. And I am forever grateful to Ms. Charlene Ogle for that wake-up call that she gave to myself and a lot of our classmates when we were going through third form. It set me on the path that I am on today, that I arrived at today. [*Desk thumping*]

And this is an appeal to the principals and the teachers in our school system. It is time that you take ownership of your product. Your product will be citizens of the future and you have a responsibility, especially when we are spending \$7.2 billion on the education system for this year alone, you have a responsibility to give us some better citizens coming out of the secondary schools. Because, and I say again, we have a demand at the primary school entry level. There is a demand at the secondary school entry level and therefore there should be a greater demand at the tertiary level in terms for our citizens and I do not blame the Government. I do not blame the citizens, the Opposition. I do not blame them. Well, when I say Government, I am speaking of both the Government and the Opposition. I do not blame the Opposition for this one either. We have to get our act together and produce better citizens. [*Desk thumping*] Maybe this is a call for TUTTA as well as well as the Ministry of Education as well.

I heard the Minister of Finance say that we borrowed four times to pay salaries and we are borrowing to pay recurrent expenditure, rather than capital investment. So, therefore, we need to do better and this is a time we are calling for a wake-up call to the nation. This is a time we need to re-examine ourselves, re-examine our priority; a time for us to examine where we are going forward.

In terms of housing in D'Abadie/O'Meara, the Government plans to spend over a billion dollars on housing. And yet, the shortage of housing, we said we have 150,000 applicants but I heard the Minister of Housing and Urban Development just mentioned 174,000 applicants. Most of the constituents who come to my constituency office come for two things: jobs or HDC housing. So, therefore, I am interested in this proposal put forward by the Minister of Finance about a four-unit proposal, and I am thankful that he called it the Tabaquite model. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** But it is not.

**Brig. Gen. A. Antoine:** I stand corrected. It is not the Tabaquite model. No it is not. But I also, the Minister of Housing and Urban Development, congratulate him as one of four contractors involved in adequate housing, and I like the idea of the four-unit proposal for 5,000 square feet. It means that we can look forward to having again, owning an apartment before we purchase our stand-alone house, dream house, that we can change the paradigm from big housing schemes to four apartments that we can own and that we can sell later on in life and give somebody else a chance and own our dream houses.

So I would like to see a further development on the rental proposals, because a lot of my constituents come to me. They want their own homes. They want to own a home. And when I ask questions of them, a lot of them do not have the employment that will allow them to own their own home. And I think that, in partnership with the Government, we really have to come up with some deal, some area, where we can help them along the way. Again, it calls for education. It calls for a change, in terms of the culture, because a lot of them really say that rent money is dead money. But the rent-to-own option is an option that will allow them to get their own dream houses, but let them look at their own dream houses somewhere down in their future.

In terms of the utilities, the Government intends to spend \$3.5 billion on utilities. But I must say that the people of D'Abadie/O'Meara, the residents, we are demanding a more efficient water supply in D'Abadie/O'Meara. Too long we go without water in Malabar. And the water problem in Trinidad and Tobago is

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[BRIG. GEN. A. ANTOINE]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

man-made, and I am glad that the Member for Chaguanas West is here. Trinidad and Tobago experienced sufficient rainfall during the course of the year. There is enough surface water. There is enough groundwater and, of course, we now have desalination water. The problem with Trinidad and Tobago is a water-distribution problem. The water is not being distributed properly.

During my former stint as the Minister for Public Utilities, I would have spoken to the problems we have in terms of the distribution of water. The system that WASA utilizes with these pumps to pump the water is not working. Maybe it is time that WASA revisits the tried and tested water system of using gravity through the use of reservoirs on hilltops and water towers, where the pump really, you just need the pump to pump the water up to the reservoir or the water tower and then let gravity feed the residents, in terms of the areas.

In terms of the infrastructure in D'Abadie/O'Meara, the population, again because it is along the East-West Corridor, we have outgrown the road system and the drainage infrastructure. The Minister of Works and Transport visited our area and we identified several critical areas that we need to upgrade and that we need to do some repairs. And that is throughout the constituency. But also, WASA is upgrading its wastewater project with a project in Malabar, Peytonville. The problem that my constituents are experiencing is a failure by WASA to resurface the roads after the pipe laying. The time frame, in terms of the repair of O'Meara Road in particular was too long and the recent rains yesterday and the day before did not help at all, and my constituents would like to see a speedier repair of the roads after pipe laying by WASA.

In terms of the drainage, Caroni River is to the south of D'Abadie/O'Meara and to the west we have the Mausica River and to the east we have the Arima River. So there are rivers all around us. The problem is that we did not take time to develop the drainage infrastructure in the area and of course we are building—I am thankful to the Minister of Housing and Urban Development for the housing schemes in River Runs Through, Bon Air, Trestrail and Malabar—*[Desk thumping]*—thank you very much, especially those eyesores that we had in Malabar for all those years.

But there are areas in D'Abadie/O'Meara where we need some drainage works. Again, when the Minister of Works and Transport visited, I pointed out several of these areas to him: Jokhan Trace in Carapo; Ascot Gardens, Carapo; Race Course Road; Peytonville, Reid Lane and Boy's Lane in D'Abadie, that we need to have a lot more drainage works so that we would take the water that would come out of these newly established housing schemes to the Caroni River and alleviate the flooding that my constituents are experiencing.



*Appropriation Bill, 2017*

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

In terms of sporting facilities, D'Abadie/O'Meara had the unfortunate experience of hurricane Anil. Hurricane Anil swept through D'Abadie/O'Meara a few years ago with gale force winds of over \$420 million—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** One billion.

**Brig. Gen. A. Antoine:**—one billion—with an eyewall of LifeSport. And hurricane Anil wrecked some of the sporting facilities in D'Abadie/O'Meara, in particular India Ground and Burnley Centeno Ground in Carapo. Carapo and Burnley ground is a cricket area, and we had night cricket going on in Burnley Ground with all the infrastructure. Along came hurricane Anil and he destroyed the cricket ground. He took down the pylon lights. They are still on the ground. I am unable to get T&TEC to put them back up because of the cost.

I had the Minister of Sport visit Burnley Ground, and as well as India Ground, and the constituents of D'Abadie/O'Meara, unlike Dominica, and these other places where, you know, they get a lot of support. Thank God. I want to thank all the Trinidadians who have come forward to assist the people in these unfortunate islands in the Caribbean. And I must say that yesterday, speaking to a pastor from Dominica, she was in high praise of the role that the soldiers and sailors and the members of the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force is playing in terms of the support in Dominica. [*Desk thumping*] And I want to congratulate the Minister of National Security on the response.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Members on the Government side, please, I am hearing a constant murmur as we continue along. I would really like to hear the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara. Proceed.

**Brig. Gen. A. Antoine:** So the soldiers and sailors are doing an excellent job, in terms of assisting. [*Desk thumping*]

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

But we were not so unfortunate, in terms of the effects of hurricane Anil on D'Abadie/O'Meara. India ground is still, how should I describe it? It was an area that the residents told me they had all sorts of activities before the creation of Larry Gomes Stadium. There is a gentleman named Hackett, a resident, former councillor in Arima Borough, who ran a league in India Ground, and after hurricane Anil left it, it is still in a dilapidated state. I am hoping that somewhere in his budget for—2018 is gone already—2019, that the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs will find room to do some work in India Ground and in Carapo on behalf—

**Dr. Francis:** Disaster repair.

**Brig. Gen. A. Antoine:** Disaster repair. So that we would overcome hurricane Anil who now has been downgraded. Well, he is not even a tropical depression now. You do not hear anything about hurricane Anil. He is just a depression somewhere.

In terms of health, I would like to thank the Minister of Health for the news about the Arima hospital that would allow the residents of D'Abadie/O'Meara medical facility within easy distance of their homes, so that we can see, in all these different areas where this Government plans to bring some relief to the people of D'Abadie/O'Meara, during the course of the year, at the same time that the Government is telling the residents: "Look, we are having a valley experience. We are no longer on the mountaintops. We no longer have access to all the funds that we had in the past. And we have to make some adjustments."

The people of D'Abadie/O'Meara appreciate that their best interest will be served by this present Government and that we will do all in our power to make this adjustment as easy as possible, but the fact remains that they will have to adjust. We cannot go on business as usual. We cannot go on same, same. We cannot adopt the—

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Member, your original 45 minutes are now spent. You are entitled to 10 more minutes if you wish to avail yourself of it. You may proceed.

**Brig. Gen. A. Antoine:** Yes, Madam Speaker. So we have to adjust. We cannot adopt the attitude of those on the other side. And at the end of the day I am hoping my mentors in the History Department of the university, I remember Dr. Baptiste and Dr. Cato, Dr. Pemberton and even my friend, Dr. Francis here, would, in our discussions, maybe to help me understand the transformation that took place with those on the other side on their move from the NAR through Club 88, ULF, UNC-A, People's Partnership and now, I guess, UNC-B. I am sorry that my friend from St. Augustine is not here so we can understand really and truly where he fits in this scheme of things.

As I say again, I am not too sure whether he is Congress of the People or "congress of the person" or where he fits in this whole scheme of things. But at least when they are analyzing the situation, explain the change. Is it because of Napoleon? Did the people on the other side have a Napoleon come and transform them into what we are seeing today? It is left to understand.

And I hope that my colleagues would help me and my constituency recover from hurricane Anil. It is going on, what, three or four years now that hurricane Anil swept through D'Abadie/O'Meara and I am hoping that the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs would come to the rescue, the Minister of Works and Transport, so that we can move forward, in terms of the further development, in terms of D'Abadie/O'Meara.

And I want to, before I end my contribution, again thank the Minister of Finance for having the foresight but also having the courage to come forth with a budget that tells Trinidadians that we need to have a different perspective on what it is to be a Trini; what it is to be a Trini. And a Trini is not just somebody who, you know, throw things out there, but a Trini is somebody who is conscious of the situation he finds himself in.

And maybe sometime in the future we may be having a next mountaintop experience when we can go out there, you know, and fly the Trini flag everywhere with everyone. But now calls for a different perspective on what it is to be a Trini and how we look at our situation and how we look at our circumstances; that we must have principles of thrift, that we must plan for the future. Maybe we need to revisit property ownership and that we can, first of all, own an apartment and later on in life we can sell that apartment and purchase a single unit or a family, as we get older and our fortunes increase.

So, Madam Speaker, I want to thank you for giving me this opportunity to make this contribution. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mrs. Vidia Gayadeen-Gopeesingh** (*Oropouche West*): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for this opportunity to contribute to this debate. Before I get into the substantive issues contained in the Budget Statement, 2018, Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate the Leader of the Opposition [*Desk thumping*] for her superb contribution. She clearly illustrated the ineptitude and the incompetence of this Government; a Government devoid of innovative ideas as to how to bring the people out of this sinkhole that we have found ourselves.

I would always like to congratulate all the Members who have contributed here from this side, and I would not forget the Member for Couva North for her brilliant run-up before her delivery. I wish her all the best. Also, we cannot forget dynamic speakers, the Member of Parliament for Fyzabad, the Member for Tabaquite and the Member for Princes Town for their sterling contributions. [*Desk thumping*]

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[MRS. GAYADEEN-GOPEESINGH]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

Madam Speaker, I would look at the overall view and give an overall view of the budget. When we look at this budget, Madam Speaker, a budget must never have the effect of really eroding the middle class in a society; neither should it have the effect of suppressing the working class, as this is exactly what this budget will do. It would place utter hopelessness and gloom on the people of this country. Poverty will increase, as the Government continues to tax, borrow and spend.

Madam Speaker, if you were to ask a poor man what is he interested in, would he tell you that he is interested to find out what is the meaning of a budget deficit? He is not interested in what is called revenue streams. He is not interested in either fixed or floating exchange rates. Madam Speaker, this economic jargon does not excite an old or a poor man. What the simple ordinary man is interested in is how he is going to put food on the table for his hungry children. [*Desk thumping*] He wants to know that his family is comfortable, that he could afford to send his children to school, to pay his bills. But, Madam Speaker, this budget puts undue burden on the poor man.

Madam Speaker, it is no secret that our country is already burdened with several persons who have mental health issues, and this is not a stigma. It is not for persons to be ashamed of. But this budget would really be a stimulus to trigger more mental health problems for our citizens.

Madam Speaker, what does a single mother want to know? What does a single mother want to know? She wants to know that when she hears the cries of her child she has money to buy the milk for her baby. But this Rowley-led administration has absolutely nothing in this budget to improve the lives of the poor family. [*Desk thumping*] Simply, it is not a people-centred budget, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, when I look at the Budget Statement 2018, I saw the theme of it says: Changing the Paradigm. I asked a simple question: changing the paradigm from what to what? Is it you are changing from suffering to more suffering? Are you changing from murders to more murders? Are you changing from high food prices to prices that are unaffordable? Would there be more job losses? Would the poor man benefit when this paradigm is changed, or would it continue? Would the people continue to exist in a state of hopelessness in this country?

Madam Speaker, after I give an overview of this budget I really want to turn my attention to crime and the failure by this National Security Minister to defend and protect our vulnerable women. I am also going to deal with the phenomenal levels of child abuse that we are experiencing and how, under this Government, the right of children to a safe and secure future has been denied.

Madam Speaker, one of the basic rights which is enshrined in the Constitution is the right to security. If we were to see section 4 of the Constitution, it is the right to have security, the right to be protected. That right, which is enshrined, is now breached by this Government, because no one feels safe in this country anymore. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, despite all the exaggerated tales of anti-crime plans and intelligence, you would hear the hon. Minister of National Security talking about gathering information and gathering intelligence, women continue to die as a result of domestic violence and crime. If we were to turn to page, I believe, 24 of the Budget Statement, you would see words like prediction, deterrence, detection, prosecution and rehabilitation.

### 3.30 pm

Madam Speaker, for the last two years I have been hearing these words and what do these words mean? These words used in a vacuum do not mean anything. These words must be put to action. [*Desk thumping*] And, Madam Speaker, in light of what I have just said, women need to be heard in this Parliament and today, each violated woman, each woman who has died through violence will be heard through my voice as I speak in this Parliament. No longer will they be mere statistics, but their cries will from this moment haunt the ears of those placed in the corridors of power in this nation. I intend to awaken this nation Madam Speaker, to the reality of disrespect and extreme violence that is the lot of so many of our women.

Madam Speaker, this reminds me of the words of a goodwill ambassador for the UNIFEM, Nicole Kidman, and I quote:

“I have learnt that violence against women knows no boundaries...”

“Violence against women is an appalling human rights violation. But it is not inevitable. We can put a stop to this”

And I ask: can this Government put a stop to it? Madam Speaker, I say this in light of the ill treatment faced in our country everyday by our women. This Government, insensitive and incompetent has totally disregarded the cries for action from the citizenry.

Many groups have outlined the need for a plan to treat with the rising heinous crimes against our women and children. Madam Speaker, in the budget of 116 pages, only two lines were mentioned about domestic violence and the heinous attack on women, with absolutely no plan to the way forward to curb this crisis.

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[MRS. GAYADEEN-GOPEESINGH]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

Madam Speaker, it is a fact that 41 women were murdered in 240 days in this country, the country deserves to know what this administration intends to do about this epidemic. Madam Speaker, nowhere in this budget are there any programmes in place to protect our women.

The People's Partnership Government was a caring government. We cared for our women, we cared for our children and we cared for the elderly. This Government makes it a habit to blame the Opposition for their inability to govern this country they say that they are in charge but they rock back and do nothing.

Madam Speaker, let us turn our attention to what the citizens have to say about violence against women under this Government and if we were to look at an *Express* article on the 6<sup>th</sup> December, 2016, it reads:

“Domestic violence against women has reached epidemic levels in Trinidad and Tobago with more than 10,000 women seeking restraining orders every year.”

