



REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Debates of the House of Representatives

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**OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)**

THE HONOURABLE WADE MARK
SPEAKER

THE HONOURABLE NELA KHAN
DEPUTY SPEAKER

Friday 5th October, 2012

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Appropriation Bill, 2012

Friday, October 05, 2012

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, October 05, 2012

The House met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2013)

BILL, 2012

[Second Day]

Question proposed.

Dr. Keith Rowley (*Diego Martin West*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, as you would observe our numbers are growing steadily on this side. Very soon we would be in the majority. [*Desk thumping and laughter*]

I want to welcome my colleague from St. Joseph who had a “lil” difficulty with 34 so he is now 43 back. [*Desk thumping and laughter*] It is alleged that he mishandled clause 34 and for that he is in perjury at post 43.

But, Mr. Speaker, it is my honour and privilege to be the first Member of this honourable House to have the opportunity to welcome the hon. Minister of Finance to his new assignment in this Chamber, and to congratulate him on his effort in attempting to present a national budget for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. It is my trust and hope that his tenure, for whatever period it lasts will be a productive one and his endeavours would bear the requisite fruits for the benefit of all the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I am not convinced that the Minister in his three months on the job has properly grasped the assignment of preparing and reporting on a national budget. It is either that he does not fully understand what is required or he has very quickly fallen into the characteristic mould of his immediate predecessor who was famous for blowing smoke and waving mirrors. The budget statement as presented by the Minister is remarkable in that it makes no pretence at reporting on or analyzing the projections and targets as set and attempted by the budgetary arrangements of the previous period of 2012. This should put the national population on notice that this Minister is about to engage in shenanigans.

Mr. Speaker, confidence is an intangible variable that is challenging to measure. It is incumbent on the Government to create an environment in which confidence is optimal. It follows, therefore, that confidence is also tied to the Government, not only as a result of its fiscal policies, but also as a result of the execution of its overall governance of the country. Mr. Speaker, on September 14, 2010, in my response to the coalition's first budget statement, I made the following statement, and I quote:

"It is our view that this Government will never be able to raise the necessary level of confidence required to propel the economy and the country as a whole...since it has stubbornly insisted that it will nakedly deny its pre-election blustering and campaign promises as it arrogantly speaks untruth to the population."

Mr. Speaker, I myself did not realize how profoundly appropriate those statements would remain just two years later. As I stand here today delivering my response to a third coalition budget, I hate to be the one to say, I told you so. I told you two years ago, Mr. Speaker, that this Government did not have the moral fortitude to engender the level of confidence that is necessary to move the economy and this country forward. They are steadfastly and myopically concerned with their ship of partners. Yes, they are concerned only with the partnership.

The economy has yet to perform even close to any of the projections of this Government. Every time they tell us to expect growth of "X", it is significantly less than "X", and sometimes negative "X". At the 2010 budget reading the Minister of Finance told us, and I quote him:

"...we have benefited from higher energy prices than expected in 2010 and will be registering a positive economic growth of 2.5 per cent in this year."

Well, according to the Ministry of Finance's numbers, growth in 2010 was 0.2 per cent, nowhere close to the 2.5 per cent the Minister announced.

At the 2011 budget reading, the same Minister of Finance took the more defensive approach, and now he is talking through the mouth of the CSO, and he said, and I quote him:

The CSO anticipates for calendar 2011, a 1.4 per cent contraction in the economy.

Well, according to the Minister of Finance's numbers, growth in 2011 was negative 2.6 per cent, not what he promised, but negative, which is almost doubly worse than what was announced by the Minister. Again, in 2011, the Minister of Finance, now our Minister of Foreign Affairs, told us that he based his 2011/2012 budget on a growth rate projection of 1.7 per cent.

Well, this past Monday, the current Minister of Finance told us, and I am quoting him here:

“After three years of negative or negligible growth” and a worrisome global environment, we—meaning the Government—have stabilized the economy with a resumption of 1.2 per cent growth.

Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, the Minister speaks of this 1.2 per cent as if it is a done deal—

Miss Cox: It is not!

Dr. K. Rowley:—as if this growth already exists. The fact is that 1.2 per cent is a projected number.

Miss Mc Donald: “That’s right!”

Dr. K. Rowley: Another one of the projected numbers that we must not believe. [*Desk thumping*] We will not know what the real growth number is for 2012 until sometime in 2013. So the PP has not stabilized anything.

Secondly, the projected growth of 1.7 per cent last year, and the new Minister claiming 12 per cent—1.2 per cent, sorry, means that at least they have already missed their projection. Mr. Speaker, I ask you and the people of Trinidad and Tobago, how confident are we now?

Mr. Speaker, in May this year, the then Governor of the Central Bank announced that Trinidad and Tobago was in a recession. The Governor further explained that after three years of negative growth the economy has been in a slump, and that the promised economic recovery had not arrived. The Governor attributed the growth delay to, among other things, the 2.6 per cent decline in the economy in the fourth quarter of 2011 which spilled over into 2012. There is no doubt in my mind that the Government’s main crime-fighting tool, that infamous state of emergency, impacted negatively on the economy from 2011 into 2012. The former Governor explained that production decreases in energy and in the refining subsector, 7.8 per cent and 15.3 per cent respectively, had placed a drag on the economy, and he also mentioned the 16.5 per cent decline in LNG production.

Mr. Speaker, the then Minister of Finance took strong objection to the Governor’s statements, and he sought to criticize the Governor publicly. He said:

There were strong headlines that were put out in the newspapers about recession. I say here today, based on the information that we have at the Ministry of Finance, there is no slump.

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That was the Government's reaction. As is usual with this Government, the former finance Minister tried to blame the previous administration by suggesting that failing investment from three years ago was now causing growth reduction.

Mr. Speaker, this Government takes no ownership for their ills. If they could get away with it they would blame the PNM for their legacy of missteps, misprints, mistakes, mishandling, [*Desk thumping*] miseries of all kinds, misconduct and their constipation. [*Laughter*] But we will never allow smoke-and-mirrors response to everything to go unchecked. In their haste to shift blame the previous Minister of Finance just chose to totally ignore the Central Bank's data. In the July 2012 Economic Bulletin, it was shown among other things that there were two successive quarters of decline in real GDP; four of seven quarters of decline or zero GDP since the PP took control of our economy.

Mr. Speaker, the former Governor was not alone in his description of the recession. The President of the San Fernando Business Association, in a *Guardian* article on June 13, 2012 had this to say:

“Business has been on the decline for three years and it has worsened tremendously in the last three months.”

She went on to say:

“We have begun to feel it already, so we are in a recession.”

Many of the businesses interviewed in the article spoke of a 25—50 per cent drop in sales from 2011-2012, and the decline was especially felt in the second quarter of 2012.

Mr. Speaker, I was in shock this past Monday when the new Minister of Finance stood here, and with a straight face, told the nation that GDP in this country had grown by 1.2 per cent, and that is after everybody knew that everything was depressed during the August to December period last year. I ask you again, Mr. Speaker, how confident are we?

Mr. Speaker, it was the Prime Minister herself who reminded us during the last of the many reshuffles, and I quote her:

We must be faithful to a leadership style that is firm but humble, passionate and impatient for great achievement. But ever conscious of the correct procedures.

Mr. Speaker, within 60 days of that Prime Minister's reminder, the Government's machinations were about to lead us down the road of the Administration of Justice (Indictable Proceedings) debacle and the PP's

clandestine and sinister proclamation of section 34. For now I say no more about that. But, Mr. Speaker, we understand that skulduggery is carried out by two or more persons acting in concert—you know, Bonnie and Clyde, Jesse James, Frank James and Cole Younger; Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid—*[Interruption]*

Dr. Moonilal: Manning and Hart.

Dr. K. Rowley: Thelma and Louise; Volney and—anyhow—*[Laughter]*. One only has to look at the figures presented in the Review of the Economy to see that the performance criteria for GDP for 2009, 2010 and 2011 are now presented as revised figures. I want to repeat that: all the figures that we have dealt with here, while they were taking praise for performance and green shoots and blue skies, have now been revised downwards: 2009, 2010 and 2011.

10.15 a.m.

So what had been reported as performance, in 2010 and 2011, are now lower figures. That is how growth is obtained in 2012, and reported by the Minister, because having lowered all the other figures, the poor performance of 2012, when compared with the new low figures, now looks like an improvement on those figures and therefore, that is how you get growth—abracadabra. Mr. Speaker, we have a word for that in our dictionary in Trinidad and Tobago. It is called “ratchiffee”. It is spelt R-A-T-C-H-I-F-E-E—“ratchiffee”. “Ratchiffee Government, ratchiffee numbers, ratchiffee growth”. *[Desk thumping]*

This is a Minister who joined us from the private sector with great fanfare and at great cost—\$10 million worth of it. There was tremendous expectation in some quarters for something new, something different, that will come to the rescue of a chronically stalled economy. Sadly, I must report, nothing has changed. The budget which has been presented as a prescription for growth is woefully off target, and without any discernible engine, except for a minor tinker here and a minor tinker there, the budget is a brave serving of yesterday’s meal with all the culinary appeals of leftovers of the Dookeran era. *[Laughter and desk thumping]*

It fails even to pretend to mention our real challenges, and insofar as it identifies initiatives or problems, many of the prescriptions advanced are either confusing or downright counterproductive.

Mr. Speaker, I want the people of this country to understand that during my many years as a parliamentarian, this has to be the absolute worst budget statement ever presented in this House. *[Desk thumping]* I wish to humbly submit

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that this budget represents yet another misstep on the part of this PP Government. [Desk thumping] It is not surprising, but still bewildering, that this Government would replace one failed Minister with another one, but this one seems less capable of addressing the serious issues confronting our economy. The budget, like the two previous ones under the PP, will achieve nothing of substance and will further erode any modicum of credibility that is left in this Government.

First, after promising austerity measures, he proceeds to bring another largesse budget in the history of the country. Obviously, someone quietly whispered to him, so he decided at the last minute to flip-flop, and come with a package completely devoid of any fiscal responsibility. How can we believe anything he says from here on in?

Secondly, he confesses that the Government intends to run fiscal deficits until 2016. That is one year after the next general election. So that means that they would run budget deficits for every year that they were in office. Regardless of whom you may think will win the next election, is this something that you should boast about? This is something to be ashamed and afraid of. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker, you remember they promised us in their early heyday, 2.5 per cent growth. They are now telling us that for their five years it will be deficit, deficit, deficit. [Desk thumping] This day, Mr. Speaker, and I quote him here, even in the face of that dismal picture you know, he is quoted:

“...the economy reached a turning point in 2012.”

What turning point?

“Growth is expected to be in the vicinity of 1.2 per cent...”

And he talks about negligible growth now becoming growth. It is not true. Not true at all.

This is the third budget of this administration. It has had ample time to settle into office and address the critical issues which face the country. Instead, they boasted that they had the answers to everything. None of us is perfect, Mr. Speaker. It is only natural, therefore, that we would expect the Government to make the occasional mistakes here and there. We would make allowances for that, but to be so consistently missing and so frequently misrepresenting facts is too much to take. The country wants its leaders to address the problems which they are expected to take care of and we expect that they would be clear in their statement, in their intent and in their purpose.

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The Minister of Finance and the Economy has said that he would pursue a policy designed to achieve economic growth, to refocus government expenditure and to build a competitive economy. Nothing in what he has presented and everything that he has evaded can contribute to that objective. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, we can dispense with much of what he had said. He announced, on his arrival to the job, austerity budget. So much so, that we were all invited to the inaugural pre-budget/austerity budget party at “austerity lane” in Mid Centre Mall. [*Laughter*] One march in Port of Spain and in a matter of days the plan changed to increases in total expenditure. [*Desk thumping*] Increases in total expenditure from \$54.4 billion to \$58.4 billion and the deficit grew from \$6.7 billion to \$7.7 billion, projected for 2013. That is the austerity budget. It is called panic budgeting. That is why the thing is short on details and without connectivity. [*Desk thumping*] We have been given no estimate of the impact of the new fiscal measures announced in the budget. How much revenue is to be foregone in the VAT on food? How much subsidy will be saved by hiking the price of premium gasoline? Not a word.

This administration took up office with no plan of action despite all the old talk. After three years in office we are now given a veiled promise of a comprehensive review of the [*Whispers in the microphone*] property tax. [*Desk thumping and laughter*]

Miss Cox: Say it louder.

Dr. K. Rowley: Property tax.

Miss Cox: A return of “axe the tax”.

Dr. K. Rowley: [*Whispers in the microphone*] “It coming” next year—coming next fiscal year. And listen to this one, an improvement in revenue collection devices—revenue authority.

Hon. Member: Ahh! Revenue Authority.

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, the Minister says he has begun a rigorous review of all expenditure including subsidies and transfers. It is not true. He has not been there long enough to do any such thing. He has no idea what these subsidies are and he has no intention of reducing them. [*Desk thumping*] Those subsidies, Mr. Speaker, are 54.4 billion, 50.3 per cent of a budget. I am sure in his three months he has had no chance to sit down and seriously focus on those things. If he did, they play no part in his budgeting arrangements.

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To achieve a balanced budget in 2016 as he says, he will reduce this deficit by 1 per cent of GDP per year. That calculates into a reduction of 1.5 billion in expenditure cuts for each year, presumably starting next year. But who believes anything this Government says? The real problem is that the deficit is 6.7 billion this year and there will be probably more—7.5—and there will be deficits for the rest of the administration's term. Elections are scheduled for 2015 or before. This is just a bluff. This offer to cut deficit is a bluff as there is nowhere that this administration—which has fallen in love with contracts, food stamps, food cards and other handouts—will reduce welfare and other expenditures in the face of elections which they are scheduled to lose.

Mr. Speaker, as for stimulating the economy with the construction sector, what exactly are we being offered? Laudable objectives of increasing the housing stock. But the key to any construction boom must be the long-term health of the economy. No shrewd investor will undertake a land development project unless he or she is confident as to the future prospects of the economy. Fiscal incentives by themselves or available supplies of cheap money are no guarantee of a rush to construction.

Given our recent experiences with this group of parliamentarians in Government, how can we be sure that the short-term incentives for housing and commercial building construction are not intended only to target existing specific projects already known to the Government. Something is curious here, Mr. Speaker. The Government has over 100,000 square feet of unused office space in a number of empty or partially completed buildings—which it has deliberately abandoned or ignored—at the Government Campus since 2010. The Government is also busy pursuing a policy of emptying out Port of Spain by relocating Government offices to areas outside of the city, mainly to Chaguanas. What then is the driving force behind any incentive, announcing tax breaks to encourage construction of commercial buildings? Certainly, this cannot be for the benefit of the capital city in its current state.

Mr. Speaker, the Cabinet has recently been approached to have HDC pursue the purchase of a piece of land in central Trinidad for \$175 million. The land with basic infrastructure was valued at \$52 million to \$65 million by well-known valuator Linden Scott. Surprisingly, an intervention was made by the Government valuator, of all people, who claimed that the Scott valuation was too low and the owner claimed that somebody had offered him \$200 million.

Hon. Member: What!

Dr. K. Rowley: This same Cabinet that approved the premature proclamation of section 34 approved the purchase at between \$162 million and \$175 million. Soon after, the Cabinet was further advised that the owner is not budging from 175 million, so the purchase price became 175 million. The moral of this little story, Mr. Speaker, is that if you want to get the best value for your land, do not use an experienced commercial valuator, use the Government valuator and the Cabinet. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: “Ohhh lord!”

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, we are very concerned about this Government’s expressed interest in private/public sector partnerships, especially in the “bikini way” that it has been announced by the Minister. This Minister does not seem to have a proper appreciation for the minefield of corruption into which he has chosen to operate. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Correct.

Dr. K. Rowley: What are the details of this PPP system to be used for infrastructure projects? Here again, the Minister flagged something, but gives no details.

When this Government came into office, they pretended to be in a hurry to keep their campaign promise of moving to speedily enact comprehensive procurement legislation. To date, that has not been done. All we have seen is the Government moving with great haste to circumvent the CTB rules by saying that Invaders Bay and the Rapid Rail Project are not award of contracts and, therefore, not subject to any proper procurement procedure rules.

We have seen hundreds of millions of dollars of contracts being hurriedly awarded and improperly awarded in the state enterprise sector under ministerial instructions using the pretence of some non-existent competitive processes. If this corrupt Government is allowed to proceed with public/private partnership projects without the enhancement and enactment of effective procurement legislation, we could well be in for a new record-breaking phase of spectacular corrupt practices involving significant physical and financial resources of the people. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I turn to the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. Section 22 of the Heritage and Stabilisation Act requires that the Minister reports to Parliament at the end of every five years. The five-year period would have ended in March 2012. Are we to believe that the Government is unaware of this? Could it be that

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they have plans to alter the provisions of this Act and/or interfere with the investment requirements of the fund? The Minister told us that the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund is the best performing sovereign fund in the world.

10.30 a.m.

This fund is managed, by law, by the Central Bank and not by the Government. So if the fund has performed well in 2012 it is the former Governor of the Central Bank who deserves the credit and not this Government that is praise-crazy. It is noteworthy that while the Minister is boasting about something that he has no responsibility for, the return on the fund was less than 1 per cent; actually 0.8 per cent last year. Until we see the documentary evidence supplied by the Central Bank we will not believe one word from the Minister about any 9 per cent performance in 2012.

Mr. Speaker, the gaming industry: the time has come for this country to shift focus from ritualistically increasing taxes on an undeclared gaming industry whilst not admitting that a thriving casino gambling industry exists in Trinidad and Tobago. In the absence of properly enforced gaming control regulations, the casino gambling industry is a real business sector but open to criminal activity, such as money laundering. The critical attention should be centred on effective tax collection and regulation.

If we continue to turn a blind eye to this problem under the pretence that casino gambling is illegal here, then we may soon attract the attention of the Financial Advisory Task Force (FATF), which will make demands and place deadlines on us, with dire consequences for noncompliance. The time to act is now when we have the option to consider the situation, without pressure. The taxing regime, disguised as being levied on social clubs, could drive these bona fide establishments—these recreation clubs—out of business, depriving the ordinary citizen of traditional recreation. The time to address this problem is now.

Mr. Speaker, on the Clico matter, on Wednesday, September 14, my friend, now Minister of Foreign Affairs, former Minister of Finance, had this to say, and I quote him—and I cannot give you the—and he was jumping like this. [*Demonstrates by jumping*] He said—

Hon. Member: No, no, no—

Dr. Moonilal: You know better.

Dr. K. Rowley:—“One year”—I want to give you the real thing, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Roberts: Laugh at Jack stuttering—

Dr. K. Rowley: “—One year after, the previous—

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Sharma: Start over.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition. Members, please, I am hearing a lot of murmuring and it is disturbing me, and I therefore ask the Members to pay attention, and let us not describe any Member in terms of physical features or how—no, that is not allowed in this honourable House. So could you continue, please?

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I do not know what all this is about, you know. He was jumping for joy and he was saying:

“One year after, the previous regime having spent almost 18 months paralyzed as to what to do, we were able in one year to do all the necessary work that had to be done...”

He was jumping for joy:

“In one year, Mr. Speaker, we have brought this all together...This shall be the beginning of the closure. The country can feel a sigh of relief.”

And he jumped for joy. That is what I was saying.

Hon. Member: That is right.

Dr. K. Rowley: In his swan song on June 04, 2010 [*sic*], just before he was relocated, he said:

“It has happened without putting at risk our debt profile and managing our cash flow position...”

And that is the problem, Mr. Speaker, we have been having with this Government. The new Minister fits right into those situations.

Based on what I have just said, Mr. Speaker, one would have understood or concluded that the Clico matter was wrapped up and put away one year ago, yet it finds itself as a matter requiring immediate and urgent further attention on the part of the new Minister. All I am saying is, do not take anything this Government tells you. [*Desk thumping*] And this new Minister just throws out the idea about a \$19 billion bailout without going into any of the details about the nature of the MOU, its existence, the legal problems, or anything to do with where they are with respect to the collaterals that the State holds in return for this billion dollar bailout. You do not get the whole story, Mr. Speaker.

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It is this kind of partial and skewed reporting like, “the treasury empty; we are on a slippery slope to the debt trap; we have become a failed state” that has mortally wounded the business and other taxpayer confidence in Trinidad and Tobago as a whole. Spokespersons for this Government have consistently damaged the investment climate and the confidence of our people with their politically motivated, inane utterances which invariably are half-truths and innuendoes. The new Minister fits right in. [*Desk thumping*]

As is typical of the entire budget presentation, the Minister raises an issue without defining any pertinent detail. While he sets out to bring closure to the Hindu Credit Union matter in 2013, he is careful not to give any insight whatsoever on how this matter is reflected in, or will inform, the budgetary provisions.

Mr. Speaker, on the matter of credit ratings, I want to point out what the country’s credit rating has been over the period 2009—2012. With respect to our rating on foreign currency—the long-term—2009 we were rated “A”; 2011, “A”; 2012, “A”. Short-term, foreign currency rating, we were rated “A-minus”; 2011, “A-minus”; 2012, “A-minus”; same as 2009. On the local currency, for the long-term, in 2009 we were rated “A-plus”; 2011, “A-plus”; 2012, “A-plus”. Local currency, short-term: 2009, “A-minus”; 2011, “A-minus”; 2012, “A-minus”. And if I may quote from the *Review of the Economy*, it states—that is the Minister’s own documents:

“These ratings reflect the country’s strong, resilient and well-diversified economic structure, as well as its strong external liquidity, substantiated by low financing requirements and healthy net foreign reserve position. ...sound fiscal flexibility, relatively low public debt, and a relatively well-regulated financial system with stable monetary and exchange rate policies.”

That is the Minister speaking on Monday against the background of the ratings I have just given you from 2009—2012, unchanged. It has been so since 2009 and that was the year of the financial collapse. In other words, all of the self-praise about the last Minister of Finance righting our economic ship and laying a new economic foundation and putting our finances into balance is just so much “hooley”. It has been so all along. [*Desk thumping*] This is the inheritance that they are never too keen to announce.

However, there are two dark clouds identified by the Caribbean Information and Credit Rating Services, and these two dark clouds are: one, a persistent high crime level in Trinidad and Tobago; and two, increasing perception of corruption in public affairs. I want to repeat that: increasing perception of corruption in public affairs. And I dare say, it is not only a perception. [*Desk thumping*]

On the question, Mr. Speaker, of diversification, once again the need to diversify the economy surfaces as a national imperative. This is not an idea of a new Minister. Rather, it seems to be more like a rite of passage, as we constantly sound the alarm bells to drive home the sense of urgency. It is here that one notices the Government's quiet admission that information technology and other knowledge-based businesses provide areas for potential growth away from the traditional hydrocarbon and other tried and tested areas.

It is a pity that there was nobody in the Government who understood that when they were shutting down eTeck technical park—when they were shutting down Tamana eTeck Park. That park has been the victim of “bad mouth”, “bad mind”, closure and abandonment under the UNC. I presume it will now surface as a new idea to solve the diversification problem. Government, according to this partnership, is to wipe out all footprints, fingerprints and foundation laid by a predecessor administration. The common objective of certain aspects of national development may eventually, after persecution and review, be found to be the only game in town. After almost three years of no plan and endless flailing, we continue to hope and dream.

Mr. Speaker, in the area of agriculture, notwithstanding the virulent attacks on the concept of mega farms for the effective mobilization of financial resources and marrying that with technology and good market arrangements, it is noteworthy that it has now found favour with the Government. All of a sudden the Government is the biggest advocate of mega farms. And, of course, we also see, notwithstanding the Government's tirade when they were in the Opposition, about never using any land for housing, this Government distinguishes itself where every Monday morning they are bulldozing crops somewhere in Trinidad and Tobago to build houses.

While this is the day-to-day reality in Trinidad, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance dredges up a tired, tried and failed Guyana food basket idea and delivers it as some new innovative initiative. Somebody in the Government should have advised the Minister about the failed Caribbean Food Corporation experience so he would never have said what he said there.

But I draw to your attention, Mr. Speaker, an article in Wednesday's *Trinidad Guardian* of October 03, where Food Production Minister Devant Maharaj—you remember him?

Hon. Member: Um-hm.

Dr. K. Rowley:—is quoted as having said that he—that is how this Government operates, “eh”—he contacted Guyana President—his Excellency the

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President of Guyana, Donald Ramotar, by telephone, and promised to follow up with a letter on this matter. If the approach was made as reported by the Minister to the President of Guyana, those who are versed in matters of diplomacy and protocol may wish to offer a comment and advise or counsel Members of the Cabinet on matters of protocol. Clearly, Mr. Speaker, such a matter between states cannot be handled in such a casual manner. I wonder if the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago was aware that the Minister of Agriculture [*sic*] was calling up a Caricom Head of State to commit Trinidad and Tobago to major policy objectives which obviously have not been properly thought through or may never have received the approval of the Cabinet?

Miss Cox: He “outa” place.

Dr. K. Rowley: Meanwhile, on this matter, I want to ask the Minister of Finance a few questions. Will this initiative in Guyana be a government-to-government arrangement? What level of funding is being proposed? What will the source of those funds be? In what form or shape will these agricultural estates or farms be established and managed? Could the Government tell the population whether any needs assessment has been done for any proposed food products? Would the produce from any such farms in Guyana be exempt from pest risk assessment prior to importation into Trinidad and Tobago?

With respect to the plan with the lofty expectation of cutting out our food import bill and cutting it by 50 per cent over the next 36 months, the Minister of Finance really does not want us to take him seriously. For him to make any attempt to defend this totally unfeasible pronouncement is to call into question his own understanding of what it really entails. Until he can tell us exactly what crops and other items will be produced in such quantity locally, and what imported items they are guaranteed to replace, this crazy target is not even pie in the sky; it is more like, “Minister high”.

To further compound the lack of coherence in the Government’s understanding in the food supply and the food import bill, one has to look at the stated short-term objective—the reduction in the food import bill—and juxtapose that against their hurriedly announced reduction in VAT on food. To the extent that there is any passing on of the savings on VAT to customers, as is supposed to happen, then it should make the affected products a little cheaper for a little while at least.

10.45 a.m.

Then this is increased affordability which should lead to greater consumption of the items since the vast majority of these new VAT-free products which are

non-basic food items and they are largely imported. It follows that this singular action of VAT reduction can only have the effect of increasing foreign consumption of non-essential items according to taste and ultimately supporting an increase in the food import bill.

The Minister must tell us if food purchased from Caricom neighbours would no longer be computed as part of the food import bill. It was always our understanding that once it was not produced within Trinidad and Tobago it is an import. Therefore, Guyanese products imported to Trinidad and Tobago are expected to be viewed as imported food, to be paid for by Trinidad and Tobago consumers.

Incidentally, what exactly does the Minister of Finance mean when he says, it is proposed on a temporary basis that VAT would be removed from all food items except luxury items and alcoholic beverages. Surely, this could not be the same VAT that attended the pre-budget rally at Mid Centre Mall. This has to be a vat of rum or VAT that would disappear after the next meal. We would like the Minister of Finance to stand in this Parliament and tell us exactly how this temporary VAT removal will work. We see all Tom, Dick and Harry outside explaining how it is going to work. The onus is on the Minister of Finance to tell us how it is going to work and against what timetable the replacement of VAT will come.

Mr. Speaker, we also have to take into context the whole question of national health. When we remove VAT on all kinds of food items—a lot of it, largely unrecommended, imported, processed foods—I am not so sure that the removal of VAT will have any significant reduction in food prices, but I am sure it is going to have the effect of increasing the consumption of largely unhealthy, processed, imported food. So the Government could take responsibility for that.

Mr. Speaker, if this measure was going to take place, why now? One possible explanation is that this was an act of desperation to regain favour with the population, in the light of the population's reaction to the Government's surreptitious proclamation of the infamous section 34. [*Desk thumping*] Knowing this Government, Mr. Speaker, there is more in the mortar than the pestle with this “no VAT on food.” The clue lies in the Prime Minister's reference to 7,000 items on the list being considered for zero rating. I am not even sure if the Customs book has 7,000 items under food. The truth is that we all know that on a list of this size, there will be a number of items that we do not consider as food in the ordinary sense.

However, these are items which are probably being imported in large quantities. This means that the businesses importing these items will get a

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substantial break if the VAT is removed, leaving room for price increases of their own. So compounding the danger to the population's health that comes with this measure, is the attempt by this Government, once more, to use the power of the State to bring benefits to persons who may be benefactors of the UNC.

Mr. Speaker, the leopard cannot change its spots. As far as this UNC is concerned, that is what being in Government is all about. It has nothing to do with putting food on the table of the poor in this country. Many people in this country already know that this Government never acts without some ulterior motive. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President, if the Government was truly concerned about food affordability and prices, would it not have been more logical to have used the stated committee to do the assessment, determine which items would be added to the VAT-free list and everything would have been normal and orderly? Instead we have an announcement, made from a political platform, in panic. After that was done we would now go and see what can be done and how much it would cost. Up to now they cannot even tell us what items would be zero-rated. That is madness, Mr. Speaker. That is drunkenness. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I want to turn to fishing because, you see, one of the main stars of the ill-fated state of emergency of 2011 was the Government's reports of the discovery and capture of numerous participants in an illegal bunkering of diesel fuel for marine use. As was loudly announced then, great cheers went up, many were apparently apprehended. One was slapped on the wrist and the Government declared billions of dollars in savings which we cannot find any aspect of in the current budgetary reporting. However, in response to this bunkering, for which nobody could be found to be prosecuted, the Government has virtually shut down the commercial fishing industry.

Would you believe, Mr. Speaker, that there were two outcomes to all this noise about illegal bunkering. One: bunkering was gleefully observed by the Government to be lucrative business. So immediately, this age-old business of Petrotrin was awarded licence to friends of the Government. It was only the alert and angry screams of the OWTU, which saw the licence that was not granted being suspended, and an evaluation of the proposal being done after the recommendations were already made to the Cabinet.

Secondly: fuel is now being rationed, I am advised, for commercial fishing

vessels in such a way that, in some instances, the allocated amount granted is way below the trip requirements and cannot even run the generators continuously as required, far less to support the travel to and from the fishing grounds.

The result of all this, Mr. Speaker, is that fewer days of fishing are engaged, commercial fishermen are losing money, people are losing jobs and the price of fish is going up. These, unfortunately, are the best plans this Government could come up with to fight illegal bunkering.

Mr. Speaker, I turn to the gas subsidy. I was a Member of a Cabinet many years ago, when the steady rise in oil prices saw the gas subsidy climb towards 1.5 billion. Even then, it was understood that this is not something to be ignored or encouraged, and the plan to get out of this selection of expenditure as a priority was devised and executed then. The plan contained the use of CNG, subsidized conversion kits and at least one increase in the price of diesel and other fuels. For a variety of reasons, this plan did not work well in some aspects and it did not work at all in other aspects.

In recent years the dramatic increase in the price of oil from \$50 to \$125, stabilizing around \$100 per barrel, saw the subsidy balloon to over \$4 billion per year. There is general agreement that this is not sustainable, especially in the face of record levels of growing debt and deficit financing on the national budget. Something has to be done. The Minister of Finance, one on whom we waited so patiently, came with a plan—the same old plan—CNG, conversion kits and an ill-defined price increase.

It should have been clear to all involved that migration of motorists from premium to super would have occurred, resulting in effect on the actual subsidy, since the super is now selling in larger volumes, it is still all subsidized. They are only buying the fuel from a different pump—the pump with the subsidy.

So really, in effect, if it was affecting only 6 per cent and they are going to the pump with the subsidy, it is another event. What is needed now is a well thought out, properly financed or incentivized programme designed to change the fuel consumption pattern of the entire country. This will not be achieved in a timely manner using a little tinkering here and a little deceptive price increase here and there.

If CNG is determined to be the fuel of the future, then Government needs to invest in a sufficiency of CNG fuel stations in neighbourhoods, in a set time frame with best technology. [*Desk thumping*] It has to be funded and funded against a specific programme—a national changeover programme. Incentives for new car buyers to choose CNG or hybrid vehicles over old models must form part of an

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integral programme of that nature. [*Desk thumping*]

As it stands now, Mr. Speaker, the current plans will not meet any targets—none of the targets that you could recognize in any time frame. All that will happen is that fuel users would migrate to subsidized super with consequent damage to some vehicles, which the current tinkering policy mischievously described as luxury vehicles. In some instances, what may be saved in fuel cost by the owner, at the pump, could easily be lost in the higher maintenance or replacement charges.

Mr. Speaker, incidentally, there is a view that the subsidy margin—and maybe the Minister could advise us here. I am advised that the subsidy margin on super gasoline is wider than the margin on premium. If that is so, it is highly likely that switching from the use of premium to super will actually increase the cost of the fuel subsidy because you are now pushing people who think they are saving to be using a fuel that you are paying more subsidy on. [*Desk thumping*] In this scenario, the Minister's nervous piecemeal tinker is guaranteed to set off further significant increases in the price of gasoline in the not too distant future—stand by for that.