Director of Gender Affairs Division, Office of the Prime Minister, Antoinette Jack-Martin said that, she said that:

“These figures are unacceptably high and alarming.”

Madam Speaker, Diana Mahabir-Wyatt, *Guardian* article, 8<sup>th</sup> February, 2017 said:

“...Rowley ought to be a role model to men and exemplify what men should not be doing rather than blaming women's choices...”

Women were being blamed for not choosing properly rather than the perpetrator being blamed for their action and violence...”

She noted Madam Speaker:

“...that the Office of the Prime Minister included a ministry dealing with women's affairs...”

And Madam Speaker, it is no secret that the hon. Prime Minister, the choice of words, the unsavoury and unpalatable words he used to describe women in this country. Total disrespect. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker, the head of the Institute for Gender Development Studies, Dr. Gabrielle Hosein, said a number of cases involving abuse of women in which they were assaulted or murdered was specifically about intimate partner violence, it is abbreviated IPV. And we ask what does that mean? Is it that there is something that is missing in terms of women who are experiencing an level of IPV

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

being able to successively get protection from social services? Madam Speaker, all the social commentators, all have recognized that we have a huge problem. This Government is in charge two years now but not a ray of hope for our women. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, as part of the special focus on this event the *Trinidad Guardian* on the 8<sup>th</sup> March, 2017, asked a sample of women across the country to state their biggest concern at this point in time and Madam Speaker, if you will allow me, the responses were as follows: we had a

“Stay-at-home-mom,”

She said:

“The disappearances and kidnappings of young women, I have a young daughter and I worry about going out in public and someone snatching her away because you don’t even know when you are being targeted.” [*Crosstalk*]

You have a:

“student,”

Madam Speaker, she said:

“My safety, as a student, it’s especially frightening walking the streets by yourself. You have to be wary of every taxi you get in and try to take pictures of the car or the driver just to have peace of mind when travelling.”

A “Programme officer,” said:

“Violence against women is my biggest concern in this country. As a mother, I am...fearful for my child's safety...”

Madam Speaker, these are the voices of the women in Trinidad and Tobago. They are afraid and why it is that women must be afraid to walk this land? Why it is that women must be afraid to get into a vehicle and not watch around? Why should that happen in this country we are in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?

Madam Speaker, let us look at what is said about us internationally, how we are painted internationally. Madam Speaker, just a few weeks ago US crime fighting expert, former Attorney General and Congressman for the State of California, Dan Lungren, was a speaker at the Caribbean Security Forum in Trinidad. In a *Guardian* article, September 25, 2017, he said that Trinidad and Tobago is:

“rated by the U.S... Department as “critical” in terms of its crime level”

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[MRS. GAYADEEN-GOPEESINGH]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

He indicated that:

“the highest level of crime that they can give”—to—“any country.”

Madam Speaker, he said this is the highest level of crime one can give to any country. Madam Speaker, do you know when countries are listed as critical what it means, it means that countries prone—these countries are prone to terrorist attacks such as Afghanistan, Chad and Algeria. Narco-states such as Columbia and Mexico.

Madam Speaker, this is where we have reached, under this so-called caring government, clueless and hopeless without a plan. Madam Speaker, this is the view of the United States, this is the view they have formulated about us. So tell me how much of that \$17 billion spent on crime fighting for the last two fiscal years, were used to protect our women? And they always speak about value for money. Madam Speaker, but what value are we receiving.

Madam Speaker, there is something called Al Jazeera News, it is a news channel station at Qatar, Doha in Qatar, on the 14<sup>th</sup> February, 2017, a documentary was done in Trinidad and the topic:

Domestic Violence in Trinidad and Tobago

A look at the issues driving violence against women

And I quote, Madam Speaker:

A young woman—“was working in her restaurant job at the popular MovieTowne complex in Trinidad’s capital when she got a phone call from a man she knew. Shortly after leaving to meet him, she was found with her throat slit in the parking lot, the victim of what police are calling”—now—“a domestic dispute.”

It went on:

“The 27-year-old’s death earlier this month is one in a string of high profile killings of women on the tiny dual-island Caribbean nation of 1.3 million people.”

Madam Speaker, this is what is happening under this Government, we did not make Al Jazeera News because of some accomplishment, Madam Speaker, or some outstanding achievement, we made Al Jazeera News because of the slaughter house we have now found ourselves in under this Government. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, in one of the Prime Minister's so called conversations, the hon. Prime Minister said:



*Appropriation Bill, 2017*

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

“You call on the Prime Minister to do something about crime. I am not in your bedroom, I am not in your choice of men.”

Madam Speaker, how much more uncaring and callous a Prime Minister can be when the society is looking up for some sort of comfort. Today, Madam Speaker, I am saying now may be the time, now may be the time for the hon. Attorney General to bring legislation to this Parliament to legalize pepper spray, to get Tasers, Madam Speaker, because women need to arm themselves, women need to protect themselves.

Madam Speaker. Palmiste grounds which is in San Fernando, Philippine, women walk there, but you know what, they are scared because there were numerous cases where women were pulled in the bushes and raped and why that should happen? You cannot enjoy the ambience, you cannot enjoy pristine nature. Why should that be, Madam Speaker? Violence against women in Trinidad has been on the rise since this Government came into office and we are talking about value for money. I said \$17 billion of taxpayers' money spent in the last two fiscal years by a Ministry of National Security and nothing to show. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, in 2016 with the COMSTAT report, there were 200 reports of missing women ranging from 12 to 40. Usually Madam Speaker, people would say that teenage children may have some fight with their parents and runaway. So that maybe. But what about the girls who go missing and turn up dead? What happened to those girls? And they are dead Madam Speaker, because we have cases where we have young women found three days later down a precipice. We had a bank employee found dead, the autopsy revealed she was smothered. We have another young woman, who was found dead at Morne Coco Road, Petit Valley. What the autopsy revealed? Her neck was broken. These kinds of heinous crimes against our women, Madam Speaker. What about the murders that go cold in this country? What about the Japanese pan player who was found dead last year Ash Wednesday? What became of that case?

**3.45 p.m.**

Madam Speaker, we still have persons who are missing. San Fernando, we had a beautiful young businesswoman missing, last seen in her Cedar Drive home in Palmiste, September 11, 2015. We had a next beautiful hairdresser abducted at the corner of Papourie Road, went to drop off her two children. No closure for that family. Those two persons cannot be found, and there are more. There are other missing young girls, 17-year, 15-year and 16-year-old girls, and then we could ask a question. Perhaps if we turn our attention to the global phenomena,

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[MRS. GAYADEEN-GOPEESINGH]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

Madam Speaker, of human trafficking. And if we look at the recently published Trafficking in Persons Report 2017, we can safely say that we are not receiving any value for money under this Government.

Madam Speaker, this report, the Trafficking in Persons Report 2017 said:

“The Government of Trinidad and Tobago does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking...

...the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. It has yet to secure a conviction under its anti-trafficking law. The government decreased funding for its anti-trafficking unit and victim care. Victims were not provided specialized services, including during legal proceedings. The government did not have policies or laws regulating foreign labor recruiters and had no basis for holding them civilly and criminally liable for fraudulent recruitment.”

Madam Speaker, this is the Government that said they had all the answers, but all this is happening under their watch.

Madam Speaker, no one really is immune to the scourge of violence. In Trinidad, usually you reach 60 years, you may believe that it is time for you to rock back and enjoy your retirement, but one may think after working all your life hard, Madam Speaker, you can be murdered. In 2017 alone we had nine women, Madam Speaker, over the age of 60 brutally murdered. Nine men over the age of 60 were killed, with the oldest being 87 years old—87. And if it is that I may only be talking about the female, weekend there was a man, 87-year-old man stuffed in a barrel, Madam Speaker. So we have many instances where pensioners are being kidnapped for their life savings.

Madam Speaker, the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, we know we are in trouble. International institutions know we are in trouble, so when will this Government realize that we are in trouble? When will they ever give us a plan, Madam Speaker, to protect our women? We have infants being killed. The Leader of the Opposition spoke about, they throw in the Beetham, in landfills, Madam Speaker. And there were some conversations at Piggott’s Corner, Madam Speaker, Friday, and the Prime Minister of this country totally misconstrued what the Leader of the Opposition said about teenage pregnancy and teenager mothers who do not want the babies. Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition said that in some states of Africa where you do not want the baby there is a receptacle where you can place the child. It sends off an alarm, and the persons in the institution will receive the baby for the safety of that child, not to throw a child in

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

a Beetham or a landfill. Madam Speaker, and the hon. Prime Minister went on to say that that is the strategy the Leader of the Opposition wants to use, “put yuh child an ring ah bell an run away”. What is that supposed to mean? You are totally misleading the nation of what the Leader of the Opposition was saying, totally misleading.

Madam Speaker, when we look at the children’s homes, just a couple of weeks ago, Madam Speaker, the Children’s Authority disclosed, and I quote:

That persons currently operating the home at Calder Hall, Tobago, are neither qualified nor licensed to do so. It is even more alarming that this home is under the purview of the Tobago House of Assembly’s Division of Health and Social Services.

Madam Speaker, we have a Government funding an illegal organization that can cause more harm than good to our innocent children. Madam Speaker, the Children’s Authority is saying this, it is not any of us here on the UNC side saying anything like that. I hope that the Fraud Squad will investigate the situation to ascertain who owns this facility so we can retrieve the squandered funds.

Madam Speaker, and we have different homes in this country. We have St. Michael’s Home for Boys, we have St. Jude’s Home, and we know of all the different things that happened. We have children being missing and not being found in some of these homes. Madam Speaker, with the few more minutes that I have, I want to turn my attention to the constituency, to my constituency, Madam Speaker. On June 19<sup>th</sup> Oropouche West was one of the worse hit constituencies. It was struck by a very eventful phenomenon called Tropical Storm Bret. Madam Speaker, over 600 persons either lost their roofs, crops, or livestock. Many families lost clothes, school uniforms for their children, and household appliances. Madam Speaker, people in Oropouche West were marooned, they could not get out of their homes for days. We had flood in San Francique, flood in Suchit Trace, Woodland, Durbassa Trace, Madam Speaker.

Those of us who know Suchit Trace would know lots of persons plant agriculture there. We have acres of corn, acres of sweet potato, acres of peas, and they all covered with water. Most of those persons, Madam Speaker, were either referred to the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services or the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. Not a single help to date from either the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services or the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, but from, Madam Speaker, the kind assistance of different NGOs we had to get these people out and get them in safe institutions for

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

[MRS. GAYADEEN-GOPEESINGH]

overnight, and to replace mattress, to replace food, to give them shelter, to give them water, and we did not have any person from the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services or the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries coming to check any of these people.

Madam Speaker, I have to give special thanks to ITNAC, an NGO from Diego Martin, the Krishna Mandir from San Fernando. We had the Princes Town Open Bible Church. We had the Sai Baba Foundation. They were all able to rescue the constituents, Madam Speaker. To date not a single help—and, you know, Madam Speaker, perhaps I could ask the Member for Laventille West, because we are seeing now Maraval flooding, Santa Cruz flooding, Diego Martin flooding, and, perhaps, I would ask him if he would want to redefine what alligators in a murky lagoon means. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, when we look at housing, Oropouche West, we have over 27,000 electorates, Oropouche West, who could vote. Madam Speaker, the number of applications per 27,000 constituents, the application with 20 homes. Twenty from 27,000, we have to calculate what percentage that is. I have written the Minister of Housing. I have, Madam Speaker, a pile of letters, a pile of letters, Madam Speaker, a pile, and you know what, not a single acknowledgment. Not a single saying, I have received your letter dated X and I am giving attention to it. Not two lines. And you know what, Madam Speaker, every time you ask, and I had said, what about the house with X or Y, they reduce every serious question in this Parliament to a joke. They make it sound facetious every time you ask about a serious issue. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, it really breaks my heart to know what my constituents have been going through, what they are going through. And I heard the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central, the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs—yesterday I sat in this Parliament, this august Chamber, Madam Speaker, and I listened carefully—I am sorry, Madam Speaker, last Friday—and the number of projects I heard being done in the north of Trinidad I thought to myself, Oropouche West is not one of those constituencies, not one of the 41 constituencies in this country, because the number of things I heard. In fact, I heard Laventille West is getting a swimming pool. I have absolutely no objection to that. [*Crosstalk*] That is what he said. The Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs said he is going to do that. I have no objections, Madam Speaker, but the people in Oropouche West they can swim too, they know how to swim. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker—

**Madam Speaker:** Order. Order.

**Mrs. V. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh:** Madam Speaker, I heard the Minister said all the different lighting that is happening in all these different constituencies in north he has written the Minister of Public Utilities, but, Madam Speaker, the Minister of Public Utilities, I could accept there might be an inordinate delay because we do not know who is really the Minister of Public Utilities. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I recall writing a letter one Friday to the Minister of Public Utilities and by Sunday I had to change the letter, [*Desk thumping*] so I could accept there might be some delay, but you cannot continue indefinitely delays like this. Madam Speaker, including the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara, he wants to be acknowledged. [*Crosstalk*] Madam Speaker, again, the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs said that some particular cricketer needed a house, all he had to do was call the Member for San Fernando East because he did not get it when he had applied. He just take one phone call, give it to San Fernando East, the Minister of Housing and Urban Development, the house was approved.

Madam Speaker, in the constituency of Oropouche West we have cricketers there, especially, Madam Speaker, there is a cricketer there who plays in the CPL, Jon-Russ Jaggesar. Why is it he is not getting his house? I have to be writing, writing the Minister, carbon copying the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, and, again, not a single acknowledgment. Madam Speaker, you must have what is called, equitable distribution of resources. [*Desk thumping*] That is what it is. We have a young woman, cricketer, Oropouche West, young woman, she is a batswoman, and also, Madam Speaker, is a pace bowler, Samantha Bissoon. I heard the Minister said he got 45 scholarships and giving out, I hope that Samantha Bissoon gets one so she could go to Australia and fine-tune her bowling. Do not forget, Samantha Bissoon, Madam Speaker.

So, Madam Speaker, in closing—I had one Member, the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West, I think the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla will deal with the social services, but one point that stood out, Madam Speaker, she said, and I quote the hon. Member, the country was left bankrupt. I want to remind her, it is this budget that is bankrupt, Madam Speaker. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for St. Ann's East.

**The Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts (Hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly):** Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to rise and to contribute in this budget debate, 2017. Madam Speaker, I have heard other speakers speak about their long years in the Parliament and the number of

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[HON. DR. N. GADSBY-DOLLY]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

contributions they have made, and I am certain, Madam Speaker, that they would be challenged, as long as they have been here, to have been subjected to a more depressing contribution than the one we were just subjected to in this House. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I know the Member referred to, you know, the budget causing mental issues, and I do not know if there is some level of depression happening, but if we stand here to recount every bad thing that has happened in this country, I am certain that over this year, over the last years, certainly under 2010 to 2015, we can have a long list if you all sit to just do that. And, therefore, I want to thank God, Madam Speaker, for the PNM, and the hope that this Government brings to Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, as I thank the Ministers of Finance and Planning and Development for what they would have done in ensuring that this country in 2017 receives a budget that really hits down the middle and makes the best attempt to give Trinidad and Tobago a fighting chance in 2017, I want to remind us that things are difficult; yes, they are in this country and around the world, but it is not impossible. The PNM has done it before and we will do it again. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I heard the Member speaking about the caring UNC and the uncaring PNM, and I also heard her speaking in so at length about the women and the children, and the problems that they are undergoing, and I just wanted to remind the Member for Oropouche West that it is the caring UNC, when the children's Marriage Bill was being debated, brought a temporary Senator into the other place who as much as said, after 12 is lunch, Madam Speaker; once they are seeing their periods they are ready for marriage. I want to remind them, that was not the PNM, that was the very caring UNC who did that. [*Desk thumping*] So, Madam Speaker, let me get into the meat of my contribution and begin to contextualize my contribution today by taking another look, just a very brief look again at the finances of this country, because it bears repeating, Madam Speaker, so that everyone can really understand and accept what we are going through. Sometimes when we hear the numbers in terms of billions, it does not compute, we do not relate to it because it is far removed from our circumstances, and so when we say that in 2014 our petroleum revenue was \$20.9 billion, and it is reduced now in 2017 to \$2.8 billion, an 86 per cent drop, maybe it does not compute.