Mr. Speaker, all of the available research tells us that after traffic volumes reach 20,000 vehicles per hour—over a particular point—buses can no longer accommodate the passenger demand efficiently and the only solution is a rapid railway which can transport thousands of persons at high speed. [*Desk thumping*] In Trinidad, the traffic is such that 20,000 vehicles per threshold was crossed 10 years ago and at peak times here in Trinidad and Tobago in many crossings in the East-West Corridor, we now have in excess of 30,000 vehicles per hour on our main roads and highways or three times the limit at which a mass transit system should be introduced.

Our roads are unbearably congested and piecemeal solutions—such as tinkering with the price of gasoline or purchasing a few more buses to create even more congestion on the roads, which are already overcrowded—will not work. We are in dire need of a modern mass-transit system, which is the only solution that can efficiently move the hundreds of thousands of persons who traverse the East-West and North-South corridors every day. [*Desk thumping*] If we do not do that, Mr. Speaker, it would just continue to get worse until gridlock is finally achieved.

Prior to the election of 2010, the previous PNM administration had reached the stage of completing the feasibility and engineering design works of a modern

rapid railway system, separate and apart from our congested road network. Contract documents were prepared for execution. The route alignment was completed. All the necessary land and socio-economic surveys were completed. Costing were done, station locations were selected, equipment and rolling stock were identified and the organizational structure of operations and management of the new railway systems were determined.

All that was needed to be done was to put the project out to tender and this could have been done in phases. The Government's response—this new Government—to all of this has been to boast that there are boxes of light-rail documents under the desk of the former Minister of Works, and before he went to national security he was using them as footstools. [*Crosstalk*]

11.00 a.m.

Mr. Speaker: Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara, I am hearing you distinctly and, really and so on, the Chamber is being disturbed. I would ask Members if they want to whisper, do it in low or undertones so that you do not disturb the proceedings. Okay! Hon. Leader, continue.

Dr. K. Rowley: Thank you for noting the injury time, Mr. Speaker. So while one Minister was using all this work which is geared to treating with the national congestion and the creation of a light rail in the country using the documents as footstools, they also claimed that the PNM wasted \$500 million and got nothing to show for it. That is a lie!

Mr. Speaker: Please! Please! We do not use that language in this Parliament. Withdraw that, please. We do not use that.

Dr. K. Rowley: I unreservedly withdraw that unparliamentary word, Mr. Speaker. That is untrue. It is not true, but the story grows as their nose while the traffic jams get worse and worse with no plans for a solution.

Miss Cox: Pinocchio.

Dr. K. Rowley: On coming into office in its effort to score cheap political points, the new Government treated this project as a political football and spitefully shelved the project, thus wasting all of the engineering work that had been done. Almost three years later the traffic congestion is far worse than before and successive PP Ministers of Works have failed to address our traffic problems in any meaningful way. The problem remains unattended. It is one of the biggest problems of waste in this country; waste of time, waste of fuel and it requires a proper engineering solution.

The Government is clearly incapable of resolving our traffic and transport

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issues, since to do so they will have to admit that a rapid railway is the only feasible solution. They will have to explain why they have wasted the last two and half years and why they have wasted, ignored and abandoned all of the planning and engineering work done under the previous PNM administration. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, as Leader of the PNM, therefore, I wish to confirm that what the PP cannot do the PNM will do. [*Desk thumping*] On coming into office after the next election—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: When?

Dr. K. Rowley: [*Desk thumping*]—which will happen as night follows day—[*Interruption*]

Miss Mc Donald: At the shortest possible time.

Dr. K. Rowley:—no matter how many Ministers fool themselves, no matter how many useless pre-budget or post-budget rallies they have, the new PNM Government will commit itself to the speedy implementation of a rapid railway system. [*Desk thumping*] We will do so—[*Interruption*] Volney somewhere on that. Not over here, you know. It was only last week he was over there telling me, “I got 10,000 votes.” Welcome to the club.

Miss Mc Donald: And he will drop a big willow.

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, we will do so by inviting tenders using the designs and engineering that have already been done, and this will be done in phases starting with the areas with the highest transportation demand. The procurement process for the new railway will be open and transparent and in accordance with best practice, with emphasis on value for money and maximizing what local content. In this way, we shall solve our transportation problems once and for all. [*Desk thumping*]

With this project involving the construction of a rapid rail system, we build not only to solve today’s problem, but to leave our grandchildren with a piece of infrastructure which will serve the needs of their grandchildren. [*Desk thumping*] In the same way previous generations built City Gate, the Port of Spain Harbour, the Red House, the road around the savannah—[*Interruption*]

Miss Mc Donald: Hyatt.

Dr. K. Rowley:—and the present highway network, we will add our contribution to the development of the national infrastructure by adding a rapid rail system in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

In this case and at this time, we will embark upon a project which will be our

major economic driver in its use of local materials and manpower in the form of steel, cement, concrete, technical skills and labour along with the imports to go with that. We will advance this project to the IDB for long-term low-interest funding which we are confident we will be able to negotiate, and all tenders and contract awards would accordingly have to fall under the transparent and accountable processes of IDB rules and IDB supervision. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, not too long ago, when the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago announced that in a period of plenty the objective was to attain full employment in the labour force in Trinidad and Tobago, he was roundly condemned and ridiculed for suggesting that we could ever reach full employment in this country. Now that we are in a classical recession, operating deficit financing, the same people who ridiculed the previous Prime Minister who announced that, now announce with great aplomb that we are currently in a situation of full employment because we are at 4.9 per cent.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Hogwash.

Dr. K. Rowley: The best gauge—

Mr. Speaker: Member for Point Fortin, withdraw that remark, please.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Withdrawn.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Leader continue, please.

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, the best gauge of the employment situation in Trinidad and Tobago, today, is nothing that the Minister of Finance and the Economy says. It is provided by the fact that recently 31,000 persons almost camped overnight for the opportunity to get in to be called when 5,000 jobs as SRPs became available—31,000 people rushing to chase 5,000 SRP jobs.

As they close down the data from the CSO, if the population wanted to have any idea of what the unemployment in this country was, these people would tell you—many were unemployed, most were underemployed, many were not coloured orange and many were desperate to find a job. What we expect of the Government is that it will redouble its efforts in ensuring that the development programme which is budgeted and approved is properly and competently spent, so as to create employment opportunities in the areas where projects are scheduled to commence.

If they proceed to build the Diego Martin sport complex, the Carenage fishing centre, the Bagatelle community centre, all construction projects which have been

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languishing for want of funding, then that will create employment at least in that area. So the Government has to get the development programme going. It will help if the Government would behave itself in such a manner as to instil confidence in the private sector because this is the investing community whose entrepreneurship will result in the creating of additional job opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, the energy sector is in crisis and we are extremely disappointed that the Minister of Finance and the Economy, while giving the highest recognition to the impact that this sector has on our economy, provided no solutions of how this decline can be stopped, but more importantly, how healthy substantial growth can once more become the norm. Passing reference to a reinvigorated deep-sea drilling programme in a virgin zone is not a panacea for the challenges facing our maturing energy industry.

When Trinidad and Tobago embarked on the development of natural gas sector, it did so while recognizing that our gas reserves were less than 1 per cent of the total reserves of the world. Notwithstanding that, the PNM's vision and drive led to a strategy where Trinidad and Tobago became the leader in the natural gas exporting business. The so-called Trinidad model has become the example for many developing countries that now have substantially more reserves than Trinidad and Tobago.

The Minister made absolutely no reference to any prospect of downstream use of natural gas. What happened to AUM 2, that project which was the highlight of two previous budgets? An explanation must be given on this project status. The Government cannot just pretend that this project never existed. It was supposed to be a \$3 billion investment. Of course, Mr. Speaker, we hear about \$3 billion from this Minister, but it is \$3 billion of foreign investment to come. While we cannot get the investment on projects announced not once, not twice, but repeatedly, he is projecting a \$3 billion profile of new investment. Wishful thinking.

Similarly, Mr. Speaker, we would like to hear about the status of the CariSal project. That was another big one, announced to great desk thumping. What about the SABIC project which was sold to us as the largest ever to come into Trinidad and Tobago? This Saudi Arabian company and a Chinese company were coming to do this gas project here, and they beat the desk until they damaged the wood. We have heard nothing about it since. The methanol to propylene project, that gone through the window. Several projects announced for Union Estate and La Brea—when they shut down the steel mill, when they shut down the aluminium

smelter, all those projects have disappeared in thin air and the Minister who was supposed to come, to come like Santa Claus, to bring us a new direction, to bring us new programmes, to bring us new hope, he has come with empty hands. [*Desk thumping*] He did not even come and report on what was there. What kind of Minister is this?

Mr. Speaker, while he is talking about full employment, all the projects I just mentioned, these were the projects that should have created in the past two years the jobs that we were looking for—the projects having not come to fruition. What are you coming to tell me about jobs and full employment? You are trying to fool me. It is “ratchiffee”. [*Desk thumping*]

As you look at the decline and note the pattern of the drop in the price of natural gas internationally, it hit a low of under US \$2 in April 2012—Henry Hub price—and seems to be fluctuating between US \$2.50 and US \$3 in 2012. A very significant challenge now emerges for us here in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, we need a plan. The PNM is working on a plan, but the Government has no plan. [*Desk thumping*] Our plan will be as follows:

- consolidate and protect what we now have; [*Desk thumping*]
- diversify the market for our energy products; [*Desk thumping*]
- add higher value to the natural gas chain; [*Desk thumping*]
- treat the Caribbean as an important market for energy products and design a strategy towards that objective; [*Desk thumping*]
- engage all stakeholders in the energy sector on the future of that sector, benefiting from their indepth expertise and international connections; [*Desk thumping*]
- continue to increase our investment in human capacity, particularly UTT. Stop harassing UTT. Stop trying to shut down UTT; [*Desk thumping*]
- in the energy sector we must continue to ensure the highest level of productivity;
- we must continue an aggressive R&D programme focused on natural gas;
- we must continue an aggressive promotion of Trinidad and Tobago as a destination for energy-intensive product.

This PNM plan and strategy will be an important part of the platform that the PNM will be constructing in the coming few months. It will give full recognition

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that we are in a crisis situation as far as the energy sector is concerned and provide specific solutions to solve that crisis. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, we need to modernize our energy sector, and in Trinidad and Tobago, we who have been for a long time a gas-based economy, there are issues which are impacting us now and they have serious revenue challenges for us. Following several decades of successful growth, the Trinidad and Tobago energy sector is at a critical juncture following a lack of investment in the upstream exploration activity.

11.15 a.m.

A shifting of the hydrocarbon portfolio towards gas has been accompanied by declining oil production while gas production growth has flattened. More critically, both oil and gas production forecasts are not robust, resulting in a production gap relative to today's levels which must be addressed, given the country's continued reliance on energy.

Sustaining production does not mean just producing more, we need to invest in finding reserves—an exercise which is currently on the way. The production gap can therefore be closed by either increasing production from existing fields, or accessing new reserves in deep water or international markets. These options all pose challenges of one kind or another. The Minister must demonstrate to us that he understands the rules of the game that he is about to play.

The Minister of Finance and the Economy tells us that energy will remain our dominant sector for the foreseeable future, both in terms of revenue and activity. He also advises us that and I quote:

“...our international competitiveness is being challenged as oil and gas exploration in shale is growing and discoveries of oil and gas are being made in East Africa and Brazil while many of our fields are reaching maturity.”

This reality, as correctly stated by the Minister of Finance and the Economy, cannot be simply stated without asking how the Government intends to improve our situation so that the revenue can be protected and sustained. Having blown the Ghanaian opportunity, this Government needs to build national success so that our technical know-how—what we have learnt from decades of being a player in the oil and gas arena—now sees us partnering with some of our international corporate associates in search of opportunities outside of Trinidad and Tobago, and I refer here to South America, West Africa and East Africa.

Mr. Speaker, it is no secret that in addition to the issue of gas price, we also have the possibility of the chemical plants, that is ammonia and methanol,

viewing the very low US prices and either seeking lower prices here in Trinidad and Tobago, and are either threatening to move, or casting a jaundiced eye on the US market itself as a place to locate. As one would recall, several years ago Trinidad and Tobago had so-called cheap gas, relatively low-cost gas, and a few plants were moved from other locations in the world to take advantage of the situation here in Trinidad and Tobago. Today, the issue is the reverse. We are the ones who are now vulnerable. This is no time for a clueless and compliant Minister of Finance and the Economy who is satisfied to pirouette over these critical issues as he saunters along towards passing ever larger expenditure packages.

The other issue for Trinidad and Tobago is the fact that finding and winning gas costs a lot of money, and there are issues here where the upstream companies are increasing their demands for the gas that they will find. This places a challenge for the future on the gas-based facilities that need moderately priced gas. They need that to be successful to even remain in the business at all. This Government is not engaging these issues and the population is exposed to a false sense of security.

Mr. Speaker, these issues mean that while we are aggressively stimulating the sector by going after new exploration, the country will also have to give up some of its current revenues which will impact our ability to maintain our current expenditure programme, and this is a matter of concern. The Government is not carrying this conversation to the population. It is only interested in perpetual campaigning in ill-defined, handout programmes. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, in April this year, US regulators approved the construction of the country's first LNG plant in nearly 50 years, and that plant is scheduled to come into production in early 2015. Only recently, Trinidad and Tobago was the largest exporter of natural gas to the United States. We are now talking about the US becoming an exporter of gas possibly to the Caribbean. A number of companies, US companies, plan to export surplus US gas and they plan to do so at competitive prices. That means that gas prices would be under downward pressure. For decades, LNG has been sold under 20-year contracts indexed to the price of oil. Natural gas from Sabine Pass instead is planned to be sold at a price indexed to Henry Hub which trades at approximately US \$2.00 per MMBtu. A price like this would be a disaster for Trinidad and Tobago.

So far, we have had relief through selling on the spot market where prices are temporarily higher, but these opportunities are not long-term guarantees. Indexing the price of LNG to gas at Henry Hub can have major implications for traditional

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gas exporters like Trinidad and Tobago. Not only will LNG exports be cheap, they will also be abundant. At the moment, the plant I just mentioned, the Cheniere plant, will be designed to export 2.2 billion cubic feet of natural gas which is equivalent to 17.64 million tonnes per year of LNG. That is the kind of market that we are now being called upon to play in. In a market that we used to sell in, that market will now be selling to others.

According to the Wood Mackenzie's projections, eight projects with a total export capacity of 120 million tonnes per year have been proposed in the United States. If all are approved and built, the US will become one of the world's biggest LNG producers. We have no confidence that this Government of Trinidad and Tobago has what it takes to steer us through the gathering storm ahead.

After all, they would not even tell us the truth about why section 34 was proclaimed prematurely. Would you trust them, Mr. Speaker? Would you trust them to tell you about the future of the world energy market? Some of the most dramatic energy developments of recent years have been in the realm of natural gas. This development alone has shaken the world and causing shifts in patterns of trade, and leading other countries in Europe and Asia to explore their own shale gas potential. The market is changing worldwide. Such developments are putting pressure on the long-standing arrangements that we here in the Trinidad and Tobago had become accustomed to.

Mr. Speaker, shale gas in the US is said to have massive global effects on these supply patterns and prices. This scenario is not over the horizon; it is here. I want to repeat that: this scenario is not over the horizon; it is here requiring an urgent national consensus and arrangements of our institutions. As I did in my budget reply last year, I once again call for the urgent joint committee of Parliament to guide the search for consensus in this critical area of national energy policy. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago, as an LNG exporter, must be concerned about these developments, and bear in mind, we have endless deficit budgets forecast for the future. The Minister must tell us how these challenges would be addressed. If this budget is any indication of things to come, then we are in big trouble in this country, and Trinidad and Tobago should be concerned, and we should have every reason to be nervous.

Mr. Speaker, I turn to GATE. The PNM recognizes that the best expenditure this country could ever make is investment in the development of our young people. [*Desk thumping*] That is why from its inception in 1956 to today, one would see a sustained focus on expenditure on all aspects of education, from primary to secondary to the variety of tertiary offerings. This commitment resulted in

education being the largest component of successive national budgets, and 2012 is no different.

Mr. Speaker, it is our view that as we invest in young people, we do two things: we enhance the quality of life of the next generation, thereby improving the society as a whole; and two, we provide each willing beneficiary with the tools, skills and opportunity to allow him or her to participate in productive activities according to their own choices in a way as to allow each one to meaningfully contribute to national development. It is against this background that the GATE programme is to be viewed and defended.

Mr. Speaker, it is no secret that when Members of the current Government were in the Opposition, they mercilessly attacked, in the most vicious way, every aspect of government expenditure, describing each initiative of the previous Government as an example of waste and extravagance. So concerned were the young people of Trinidad and Tobago, who viewed their future prospects as being threatened by the negative position of the then Opposition, that during the last general election campaign, UNC aspirants had to reverse themselves and make a public pledge, not just to continue to support GATE, but that they promised to open the gate and expand the programme.

The GATE programme, if not properly managed, could be exposed to some instances of waste and malpractice, and that is why from its inception, it has had specific guidelines, and has been subjected to continuous audit in an effort to eliminate all aspects of abuse in all its manifestations. There can be no disagreement with the current Government's stated intention to continue the programme of audit and improvement in the quality of the programme.

However, we have serious concerns that this Government continues not to understand the fundamental but subtle difference between the concept of education and the concept of training. As a result, it is treating with the GATE programme in a way that will fundamentally derail the original concept of equal opportunity which was re-established by the PNM when GATE replaced the imbalances that were inherent in the dollar for dollar programme. We are concerned that, under the guise of audit and examination, the Government is more interested in closing rather than opening doors. We are disturbed by the prospect of this Government limiting access to the programme through the use of some as yet undetermined means test which could see some people being excluded for all kinds of reasons.

A level of unease now exists among our tertiary student population since the Government began addressing this programme and hinting at policies without the

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necessary details and commitment to the original purpose. It is an established fact, too commonly borne out by concrete examples, that this Government cannot be trusted and ought not to be trusted, [*Desk thumping*] so that even when it speaks to calm the fears of young people and their parents, the Government will not be trusted to keep its word. This unhappy state of affairs is a constant source of worry to parents and students who look to GATE as their passport to a stairway of achieving their life's goal.

Mr. Speaker, means-testing students before they can access the GATE programme may sound good to some, but such an arrangement in the hands of persons of ill intent could be devastating to the aspirations of others. [*Desk thumping*] To carry out means testing without transparency and in the absence of a proper socio-economic database against which to do so is to so disadvantage some people as to put them at the mercy of others. Even if the Government is to make appointments to some board or some similar group, given this Government's track record with appointments, could you imagine what would happen with the lives of the future of young people—what would happen with the lives and the future of those young people who will now be placed in the hands of corrupt and otherwise unsuitable officials? [*Desk thumping*]

11.30 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, the allocation for GATE in 2009—2011 averaged 625 million per year. The Government claimed that it was auditing and eliminating abuse within the programme. Yet we see, instead of resulting in a reduction in expenditure, that the cost of the programme in 2012 has ballooned to 834million, without one word from the Minister of Finance and the Economy. This represents an increase of approximately one-third, at a time when the Government claimed it was eliminating waste and abuse in the programme.

Mr. Speaker, we would like a thorough explanation from the Government on this matter, as to how the student population grew, as compared to 2011 and 2010 and 2009. We would also like to know if there were new service providers who are accredited in the last two years, who they were and how much they were paid.

The Auditor General needs to look very closely into this sudden explosive growth of the GATE expenditure to ensure that this well intentioned and worthy programme is not used by elements within this Government to further enrich themselves and their friends with taxpayers' money, while pretending to be cleaning up the programme. We caution the Government to tread carefully on this programme and demonstrate a willingness—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. McIntosh: We looking.

Dr. K. Rowley:—to finding the \$600 million in the ever-increasing large national budget, to continue to make the investment in all our young people—those who look to GATE as their passport to the future. We also would like the Government to operate the programme in such a way as to eliminate the constant fear and stress currently experienced by thousands of young persons and their parents every time the Government makes a statement on GATE.

I wish, first of all, to deal with this matter about Tobago. Out of a total proposed national current and development programme expenditure of 58.6 billion, according to the published estimates, the Tobago House of Assembly will get 2.337 billion for its development programme in total, and I am advised it is not the 2.356 billion the Minister said. So, I hope that we get some clarification there. That amounts to 3.99 per cent of the total budget. In this budget, the Government of the PP has effectively told the people of Tobago: “We do not really care about any Dispute Resolution Commission”, where the upper limit of 4 per cent is the figure there.

Lest we forget, this is the third consecutive year in which the PP has done to Tobago this reduction of its allocation as a percentage of the national budget and that has been done without a whimper of protest from those who claim to represent the island. Not one of them, inside or outside of this House, speaks in defence of Tobago, except to repeat the tiresome rhetoric and other utterances of their UNC masters directed against the Tobago House of Assembly executive. They cannot differentiate between their own personal contempt for the PNM and the UNC’s contempt for the THA and its duly elected executive. Three years of the PP have seen Tobago’s share of the combined national recurrent and development programme budgets fall below the peaks of 4.68 per cent and 4.6 per cent set under successive PNM governments in 2004 and 2007 respectively. It was 3.98 in fiscal 2011 and now it is 3.99 for 2013.

Mr. Speaker, consider the contentious proposal of the Minister of Finance about a so-called growth pole in northeast Tobago, forgetting the fact that it is the second time we are hearing that or the third time.

Mr. Imbert: The third time.

Hon. Members: Third, third.

Dr. K. Rowley: The third time. No growth, no pole. But, the idea is that he is simply resurrecting an idea mooted in the budget of his predecessor of 2010. It survived 2011. It is now here 2012 for 2013.

Miss Mc Donald: “We go talk ‘bout dat.”

Dr. K. Rowley: It was true then and remains true today that this idea has

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never been discussed, either with the Tobago House of Assembly or with the people of Tobago, and Tobago says no to that. [*Desk thumping*]

Without appropriate—I hear my friend from the Tobago House of Assembly over there telling me it is not true. Well, when it is your turn to speak, get up and say it is not true—

Miss Mc Donald: That is right.

Dr. K. Rowley:—and they would answer you in Tobago.

Miss Mc Donald: Do not be rude. Do not be rude.

Dr. K. Rowley: Without appropriate consultation with the Tobago House of Assembly and the people of Tobago, the growth pole for the northeast of Tobago is DOA, dead on arrival. The people of Tobago now know that the THA requested 49 million to complete the Scarborough Library. In this budget, the Minister of Finance has provided 8 million. They have requested 20 million to complete the Shaw Park Cultural Complex, the Minister has provided 5 million. They have requested 285 million for housing and settlements, the Minister has provided 28.5 million. And what is worse, the assembly is not offered one single cent of the borrowings by the central government and has made no indication that the Minister of Finance will authorize the assembly to borrow. The list goes on, and all of that, in the largest budget in the history of this country, 58.6 billion, and the Minister of Finance and the Economy cannot find it within him or within the budget to allocate sufficient money to complete the projects in Tobago.

Although the Minister speaks glowingly about collaboration with the THA, he does not provide the requisite funding to undertake and complete these projects. One cannot, therefore, escape the conclusion that this is nothing more than a thinly-veiled effort to grant their man at the top in Tobago an opportunity to blame the PNM in Tobago for delays in these projects, but top or bottom, the PNM will win the election in Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the Minister also spoke glowingly about Cabinet's plans for diversifying the economy.

Miss Cox: Top or bottom.

Dr. K. Rowley: But in all of this, not a single word is said about Tobago, where the tourism sector alone accounts for over 90 per cent of the island's foreign exchange earnings and whose need for diversification is much greater than that of even Trinidad. But, why are we not surprised? This refusal to include Tobago in the national effort to diversify the economy is consistent with the refusal of some central government officials, including the Tobago East and

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Tobago West MPs—I want to repeat that, I want to repeat that for Tobagonians to hear—[*Interruption*]

Miss Mc Donald: Yes.

Dr. K. Rowley: Refusal of the Tobago East and West MPs—

Miss Mc Donald: Yes.

Dr. K. Rowley:—to attend the recent opening of the Cove Eco-Industrial and Business Park in Tobago—

Miss Mc Donald: Um-hmm.

Dr. K. Rowley:—because they are somehow boycotting the THA in Tobago and the refusal of the former Minister of Trade and Industry to enter into any discussions with the THA to place the same Cove business park on par with similar parks in Trinidad, in terms of overall business incentives.

Mr. Cadiz: “Whay yuh living?”

Miss Mc Donald: Loud echo.

Dr. K. Rowley: But, Mr. Speaker, Tobagonians—[*Interruption*]—“yuh” went Tuesday? You tapped my phone Wednesday? “Yuh” going Tuesday?

Mr. Cadiz: Any Tuesday.

Dr. K. Rowley: Stop listening on my phone when I am talking to Tobago “eh”. Mr. Speaker, we Tobagonians are a strong people—[*Interruption*]

Miss Mc Donald: Yes.

Dr. K. Rowley:—and aided by the PNM Tobago House of Assembly, we will persevere—[*Interruption*]

Miss Mc Donald: That is right.

Dr. K. Rowley:—we will cut and contrive to reduce the island’s over-reliance on the tourism sector with all its known volatilities and vulnerabilities. We will survive as we have always done since in the days of our grandfathers.

Mr. Speaker, I turn to security. Most persons would agree that crime and security hold out major challenges for us here in Trinidad and Tobago. We note the Minister’s bold assertion of the Government’s goal to reduce violent crime by 50 per cent in three years. This, according to the Minister, is to be achieved by an administration of strong law enforcement, social intervention and strengthening of the criminal justice system. Just as the concept of confidence is a critical factor in

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the business or economic activity and to grow the economy, confidence in the administration of justice, particularly criminal justice is equally critical. Mr. Speaker, confidence in any criminal justice system was a major casualty in the face of the conduct of the Government, in relation to the perverted application of the now repealed clause 34 of the Administration of Justice (Indictable Proceedings) Bill—a matter which this nation will keep constantly in focus.

It is well known to all experts in national security that the use of soldiers in joint patrols and policing communities was conceptualized as a temporary measure and that once the initial objective was realized, soldiers are to return to their barracks. Their training does not easily lend itself to interfacing with civilians in our communities and the maintenance of law and order is a civil society requirement. It requires the civil police. An undeclared state of emergency exists in Trinidad and Tobago and I am calling on the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, if you are to use those methods you are to properly declare the state of emergency.

We, the people of Trinidad and Tobago, understand the need to supplement the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service in order to address the current pressing problem, but we expect that these additional men and women would be well trained and can perform much like their regular counterparts in any situation. It must not and cannot be that we simply adorn less-abled persons in police uniforms for cosmetic purposes. A serious programme of training, followed by structured on-the-job training exercises, alongside their regular colleagues, is necessary.

Mr. Speaker, we believe that the two main contributors to the crime scourge that afflicts Trinidad and Tobago have to do with the bad attitudes and anti-social behaviour of some of our citizens. It also has to do with the easy availability and access to drugs and firearms, both of which have their origin largely from outside of Trinidad and Tobago.

This is why this country, under a previous government, embarked upon an expansive and costly project, weaving together ocean patrol vessels—the famous OPVs—surveillance capability, helicopters and whatever and we had the facilities for swift interception and we paid a lot of focus on training to improve the manpower requirements of the police service. Together, all of these, along with other national programmes, were to achieve an almost impenetrable blanket as well as other security considerations around our islands.

The Minister of Finance said, and I quote:

“We”—the Government—“have conceptualised and commenced implementation of a new naval operations plan to combat the drug trade...”

I read this many times and I—he said:

“We”—the Government—“have conceptualised and commenced implementation of a new naval operations plan to combat the drug trade...”

The people of Trinidad and Tobago will ask: What is this plan? We suspect that just like the property tax, the revenue authority, the rapid rail, this Government is moving sheepishly, deceitfully, but inexorably in the direction of these sound policies that they condemned for shortsighted political purposes. [*Desk thumping*] They condemned these policies for shortsighted political purposes, only to again visit them and order and purchase naval assets in order to do what has to be done under a different name. This Government, on all pre-existing programmes, have a gestation period of two to three years, bad-mouth it in opposition, bad-talk it for two or three years and then come back with it and it is now ready to go.

11.45a.m.

When we hear the Minister of National Security discussing the police covert operation in public, we are very concerned. When we see this Minister in army fatigues congratulating officers after a fatal confrontation with alleged transgressors of the law, and before any properly constituted enquiry had gone to work, we are concerned. When this Minister then offers to take these officers to dinner in celebration of an extrajudicial killing, we are also very concerned. Mr. Speaker, we ask ourselves: after the celebratory dinner, what next? When the police are told to lock them up first and find evidence after, we are concerned. When we encounter interference and reluctance to investigate matters diligently without malice or ill will, even when it involves government friends, government officials, we are concerned.

Mr. Speaker, we will continue to monitor the Government very closely to ensure that they promote protection and safety for our citizens under an independent office of the Commissioner of Police, and the Minister of National Security is not the Commissioner of Police.

Hon. Member: Uh-huh! That is right.

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, in the area of sport, this Parliament during fiscal 2012 allocated \$541,505,979 for the sporting and youth community in Trinidad and Tobago. There was an original allocation of 406 million, plus 9.2

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million in the development programme. There was a further 126 million supplementary allocation, bringing this to a total of \$541million—that is \$.541 billion for the 12-month period ending September 20, 2012. That is the allocation the Parliament gave to sports. Under these circumstances, how do we explain that the national football teams—juniors, under-19s and seniors—are humiliated on an ongoing basis by the Ministry of Sport?

Recently, the under-19s qualified for a major tournament and could not travel to prepare. The seniors are currently passing the hat on Frederick Street to collect coins and other charities, and whilst this is going on, the Minister of Sport, sponsor of Nicki Minaj with resources of the Ministry of Sport, now spends as he did in August and September or July and August, \$10 million in a two-month shindig on something called Life Sport Programme, the reports of which I am still receiving and collating and I will bring them for parliamentary reading at some time in the not too distant future. He could also find \$864,000 to house nine Cuban coaches in premises procured under very shady circumstances, with 50 per cent of the rent for the premises which are unfurnished being paid one year in advance.

Hon. Member: What!

Dr. K. Rowley: Cubans who are accustomed to some element of, you know, “make do” austerity, come to Trinidad and Tobago while the national team cannot travel to play in tournaments for \$400,000, the Sports Company could find \$864,000 to pay some Mickey Mouse company to rent their unfurnished premises and pay one year’s rent in advance.

The Eddie Hart ground, for all the years Eddie Hart carried on football there and up until recently, the corporation managed and maintained that ground. This Minister, under this Ministry, the Sports Company has taken the ground and put it in the Sports Company to allow the Sports Company to be able to award a maintenance contract, and the Sports Company is busy maintaining maintenance contracts for hundreds of thousands of dollars to a recently incorporated Mickey Mouse company—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: What!

Hon. Member: Ohhhhhh!

Dr. K. Rowley:—that is not even VAT registered. Not even VAT registered.

Hon. Member: Ohhhhhh!

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I want to tell this country, if all of this ill treatment—in fact, I will not tell them. The Minister must tell this country if all of

this ill treatment of the country's footballers—boys and girls, young and old—has anything to do with the letter he received from the former vice-president of FIFA [*Desk thumping*] who was banned from football in all its forms and fashions. I understand that he cannot even buy a football. I want to know if that letter has anything to do with it because you see, Mr. Speaker—let me read it for you. This letter comes from—and I want the Prime Minister to hear this, “eh”, because she is the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. This is on the letterhead of the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure and is written to Minister Anil Roberts:

Dear hon. Minister, it is with much grief and concern that I must pen this letter to you given standings of Trinidad and Tobago with the CFU—
[*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal: What is the date of the letter?

Dr. K. Rowley: April 20, 2012. I do not want to waste my time reading the content of the letter, it is about CFU problem, but I thought on April 20, this former vice-president of FIFA was banned from football, but he was in the Government, using the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure letterhead, directing the Minister of Sport.

It is in this regard that I wish to recommend that no support be provided—
[*Interruption*]

Miss Cox: What!

Hon. Member: A-A!

Dr. K. Rowley:—to the TTFF until they can defend the basis upon which Trinidadians and Tobagonians are being denied opportunities to excel and are treated worse than second-class citizens.

But the bottom line is—so what has happened here to our footballers? While right now our footballers are in the worst position they have ever been, it is because the Minister of Works and Infrastructure [*Desk thumping*] instructed the Minister of Sport not to provide any money for football. [*Desk thumping*] And that is a Minister who is banned ostensibly from having anything to do with football you know. What more power can one have over football in this country than to instruct that football not be funded? I want to hear from FIFA about this, if the ban is still in force.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance and the Economy—yes, I want to hear from you, I want to hear about the VAT-unregistered company that you all are funding in Eddie Hart ground. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: We want to hear, tell us. Tell the public.

Dr. K. Rowley: The Sports Company is a den of iniquity, corruption and malfeasance, and the Opposition will bring the proof to this House soon. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Sport, [*Laughter*]

Miss Cox: Mr. Sport! [*Laughter*]

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance and the Economy, this Minister of Finance and the Economy really has a nerve. His very first assignment in the Parliament saw him presenting in this House the largest budget in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, \$58.6 billion. Would you believe that after he promised us an austerity budget and delivered instead a record-breaking package, he proceeds to cut the meagre allocation of the Office of Leader of the Opposition?