Madam Speaker, when we say that the total energy revenue in 2014, being \$20 billion, is now down in 2017 to \$9 billion, a 68 per cent drop, maybe the figures are too large, but if we think about it in terms of a salary, a household income, and all of us live in houses, all of us balance our budgets every day. And if we think about a household that has been receiving \$8,000 a month in income and that income is

reduced to \$2,560 it becomes a little clearer the situation Trinidad and Tobago is in, and if that salary was \$5,000 a month, Madam Speaker, the circumstances we are in today has reduced that to an estimated \$1,600 a month.

And as homemakers what would we do if that were our circumstance? What would we do? How would we operate our business? Would it be business as usual? Madam Speaker, as a household we can now extend that to a Government, what does a Government do when placed in those circumstances of reduced revenue, sharp as it is?

Madam Speaker, allow me to just look a little bit at three examples of responses to these types of the situations. I want to look at the NAR's response in 1980, in the 80s, Madam Speaker, and we are all familiar with what happened there, sharply reduced revenue, and the NAR attempted to reduce expenditure. And to do that, Madam Speaker, they had a drastic downsize of the public sector, reduction in public sector salaries, and we know the results of that, of choosing that option to reduce expenditure. Catastrophic on the country, and, I dare say, that we are still reeling in some aspects from the result of that decision to choose to do that, to reduce expenditure.

Madam Speaker, if we look at the response of the UNC during 2010 to 2014 when the revenue was pretty much stagnant, what was their response, and their response was actually to increase spending. So, imagine you are in a household and your income is the same over the years, but in four years, Madam Speaker, with constant and stagnant revenue, the UNC's response was to raise expenditure to the tune of \$16.1 billion from \$46.7 billion in 2010 to \$62.8 billion in 2014. And concurrent with that came a sharp increase in the price of Government projects. Madam Speaker, what should have cost \$4 million, cost \$40 million, \$400 million, and it seems that there was no scale. There was no multiplier, it was just whatever you felt to multiply this by, and what was the result of that? And I like, and I want to congratulate the Minister of Finance for using the term, "false economy". [*Desk thumping*] That is important, it is a good term to use.

**Hon. Member:** What?

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** False economy, because that is where you would of described the inflated perception of this country's wealth. People honestly felt we had more money than the Government had, and on top of that came exaggerated expectations of what people should receive. And up to now, Madam Speaker, there is a total unwillingness in the population to believe and to accept our financial circumstances, and a belligerence in the population demanding that they should get what they do not know is there for them to get, Madam Speaker.

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[HON. DR. N. GADSBY-DOLLY]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

I, myself, have experienced numerous phone calls, texts, people showing up in my office even, Madam Speaker, to bully for money that they believe is their own because they have an unreal understanding of what our circumstances are in this country. And when, Madam Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition stands in the Parliament and says, words to the effect, that things are not as bad as we are making it out to be, Madam Speaker, then that leads to the type of confusion that we have going on in our society today, and it leads to that false economy. Madam Speaker, the TT Chamber of Commerce on Friday, October the 6<sup>th</sup> said very clearly, it should be clear to the entire population that the nation is facing an unprecedented economic situation. So business community recognizes it, this Government recognizes it, but leaders that we expect better of, stand in the Parliament to mislead the population and to deliberately confuse the issues.

I saw the Member for Princes Town, he is absent from his seat now, but I saw him introducing into the debate, you know, that the PNM is throwing shade. Madam Speaker, let me tell you something, the PNM does not throw shade, we plant trees under which other people take shade. [*Desk thumping*] That is what we do in the PNM, we do not take shade. And, as a matter of fact, we throw spotlights on the issue, and in the last two weeks [*Desk thumping*] we would have seen the spotlight being thrown on the real circumstances. Madam Speaker, how does the PNM respond to this situation, and I am going to quote two examples of the PNM undergoing situations where the revenue is declining. In 2007 to 2010, when we were faced with declining revenues, what did the PNM do? We reduced expenditure by \$7.1 billion, and, again, in 2015 to 2017, Madam Speaker, against all the odds the PNM has been successful in introducing fiscal measures that have reduced our expenditure by 20 per cent to \$12 billion. And, Madam Speaker, every Minister here is to be congratulated for the efforts they would have made to make this a reality. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, this PNM Government continues to deliver strong, responsible and measured leadership. We understand that things have to be different and we have to adjust to our new normal, but the measures we have implemented have ensured that we reduce our expenditure without disrupting, as much as possible, the quality of life of our citizens; a measured approach to doing it, and, of course, with maintaining critical investment in national development, and that is why I congratulated the Minister of Planning and Development and the Minister of Finance. It is a balance. We have to achieve that balance to be able to go forward as a country even as we make our adjustments.

Madam Speaker, as we speak about national development, the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts plays one of the essential roles in human development in Trinidad and Tobago. In times of financial adjustments,



*Appropriation Bill, 2017*

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

such as we are experiencing right now, critical factors, or critical types of experiences for our people in this country, our citizens, would be adaptability. We have to maintain our adaptability, which is the ability of all of our citizens to accept your changing circumstances. We have to maintain optimism, Madam Speaker, optimism which is what the Member for Oropouche West showed none of in her contribution. Bad times do not last. We have been through bad times before, they do not last. Madam Speaker, the third quality that we have to hone in our citizens in times of financial adjustment would be patriotism. Patriotism is not just waving a flag; waving a flag, anybody can do that, but patriotism is love for country, as well as the willingness to work for its development. [*Desk thumping*] So adaptability, optimism and patriotism, these are the three qualities that our citizens need. Allow me to just quote from Dr. Eric Williams in his 1962 independence address where he said:

“The strength of the Nation depends on the strength of its citizens.”

Let me repeat that:

“The strength of the Nation depends on the strength of its citizens.”

Madam Speaker, that is why in times of financial adjustment it is important to have all of the fiscal measures, but it is equally important to devote and to invest in the quality of citizens that we are producing, because on the quality of the citizens lies the strength of the nation. Madam Speaker, this is where the work of the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts is focused, on the development of our citizens.

Let us look at the aspiration statement of Vision 2030, Madam Speaker, because as you contextualize this human development, emphasis on citizenry, we have to look at where the PNM sees this country going at the year 2030. So I am going to paraphrase, Madam Speaker, allow me to, aspiration statement of Vision 2030:

We are a united, resilient, productive, innovative nation, with a disciplined, caring, fun-loving society, comprising healthy, happy people, with self-reliance, respect, tolerance, equity, inclusion and integrity. The diversity and creativity of all people are valued and nurtured.

And along with that aspiration goes a development Theme I, which says:

“Putting People First: Nurturing Our Greatest Asset”

Madam Speaker, these themes wholly encapsulate the work of the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts.

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[HON. DR. N. GADSBY-DOLLY]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

So allow me, Madam Speaker, at this point to go into what the work of the Ministry encapsulates, and we see our role happening in 10 different areas. Those 10 areas, Madam Speaker, would be:

- policy formation;
- skills training;
- artist development;
- community entrepreneurship;
- community and performance infrastructure;
- immersion in culture and the arts;
- personal development;
- support for community initiatives;
- heritage preservation; and
- support and development of the cultural tourism product.

This is a very broad Ministry, Madam Speaker, and at this time I am going to go into these 10 areas what we have done for 2017 and how we intend to proceed for 2018.

Madam Speaker, in terms of policy formation, policies are very important to us at the Ministry because they help us to chart the way forward, make our objectives clear. They allow us to inculcate monitoring and evaluation strategies into the programmes that we are running, and, of course, allow us to look for the effectiveness, whether we have achieved our objectives, and whether we have achieved value for money, which again is very important. And so in 2017, Madam Speaker, we would have developed the community development policy, the culture and the arts policy, as well as a policy for support to the museum sector.

**4.15p.m.**

These discussion papers have been developed and they will be out for public comment before the end of calendar 2017. We intend to finalize these policies in the year to come so that they are enacted and enforced in the Ministry for 2018.

Madam Speaker, I am sorry the Member for Princes Town is not here because I know he mentioned the funding policy which has been in force since 2016. We

came in, met none in 2015 and made sure that we developed that since 2016. So, Member, I hope wherever you are, you are listening and you know that we have already been there and done that.

Madam Speaker, with respect to a subvention policy, the Ministry distributes over \$4 million in grants every year, and we met no subvention policy at the Ministry and, therefore, we have gone to Cabinet and gotten a policy approved, because we think it is important for a reporting relationship to be very firmly established between those who receive Government subventions, and we have dedicated staff to have that particular oversight because we want to ensure that there is value for the money that is given to these NGOs that receive it.

In the area of skills training, the well-known community education programme is still running in the Ministry, and what we do every year is look to see which communities want which different skills and add them on to our arsenal. This year, Madam Speaker, we were able to have over 7,500 graduates through the Ministry's programme in the different communities, out of 400 classes. And most importantly, Madam Speaker—very importantly—245 tutors were employed and gained temporary employment in this community education programme.

For 2018, we want to continue this and to encourage non-traditional participation, because there are many people who do not participate because they do not know. So we are encouraging putting it out there, sensitizing persons so that more people can take advantage, because in this time we can use this as a skills training, retraining type of programme for persons who may need it if they are out of the job market or if they need to supplement their salaries.

Madam Speaker, in the area of artiste development, allow me to mention our long running Best Village Programme which caters to over 12,000 participants in 2017, more than 70 per cent of them being under the age of 25. In 2016, I would have promised to increase the training so that we increase the quality of the artistes coming out of the Best Village Programme. I would have promised to increase the prizes, to reintroduce the food and folk fair so that we enhance our traditional and local culinary arts in this country; to maintain the Junior Best Village which is a programme that in 2017 saw participation of 800 students all over the country in the vacation period learning about our culture and heritage; to introduce a folk theatre season, the first ever folk theatre season, where the best productions of the Best Village folk theatre productions are put on for the general public's edification, and to re-establish the Tobago participation in Best Village.

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[HON. DR. N. GADSBY-DOLLY]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

Madam Speaker, I am happy to report that all of these have been accomplished to the joy of the Best Village community, and most importantly, without increasing the budget that was allocated to Best Village. [*Desk thumping*] This is a programme that employs, again, over 200 tutors annually. So it is not just learning about culture, the arts and being an artiste but it is also an employment strategy for many people in the arts. Of course, it affects many spin-off industries: dressmakers, production technicians, choreographers, producers, creative directors, makeup artistes and many more. So, this very pivotal programme, we continue to work with this programme and to work with the young people who are involved in this programme and to ensure that as one of the most important programmes in this country it is continued with the degree of excellence that we are working towards.

Madam Speaker, let me mention other artiste development programmes, such as Mentoring by the Masters, where we had seasoned professionals such as Sharon Pitt in broadcasting, Rosalind Gabriel in Carnival arts, Lionel Jaggessar in fancy Indian mass, Patricia McLeod in the Orisha tradition, Simeon Sandiford in music production. We had 85 students being able to sit with them in a mentorship arrangement for 12 weeks and to learn from them. These students were handpicked, they were artistes already, so that they were able to get in their particular field of practice the tips and the tricks and the knowledge transfer necessary to increase the quality of the artistes that they could be to this country.

We also ran technical camps. More than 100 young people from the age of 18 to 25 were able to learn advanced skills in terms of visual arts, stage makeup, fashion design, et cetera. Eleven camps ran around the country in 2017. Handicraft workshops, and we are speaking still about developing artistes. Look at the different areas that we are touching, Madam Speaker. Handicraft workshops, because we are seeking in the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts to revitalize the craft industry. This industry has tremendous economic potential. In many of the Latin American countries there are a number of people. In Colombia, for example, over one million people employed directly in the craft sector, and so we see this as an area that we can work on and revitalize to make sure that there are many people who can take part in it, and ensure that they would be able to either diversify their own income into their households or form new streams of revenue.

Madam Speaker, we held two such workshops coming out of the handicraft symposium that we held in July, and that was one of the recommendations coming from the handicraft artisans themselves. They wanted increased training

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

in different areas such as economies of scale, social media marketing, to bring handicraft into 2017, and we have started that thrust and we intend to continue it as we go into 2018.

Madam Speaker, let me also mention that the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts with the responsibility for culture, sees itself as the bridging Ministry between the Ministries of Trade and Industry and Tourism, because we see our role as the development of the artistes where trade now, where the creative industries lie, would take the artistes and monetize the cultural product, and of course tourism would take the cultural product and advertise it internationally. We have had discussions with both FilmTT and the Trinidad and Tobago Film Festival and we are preparing to implement—it is already drafted—a programme in 2018, where we partner together to offer funding for developing film-makers, to take them from the idea straight up to the production of the film and the showing of the film in the TT Film Festival. [*Desk thumping*] So, Madam Speaker, we are playing our role.

We have also been discussing with MusicTT the plan to leverage the success of our very own Calypso Rose in Europe, and how we can use that door that has been opened to allow other artistes to pass through. A plan has been drafted and we are seeking its implementation in 2018.

In the area of community entrepreneurship, let me mention very importantly that we held a very successful craft market in September at NAPA. Over 60 artisans took part, and they recorded sales of over \$57,000. We are looking forward to instituting a craft market every quarter, so that the Ministry can facilitate these artisans having a consistent space to show the country what they can produce, and for the country to understand what is possible to be bought here and to buy local. [*Desk thumping*] So we are going forward with that thrust.

Let me mention as well as we speak about community entrepreneurship, there is one project that is very near and dear to our hearts at the Ministry. We met with the groups operating in the area of Laventille, and they all spoke to us about this particular group of young men who, trying to avoid the problems that may be associated with crime, started a tilapia rearing business in the hills of Laventille, and they needed some grant funding to assist them with their rearing of tilapia and they also needed some training in some of the technical areas. Madam Speaker, as I speak today, those young men are in classes in electrical and plumbing to be able to manage their fish tanks. [*Desk thumping*] That is the work of the Ministry adding value in communities, and we intend to continue providing that to the success of communities in the country.

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[HON. DR. N. GADSBY-DOLLY]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

Let me mention community and performance infrastructure very quickly. Community centres as we all know are the hubs for community development, and every Member of Parliament knows the importance of providing those things to their communities. Madam Speaker, in 2017 we were able to open six new centres, refurbished five centres. There are presently four centres under construction, six centres being refurbished, which will be completed by January 2018. Contracts have been awarded for the construction of 11 centres, and the refurbishment of four centres, and we intend in 2018 to continue our drive on prioritizing the delivery of these community centres all around the country—even as far as Fyzabad. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, we would have said in 2016—I would have stood in this House and said—that the activity centres which unfortunately were built without approval and handed over to Members of Parliament and therefore no plan was in place for their upkeep and maintenance—we were going to seek to take them under the Ministry’s wing, regardless of how they were built and we were going to make sure that we take them under our wing to put them to maximum use. I am happy to report that has been done. [*Desk thumping*] Allow me to thank UDeCOTT through the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development for their sterling efforts at delivering these communities centres. They really have been pulling us out very well.