Hon. Member: Oh God!

Dr. K. Rowley: We requested for 2013, 4.5 million, and received 2.8 million.

Hon. Member: Wow!

Dr. K. Rowley: Last year for 2012, in a smaller budget, we requested the same 4.5 million and our good friend from Tunapuna gave us 3.5 million. In a larger budget, we made the same request; we got \$700,000 less—[*Interruption*]

Miss Cox: My God!

Dr. K. Rowley:—to operate the Office of the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Members: Shame! Shame! Shame!

Hon. Member: Cutting down the Opposition! [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. K. Rowley: What the Minister of Finance and the Economy is telling us is that in a \$58 billion budget, this country cannot properly fund the Office of the Leader of the Opposition. He does not stop there you know.

This Parliament, under television broadcasting, needs \$2.5 million to keep the Parliament Channel functioning. That is the Parliament Channel as we know it. The Minister, apparently, obviously intends to minimize or silence the Parliament Channel because, of the 2.5 million needed; he provides \$500,000.

Hon. Members: Wooooo!

Miss Cox: Shame!

Dr. K. Rowley: To broadcast Parliament Channel, as we know it, requires \$2.5 million, he provides \$500,000. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Imbert: “Dey buying space on TV.”

Dr. K. Rowley: The Minister’s idea of austerity is curtailing allocations to perceived enemies as described by the Prime Minister at the Mid Centre Mall rally. Unfortunately, Parliament, which has been so betrayed by this said Government, has the broadcasting channel targeted by the new Minister of Finance and the Economy.

As hon. Members of this House, I call on all my colleagues from both sides to prevail upon the Minister to provide the Parliament with all the necessary allocations in order to do the people’s business [*Desk thumping*] of monitoring and informing on the carryings-on of this Government.

I refuse to accept, Mr. Speaker, that the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago cannot be funded properly by the people of Trinidad and Tobago. This Government’s approach is that anybody who says anything about them must feel the weight of their heavy hand and the Minister of Finance and the Economy has walked straight into that policy. If you say anything about any Minister you have to expect a backlash.

Miss Cox: Correct.

Dr. K. Rowley: There is one particular Minister who is making a career of threatening people in the national community. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Yes! [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. K. Rowley: Threatening people and I want to put on *Hansard* that I take umbrage. I have been in public life as a Minister of Government, as a Leader of the Opposition and a Member of the Opposition since 1987.

Miss Mc Donald: Wow!

Dr. K. Rowley: During that period of time I have received numerous threats—[*Interruption*]

Miss Mc Donald: That is 29 [*sic*] years.

Dr. K. Rowley:—and on every occasion I have reported it to the competent authorities in Trinidad and Tobago, and on every occasion my safety had been looked after by the relevant authorities in Trinidad and Tobago. Recently, when I

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received what I consider to be a vile and violent threat, I took that threat to the office of the Commissioner of Police. I went home to my wife and children and did not tell them anything as I always do not tell them about these things.

Lo and behold, Mr. Speaker, while the police tells me that they are conducting covert investigations to determine who might be found to be threatening me in that way, I have to see the Minister of National Security on television, on a political platform somewhere, telling the world that my life is under threat by some person and I have been reporting that to the police. What vile and vulgar conduct.

Hon. Members: Shame! Bad! Terrible! [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. K. Rowley: As a result of that, the security I felt knowing that the police were out there making covert checks and giving me and my family that sense of comfort, I no longer feel that security because if there was a person who seriously wanted to harm me, they are now alerted that the police is on to them and they can now cover their tracks. The investigation has been compromised by the Minister of National Security, and he is laughing.

Hon. Member: Terrible! Terrible!

Dr. K. Rowley: I have received death threats as Minister of Housing. I have received death threats as MP over URP. I have had the police come to me and show me pictures of persons who have been identified to shoot me. I am telling the Minister of National Security as long as my name or my family is involved, any threat I report to the police, keep your distance! [*Desk thumping*]

12.00 noon

Mr. Speaker, this is the third time that we have had the privilege to watch the Government present random numbers and praise itself in the process. We gave them every chance to get it right. They have failed. They have too much confidence in trickery, deception and in glorifying corruption. This Government has lost the trust of the people. [*Desk thumping*] This budget has written this Government's epitaph, and it reads: Good riddance! [*Desk thumping*] Thank you.

The Minister of Housing, Land and Marine Affairs (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to intervene at this time and contribute on what would be the 11th occasion that I have the privilege of contributing to an Appropriation Bill, a national budget in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago.

May I first take the opportunity to congratulate Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai, Minister of Finance and the Economy, on the presentation of this budget. [*Desk thumping*]

This morning, of course, Members assembled here came, some with a view that we would have been treated or exposed to fireworks, to rapid fire, to some elegant shots, but we were not disappointed. The West Indies made 205 in 20 overs and Australia are now 49 for six in reply. What we missed in this Chamber, we got in another arena. [*Desk thumping*] We will monitor that as we proceed.

I want to congratulate, of course, Minister Howai on his maiden presentation. We also lost the significance of the occasion in that the very first time Sen. Howai spoke in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago was, indeed, to present the national budget. [*Desk thumping*]

One would have been tempted to believe that we also had a maiden contribution by the Leader of the Opposition in his reply, but my friend is a veteran politician as he indicated to us a few minutes ago and, really, nothing about him could be characterized as maiden.

The Leader of the Opposition raised several matters which I would like to discuss and to raise in the context of his contribution, but may I first generalize that we have witnessed and we have heard from the Leader of the Opposition—I believe this is the third occasion he has responded to an Appropriation Bill—and there is a pattern that has emerged that was again reinforced today, that pattern of speaking to the issue of trust, the issue of deception and repeating that several times, with the belief that if you repeat that, it will stick. So, if you get up and you recite with monotonous frequency, you create a mantra that the Government cannot be trusted, then he believes that people will believe that. He believes that if he talks about deception and so on, people will believe that.

Mr. Speaker, my friend opposite also made, to me, a remarkable contribution because he spoke to the issue of housing and I would have thought it was not an area that my friend should have gone—he should not have gone there. There were other areas he could have discussed because then I would have had to respond specifically to those matters.

This theme that is developing, this mantra, trust, deception and so on with the belief that you can stick that on the Government and after two and a half years you can stick that; but the third contribution of the Leader of the Opposition, today, I believe, was the very first occasion in three years we heard anything

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suggesting that they had a plan. In fact, my friend opposite, in recent times, has almost taken on a new role, believing that he is getting closer and closer to sitting on my right.

Within recent times he has been telling the Prime Minister who to appoint to the Cabinet, who to fire from the Cabinet. Within recent times, Mr. Speaker, I noticed the Leader of the Opposition announced that he is giving what—a state-of-the-nation address, but I thought only the Prime Minister and President can give an address to the nation, but he proposed to do that.

That address was published in the newspaper. At first, I was happy. I thought it was in braille, so this was very developmental; only to know that they made some mistake with the printing. If they did not make a mistake with the printing, it would have had little effect.

Today we heard a plan. The plan was really several objectives—diversify the economy and so on, but remarkably the hallmark of this plan is return to the “racket rail”. That was the hallmark of the plan. After two and a half years of waiting for a plan, the plan is, return to the “racket rail” where \$500 million of taxpayers’ money was spent —

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: It was not five; it was \$485 million.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Four Hundred and Eighty-five million dollars of taxpayers’ money went into a study, pre-feasibility; not the feasibility, “eh”, the pre-feasibility. So half a billion dollars of taxpayers’ money goes to pre-feasibility and the Leader of the Opposition assures the nation that if in a nightmare they are returned to office, “we comin back with the racket rail”. So the PNM will return “racket rail” to Trinidad and Tobago if under some nightmare they are allowed to return. Mr. Speaker, that is after two and a half years where we on this side were pleading and begging the Leader of the Opposition: “Tell us what are your plans for Trinidad and Tobago. Tell us.” He told us he will come back with the “racket rail”, then you could expect that he would do something else.

I want to point out the contradictions in the statement before I even get into some details. At first, when the Prime Minister at a mass rally of citizens at Mid Centre Mall last Saturday, a pre-budget rally where the Prime Minister and the Government has a duty to report to citizens and account to citizens on our stewardship; when the Prime Minister announced the removal of VAT on all food items, the instinctive response of the Leader of the Opposition is—the next day he said: “Well this is deception.” The media fell hook, line and sinker for that because the critical foods were already VAT zero-rated.

Then, 24 hours later that tune changed because he said: “Hold on. This will lead to a huge import bill.” So an import bill of what? Foods that people are not eating? How will you get a high import bill?

Mr. Speaker, what they do with us is that they move the goalposts all the time. No wonder the Minister of Works and Infrastructure had to tell the Minister of Sport watch them. They are moving the goalposts. Every time they raise an issue, they change their story as it goes along. So the VAT announcement was deception because those foods are not critical foods; but 24 hours later that will lead to an exorbitant import bill. Who will import? What will they import?

So they stood at City Hall and announced all these foods are already VAT-free and so on. When it became known that there were thousands and thousands of food items under specific categories; not just the thousands, but there are categories of food items, which would now be zero-rated, Mr. Speaker, including some very healthy foods, including yogurt, sweeteners, all cereals for breakfast; for diabetic persons and so on, I think the alternative sugar, sweeteners and so on; packaged foods, tinned foods, processed foods; the “peas and carrots yuh put in pelau, for poor people meal”. When we started to recite all of the foods and particularly the healthy foods that are included there, they “den turn around; dey say dat go cost too much money now. Where you getting de money from?”

Mr. Speaker, I am informed that items of VAT returns—55 items are currently zero-rated. It is 6.7 billion or so that the State raised from VAT, of which only about 350 to 400 million will be foregone with this measure, out of over \$6 billion.

It did not stop there. When the announcement was made of the increase in the cost of premium gasoline, the response was, “hardship, this will cause hardship, badly thought-out.” Twenty-four hours later it changed and we heard it today. They say, “Well everybody switching to super”. So who will suffer hardship? If everybody is switching to super and diesel, who will face the hardship?

Mr. Speaker, we always admitted that it is 6 per cent or thereabouts who will use premium, particularly on some luxury-end motor cars and so on. Mr. Speaker, in any event, it will encourage the switch to super, diesel and so on, cheaper products; but they change their story as they go along.

My friend opposite began by taking the Minister of Finance and the Economy to task to say the growth is a projection and he is right. He says you cannot believe the Minister of Finance and the Economy because the figure of growth, 1.2 per cent, is a projection; so do not believe him. Then he projects that “it will

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have a loss”, so believe his projection. He projects “it will have a loss, but you cyar believe” the projection of growth; but believe the projection of loss. That is the argument.

To hear my friend, the Member for Diego Martin West, talk about skulduggery and Bonnie and Clyde and “ratchiffee”; this is a gentleman who was part of an administration where there was a scholarship fund that cost over \$50 million taxpayers’ dollars; where “they sit dong somewhere and just write dong name and give away scholarship; you could not find student; you could not find university.” A 12-year-old child got a scholarship to do Greek dialect or something like that. This is what we faced.

There is another theme emerging and I just want, in the beginning, to get the thematics out. Any time the current Government, the partnership Government, goes to a state enterprise with an agenda of reform, of efficiency, of transparency—whether it is UTT, whether it is GATE, whether it is CEPEP—they always come we “harassing the entity”. So, we were voted into power, not to harass these institutions that the PNM built; we were voted to keep them as they are. Billions of dollars go and we should do nothing; but when we attempt to reform and bring transparency and efficiency, it is harassing.

Mr. Speaker, I want to tell the Leader of the Opposition he ought to have known that the GATE programme has been expanded by this Government, the People’s Partnership Government. [*Desk thumping*] The GATE programme has been expanded to include vocational studies and technical education. He will not tell us that, but will raise again the gloom that is closing when we attempt to bring efficiency.

The relevant Minister of Tertiary Education and Skills Training will speak to this issue, but they do not want to bring efficiency, whether it is to UTT, GATE, WASA. Wherever there are inefficiencies, their approach is, “Leave it alone; do not touch it.” Had they been in office, they would not touch it; they would leave it alone; but we cannot as a responsible Government face inefficiency in any state enterprise like that and do nothing. When you try to do something, you are harassing the state agency. This is the first time I have ever heard that, “eh”. We are now harassing UTT, harassing GATE and harassing CEPEP as we try to bring reform.

The Leader of the Opposition raised some other matters, dealt with some figures in terms of GATE where there was an expansion in the allocation. But there was another issue that we keep repeating. When we came into government, the last administration—and it may well be because that administration was removed

on the runway—they crashed on the runway, so to speak. It was mid-term, so they crashed on the runway and they left us with bills. They were like—you go to a restaurant with someone and you share a good meal and the bill comes and you look across the table and the person says, “I am going to the washroom.” That happened. They left us with bills at UTT and GATE. They left us with bills at UDeCOTT, so we had to take our time to clean up the mess that the PNM left.

Today, if they have a problem with us, it is probably because they believe we are taking too long to clean up the mess that they left. That is the problem. They thought that we should have done it faster, so they attack us on crime. We are cleaning up the mess they left. They attack us on education. We are cleaning up the mess they left. They attack us on housing. We are cleaning up the colossal mess that they left.

12.15 p.m.

You see, Mr.Speaker, I will get to the housing matter one time. My friend began his contribution there, and I had a feeling that—I remember the Member for San Fernando East. In his wisdom the Member for San Fernando East said a few months ago, he said one quality of the Member for Diego Martin West is that he tends to rush every issue. I had a feeling that he got a piece of paper, and when he got this piece of paper involving purchase of a parcel of land by the HDC, I had a feeling he would come to the budget and raise that as a big issue, and would seek to place that in the context of some corruption and “ratchiffee” and so on.

Mr.Speaker, out of an abundance of caution I compiled some information in the event that he raised it.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: And he did!

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: And he did! In fact he did within the first 10 minutes. It involved the purchase of a piece of land at Eden Gardens, which he raised. I have the documents here which I will now deal with.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: He must “take in front” because he knew you were coming to speak about Eden lands.

Hon. Warner: I have that here too.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: You have that too?

Mr. Warner: I have mine here too.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Of course, he raised a valuation by Linden Scott, which I have in my hand; and the valuation by the Commissioner of Valuations and so on. Before I get to the issue that he raised I want to indicate to him that,

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after 2011 when the HCU fell into problems—bulldozing lands for housing—incidentally, it was the same lands that were earmarked by the former administration.

The former Senator, Emily Gaynor Dick-Forde—that Senator had earmarked lands for housing. HDC then went on those lands and there were problems with the farming community. We took a policy decision that to avoid future problems with farmers, conflicts and so on, we would engage the private sector, so public-private sector approach to home construction—where instead of going on lands and having conflict with farmers who are there and may or may not have some legal interest in the lands, we will involve the private sector.

Mr. Speaker, the piece of land mentioned in Couva came to our attention. That land in Couva was the subject of a negotiation with the HDC, the Ministry of Housing, Land and Marine Affairs and by letter from the land owners and developers dated January 20, 2012, they offered the parcel of land, 50 acres of freehold land, for a price at \$200 million. Mr. Speaker, they offered it.

In reply, the Ministry of Finance—which is the competent authority, the Ministry of Finance, Valuation Division—looked at a report from Linden Scott on valuation in which the Linden Scott Report—you are correct—valued at 50 but also went on in the report, which I do not think my friend opposite would have had, the complete report, he would have just had the news—where the Linden Scott Report, itself, concluded that the gross development value is \$115 million, the gross development value. Then they took certain deductions off.

Mr. Speaker, that parcel of land is land that already has infrastructure on it. It has water, provision for electricity, drainage, a sewer treatment plant. Would you believe there are also street lights there? So on HDC stock which we inherited “yuh doh have street light”—I will come to it just now—“yuh doh have drainage, yuh doh have infrastructure”, in fact in any HDC estate—and let me give you one that you did.

At Victoria Keys, Cocorite, which is opposite West Mall, do you know the cost of infrastructure for 14 acres of land? “Da is where you blow up a mountain to put two/three apartment building”. The cost of infrastructure was \$220 million. The cost of the land incidentally was about 40 million. So 40 million for the cost of the land, but hear infrastructure “eh”—for 14 acres of land, infrastructure is 220 million. You know how much units you get from that? You get apartment units; that is the apartment buildings. So, on 14 acres of land, infrastructure cost \$220 million, plus that. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, another one, at Wellington Gardens, in Debe, in my constituency where I had the honour to turn the sod with you; you see, that land is state land so there is no cost to it, but hear “de” infrastructure costs, \$103 million in infrastructure. When they did that with 103 million we came into office, that land was moving. It was cane land in Wellington Estate. They put some houses there and the houses moved six inches. “Ah doh want to say dey were wining to de side, I’d get in problems with that”, but those houses were moving. If you see the PVC off their sewer systems you would see six inches they moved because they did not put drainage, they did not put retaining walls, they did not do infrastructure. We had to spend another \$60 million to take care of that estate before we could go and allocate the homes, Wellington Gardens. There, you are dealing with 65 acres of land, 280 single family units.

Eden Gardens, Couva, which you raised today is 50 acres of land that will provide 264 single family units, to which the land costs, when you add the infrastructure costs, we got for \$175 million—infrastructure and land with street lights.

There are HDC estates in this country five, 10 years old, and they do not have street lights. This has streetlights, sewer treatment plant, drainage, the roads paved already. You have to go in there and in six to eight months put the housing up, that is the infrastructure we bought. My friend thought he got something juicy so he came to Parliament, he had something to announce. Fifty acres of land, 264 single units, the land owner wanted \$200 million. Commissioner of Valuations—I just want to read into the record the Commissioner of Valuations. Commissioner of Valuations came in at 180 million. We shaved off five million, so we took them down from 200 to 175. We saved \$25 million and five million less than the Commissioner of Valuations suggested, and that is the deal, with infrastructure and land.

Mr. Speaker, my friend announced this today as if this is some major matter. The Commissioner of State—the Valuation Division, Ministry of Finance and not Ministry of Housing, Land and Marine Affairs, went on by letter March 06, 2012, to indicate:

I am of the view that the valuation done by Linden Scott and Associates is grossly understated considering the current state of the development and under the assumption that all statutory approvals have been had for intensive residential use.

This is how we did our work.

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We went beyond that because we know this information in his hands he would want to make a song out of it. We got a comparator with lands sold in that area, which is Central Park in Couva. When we did the math, the land sold in Central Park—which is within one mile of our HDC site—it sold at \$125 per square foot. “But hear dis”, with our sale we got that land at \$87.50 per square foot. We got the land cheaper than if you go privately and you buy land in that area. You see, Mr. Speaker? We got the land cheaper. Land in the area, going at 125, the State got it at 87.50. You should compliment and congratulate the tough negotiators at the HDC that they are able to do this. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, as I told you, my friend opposite got a piece of paper and he started to get excited that he had something. I will come back to housing later, but to only indicate that that Victoria Keys building that was started under the tenure of my friend which has now reached almost three to \$350 million and counting— [*Crosstalk*]

My friend opposite really has the gall to raise issues of housing. I want to tell you at this moment there are two structures in Morvant: Las Alturas, Lady Young development buildings H and I. Today the Government of the Trinidad and Tobago has taken steps to demolish two structures built by him, by the Ministry of Housing. [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: The then Ministry of Housing.

Dr. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I do not want to disturb, “yuh know”—imputing motives! I had nothing to do with that. I hate to interrupt my friend, but if he is going to go on like that I really have to. I had nothing to do with that.

Mr. Speaker: Do not impute improper motives in this instance please.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, it is never my intention to do so. I just want to get the facts clear. I am not imputing; I just want to get my facts clear.

Miss Cox: Well get it clear!

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: My friend opposite held the privileged position as Minister of Housing until—if I am not correct, was it November 2007? Correct? Mr. Speaker, unknown to him at that time, as Minister of Housing there was a report, geotechnical investigation report September 2007. Unknown to my friend opposite, in this report, in a geotechnical report—I have it in my hand here—it concluded—page 15 is really what I am looking at. Slope stability, a report that was done when my friend was Minister of Housing but unknown to him the report says:

The large crack that developed along the northern boundary of the site is a clear indication of the inherent instability of the entire slope as it indicates the start of a very large failure plane. Factors of safety are less than 0.9 which means that slope failure is highly likely.

Now, I want to put this into layman's words. They built a building on a gravel heap—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Warner: Unknown to him!

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:—unknown to the Minister of Housing at the time. Today, \$23 million of taxpayers' money will go with a demolition crew at this moment at Morvant. Mr. Speaker, \$23 million because the report concluded—several reports, including Trintoplan Report—that we cannot place persons there.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to read a couple of items in the report.

With this in mind, block F presents itself as an area of concern as it straddles both a very strong and the weakest soil profile. Slope stability analysis indicates that for slope angles 25 degrees and greater the factors of safety are less than 0.9 indicating the likelihood of collapse.

Mr. Warner: Unknown to him!

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Unknown to him! The report said:

It is expected that material that would have been cut from the top of the hill to create the plateau for the plan would more likely have been pushed down onto what is the proposed site now.

It was not built yet. It was a proposed site. This means that the surface soil would consist of loose fill material.

Mr. Speaker, with a report like this in hand they went ahead and constructed not one but about five apartment towers on land like this. This is what we inherited. [*Crosstalk*] They were rushing to build. They did not care about any geotechnical—and you know my friend opposite is well known as a geologist, but did not have knowledge of this. The report I just read from is September 2007.

Miss Cox: Which one?

Dr. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I must object! [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Please! Could you take your seat please? You are rising on a point of order?

Dr. Rowley: Yes, Sir!

Mr. Speaker: Go ahead!

Dr. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, the Member is going out of his way to impute motives in me for misconduct—36(5)—[*Crosstalk*] I left the Ministry of Housing in November. That report was September. The project was done after I left there. I object to him coming here and trying to call my career and my profession into question. [*Crosstalk*] I had nothing to do with it.

Mr. Roberts: Calm down!

Mr. Speaker: Okay. Minister of Housing, Land and Marine Affairs—
[*Interruption*]

Miss Cox: Foolishness!

Mr. Speaker: Could you withdraw that word, Member for Laventille East? You used an expression that is really unparliamentary.

Miss Cox: What word, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: You know what you said!

Hon. Member: Come on, you know better than that. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: You know the word that you used.

Miss Cox: Mr. Speaker, “foolishness” I have to withdraw “foolishness”?

Mr. Speaker: I asked you to withdraw the word ma’am.

Miss Cox: Withdrawn!

12.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Minister, please, if you want to raise the conduct or make any personal charge against any Member of this honourable House, please bring a substantive Motion. I advise you, do not impute improper motives or raise the question of the conduct of a Member. Kindly be guided, continue.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, I will be guided. I would just deal with the issue and not get to any person and so on there. So, what I would conclude is that the liability for this colossal act of mismanagement and incompetence will not lie with my friend, the Member for Diego Martin West, but with the subsequent Minister of Housing of the PNM because we are clear that knowledge of this would dwell with the PNM administration, but not the Member for Diego Martin West. The subsequent Minister of Housing, I think it was Sen. Emily—whatever it is. So the PNM Government would take the responsibility for this, but

not my friend, the Member for Diego Martin West. Are you happy with that? Okay, great. So, you did not know.

But let me get to one where it gets closer home now. In that same period, what was happening was that they were “ramping up” home construction as a tool of political propaganda, bringing in each and every one. You know, today, I want to make reference to my friend opposite who spoke about the perception of corruption and friend and family—this Government is engaged in acts of deception and if we have to distribute awards on contracts—his favourite word, “deception”—and our friend and family and party people will get contracts and so on. You see, during the years 2006—beginning 2006—2008, but beginning in 2006, a company was incorporated in 2005. The ninth month is what? Is it August?

Hon. Member: September.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: So in the ninth month of 2005 a company was incorporated. Mr. Speaker, this company immediately moves within the HDC to collect work to the value of \$44 million; incorporated. By 2006, infrastructure development works in Buen Intento, \$7 million. Now, this is in 2006. The company was incorporated in 2005. Mr. Speaker, Edinburgh 500, 1.7 million; Buen Intento, 2007, 4.1 million; Glenroy, 7.5 million, all in 2006/2007—add up all of that—my friend from Caroni East is very good at doing this quick—\$24 million in 2006/2007 in infrastructure work at HDC for a company that was incorporated in 2005.

Mr. Warner: One year old!

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: One year or less? And that company by the name of Vidara Enterprises Company—

Mr. Warner: Belongs to?

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Who is Vidara? What is Vidara?

Mr. Warner: Belongs to?

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, that company I think belongs to the current chairman of the People’s National Movement.

Mr. Warner: “That’s de man.”

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: “That’s de man.” [*Crosstalk*] Then when he left the Government under clouds of corruption, they went on the back bench and said: “Listen, you on the back bench, we go help you out.” So, “how much millions”? Mr. Speaker, \$24 million within 12 months at the HDC in 2006 and 2007.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: And he was a sitting MP at the time.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: And he was a sitting MP, chairman of the People's National Movement. Now, this is a company that is operated by the chairman of the PNM and operated, I believe, by his wife, his spouse, who moved from being a primary school teacher in San Fernando and did well to be a businesswoman. Now, I have no difficulty with that. People have competence. I have no difficulty with this. My wife “doh build house”, but I have no difficulty with that. Mr. Speaker, she does keep house. [*Laughter*] I have no difficulty with this. She is an attorney-at-law and has no contract with this Government, had none with the one before and will have none with this Government—no work coming in anywhere—but this is just the HDC.

In the EMBD, this very company moved in there too and over \$70 million of work was provided. In the PURE programme, they moved in there as well. They moved in and cleaned up operations in PURE, EMBD and HDC totalling—and I stand corrected—in the period 2006—2010 or thereabout totalling what could be \$300 million in the state sector.

Mr. Warner: One company!

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: One company! Mr. Speaker, \$300 million in the state sector led by the chairman of the People's National Movement, and that is why they want to come back. When they talk about coming back in government, that is why they want to come back. [*Interruption*] “Yeah, dey trust you! Me, I will close down meh shop before I trust you”—[*Laughter and desk thumping*]—because they want to come back to do this—where the chairman of the PNM formed a company because he is no longer in the Cabinet, they said: “No problem, we go help out we boy.” Mr. Speaker, \$300 million gone in work to this company.

Mr. Warner: The PNM takes care of its own.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: And that is what we heard from the former Minister of Health, “the PNM takes care of its own”, not the national community, its own. You see, Mr. Speaker, again, I do not want to lay blame anywhere because I am sure they would say they were not there and they did not know. Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you something. When you stand on this pedestal—on this platform of integrity and self-righteousness and transparency—when you stand there, you must stand with clean hands. When you throw stones, you must not live—

Hon. Member: In glass house.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:—and you must change your clothes in the basement

[*Laughter*] when you live in glass houses otherwise it is an obscene event. Mr. Speaker, I want to indicate that under this Government this will not happen, it cannot happen. It will not and cannot, where the chairman of a party and that party is in government, loads up \$300 million in work, “gone dey way”, including over \$50 million in housing. These are the issues I put on the table. I cast no aspersions. I make no reference to my friend opposite. He held the position. It could well be that he would not have known about that.

Mr. Speaker, so you take Las Alturas—you take Vidara and the housing developments that they dealt with—Victoria Keys, Wellington Gardens—and you ask: what is the legitimacy? What is the authority you have to speak to issues of trust?

My friend opposite made reference to traffic—increased traffic and so on—and suggested that the Government is doing nothing. This is the Government which in two and a half years constructed an interchange at Couva. “Today, you just fly through Couva, whoosh-whoosh [*Desk thumping*] and you go through to Rivulet Road.” We intend, as Minister Howai said, to dual that carriageway, that lane between Couva on the highway straight to Point Lisas—[*Desk thumping*]—four lanes. [*Desk thumping*] We built the interchange already. At Piarco—that area in Piarco—another interchange was constructed there and also in Kelly Village to ensure access now to Piarco to and from. Mr. Speaker, the Point Fortin highway is under construction. There are plans for Diego Martin, you will be happy to know that.

So when you look at those initiatives: Couva interchange, Kelly Village interchange, four-lane highway to Point Lisas and the Point Fortin highway on the move, that is what we are doing to alleviate traffic and inconvenience and there is more to come. The Minister of Works and Infrastructure will speak to these infrastructure programmes and the very distinguished Minister of State in that Ministry, the Member for Oropouche West, will speak in detail on those initiatives.

I want to announce that the highway from Golconda to Debe is 60 per cent complete. [*Desk thumping*] You can go on the highway at Debe and accelerate, and the first traffic light you will see is when you reach Beetham, Port of Spain. From Debe, we removed all the traffic lights along the way. [*Desk thumping*] Many persons prefer not to go on the bus route anymore if they have access to that, but to stay on the highway. There are no traffic lights so there is a clear flow.

You see, they are trying their best to speak to the issue of trust, deception and competence, but this is an administration that was bold enough to publish, two

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years running, a booklet on our achievements. You see, “An Era of Caring has Begun”. We produced a booklet with 27 pages of achievements, “Fulfilling the Promise” another booklet—another magazine almost. It is a book—with achievements: health care, gender and youth.

Mr. Warner: Show them! Show them!

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, look, look [*Books in hand*] we have them here.

Dr. Gopeesingh: One in the first year and one in the second year.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Which Government in the history of this country dare every 12 months to produce a book of achievements? Where? Who? When?

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: The partnership.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Never! It is the People’s Partnership that has brought this level of accountability and responsibility. [*Desk thumping*] It is the partnership. [*Desk thumping*] Normally, you would save this for election. In an election year parties print achievements and so on. This is achievement. [*Interruption*] You know, they say PR, but they would not read it, and tell us if something is there and it is wrong. Tell us! You do not and you stand and talk about delivery and expenditure.

Today, the Leader of the Opposition attacked us on the issue of expenditure, almost to suggest that their plan is to reduce deficit by cutting expenditure. So, it is hardship. So, when we say that VAT is temporary, it is temporary, because if “behind God back” you come back into office, the VAT will be removed from all food items, the VAT will return. So the temporary is that the PNM will return the VAT. That is what they will do because they do not believe in that. How do you cut expenditure? So, interestingly, the Leader of the Opposition today tells us that cutting expenditure is the way to reduce the deficit, but he did not tell us where to cut the expenditure. Is it in the social programmes? The expenditure they will cut, will they cut it from subsidies to state enterprises?

So, our policy approach is to stimulate growth by generating prosperity. That is the theme. You grow the economy. People get their money and they spend, and you create economic activity. If there is a greater demand, suppliers will produce. The business community will produce goods and services in relation to that demand, and you increase the demand through expenditure policy. This has been

outlined, but their approach is to cut the expenditure. Tell us, are you cutting it on subsidies or on the social sector programmes? Where are you going to cut this expenditure from? And then they complained as if it is some great problem that the Office of the Leader of the Opposition got a cut in budget by \$700,000 or thereabout.

The Leader of the Opposition and the office is a very important office. Many of us have had the honour to serve for many years in the Opposition and it is an important office. I would like to know how much they spent last year. It is one thing to talk about your allocation, but it is something else to look at your actual expenditure. How much did you spend?

I am sure that if they have an amount and they have exhausted the amount, they can come back to the Parliament or the relevant authority and make a request for a bigger allocation. We all know that there are variations and supplemental Bills and so on where you can get some extra resources if you need it. They come with the—we reduced the budget for the THA and so on.

You see, the THA election is upon us, so we expected the Leader of the Opposition to talk at length about the THA election. I wanted to indicate and we understand now there are two parties in Tobago. The leader has alerted us to that. You have the TOP and you have the bottom. [*Laughter and desk thumping*]

12.45 p.m.

So, it will be a big fight. It will be a big fight. It will be a fight. It will be a fight to the finish. The Leader of the Opposition has put it in a good frame, I think. He framed that debate well. It is really the TOP versus the bottom. Mr. Speaker, and we will go to Tobago and tell the people that they are the beneficiaries in terms of direct transfer of 4.0 per cent of the total budget—4.0 per cent.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Minister of Housing, Land and Marine Affairs has expired.

Motion made: That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh*]

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Before you rise—because I do not want you to continue in that flight and I interrupt you later—I would like to suggest at this time that we take lunch. We break at this time for lunch with your leave.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: We will go to 1.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: You all will like to go to 1.00 p.m.?

Hon. Member: Go to 1.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: You all will like to go to—

Dr. Rowley: When he is finished.

Mr. Speaker: Okay. Hon. Members, the question is that we allow the hon. Minister to conclude his speech and we then break for lunch. That is the feelings of the House. The Member of Parliament for Oropouche East and Minister of Housing, Land and Marine Affairs, you may continue.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I was on the issue of Tobago and pointing out the deception of my friend opposite, and I indicate, according to the *Draft Estimates 2013*, 4.03 per cent of the total budget in terms of direct transfers went to Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, but in terms of indirect transfers the work of other Ministries that are operating in Tobago—not just the THA but other Ministries—because Tobago does not operate that way, they have both the THA and all, well most, if not all the Ministries operating in Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, would you believe the allocation as a percentage of the total allocation is 5.53 per cent? [*Desk thumping*] So, Mr. Speaker, 5.53 per cent of the total budget allocation for Tobago. The environment and water resources sector, 16 million; health, 20 million; Cipriani Labour College, 2 million; National Security, 6 million; Police Service, 12 million and counting and counting. So Tobago has gotten its fair share and more than its fair share, and, I believe, more than the formula that is provided. But you see, I come back to the issue I raised in the beginning; it is an issue where the Leader of the Opposition would like us to focus on the issue of trust, you know: “Don’t trust the Government, trust them”.

Mr. Speaker, a matter occurred recently, a development, and I just want to put it in perspective. Mr. Speaker, on the September 18, 2012, my friend opposite led a march in Port of Spain. First it began as a PNM march and then widened, expanded in terms of the persons. But, you know, as a democrat, myself, I was happy to see citizens critical of public policy, raising their voices, expressing themselves. It speaks well to the democracy.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: That is right.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: That you have persons who are willing to come out and protest and raise critical voices in relation to public policy, because at an earlier time if you had tried doing that—like one trade union leader—they would have lifted him by his belt.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Or arrested him.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: And lifted him and carted him away with all his parts of his body uncomfortable, dragging him away. They did that before. Today, you call a protest, citizens come out; but I have no difficulty with that, my difficulty was the attempt to con the citizens and the nation. Mr. Speaker, on the day after, September 19, 2012, the *Guardian* newspaper stated at page A5, it says:

Opposition Leader Keith Rowley has asked acting President Timothy Hamel-Smith to call Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar to explain certain matters and so on.

Mr. Speaker, but they also indicated that they delivered a petition to His Excellency.

Rowley took a petition to Hamel-Smith along with 25,000 signatures which the Opposition PNM said they gathered in 48 hours.

When I read this on that day, the 19th, I remember “I sell raffle and so on over the years to raise money for lil constituency activity, but I cah remember yuh getting 500 people signing a raffle in two days.” So I say, “How this worked?” I asked around, I said, “Were the offices of the People’s National Movement open so that they were inviting citizens to line up to sign? A colleague said, no. So I said, “Twenty-five thousand signatures in two days, what is happening?”

Mr. Speaker, we were then informed that what they were doing along the march was asking people to sign blank paper and then stuff it in a bag—“like when you go to ah prayers, you stuff soharee leaf in ah garbage bag when you finish”—and they went to His Excellency with that. I just want to read the contents of a letter from the Office of the President, addressed to the Prime Minister on this very important matter, because if there is a petition of 25,000 signatories, that is very important. It is important for us as a government to take note of the weight of certain issues and in particular, a petition. Mr. Speaker, I just want to quote from the relevant section.

The petition, according to His Excellency, acting President Timothy Hamel-Smith—

Mr. Warner: Date.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: October 04, 2012.

Mr. Warner: Yesterday, right?

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Yes, Mr. Speaker, yesterday.

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The petition received by me did not bear the signatures of any person. Dr. Rowley indicated that he had collected thousands of signatures in response to the petition and produced to me a bundle with lists of signatures which were to accompany the petition, which I did not review. I suggested rather that when he had properly collated all the signatures it might be appropriate to deliver same, and Dr. Rowley undertook to do so.

Mr. Speaker, they told the population they delivered 25,000 signatures, including very distinguished people. I noticed former Senate President, Michael Williams has written about this, but his signature too, I imagine, is in a bag somewhere in Balisier House, in some corner of the archives or something. It is there, but when Mr. Williams signed, it was intended to go to His Excellency, he was expressing his concern. But that bag is languishing somewhere and someone told me it had raffle sheets in it, and so on. “That they put signatures and throw in inside there, so ah man sign a 24 cents chance, thinking he winning six glass and a jug, a sponge cake or a blender, and the signature is by His Excellency.”

Miss. Mc Donald: Mr. Speaker, I rise on Standing Order 36(5), imputing improper motives. Could you please have your seat? I have risen on 36(5). Mr. Speaker, 36(5).

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I think you have made your point, we can move on.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, I will move on from this; I was just using it as an example to speak to the issue of trust; and in leaving this, “the only petition I know that does have one signature, I think, is a divorce petition. That is the only petition I know that does keep one signature.” Mr. Speaker, they must really be honest with the population and tell us—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Rowley: Pinocchios.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal:—if and when you do have a petition. But having said that, let me say, I support the democratic action by citizens and their right to sign a petition on these matters.

Mr. Speaker, I also want them to respond on a next matter because they talk about trust, and friends and family benefiting. I have in my hand a cheque dated June 19, 2007, a copy of a cheque. Mr. Speaker, this cheque is made out to the People’s National Movement—June 19, 2007, signed by Lawrence Duprey, for a tune of how much? Mr. Speaker, \$5 million. This \$5 million cheque which they collected—[*Crosstalk*]—you did not collect it? Okay, they did not collect it. You

did not collect the \$5million. Mr. Speaker, I “doh” blame my friends opposite, you know, I do not think they had nothing do with this. I mean, they did not collect a cheque for \$5, far less \$5 million.

Dr. Rowley: How many [*Inaudible*] for your children?

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker—[*Crosstalk*] Move the microphone your nose is growing. [*Laughter*] Mr. Speaker, they collected \$5 million from Lawrence Duprey. And we were not surprised then, we were never surprised when the former Minister of Finance in their regime, went down on December 31, 2008, and what did she do? Former Minister of Finance, who I see on television now as an expert, you know, advertised as an expert.

Hon. Member: She “eh” no expert in this.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, this former Madam Minister went down to Clico Investment Bank and on Old Year’s Day, “bail out” all her money. She went down there in a nightie or with a duster over it, with curlers in her hair. Old Year’s Day, when she would have been preparing for a nice party in the night when she should have been home “Cutexing” her toes and so on, went down to Clico Investment Bank and “bail out” all her money. And this is the party that say, trust them. That is what they want to come back for. That is why they want to come back. They want to come back to do this.

Mr. Speaker, and you know when she came back home that was not the end of it. She called up the mother and say, “Mammy, go and bail out your money, too.” So, the mother went and bailed out too, the family bailed out. Regrettably, some of my friends opposite did not have the information, they could not bail out.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: You could not bail yours.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: You see, they could not bail out. Mr. Speaker, they want us—[*Interruption*]—no, not to speak out.

Miss. Mc Donald: But we adjudicated that at 2010, move on. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, I cannot talk now?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I know the temperature is rising. I know that. So, I will just ask you take your notes and at the appropriate time you will respond. Hon. Minister, continue, please.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, there are laws against that “eh”. Mr. Speaker, let me move on. You see, I am speaking to the issue of trust that they come here and say, well, do not trust the Government, trust them. Two and a half years later the grand plan is to return the rapid rail. That is the grand plan. They did not talk about box drain for people. In this budget, the Minister of Finance and

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the Economy spoke about a national small micro-drainage programme to help citizens. [*Desk thumping*]

And, you know, I want to speak to this issue of trust because they will speak again later on this. At the end of the day, all political matters are determined by people.

Hon. Member: That is right.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: People are the final arbiters of everything political.

Hon. Member: Thank God.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: They did it in 2010, they did it again later in 2010—local government—and they will again. But at the end of the day it is the people of Mohess Road who have to say whether they trust us because they get a road—a road that closed down since 1979 was opened by this administration. [*Desk thumping*] They will say if they trust us to fix their road. The people in Diego Martin, when the floods came, the Prime Minister was there within minutes.

Hon. Member: And what they get after that?

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: I “doh” know where the MP was, you will have to—

Mr. Warner: He was playing golf.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: He was what? Playing golf? I “doh” know about that. Mr. Speaker, I “doh” know about that. Mr. Speaker, the people of Diego Martin, when they received their cheques for their grants, my friend opposite, you know, he was unhappy and angry with their expression of gratitude, but that is a personal matter.

The people of Diego Martin, when we went on that Sunday, I believe, and they came out, they looked at the Prime Minister. They said, “Madam Prime Minister, I want to show you a picture of yesterday”. Remember?

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: [*Nods her head*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: They said, “Yesterday, this is what that bridge looked like. We could not believe that that could be fixed in one day, we thought it would take months.” [*Desk thumping*] They will determine if they trust us—they will determine that.

Mr. Speaker, the children who will go to the south campus of the University of the West Indies, which they say not to build, they will determine if they trust their Government.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Laventille and Port of Spain—the Minister of National Security visited a few days ago—when they speak of their neglect—they

will determine who they trust. We are now doing construction in Beverly Hills; I believe we are building a children's park, a basketball court—they will decide on trust. It is the people will decide—not you, not you. They will determine whether we deliver to them in terms of their drains, their roads, bridges, infrastructure and education. Mr. Speaker, they will determine that.

1.00 p.m.

You can talk how much you want, at the end of the day our delivery of goods and services will stand the test. [*Desk thumping*] That is why they are scared.

Mr. Speaker, within recent times—we do not want to boast because it is not something you boast about. We are not happy with the state—with our concern for crime we are not happy with that. But under a Minister of National Security and his colleagues in the Cabinet and Government, you have had no murder—Minister, for how many days? Twenty-six days in Laventille and other areas there have been no murders. [*Desk thumping*] In a nightmare, if they return, murder will return, because they told us today not to use the soldiers, that soldiers and police do not get along. We know that, but they get along to deal with crime. They get along for “twenty how much” days?

Mr. Warner: Twenty-six days.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: In twenty-six days no murder, no gunshots in Laventille. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Warner: Consecutive days.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Twenty-six consecutive days. You have to get “history book” to find out when that happened before, but that is what they feel now. They are desperate. They sense that with the performance of this Government, with our attack on crime, they would have very little opportunity to return to office by constitutional means. They fear that, and they are becoming desperate. The desperation is seeping in; this is why there is now an assembly of all types of different shades of political tricks. We want to indicate that we are looking on at this; it is a level of desperation that is taking place.

The performance of the Government is what is troubling them, because when they look on and they see the Housing Development Corporation—lands have been vested in the HDC—where we have another \$1.2 billion by way of assets, so we can continue our work. When they look at the achievements across the board in terms of distribution of grants, construction of homes—we have three active sites at this moment, constructing over 3,000 housing units at Union Hall, Princes

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Town and Egypt, Chaguana. I myself have not made a tour, but I am told by citizens that the homes in Chaguana, in particular Egypt, they are among the best housing units ever constructed by the public sector. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Warner: I was there.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: You were there? Mr. Speaker, people are driving around in cars now and want to pick out “house number and apply”. They are the best homes constructed, the highest quality and the most beautiful ever constructed by a government—over 3,500 housing starts, three areas. In the coming fiscal year we will now go to Trestrail in the East-West Corridor, Pineapple Smith, D’Abadie, O’Meara and Couva, where we have completed that transaction to construct another 300 housing units at Eden Gardens. But they do not want us to do that; “they doh want dat”—Princes Town, Union Hall, Egypt, Chaguana, Trestrail coming, Pineapple Smith, Couva, Eden Gardens.

While we were doing that, you know we had to clean up their mess. So when they left us with a housing stock that needed repair work—sometimes the Ministry would allocate, and someone would collect the bunch of keys to their home. Two weeks later someone came back to me. “I thought dey come with a sponge cake or something to say thank you they got a house; when dey pull out a letter from de purse, 75 defects with this housing unit, 75 defects.” They left us with a housing stock where we had to spend so far \$100 million in repairs. “And then asking what we build?—is what we repair.”

We could not distribute housing units that they constructed. When friends and family and party supporters weighed in and “just come in and left, right and centre, everybody become a contractor now; everybody building house”. Prior to 2010, “you just appear somewhere, dey see you, dey say, build house, 10 for you, 20 for you”, and half of these people cannot finish the homes. They are coming to say they are owed money, they cannot close their deals. That is what happens when you mismanage the housing sector.

Mr. Speaker, we are not going to do that. We are not coming here to say 10,000 houses in a year, as they used to come to boast. Then you produce 10,000 houses, “nobody cyar live in 1,000” because you have to repair them. You build them, there is no drainage. There is no infrastructure. There is no retaining wall. There is no electricity. There is no water. You go in, “ceiling falling down”; so that has been our challenge. Notwithstanding the repair programme, we have been able to work fast to correct some of those problems and to also construct the very first partnership homes at three locations in Trinidad. [*Desk thumping*]

In UDeCOTT we inherited from my friends opposite a criminal enterprise—an almost criminal enterprise called UDeCOTT. We have now cleaned it out. When was the last time “you hear” about UDeCOTT in the news with bacchanal and scandal? We delivered the financial complex, which is another one they will talk about in Tobago. In December this year we intend to open the Chancery Lane extension project hospital in San Fernando. For the people of south in particular, and central, no longer you go there with your loved ones lying on the ground waiting for a bed. We are working on that.

The children’s hospital construction will start by November. All the approvals have been granted, all; a contract is in place. The Mayaro fire station—my friend from Mayaro would like to hear; yes, he is here—in February 2013 construction should begin on the Mayaro Fire Station, which they promised since 1962.

The medical centre for non-communicable diseases in Penal; we will also build the Point Fortin Hospital, the oncology centre. UDeCOTT is on the move, but without the scandal and corruption that has dogged that company under the previous administration.

Forgive the pun, but CEPEP is today a clean company. There was a time under their administration, you go to the Magistrates’ Court, the accused is a CEPEP worker and the bailor is a CEPEP contractor—“dah is how dey run de company”. That is how it was. Today, CEPEP has pulled away from that reputation. Today, they contribute to the community through projects. In Beverly Hills in particular, whose constituency it is, you surely would know that a project at Beverly Hills was for the contractor to produce a beautiful architectural fountain with spring water. They had a map of Trinidad and Tobago which they designed the fountain in. That was a CEPEP contractor. CEPEP is now integrating with the community to undertake community work to help in several projects.

We have managed that programme. We have ensured that we reduce the number of teams and therefore the income that goes to contractors, so we would not have a situation where mafia leaders, dons and so on come in, as happened in the past under their regime, and get \$200,000 a month as a CEPEP contractor. That simply will not happen. The CEPEP marine programme is also being expanded to south Trinidad; it is now in north Trinidad.

Mr. Speaker, CEPEP has also worked with COSTAATT, Cipriani Labour College and other institutions to encourage training of their workers. And this is why the Minister announced in his budget that URP and CEPEP workers would now graduate to the private sector. Private employers can now hire a former URP or CEPEP worker and get a 150 per cent uplift on their allowance, so when they

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calculate their tax at the end of the year they would get an incentive to hire CEPEP and URP workers. So that they will move into long-term, permanent, productive employment that has higher skill. That is the vision. [*Desk thumping*] That is the vision the Minister announced. Not a vision of keeping people 100 years in URP.

Under the former administration you had an intergenerational transfer of poverty, where persons work in the URP and their grandson would work in the URP. You are a CEPEP worker and your grandchild would be a CEPEP worker. We are not doing that. You have to get into these programmes in two or three years, get your skills and beat it; get into the private sector. We intend to approach the printing industry; they need labour. We intend to approach some of the beverage companies—they need labour—to source from the CEPEP cadre those with certain skills who have availed themselves of the opportunity to be trained: literacy training, conflict management, health and safety, basic supervisory training. You can now go into the private sector. That is the vision of this budget.

So, Mr. Speaker, when we speak about the vision for Trinidad and Tobago, when we speak about stimulating growth and generating prosperity, those are not just words we use lightly. We bring the programme to demonstrate how you stimulate growth, how you generate prosperity.

You know, they made a song and dance, they said the Minister did not give details on this, did not give details on that. Our parliamentary procedure allows for a debate, I think for four days. So it is not meant that the Minister of Finance and the Economy would come and speak for six hours and say everything about everything in the world. He would outline his policy, his fiscal measure and the relevant Ministers would speak about their relevant departments, bring their programmes; listen to the Opposition. There are times when my friends opposite, not all, but some, would give us valuable insights, good critical observations.

Hon. Member: Very rarely.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Well, I think it is more than rarely. There are times when we would like more to listen to them; that is what a budget debate is all about. It is not the Minister talking for six hours. So when you talk about details—today my friend opposite raised several matters. In fact, I do not know if it is the new marketing company. They have a new marketing company that is helping him [*Interruption*—\$15 million for that? You did not see it today. You did not see a dollar today. But he is now positioning himself as an expert on the political economy of the global energy industry. So he spoke to some energy issues, as if nobody knew about shale gas before. But we have the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, and at an appropriate time he will speak to these

issues and bring detail. He will talk about the plans and the projects. So in the debate that would follow, that we are engaged in now, we expect that Ministers would speak to their departments and provide details.

We have announced with fanfare a programme called Land for the Landless, where over 10,000 lots will be given out in three years to allow persons to construct their homes on a lot of land. So we will not have this overdependence on the state housing construction programme, which you cannot satisfy in any event.

The Minister outlined his proposal. If you are working—let us say you have a worker at a Hi-Lo cash register there, that person makes \$3,000, \$4,000 a month, that person would find difficulty to get a housing unit of their choice in the HDC. The chances are, if they have two children, some commitments somewhere else, they would be able to afford an apartment. When they come, do they want an apartment? No, they want a house, but they cannot afford a house in the HDC. So we say, “We have the plan for you.” If you can access a piece of land, we give you \$150,000 at 1.5 per cent interest rate and you construct your modest home. *[Desk thumping]*

There is a lot of great skill and hard work that citizens are capable of. When they go to squat, in one day on a holiday on the weekend they put up a house. We must now channel that energy into lawful conduct, meaning: I give you the piece of land, go and build your house now; build it for yourself; work over time, build. *[Desk thumping]* That is what we are providing in the budget.

For those involved in commercial construction you build, you have land now and you are doing nothing with the land. There is no economic value. You go, you build within two years, I believe, for rental purposes. We say to you, five years without paying tax. No tax on your income for five years, if you construct in the next two years. That is vision. We bring land into economic activity and generate growth and stimulate prosperity. That is the vision. So there is commercial development, residential development, and for the lower income groups, housing construction. That is what we will be about in the next year. Programmes will start, not all will finish, but we will certainly start the Land for the Landless Programme and the distribution of low income housing.

We went one step further, and we can announce that persons who are so low in terms of their income, we are prepared to build a platform for you. It is called: Platform for Growth. We put a concrete platform for you there and say, “Listen, come now and just put something on that platform and live.” I assure you that it would not take the length of time as the Scarborough library and hospital.

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Mr. Speaker, it has been for me a pleasure to address this Bill. I want to congratulate yet again the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy [*Desk thumping*] for his brilliant presentation, his very first presentation to the Parliament, on the fiscal package. I would like to congratulate as well the Prime Minister, the Member for Siparia and her leadership of the Government and Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago, [*Desk thumping*] that will result in generating growth and stimulating prosperity.

As I close, may I take the opportunity to congratulate the West Indies team that managed a major victory against Australia, by 74 runs. And I understand that among the Trinidad and Tobago bowlers in that match they took nine wickets. It is good batting in the Parliament and it is good batting out of the Parliament. Seventy-four runs is a lifetime in Twenty20 cricket, to win by 74 runs. So we congratulate the West Indies team, and I thank you very much.

STANDING ORDER 36

(PAYING PARTICULAR ATTENTION TO)

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, before we suspend for lunch. I do not like to interrupt Members of this honourable House when they are in full flight. I try not to be an interventionist Speaker, but I just want to remind hon. Members to pay particular attention to Standing Order 36(8) and 36(9): we shall not bring the name of the President in any debate in this honourable House, and also the conduct of His Excellency. I just want to remind Members to focus on those two Standing Orders whenever we are talking about the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago or the Acting President.

Hon. Members, I want to at this time suspend this sitting until 2.17 p.m. We come back in one hour's time. This sitting is now suspended until an hour from now.

1.17 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

2.17 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

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Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Diego Martin Central. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal: Leader after leader.

Hon. Member: Who knows!

Dr. Amery Browne (*Diego Martin Central*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Right off the bat I must say that I listened very closely to the hon. Member for Oropouche East in his contribution today, and his references to former Members of Parliament and their parents, and Cutex on their toes, and the duster over their heads, et cetera. Mr. Speaker, I could not help thinking what a poor example to

the young parliamentarians of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] What a poor example to the young citizens of this nation of ours

Mr. Speaker, I am afraid that I have to conclude that the best part of his contribution was when he was kind enough to share the cricket scores with the nation of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Sharma: What is your best score?

Dr. A. Browne: And I believe he was accurate in that regard.

Mr. Speaker, I want to really start by congratulating the Minister of Finance and the Economy for presenting to us what was his first budget presentation. And I want to salute the hon. Leader of the Opposition for his third budget response. [*Desk thumping*] On behalf of the Opposition People's National Movement, I dare say it was the best response, thus far, from the hon. Leader of the Opposition, and he continues to represent with distinction. In case the Minister of Finance and the Economy is getting jealous, I want to say this was his best budget presentation thus far as well.

Miss Hospedales: First and only.

Dr. A. Browne: You are saying that it might be only one, I would not go there. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, this nation normally highly anticipates the budget speech and the budget debate because it really does give an opportunity for some insight into the philosophy of the Government, into the business plan of the Government over the coming period, and it offers an opportunity for the Government to take a look at itself, and to offer a look at the state of the nation of Trinidad and Tobago. We do not have any State of the Union Address in this country, so most persons really anticipate the budget speech with some enthusiasm.

I think under this UNC Government the stakes are even higher, and the anticipation is even higher because citizens do not have any Government vision that they can examine. They have no national development plan that the Government has offered. So, really, there is keen anticipation and almost a hope, every year, that the Government would be able to give some sense of its direction to the nation, at this time, and to point us in the direction in which they would like to take our society.

This was such an opportunity and I am afraid that the Minister of Finance and the Economy failed in that particular regard. This was an opportunity, Mr. Speaker, for the Government to demonstrate that they understand and accept that true diversification is impossible without innovation, and to recognize the State's role, responsibility and duty to stimulate and fertilize that innovation in our

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people and in our sectors. And again, I believe that this budget presentation was another opportunity missed.

So in that regard, it is my respectful conclusion that this budget presentation was a failure on behalf of our new Minister of Finance and the Economy. [*Desk thumping*] It is my respectful conclusion.

Many observers have found it to be a bit disjointed, a bit disconnected. There is no cognitive glue that bound the presentation together or that would, in any way, serve to stimulate broad national support, and we know that that support has been fading year after year, month after month, week after week and day after day under this particular Government. [*Desk thumping*]

The opportunity was not seized, in any way, to address the psyche of the nation, and to at least begin to repair some of the tremendous damage that this Government has done to the national psyche in the recent few weeks that have just passed us.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Oropouche East, right at the end of his contribution, attempted to do what Ministers normally do in budget speeches, which is to give some insight into the work of their respective portfolios and Ministries. Unfortunately, much of his time was taken up in a failed attempt to launch personal attacks against the hon. Leader of the Opposition and many other former Members of Parliament and Members of the People's National Movement. And he does this time and time again. And there are a few points that I really must be delayed in addressing at this time.

Mr. Speaker, he made a very curious point that the hon. Leader of the Opposition was somehow out of place to address the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, and I found that point very bizarre. He said that only the Prime Minister and only the President should address the citizens of this nation. But when he stood to the floor in the House of Representatives, maybe he does not even realize that is exactly what he was doing, addressing the nation, and any Member of Parliament, any public official has that right. That is not the purview of the Prime Minister, no matter how great the regard that he holds her in. So that was a false proposition, and one that we have to reject.

Mr. Speaker, he went on to say that the PNM only wants to build a "racket rail"—a "racket rail", and that is a false assertion. He may have forgotten—[*Crosstalk*] No, he never said anything about racket, that was Member for Oropouche East's comment. He did not tell us or remind us about their notion, the brilliant notion, of a rapid bus system that they floated to us a few months ago. Mr. Speaker, he did not tell us who—[*Interruption*]

Miss Hospedales: The rapid bus, yes.

Dr. A. Browne:—was going to import and install all of these mysterious GPS systems in these hundreds of buses, and in these hundreds of police cars, et cetera, et cetera. [*Crosstalk*] And that is where the concerns of the citizens are, with regard to racket, and this Government appears to be experts at racket in whatever they seek to do.

Mr. Speaker, he surreptitiously and very quietly attempted to change the Prime Minister's figure. She referred several times to the issue of 6 per cent of the population—

Miss Hospedales: Where they get those—

Dr. A. Browne:—driving cars fuelled by premium gasoline. Now they realized the error of their ways, but they are not very good at admitting when they make—well, I do not even know if these are mistakes or attempts to deceive and mislead the population. So, they started off with this 6 per cent to seduce the population into a false sense of security. Not many of us are affected.

And then I listened closely to the Member for Oropouche East today. He said 6 per cent or thereabouts. In other words, he is giving himself and his Government a little more wiggle room for error.

Mr. Speaker, again, whether it is 6 per cent or six per cent or thereabouts, absolutely false once again. Not one of them to this point, and this is the Minister with responsibility for the environment, not one of them has offered us any analysis with regard to the environmental impact of the measures that they are offering in this year's budget. But the more intelligent citizens, the thinking citizens, are sitting up and looking at the implications of every decision.

So, whenever they announce one of these ad hoc decisions, they give an in-your-face reason, usually it is something like, "we helping poor people", or some sort of knee-jerk rationale. But just because they say that, does not mean that we have to believe that. Fortunately we have intelligent, thinking Members on this side of the House [*Desk thumping*] and the Leader of the Opposition gave us a good example of looking behind those headlines and identifying the true intention of the Members on the other side. So we have to look at everything that the Member for Oropouche East said with great attention.

Mr. Speaker, he then went on to give a long ramble about his Government being about efficiency—efficiency and transparency. Mr. Speaker, I do not know if anyone listening on this day, October 05, 2012—after what this Government has put the citizens of this country through—could take those words seriously at all.

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It appears that the only thing that this Government has done efficiently is to shuttle and shift that case with their rich friends through and through the courts of this country, and present them with an amnesty of sorts, which is a concern to civil society in this country.

The Member for Oropouche East went on to pretend that lands earmarked by the HDC for housing, before the election, somehow bound him—he was obliged to go in and attack those lands and pumpkins, with tractors, after the election, because of commitments made by the PNM Government before May 2010. Mr. Speaker, that is a very, very—*[Interruption]*

Hon. Member: State land.

Dr. A. Browne: State land—a very, very—*[Interruption]*

Hon. Member: That is private land?

Dr. A. Browne:—very curious twist of logic coming from a senior; a very, very, very, very senior Member of this UNC Government. *[Crosstalk]*

There were obligations made before the election, under the HDC, and somehow he felt obliged to start up that tractor and head into those fields—*[Interruption]*

Hon. Member: A year after the election.

Dr. A. Browne:—a year after the election, and he presented that somehow as something that we should accept as logical.

But, Mr. Speaker, let us look behind the headlines again because the truth is this Government, the Members of this Government—well let me say this Government—are masters of breaking their word and breaking contracts. *[Desk thumping]* They are specialists in that regard. They are the emperors of agreement breaking. *[Crosstalk]*

So, why was this obligation somehow so important that those agricultural fields had to be tractored at that time? Look at the contracts with the offshore patrol vessels. They had no hesitation in breaking those because of a political promise, and it is costing us as we speak.

Miss Hospedales: SAUTT.

Dr. A. Browne: Look at the people who were allocated and approved for housing before the election. Many of them have been dismissed and treated in a very shoddy fashion. Why did they not honour those commitments after the election? Look at all the self-help applications and forms that thousands of citizens had filled out, many of them appeared to have been totally discarded now,

and told you have to re-apply and so. No fault of the citizens at all you know, but that did not involve tractoring pumpkin fields, so, maybe they were not obliged to keep those agreements.

2.30 p.m.

Look at the way they violated the overall social contract with the citizens of this country and the oath to serve without fear or favour, affection or ill will. That is a contract as well that was made on election day, and already our citizens have concluded that this Government has violated its mandate and broken its word to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Those are the types of contracts the Government should be keeping as opposed to trying to justify the atrocious attack against the farmers by saying that the commitment was made before the general election.

The Member for Oropouche East went on, Mr. Speaker, and you would recognize that these are not personal attacks on the Member, for whom I have great respect, but I am looking at what he said, looking at how he represented the Government and trying to assess whether or not we can take them at their word in their public positions. The Member for Oropouche East complained bitterly, bitterly—high-pitched tones—about the cost of infrastructure for the Victoria Keys Housing Complex. He complained bitterly and he gave some astronomical figures, and I must admit I saw members of the media sit up and others sitting up and being very alert—high cost of infrastructure for the Victoria Keys Housing Complex.

But, Mr. Speaker, I want to ask, through you: when they came into office with this Member being the Minister with responsibility for housing, did they take the responsible actions that would have been required of them and for which they were elected? Did they rapidly finish that housing project and deliver it to the needy families of Trinidad and Tobago?

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Dr. A. Browne: Not at all. In fact, as the Member for Diego Martin West is saying, they went back into Victoria Keys, not to wrap up the project and deliver it to the needy families who are listening right now, but to spend even more millions tearing down walls, creating fancier bedrooms—one-bedroom and two-bedroom units—to escalate the cost so that persons would have to pay more. So that, instead of for needy families it would be for young professionals—and there was a whole scheme of justification, and then to come here after two and a half years, project still unfinished, families still without shelter, buildings still empty

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and, somehow, complain about the infrastructure cost before the general election.

Mr. Speaker, that is a classic example of UNC recklessness and irresponsibility [*Crosstalk*] towards the citizens of this country. [*Desk thumping*] They went back in, looking to waste even more money and they still have not finished it as yet. Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the citizens of the western peninsula, on behalf of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago from all constituencies, I am demanding that the Minister of Housing, Land and Marine Affairs stop tiptoeing around those unfinished housing projects, get those projects wrapped up and delivered to the citizens of this country. [*Desk thumping*] How dare he try to blame the Member for Diego Martin West for his own inefficiency after two and a half unbroken years at the helm of the Ministry?

So, Mr. Speaker, I believe that the Member for Oropouche East, a very courageous Member, actually did a disservice to the Government's budget presentation today, and he did a disservice to the efforts of the Minister of Finance and the Economy, in the heavy, personal nature of his contribution. There was nothing to edify the nation of Trinidad and Tobago; there was nothing to inspire confidence in the Government or the Government's plans for the next year, and there was nothing to edify this parliamentary Chamber. But there is one thing that we can predict—that when the Member for Oropouche East rises, there is going to be bacchanal, there is going to be odium, there is going to be controversy—[*Interruption*]

Miss Hospedales: Always! Always!

Dr. A. Browne:—there is going to be excitement; he has become somewhat of a specialist in that regard and I just hope that there are no Members of Parliament, especially the younger ones present, who feel that that is a good substitute for a proper contribution in the Chamber of Parliament, because it really is not. A super specialist in bacchanal, he gave us the cookies and the cookie monster and all those other things—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal: You remember? You remember? [*Laughter*]

Dr. A. Browne:—and that has imprinted on my mind, Mr. Speaker. [*Interruption*] He specializes in personal attacks. But, Mr. Speaker, that is the UNC and they are proud of it; they put more energy into blackening people's name than into trying to govern and administer this nation. That is where they put all their energy into. [*Desk thumping*] None of us should take kindly to the kinds of innuendoes that I heard floating around.

Mr. Speaker, I have to just make one last adjustment to what I heard from my colleague from Oropouche East. He started to use this thing about “con job” and,

again, always trying to connect the Member for Diego Martin West, who spoke before him—and “con man”, and always personal. But, Mr. Speaker, how dare this Government talk about con job in the national public? How dare they? What audacity! What audacity!

Mr. Speaker, I am not even referring to section 34, which I am sure we would hear about a little later on. What I am referring to is the perception that was presented to this population that Members of this Government were giving out of their pockets 5 and 10 per cent of their salaries since that general—[*Inaudible*—since that—exactly, exactly [*Crosstalk*] and, Mr. Speaker, it took the same investigative journalists that are under attack today to reveal that no money was being paid, while they were coming here and boasting about it. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Tell them.

Dr. A. Browne: And chiding—I mean, we were “bouffed”, Mr. Speaker—chiding the Opposition, because when they give they have to give publicly. They have to give publicly. Chiding the Opposition—you all need to match us and so, match you, and they were not giving anything at all, Mr. Speaker.

Con job—reminiscent—no, in addition to that they went and secretly—as a Government, as a Cabinet—requisitioned state vehicles for the use of their Ministers; value exceeding 5 per cent of salary. So, give with one hand—they did not even give with one hand but they are taking back with two hands. [*Crosstalk*] That is the mentality of the United National Congress. How can the citizens ever forget or forgive that approach to governance? How can we forgive or forget that approach to Government? It is unforgivable, Mr. Speaker. Oh, what a Government we are saddled with in Trinidad and Tobago. So, they pretended they were giving away this 5 and 10 per cent, when it turns out that it was all smoke and mirrors. It reminds me of that notorious Caribbean Airlines cheque—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: “Ah”.

Dr. A. Browne:—that was given in a public forum with the media and television cameras all around; a huge white cheque—

Miss Hospedales: Just imagine that.