Allow me to speak a little bit about NAPA, because I heard, again, the Member for Princes Town. He ran away, but I want to mention to him that he saw \$2 million in the budget for NAPA; well thank God, because in 2010 to 2014, there was nothing in the budget to maintain NAPA. Imagine investments like that in this country, no maintenance plan. I want to indicate that we have been able to sign the first ever maintenance plan for NAPA and SAPA to ensure that they are kept up to the quality that they should be as major investments in this country. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, allow me to also mention that Queen’s Hall and Naparima Bowl have not been left out. If the Member had looked very carefully in his budget documents he would have seen money for them too, because as our performance spaces that have stood with us through the test of time, we are also making sure to upgrade them. So, Queen’s Hall and Naparima Bowl would have gone through upgrades this year, to their seating, their lights, their audio, bathrooms, dressing rooms, carpet, all of that has been done, because a building requires maintenance and money is required to maintain a building. Everyone that goes into these performance spaces, every artiste knows the importance of maintaining these spaces so that everyone in this country can benefit from them. We will continue those upgrades in 2018.

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

Let me mention the area of immersion in culture and the arts. This is important as we create audiences for our artistes. It is important for artistes to perform and to perform to people who appreciate that. The national performing entities, the National Steel Symphony Orchestra, the National Philharmonic Orchestra, and the National Theatre Arts Company have been involved in putting on productions for the edification of the general public. At least six open air lunchtime concerts have been held in Port of Spain, and in 2018 we intend to increase that and include venues in South, so that everyone in the country can benefit from these performances. At least 15 shows, productions within our performance spaces have been held over the year, and we intend to increase that.

I want to let you know, Madam Speaker, that what we have been working on successfully, and I want to thank the staff, is ensuring that these productions are not overpriced, in terms of how much they cost to produce, and so therefore we can have more productions for less money. That is what we are looking for, value for money, more for less.

We have run the programmes called Musical Schools in the Community in 2017, 250 persons, and 90 per cent of them under the age of 20. Five venues around this country have benefited from learning to play the steel pan and another instrument, and the introduction to reading music, music literacy, because we know the importance and the effect that can have on young children. They were exposed to three months of training, and some of that training took place in the pan yards, as we want to maximize the potential with the pan yard as a learning space in the communities. In 2018, we intend to take some of the students who show the most promise in this programme, and allow them to attend a music school of their choice within the community. The neighbourhood person who teaches violin at the neighbourhood music school, we intend to afford them that opportunity of course with the requisite monitoring and evaluation to be able to further their musical careers as we generate the new cadre of musicians in Trinidad and Tobago.

Cultural camps—19 camps held over the vacation time to give our children healthy positive options for engagement. Over 500 students participated in the vacation classes where they learnt elements of the culture, elements of the arts, and that was held all around the country and we intend to continue that.

I also want to mention that the diplomatic corps has worked very clearly with the Ministry to ensure that we had cultural exchanges taking place in this country. So you can sit in Trinidad and Tobago at one of our well-maintained performance spaces and enjoy the culture of China, of India, of Venezuela, of Mongolia, and

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[HON. DR. N. GADSBY-DOLLY]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

all of those happened over this 2017. We have pledged our support to the diplomatic community to continue to expose the people of Trinidad and Tobago to those experiences in this country.

Along with having all of these programmes as we seek to grow audiences and to immerse our citizenry in culture and the arts, what we have done is increased our marketing of events using the most cost-effective means possible, and we have also launched the CultureTT App. I encourage everyone listening to go download our app because that is where we are going to put all of our cultural activities happening in the country, so that you can have a repository for the cultural events of Trinidad and Tobago.

For 2018, we intend to publish an annual cultural calendar listing all of the events that are being held by the Ministry and other persons in the country that deal with all of our facets of culture, so that everyone can plan to attend the different events and really immerse themselves in the culture of Trinidad and Tobago.

Allow me very quickly to speak about personal development and the work of the mediation department where over 7,000 persons, some them referred by the courts, took part in the mediation and, of course, that has the effect of reducing the caseload in the courts. Also, over 2,000 persons participated in the workshops offered by this department, and those workshops are in conflict management, parental support, and they are also in the schools running the peer mediation programmes. I would have stood here again in 2016 and told the Parliament that the mediation department was making a down payment for two buses, that that would happen in 2017. So those retrofitted buses that are all soundproof and so on, can serve as mediation centres for the rural areas that do not have the benefit of a mediation office very close. I am happy to report that as promised, that down payment has been made, and in 2018 the Ministry looks forward to taking possession of those two buses and the service of the rural communities in terms of mediation.

It is well known that we, as the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts, support community initiatives through our grant funding programme, and we continue to do so in 2017, and we will continue to do so in 2018. However, the policy that we introduced in 2016 we are now looking at how it has been enacted, how it has been implemented and we would be making certain adjustments to ensure that our present circumstances are realized. We also will be working with groups to present to us realistic budgets, because unfortunately many of the NGOs and the community groups that apply to us need some help in that area, and we are well poised to offer that assistance going forward in 2018.



*Appropriation Bill, 2017*

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

With respect to heritage preservation, we at the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts are in charge of the National Museum and Art Gallery, and that museum as you well know is in need of an upgrade; that museum that has a building that is more than 100 years old. So we will be going forward trying to get the design for what we need to do to upgrade the museum, bearing in mind our present circumstances, and we intend to have that way forward outlined in 2018.

With respect to the sugar museum, that was very briefly opened before the election in 2015 and closed its door soon after that, we intend to open that museum in 2018 and therefore we are now working up the plan for utilization of it and also the scope of works which have already been prepared for refurbishing the building which does need some work in order to be reopened.

Let me mention also the refurbishment works that have already been contracted and awarded, and will be taking place on the museum in the City of Port of Spain, and we intend to open that museum with a Carnival theme, with some performance space incorporated into it. We intend to have the doors of that museum that really is in an area where there is so much foot traffic in the heart of city, where anybody, the tourists coming from the nearby port, anybody walking through the city can get a snapshot of Trinidad and Tobago Carnival and culture. So it is a museum and we intend to put it to use to ensure that there is always a presence of our largest festival, Carnival, in the City of Port of Spain.

Madam Speaker, the last area I would like to mention is the support and development of cultural tourism products. It is well known that Trinidad and Tobago has festivals almost every month. The Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts is the one that underpins some of these festivals by hosting these festivals, and in other ways we support the festivals that other people and other NGOs have. If I were to mention a few of them, I could mention the community festivals that take place around the country in the month of June, and these are hosted by the Ministry and staff of the Ministry: the Bocas Lit Fest in April; Trinidad and Tobago Film Festival in September; the Opera Festival in July; the Trinidad and Tobago Music Festival in March; Carnival, our largest festival between January and February; Divali in October; Ramleela in October; the Best Village Folk Theatre Festival in September; Eid, which varies from month to month depending on the year; Hosay in September; Patriotism Month, another initiative of the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts, between August and September; Emancipation, between July and August; Parang festivals, October to December; Sanfest in October; Phagwa, between February and March, and that is not an exhaustive list.

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[HON. DR. N. GADSBY-DOLLY]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

One of the largest growing areas in tourism, as I am sure the Minister of Tourism will elaborate on, is festival and cultural tourism, and we see our role as the developers of these festivals, the supporters of these festivals, and of course very importantly, the link is being made between the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts. We are responsible for culture and the Ministry of Tourism and the new entity Tourism Trinidad, to be able to develop and to market these festivals abroad, because that is one of the greatest draws to Trinidad and Tobago. So we will continue to develop those festivals.

Madam Speaker, allow me to mention that Trinidad and Tobago will host Carifesta 2019. [*Desk thumping*] We know that this is an opportunity for our artisans, for our cultural tourism product, for entrepreneurs. This is a large opportunity for this country and, therefore, we are treating it with the requisite respect that it deserves. So though we are in 2017, the implementation plan for Carifesta is already being drafted and will be finalized before the end of calendar 2017. We are serious about this business.

The management committee, the Carifesta Secretariat, all those things have been put in place so that in 2018 it meets us implementing the Carifesta plan. So that by 2019 all is in place for a successful Carifesta, because that has the potential to drive our tourism industry. As we are putting ourselves in place that has the potential to kick it off, and we really want to ensure—and we will ensure that in collaboration with all of the Ministries—because it is an interministerial team right now drafting that plan—will be on board and contributing in every way necessary to put Trinidad and Tobago, not only on the regional map, but on the international map through Carifesta 2019. [*Desk thumping*]

All of this work could not have been possible without the hard work and dedication of the executive and staff of the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts, working hard with professionalism, very strong work ethic and what I appreciated most, they took the guidance for the cost-cutting measures with grace and they executed without sacrificing quality to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] For their hard work in achieving more with less, I want to really thank them for their efforts.

Madam Speaker, I stand here by virtue of having been elected by the people of the St. Ann's East constituency, and therefore let me turn to my constituency and speak a bit about what is happening there. Let me first thank my office staff of the St. Ann's East constituency office who have given yeoman service to our constituents over the last two years and counting. They have gone beyond the call of duty many times to ensure that the constituents received the respect that they

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

should. Regardless of what happens when they come into the office, they have gone beyond the call of duty, and I thank them for treating them with that level of respect and love and service. I also want to thank corporate St. Ann's East for supporting. They have been very supportive in all the initiatives, and I thank them for that.

Madam Speaker, 2017 has been, I want to call it, a watershed year, as I mention water. The MP for Oropouche West did mention the amount of landslides and floods we experienced in St. Ann's East, through Santa Cruz, the North Coast Road, Maracas Bay, Las Cuevas up to which my constituency reaches, we have been challenged in 2017. I want to publicly thank the responders who came out. Last two weeks or so there was a flood on a Thursday evening, and people's homes were affected, and I saw staff of the regional corporation, URP and CEPEP in people's homes sweeping out water, lifting out mud. I want to thank them for their response and for helping the people of St. Ann's East. [*Desk thumping*]

I also want to recognize the Minister of Works and Transport and his staff who were on spot every single time. When the big stone fell in the road, when the river overflowed its banks, they were there on spot assisting us to ensure that the people of St. Ann's East got the service they deserved.

Madam Speaker, I want to assure my constituents that there are some pressing issues that they have been contacting me about. I know that we want the upgrades to the Saddle Road. I know there are some issues with water and so on, but I want to thank my constituents for their patience and their understanding. I want to assure them that my Cabinet colleagues have been very responsive, have been helping in every way they can to alleviate any little difficulties that we have had, and so we look forward to their continued support in 2018.

I want to thank some of my colleagues and their staff members, because we have had some notable upgrades in our constituency. I want to thank the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries and the Minister for the upgrades to the Las Cuevas fishing depot. When I mention this, I want to say that the people of St. Ann's East languished between 2010 and 2015, and so I am so happy that they are able to have some measure of attention paid to them at this point in time. So, thank you Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries for the upgrade to the Las Cuevas fishing depot. Thank you for the NAMDEVCO farmers market in Bourg Mulatresse that is serving the constituents of Lower Santa Cruz.

I want to thank the Ministry of Works and Transport for rescuing that Maracas Bay project from the overspend that we would have been facing. I want to thank them for the work that I saw proceeding apace when I passed there last week. I want to

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[HON. DR. N. GADSBY-DOLLY]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

thank them as well for the roundabout at the corner of Saddle Road and La Pastora that we have been asking for for years because it causes a lot of dangerous accidents happening at that point, and that roundabout has been very helpful in alleviating that damage. So I want to thank them for that.

I want to thank the Ministry of National Security for opening the Maracas St. Joseph Police Station. Let me say, Minister, that the residents are very, very grateful. They now feel a sense of security and safety in that community because crime was rearing its ugly head, but opening that police station made a difference to them, because they knew that the Government was truly caring and willing to do something about their security. [*Desk thumping*]

**4.45p.m.**

Madam Speaker, the Member for Couva North, I know that she is not here right now, but she did ask—she did say that she did not know there were any new police youth clubs being opened around the country and she not sure. Well, I want to let her know that in St. Ann's East we are very, very grateful for the establishment of the Bourg Mulatresse Police Youth Club, as well as the Maracas/St. Joseph Police Youth Club which has now joined all the others, the Maracas Bay Police Youth Club, the Febeau Village Police Youth Club, La Canoa and so on. So, we are glad for the establishment of two new police youth clubs because they bring with them a lot of positive involvement for our young people, and in St. Ann's East we need that and so we thank you, Ministry of National Security. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, it would be remiss not to mention and I am thanking UDeCOTT and the project unit of the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts for noticing that we have very old centres in need of upgrading in St. Ann's East and for some work that is happening there. So I want to thank UDeCOTT and the project unit for that work on one or two of our centres.

Madam Speaker, I want to thank the regional corporation, PURE, Ministry of Works and Transport, Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government for assistance in Farrell Hill, Sou Sou Lands, Charleau Lane and that road-paving assistance that is so necessary; we thank you for it and we thank you for what is to come in 2018. And, Ministry of Education, we thank you for upgrading the La Pastora Government School, it really was necessary during the vacation; we thank you for what we received there.

Madam Speaker, I want to indicate that to my constituents that I continue to say and stand in this honourable House in advocacy—

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Member for St. Ann's East, your original 45 minutes are now spent. You are entitled to 10 more minutes if you wish. You may proceed.

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] I want to assure my constituents that their Member of Parliament is here, is present and is always advocating for the increase in their quality of life. I want to assure them as well that this Government and every Minister here is committed to ensuring that whatever we can do to assist them will be done. I want to also assure the national community that the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts is tending to your needs and is ensuring that we reach out in all of these areas and these will always redound to the benefit of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, with these few words, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

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

**Mrs. Christine Newallo-Hosein** (*Cumuto/Manzanilla*): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for this opportunity and I rise to contribute to this budget debate, and I take the opportunity to applaud and endorse the sterling contributions of the Leader of the Opposition and the hon. Member for Siparia and my other colleagues. [*Desk thumping*]

I would like to start off by quoting the hon. Leader of the Opposition in her initial reaction to the fiscal package, and hon. Leader of the Opposition indicated that it is a bankrupt budget that will cause everything, every single thing in this country to go up and the people will suffer. It is bankrupt of any ideas, it is bankrupt of any plan to take the country out of the recession we are in and it is one that is literally bankrupting the country. So in every regard it is a bankrupt budget.

You know, and what pains me today is to hear how the Members on the Government side are struggling to defend this budget, they are literally struggling. [*Desk thumping*]

But before I go on to anything, I just want to respond to—the Member for St. Ann's East brought a very valid point, that the NAPA and SAPA did not have a maintenance plan. I wonder if Member remembers that this NAPA and SAPA were, in fact, opened hurriedly for CHOGM and it was under the PNM administration, [*Desk thumping*] and if Member would remember it was now Prime Minister who had a very public argument with the then Prime Minister, hon. Patrick Manning,

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[MRS. NEWALLO-HOSEIN]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

regarding this very same [*Desk thumping*] NAPA and SAPA. [*Crosstalk*] And when we came into Government, when we came into Government, we had to look at the building and there were serious structural—[*Interruption*]

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Madam Speaker, I would like to invoke Standing Order 53. We are trying to hear the speaker, but we are getting a lot of mutterings from that side, so we cannot hear.

**Madam Speaker:** Okay. So, Members, I know it is coming towards the suspension, but please contain yourselves so that we can all hear the contribution from the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla. Please proceed.

**Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. And so as such, there were serious overruns starting with US \$100 million for each and it went on to US \$200 million for each and counting, and at the end of it there were serious structural defects, so much so that we had to intervene and shut it down. And, of course, all of these issues took place under the PNM. So if there was not any maintenance plan, it was not the fault of the People's Partnership.