Dr. A. Browne: Oh yes, from the profits, CAL profits, because they are doing so well. I see the Member for Tunapuna is not here at the moment. It turns out that that was just a big piece of plastic and there was nothing at all behind it, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

It is just like their whole PR and campaigning that they continue to this day,

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just a lot of smoke and mirrors. There is nothing of substance behind it for the citizens. [*Desk thumping*] And then they talk about con job and so on, Mr. Speaker. There is very little—now, the Minister of Finance and the Economy did something very interesting: he set the nation up with talk about—maybe it is a good strategy, I do not know—but he talked about an austerity budget. He got people very anxious, raised stress levels, created a sense of uncertainty in the national population, and especially among the more vulnerable members of society, and then when the situation changed, came, and at the end of the day some citizens are saying that the budget, maybe, it was not as bad as we thought it was going to be.

So, maybe that was the technique of slipping this budget through—create a sense of fear and, then, maybe the budget was not as bad as we thought it was going to be. But I do not know if that is the response a Government should expect or wish for from a thinking population. You really would not want that to be the overarching response from your population: maybe it was not as bad as it could have been, because, really, you would want to inspire a collective effort from your citizens towards national development. So, that was the response.

There is one sector that appears to have greeted this budget with great enthusiasm and excitement, and that is the big business sector in Trinidad and Tobago. They seem to have gotten exactly what they wanted in this year's budget, and I think they had a friend—and there is nothing wrong with that—a good friend and colleague now sitting at the head of the Ministry of Finance and the Economy. So there were those consultations, the private sector was present. There were some clips in the national media, and they told the Minister what they wanted and it appears that for all intents and purposes, they got pretty much what they wanted this time.

But I am wondering, Mr. Speaker, if there were other types of consultations as well, because I did not see those on the information service clips that we saw with other sectors, with groups of stakeholders representing the ordinary man in the street in Trinidad and Tobago. I am sure that—first of all, those consultations did not occur with the same degree of thoroughness, and certainly, those people—John Q Public and Jane Q Public—did not get exactly what they wanted in this particular national budget. The approach seems to be the old trickle-down economics that we have seen time and time again, and it is back here with us. You give the big business what they want and automatically the humble citizens would benefit.

I do not believe, Mr. Speaker, that that is a holistic approach to national

development, and the overall response by the national community to these pronouncements has been one of uncertainty. This budget has only triggered uncertainty among our citizens. The budget has generated more questions than it has provided answers, and it has taken our nation to what I believe is a dangerous level of uncertainty in many respects. I will give a few examples—as I said, one of the questions that I believe has been generated by this budget: how can Government profess to lead our nation into the future when you are exerting such mental torture on the young people of Trinidad and Tobago?

Mr. Speaker, the vague pronouncements and the ominous rumblings that have been coming from this UNC on the issue of the funding of tertiary education, and the very vague and ominous references in the Minister of Finance's speech do nothing to allay the fears of the young people who are participating in higher education at this time. It has only heightened a sense of stress and uncertainty.

I cannot tell you the number of calls, emails and text messages that we as Members of Parliament have been receiving and, Mr. Speaker, I guarantee you, if MPs on the other side are working, and I am sure some of them are, they have also been receiving those same signals of concern. I believe that the creation of that type [*Crosstalk*] yes, that type of uncertainty is not responsible conduct of any Government. So, there is a degree of trauma among our young people at this time that the Government must move swiftly to allay and treat with countless emails, countless calls, trauma, confusion and a disconcerted response to the vague threats and ominous notions uttered by the Government against tertiary education.

I am not sure they understand the importance of ensuring that persons are able to pursue their dreams no matter what their economic means. I can tell you that the People's National Movement completely understands the importance of that to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: That is not—[*Inaudible*]

Dr. A. Browne: No, well you need to tell that to the young people, not to me.

Dr. Gopeesingh: All right!

Dr. A. Browne: I have finished that! It is those who are pursuing their tertiary education. Mr. Speaker, you cannot look at tertiary education—Member for Caroni East, you cannot look at it only from the perspective of economics or from the perspective of banking, as a banker; that is not going to work. That is not futuristic.

Mr. Speaker, the Government has presented no evidence whatsoever to

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support their strangling of the GATE funding. When I say no evidence, I do not want them to send Sen. Karim here to tell us how many passed and how many failed this year, or last year, or the year before; that is superficial; that is easy to do, but we need to go behind those headlines, go behind the superficial statistics.

The questions I have for this Government before they dare touch that important and precious programme for the future of the young people—these are some of the questions, Mr. Speaker.

Why are those who are failing, failing? That is number one. Do not just dismiss them like that. Number two, how many are single mothers or single parents? Some of them are pursuing one or two jobs while at the same time trying to better themselves and their family's future through tertiary education.

2.45 p.m.

What steps has the Government taken to provide counselling, support or other services to these students in the tertiary education sector before they bring down a hammer or raise some threshold that they decide in their meetings and start cutting our young people off? How can they make a decision so abruptly? When citizens would have engaged in their education process with a particular understanding and then midstream they are faced with the prospect of a changing environment, changing landscape—that was not the understanding with which they got involved in these programmes.

Mr. Speaker, my advice to the Government is, do not rush this one, please. Do all the other things. There are so many ad hoc, knee-jerk things that the Government is trying—this one is a little too precious to rush. I would recommend more discussions with youth representatives, the youth council—*[Interruption]*

Yes, the institutions themselves. Do not rush this one at all. Put measures in place first to try to minimize failure, to mitigate and assist these students, especially those in the circumstances I have been describing through my questions, before you even consider putting those bars in place, because at this stage—other questions: how many of these students have to deal with drug-infested neighbourhoods, houses and families or gang-infested streets, et cetera? All of these things have an impact on their rapidity of success, or the ease with which they can transition to a degree or a certificate, et cetera.

So let us not just come here like a banker and say, this amount is passing, this

amount is failing, if you fail “you gone”. That is not going to work and that is not going to take our nation where the PNM would like to take our nation, and that is to developed, enlightened, empowered status in the shortest possible time. This is serious business and my advice to the Government is, do not play games with the future of our young people. The young people are traumatized.

Mr. Speaker, casting no aspersions whatsoever, and I say with the greatest respect, there are Members on both sides of the House who may not have even succeeded the first time at the common entrance level. If this same brutal approach was taken then, where would we be today? Even at O levels or A levels. Where would we be today? So, please do not rush this one. Stop traumatizing them with these vague and ominous rumblings because it is not achieving anything; it is not achieving anything.

Whatever your plans are, phase them in slowly over a period of years. If it is about revenue, there are many, many other areas that we would be exploring that are more amenable to a draconian approach than this particular one, Mr. Speaker. I think I have made the point and there are a few other things I could say on it, but I am not going to belabour that particular point.

Mr. Speaker, another question arising from this year’s national budget—I am not seeing the Minister of Health. Does this Government recognize that a healthy nation begins with healthy families and healthy children, and the basic rule applies that we are what we eat? The Member for Diego Martin West—he is not a physician, but he hit on it very early in his discourse, because no one as yet—besides the sycophants in the rally or whoever—no one as yet—[*Interruption*]

No, there were not any there. I am sorry. I withdraw, Mr. Speaker, there were no sycophants there—[*Crosstalk*—citizens, great citizens.

Mr. Speaker, I do not want them to get distracted. You see how easily distracted they are. No one as yet has been able to make good sense of the decision to zero-rate the particular 7,000 list that the Government has been boasting about. I will tell you why I am saying that. These are not idle words. The fact of the matter is many of the foods that have now been zero-rated appear to have little nutritional value to our families and our children. Many of the foods that have now been zero-rated in this—impressive on the surface—blanket withdrawal of VAT coverage are imported processed foods, and the Member for Diego Martin West said it. Many of these foods—if VAT is reduced and the price is lowered—may pose a nutritional threat to some families and also a threat to local agriculture and local production.

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Mr. Speaker, again this is another area where I think the Government has not thought through their proposal at all, at all. It is not a proposal anymore. It is a decision, with a date. It is also temporary in nature and if the Prime Minister can be held to her word—that is a big “if”—but if this is a measure of caring for the poor and vulnerable citizens, why on earth is it temporary in nature? I hope the caring is not something to be extended and withdrawn.

So, it sounded good at the rally, and by all means expand the list of zero-rated food items as has been done several times in the past under several administrations. This thing is 26 years old now. It has been expanded over time. But this again, poorly thought out, non-strategic blanket approach may have consequences that the Minister of Health certainly is not prepared to deal with and I do not think the Minister responsible for agriculture is prepared to deal with either.

So again, it seems that nothing this Government does is properly thought through. Nothing this Government does is in the best interest of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. They seem to have a reverse Midas touch, and I am sure some of them actually feel that. Every topic that they deal with, everything that goes on, almost every Bill that is passed, it is a reverse Midas touch, everything turns to dust and coal and there is no success, there is no cheer, there is no encouragement for the citizens of this country.

The only thing they seem to be able to pull off with some success has to do with benefits to friends and other powerful people in the society. I am sure the Member for St. Joseph, wherever he is, must be shaking his head and maybe even the Member for St. Augustine. I see he is drawn deeper and deeper into that web. I do not think that I would trouble him too much at this point—deeper and deeper into that web, Member for St. Augustine. You are an experienced Member and I am sure you know how to handle the quicksand that you are being drawn into on a daily basis.

Mr. Speaker, on that topic I wonder if the Minister of Education—I see he is smiling brightly today. I wonder if the Minister of Education is aware—and this came to me just this morning—that at the cafeteria of some secondary schools now, special provisions are made, arrangements are made through Royal Castle, KFC and Mario’s Pizza to offer these fast foods—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: I am not aware.

Dr. A. Browne: Check a secondary school in Mucurapo and others in that locale—offer fast foods to be brought in and made available on the school compound for the students. [*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: [*Inaudible*]

Dr. A. Browne: “Just now, just now” because I want to make a broader point on health and then you might wish to intervene.

Mr. Speaker, that is in direct contradiction of some of the representations the Minister of Health has made right here in this honourable House, and I would like an immediate investigation because, again, healthy families, healthy children, healthy nation—[*Desk thumping*]*—*we are heading in the wrong direction. We are already under so much stress and mental trauma, let us not add nutritional trauma to that.

Now, the other thing that some of my colleagues and stakeholders have noted is that in an almost-two-hour speech the Minister of Finance and the Economy spent only a couple of minutes—and I am being generous in saying that—only a couple of minutes on the topic of the health of the nation of Trinidad and Tobago. If you go through the documents, if you go through the speech—and this again, people are listening and the budget is really a signal of the priorities—not everything can be addressed in great detail, but two minutes out of two hours really says something and indicate something to those who are listening. I am not surprised at all because when you look at what is happening in the health sector in this country it gives you cause for pause. If I am a new Minister of Finance and the Economy I might say listen, the best I am giving you is two minutes in this thing because your house is in a mess; your house is in disorder.

It could really have been summed up in one sentence: the UNC has been presiding over the decimation of the health sector in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Health care systems and health care workers, who are already under pressure—it is not an easy field at all. They are now stretched to the breaking point under this particular administration.

First of all we had a bizarre Minister—we all agree there is no controversy about that—[*Laughter*]*—*who did a poor job and that is why she was probably removed by the Prime Minister. Now, we have a sane Minister, a sane experienced Minister who is doing an even worse job for the health sector and that must be very disappointing. Mr. Speaker, this last year—[*Interruption*]

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Yes, I am just trying to be fair. This last year, the hon. Minister of Health, for whom I have great respect, made a very poor decision in antagonizing the nursing professionals of Trinidad and Tobago. I want to sound a warning to the Minister of Health today, on the *Hansard* record: Do not dare engage in political interference in the nursing sector of this country. [*Desk thumping*] Stop the uncertainty—there is that word again; stop creating uncertainty among our nursing students and our nursing professionals. I warn the Government that the nurses of this country have the power to bring the administration to its knees and to drag it out of office in a short space of time. So caution is the word of the day. I do not think the Member for Barataria/San Juan would want to be responsible yet again for the collapse of a UNC Government. Caution is the word—and I hope the Prime Minister would warn him.

There is unbearable uncertainty in our national STI service as well, Mr. Speaker. The Queen's Park Counselling Centre and Clinic was moved to a temporary location. It is now years that have passed—with two Ministers of Health and they are still—it was supposed to be months, it has turned into years. [*Dr. Khan enters the Chamber*] “Ahh”, welcome back, Mr. Minister. I wonder if the Minister is aware that there—at this particular clinic located on the grounds of the Port of Spain hospital, there is no toilet for clients and patients. There is no toilet for the use of clients or patients.

Mr. Speaker, that is unacceptable by any standards whatsoever. I see a lot of work—great refurbishment with the restroom facilities here, great, this is the Parliament. But come on. So those are supposed to be temporary facilities and nothing has been done to address the long-term needs. Even on a temporary basis you cannot have clients undergoing sensitive internal tests and examinations and then scrambling across the car park and up a hallway to use the restrooms at the Port of Spain General Hospital further. That simply is not acceptable.

Then there was an incident a couple days ago where a female patient called me in tears and said—to offer on additional slice of madness—it appears, and the Minister might have some more information on this one, but it appears that the toilets at the Port of Spain General Hospital are under repairs at this time. Yes, Mr. Minister?

Dr. Khan: [*Nods head*].

Dr. A. Browne: Are under repairs at this time.

Dr. Moonilal: You went and checked?

Dr. A. Browne: It is either you care or you do not care, Member for Oropouche East. This is not a joke or a game. What I am saying, Mr. Speaker, is that the female patient came to say—*[Interruption]* You know what she said? I believed her because I went and checked—*[Interruption]*

Dr. Moonilal: You went and checked?

Dr. A. Browne: I will tell you all about it. During working hours, during clinic hours, a team of male construction workers—this is the toilet facilities at our nation's general hospital in the capital city. Male construction workers are in that facility doing repair work at the same time that visitors and female clients have to use the restroom facilities. That is an easy fix and this has been going on—she said for the last month.

Mr. Imbert: A month to fix a toilet?

Dr. A. Browne: Well, that should be an easy fix—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Imbert: That is efficiency.

Dr. A. Browne:—at minimum that work should be done outside of clinic hours, outside of visiting hours, to give some semblance of dignity to the females of this nation.

3.00p.m.

We would not do that to female Parliamentarians, Mr. Speaker; we should not do it to the visitors at the Port of Spain General Hospital or the family members of patients. *[Desk thumping]* I say it because I am sure of it. That one I am sure about and I hope the Minister would take urgent action to correct that, Mr. Speaker, but unfortunately there is a lot more that has been going on in that regard.

The procurement system within our health services seems to have collapsed. I know we had a Bill here some months ago representing that the RHAs will be working together and so on, but, Mr. Minister, Mr. Speaker, even the small basic needed items seem to have evaporated—things like tissue for the staff to wipe their hands; soap, in some of the clinics and some of the wards. Something has gone bizarrely wrong within our health services and our wards and clinics are starved of the most basic equipment.

I know the Minister has a very nice list and lots of fancy equipment coming in and big procurement, et cetera, but the basic consumables—and at the same time under the CDAP programme, the same generic drugs that the Member for Caroni East used to come here and with thunderous clouds and ominous utterances tell us

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we are killing patients, those same generic drugs are still being provided under the CDAP programme—two and a half years with a medical doctor in the Ministry of Education—the same one—and another in the Ministry of Health. So, I do not know if the Minister of Education will ever clear the air on that; I do not know if he ever will do that, but that is the record of this Government when it comes to our health sector.

So no culture plate—

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

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

Question put and agreed to. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. A. Browne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And, again, I am not making any personal references. I do not think the Member for Barataria/San Juan is a bad person at all, but there is a lot of work—

Hon. Member: He is a good person.

Dr. A. Browne: He is a good person, but there is a lot of work to be done and there is no excuse for neglect; there is no excuse for complacency; and there is no cause for anyone to tap themselves on the back in the health sector, especially when it comes to primary care.

Mr. Speaker, examination lamps, absent in many clinics, even those in which sensitive tests are done again. Imagine doing a test for trichomonas vaginalis and the physician is not even able to visualize the cervix to take a proper sample. That is like sending our pilots to fly blindfolded. It is irresponsible; it is reckless and you do not get good results. So whatever is happening with the big, fancy equipment, you know, with the big importers and so on, fine, but the basic consumerables within the health sector—yes, it may never have been perfect, but I am saying that there is an ongoing crisis as we speak and it is affecting the well-being, comfort and welfare of the patients of this country.

Again, one lady communicated with me and said she comes up from south every day to visit her mother at the neurosurgery ward at the Port of Spain General Hospital, and we know why she has to come from south to Port of Spain to visit her mother in neurosurgery—because the service is not currently being offered in the southland. She has had to do this for the last three months. Why

does she have to come on a daily basis for three months? Because the staff is still awaiting a drill bit—a drill bit—for three months. We are not talking about botox or cosmetic surgery; we are talking about the need for lifesaving, life-improving and life-altering surgery. Something is wrong, and I am saying it again, with the procurement of basics within the health sector, Mr. Speaker; many of these things are lacking.

In the face of all of this, the Minister of Health comes here and mutters some words about, “We will build new hospitals here and new hospitals there.” Is there anything new in that?

Mr. Imbert: It was Finance.

Dr. A. Browne: The Minister of Finance and the Economy. There is nothing new in that. It would have to be described as tiresome repetition and clearly disconnected from the reality that there is a lot more work and a lot of different work to be done within the health services.

Mr. Speaker, the recruitment and retention practices are abysmal at this time within a number of our regional health authorities, and this simply pushes professionals further and further away. The degree of management incompetence has created bitterness, especially among some nurses. They do not have their contracts. They are not even able to get a bank loan or purchase a vehicle, or all the other things any professional will want to do, because of the chronic delays and management incompetence. That management crisis is plaguing our health sector to this day and I know the Minister is aware of that.

On top of that you have a number of—I would have to call them, political hacks, within the regional health authorities that are not focused on improving services but are really there to help get people in, and jobs for the folks and that type of thing, and it is getting worse. Mr. Speaker, there are some RHAs that are doing better than others in this regard, and I think the Minister is aware of the most notorious of the bunch.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Some people have to go.

Dr. A. Browne: The North Central Regional Health Authority is really the most notorious of the bunch, a highly politicized administration, especially in the human resources department, that most precious department that makes all of these decisions. I am not going to go into the details, but—I do not even know if the Cabinet is aware of some of the salaries being paid for consultants and other individuals within that regional health authority. And these consultants are

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making serious decisions, sometimes even trying to make clinical decisions, even though they are non-clinicians, and there have been letters back and forth within the health sector.

I have the feeling that the Minister of Health is suppressing all of that, hoping it does not come to the attention of the wider Government. But there is a crisis going on at North Central RHA. We are seeing the industrial action; we are seeing all the signs that something is very, very wrong in there and it requires urgent attention—urgent action—especially in the area of primary care.

Mr. Speaker, curious eventuality—and the Minister would give his own views on this whenever he speaks, if he does. In May of this year, I am informed—now, let me say like the Prime Minister, “I am advised”, that in May of this year—

Miss Roopnarine: Good role model.

Dr. A. Browne: Yes, indeed—the patient escorts at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex took industrial action, and guess what was done? Guess what was done, Mr. Speaker? Constituencies were called. UNC constituencies were called and told to send people to the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, and they were given white coats to put on. This is because the patient escorts, the people who push the trolleys and the wheelchairs and take care of patients in the elevators, were on industrial action. Constituency persons were mobilized—brought in. They just gave them white coats to fool the population. So you have your cousin and your daughter and grandchild being pushed on a trolley by strangers, persons who were not properly vetted; sharing an elevator, while in the wheelchair, with someone who just has on a white coat and a constituency—*[Interruption]* You would not want to believe that.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: That is not true.

Mr. Imbert: “Yuh doh believe dat?” *[Crosstalk]*

Dr. A. Browne: Ahh. You know, sometimes they say the truth is stranger than fiction. Mr. Speaker, anyway, I would not take them on because they still feel that section 34 was some sort of innocent typo. So I cannot trust their judgment at all; none of them; none of them. So let me move on. And I think they are trying to distract me now, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it has been one disaster after the other, especially in that North Central RHA. I am told that the basic services are in jeopardy. Pap smears are not being offered right now at some of the health centres. Mr. Minister, are you aware

of that? He is. He said yes. Post-natal clinics are being cancelled and there seems to be a free-for-all, and these are mandatory services under the annual services agreement with the Ministry of Health.

Mr. Speaker, primary health care appears to be slipping into ruin, and this is not about personalities but about proper systems for service to the population. There is great fanfare about additional hospitals and big equipment, but these hospitals would be staffed by whom? Who is going to staff them? Are we going to bring Minister Mc Leod in as a professional? Who is going to staff these new hospitals? I do not know, Mr. Speaker. The existing hospitals—[*Interruption*]—You know you could do it.

Mr. Mc Leod: You are there.

Dr. A. Browne: I am only one very small person. The existing hospitals are already understaffed and stretched to the limit, but we keep boasting year after year, “New hospital; children hospital with adult beds”, et cetera. Where are these—and they shut out the Cubans and then sheepishly came back around to them. [*Interruption*] Yes, to sneak them back into the country under the cover of darkness.

Mr. Speaker, is there any surprise with this ongoing crisis that we have this headline in today’s *Express*? Is there any surprise at all? “Unicef”—not Browne; it is not PNM: “Unicef: T &T infant and child mortality rates rising”. “Too many babies dying.” This is not a new phenomenon. [*Interruption*] You know I am an honest person. This is not a new phenomenon, but it is a rising phenomenon. It is an increasing phenomenon and it is something that we need to treat with as an emergency. It should be a priority and if it is a priority—if health is a priority—I would have expected just a bit more weight when it comes to the national business plan that was presented to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. We are falling short of our millennium development goals, Mr. Speaker, and health seems to not be taken seriously or treated as a priority.

I go right on to another priority of the citizens that is not a priority for this Government. People who were listening to the Minister of Finance and the Economy—what is he going to say about flooding? What is he going to say about the biggest natural disasters that have hit us over the last year?

Hon. Member: Nothing.

Dr. A. Browne: What did he say?

Miss Hospedales: Nothing.

Dr. A. Browne: Nothing! Nothing, Mr. Speaker! A total disconnect from the reality of the citizens. Nothing whatsoever! [*Desk thumping*] People in the western peninsula, people in Claxton Bay, people in other parts of the country, have been under assault and at least a signal that the Government is doing something in terms of the drainage emergency, or a revolution with how a run-off of water—[*Interruption*] Well, you will get the chance, my dear. You will get the chance. Flood mitigation—they heard nothing. From Cocorite to Barker Trace, Pioneer Drive, Morne Coco Road, Pinewood Gardens, Pearl Goodman Avenue, the Diego Martin Main Road and highway, all of these areas, they are under trauma. The rainy season is not over and there has been no sign from this Government that they are looking to deal with the big picture.

Yes, replace a fence and so on, but the major issues: blocked cylinders, narrow entrances to rivers and the other things that the residents know are causing the problems, the Government does not seem to have the ability or aptitude to treat with these issues. [*Interruption*] But you are in power now, so at least give an effort or show a signal that you would like to—because you all are the ones who made the promise to stop flooding in this country, you know, Member for Mayaro. Do not forget that. So let us be honest in this House. At least the citizens should hold you to your word. At least you should try. So do not try that here today, Member for—

Mr. Peters: “All yuh never promised?”

Dr. A. Browne: To solve flooding? Come on! Come on! Do not be ridiculous! We had a much smarter Minister of Works than that. [*Desk thumping*] He was a working Minister but he was not in the business of making foolish and idle promises to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Please, we have ruled on that unparliamentary—“foolish”.

Dr. A. Browne: Mr. Speaker, I pointed out to the current Minister of Works and Infrastructure, the sinkhole in the Diego Martin Highway near to Crystal Stream is developing as we speak. They sent a team. I do not know how much money was spent. They said they repaired it, Mr. Speaker, and now the entire width of the highway is collapsing—is a crater.

Mr. Speaker, this is serious. And again, it is the reverse Midas touch. Everything they touch seems to turn to dust. That walkover at Powder Magazine—Mr. Speaker, I have come here too many times now and referred to this—that was a flagship project of the Member for Chaguanas West, joined by the Member for Caroni Central. Fine, they made a big thing; they were not inviting the MP. All right, fine; water under the bridge, to coin a phrase.

3.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, to this day—[*Interruption*—2012—after the first day, it stopped working. They gave out these electronic cards, just to mamaguy people—still not working. What did they do? I complained about the shaft being open and children liable to fall in, they came and they put up a wooden partition to just block off the shaft so you cannot see it. That is now rotted away. The walkway is filthy with moss, mud and silt. It is not properly lit. There are no working elevators. Senior citizens and disabled persons for the last two and half years have been scrambling across the highway. After, they went and did a full media presentation: wheeled people across and made a pappyshow right there in Powder Magazine. Mr. Speaker, at least find a little money and help these citizens please. I am begging you.

Mr. Speaker, the Cocorite fisheries depot—lots of promises over the years. All they are asking for right now is to at least pave the access to the jetty because when the boats come in, to move that fish from the jetty to the platform it is such a long distance. They have these old shopping carts. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Peters: [*Inaudible*]

Dr. A. Browne: I know you do not care. [*Interruption*] Of course, that is why I am here, to represent the people—these old shopping carts. [*Desk thumping*] You are not here for that. You are not even going to speak in this debate. At least, if you do not have the big fancy infrastructure, fine, but for now at least pave the access and give them the ability to move the fish. Because, you know who is eating that fish? You and I, Mr. Speaker. It is probably ending up right here in the Parliament for Members to feed themselves at lunchtime and at tea time.

Mr. Speaker, come on, there is so much work to be done and I do not think this Government has, as yet, come to grips with the fact that they are responsible for alleviating the concerns of citizens and responding to the needs of citizens. Two and a half years have gone and it seems to be campaign after campaign, rally after rally, pretence after pretence, smoke screen after smoke screen.

I have a few minutes left and I want to address another issue. Mr. Speaker, there have been some suggestions in terms of what took place with the recent transgression of this Parliament—what I consider a transgression of the Parliament. There has been a bit of a scandal across this nation.

Mr. Imbert: Resulting with a fella sitting behind you.

Dr. A. Browne: Yes, but citizens remain very, very concerned about this. Some are concerned that we may not have learned the true lessons of section 34. [Interruption]

Dr. Moonilal: Standing Order 30—

Dr. A. Browne: What?

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: What is that?

Dr. Gopeesingh:—36(3), as well.

Hon. Member: “What you talkin bout”?

Dr. A. Browne: What?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member for Diego Martin Central, if you are not aware, a Motion has been filed by the hon. Leader of the Opposition to deal with this whole issue. I would like you to retain your fire for that particular Motion because we do not want to anticipate a matter that we have already accepted in this honourable House. So if you could refrain or en passant. You see, like what the hon. Leader did, he just passed, but do not stay on that subject at all.

Dr. A. Browne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I do not have time to stay on anything at the moment. What I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, is that I will not be making any direct reference to the conduct of the hon. Attorney General who is the subject of that particular Motion. I appreciate your guidance. You would see where I am going with this, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: You would exercise your discretion.

Dr. A. Browne: Yes, exactly. Mr. Speaker, I think the Parliament is aware that just focusing on the personalities is not going to get us where we need to go. Something went very, very, wrong in this country and the citizens remain traumatized to this day. I have a number of suggestions for the consideration of this Parliament that might help us to look more at the systems that resulted in what did happen, because some of the personality issues have been dealt with and I am certain that others will be dealt with. I want to congratulate the Leader of the Opposition for his very firm stance and leadership on this entire matter. [Desk thumping]

Mr. Speaker: Again, I just want to guide you. All those wonderful suggestions, in terms of how we improve our systems, in terms of dealing with the issue that you refer to, could I ask you to just hold your fire and when that Motion comes formally before this House, you will have the opportunity to deal with

whatever systemic changes you would like to recommend. I do not want us to get into a matter that this House has agreed to in terms of debating and a date has been set for that full debate. I do not want anticipation. We will be violating the rules of our Standing Orders. So, if you could stay clear of that area and maybe go on to some other subject, I would appreciate it very much.

Dr. A. Browne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would have to be guided by your interpretation of the Standing Orders in this regard. Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day—I noticed the Member for Oropouche East was quiet all through, but he got very excited at that particular point, so I am sure he is in for a torrid time when the Motion does come up.

Dr. Moonilal: Oh yes, yes.

Dr. A. Browne: I could assure him of that. Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day, I can tell this Government and this Prime Minister and even this Parliament, that yes, while the budget may not have been as painful as some people thought it would be—at least on the surface—once again they have missed an opportunity to signal to the citizens that they are serious about the governance of this country. They have missed an opportunity to signal a connection with the people's priorities, and they have missed an opportunity to address the real burning issues that confront the citizens. I gave some examples of those priorities and burning issues that are confronting much of the citizens. And much of the pain in this budget is still to come. It lies in those certainties, the gaps and vagueness and the ominous rumblings that we have heard from the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy.

Mr. Speaker, the current Minister of Finance and the Economy has aptly—
[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Fifteen more minutes.

Dr. A. Browne: Fifteen, okay—and ably taken up the baton handed to him by the hon. Member for Tunapuna. That is a baton of record deficits in the economy of Trinidad and Tobago and he has continued that record with great aplomb while making meaningless promises about balancing our budget in three years' time. Not a single citizen believes that particular promise, and I include the Minister himself in that because he is a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago. Not one citizen believes that that is going to happen. We all know that it cannot happen under the stewardship of the United National Congress.

So, Mr. Speaker, this is what we are faced with today, responses focused on personalities and attacks on former parliamentarians and Cutex and so on and so forth. Citizens struggling to cut through the smoke, struggling to recognize that

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they have a Government that really does not care about them. Citizens struggling to get through each day under the cloud of uncertainty about what transgressions will this Government commit next. That is the big question. What transgression will they commit next?

Mr. Speaker, the citizens try to keep their sanity and sobriety as the sense of betrayal weighs heavily on their backs on a daily basis. Every day they go outside and they check their Nissan Tiidas to see if they have turned into BMWs, Audis or Mercedes Benz, as the Prime Minister seems to feel. They check their whackers to see if suddenly they have turned into premium pieces of machinery. *[Interruption]* They were made by Mercedes.

Hon. Member: *[Inaudible]*

Dr. A. Browne: Yes. You do not even know, but the yard workers and other humble individuals are complaining now that their whackers are designed specifically for premium gas. *[Interruption]* No, you do not believe that. Okay. Good.

Mr. Peters: No, wheelbarrows and all designed for premium gas.

Dr. A. Browne: Mr. Speaker, this is a callous Government. This is a Government that simply does not care. This is a Government that has made a decision that is not based on good evidence or advice—*[Desk thumping]*—and they are sticking by their guns no matter what. That is what we are dealing with. So the citizens are struggling.

They come outside in Diego Martin and they look heavenwards every day and every night hoping that they do not get a drop of rain that could add up and turn into a torrent to flood away the empty promises about dealing with flooding.

Mr. Speaker, they approach the supermarkets with caution and trepidation, checking cautiously to see if the price of anything that they consume, if the price of anything that they eat, is really going to fall because there is great uncertainty. This is a budget of uncertainty. This is not a budget of caring. *[Desk thumping]* This is now a nation of uncertainty under this particular Government and we have been given a budget of uncertainty.

Mr. Speaker, we are also alarmed by the intimidation of any member of the media, particularly investigative reporters, and now the intimidation of religious leaders. We are alarmed by that. That is serious. How dare any public official try to stop a priest from speaking out on national issues? *[Crosstalk and desk thumping]* How dare they? Is this really happening in Trinidad and Tobago, the

supposed land of freedom? How could the Prime Minister remain silent when those types of actions are taking place? Has this Government never heard of Martin Luther King, Jr., have they never heard of Jean-Bertrand Aristide, have they never heard of the Dalai Lama, Mahatma Gandhi and all the other religious figures who saw it as their duty to have a voice in national affairs? I am saying that the same religious leaders who are under attack by this Government are simply carrying out that same national duty and responsibility that those others have had.

In the midst of all of this uncertainty there is a growing sense that this level of UNC corruption, incompetence and “visionlessness” cannot last forever. It cannot last forever. The actions and utterances of the Government have resulted in stress and trauma at increasing levels. [*Interruption*] You are damaging the social fabric of our nation and no hampers and cards and photo opportunities and relabelled programmes will ever be able to repair the damage that you are doing.

In the midst of all of this, Mr. Speaker, there is a growing level of certainly as well. Yes, there is tremendous uncertainty. This is a budget of uncertainty. But, there is a growing certainty, Mr. Speaker, that by the grace of God, at the next possible opportunity we will have a new Government, one that really cares about the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Sport (Hon. Anil Roberts): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to let all our CEPEP contractors know and the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central, that the STIHL which is one of the main machines that we use for cutting and so on—the whackers—it states here under a website:

Use a minimum of 89 octanes.

Let me let you know that super is 92 and our premium unleaded is 94. So just to let you know about that.

Secondly, Diego Martin Central, I know that you are an honest gentleman and you may want to pay attention—because I know you are honest—and when I show you something I think you may want to stand and apologize because I know you are a man of good character. You made a point that all of us on this side were defrauding the population and saying that our salaries were going towards the Children’s Life Fund when it was not so, and that was not true. I have a payslip. I never had a payslip before, being on Spalk and on radio and coaching. I never had a payslip but I have a payslip here. I have a lot of them in the drawer. I grabbed

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one from the 31/08/2011. Now, when you look, after they have taken out all of this tax, about 19,000 in all kinds of things—\$7,000 in PAYE and so on, you see Children FD, right here, 1,650. a month. One thousand six hundred and fifty—
[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Awwwww.

Mr. A. Roberts:—has been coming out every single month. [*Desk thumping*] Now, where it goes? Where it was Ministry of Finance and if there was legislation? Let me repeat again—I know you do not want to listen—I got them to dig in my drawer, I just put the payslip there, they got one out from the 31/08/2011. If you would like me to get one from June 2010, I could go and find that one for you. So, I am just showing you that from the very onset, 1,650 a month—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Browne: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. A. Roberts: This is not the onset but I am saying if you want me to go to the June one or whenever that decision was taken, I could find it. I am just showing you that every month 1,650 comes out.

So please, let us not tell the population “ting”, especially about children and so on. Come on man! Now—[*Interruption*]

3.30 p.m.

Dr. Moonilal: He wants to apologize.

Hon. A. Roberts: You want to apologize?

Dr. Browne: I would like further clarification if the Minister is so willing to provide. Is it also correct that the Cabinet did not allocate state vehicles for the use by Ministers which exceed the value of that?

Hon. Member: He is talking about the children’s fund.

Hon. A. Roberts: Thank you. You see I gave you a chance to be a man and you decided to ignore it. Now, moving right along to the hon. Member for Diego Martin West, “Diego Martin West” came out here and accused the sport company of being, and I quote, a den of iniquity because the sport company had rushed across to the Eddie Hart grounds, took it over and decided to give out maintenance contracts of hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Let me just say to the hon. Member, at no time, past, present or in the future, has the sport company had any authority or any power over the Eddie Hart ground. So it was totally false and misleading. Totally false! The Eddie Hart ground is under the auspices of the Ministry of Sport, not the sport company.

Furthermore, I have a letter here where he went on to say that the sport company took it over and decided to take the maintenance contracts from the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation in order to give some company a contract.

I have a letter from the Chairman of the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation, dated June 27, 2012—just a few months ago.

Dear hon. Minister,

Re: Eddie Hart Recreational Ground, Orange Grove Road, Tacarigua

For more years, the Councillor of the Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation has had to attend to complaints about the unsatisfactory conditions at the Eddie Hart recreational grounds even though these grounds do not fall under the purview of the corporation.

On a fairly regular basis, the TPRC maintenance crews are dispatched to clean and cut the area as a service to the community. Notwithstanding, we are hereby requesting the Ministry to undertake regular maintenance of these grounds.

Now—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: They have PNM members on that committee.

Hon. A. Roberts: That is all right—the Ministry of Sport. Then the Ministry of Sport, the public servants, went through their process and I was advised that five contractors tendered and the lowest bidder was selected. So I would prefer if you do not bring public servants into the debate in the Parliament and cast aspersions on them because as you wilfully well know, in a Ministry under their processes, a Minister does get involved in carrying out contracts for maintenance and so on. So please do not mislead. And to all the people in the sport company, I apologize on your behalf, Member for Diego Martin West because I know you do not have the testicular fortitude so to do. So I shall do it.

Hon. Member: Send him to the privileges.

Hon. A. Roberts: We then move on. Yes, I will. Since he does not want to apologize, we have to take it further. But it is clear now—[*Interruption*] It is privilege. Well yes, we will have to do it. With clear reference to the Member for Diego Martin West, I now understand when the Member for San Fernando East said he would run down every issue like a “pot hound”, better known as a Caribbean terrier, chasing anything that moves. I now understand what the Member for San Fernando East meant in referring to the Member for Diego Martin West.

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He then went on now—he was having a great day. He “pelt all kind a stone and all miss”. He then went on to say that the Ministry of Sport was given by the Minister of Finance 500-and-something million dollars and how it was so disgraceful that the footballers cannot get any funding, and there was a letter from the Minister of Works and Infrastructure at the time, the hon. Jack Warner, the Member for Chaguanas West, saying, stop the funding, and since then he instructed the Minister of Sport to stop funding and funding stopped. A lovely fairy tale. There is only one person on this side who can instruct any Minister, and that is the Member for Siparia, the hon. Prime Minister [*Desk thumping*] and, by extension, the entire Cabinet. Since he wants to go into it now, let me let you know that over the last few weeks, about four and a half weeks, there has been a gentleman who was the Chairman—“well, leh meh reverse a bit.”

As this Minister came in, there were issues about the transparency and accountability of the Trinidad and Tobago Football Federation. Being a Government way back, if you pay attention—not now, if you pay attention—you see, you do not pay attention. “Dat is why yuh doh know when other people coming for yuh leadership seat.” Now, way back in 2010, there were issues about the Trinidad and Tobago Football Federation and this Minister and this Government believes in transparency and accountability and we believe in the value of taxpayers’ money, unlike those on that side. That is why they are there and will remain there.

So what we did was, since there was an issue, in order to fund our players—whether they are young ladies, our national teams and development and so on, and we could not in good conscience give money to an organization that was not, in the eyes of the population, accounting properly—we created an independent authorization committee which was chaired by one Mr. Tony Harford. At that time the World Cup qualification was going on and we said, okay, this authorization committee will now be accountable for the public funds. Mr. Tony Harford was the chairman, so immediately some \$11 million was disbursed for that failed qualification World Cup 2014.

Unfortunately, when Mr. Harford presented to the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Sport, who is the accounting officer, the accounts of the \$11 million in January, on March 17, the Permanent Secretary wrote to Mr. Harford stating that there were some discrepancies and lack of information, indicating that any further payments will be on hold until such proper accounting processes, paperwork and invoices were given. That was March 17. On July 06, again, the Permanent Secretary wrote to Mr. Anthony Harford stating that he still had not presented the accounts and invoices as requested.

Again, on September 12, another letter here from the Ministry of Sport by the Permanent Secretary stating—I must quote from this one because it was right after this letter, Sir, around that time, September 12, that Mr. Tony Harford went all about from every media station, starting with i95 on to WiSports, all over the place, *Express, Newsday* you will see, and for once I am learning from you, Mr. Speaker, I decided not to say a word. I was not planning to, but since the Member for Diego Martin West has brought it out and said that this Government does not like football and is thwarting our senior team from playing in the Caribbean Cup, I have to bring it out here. So please forgive me.

On September 12, a letter was written to Mr. Tony Harford by the Permanent Secretary—not the Minister. The Minister does not get involved in accountability and accounts and so on—and the letter goes as follows:

In conducting the annual audit of the Ministry of Sport by the Auditor General, it was disclosed that there are significant discrepancies in statement of expenditure which was submitted with regards to the TTFF marketing invoice No. 2001, TTFF MKT 100. It has been noted by the Auditor General, Financial Instructions 1965, section 56 and Financial Regulation 1965, section 76(1), that the following financial irregularities have occurred—this is September 12, just last month:

1. An incomplete financial statement has been submitted for the sum of \$11 million paid to your organization—

“So when yuh get ting from Tony Harford, you shouldn’t just come here and talk. Don’t run down every ambulance yuh see.”

—by the Ministry of Sport. A financial statement totalling 5,061,933.25 was submitted creating a statement of expenditure difference of 5,388,066.75, which is yet to be submitted by your organization.

2. On the statement of expenses of the amount allocated to the TTFF coaching staff, officials, players’ salary, match fee was listed at 2,000,579. However, the amount reflected on the statement attached was 2,000,449. As such, there is an unexplained difference of \$129,970.

In light of the above, the Ministry of Sport requests the following information at your earliest convenience.

Now the information has not come. It did not come, but Mr. Harford went talking, talking, talking and has led other people to talk and make mistakes.

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It goes on, October 01 now, from the Permanent Secretary. That is recently.

I wish to accept receipt of your letter. An examination of the information provided shows that the required invoices, bills and receipts were not—I repeat, were not—included with the 24 items of expenses listed in your statement.

The Ministry of Sport would like you to provide the required invoices, bills and receipts to cover expenditure of \$5,388,066.75 as requested in his September 12 letter.

So, here we are today, the information, the accounts and the invoices are not being given in. Furthermore—you would like this one—when the Auditor General went through the statements, it was seen that Mr. Anthony Harford is the director of All Sport Promotions and Mr. Anthony Harford, as head of the authorization committee and the TTFF marketing, when given \$11 million of taxpayers' money, he went on to pay himself from himself to All Sport Promotions the sum of \$936,250.

For promotions, he paid himself to himself. These are all the things that were being dealt with, and from that issue the TTFF as of yesterday, since Mr. Harford was not informing the others, the Permanent Secretary then wrote to Mr. Groden, the general secretary, yesterday, giving him all of this information and telling him, “Listen, these things have not been dealt with for a very long time.”

Furthermore, it is very interesting to note that this morning—because everybody likes to print stories when the Minister did not say a word—the Trinidad and Tobago team, its manager and through the TTFF without the interference of Mr. Harford—who has now been put on the side because the Auditor General is waiting on his information—the tickets, the flights and all the participation necessary for our national team will be seen about by the Ministry line by line. So Trinidad and Tobago is going to the Caribbean Cup with value and with taxpayers' money being spent properly [*Desk thumping*] and I wish Mr. Anthony Harford all the best.

“Ah was waiting fuh next week, but you bring it, so ah ha' to talk now.” So you could get up and apologize anytime. Anytime you want to apologize you could, you know. Change the PNM now. [*Interruption*] You did not ask. You accused. You accused, you did not ask. If you asked, you know I love to answer questions. You did not ask, but it is all right. “You could apologize when ah see yuh parking up de hill by meh fadder. When yuh move de car, you go apologize to meh.” [*Laughter*] Let us move on.

Dr. Rowley: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. A. Roberts: “You wah? Taking me to court? Is two years ah waiting.”

Dr. Rowley: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. A. Roberts: “All right, but ah waiting to go to court long time. Look meh clothes. I eh looking good? All yuh take ah picture. [*Laughter*] You see, court clothes. I in Parliament, thank you. Doh start me, yuh know. Ah on him right now, not you.”

Now, let us go back through some of what the hon. Member for Diego Martin West tried to do in the budget and it was not much. My colleague dealt with GATE, so I would not deal with that. It was amazing though that the Member for Diego Martin West, who has championed himself to the population as a corruption buster, the man who brought Calder Hart to the attention of the Member for San Fernando East in August 2003, would talk about the rapid rail, and unfortunately he did not really know. The Member for Diego Martin North/East has the full story. You did not know the full story because first and foremost, the population, the JCC, all the local contractors were up in arms with this rapid rail. The country did not know whether it was 7 billion, 12 billion, 18 billion, 19 billion or 24 billion.

3.45 p.m.

They said—and right here on this side, the Member for Diego Martin North/East was on this side and he was in the Leader of Government Business chair and he said to all those local contractors and so on, “Sour grapes, yuh didn’ get it so yuh vex. There has been a feasibility study done and we are moving forward.” Next thing you know, \$485 million later that was the feasibility study, stage one. [*Interruption*] Pre-feasibility, but they sit down here and talk about deception and untruths; I would not use that word that they used, hon. Speaker. Then, the Member for Diego Martin West also went on to say that no tendering went through. Did he not know? Did you not read the papers?

Dr. Rowley: I did not say that.

Hon. A. Roberts: You said it was waiting to go for tender; you did all the pre-feasibility and so on. You want to clarify?

If you all remember, back in the day there were some full-page advertisements put in the papers by Bombardier, a company that had done rapid rails all over the place; in Europe and so on. When the Member for San Fernando East, somehow,

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went on a Bombardier flight around St. Lucia and Antigua, and in the *Express*, Monday morning, we saw a picture of the jet, what he had for lunch, who sat next to him, what temperature it was and what altitude the flight went by.

When we checked those advertisements, paid advertisements by Bombardier, they were very upset because, they said, that in the tender process the committee was told by someone on high, by somebody, not to consider dual propulsion because their trains—their technology—are dual propulsion. So, “when electricity go, yuh flick a switch and yuh put in diesel”. Whether subsidized or not, you turn on and the diesel will take you on your way. A very good idea, especially in Trinidad and Tobago because we do not want people getting stuck on the way to town.

But, somebody told this committee that dual propulsion was not industry standard, therefore, do not consider that technology; judge the bids without that. All of a sudden, Bombardier, which was up here, fell down just to about here, behind a consortium called Trinitrain. Bombardier went on to complain to deaf ears, but then, luckily, May 24 came and that thing was put aside.

So, Member for Diego Martin West, find out a little more before you put your brand new PNM into the old Calder Hart/Uthara Rao kind of thing. *[Interruption]* “Yuh was wondering? Yuh find ah take long? Good, ah go stay dey too, since yuh like it.” *[Laughter and desk thumping]*

Miss Mc Donald: Do not forget the curlers and the Cutex.

Hon. A. Roberts: When Karen took out her money and forgot to tell you to take out yours? *[Laughter]* Okay, but do not worry we will get you. “Just leave meh alone nah, ah going good. Why all yuh so?” *[Crosstalk]*

Moving right along now, having dealt with the hon. Member for Diego Martin West—Mr. Speaker, I am trying my best. There is a little constituent—a little old lady, she is about 82, from D’Abadie/O’Meara and she said, “Anil, ah love yuh, yuh know, but try to talk a little softer.” I am trying; “ah does bawl”, yes, but they are disturbing me. You see, look? Now, some of them down there look “unbewievable”, Sir, but I am trying to talk softly. Could you tell them to stop disturbing me, please? Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Do I have your protection, Sir?

Now, I sat in amazement as the Member for Diego Martin West attacked our current Minister of Finance and the Economy, hon. Larry Howai, a man of incredible intelligence and academic qualifications. *[Interruption]* I am trying my best, Mr. Speaker. I hope the Member for Port of Spain South can put that scarf a little higher up because she is disturbing me. *[Laughter and desk thumping]*

Mr. Speaker, I listened in amazement. The hon. Larry Howai, a well-renowned, well-qualified, educated Trinbagonian, a man who saved Workers' Bank after its collapse under that regime at another time—when thousands of people were going to lose their jobs, he came on, he saved the bank, he saved the jobs and he created First Citizens Bank into one of the strongest assets of this country and the Caribbean at large. [*Desk thumping*] He is involved in charity, sports and sponsorship. People are now fighting to buy a piece of that. I am sure some of those boys over there are lining up to buy some of that 20 per cent.

How could the Member for Diego Martin West criticize and use such harsh language about such a patriot and an intelligent man when his last Minister of Finance was “Taxsheira”, a lady who was an owner of shares? You know it must come—that is your Minister of Finance, compared to ours. She was an owner of Clico/CL Financial, 10,500. She did not tell anybody and purported to negotiate on our behalf. [*Interruption*] This is budget. This is a response to the Opposition.

You are talking about Tesheira, who was an attorney, who used to teach in Hugh Wooding, who never did anything in finance, accounts or macroeconomics, nothing. She wrote a book on ethics and forgot to read it. I heard it is on Amazon's best-fiction list. [*Interruption*] A book on ethics. Hear who you had before that: you had former Minister Conrad Enill, then Mariano “Barbados Bank” Browne, then the Member for San Fernando East himself—yet the Member is complaining about this genius of a man.

Minister, I humbly apologize for any words of hurt that the Leader of the Opposition—that geologist, the Member for Diego Martin West—said to you today. I humbly apologize.

Dr. Rowley: You talking about the man, what about the budget?

Hon. A. Roberts: You spoke about the man, Sir. Let me tell the Member something—Mr. Speaker, I do not know, he spoke about smoke and mirrors, “now he getting mirror he frighten; de only thing dat we look alike is de same bald head buh it look good”. I take that back because the Speaker is looking like us too, but I would take it back, Mr. Speaker. [*Laughter*]

Yes, let us go to talk show, now. The theme of the Member for Diego Martin West's contribution was “You cannot trust those on that side, they are untruthful, dishonest and you cannot trust them”, but nobody on this side attempted to start a sheep farm in Tobago without the requisite permission. None of us did that.

Mr. Speaker: Member, please, I have made it very clear that any attempt at charging any Member on a personal basis, in terms of conduct, please bring a

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substantive Motion. Do not use the veil of a budgetary debate to attack the integrity or conduct of any Member of this honourable Parliament. So, could you continue but leave out what you were going to utter.

Hon. A. Roberts: Mr. Speaker, I was not referring to anybody specifically.

Mr. Speaker: I understand where you were heading.

Hon. A. Roberts: It was en passant. All right, moving right along, I would also tell you that I have never—[*Interruption*]. Moving right along, we are dealing in this Budget—I would like to link it because I am following on from the contribution of the Leader of the Opposition—where he went on to attack individual Members on this side about their credibility and trustworthiness.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, you had to stand up and ask him not to use unparliamentary language. So, I am responding to that element of the Member's contribution when he dealt with our honesty, integrity and trustworthiness; in his opinion, we have none. So, Mr. Speaker, please, if he says that we have none, I have to be able to show that we have some and that, maybe, some of them over there may have none, but we would follow that. [*Interruption*] Leave your sheep alone? All right, we would get a place for them at Landate one by one.

We must move on very quickly because—[*Interruption*] Yes, they are going to learn right now. They are going to learn something right now.

There are two lovely buildings down in the west. Unfortunately, now they are under a little pressure; a lot of citizens are having a hard time knowing whether they are actually going to get into their luxury condominiums down there at the Renaissance.

We must realize that when aspersions were cast on the Member for Oropouche East, the Member for Caroni East and so on, let us remember that a former Minister, John Rahael, was put up to be chairman by the Member for Diego Martin West. Back when he was Minister of Integrated Planning he had the power, and so he did grant outline approval to that project despite many objections from citizens, residents, the codicil that existed for the area and so on.

The Member for Diego Martin West found it to grant outline approval for the son of his desired chairman; no problem, people are like that. Right now, people are suffering and even Mr. John Rahael and Joseph Rahael are suffering because the bank is calling for their investment.

Let us flash forward now to Tobago. The Tobago House of Assembly election is coming. Recently, I had the opportunity to read a column from one Reginald Dumas, a very respected citizen in this country. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I, too, am being disturbed by the front bench of the Opposition. I keep saying that we can whisper in undertones, but I am hearing everything and you are disturbing the proceedings. So, allow the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara to speak in silence, please. Thank you

Hon. A. Roberts: Thank you, Sir, but it looks like we are getting déjà vu all over again. We have the Leader of the Opposition right here in charge. He recently wanted John Rahael to be the chairman; he did not win out, but no big thing, and we know about the Renaissance.

Now, in Tobago there is a little parcel of land and the Tobago House of Assembly bought this parcel of land—some three acres—[*Interruption*] The Tobago House of Assembly is under the People's National Movement which falls under the Leader, the Member for Diego Martin West.

Hon. Member: For a short time.

Hon. A. Roberts: The land—the three acres—was purchased for \$12 million by the Tobago House of Assembly from a company called Dankett Limited. Guess what: two of the directors of Dankett Limited are one Joseph Rahael, son of John Rahael, and one Anthony Rahael, brother of John Rahael. This is where the story gets very interesting. So, the Tobago House of Assembly pays \$12 million for three acres of land; six days later the Tobago House of Assembly leases the land to a company called—let me get this company correct on this record—Milshirv Properties Limited, for 199 years at \$10 per year—six days later. Now, what happened after that? Follow me carefully.

Hon. Member: Oh Lord.

Hon. Member: How many zeroes they missed out.

Hon. A. Roberts: Now, what happened after that? Let me just say to you that Dankett Limited had the land first—that was Joseph Rahael and Anthony Rahael; the THA bought the land for \$12 million, six days later they leased it out to Milshirv Company whose director is Joseph Rahael. Now hear what goes on—the story gets even worse.

So, this company now, Milshirv, says, “We telling you”—the THA did not go and say, “Listen, we need office space, you know, let us tender out and take some requests for proposals” and so on. No, they—Joseph Rahael, son of John Rahael—“come and tell them: ey, all yuh need office space, buy my land, lease it to my next company; ah have a next company called Amera that I am a director of; ah will give you the designs and you now pay me, over the next 20 years, 1.2 million a month.”—

Hon. Member: Collusion.

Hon. A. Roberts: For the next 20 years, \$320 million.

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Now, this was done—“Allyuh feel it bad? It get worse.” Now, they said that—the THA said, now that they did this 199-year lease so that Rahael and “dem” could go and get—secure some financing so that the THA would not have to put a cent. But, lo and behold, somehow when this lease agreement was done with Rahael—the same Rahael of Renaissance down in the west, “the same Rahael son who Diego Martin West wanted as chairman”—the PNM in charge of the THA. Now, when they say they did not want any money, lo and behold, the THA agreed to pay 18 months up front—\$21.64 million up front put in a First Citizens account and the THA and Milshirv will be the signatories on that account.

Hon. Member: Really.

Hon. A. Roberts: “Oh, you see how quiet allyuh get now! Da is what ah like, ah could talk soft.” I could talk soft with friend and family—you see, you did not know—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Trust and deception!

Hon. A. Roberts: Trust and deception. This is the last piece the PNM “have” in the whole country—the last little piece, Tobago.

Hon. Member: “Dey losing dat!”

Hon. A. Roberts: And this is what they are doing in Tobago! This is why we call on Orville London to call the election fast [*Desk thumping*] because Ashworth Jack and the TOP are waiting to save the last piece. [*Desk thumping*] I could see the pain in some of “allyuh” face because this is upsetting. It will be upsetting to anybody. Let us go through it quietly and quickly one more time.

Hon. Member: “Yeah, one more time!”

Hon. A. Roberts: Three acres of land owned by Rahael, the THA is PNM, “the Leader of the Opposition and Rahael very close; dai pardner.” [*Interruption*]

Dr. Rowley: “Wey yuh calling my name for?”

Hon. A. Roberts: “How your name call?”

Dr. Moonilal: Forget it.

Hon. A. Roberts: Are you—okay, let me continue. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Do not call the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. A. Roberts: But you in the story. You are the story. [*Laughter*] Okay, the Leader of the Opposition, preferred choice—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Do not impute improper motives and please address the Speaker.

Hon. A. Roberts: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition, it is well noted in the media, his number one choice for Chairman of the PNM is John Rahael, his colleague from a former Cabinet. Now, it is also noted that Joseph Rahael was in the Renaissance project when they got the outline approval.

So here it is now, Mr. Speaker, the THA going on very well—Orville London, Anselm London—they have a lot of problems because they “cyah finish ah project”.

Hon. Member: Cousins.

Hon. A. Roberts: They are cousins, and it is just dozens of millions overspending all over; just millions overspending, and here it is Rahael comes up to the THA—[*Crosstalk*] “Because I have part Tobagonian so I want to know if we could do that too, ah go send meh brother.” Go to the THA and tell “dem, aye, allyuh need space. Allyuh need office space, man. I have some land here, three acres, buy it nah.” The THA say, “Yeah, dat sounding good; we need space. Take \$12 million.”

Six days later, the THA now who owns this \$12 million parcel leases it back to Rahael in a different company called Milshirv at \$10 a year for 199 years, Mr. Speaker, and then Milshirv tells the THA, “Listen, ah have ah company called Amera which Joseph Rahael is a director. Look, we have designs for a office. We going tuh go with Milshirv. We going tuh build this building of 82,654 square feet, and we going and lease it back to you at 1.2 million a month for 20 years”—320 million, and they have the audacity to talk to us about dishonesty, about corruption! The PNM is the same! Calder Hart still here! Uthara Rao still here! Ken Julien still here! The PNM cannot change! [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Shame on you! Let them call elections now!

Hon. A. Roberts: Now, the Minister of Finance and the Economy—brilliant budget. It was so brilliant that the Leader of the Opposition could not deal with any of the major points. The macroeconomic, he said, “Oh, the growth was

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projected at 1.2 and therefore that is a wrong projection”, as if the Minister of Finance and the Economy “does siddown” by himself in a room somewhere in the Renaissance Towers and say, “Leh me project this”. There is a process, there are technocrats, there are experts qualified who look at all the indices and project because, in a government, all this time, you do not have the actual figures because, obviously, the last two weeks and so on would not have been computed while the budget was being done, the last month or six weeks. So you have to estimate, from the trends and so on that were going, what would happen; so the projection was 1.2.

But, in the same breath, the Leader of the Opposition said that that projection was ridiculous, but you know how we got growth?—because the actual figures that came in from last year were fudged. Now, understand this, the process is, you estimate the last six weeks of your year. Then eventually, sometime after two or three months, the last six weeks’ actual figures would come in, and you put the actual figures together, and you get your actual growth. So that happened in 2011 and it showed that we got growth. He then discounts the actual figures, so he discounts the projection and the actual just to make an argument, and by doing that, he discounts himself because he could not analyze. We sat here for a very long time and there was only one portion of the entire speech by the Member for Diego Martin West for about three minutes where he made a little sense, and that was when he was quoting from some Mackenzie Woods. I “doh” know who Mackenzie Woods is but I thank them because that was the only thing that made sense in that thing.

Dr. Rowley: Wood Mackenzie.

Hon. A. Roberts: Wood Mackenzie. Thank you. Now, the hon. Minister, Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai is a family man and he puts his wife first, puts his family first. So much so—[*Crosstalk*] I cannot hear—Diego Martin North/East, “like he want to talk but I doh know.”

Mr. Speaker: I think he is through.

Hon. A. Roberts: Thank you. [*Laughter*] He is a family man.

Mr. Imbert: “I say yuh done.”

Hon. A. Roberts: Minister Howai, the Minister of Finance and the Economy, puts his wife first so much so that if she “bbm” him now to come home, he will go home. [*Crosstalk*] “Yuh want to be meh wife, yuh say? [*Crosstalk*] Cool it,

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nah, let we deal with Parliament—[*Crosstalk*] But yuh ask meh. I heard that. Just now, call meh nah—680-8343. Quietly, not just so in public. We cyah do dat on the *Hansard*.” He puts his wife ahead of politics so if she were to “bbm him now, he get up and he gone yuh know; dai how serious he is.”

Now, I cannot say that for everybody because the Member for Diego Martin West has been calling upon the Attorney General to step down, the Prime Minister to fire him—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Do not go there.

Hon. A. Roberts: “Ah know, ah just going en passant.” [*Laughter*] Just passing through, Mr. Speaker, “don’t be frighten” at all. But the point that I am making is that there was an instance—[*Crosstalk*] No, no, I respect the Speaker; “doh try to chain me up”—he calling for that person to be removed; must be removed, and in fact, next month, “dey gonna remove him and so on but let’s talk now; let’s see if”—because this debate is about consistency, honesty, integrity and trustworthiness.

Now, back in March 2010, unfortunately, and let me state from the front that I state here categorically that from all of my investigations, the wife of the Member for Diego Martin West never had a Cayman Islands’ account as it was alleged. [*Interruption and crosstalk*] I am stating that—[*Interruption*] Listen to me, I am saying it.

Dr. Rowley: How my wife get in your business?

Hon. A. Roberts: Well, if you would let me finish, continue. I am saying—[*Continuous crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I think that we should get back—let us not go there, please. I really think that we—just move on to the budget and do not get into people’s personal—[*Interruption*] Please, please, do not get into Members’ personal life.

Hon. Member: He is instructed by the Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker: All right, but I am not following there; I am here, and I am saying to the hon. Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara, do not get into Members’ personal life, please. It is disrespectful, okay. Move on to some other subject.

Hon. A. Roberts: Mr. Speaker, I am not dealing with any personal issue, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: I have ruled.

Hon. A. Roberts: I am guided.

Mr. Speaker: I have ruled; just move on. Leave that subject off. Cool, please.

Hon. A. Roberts: I am moving on. Let me just say that when the former Attorney General had information that he could have cleared an individual and a citizen in the Parliament, and he had that information, John Jeremie refused on several occasions to bring information that he had that would show that there was a major hoax going on involving a citizen, her character, her integrity, and there was an Attorney General who had information to clear that situation for the entire population. He had it in his possession and refused in this Parliament to make a statement to clear the individual. He refused to make a statement to the media. He stood and told untruths when asked by Ria Taitt of the *Express* about his statement on the Saturday, which was on March 19. When he was asked on Tuesday, “Why didn’t you make the statement?”, he said he did not have any information to clear that individual. So here it was, a PNM Attorney General had information to clear a human being—[*Interruption*]

Miss Mc Donald: Mr. Speaker, I rise on Standing Order 36(5), imputing improper motives.

Hon. Member: Against who?

Miss Mc Donald: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I think I understand, and I think the whole Parliament understands where you are going. Let us proceed and leave that—I think we got your picture. I do not think we want to go further than that please.

Hon. A. Roberts: Okay, Sir, but I would just put it—to wrap it up and move on—that never did the Member for Diego Martin West call for that Attorney General to resign. He did not move to censure that Attorney General. He did not move to discipline him. He did not point him to the disciplinary committee of the PNM. [*Mr. Imbert stands*]

Mr. Speaker: Your point of order?

Mr. Imbert: Standing Order 36(1).

Mr. Sharma: Standing Order 36(1). You are being silly. Irrelevant!

Hon. Member: This is a budget debate.

Hon. A. Roberts: Once again, Mr. Speaker, thank you. The Member for

Diego Martin West, the entire theme as we were forced to listen to it this morning, and I listened to every word, his entire theme was that the People's Partnership cannot be trusted, that we cannot be—[*Crosstalk*] Well, I used a stronger word—we are untrustworthy, we tell untruths. The population cannot believe us. This is his whole argument so when I am responding, and I am showing that his behaviour towards a People's Partnership member as opposed to a PNM member that he acts differently, that deals with trustworthiness. You must act the same like how—Mr. Speaker, with all due respect—you act the same. “If I do wrong, yuh put meh down; if dey do wrong—dat's how you act”, impartially. But, if I am proving that that Member acts differently, his integrity is different for People's Partnership personnel as opposed to PNM personnel, in other words, politics has a morality of its own for him; that is what I am showing here because he introduced that as the theme of his budget contribution.

Mr. Warner: “The PNM protects their own, boy.”

Hon. A. Roberts: But this is what I am saying, the PNM protects their own.

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. A. Roberts: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want the population to understand because when politicians stand and talk about integrity and honesty and call for people to be removed and their lives to be changed, and yet their actions are different when faced with evidence, a mountain of evidence, but, it is a member of their team, they act differently. Without evidence, “dey calling for someone here to lose their job,” but when faced with full frontal evidence that a PNM Attorney General had information, refused to use it. When he was asked, he chose to lie. [*Crosstalk*] I am not gone, I am wrapping up. Please stop interrupting me. Yes, he did not call on that one to resign. He did move for censure. He did not take him to the disciplinary committee.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, a point of order.

Mr. Speaker: Please, please, Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara, I would not like to tell you to discontinue your speech, but I have asked you on several occasions; there is a Motion before this honourable House, a date has been set,

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“hold yuh fire” for that Motion. You are anticipating the Motion, and I have given you three warnings and you seem to ignore me. Please, move on.

4.15p.m.

Hon. A. Roberts: I am guided, Mr. Speaker and I could never ignore you, Sir. [*Interruption*] “Northeast doh leh meh start, yuh know.”

Mr. Speaker: Forget northeast.

Hon. A. Roberts: All right. That I can do, with pleasure, easily, Sir. [*Laughter*]

Housing, Mr. Speaker, let me just say—because in the budget presented by the Minister of Finance and the Economy, we as Members of Parliament here—and that is why I was a bit shocked as some of my colleagues on the other side as MPs, when they know that every nine out of 10 constituents you see, they want housing. Housing is a serious issue. There is an overwhelming demand for housing. Every Tuesday I go to my office and I see between 85 and 120 people and if it is 85, 79 want housing. If it is 120, 110 want housing.

Yet, the Member for Diego Martin West did not see the brilliant measures put in this budget to not only increase Government housing but to provide incentives for small developers, medium developers and large developers, to build low-cost housing, removing the tax on profits, so that the cost could come down, so that some of these people can get into homes and take care of their families. I thought I would hear some discussion on that, but I did not.

Now, what used to happen—as we move on to another serious point, the Member for Diego Martin West, and I saw him do it with a straight face, spoke about labour. Recently he is making overtures to labour and telling them how much they love them and that the PNM will take care of labour and they were marching with labour and marching around with an empty bag around the savannah with labour. But let me just remind him, because in this Government we met—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: “Ah” empty bag?

Hon. A. Roberts:—“ah” empty bag. In this Government, when the population rescued part of the country from the PNM—and the other part will be rescued very shortly, Tobago we are coming—we met 59 unsettled wage disputes and negotiations, 59, and this is after the PNM went through a boom. There were 59 unsettled negotiations and our Ministers of Finance and Labour and other

Ministers got involved and we have settled 49 out of 59 of those wage negotiations. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Warner: Hats off to Mr. Mc Leod.