And so, continuing, a question I would like to ask is: CARIFESTA, at what cost? And in the implementation, is there any consideration to the security that would be required?—because you are looking at persons coming in for tourism, but we have a serious problem with crime here and internationally we are being branded by countries such as Britain and the US and Australia that persons should be wary about considering coming to Trinidad and Tobago. And I am just saying, I am not saying—you already have your plans, but is there a plan for security?—which you do not need to answer at this point.

And continuing just to put in a plug, this will not cost you one cent, hon. Minister, but the people of Plum Mitan would like to know when they will get their community centre opened as it has already been completed one year ago. So, continuing.

I was listening to the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara and I really felt for you very much but, you know, you were very open and very honest and you said that your constituents feared the budget, Madam Speaker, and that is what we have been trying to say: Everyone fears this budget and, [*Desk thumping*] therefore, I thought it was very honest because no one in the Government is actually saying that it is one that is fearing, and they have their constituents, but I guess Member would have enough time to spend in his constituency as he does not have a Ministry.

But it is the same point that we are trying to explain, that people are fearful as to how they will survive. What will they do? How will they cope? And so, you know, when we understand that the added burdens of overall increases which average about around 10 per cent will place additional burdens especially on female-headed households, and this 10 per cent overall rise in the cost of living devalues savings, raises costs and increases hardship.

And so this is what we are looking at, the given continued economic pressure brought to bear on households and their associated social impact of increased prices, job losses and wage freezes; of course, with that, a greater demand is expected for social services obviously and allocations in the budget do not indicate a responsible response to this reality. And this is where our concern is and it is a concern that is being articulated not only to the Opposition Members, but also to the Government from what is being articulated here today.

So in continuing, we are looking at what is, in fact, needed, what is, in fact, required. And I listened to the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air and the Member indicated several things. First of all, that 170,000 recipients hoped for a better future based on this budget, and I strongly disagree because 170,000 persons do not hope for a better future. As a matter of fact, we had persons on Friday marching, we had persons throughout Trinidad burning tyres in protest of this budget and therefore, it indicates that people do not have a hope and they are fearful and they are trying to get the attention of the Government to say “hey, hold up, wait up, you know, tell us how it is going to work, what provisions are in place to take care of my needs while we are going through this process”, because we are being told, you know, tighten your belt.

The Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara said, you know, he drank, back in his days, you know, the gallon of Peardrax and whatever it is and, you know, they had to drink sorrel and so forth, and all of that is understandable. But what are we saying to the people today because we are not buying Peardrax, we are not buying Cydrax, we are, in fact, just trying to survive with whatever little that we have in buying groceries that have gone up because of increased prices. And what caused these prices to increase?

First of all—but before I get there. You know, something I listened to the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air and I was a little bit taken aback because I heard for 55 minutes, I heard from the Member all sorts of things. I heard about reports, plans, conferences, programmes, but nothing about the needs of the persons that the Ministry is there to serve, I did not hear anything about that. I did not hear any concern, I did not hear anything being articulated as to what are the plans that

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[MRS. NEWALLO-HOSEIN]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

would be in place. And, you know, I listened to the point of the disability grant and in the disability grant these words were said. She said—the Member said divergent views were coming from various sectors concerning the disability way forward.

And so therefore, that whole plan is still in limbo. And my question is, you know, why not look at best practice internationally? Why reinvent the wheel? And therefore, you know, people would have different opinions and so forth, but at the end of the day we cannot have a whole stakeholder group being put on the back burner because of the fact that you cannot find a common way forward, and therefore, it is a very serious situation.

I mean, Madam Speaker, I broke my foot recently and I had to learn to walk on crutches, I had to learn. I did not know, I thought it was easy, I see everybody doing it, I just hop on, you know, and “I gone my way”, not realizing it is not easy. And in fact, I injured my good foot and my shoulder, and as a result I had to go in a wheelchair. And you know, because of the fact that I went through that situation I understand even more how difficult it is for someone who has a disability to cope particularly if they have been thrown into it, you know, suddenly, whether it is by an accident—a vehicular accident that they have to live that way or they were born, it does not matter.

The point about it is that we have to be a little bit more sensitive as to how we move forward with disbursing disability grants and therefore, there must be a formula that we can glean from internationally, best practice, and tailor it to suit our needs.

And so my concern was also a registry to find, a registry to put in place for disability recipients, still outstanding three years later. When we were in Government under the astute leadership of Kamla Persad-Bissessar we had teamed up with ODPM because ODPM already has a list in place because when they go and they work with the regional corporations particularly in areas where there are natural disasters, they already have a listing.

So it is a matter of just teaming with ODPM and working with the registry as opposed to waiting for any lengthy period of time, because at the end of the day if something, a tragic incident was to happen to Trinidad and Tobago, the first person you need to respond to are those who are bed-ridden, those who are incapacitated, and if we do not have that information now, I mean, thank God, thank God we have not had a Maria or Irma or anything like that. Because had it been so, I mean, the first persons who probably would have probably lost their life would be those who are in that position.



*Appropriation Bill, 2017*

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

And then, of course, we have—the Member spoke about the socially displaced, and Member said she met with four Ministers and DOMA and chairmen to determine what was already public knowledge.

Madam Speaker, from inception when we came in one of the first things we wanted to deal was the socially displaced and how to work around having them rehabilitated. And what we recognized is that the human rights aspect of it prohibits us from physically removing anyone off of the streets, they have go voluntarily. And I found it strange after having all these meetings and all these discussions and so forth you were able to determine this was the reason that you cannot move them off the streets. And I said, like really?—but that would have been in the Ministry already.

That would have already been articulated and already in a document stating that we probably need to bring legislation to Parliament to find a way how to remove persons, you know, not voluntarily because of the fact that it is causing a problem on the streets. I mean, some persons are mentally unstable and as a result they are causing a lot injury to innocent pedestrians and even persons who are driving by, when they get violent and they throw stuff and so forth.

So therefore, I want to suggest to the Member, there is a document there that was approved by the Government of the day, that is the PP, that we visited a Chapman—

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla. Members, it is agreed that we will take the suspension at five o'clock. We will resume at 5.30 p.m.

**5.00 p.m.:** *Sitting suspended.*

**5.30 p.m.:** *Sitting resumed.*

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

**Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein:** [*Desk thumping*] Thank you. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was explaining that while we were in Government we visited a facility in Miami called Chapman facility. At this facility if you travel often and you go to Miami, you will see that there are no street dwellers on the streets and that is because of this successful facility that operates in Miami, and they also work in tandem with businesses and with the Government, but the Government does not play too much of a role except to bring in legislative agendas and so forth. And so when we wanted to emulate this facility here in Trinidad and Tobago and

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[MRS. NEWALLO-HOSEIN]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

therefore, we were looking at establishing a working committee. As a matter of fact, a working committee was, in fact, being established, and I think that it would be beneficial if the Minister looked at that report that has been established.

And you know it is, again, I was a little bit concerned that this working committee that was established, it says after 15 weeks, the Member said after 15 weeks a report came out and the report says that the TTPS is the one responsible for removing the socially displaced, and that 30 per cent of the socially displaced, in fact, had mental health issues and the third aspect was that there was no head count because they were unable to have a head count. And I am saying, the reason why the Ministry cannot give you a head count is because you disbanded the IAU unit which was responsible for the implementation of the street dwellers removal plan. You had the policy and you had the implementation and you disbanded and you fired everyone in the implementation unit, and as such, there is no one to actually go out and encourage persons because they were very successful in having persons removed voluntarily because of their ability to speak and to persuade them.

And so, you know, I do not see that the Ministry will be moving forward successfully, unless you understand that these programmes were already in place and as long as you continue to dismantle and disband and disrupt and send home persons, you are sending home key persons who have an idea and an understanding of how you can successfully implement this plan.

The Leader of the Opposition stated in her budget contribution that one of the functions of a government is to be an investor in people, and that is sadly lacking coming from the Government's side, Madam Speaker. You know, during the tenure of the People's Partnership, our mantra consistently was people-centred development. And having already endured 12 months of this administration beginning in September 2015, citizens are today wary of this PNM administration going forward and of the many hardships, the pain and suffering that citizens are expected to endure under an administration that simply has no plan whatsoever to keep this country's economy afloat; to inspire hope in the people; to inject confidence in institutions both private and public; and there is no confidence whatsoever by any administration, by this administration that has allowed this economy and this country to operate on autopilot or so it would seem, while focusing on trivial witch-hunts, matters which add little or no value to the people and their social and economic progress of this country, but rather focus on issues which they perceive would give them political gain and clout.

And I hear it all the time on the other side, Madam Speaker, “We will lock yuh up, you are going to jail, yuh tief”, and those are the things that they are focusing on instead of focusing on how do we address the needs of the people; how do we help them to cope with the economic hardships that are ahead for us.

And so, you know, as if to tell the nation and confirm that they have no plan as to how to govern a country, the Minister of Finance very early in his budget, I believe, it is on page 3 indicated that implementation has not been easy, and you told the people you can do a better job, that all of you had the answers, and now you are hiding behind technicalities saying, implementation has not been easy.

Well I beg to differ because I am going to say that implementation has never been the hallmark of the PNM. [*Desk thumping*] And so, two years later and three budgets, amounting to \$150 billion, there is little or nothing that one can show that can be deemed as meaningful and beneficial to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

So, we are going to look: what has this PNM Rowley-led Government implemented since assuming office? What new projects can citizens recall that have positively impacted on their social well-being? What new jobs have they created? What new have they done for our ageing population and senior citizens as a whole, the poor, the indigent, the differently abled, many of whom are children and babies with special needs such as cerebral palsy and Down’s syndrome, you know? What has been done to help, you know, those who are on the streets, you know, to be done humanely and voluntarily remove them and rehabilitate such persons; those living below the poverty line?

Madam Speaker, what this country can certainly remember about this PNM administration is not their implementation, but what they have mercilessly dismantled, diminished and destroyed and so what they have implemented instead is an avalanche of taxes on citizens, some with immediate effect creating fear and panic, and we heard from the Government MPs that there is fear and there is panic, so much so that they are trying to alleviate those fears by telling them what?—you got to tighten your belts, you got to, you know, stop drinking Peardrax, you know, and drink something else. [*Desk thumping*] And within a population, never within the history of this country have citizens expressed so much anxiety and fear in anticipation of a budget, you know.

And what are the social implementations and the burdens on the poor and vulnerable? Madam Speaker, what we have heard in the budget that would cushion the impact to the poor and vulnerable, what have we heard?—little, nothing, absolutely nothing. All we are hearing is tighten your belt. Oh, by the way, everybody has to

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[MRS. NEWALLO-HOSEIN]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

bear the brunt of the burden, everyone, and that is it. And that does not help them, that does not, you know, put any level of confidence or peace of mind at all. And so there is an ever widening gap between the rich and the poor and this has grown exponentially wider, and the value of the middle class with the country's social and economic development is constantly being eroded away.

You know, Madam Speaker, when I was Minister there was a situation where a company had, there was a fire, and we took a decision to be able to buffer their needs because of the fact that they would have been out of jobs and so forth. And while we were speaking with the technocrats, one of the things they indicated, they said well, you know, these people would have had good jobs or whatever it is. And that was not the case, you know. You know, there was this mindset, you know, once you have a refrigerator or deep freeze or whatever it is that, you know, you are insulated and nothing could happen to you, and if it did then, you know, somehow you would be able to make it on your own.

And the answer was, no, I said no. We are not giving anybody any help for the rest of their life. It is a one-month window, one month to be able to help them, you know, be able to stabilize their financial and economic situation while they go job hunting. And it was really trying to pull teeth and it was because of the fact there is that lack of understanding that sometimes things do happen. And now we are in a situation where a lot of middle class have now become what we would term the working poor, they are now faced with a situation and therefore, the policies and the social development plans must include where it is you have this new stakeholder that is coming onto the social economic plan, their needs are addressed, you know, equitably, and is what the concerns are, whether there is equitable distribution when you have this level of issues and problems affecting our country.

With the growing unemployment as a result, what assistance would be made available to them; what of the national employment registry; what has become of it; and how many persons have been gainfully employed since its inception? I mean, all of these questions, we keep hearing these figures being bandied about.

And you know, coming back to figures of what Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West indicated, when Member said that 30 per cent of the persons on the streets have a mental health issue. If we do not have a head count, how can you put that 30 per cent? I mean, I "doh" know, maybe, I "doh" if my mathematician colleague here could help, but if you do know, if you do not have an idea of a head count, you do not know how many persons are on the streets, then how can you say that 30 per cent of those who are on the streets have a mental problem. So, I "doh" know.

So these figures, you know, kind of confuse me and therefore, I think we need to be very careful when we speak about data which, I think, hon. Leader of the Opposition alluded to when she spoke of a book, *How to Lie with Statistics*, I think, that was the name of the book. That is why we have to be very careful.

And so, you know, how does the State through the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services intend to monitor and evaluate the increase and decrease of the poverty levels? And I am making this case, Madam Speaker, because of the fact that the monitoring and the evaluation department was disbanded and everyone from that unit was fired. How can you remove M&E department? And I heard Member for St. Ann's East speaking about this monitoring and evaluation and she is explaining it head on, spot on. And I am saying, yeah, you know, you understand it, but it is not happening in the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, a key Ministry, and I will tell you why it is a key Ministry. Because when you have policies in place, Madam Speaker, you must be able to ascertain whether the policies that you have established and the programmes you have in place, if in fact they are impacting positively or negatively, whether it is bringing about relief or it is causing undue hardship. You know, you must have this system in place to be able to measure because that is how you know whether you are on the right track or you are on the wrong track and you make a detour.

And so it is not a situation where you guess, you sit down in your office and say well, you know, I do not think this works or that should work. You have scientific and clinical studies being done to show that persons who came into the programme are, in fact, coming off the programme because they have been empowered because that is what the Ministry is supposed to do; it is supposed to empower you to help you to become a social, viable and solid contributor to society. [*Desk thumping*]

So, I think it is a misunderstanding or a lack of understanding of how important these statistics assess the things that need to understand how a programme works. And you know, what is very important is that we had through the hon. Prime Minister at the time, Kamla Persad-Bissessar, while she was Minister of Legal Affairs, she envisaged this plan of having this biometric card. And I will speak about the biometric card, and I will speak about the biometric card over and over and over again because I do not think people understand the importance of it, and I am going to explain this.

You know, we have invested a lot of, a tremendous amount of financial and human resources into providing this system which eligible citizens of Trinidad

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[MRS. NEWALLO-HOSEIN]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

and Tobago would have been able to access a range of social benefits including social assistance grants, disability grants, food cards and general assistance grants with the use of a singular card at scores of merchants throughout the country.

Now, this biometric card would have allowed the Ministry to better manage the system of grant distributions. I heard the Minister of Finance and a couple of other Ministers, I think, Member for San Fernando East indicating that as a result of a number of grants that are available to the various Ministries that you have a number of duplication of grants and you have a number of persons who are accessing all these various grants which may not be the best way of handling state funds and, in fact, might be an abuse. Now, what this card would have done, it would have ultimately lowered administrative costs, the abuse of state funds, fraud and, of course, duplications of grants to any one person.

For instance, Madam Speaker, during the 2015 election there was someone on Facebook who had displayed, I think, it was about five or six ID cards, the same person with different ID cards, different names, different personas, different addresses. And you could have this one person who could have several ID cards. How it happens, I “doh” know, I am not here to investigate that.

But what I do know, is this little finger here that has a lot of little circles around on the finger, there is only one of that for one person. Nobody could duplicate that, because it cannot be duplicated. This in itself prevents any abuse.

**5.45 p.m.**

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** The fingerprint?

**Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein:** Yes, the fingertip. Any abuse, any fraud, any duplication, and therefore it was a foolproof plan to prevent and to reduce significantly, corruption. [*Desk thumping*] But, you know, I do not understand, and I probably need to be told why any responsible, right-thinking Government would not want to implement this system. Why?

Yes, it was costly, and like everything else, when you have to put systems in place, it costs a lot initially. But when you think about the cost that you would save at the end in terms of not just finances, but you would have brought a level of efficiency to the system, and you also would have been able to measure, because what this would have done, and this is a very key point, especially for senior citizens, people who actually have to move, assuming that an elderly person has gotten ill and she has to move and go and live by her daughter, and her daughter lives, say Chaguanas, she left from my constituency.

Once your file—your file must go. Once your file leaves that office it could get lost. Once it gets lost that is it. Your grant would be immediately stopped until someone picks up on that file, traces it or tries to—or probably creates a new one. And that has happened to a number of persons. And so, what the biometric card would have done, it would have provided for case management, so it means that it would have been an integrated IT system, where it is you could go any part of the country and you could go into an office and you would have been able to access whatever information that is required. And currently you cannot do that. If you are based in Sangre Grande, you have someone there, if that person is sick, on vacation leave, decides not to come back out to work, you are in limbo. So therefore, it causes unnecessary bureaucracy to the persons who are receiving grants. So it would have brought about a greater level of efficiency into the system.

And, of course you know when you talk about cost overruns, I think the Member for Tabaquite was indicating you know that you need to look at the ports. If you are able to collect the revenue from the ports then, you know, you have reduced cost. And so, yes, it would cost a lot of money to put scanners there, but when you look at the reduction and the removal of high level of drugs and ammunition from entering our country, the cost may be high in terms of putting the necessary systems in place, but in terms of reducing the abuse and the fraud, it would be even more beneficial to the country. So therefore, I do not buy the point from the Minister that the biometric system was way too expensive and therefore they removed it.

And what is it you are going to bring back? I see the Minister had indicated that there was a new card development, an integrated IT system. And what is the system? What does it do? You know, and in addition to this biometric card, do you know one of the things that you ought to measure when it is you are dealing with poverty reduction, is not just if people are receiving food, you know, you have to ensure that they are receiving the food. Now, when you have a direct deposit system, a cheque goes into it, when I pull out the moneys from the bank, I could go and buy cigarettes, I could go and buy alcohol, I could go and buy anything other than food. And therefore, what it is this biometric card does, you are only allowed to purchase food items from the groceries or pharmacies—you have certain things that you are outlined, and therefore you can ensure that the nutritional needs of the most vulnerable are being met. But with that being removed there is no gauge, there is no measurement, there is no monitoring, there is no evaluation, and therefore when we have to do our reports for the UN, what

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[MRS. NEWALLO-HOSEIN]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

are we going to put? Because right now the UN report says that the poorest part of the country is in my constituency, and in my constituency people cannot access any grants, they are being turned away, they are being told that they are not eligible. [*Desk thumping*]

As a matter of fact—just coming off a little bit—with this Bret that passed, I heard the Member for San Fernando East speak about they had these grants, \$15,000, and people were able to put up their homes and everything. You know how much my constituents received, Madam Speaker? One thousand dollars. [*Interruption*] And so it is important for us to understand where the equity is in this system. Where is the equity? And so, this data would not be captured in the system because of the fact that with a direct deposit you have cheques going in, you do not know how the money is being spent, and therefore you do not even know if you are getting value for money, and I think this is what the outcry is about from persons outside. What is the value for money? They are not seeing it, and their concern is to “eat ah food”. And therefore, what we were trying to do in the People’s Partnership is to remove that and empower people and get them self-sustenance. [*Desk thumping*]

I know what is really missing, there are two critical elements missing from this administration, if there is to be success through these economic conditions, would be leadership and management, sorely missing and absent in this current scheme of things. And under the guise of an audit, the unit was dismantled, this same food card was dismantled, some 15 regional offices shut down and close to 100 contract workers thrown on the breadline. And what was left of the food card unit is now lumped with social welfare, adding bureaucracy to the entire system. So this budget really has not assisted in any way.

And so, we talked about the increase in diesel and gas price. Anyone who understands economics would know that once you touch fuel, you have touched everything. So to say that the poor is not impacted is untrue. It is not a reality. You are living in Mars or somewhere. And so, anyone with a heart for the vulnerable in society would know that within a short two-year period, something which has been in place for decades would have had a devastating impact on several quarters and sectors of society, and so we look at the domino effect, a ripple effect, a cascading effect in terms of what is happening here. So, we have here in October 02, 2016, Joel Julien, a reporter of the *Trinidad Guardian* is quoting the hon. Member for Diego Martin West as saying:

“You better begin to get weaned off the Government because the Government’s shoulder cannot carry the weight anymore.”



And in other words, like the last budget, this budget is also saying pay your taxes, expect nothing, but all of us must share in the burden of adjustment. Governance, PNM style.

So, Madam Speaker, it is elementary principles of business that fuel drives this economy, the fuel that carries goods and services and people on a daily basis. Such an increase as announced in this budget, some 48 per cent increase in the price of diesel fuel would send shock waves throughout the purchasing public. And an already straddled middle class would be further economically burdened. Those living on fixed incomes, minimum wage, pensioners, the self-employed, they are the ones that would carry the cost of living, as producers and suppliers would pass the increased cost to the end of the consumer. So, this scenario is well articulated by the president of the Couva/Point Lisas Chamber, that is Liaquat Ali, and he said that:

“...the 2018 Budget is a blow to small businesses and consumers, who would be forced to raise prices in order to stay afloat.

...the price of diesel,”—and I continue—“which increased from \$2.30 to \$3.41 per litre, will not only harm small businesses but will cause more hardship for consumers.”

And he says:

“...the price of the goods will increase”—and they—“as a business community absorbed fuel increases from previous years to keep some of the costs down, but this increase is definitely going to make an impact.”

As to who is going to pay for it? All of us—well, forget about us, it is the poor, the indigent, the most vulnerable, who will be impacted the worst. So no doubt, the spending and purchasing power will continue to reside in the pockets of the wealthy, creating a social imbalance, which, if not managed carefully, can lead to social discontent and upheaval.

The Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara indicated that he had a teacher, Miss Ogle, who helped him, you know, guided him on the path that he is on, and he said that he wished that there was more like her. I want to tell you something, Madam Speaker. The baby grant was removed, and the baby grant was not a handout. As a matter of fact there was an important module to the baby grant that was so critical, that if you wanted to be on it you had to go through it. It is called a training. It was a training module. And the first training, of course, I went to it, and most of the parents who were there came with an elderly person, a mother or

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[MRS. NEWALLO-HOSEIN]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

grandmother. And you would not believe, at the end of the training module they all said this—and you could go back to the persons and ask, and they all indicated. They said, you know Minister, had we known this we would have made better choices. We would have made more responsible decisions. And that was the whole aspect of it, because we were all complaining that there is this mindset. How do you deal with the mindset? How you deal with the cultural mindset?

So, if it is you are dealing with a mindset, there must be a training module in place where young mothers are having babies. I am not saying that babies are not good, but you must be able to provide for them. And the Government must not be the source of income, and it must be that we are putting in place a path for you to follow that says, look, you need to understand that whatever thoughts and patterns you may have had before it does not bring equity in your home, because sometimes one child benefits and the others cannot for a number of reasons, and so—

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** That is why the Prime Minister said to choose wisely.

**Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein:** And so—no, no, no, the Prime Minister cannot make a decision and say to choose wisely. They are being trained, if they do not know any better. If you do not know any better, then we have to be able to put in place—and so you removed the baby grant, along with the training component. And what happens? You do not have the exposure for persons, and therefore you would never have someone like Miss Ogle to guide persons on the way, because you may not have it [*Desk thumping*] some persons do not even go to school.

So, Madam Speaker, I decided, you know what, I want to see for myself how difficult it is, so I went shopping. I went to the grocery, and I did not go to the grocery for me. After interviewing several persons with different salary brackets, and after reading this article—I would not hold up the article—“Scary future for single parent”, by Sascha Wilson. There is this single parent who says that you know, she is scared. She says and this is it:

“I am scared because things so hard already. What am I going to do because things will go up? Once fuel prices go up, groceries, transport, all those things will go up’. Ramcharan, 45, said at her Pundit Trace home yesterday.”

And so, she knows that once you touch fuel, everything would go up. Apparently, the Minister of Finance does not understand that. But I decided I am going to speak to different persons, and I went to the grocery with the intention of purchasing food for three groups of households. For instance, the first household consists of a grandmother, a mother, a father, and three children who go to school. They told me they put aside

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

\$2,000 for groceries on a monthly basis out of their entire pool salary. So, therefore you divide it, four weeks, sometimes you have a five-week month, but we are not working with five, we are working with four, and so we divide it up, and you have \$500 for the month, of which \$200 they go to the market and they buy their greens, and provisions, and whatever it is. And so here it is you have \$300 per week, and then the two other families consist of single parent homes that can barely afford a thousand dollars per month, which equates to \$250 per week.

And, Madam Speaker, I took the role of both a Muslim and a Hindu family. I do not know what the religious backgrounds of any of the persons, but I chose not to enquire; it was not relevant. What was relevant was that I went to the grocery to look for things that I can stretch. I had to look for things that can yield, and so I went and I said, okay, if I am a Hindu, I cannot buy anything that is beef. So, I cannot buy the corned beef, which would have stretched to feed 10 persons. And, of course, if I am a Muslim, I cannot buy anything with pork, so therefore I cannot buy Spam, which could be stretched to feed 10 persons or more. And so I went and I got some groceries— and I would not hold up the paper I would just tell you. First of all—well, this is how it went at the cash register, not that I had planned it that way. I know I need the food, but I also need toiletries, so I had to buy toilet paper. So heading on my list was a six-pack of toilet paper.

The two persons that I interviewed were young, and because they are young, it means as a women she needs to get her toiletries—sanitary napkins, she cannot do without that, and so I bought one of that. I bought two tins of sausage.

**Mr. Mitchell:** What kind of sausage?

**Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein:** I bought chicken Vienna sausages. I bought a tin of tuna, a tin of sardine, a tin of luncheon meat—chicken luncheon meat—onions, because I have to season it. “Ah not buying any other thing, ah buying seasoning.” Breeze, because I have to wash not only my clothes, but my children’s clothes. I bought cream of wheat, because it did not have any oats, but I bought something that can yield, so I can stretch. I bought flour, I bought cheese, eggs, I bought macaroni, because, again, macaroni can yield, I bought milk, powdered milk, and let me tell you why I bought powdered milk as opposed to anything else. At least powdered milk I can mix a little bit in a little bit of water. I can water it down—remember when you used to drink watered-down juice when you go in the “Chinee” shop, I have watered-down milk. [*Desk thumping*] Watered-down milk. So that at the end of the day, you know the baby, if the baby drinking powdered milk, at least the baby could get powdered milk too. It may not be the right milk, but at this point I have to think about everybody in my household getting a little bit of something to eat. [*Desk thumping*]

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[MRS. NEWALLO-HOSEIN]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

I considered hard and long, should I buy the packs of peas such as split peas, black eyed peas, lentils, red beans, or should I buy the tin? And let me tell you why. You might say to me, well, obviously, yes, obviously, it would yield, but guess what? If I do not have gas—if a tin of peas will take me two minutes—

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Member, your original 45 minutes are now spent, you are entitled to 10 more minutes, if you wish to avail yourself. Please proceed. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein:** And so I am considering, should I take 20 minutes of gas to cook something that would yield, or should I buy a tin which will be two minutes of cooking. And the point is, do I do that? You know I decided, you know what, I will go with the dry peas. I bought, of course, soap, because I have to bathe myself. I bought Lipton. I had to drink some tea because guess what? If at the end of the day my children do not get anything, I could drink some tea. If I drink some hot tea—

**Hon. Member:** Soursop.

**Mrs. C. Newallo-Hosein:** I “doh” have any soursop. If I could drink some hot tea maybe I could survive this while my children eat.

Now hear, when I bought this it came in at \$349.71. In other words, it crossed the threshold for the \$250 for two families, and it crossed also the threshold for the person who has the \$500 to spend, but needed \$200 to go to the market so they would get cheaper stuff. Buy the provisions and stuff. And so, at the end of the day you ask yourself, okay, how many meals can this prepare? And you know how many? Let me tell you. For one person you are looking at 21 meals, because it is three meals a day for seven days. That is 21 meals. And for a family of six it will be 126 meals a day. And this, what I bought here could only give—a week. A 126 meals a week. And so what this could only provide was meals for two and a half days. So it means therefore, that it is difficult for anybody to survive. It is difficult. It is difficult. [*Desk thumping*]

And so, Madam Speaker, I know some parents might be saying, okay, maybe I can work with 63 meals, because 63 meals—how did I get 63 meals? If my child goes to school for a week he or she can get breakfast or lunch in school, because they will be depending now on the School Feeding Programme, which, I have been told has been reduced. So therefore, it means that the children today may not be able to get anything like that. So, going on, Madam Speaker, it is a very real concern that we have to address. [*Desk thumping*] The Gender Division, I have concerns regarding the Children’s Authority. You know, there is a lack of policy,

development policy and framework for the years ahead. What system and policy is in place in accordance with the Act? Madam Speaker, a grave incident took place early this year, when a director removed a child from the protective home and was placed in the director's home unknowingly to the board. You know, a report was subsequently submitted by the then chairman Stephanie Daly. My question is, where is that report? And what are the findings? And in addition to that, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, apparently called for an investigation, of which Justice Paula-Mae Weekes, had investigated. I am calling for this report to be laid in Parliament with immediate effect.

For the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, there is a young lady 11 years old in my constituency, Chelsea Winters, has won 15 competitions that she has attended, Karate, and she has won all gold, local, regional and international. [*Desk thumping*] I am asking the Minister to put her on the list. He announced that she may be able to get the requisite assistance. Of course, there is crime all over. There is crime in my constituency. We are asking, Madam Speaker, for the hon. Minister to allow for astute management and leadership to be a key feature in dealing with the situation in the constituency regarding the crime. And of course, you know that my constituency is predominantly agriculture. You know, things are cut, yet we need access roads. The farmers are going to pay more, because you are going to pay more for diesel, and you are going to pay more for tyres, because they were depending on these subsidies to be able to absorb some of the costs. So, the food now is going to increase. Vegetables and so on is going to increase.

And so, we are asking for the roads to be repaired, the access roads. There are a number of roads, Comparo Road. A number of roads. Alexis Road, Salazar Road, and then of course we have in the Ministry of Works and Transport, we have a number of roads: Guaico, Tamana is one of the roads that we are asking for. And I already say that the Government know, be warned, the writing is on the wall, you have been weighed and found wanting. The people will speak. Your political reign is slow, but surely coming to an end, when the people would wean themselves from you, and you need to understand that. They will, and they have started already, and is because of the level of disrespect that the people are seeing, and saying, no, they do not want it. They do not want this level of disrespect. You are changing paradigm and putting the economy on a sustainable path, it is furthest from the truth. And therefore, you need to understand that this classification, this Dutch disease, who implemented it? Who put that in place? It comes from that day when it was established long ago when the comment was made—maybe it was not meant to be that way, but it was taken, and “massa day done”. So, what has happened now? We are suffering as a result of that.

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[MRS. NEWALLO-HOSEIN]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

And so, Madam Speaker, I am looking for, as I said, there are some roads that we needed to get repaired in the constituency—and the hospitals, the Minister was saying that the hospitals, he has increased the tax, and he was laughing about it, as though it was going to affect the Member for Barataria/San Juan. But what has happened? The people cannot get—the poor and the indigent cannot get the assistance in the public institutions. Either there is no equipment, or it is down, or something is wrong, and therefore they have to have bar-b-ques and all different things to be able to go into the various—to go to the private hospitals to have their surgeries. So you know we are saying that—we think that it only impacts upon the rich. But it does not. It impacts upon everybody, including them. Because they need medical assistance just like anybody else. They have situations where they need to be operated on just like anybody else. They are no different.