Hon. A. Roberts: And that is hats off to the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre. “Yuh” see how calm and cool he is? “Ah trying tuh get like yuh” but sometimes they rile “meh” up. I apologize, but eventually I would get that sort of joie de vivre.

Let me just remind the population, because they will never forget the PNM’s attitude towards labour. The PNM went through a gas boom, 2003 to 2006 and a half—seven and in 2005, Patrick Manning told the labour movement: “tighten yuh belts” while millions and billions were being squandered all over the place. “Tighten yuh belt in ah boom” and now, when we are coming out, after the former Minister of Finance stabilized the economy—the Member for Tunapuna—and now this Minister is carrying us into growth, diversification and improvement in the non-energy sector, where in a budget you can see that sport has moved from the leisure and recreation into the business element of the budget to understand how important people are.

Let me remind the population about PNM and labour because they feel people forget. “Leh meh” read from the *Guardian* of July 01, 2010, page 26, Michelle Loubon:

“No apology for removing PNM”

—says Roget.

“Roget said if there was any doubt Manning was anti-worker, he should be judged on his statements at the PNM rally at Palo Seco on April 23, 2010.”

Mr. Warner: Who said that?

Hon. A. Roberts: Roget.

“Manning had questioned ‘the undue influence of labour.’”—

Miss Mc Donald: Yesterday was yesterday.

Hon. A. Roberts: “He alluded that contract...”

[*Interruption*] please.

Mr. Speaker: Please, Member for Port of Spain South.

Hon. A. Roberts: “He alluded that contract labour was critical for maintaining the country’s competitiveness. ‘If Manning had regained power’”—said Roget—“‘contract labour would have become the order of the day and the life of all trade unions would have been jeopardised.’”

Another one, we move to the *Guardian* of July 18, 2011. Rowley accused this Government of bullying the labour movement. [*Laughter*] Excuse me, sorry for

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laughing. The Member for Diego Martin West accused this Government of bullying. I wonder what the Member for San Fernando East has to say about that.

Wednesday, March 10, 2004, let us go back in the day, an article by Sherry Ann Singh in the *Guardian* archives 2004, March 10. It states:

“At a news conference at the NUGFW headquarters, Henry Street, Port of Spain, some 18 unions representing about 400,000 workers...”

2004 “eh”, boom starting. Think back, gas 12.81 per MMBtu. Right now it is 2.75; US \$12.81 per MMBtu, “yuh” see how much money PNM had? But all the:

“...unions representing...400,000 workers belonging to the National Trade Union Centre (Natuc) and other independent unions, raged against the ‘oppression’ being meted out to their members.”

Earnest Thompson from ALNG said:

“It is a sad day for Point Fortin and a sad day for T&T when our natural resources are being exported outside cheaply by this piper Government.’

Thompson said, ‘For Patrick Manning to say this is a wildcat site, he will know this cat is really a lion. Not only is (ALNG) Train IV shut down, no gas can leave the country now.’

October 31, 2007, legacy *Guardian*:

“Mc Leod: Stay home and reflect”

—by Yvonne Webb. Errol McLeod said:

“He recalled that at a political meeting on September 21, Manning said all outstanding negotiations would be settled before the general election.”

—of November. Election came, election went, another came “all yuh went” and we, the People’s Partnership settled the negotiations. [*Desk thumping*] And “all yuh” want to talk labour.

And Mc Leod continued:

“So for Manning to now say we are demanding the impossible and government is not going to yield to the ridiculous demands that negotiations be settled before November 5 is ridiculous and disgusting, and I think he has contributed just a little more to people losing respect for him.”

Not only that, TTUTA now, teachers too, so “doh leh PNM start tuh march with

labour with empty bag. De people will remember.”

The Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers’ Association

This is April 26, 2010.

TUTTA is peeved that the Prime Minister, Patrick Manning, invited high-ranking schools officials to a dinner function on the same night of its 31st anniversary.

“How yuh could do dat? Yuh cyah do dat.”

Speaking first at the TUTTA’s function at Centre Pointe Mall, Chaguanas, Keith Sankar, the association’s third vice president said TUTTA had been in a tireless struggle to fight draconian measures from an employer bent on implementing policies without consultation.

So, while TUTTA is meeting on their anniversary, PNM invite them—divide and rule—invite some “ah de topper toppers for scotch and strimps” while people meeting.

Mrs. Khan: They eating “strimps and ting.”

Hon. A. Roberts: Finally, Vincent Cabrera, the fourth, April 28, 2010 said:

“...President of the Bankers, Insurance and General Workers’ Union (BIGWU) yesterday knocked the”—PNM—“administration, claiming that Cepep workers were being taken advantage of, and forced to attend PNM political meetings... ‘The PNM has done a very bad job of reforming our labour laws...’”

Well the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre will let you know where we have reached with the labour laws—labour laws that had not been touched since the 1950s, but he will let you know about that.

So, when “yuh come tuh talk” about deceit, do not try to deceive labour, we did not “jack up anybody by dey belt and give dem ah wedgie” because they were walking in a peaceful protest and “throw dem in ah van and lock dem up” like you all did to your new-found friend David Abdulah. We would not do that. People protesting—*[Interruption]*

Miss Cox: The PNM is the police?

Hon. A. Roberts: You would like PNM to be the police. We would not talk about that “yuh know”, go ahead. When you talking about that, the PNM wanted—since you want PNM—wanted to come here and bring legislation to thwart the power and actions of the labour movement, but May 24, Juliana Peña talked to

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“Sando East” and saved us from that. They were coming to bring legislation to outlaw unions, but the election came and that is what the people were saved from. So—[*Interruption*] yes, imagine that.

Now, the PNM policy, as the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre would tell you, was to break the backs of the unions. Just ask the BeeWee workers, NBN, PSA. They were coming with a revenue authority. The issue is not that the revenue authority is a bad thing; it was how they were going about it. So, 2,100 people were in jeopardy of possibly losing their jobs. But that is PNM way. Now, all of a sudden, “they saying they labour friendly, walking around the savannah with ah empty bag.”

Mrs. Khan: “Whay yuh looking for”?

Hon. Member: A raffle sheet.

Mr. Warner: A crocus bag.

Hon. A. Roberts: Now, well, food, the Member for Oropouche East dealt with that. And in sport, I must commend the Minister Larry Howai. Never before in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, did we see that sport got a page and a half in a budget read out by a Minister of Finance. Normally, we get two lines and we are thankful for that. If they mentioned, PNM mentioned, the word “sport” we are lucky. But this Minister has understood, through consultation with the Minister of Planning and Development, the Minister of Tourism and the Minister of Sport, about how big an industry sport is and that is why we would move towards—a thrust towards—sport tourism first and foremost.

The aquatic centre, the national cycling velodrome and the tennis centre have begun. In 18 months or 24 months they will be finished. When they are finished, not only would our citizens have brilliant facilities to participate, to train, to compete along with sport science centres with MRI, water rehabilitation, ponds, every bit of equipment, massage boards, anything required for elite-level sport in these sport science centres. Two of them would be built—one in Ato Boldon Stadium and one at the Hasely Crawford Stadium. So, when athletes, during the winter, come from the USA, from the NCAA Division 1, 2 and 3, NAIA, come to train for whatever sport, they can come to Trinidad and Tobago, take advantage of our favourable exchange rate and when they come, they utilize the hotels, transport, eat our food, do some ecotourism, go down to Chaguaramas and do their cross-training. Sport tourism will be one of the ways we diversify the economy.

Furthermore, in conjunction with UWI and UTT, we are moving towards a nest

programme to ensure that there are qualified, certified coaches in every primary school and secondary school across Trinidad and Tobago—in the first instance in track and field, football and cricket and then with specific sports like table tennis and swimming, as we start to build 25-metre pools, so that by 2015, we can have compulsory swimming for primary school children under the age of eight, where they will all learn to swim. They do not all have to become George Bovell but they will all be water-competent so that when we lime in the rivers, go down the islands or to our beaches, we do not lose our citizens needlessly because of a fear or a lack of understanding of water.

We shall build regional centres. Three are going out for tender and another five, including Yolande Pompey in Princes Town will be going out for tender within the next two months. These regional centres will be equipped with, not only indoor facilities but also netball air-conditioned courts as we move towards a professional netball league and try to get Trinidad and Tobago back up to the top of the world in netball.

There will be indoor centres, cricket, football nets and sport science centres, along with computer rooms and homework rooms for our citizens to take part in each one. In others, there will be squash courts where we start to move towards developing certain sports, racket skills, hand-eye coordination, where we can become the best in the world in a short space of time.

4.30p.m.

Right now we have a lot of brilliant young table tennis players: Aaron Roopnarine, young Aaron Joseph, I believe from Diego Martin, Catherine Spicer—a young group. So we are going to liaise and make a government-to-government relationship with China to bring some of the best coaches in certain racket sports—in table tennis, badminton and squash—when the aquatic centre is built, for synchronized swimming and diving.

Mrs. Khan: “Watch yuh time eh.”

Hon. A. Roberts: So sport is on the rise. How much time?

Mrs. Khan: You have a few minutes again.

Mr. Speaker: You go ahead.

Hon. A. Roberts: Now, the Minister of Finance and the Economy in the document, you will see that 93—95 per cent of the PSIP was spent by this Government, and yet the Members on that side say that they cannot see it, they

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have not seen it. Where did it go? The reason they cannot see it is—as you take from the Member for Diego Martin West—the PNM only sees Port of Spain, but this Government sees everywhere and has spent it through the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago, [*Desk thumping*] down in the rural areas which the PNM “doh see”. That is why the Leader of the Opposition wants to bring a Ministry of Rural Development—that Ministry “done here”. It is the People’s Partnership Government which will develop the rural communities, urban communities across the board without fear or favour. So that is why they cannot see it—because this is implementation PP style. Gone are the days of the PNM implementation of Gangnam Style. The PNM will never be able to see that [*Laughter*]

Hon Member: What is that?

Hon. A. Roberts: How much time? Now, deficit financing.

Mrs. Khan: Ten minutes again.

Hon. A. Roberts: All right. Then the next problem they talk about: deficit financing, deficit financing, deficit financing. No matter how much the Ministers of Finance tell them: “Listen, we understand, but we have to create jobs, we have to move the economy forward, we have to get people working, we have to keep food production high, we need to invest and get the economy”—no matter how much they tell them, they say deficit, deficit, deficit. “Leh me tell why dey have deficit”—because of the PNM budget of arithmetic.

Let us see, PNM’s overrun, wastage and corruption: World Petrotrin GTL, nine billion; Waterfront, two billion; “two CHOGM and ah Summit ah de Americas”, 2.2 billion; Tarouba, 1.1 billion; e TecK, 1.2 billion; rapid rail, 475 million; Education Towers, 400 million; NAPA and SAPA, 300 million—“all dis is overruns eh”. Ministry of Legal Affairs, 200 million; the palace, 150 million; the Caribbean Games that never happened, 100 million; “de water taxi dat dey buy and it never sail a day” and incurred maintenance costs, 80 million; the Mastrofski plan that never worked, 85 million; Bamboo Networks that they should not have invested with, 31 million; and a \$2 million flag for 17.3 million. And over the two and a half years that we have been in Government the deficit that we have put forward here to the population is 17 billion. And “dat lil bit ah talk” about PNM was 17.3 billion.

So when you hear deficit understand what you did, do not sit there arrogant, or do not sit here as if you all are Pharisees, understand what you did with the people’s money. And then in Tobago—that was just Trinidad you know,

remember we are a unitary state of twin beloved islands—in Tobago, Scarborough Hospital—“overruns eh, dis is not cost, dis is overruns”—620 million over; financial complex, 80 million over; Shaw Park, 150 million over; a goat racing track, ESPN is waiting to rush down here to film that instead of T20 cricket, they are going to film a goat race, for 110 million; and the library, 52 million spent, and “it only have” a foundation; for a grand total of \$1.12 billion of overruns in Tobago alone.

Then we have the Member for Diego Martin North/East talking about fudging figures. But he knows about the process, the last part as I said, you project and then you get the real figures, then check it and you adjust. Is that not it? You know it better than me. “You ah genius.” But fudging is nothing new to the PNM. The Rapid Rail feasibility—“yuh hear fudge? Dat is fudge. The *Su*—yuh hear fudge? Dat is fudge.”

Hon. Member: “He name dat for he wife yuh know boy.”

Hon. A. Roberts: “What kinda fudge? Doh leh meh tell yuh nah.” Coconut fudge. [*Laughter*] Now, “how much time ah have, Mr. Speaker?”

Mr. Speaker: Eight minutes.

Hon. A. Roberts: Eight minutes? All right. “Leh meh just give ah lil story den, ah tired of just too much facts, facts, facts.”

Mrs. Khan: “Fiction yuh going for now?”

Hon. A. Roberts: There was a mythical country called “Manning coming back”. [*Laughter*] It existed somewhere in the universe.

Hon. Member: “De story cyar geh better dan dat.” [*Laughter*]

Hon. A. Roberts: Now, in this country of “Manning coming back”, there was a mythical rebel leader called Rowlie. Now—[*Interruption*] What? What is that? “Yuh doh want to hear de story?”

Hon. Member: Proceed! Proceed! Proceed!

Hon. A. Roberts: Right. Now, this group that was led by the mythical hero, Rowlie, they were envious of the people’s leader Kams. Now, what happened was, there was an issue where Parliament needed to be called and Kams called the Parliament in this mythical land and Rowlie said, after knowing that Parliament had been called: “If dey doh call Parliament we will march and march and march.” Rowlie—

Miss Cox: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order.

Hon. A. Roberts: “Point of wah order?”

Miss Cox: 36(1).

Mr. Speaker: No, the Member is seeing if he could connect them, so at least it could be relevant to the whole debate.

Hon. A. Roberts: The story about this mythical island where, Manning coming back, the name of the island, Manning coming back. It is about—what it does, it talks about the possibility of good over evil, of trustworthiness, this whole budget is about trustworthiness. The entire argument of the PNM is that we are not trustworthy.

So when this mythical leader Rowlie was speaking to members of the media in the island of Manning coming back, he said that the then Attorney General went to New York, and was talking “all kinda race ting”. And then it was proven that the Attorney General did not even have a passport, he did not go, he never went, and people said, Rowlie—[*Laughter and crosstalk*]

Mrs. Khan: Liar!

Hon. A. Roberts:—went to walk around the big football field with a bag—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Member, I think you better wrap up. [*Laughter*] I think you better close up because I will have to close you up. I think you better close up. Close up. Close up, please, please.

Hon. A. Roberts: Mr. Speaker, “it would da been ah nice story, yuh know, but dey geh de idea yuh know”. [*Laughter*] Once they understand—[*Laughter and crosstalk*] “Rowlie woulda continue after tea.” Yes, yes.

Mr. Speaker: Do not go there. Just wrap up.

Hon. A. Roberts: Mr. Speaker, as I wrap up, I am glad that you said that, because we like people on this side. “Yuh know, in politics some people doh like people.” We like people. This is a people’s budget presented by the hon. Minister Howai. [*Desk thumping*] We lime with the people. We are of the people. [*Interruption*] “Ah stop meh story there, but ah cyar hear, like dey want to hear de story.”

Mr. Speaker: You have my protection.

Hon. A. Roberts: “Ah feel dey want to hear de story yuh know.” [*Laughter*] We listen to the people. We govern for the people, by the people on this side, the People’s Partnership. We believe in people unlike the PNM who believe in the worst of our people.

Imagine the Minister of Finance and the Economy says: “listen, we have to cut down the subsidy”, he puts up premium. You know what the PNM said: those taxi drivers, those bad people will immediately start to raise the fares and everybody will be under pressure.” We do not believe that and what has happened? All of the taxi drivers [*Interruption*] you do not know? Check your PR officer. All of the taxi drivers have said: “listen, we understand, we make adjustments and there will be no increase in taxi fares,” and I applaud the taxi drivers of this country. [*Desk thumping*]

When the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance and the Economy say: listen, “we taking off VAT off extra goods now”, there was some without, zero rated, we want people to eat, and that will put savings of 400 million into the pockets of poor people, \$400 million, think about that. Instead of overspending 400 million on an education tower, we take 400 million and give the people and “put it in dey pocket” so that they could have a nicer Christmas. You know what PNM say? That some unscrupulous supermarket owners will go and raise price and price gouge. “Why dey saying dat?” “And you know wat happen?” The supermarket association and all the owners say: “listen, we going to work with you and we going to help feed our nation.” Give them a round of applause. Those are the great people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

The PNM always follows its leader throughout time, from time immemorial, they follow their leader. “So, if you doh—when we like people, we noticed dat de PNM somehow now, de new leader dey doh like people. When we want to give hampers to poor people, he doh want dat. If yuh doh want dat, yuh cyar like people. If yuh office close when people suffering from flood, you cyar like people. If you call children duncey head, you cyar like children. If you make fun of the Member for Chaguanas West when he has a slight speech impediment, yuh cyar like people. When yuh doh want \$10 million for each MP to help with box drain, to fix pot hole, fix drain, get insect vector, help people in your community, yuh cyar like people. When yuh attack ah poor woman for showing immense gratitude for receiving assistance from the Member for Oropouche East, yuh cyar like people. When yuh park on ah pavement for people to walk on de road, yuh cyar like people. If ah man attack meh wife”—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Wait. Member for Diego Martin North/East, you know you cannot call Members of Parliament deceitful. You cannot do that. So could you be respectful? Thank you.

Hon. A. Roberts: Thank you. “He can’t help it.” You know if a man attacks the one I love, and treats them unfairly, and does not do what is right even though they know what is right and they have the truth and they refuse to tell the truth, if

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a man do that to somebody I love “I cyar hug dem up, and den say come and vote for all ah we. Leh we go in ah election. If yuh do that yuh cyar like people.”

Mr. Speaker, it has been a pleasure. God bless! [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, at this time we will suspend for tea. It is now 4.41pm. We will come back at 5.15 p.m.

4.41 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.15 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Speaker: Before I call on the hon. Member for Laventille West to address this honourable House, may I again remind hon. Members, especially those who are relatively new to the process, to pay attention to 33(1) of the Standing Orders. I notice when Members rise to speak, they tend to speak to the audience and they are speaking to the media; but once the Speaker recognizes you, you address the Speaker.

I just want to remind Members, when they rise to speak in this Chamber, you are not speaking to the press; you are not speaking to the public gallery. You are addressing your remarks to the Speaker. I just wanted to remind Members of that.

Mr. Nileung Hypolite (*Laventille West*): Thank you kindly, Mr. Speaker. Today is a sad day for us. It is a sad day for our young ones, especially those who would have been looking at this particular debate on television or listening to it live on radio.

Let me just remind Members of this honourable House of what we are doing here today, which is to debate the Appropriation Bill, 2012, the financial year 2013. I would have expected to hear some more information from the speaker who spoke last, at least what he would have done over the past year or probably even the past two years at his Ministry, the Ministry of Sport. Rather, what we would have heard is a debate on the Opposition leader and his entire contribution, except for four minutes—would have been strictly on that on the Opposition leader and of the People’s National Movement.

One would have preferred to hear exactly where the \$108 billion over the last two years has been spent. One would have preferred to hear more about where the Government would be getting revenue so as to clear this \$58 billion budget. One would have preferred to hear how we are going to go about the \$17 billion deficit; how we will go about neutralizing, clearing that \$17 billion deficit that would have been generated over the last three years.

Mr. Speaker, the last speaker would have spoken about land in Tobago. Let me indicate to you that the Chief Secretary and the Secretary, Finance, of the

Tobago House of Assembly would have dealt with that issue. That issue would have been dealt with by those two individuals in Tobago over the past couple weeks and the entire Trinidad and Tobago is quite aware of what they presented.

Let me also indicate that Mr. Rahael has never been the chairman of the PNM, nor has he been a nominee for that position. I want to clear that so that it would not come across as if Mr. Rahael once held such an esteemed position. He never did.

Let me also ask the question, seeing that the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara pulled out a payslip and identified that since August 2011 they would have been making a contribution to the Children's Life Fund.

Mr. Roberts: Before that.

Mr. N. Hypolite: As they say, before that. I just want clarification as per the "No Life Fund payments for 2 years", which would have been reported in the *Trinidad Express* on September 29, 2012. It reads:

"No monthly ministerial salary contributions to the Children's Life Fund charity were made for two years. It was only within the last six months that the salary deductions started going towards the children's charity fund again."

I just need for someone, probably whoever comes on after, to clarify that for us.

It also went on to state—

Miss Mc Donald: Just now. Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 40. I am hearing a hum. I cannot hear the Member speaking, please.

Mr. Speaker: If Members are disturbing or speaking or uttering heavy tones whilst the Member is speaking, I ask you to listen to the Member in silence. You may continue, hon. Member.

Mr. N. Hypolite: Thank you kindly, Mr. Speaker. That article went on to state that a Cabinet Minute decided to "reinstate all salaries to the level prior to the reduction; update pay records to reflect the reinstatement of salaries and other adjustments".

Maybe someone from on that side ought to really and truly stand up and explain exactly what is taking place with respect to that Children's Life Fund because we are hearing one thing coming from the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara and, on the other side, we are reading and also hearing other statements, more so in the public domain by way of the media.

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The Member for Oropouche East would have spoken about 25,000 signatures not reaching the President. He also would have spoken about—

Mr. Sharma:—an empty bag; raffle sheets.

Mr. N. Hypolite:—an empty bag and raffle sheets and all those different things. Am I correct?

Let me state quite clearly that on that Tuesday, thousands of persons would have walked from Woodford Square to President's House and over 25,000 signatures would have been presented at that point in time. Just Laventille West alone would have presented over 2,400 signatures.

There is a particular saying: "where there is no vision, the people perish." Where there is no national vision by a government, the people of that nation will perish; and that is exactly what we are saying here today. [*Desk thumping*] This budget can be seen as a section 34 budget. [*Interruption*] I am not even going in that direction, but rather I would say that it is a formula for deception. [*Desk thumping*]

The Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara spoke, as I said before, strictly on issues pertaining to the Opposition leader. He spent four minutes speaking about his Ministry, the Ministry of Sport; nothing pertaining to the budget itself. I would have preferred to hear something pertaining to the budget document coming from the Member. I would have preferred to hear something pertaining to our young people; something coming from the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development; absolutely nothing.

Mr. Speaker, not even in the budget document you have any kind of information pertaining to our young people. In fact, the Minister of Finance and the Economy would have spoken for approximately two hours and there was no mention whatsoever with respect to the youth. Our young people, our future, they are the future of this nation.

When we go deeper into the budget documents and look at the *Social Sector Investment Programme*, under the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development, you only had three lines. A \$58 billion budget and on page 175 of the *Social Sector Investment Programme* document, you had three lines. These are the three lines:

"The following projects outlined in the Boxes 7.IX and 7.X at right have been identified for implementation by the Ministry, in keeping with its aims and objectives."

Three lines.

I would like to know—if only because we have young people in this country who would like to find out exactly how they would be affected by this budget—for the Minister of Gender, Youth and Child Development to come and share some more information with this particular House on exactly the policies, the programmes to move the young people forward.

We know the situation with GATE. My colleague, the Member for Diego Martin Central, went in-depth with respect to the GATE programme. We want to hear more.

You see, Mr. Speaker, under the PNM, we had a number of programmes set up for our young people. We had programmes such as the MYLAT, the MYPART and the CCC. We also had a number of youth camps throughout Trinidad and Tobago. We would like to know the status of those youth camps.

5.30 p.m.

The present Minister of National Security has a likeness for the Trinidad and Tobago Cadet Force.

Mr. Roberts: Liking, not a likeness!

Mr. N. Hypolite: We want to know what is taking place with respect to that organization—not just opening of new units because it was under the People’s National Movement that a mandate was given to open new units in all secondary schools. Mr. Speaker, we would like to hear more on that because we believe that it is an organization that can actually assist in the crime situation of this country.

The Member for Oropouche East would have spoken about Victoria Keys, and he went in-depth. about Victoria Keys. Let me say to you, Mr. Speaker, that that \$350 million that would have been spent on Victoria Keys also includes the Invaders Bay project because when they excavated the land for the Victoria Keys project they went and backfilled the Invaders Bay. Transportation costs alone would have been somewhere around the vicinity of \$44 million.

Mr. Sharma: “Way yuh transport, gold?” [*Laughter*]

Mr. N. Hypolite: Not only that, but you have the whole Invaders Bay landfill which at this point in time I am certain the value would be very close to \$1 billion. We also got to realize, based on what Member for Oropouche East said as Minister of Housing, Land and Marine Affairs, that over 3,500 units are being built right now in places such as Union Hall, Egypt, Princes Town.

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Mr. Speaker, we have the East-West corridor also. We want to know what is taking place along the East-West corridor. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Roberts: Pineapple split! Trestrail!

Mr. N. Hypolite: The Minister of Finance and the Economy spoke about land development. In fact, on page 17 he would have spoken about land development. He would have spoken about giving some—let me read exactly what he said in the budget:

“I propose to exempt income from the gains on profits derived from the initial sale of land developed for residential housing where the development of such land commences after October 01, 2012 and the sale is consummated prior to December 31, 2015.”

You are looking at approximately three years. I wonder how practical it is to really and truly start such a project and get it approved within that three-year period.

Mr. Speaker, you have to face town and country. Unless something is done to make town and country a lot more effective we will have a problem there. Unless, of course, as I said, it is designed to really and truly cater for persons who probably are already in line to get all those things approved. After town and country, you also have the municipal corporations to deal with, to get further approvals. I was speaking to someone from one of the corporations who indicated to me that it sometimes takes two years to get approval coming out from town and country. When you are finished there and you go into the regional corporation it is a next very long process to follow.

Mr. Speaker, under the Ministry of Housing, Land and Marine Affairs in the last two budgets it was made mention that the Government will be building some 6,500 houses a year. We need to know the status of that initiative. [*Desk thumping*] It is one thing to come into the House to debate the budget, and it is a next thing to come to try to embarrass the Leader of the Opposition and Members on this side.

We want information coming out of the budget. It is one of the speakers who made mention that each Minister will stand up and speak about their own portfolio; so far we are not getting that. All we are hearing is “PNM, PNM, PNM.” [*Crosstalk*]

Miss Cox: They attacking people.

Mr. N. Hypolite: The entire country, the entire world—we are all aware that the People’s National Movement is in the Opposition at this point in time. The UNC is—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Alive!

Mr. N. Hypolite:—the Government of the day. We all know that! They may want to think that the People’s National Movement is dead. Well I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, it was on that Tuesday when thousands of persons hit the streets they panicked, and they are still panicking. [*Desk thumping*] Even the Member for Chaguanas West is panicking. [*Desk thumping*] He is panicking so much that he wants to walk up and down Laventille. [*Laughter and crosstalk*]

Mr. Roberts: You see him panicking?

Mr. N. Hypolite: He is panicking! No need to panic, no need to panic at all. None whatsoever.

Miss Cox: He is trembling.

Mr. Roberts: This is how I look when I panic. [*Member leans back in his chair*]

Mr. N. Hypolite: Trou Macaque, of which the Member for Chaguanas West ran up there the other day, it was approximately one year ago the Member for Siparia went to the Trou Macaque plannings, when it had a fire and a number of persons jumped out and four persons died, and promised the people of Trou Macaque that the building would be demolished, and not only that but the fire escape staircases would be placed in the other buildings, and throughout all plannings, all high-risen buildings throughout Trinidad and Tobago. To date, Mr. Speaker, not—high-rise buildings.

Miss Cox: High rise!

Mr. N. Hypolite: All the high-rise buildings throughout Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Speaker, not one.

Mr. Warner: Not one high-risen building.

Mr. N. Hypolite: Mr. Speaker, the Government continues to promisethis nation a number of things. They promised to stop the traffic situation. They promised to provide this country with a crime plan within 120 days.

Miss Cox: They have the solution for crime.

Mr. N. Hypolite: They promised to fix the President’s House upon entering office. They promised no more flooding.

Hon. Member: We did not!

Mr. Sharma: “We eh promise no more rain!”

Mr. N. Hypolite: They promised—

Mr. Warner:—to keep the PNM over there!

Mr. Sharma: We did! We have CNG buses.

Mr. N. Hypolite: They promised to make legal the “PH taxis”, and they made a whole host of promises, none of which they would have lived up to. Most of those promises would have come from the Member for Chaguanas West—
[*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Shame on you!

Mr. N. Hypolite:—the same Member who continues to promise people of Trinidad and Tobago a whole host of things and not delivering on any. They would have promised to bring 100 more buses—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: “It coming!”

Mr. N. Hypolite:—on the roads of Trinidad and Tobago. In addition to that, we are hearing about 300 more police vehicles and I think that we need as much police vehicles as possible. We need it! To fight crime, we need the tools. If 300 more vehicles on the nation’s roads is the way to go, then let us go.

While that is so, remember they promised to solve the traffic situation in this country. When you go down Frederick Street, Abercromby Street, or any of the streets in Port of Spain, you have cars parked on the left-hand side, cars parked on the right-hand side, and only one lane of traffic. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: “Dais Lee Sing!”

Mr. Imbert: Warner. “Is Warner cause that!”

Mr. N. Hypolite: Mr. Speaker, the traffic situation in this country is ridiculous. It is terrible and it is getting even worse. The Member for Fyzabad who is right now in the Government holding the position of Minister of Transport is asking: what is the solution? [*Interruption*] I will tell you what is the solution. [*Crosstalk*] The solution is something that the Opposition Leader made mention of earlier on: to reopen the conversation once again on mass transit.

Mr. Sharma: Mass transit? Racket rail? [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. N. Hypolite: That is right. That is it. That is the solution. It is taking place throughout the world.

5.45 p.m.

They spoke about the rapid bus system last year. They are bringing some 100 more buses into the country to assist with the rapid bus system. The People's National Movement had a solution, and that is one of the reasons we implemented the fast ferry service. [*Desk thumping*] One of the reasons we did that was to ease the traffic situation.

Under the Member for Diego Martin North/East as Minister of Works and Transport then, we looked at the rapid rail system. It was the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara who said it would have cost this country, the taxpayers, some \$475 million for the feasibility study? Am I correct?

Hon. Member: Yes.

Mr. N. Hypolite: Let us look at what transpired under Nidco at that point in time.

- “By Minute No. 378 dated 2 February, 2006, Cabinet agreed inter-alia to accept the project objectives for the conduct of a Mass Transit System study for Trinidad and Tobago and that the study should focus on Rail Technology.
- Cabinet also agreed that the National Infrastructure Development Company... would undertake implementation of the Mass Transit System.”

I am reading from a document from Nidco dated June 17, 2009.

- “Due to the complexities and public policy issues of such a mega project Cabinet established a Ministerial Committee by Minute No. 2944 dated 9 November, 2006 to oversee the procurement process.
- After a 20 month procurement process a contract for the Rapid Rail Project was executed with the Trinitrain Consortium on 11 April, 2008.”

Mr. Speaker, the Contract Structure:

- “- Phase 1 Data gathering, Preliminary Design and Preliminary Engineering
- Phase 2 Design Build
- Phase 2 Operation and Maintenance (15 years).”

We also had the “Discretion not to proceed” with any part of the contract.

- “Under the terms of the DBOM Contract, NIDCO and the Government have the absolute discretion not to proceed with any phase.”

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That was put into the contract just in case we were not comfortable or happy with any part of the contract, we could have stopped it before it went on to another phase.

- “There are two (2) major points at which NIDCO and the Government would be free not to proceed under the Contract and could re-tender the particular phases/activities:
 - (1) At the end of Phase 1 prior to the design and build period
 - (2) At the end of Phase 2 prior to the operation and maintenance period.”

Mr. Speaker, we had reached the point whereby we had identified with a feeder system. We had consultation with the various maxi associations and even PTSC. So, we had reached a stage whereby we had a conceptual design in place. We had data gathering, statistics, aerial surveys, utilities. We had all those things in place—the project planning, demand studies, feeder systems, buses and maxis. We looked at all of those things. We had identified the various routes from Westmoorings to Port of Spain; from Port of Spain to Curepe or St. Augustine; and from St Augustine up to Arima into Sangre Grande.

Mr. Sharma: Was it reaching Fyzabad?

Mr. N. Hypolite: Mr. Speaker, we also had the north-south route, moving from St. Augustine all the way to San Fernando, and we were also looking at sending it all the way over to—

Mr. Warner:—to Tobago!

Mr. N. Hypolite: Mr. Speaker, some of these people “does make some kinda statements in this House. One does sit down and wonder if is big men we dealing with yuh know boy.” Oh my God! [*Laughter*] Member for Chaguanas West, come on! I look up at you sometimes even though you are shorter than I am. [*Laughter*] I do look up at you sometimes. “Lord have mercy.” [*Crosstalk*] We went all the way to Debe. [*Interruption*] “Right after whery yuh does eat doubles.” So we had five segments, 17 stations identified. A lot of work would have gone into this initiative, and it is an initiative that can assist in the traffic situation of this country.

It is under this same UNC Government, only a year ago, that they themselves were looking at a light rail system.

Mr. Sharma: Okay, we were doing it. Move on, next point. Do not waste time.