And so, therefore, Madam Speaker, again I am concerned about the level of quarantine that is in the agricultural sector. Because we had the Prime Minister and the Minister of Agriculture visit my area, and after that the citrus—65,000 citrus plants were infected with a disease and had to be destroyed. As a matter of fact, there were 200,000 in the entire country, and why? Because a plant might have been brought in that had this disease. And therefore I am asking, is this proper quarantine procedures in place? Is this going to be a matter just like, many, many years ago, with the anthuriums, where it was decimated as a result of the lack of quarantine put in place for us. And so, you know, we are not seeing the level of enthusiasm that as spoken about in the agricultural sector. As I said, my area is agriculturally based.

So therefore, for the roads that I am requesting for slope stabilisation road rehabilitation would be the following: Bon Air Road, St. Isidore Road, St. Marie Emmanuel Road, the Eastern Main Road in Maraval—everyone knows that—St. Ann's Trace, Veronica Boulevard, Tamana Section Road, Guaico Tamana Road, Cumuto Main Road, Charuma Road, Guataparo Road, and Bound Deyalsingh Road, Balata Hill Road, Tamana Hill Road, Los Armadillos Road, Bamboo Trace and Alexander Trace, Barker Trace, Good Hope Trace, Sonia Drive, Old Plum Road, Sookram Trace, Peterson Trace, Pat Lawrence Drive, just to name a few. But it would be remiss of me if I did not make mention of it, because my constituents are anxiously waiting to hear that I have made them proper representation in the House.

And with those few words, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**The Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of National Security (Mrs. Glenda Jennings-Smith):** Madam Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the debate on the Appropriation Bill of 2018. And I would like to

first congratulate the Minister of Finance [*Desk thumping*] assisted by the Minister of Planning and Development, for the delivery of an excellent budget statement. Excellent budget statement [*Desk thumping*] “Changing the Paradigm—Putting the Economy on a Sustainable Path”.

Madam Speaker, before I go into my budget contribution, all I could remember listening to my sister there who is from Cumuto/Manzanilla, the hon. Member of Parliament, is an old song my parents taught me. It is a calypso “Teacher Percy say if yuh tell a lie yuh going to hell as soon as you die.” [*Desk thumping*] Because, Madam Speaker, I will say why I am saying this, you see when the last storm passed, I was at the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation, when many of the constituents of Cumuto/Manzanilla received grants from the HDC and social services. [*Desk thumping*] So, Madam Speaker, I will tell you why. The Sangre Grande Regional Corporation, unfortunately, is one where you have an equal proportion of PNM and UNC representatives.

And I was proud to see that persons from the both areas—because in that regional corporation, the Cumuto/Manzanilla district and the Toco/Sangre Grande district are represented, and I saw persons from the both areas received grant, and cash grant to boot, and they were quite pleased. So, today, Madam Speaker, I think when we stand in this honourable House, I do not want to come from an organization as the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, when I believe in honesty and integrity, and high standards, to come and stand up in this House here this evening, Madam Speaker, and listen to lies, half-truths and innuendos. [*Crosstalk*] [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Okay, Member for Toco/Sangre Grande, just withdraw that word, please.

**Mrs. G. Jennings-Smith:** I withdraw the phrase, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** And I know that you can say it in another way.

**Mrs. G. Jennings-Smith:** But I will still say that I am surprised to hear the statement made, that nobody received any benefits, when I saw persons from the Cumuto/Manzanilla district receive benefits.

Madam Speaker, I want to go back to the whole concept of changing the paradigm, and putting the economy on a sustainable path. And, I want to also say, that today I stand here proud to represent my constituency of Toco/Sangre Grande. [*Desk thumping*] And, you know, Madam Speaker, in that constituency where I grew up, I have been taught a lot of things that served me in my capacity

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[MRS. G. JENNINGS-SMITH]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

as a woman. And one thing we do, we try to speak plain language. But, you know, I want to say this for the members of my constituency to understand, that you know, we must not be carried away by how people turn around language, because I want to say, and I want to refer to the energy sector revenue, and taxes and royalties.

Because in 2010 this country received \$15.7 billion. In 2017, \$2.1 billion. And you know, just this morning I had to speak to two members of my constituency because they were confused when they heard gas prices going up, diesel going up. I would rather change it around, Madam Speaker, and put it in a more positive perspective.

**6.15 p.m.**

So I tried to explain to the members of my constituency, listen, in 2010 we had \$15.7 billion and in 2017 we have \$2.1 billion. But what is happening now, is that the Government is paying subsidy on your gas and your diesel and any responsible Government—put it like a family arrangement, times have changed drastically. We are entering the real world.

I will not stand here and say a story like a story tale. I would want to bring my constituency to a position of realism and to explain to them that if you have a house to run and you have less money, but you have more bills, you have to cut and contrive. You see, the country people have that saying, learn to cut and contrive. And then we come to a realization, because if I want to go to the bank for a loan but I have more expenditure than revenue, which bank would give me a loan? And we could put that example to our own country Trinidad and Tobago, because if Trinidad and Tobago has to be assessed on the international market, but we are just having a good fun time and spending, spending, spending as we saw happened from 2010 to 2015, Madam Speaker, how do we expect our country to be categorized?

And, Madam Speaker, my people understand that. So no amount of rabble-rousing in this House would influence them otherwise, because they understand that Trinidad and Tobago today, we are facing different times and we must face the thing as we see it. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Madam Speaker, we speak now about diversifying our thinking, and my sister again, she spoke about going to the grocery, but I would speak about eating healthy. I would speak about eating healthy and following the direction of the Minister of Health because he has gone to pains to tell the people of this land how we should eat healthy.



Madam Speaker, people are dying of cancer. As I stand here, I mourn the death of my sister in the police service who died of cancer and we do not know what are the causes of such of these deaths. So, Madam Speaker, today, where are we? Where are we as a country? And as a Member of Parliament I want to stand as a responsible Member of Parliament. They may not like me for everything because I stand for reality and at the end of the day they would love me. You know why they would they love me, Madam Speaker? They would love me for my honesty and my integrity. [*Desk thumping*] So this budget takes us to the point of realism.

So, Madam Speaker, as the Member of Parliament for Toco/Sangre Grande I would look at where we want to be and how we would align our goals in that constituency with what the Government is offering to society. And, Madam Speaker, we have our problems like everybody else. We have unemployment, we have housing needs, we have access road desires, we need water. But you know what, Madam Speaker, we understand that there is something called prioritizing, prioritizing. If you make a list of groceries and you have only \$5.00 you would prioritize on what are the most important needs.

So, Madam Speaker, what is there in the budget to help my constituents? And, first of all, I looked at the agricultural incentives and what there were for the fisherfolks. And I want to thank the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries for putting up the building, the fishing depot at Cumana. And I am looking, Madam Speaker, at the access to ownership of land for young people from the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. I intend to help them by organizing groups so that they could access lands and training to be categorized as a farmer that they could benefit from the \$100,000 grant.

To the young men who are always called “touts” in the maxi-taxi, now they can have ownership. They can buy their maxis and from Grande to Toco. [*Desk thumping*] We have problem with transportation, they could provide transportation from Grande to Cumana to Toco to Sans Souci and to Matelot. So, there is an opportunity that a young man can become an entrepreneur by buying his own maxi and working. So, Madam Speaker, again, we have to look at what opportunities there are for our young people and for the other members within our community.

The next area I looked at, Madam Speaker, is the whole situation of housing, and as you know, Toco/Sangre Grande we have a squatting issue, but I am working together with the Minister of Housing and Urban Development and the LSA department and very soon we have two housing estates which would receive

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[MRS. G. JENNINGS-SMITH]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

their deed of title. [*Desk thumping*] And I want to thank the Minister of Housing and Urban Development for understanding. And, Madam Speaker, not only that, we have many incentives which we work with those communities in Toco/Sangre Grande to better their community life, like giving the water tanks to the various communities.

Madam Speaker, it is not what is there, you have to have that vision. But, Madam Speaker, unfortunately not everybody has that vision. You need to have a positive vision for your constituency.

I want at this time to also thank the Minister of Education for his work on the Early Childhood Care and Education Centre in Valencia.

**Hon. Members:** What! And none in Naparima. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mrs. G. Jennings-Smith:** The Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development for the continuation of the Community Based Business Incubator programme which we called SEED, where there is an incentive again for financing. I want to thank again the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries for developing the agricultural/horticultural planting for our people in Grande Riviere and Matelot. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Madam Speaker, our farmers they are welcoming the \$100,000 grant and I am saying that they are going to put it to use and I am going to help them as the Member for Parliament. Not to be left out, Madam Speaker, the proposed highway as we saw just a few weeks ago, from Cumuto to Manzanilla. I was present and that highway has provided us and will provide my constituents with employment that they sorely desire, [*Desk thumping*] because I have met with the contractors and they have promised to help us and I am working along with the Minister of Works and Transport.

So, Madam Speaker, you see when some people decide to criticize and not see because, Madam Speaker, fortunately that highway started in the area of Cumuto/Manzanilla and, Madam Speaker, we could all share. Sometimes in my constituency I see people from both Cumuto/Manzanilla and Toco/Sangre Grande. So I will say all of them will benefit because they are coming and I am going to deal with them. [*Desk thumping*]

The proposed highway again, going into Toco and the port, the expected development of the port. I am looking at the future. So we are meeting, we are developing cooperatives and developing training programmes from members within our constituency so that when it comes we will be prepared and with the

ability and the type of people we have in Toco/Sangre Grande, I can tell you that with that Toco port and that highway, upon completion it will be the beacon and it will provide what the Minister of Finance is looking for, diversification, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Now, I heard many people speaking this morning about lack of funding, lack of help and I want to say I too want to thank many of the citizens who came on board when we had that flood in Matelot. We actually opened the floodgate in Trinidad and Tobago. I want to thank the responders from that ordeal. Firstly, I want to thank the Minister of Works and Transport, he was there within the first 24 hours. The Ministry of National Security, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services and the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts.

Madam Speaker, I want to thank most of the colleagues on this side because most of the Ministries, even the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs was up there. I want to thank them for their response to that ordeal we went through in Matelot, Toco, Cumana, where we saw Matelot being cut away from the rest of Trinidad and Tobago. Would you believe, Madam Speaker, in one week we were able to restore connectivity by the building of a Bailey bridge. [*Desk thumping*] I want to thank the Minister of Works and Transport.

So, Madam Speaker, I want to highlight some of the sponsors. You see, throughout the year we have had many functions and were it not for the help of the citizens and the corporate citizens within Toco/Sangre Grande and outside of Toco/Sangre Grande, it would not have been possible. You see, we got help and we were able to have many activities like a sports day, Emancipation celebration, Indian Arrival Day, Corpus Christi tree planting exercise. So, throughout the year I was able to have my constituents happy, engaged and always doing some kind of activity. They always look forward to another day.

So, Madam Speaker, this is what we speak about when we speak about an MP for a constituency. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, being able to articulate, to streamline, to maximize opportunities and think for ourselves, make adjustments in these trying economic challenging times. I want to thank each and every one of my colleagues who have helped me during the cost of this year.

I want to now turn to my being the Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of National Security. But before I turn there, I want to also thank the members of staff of my office, the Toco/Sangre Grande office, for their dedication to duty, [*Desk thumping*] hard work, coming out at nights, coming out at weekends, even on holidays to make these things a reality. I thank you all.

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[MRS. G. JENNINGS-SMITH]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

Madam Speaker, let me assure you that this Government undoubtedly shares a common preoccupation, and that is the safety and security of Trinidad and Tobago and its citizens and visitors alike. And, Madam Speaker, we are at a juncture in this country's national security history where our defense and protective agency, our police officers, must bear and they are bearing greater responsibility in safeguarding our nation, in consideration of new threats locally, regionally and internationally. Our national security environment is of a multidimensional phenomenon and any response to solve these issues would require a multidimensional and collaborative approach and this is absolutely necessary if we are to successfully achieve a reduction in crime.

So, Madam Speaker, in keeping with our Government's national development strategy, our national security agencies are utilizing five strategic pillars: prediction, prevention, detection, prosecution and rehabilitation.

And with my experience, 35 years in the police service, ending as an Assistant Commissioner of Police, I can tell you that these pillars are on point and it comprehensively covers all aspects in crime-fighting. So in my role as Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of National Security, I have been tasked by the Minister of National Security to oversee the Ministry's Social Intervention Programme, which falls under the umbrella of the prevention pillar. And I wish to emphasize, Madam Speaker, that the Ministry of National Security understands the critical needs to continue investing dedicated attention to the social side of crime management as we work to increase citizens' security.

But, Madam Speaker, we must understand that crime is manifested from a mindset, a mindset which seeks to deviate from social codes, from social codes and rules established for collective safety and order. Over time, our societal values have become, unfortunately, skewed. The sense of duty that makes us respect the law has contributed positively to community and country, but that has been lost. What do we see in our society today? And I want to quote from the last speaker, the Member for Oropouche West, because the Member for Oropouche West identified what is happening in our society today. Because I was just going to quote from the *Sunday Express*, where two relatives held in pensioners killing. And again, self-gain, inhumane behavior, hunger for revenge, protest for everything, increase levels of anger, senseless killing.

So I was happy to hear the Member for Oropouche West outline some of these issues. But when this Government tried to bring legislation to this Parliament, what was the response? Apart from one, every single one, we did not get the requisite support, but this is the culture I have realized emanating from this

honourable House. That you know today we say, yes, but tomorrow we say, no. When it suits people's favour. Because, yes, we are admitting to the problems, and we are admitting to women's problems and who knows women's problem more than me. I have been there. I have seen the tears. I have seen ex-Ministers called before the police stations for investigation and I could read, Madam Speaker, yes.

So, you see, what is happening in this society? It is about our minds, our minds, and we need to come together collaboratively to make a difference. There are those who banter the supposition that the passage of illegal firearms and drugs through our borders is an ultimate cause for crime in our society. But, Madam Speaker, it is criminal minds and hands that inflict harm. It is criminal minds and hands that inflict harm. Therefore, social behaviour change has been our targeted focus as we strive to transform the mindset that now pervades us.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of National Security is taking an active and vested interest in influencing voluntary compliance with the law. This is what we are about. We are trying to influence voluntary compliance and how are we going to do that? We intend to do that by changing and improving on our social condition and culture of individuals, groups and communities. My sister, the Member of Parliament for St. Ann's East, she spoke about all her initiatives and those initiatives are initiatives that would impact positively on preventing crime. And this is what we expect to happen in this society in Trinidad and Tobago today and when I speak, Madam Speaker, the only thing I ask of the Opposition, those on the other side, is the support, support good legislation, [*Desk thumping*] because we are creating greater opportunities for choices and strengthening social bonds and encouraging the practice of social control, but in order to ensure that we get that we need your support. So that this country, by and large, will voluntarily comply with the law.

The Government is cognizant of the need to address crime at all levels. We are not looking at only the women. You will be surprised that the men are most often victims of crime. So we are looking at all. We are not taking one side against the other side, we are looking at all. Youth violence, however, is high priority, high visibility concern for us. Not only in Trinidad though, Madam Speaker, but throughout the world and across the Caribbean. Our young people though are suffering from exposure to all types of violent crime and I call on all my colleagues here in this House today, let us be the example; let us be the example by our behavioural patterns while we sit in this honourable House. Let us be the example by the lives that we live. We should be the example, because I read social media and they are all speaking about our behaviour patterns.

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[MRS. G. JENNINGS-SMITH]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

So, Madam Speaker, I want to assure you that our Ministry's Social Intervention Programmes are designed to provide our young citizens with guidance, training, mentoring alternatives to deal with these negative lifestyles. One of the greatest accomplishments we have had so far is the Trinidad and Tobago Cadet Force.

Now, the cadet force was mandated by this Government to establish a cadet unit in every public secondary school. Today, there are more than 30 cadet units operating in secondary schools [*Desk thumping*] impacting the lives of over 2,000 of our young men and women and with the ongoing expansion of the programme many more of our nations young people can be encouraged and inspired to participate and take an active role in making a positive difference to their lives.

It will also reduce crime, delinquency among the youth population. Madam Speaker, there is also the specialized youth services programme which comprise of the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Military-Led Academic Training programme. Again, statistic have shown that these programmes continue to be a positive investment in the lives of young people in Trinidad and Tobago. Give them a second chance; this programme gives them a second chance instead of them being labelled as school dropouts. Many graduate and they have the opportunity to successfully turn their lives around and permit me to read some statistics. Sixty-two MiLAT Cadets successfully graduated from batch 1501 in July 2017; at CSEC exam, 40 per cent of the cadets obtained five or more subjects. Now, remember these were dropouts; 80 per cent of cadets obtained three or more subjects and 100 per cent passes were received in theatre arts and physical education. All the MiLAT Cadets completed the Microsoft Digital Literacy Programme and the bronze and silver medal of the President's Award Scheme were awarded to them. One former cadet obtained a sports scholarship to UTT and six former cadets were recruited into the last intake of the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Madam Speaker, we are providing a life, a course for these young people. When they go to these training they are afforded the opportunity to join the Defence Force upon completion and successfully completing their training. And I continue, Madam Speaker. Nine hundred and twenty-eight Civilian Conservation Corps trainees successfully graduated from cycle 1701 in 2017. Eight hundred are currently participating in cycle 1702 from over 1,500 applicants.

Madam Speaker, having a greater appreciation of the value of education, almost 25 per cent have gone onto tertiary education. Recent evaluation of this programme has revealed that the Civilian Conservation Corps graduates enjoy a

high percentage of employment, almost 75 per cent. So, Madam Speaker, the Civilian Conservation Corps programme also imparts a keen sense of social responsibility to graduates, helping them to understand their worth as skilled and productive citizens. In this regard, I am proud to note that many of them are engaged in mentoring programmes at secondary schools and other groups throughout the country.

Madam Speaker, the flip side of these commendable successes we face, we face the tragedy of our young citizens opting to enter into the world of crime. And it is truly saddening to see so many young persons being caught in the cycle of crime and criminal activities. Unfortunately, violent crimes are committed at younger ages in many countries including ours. Many of our young persons who end up as homicide statistics are collateral damage to gang violence. And, Madam Speaker, I plead to you again, through you, Madam Speaker, we brought the Bill before this House, we did not get any support. And as we go into this next sitting, I make the plea again to those on the other side that we need their support, to support this legislation that we so need to make a difference in the lives of young people who are now jeered and brought on to the gang living, the gang leaders, the gang members, they are carried into the gangster life. And what it is about, it is about getting money quick, material profit, Madam Speaker. And as I noted earlier, we live in a society that advocates immediate gratification.

As I listened to the opposite side, silently, I am feeling a thread of encouragement that persons will say, yes, we have a hard budget, so more crime. Madam Speaker, I am appealing to the citizens of this nation that poverty is not crime. Poverty does not cause crime. I have come from poor humble beginnings and in my constituency I can attest that we have poor people but that does not take them to crime. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Madam Speaker, as we look at what is happening here, let us now in our contribution face reality. It is not business as usual. Things have changed, we are facing different times. I would not say hard times, because yet still we are better than many other people in this Caribbean nation around us, and the Caricom, so it is not hard times, but we are facing different times which calls for different arrangement, adjustment, sacrifice and all these issues of divestment and reallocation from the Minister of Finance budget, it speaks to crime, it impacts on crime because what happens in the mind of people when they feel that they are justified in committing crimes, committing offences, to get rich quick, it speaks to how we raise our children.

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[MRS. G. JENNINGS-SMITH]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

The old people will tell us, never hang your hat where your hand cannot reach. We need to be telling our young people that they need to organize themselves differently. There is life, because you know, Madam Speaker, one of the most hurtful things I have seen, I have seen, eh, is when you have young people feeling justified that they could commit these offences and they apply for jobs and they have a long criminal history. Because we as adults, we need to set those pace right. We need to set that priority right for them. We need to show them that there are consequences and the consequences could impact on their future lives.

So, Madam Speaker, soon when these young people find themselves in gang-related and organized crime there is no exit but death. They either become victim or a killer and if they are a killer, they will be hunted down by the police. The police will pick up with them sooner or later. And if they were killed they become a statistic. Is that what we want for our young people? Is that the life we want for our young people, Madam Speaker? The answer is, no. So, Madam Speaker, there is a language in the gang language, today you kill and you will be killed tomorrow.

This Government has for the past two years accepted the responsibility. We have seen it. We see it and we know it. And the Ministry of National Security, through its agencies, we have been working collaboratively and relentlessly to change that course. All we ask is the support from those on the other side.

Madam Speaker, I will talk about the Citizen Security Programme. And one of the Ministry's social intervention programmes that work directly with at-risk communities, including those affected by gangs, is the Citizen Security Programme. The overall goal of the Citizen Security Programme which, I want to say again, was started by a PNM Government under Mr. Martin Joseph, the Minister of National Security. It seemed as the Member for Siparia she actually forgot that, because I heard her saying that this was introduced under her Government's watch.

**6.45 p.m.**

So, Madam Speaker, I do not want to be put down again because "ah doh want tuh talk about de calypso. Ah doh want tuh talk about it again." So, Madam Speaker, that Citizen Security Programme was introduced under a PNM Government and the Citizen Security Programme focuses on addressing the high-needs community—high risk—and addressing risk factors associated with the crime and violence using the community interventions as the primary strategy. I want to commend the Citizen Security Programme, the members of staff, as well



as Project Reason—because Project Reason under the Cure Violence model, they deal specifically and they target strategically, persons involved in gang-related activities—and their continued intervention and the part played in the decrease in gang-related homicides, the prevention of gang and gun violence in the partner communities.

I have to also commend the officers of the Hearts and Mind Programme [*Desk thumping*] which comes from the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, which comprise of Members of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, and they continue to establish better relationships between citizens and our law enforcement agenda which is critical for our nation to establish a collaborative approach to fighting crime.

Madam Speaker, there is growing evidence that youth violence can be prevented and offenders can be rehabilitated when appropriate policies and interventions are adopted. The Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service houses the Youth Training Centre. Over the past two years of our stewardship, the Ministry of National Security has recommitted itself to tackling youth involvement in crime head-on through community intervention and prevention initiatives. Records show that the YTC population is comprised mainly of young men in the 15 to 18 age group, and they are there for offences ranging from larceny to robbery and murder. YTC continues to provide appropriate educational skills training and mentoring programmes to promote the reintegration of these young men back into society with a productive purpose.

Yesterday morning, Madam Speaker, I was at home and I listened to a radio station where a young lad—that is how they are described—was being interviewed and he spoke about the religious intervention he had in his life whilst in prison. And he spoke about his being sent back home. But you know what happened? When he was sent home, he engaged in crime again and he was sent back into prison. On the second occasion, they continued working on that young man and he praised the prison department for changing his life around, because he now is in the religious scheme of things, preaching and he understands life and sees life from a different perspective. So, Madam Speaker, it is not an easy situation changing persons' lives around. A government needs all the support it can get, both from the community and from the persons on other side in this honourable House. Madam Speaker, these social intervention programmes represent a unique window of opportunity to change negative behaviour and prevent reoffending and ultimately prevent and reduce crime and violence.

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[MRS. G. JENNINGS-SMITH]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

Madam Speaker, permit me to share some information. When we came into office in 2015, out of 420 murders, 33 per cent were gang-related. I am pleased to report that in 2017 we have seen a reduction of gang-related murders to 18 per cent. [*Desk thumping*] That means—[*Crosstalk*] Of course. This information came from the CAPA Unit of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service and these statistics by—[*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. Member:** How do you know?

**Hon. Member:** “Doh take dem on.” [*Crosstalk*]

**Mrs. G. Jennings-Smith:** Madam Speaker, statistics from the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service have shown a notable decrease in the number of gang-related homicides. I did not say a decrease in homicides, I said a decrease in gang-related homicides. And I can tell you that the initiatives that the Ministry of National Security is now engaged in, it is working. [*Desk thumping*] It is working slowly, but surely. [*Crosstalk*] It is working slowly, but surely.

You see, Madam Speaker, when we speak on this side of any activity that brought success, it is denied, but we must face the truth. We are not about storytelling on this side. We are speaking real truths here. [*Desk thumping*] So, Madam Speaker, these initiatives are working slowly, but surely, and I can tell you as I stand here, knowing of more developments—we have more to come—in the coming years we will be a Government standing strong because we have a hard-working Attorney General, [*Desk thumping*] a hard-working Minister of National Security who works every day and night, [*Desk thumping*] and we have a smart Minister of Finance who could put a budget [*Desk thumping*] that could lead us to a position of changing our lives around, changing our misfortune into fortune. And it is the same thing. We are going to change our misfortune of crime into fortune. We are going to reduce.

Because, you know why, Madam Speaker? We heard from the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs. We heard of his activities, his plans and his projection, his vision. We heard from the Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts. We heard of her plans, her projection and her vision. We heard from the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. We heard of her projection and her vision, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] And you will hear, Madam Speaker, from the Minister of National Security tomorrow of his plan and his vision for success. We will take one community at a time and we will change this country around. [*Desk thumping*]. So, Madam Speaker, I want to say that

criminals do not drop from the sky. Criminals do not drop from the sky. Criminals are created from human beings in our homes, in our family and I do not to want to say in this honourable House because we do not come from this honourable House. Madam Speaker, we come from homes, we come from families, we come from communities, and we come from institutions.

Yes, Madam Speaker, today we witnessed a fall in our reserves, a fall in the price of oil, lower capabilities in the gas market, and we said, whereas in 2010 the energy sector revenue was \$15.7 billion, today in 2017, \$2.1 billion. And I must say it over and over because it seems to me that some people are sleeping. Madam Speaker, I want to wake up this House to the realities of this situation. [*Desk thumping*] The realities—it is real. We are not dreaming. The figures are there. We had a Spotlight and we showed the nation what the reality is, but some people choose to keep the reality in the darkness and feed them on information they want to believe. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Madam Speaker, we are faced with a fall in revenue. “It come like meh husband say, ‘listen, I eh working for \$10,000 again. Ah only working for three.’” What would I do, Madam Speaker? Would I go and borrow more money? But I am a noble person. I will tell my children, no more desserts, no more ice cream. Yes, Madam Speaker! I will cut and contrive because I was taught, do not hang your hat where your hand cannot reach. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Hinds:** “And doh put huh hand in nobody pocket.”

**Mrs. G. Jennings-Smith:** Yes, “doh put yuh hand in nobody pocket”. Some of the naysayers will take the opportunity to invade the minds of our young people and tell them that crime is the only way out. But I hasten to add that within this budget there are many opportunities for young people. [*Desk thumping*] Many opportunities! And as I said before when I spoke about my constituents, there are opportunities for people to become entrepreneurs. And we did not have it when we had plenty, but we have it when we have less. So I do not know the magic that this Minister of Finance has done, [*Desk thumping*] because he has created opportunities for young and old, because the farmer is “saying he happy. He get \$100,000. He say he feeling bad tuh raise the price of de dasheen bush because he said that although gas going up, he getting \$100,000 grant.” So he is now going to deal with a business venture, [*Desk thumping*] a business approach.

So, Madam Speaker, what we see happening is the Minister of Finance has directed all wise-thinking people in Trinidad and Tobago that that is the way we are going. We are going to see what we could do with less. We have to do it. We have no other choice, Madam Speaker. You ever see “ah old mother in a house how dey does

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*  
[MRS. G. JENNINGS-SMITH]

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

drop it on you, and tell dem, ‘listen nah, yuh cyar get no new uniform next term’?” You know what I used to do as a small child, Madam Speaker? We used to take our uniform and turn it on the other side and make a new uniform. [*Desk thumping*] And that is where we come from, Madam Speaker. Yes, Madam Speaker. So that is what we have to do in Trinidad and Tobago. I would not hasten to add that some of us do not know about those times, and I am one to educate how we could make do with less money. Because if we do not speak that language, crime is going to flourish, and especially when we do not get the support from those on the other side to pass our legislation.

So this Government, today, it is our time to make adjustments, sacrifice and our country’s economic constraints, we are going to sacrifice. And I could tell you, people out there, they know what is going on, you know, Madam Speaker. They know what is going on. They know what time of the day it is. I can tell you that. People say they “jamming still”. They know how to jam still because they know how to cut and contrive. [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member, your original 45 minutes are now spent. You are entitled to 10 more minutes if you—[*Crosstalk*]

**Mrs. G. Jennings-Smith:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. Member:** We now start.

**Mrs. G. Jennings-Smith:** So this Government, “we standing alone, eh, and we standing strong”. But I am certain, from hearing the people out there—I am a Facebook fanatic. I am on social media every minute of the day too, and I am listening to the concerns and the expectations and the comments made on that social media. And, Madam Speaker, people understand and they are on the ball. People know what they have to do. And they are praising the Minister of Finance. They are praising Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley’s Government. [*Desk thumping*] Because you know what are the things they are saying? And I come from the country, eh, but I will tell you all, country people wise, eh. We may not be speaking all the flowery language, but “we wise”.

Madam Speaker, you know what they are saying? Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley, you know “what he do? He bring equity.” Everybody must pay. Everybody must pay tax, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] And we like equity. Everybody across the board, they have to pay the tax. And you know what, Madam Speaker? That shows that a Government is not taking for some as opposed to others.

**Hon. Member:** Some are more equal than others. Take some water, man. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mrs. G. Jennings-Smith:** Yeah, I need some water.

So, Madam Speaker, we must—and I know we will endure. The majority of right-thinking citizens will understand that we are facing trying economic times. And I have faith that all the citizens in this country, right-thinking citizens, they are going to support this Government. Rest assured we will be standing strong in 2020 and we will be going forward after this situation here is rectified. This is leading us into victory, Madam Speaker. We will be victorious. [*Desk thumping*]

But I want to say to each and every one of us, if there is one time your community needed you, it is now, and if there is one time Trinidad needed you, it is also now. As indicated earlier this week by the hon. Minister during his presentation, this Government proposes to launch a National Crime Prevention Programme. I believe the time is now for our citizens to stand up and participate. It is time for us to empower our communities. It is time that we act from the voices from our communities. In the same vein, the Ministry of National Security intends to introduce shortly this programme which strongly would impact on the communities and empowerment of our communities.

So I wish to advise this honourable House that the Minister of National Security will present full details of the National Crime Prevention Programme during his presentation. Our Ministry, the Ministry of National Security, will continue to dedicate resources and efforts to ensure that our young people can recover from the ills they suffer and help them to realize their true potential as worthy, valuable and truthful. You see truth, Madam Speaker? Truth will always overcome.

Through direct collaboration with our citizens and the communities, through a whole of Government approach, a whole of ministry approach, a whole of country approach, we will reclaim this country. [*Desk thumping*] We will certainly reclaim this country, and we will reclaim it from the tentacles of criminals, community by community, until the whole of Trinidad and Tobago will be safe again. And we will say great. Great is our leader. Great is our leader, Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley and great is this party, and great is this Government.

I thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Prolonged desk thumping*]

*Adjournment*

*Monday, October 09, 2017*

**ADJOURNMENT**

**The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):**  
Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this House now adjourn to Tuesday, the 10<sup>th</sup> day of October, 2017, at 10.00 a.m.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*House adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 7.01 p.m.*