Mr. N. Hypolite: And the Member for Fyzabad is saying to the people of Trinidad and Tobago that they will do the light rail system.

Mr. Sharma: Next point!

Mr. N. Hypolite: It is the Government right now who was against the rapid rail system, and the Member for Fyzabad is now admitting to the people of Trinidad and Tobago that they will be doing the light rail system. [*Desk thumping*] I thank you so kindly, Member for Fyzabad.

Mr. Sharma: Move on!

Mr. N. Hypolite: I thank you so kindly. I would have preferred for the Member—

Mr. Speaker: Please, please. The only person who could tell the Member to move on is the Speaker. [*Laughter*] I did not authorize you to take any delegation of my authority. [*Desk thumping*] So, I would ask you to just remain silent and allow the hon. Member to speak. You have my full protection, and please ignore the Member for Fyzabad and address the Chair, please. Good!

Mr. N. Hypolite: Thank you so kindly, Mr. Speaker. That shows the kind of disrespect in this House coming from that side.

Dr. Griffith: Tell us what you are doing for Laventille West.

Mr. N. Hypolite: You hear that again, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: Forget him. [*Laughter*]

Mr. N. Hypolite: Mr. Speaker, it is difficult. It is really difficult to forget him.

Mr. Speaker: Ignore him.

Mr. N. Hypolite: Ignore him, Mr. Speaker, “Lord have mercy”. It is difficult to ignore him. [*Crosstalk*] You are quite correct, he needs to be ignored. Let us talk about the gas subsidy removal. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Stop throwing those things across the floor. Continue hon. Member.

Mr. N. Hypolite: It was the Prime Minister who indicated that 6 per cent of the vehicles in this country would be affected by the removal of the gas subsidy—the increase of premium gas to \$5.75. She went on to say that it is only the high-end vehicles: the Audis and the BMWs that would be affected. Mr. Speaker, the

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vehicles that would be affected are vehicles of simple persons working in the banks, teachers, police officers, labourers. Those persons would also be affected by the increase of premium gas.

Mr. Roberts: What is the octane?

Mr. Speaker: Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara, you spoke already.

Mr. N. Hypolite: Some of those vehicles are Nissan, such as the Nissan Tiida, Nissan Cube, the Almera, the Mazda, B14 and B15, Mitsubishi Lancer, Toyota Yaris, Honda, Suzuki, Volkswagen, Volvo, Kia, Peugeot. Those are vehicles that carry premium gas. Mr. Speaker, but that increase in premium gas would definitely affect not only the drivers of those vehicles, but it would also affect the hotel taxi and the airport taxi operators. It would also affect some of the small fishing boat operators; it would also affect landscapers. It would affect them. I ask the question: what was the reason for increasing premium to \$5.75? What was the reason?

Mr. Roberts: Let me answer you.

Mr. N. Hypolite: Sure.

Mr. Roberts: Thank you for giving way. Now, clearly, you may know and everybody knows that there is a heavy subsidy on all fuels in Trinidad and Tobago, and many have argued over the years that it is a good distribution of resources. Now, there needs to be a gradual coming down, especially as you said, we cannot keep going on a deficit forever. So, therefore, premium gas is a luxury item and it is not necessarily used because of the octane—super is 92 and premium is 94. We have to start there gradually so that people could switch to the CNG and then the burden, the \$4 billion, would get small and we could spend more money on “hospital and recreational ground and ting, nuh”.

Mr. N. Hypolite: Thank you so kindly, Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara. He is a good guy at times. Mr. Speaker, if premium gas moved from \$4 to 5.75 and super remains at, let us say, 2.75, and the people of Trinidad and Tobago move from using premium to super, is it not that the Government will be putting out more money? [*Crosstalk*] That is the question, and one of the other Members will answer it. I am certain that 2.75, or moving from 5.75 down to 2.75, is moving away from the real cost of the gas and, as such, it will cost the Government more. The Government will have to put out more. But, we will continue. We need answers to that also, because whereby they are looking at the

octane, the octane and the octane, there was a particular reason Trinidad and Tobago went the way of premium gas. Mr. Speaker, throughout the world, that is the way they are going.

6.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, it is the climate change throughout the world, that in 1997—in 1997, that the Kyoto Protocol—

Mr. Roberts: Kyoto.

Mr. N. Hypolite:—Kyoto Protocol, all right, started to look, Mr. Speaker, at negotiating so as to make sure that a number of countries and developing countries went the way of premium gas, or more sustainable, renewable energy than that of, you know, gas that will—gas that causes emissions that will affect the environment.

Mr. Mc Leod: You do not understand.

Mr. N. Hypolite: That is one of the reasons.

Mr. Mc Leod: You do not understand that.

Mr. N. Hypolite: All right, that is one of the reasons.

Mr. Mc Leod: You do not understand it.

Mr. N. Hypolite: That is not one of the reasons why they went that way?

Mr. Speaker, that is one of the reasons they went that way, okay. [*Crosstalk*] So, Mr. Speaker, that is one of the reasons why, you know, we concentrated on having premium, and it is something that is taking place throughout the world, Mr. Speaker, throughout the world, not only here in Trinidad and Tobago, but throughout the world.

Mr. Speaker—[*Interruption*]

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. N. Hypolite: Thank you kindly.

Mr. Mc Leod: And you would explain now what you were talking about. [*Laughter*].

Mr. N. Hypolite: Thank you kindly, Mr. Speaker, and may I say thanks to the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, and all others, all other Members in the House, including the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara.

Mr. Roberts: Thank you.

Mr. N. Hypolite: Mr. Speaker, within the budget document, the Minister of Finance and the Economy spoke about URP and CEPEP workers moving across to private enterprise. In fact, what he said was:

“I propose to provide each company which elects to employ CEPEP and URP employees with an employment allowance uplift of salary of 150 per cent for tax deduction purposes.”

Mr. Speaker, I can see that working for URP workers, but I ask the question, how will that work for the CEPEP employees? Is it that the CEPEP employees are working directly with the Government, or is it that they are working for a private company that would have gotten a contract with the CEPEP company to provide services? You see, Mr. Speaker, I do not think that the workers at the CEPEP companies, or the CEPEP contractors, can just move out from that company just like that, because they are employees of that particular contractor.

To me, Mr. Speaker, what can possibly take place is for the contractors to be probably elevated into a position whereby 10 per cent of the construction work, whenever that comes, or 10 per cent of other Government contracts can so be given to them. I can see something like that working out. But I really and truly cannot see how the CEPEP employees, who are actually employees belonging to a private company, can move from one private company to another private company. It is just not working out, Mr. Speaker, and probably somebody can explain—the Minister of Finance and the Economy could probably explain how that will work.

Mr. Speaker, I want to touch a bit on the Ministry of Local Government, and on touching, Mr. Speaker, on the Ministry of Local Government, I want to ask the question—

Hon. Member: For what period?

Mr. N. Hypolite: Huh? Not the period when \$80,000 went into transportation. I am talking about the period, this period right now. [*Desk thumping and laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, I just want to find out from the Minister of Local Government why is it that in this year’s budget under the development programme there is an increase—there is an increase in all the regional corporations, and we could look at Port of Spain moving from 20.2 million to 20.6 million; Chaguanas, Diego Martin, Tunapuna, Grande, 13.4 to 15, Couva, Mayaro, Siparia, even Arima.

Mr. Roberts: “We geh more?”

Mr. N. Hypolite: Arima, yes, yes, we get \$400,000 more. It is an increase.

Mr. Roberts: “Buh we happy.”

Mr. N. Hypolite: But, Mr. Speaker, the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation went from 19.1 million to \$15.3 million, and Tunapuna, from 17.3 million to \$15.4 million. In Tunapuna also, right. You see, the thing about it, Mr. Speaker, is if there is an increase for one, it should be an increase for all; that is fair play. It is fair play. You see, when you do not do it that way what happens is it comes across as if you are having a problem with, you know, the areas throughout the East-West Corridor.

Hon. Member: It comes across that way?

Mr. N. Hypolite: Yes. It comes across that way. Mr. Speaker, you see, when you move from 19 million down to 15 million—

Hon. Member: What about Point Fortin?

Mr. N. Hypolite:—there are lots of services that you would normally offer to that community, and that community or those communities would no longer get, no longer get, and as such we need to revisit that. And probably the Minister of Local Government, not you, the real Minister of Local Government will be able to answer that particular question.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the removal of VAT from some of the items, normally, Mr. Speaker, when you go to the grocery, when you go to the supermarket, even if the Ministry of Social Development provides you with a hamper, there are certain items inside there—basic items inside there—that a family can be very much comfortable with, very, very much. When you look at the items, Mr. Speaker, that are already zero-rated, items such as rice and flour and bread and milk and cheese and curry and fresh butter, yeast and toilet paper, smoke herring, tinned sardines, cane sugar, coffee, mauby, orange juice, tuna.

Hon. Member: We know all those things.

Mr. N. Hypolite: “You know what is all those things?”

Mr. Roberts: Turkey parts.

Mr. N. Hypolite: Grapefruit juice, vanilla essence, “soya sauce”, vinegar, orange drink.

Hon. Member: Mango chow.

Mr. N. Hypolite: Ordinary, natural water.

Hon. Member: Toolum.

Mr. N. Hypolite: Tomato ketchup, baking powder—and I could go through the entire list, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Member: What about geera?

Mr. N. Hypolite: All right, which would have started since—and I am looking at the Schedule 2 of the Value Added Tax Act of 1996, okay, where you had a schedule attached to the Act, and then it was also amended to include a number of other items. Mr. Speaker, I ask the question, and maybe when the Minister of Finance and the Economy is wrapping up he will be able to identify or present to the House a schedule of all 7,000 items that the Prime Minister would have spoken about.

Mr. Speaker, also in the budget document, the Minister indicated that there has not been a single murder in Laventille for 22 days.

Mr. Warner: Twenty-six.

Mr. N. Hypolite: In 22 days, budget document. The Minister of National Security is now saying that there has not been a single murder in Laventille for 26 days. Mr. Speaker, that is not true. Mr. Speaker, that is not true! Mr. Speaker, Laventille is not just John John. Laventille takes up Beetham. Beetham is also part of Laventille.

Mr. Warner: Curepe, too. Curepe, too.

Mr. N. Hypolite: Mr. Speaker, Trou Macaque is part of Laventille. [Laughter] Pelican Extension is part of Laventille. St. Barb's is part of Laventille.

Mr. Roberts: Penal.

Mr. N. Hypolite: Mr. Speaker, Chinapoo is part of Laventille. Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Roberts: “The man searching for a murder, yuh know.” [Laughter]

Mr. N. Hypolite: It is not a matter of searching for a murder, it is the misinformation that comes out of the Government at times—

Mr. Roberts: Oh, my God.

Mr. N. Hypolite:—that comes out of the Government at times, and they are beating their chest. They are beating their chest. “Nobody ain searching for no murder.” Mr. Speaker, one murder is too much.

Hon. Member: “Is so?”

Mr. N. Hypolite: One murder is too much, and anything that can be put in place to decrease the murder rate, we on this side support. We support it, all right. [*Desk thumping*] But when the Government has to go outside there and beat their chest, “no murder, no murder,” but you can read: “Morvant man shot dead close to home,” and you are speaking about Pelican Extension, and Pelican Extension is part of Laventille, Mr. Speaker—[*Interruption and crosstalk*]. Mr. Speaker, I would go on.

While I am on Laventille, let me also—[*Interruption*—one of my other colleagues would deal with crime. I would not want to correct the record by indicating—they are going into Picton and calling it Laventille and beating their chest, “No murders in Picton”. Tell me “No murders in Picton”, “No murders in Beverly Hills”, I could work with that, but do not tell me “No murders in Laventille”. They are not giving the country the correct information.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of Laventille, we are still looking for our roads to be fixed. In 2010—[*Interruption*—in 2010 I spoke about the roads in Laventille. I indicated that I submitted a list of over 117 roads, not expecting all to be fixed immediately, and the then Minister of Works and Transport would have approved six roads at a value of \$5.9 million. Out of those six roads, five were completed and one of those roads would have rolled over into 2011/2012. That particular road would have been the Beecham Cocoa Road, from Lady Young Road to the Holder shop. [*Interruption*] You are beginning to be a little annoying. Be like your colleague from D’Abadie/O’Meara. “You ain see how nice he behaving? Oh, God, I wasn’ expecting that from you.” I expect it from him and he is behaving. Take some example.

Mr. Speaker, that road was rolled over into the 2011/2012 budget. Not a single drop of water, not a bag of cement, nothing at all, Mr. Speaker, would have been done on that particular road to date. I am, therefore, pleading—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Warner: “You get five out of six, though.”

Mr. N. Hypolite: Pleading, yes. Five out of six; \$5.9 million, but there are roads in Siparia being paved for over 120 million.

Mr. Roberts: Be careful, not 120 million in Siparia.

Mr. N. Hypolite: One hundred and nineteen million. Roads in Caroni East—

Mr. Roberts: You are breaching privilege, you know.

Mr. N. Hypolite:—119 million.

Mr. Roberts: How much in D'Abadie/O'Meara?

Mr. N. Hypolite: D'Abadie/O'Meara—a couple million well.

6.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I am asking, through you, that we get our roads fixed in the Laventille constituencies, in the Port of Spain constituencies, in the Diego Martin constituencies, in the Point Fortin constituency, in the La Brea constituency, also in the Arouca/Maloney constituency [*Desk thumping*]. We need our roads fixed—St. Ann's East also. Mr. Speaker, not only our roads, but I submitted a list of 58 drains, 58 drains; not expecting all the drains to get fixed, but if I get two or three, I will feel a bit comfortable. Not one single drain—not one.

They speak about the growth pole, Mr. Speaker, and it was the former Minister of Finance who spoke about it. He spoke about it in the 2010 budget; he repeated himself in the 2011/2012 budget; and the present Minister of Finance and the Economy came right back with the same thing. Not a single report would have been submitted with respect to that growth pole, that development plan.

But East Port of Spain Development Company, Mr. Speaker, has a comprehensive plan for the development of East Port of Spain. And in 2010/2011, they were seeking some \$27 million to do some work on the drains of Beetham, Pashley Street, St. Joseph Road, Belmont Valley Road—nothing. To do some work on Desperadoes, on the upgrade of Desperadoes pan yard—nothing; Laventille Road—nothing; Beetham Gardens, Phase 1 and Phase 2—nothing. The Member for Fyzabad was the Minister of Local Government then—nothing, Mr. Speaker, nothing.

Community centres—and I have to give praise where praise is due and I have to say thanks to the Minister of Community Development, who would have walked—[*Desk thumping*] who would have invited me, good manners, good manners, good manners, I must say—invited me to walk with him and visit a couple of community centres in the Laventille constituency. Beetham Gardens is one, Pelican Extension is one and Chinapoo another. I have to say thanks.

Mr. Speaker, through you, I would ask the Minister to make sure and try to get the Beetham Community Centre started because when I look at the budget documents, Beetham is not inside there. Okay. Beetham is not inside there, so I am asking for Beetham. Okay.

Mr. Peters: I thank my hon. colleague for giving way. When I walked with you, I promised you that Beetham is one of the priority community centres that we are going to be working on, and I keep my promises. I said I was going to do it so you do not have to come here and beg me to do it. It is of my own volition and the volition of the people at my Ministry that it is going to be done. And this Government, when we say we are going to do something, we are going to do it. It would be done. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. N. Hypolite: I will hold you to your word—your words. Okay? To the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara, I am still looking at my recreation grounds.

Mr. Roberts: What? “You ain get none?”

Mr. N. Hypolite: “How much you want to give me?”

Mr. Roberts: “How much you get already?”

Mr. N. Hypolite: “How much you want to give to me?” I got none.

Mr. Roberts: None?

Mr. N. Hypolite: No. All right? So, Mr. Speaker, all I am requesting is for my recreation grounds also to be upgraded.

The budget has to be reviewed in the context of development which will not occur without a plan. Local government will continue to be underfunded and controlled by central government. Mr. Speaker, we need local government reform. It is the Prime Minister who spoke about local government some time ago and spoke about reform to the local government system. Mr. Speaker, programmes and interventions develop with little links. The reality of their ineffectiveness must stop. We cannot accept a military state, and that, to me, is what is taking place right now in the Chinapoo area.

Mr. Speaker, as I see the Member for Caroni Central back here, we also indicate to him that he promised, a couple months ago, to complete the home of my dear 104-year-old lady. That house still is not completed. The Member for Caroni Central promised the little old lady, 104 years old, 104 years old—come January she will be 105. My dear friend, the house is still not completed.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker —

Dr. Ramadharsingh: Work is taking place.

Mr. N. Hypolite: Work is still taking place. Thank you for telling me work is still taking place. He promised to complete that work, Mr. Speaker, in three fortnights—three fortnights. It is probably over six months now.

Dr. Ramadharsingh: More than 50 years.

Mr. N. Hypolite: All right, and that is still in that same position. Mr. Speaker, as I end, let me say again, where there is no vision, people will perish. This Government still has no vision for Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] and the people outside there are perishing daily, daily. We ask the Government to stop the PR exercise and start looking at the lives of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you.

The Minister in the Ministry of the People and Social Development (Hon. Vernella Alleyne-Toppin): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour for me to address this honourable House once again as we debate the Act to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending on September 30, 2013.

Mr. Speaker, I would like, first, to congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai, for an excellent fiscal package for 2012/2013, [*Desk thumping*] a people's budget guaranteed to stimulate growth and generate prosperity in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, even as a child I listened with rapt attention to the crackling Blaupunkt radio in our home as leading luminaries Simbhoonath and Rudranath Capildeo, Eric Eustace Williams, Lionel Seukeran, ANR Robinson, in stentorian tones, argued about the policies, projects, programmes and initiatives of the governments of the day, of significant benefit to Trinidad and Tobago. My home was filled with debate on the prognostications of Albert Gomes and APT James, The "Legco" and the trade unions.

Mr. Speaker, I stand on the shoulders of members of my ancestry, including former assemblyman Richard Benjamin-Alleyne, including Pollard Moore, including Eugenio Moore, Dodd Alleyne, JD Elder, Ina Nicholson, Wilbert Winchester, Pamela Nicholson, Reggie Dumas, Edwin Carrington, Henry Washington and others. I stand on their shoulders and I represent the people of Tobago East as they all did in their time in some manner.

It is, therefore, a signal honour for me, Mr. Speaker, to be chosen by my God and my fellow men and women, my political leader, my party and my Prime Minister, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, to be embraced, celebrated and endorsed by my colleagues in the People's Partnership Government and to join the chorus of architects committed to building a nation together. Life is indeed a stage and we are the actors, and everybody "ha dey part to play".

Mr. Speaker, I stand here wearing two hats, that of Minister of State in the Ministry of the People and Social Development and Member of Parliament for Tobago East. Indeed I have indicated before in this honourable House, that it is

with my walk through the streets of Tobago East as campaign manager for Mr. Lenn Toppin—who fought the Roxborough/DelaFord seat in the 2009 elections—that I came face to face with the startling reality of the extent of hopelessness, helplessness, despair, desperation and apathy driven by need in the homes of the people of Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, I went then to Maslow's hierarchy of needs and saw the need—the physiological needs first, including the need for food, water, sleep and sex; safety needs including security of body, employment, resources, morality, family, health and property; needs for love and belonging including friendship, family and sexual intimacy; need for esteem including self-esteem, confidence, achievement, respect for others and respect by others; the need for self-actualization including morality, creativity, spontaneity, problem-solving, lack of prejudice and acceptance of facts, and found the socio-cultural delineations relevant in the context of Tobago and, indeed, in the context of Trinidad.

Mr. Speaker, I went then to the survey of living conditions, to the literature on the documentary of the lives of our peoples; and the statistics in print cannot capture adequately the reality of the abject poverty pervasive in our society. Mr. Speaker, the People's Partnership Government took over office in May 2010, with an overwhelming mandate from the citizenry of Trinidad and Tobago to operationalize our comprehensive programme of growth and development as outlined in our manifesto document.

Mr. Speaker, perhaps what has brought me to the Ministry of the People and Social Development, led by the dynamic Dr. The Hon. Glenn Ramadharsingh, Member of Parliament for Caroni Central, envisioned by the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, leader of the People's Partnership, like Esther in the Good Book, I believe that my God has brought me to the kingdom for such a time as this, to represent my people on such an occasion as this. So, Mr. Speaker, let us talk Tobago.

I have with me the document designed for Tobago, the budgetary document designed for Tobago, by the Assemblyman for Finance, Anselm London, and I thought I would use it today to talk about Tobago and to talk about some of the projects and policies that he has outlined, and to put our People's Partnership's spin on it. But then I remembered that we have an election coming up, a Tobago House of Assembly election coming up and it must come up by the end of January.

6.30 p.m.

I decided that this is in fact now a useless document, because when the TOP takes the assembly in January 2013, we will have no need for this document. [*Desk thumping*] So I want to put the Minister of Finance and the Economy on notice that when he does his budgetary allocations for 2012/2013, in the first tranche of that, the first quarter of the moneys that will go to the Tobago House of Assembly, you must be extremely mindful of the fact that most of those funds, we imagine, will go to buying votes for the 2013 January election. So you must understand that you have to monitor very closely and very carefully the allocations of the THA, as you go along.

Mr. Speaker, let us talk Tobago. Every home in Hermitage Village in Charlotteville is fitted with an outhouse, a latrine, because Hermitage has never seen the luxury of pipe-borne water, not even after 12 years of PNM rule in Tobago, and all of the cries of the people of Hermitage. Not one house is attached to pipe-borne water. We faced two oil booms and Tobago remained neglected.

Almost 56 years of PNM rule in many communities in Trinidad and Tobago—many communities in Trinidad and Tobago had 56 years of PNM representation, of PNM Members of Parliament, and many of those communities are today neglected, underdeveloped and in a state of abject poverty. Mr. Speaker, after 56 years—and I want my colleagues on this side, just in front of me here, to tell me which are the communities in Trinidad and Tobago that had continuous PNM representation for 56 years, and whether those communities have shown any sign of proper development? Any sign?

Hon. Member: Not one.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Think about it. Mr. Speaker, an enterprising and hard-working people populate Hermitage, that little fishing village off Charlotteville. Every home carries a bank of water tanks and reliance for water is entirely on rainfall.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Does it have water now?

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: No. “We just getting that.” I must say that. Thanks for reminding me. The People’s Partnership has started the move to give Hermitage water. Pipes are being laid.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: “So long they take to do that?”

[MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Well you took 56—you took a much longer time. Madam Deputy Speaker, even here in Port of Spain and in many other

communities some folks dig a hole in the ground or use a plastic bag for excretion of waste. No pipe-borne water, no indoor plumbing, no drainage, houses made from steel drums, ply board, rusted galvanized iron sheets, tarpaulins and no electricity. In September, the Member for Caroni Central gave electricity to 17 homes in south Trinidad—17 homes in this day and age. Children were studying by deya, the lights of deyas, the lights of candles, the lights of lamps, in this day and age—[*Interruption*]

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:—and ironing their clothes with flat, coal pot irons in this day and age, in 2013, after all of those years, 40-something years of PNM rule. I am saying this to say that it is not only in Tobago that we have been neglected by the PNM, we have also been neglected by the PNM in many constituencies in Trinidad and especially in many PNM constituencies.

Madam Deputy Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago is reaping the whirlwind, stemming from years of neglect to certain communities in a country as rich as ours, blessed with such wonderful natural resources, human and otherwise.

The inequity of the distribution of wealth is indeed vividly striking. We have come across homes where the flooring is absent, literally absent. The roof has caved in, there is absolutely nothing resembling furniture. The People's Partnership Government is here. We have begun the transformation of all such communities, rural and urban—and Member for Laventille West, we are in your community, and I see that you recognize that the Member for Mayaro went with you, I also went with you. I also went with you into your communities and I have seen—now that I have an opportunity to walk Laventille, especially—the neglect of the people. It is disastrous. It is wicked. It is pathetic.

The People's Partnership Government will change that, and you will see, as we change that, how the people will realize that real governance comes from the People's Partnership Government, and they will vote accordingly. I promise you that. I promise you that. We have seen brave faces hoping, yearning, praying for a “hand up”, praying not for handouts but for a “hand up”—a proud resilient people, a people who have survived only on the crumbs thrown at them from the national pie, from the rich and powerful who do prey on the poor.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the People's Partnership Government is led by a compassionate Prime Minister and is committed to transformation of the lives of the people who remain vulnerable and neglected after 56 years of PNM rule. Madam Deputy Speaker, the MP for Diego Martin West sat for over two decades in this honourable House, while Members of his constituency built houses on the

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hillsides. He was, in fact, the Minister of Planning and Development at one time, the Minister of Housing at one time, a geologist who is supposed to understand the use of land, ecology and soil structures, and he approved and supervised what I would term the raping of our virgin forests and hillsides.

Miss Ramdial: We will deal with that.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: The raping of our virgin forests, the degradation of our environment which resulted in injury and loss of lives to our brothers and sisters, and social, political, physical dislocations and loss, as recently as August 11, 2012. Madam Deputy Speaker, after the Prime Minister “hailed on” her boots and waded through the flood waters, through slush and silt, in empathy and with compassion for the people of Diego Martin and environs and the entire north-western peninsula, she headed back to the Diplomatic Centre, convened the first-responders and the people and the ODPM, and moved a dramatic response into that area, the likes of which have never been seen before in any government that passed before ours. That same Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West had the audacity to attack the Prime Minister and this Government for being slow to respond.

Mr. Roberts: Shame.

Miss Ramdial: He is wrong.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: This Government’s response has trumped all international standards for responses to disasters. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Deputy Speaker, our Prime Minister is truly royal, she is one of a kind—one of a kind. Which Prime Minister has done the things that she has done for the needy, for the poor, for the vulnerable and for all of Trinidad and Tobago, every time? Madam Deputy Speaker, some males harbour that penchant for attacking the fairer sex. Some males do harbour that penchant, and some have attacked and plucked all of the petals of the flowers of the pride, even of the pride of Charlotteville—plucked all the petals, in other words, deflowered some of the pride of Charlotteville; robbing the innocents of promise.

Hon. Member: What! Who is that?

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Madam Deputy Speaker, Tobago people say “mouth open, tory jump out”. The Member for Diego Martin West has left an indelible mark on the people of Tobago. He has also left some chops in the water.

Hon. Member: What?

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Chops in the water “doh” leave mark—on the people of Tobago; all along the Windward Road and into Charlotteville, we will not forget. He has also left legacies for his children and grandchildren, and we will not forget that he sat in this House over 20 years and did not raise anything resembling raising the quality of life in Tobago. Not one time did he raise anything, anything, resembling what he raised to bring his leader down. At no time did he talk of corruption—no time will he talk of corruption in the Tobago House of Assembly. At no time will he talk of cost overruns in the Tobago House of Assembly. At no time will he talk of immorality or malfeasance in public life as far as the Tobago House of Assembly is concerned, but he is the Leader of the People’s National Movement which holds the authority of the Tobago House of Assembly in Tobago.

Madam Deputy Speaker, there is so much that the People’s Partnership Government has outlined for Tobago over the past two years and has done for Tobago, bringing every government service to the people of Tobago in Tobago. Dr. Jeff Davidson, former Chairman of the THA, wrote a book entitled, *The PNM versus Tobago*, and I recommend that reading as compulsory literature for all who will purport to study the relationships between Trinidad and Tobago and where Tobago has ended up.

After \$20billion and 12 years of PNM rule, where is Tobago at this juncture? Tobago remains underdeveloped—undeveloped; Scarborough remains quite a shanty town; and I will go to several areas of the Tobago House of Assembly just to explain what I am talking about.

The hon. Minister of Community Development, last year, spent \$5million on the entire Best Village programme in Trinidad. In Tobago, the Best Village programme carries over about nine months, 10 months. In Tobago, the Secretary for Community Development and Culture spent \$6 million for three weeks of the Tobago Heritage Festival. Madam Deputy Speaker, \$6 million for three weeks of the Tobago Heritage Festival which takes in maybe 10 villages in Tobago. The Minister of Community Development in Trinidad used \$5 million to do the whole of Trinidad and Tobago Best Village competitions.

6.45 p.m.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in our Heritage Festival there is nothing like a proper archiving, no lasting monuments, no sculptures, sketchy literature, no professional structures, bad planning, partisan, nepotistic structures and personnel. This year I see on the books an allocation of \$20 million for the Tobago Heritage Festival.

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Minister of Finance and the Economy, I want you to note that if \$20 million can be spent on the Tobago Heritage Festival, we can have a festival that could last more than 10 years.

Every village in the Tobago Heritage Festival has a corporate sponsor, so I do not understand, even when they were spending the six million, much more the 20 million that we have now put in, what is happening with the corporate sponsorship. Now where is the educational component to this? Where are the scholarships?

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to place on the *Hansard* records the hospital situation in Tobago, the situation of the new Scarborough Hospital. According to Anil, “Moving right along”—We have talked about the cost overruns at the Scarborough Hospital, and we continue to see that the hospital to date has not admitted one single patient, not even now. The hospital was started in 2003. I want to just read a little from the Anestine Sealey report:

“Nevertheless an abundance of evidence that materials and machinery were removed from the Scarborough Hospital site to the Land Date Development from 1st October, 2003 to 16th October, 2004.”

I want to read for you a list of some of the material that was removed: one load red plastering sand; 20 lengths one and a half inch PVC pipes; 35 bags cement; 54 cubic metres stone, 54 cubic metres red plastering sand; 54 cubic metres stone, sharp sand, concrete cylinders, 35 bags of cement. I am talking about over a period of months. I am reading: 12 pallets of concrete blocks; 6.8 cubic metres mix aggregate sharp sand; nine pallets of blocks. And I could give some dates: February 06, 2004, three pallets concrete blocks; February 07, 2004, 12 pallets 6-inch blocks; February 13, 2004, 12 pallets of blocks. The list is extensive. Anybody could have a copy so you could read it, the Anestine Sealey report. *[Interruption]* We went to Landate, and we have here the allegations of:

“You are hereby summoned to appear before...Madam Justice Anestine Sealey...”

We have all the records:

“the allegation of the removal of materials, equipment and resources...whether through its servants, agents or contractors or by any other person, company or authority from Scarborough Hospital site...to the site of a private construction project called ‘Land Date’ at Mason Hall, Tobago, with particular reference to the following issues:

- (i) whether the materials, equipment and resources were in fact removed, transported and delivered in the circumstances alleged as above;
- (ii) if materials, equipment...were in fact removed, transported and delivered as is above alleged, whether there was any impropriety and/or misconduct on the part of any person, company or authority including any Minister of Government.”

I listened very carefully when the Member for Oropouche East was talking. I know that some people do not have any recollection or have nothing to do with any of this.

Madame Deputy Speaker, let us move on to what is happening in the hospital itself, now that from 2003 we have a completed hospital with no patients. We have a TRHA board. The TRHA board has given themselves increases of salary and allowances, doubled their salaries and allowances; the same board that the People’s Partnership Government in a spirit of goodwill allowed Mr.London, Chief Secretary, to put in for himself. The board is now under question and the hospital is still not functional.

Madam Deputy Speaker, Dr. Glenn Ramadharsingh, the Minister of the People and Social Development, Member of Parliament for Caroni Central, established the public assistance board in Tobago according to law. The THA led by Orville London has decided that that board should be installed, established, named by him and has therefore disallowed the board from meeting with the Social Welfare Division in the Tobago House of Assembly. Therefore, nobody who is eligible for public assistance could access any of it because the board has been debarred from working with the Social Welfare Division—

Dr. Ramadharsingh: Shame!

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:—notwithstanding senior citizens’ problems, problems of the differently abled, the indigent, the vulnerable and those who benefit from the provisions of social welfare. Even tonight I went to the bathroom and took a phone call a while ago. There was this woman calling me. She has a granddaughter who has cerebral palsy, not a cent. The child is now about three or four years old, not one penny, not a penny, because of quibbling over a board.

Moving right on. The Tobago House of Assembly had in 2011 an allocation of 1.978 billion; in 2012, 2.0808 billion; in 2013, 2.356 billion, plus 874.9 million allocated to various Ministries to spend on Tobago, all amounting to 3.2309 billion. The allocation is therefore projected to be 3,230,900 billion. If the

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national budgetary allocation is 58 billion, THA's allocation is 2.3 billion, then the THA is expected to receive 4.03 billion as per the Dispute Resolution Commission.

When 874.9 million is added from the moneys allocated to other Ministries pertaining to activities in Tobago, the percentage becomes 5.53 per cent. These figures represent actual figures out of the budget documents, therefore the statements brought in the budget response by the Member for Diego Martin West about 3.98 per cent of the national budget for 2011 and 3.99 per cent of the national budget for 2013 are incorrect calculations, and indeed show the disingenuity of that Member.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Shows mischief.

Mrs. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Lies, half-truths and innuendoes.

The Auditor General's reports of 2003, 2004 and 2005 are in, and hundreds of millions of dollars in taxpayers' money cannot be accounted for. That is something that we can all read. We can go to the—I do not have enough time to go through all of that.

The Orville London administration had the time; three consecutive terms with a solid foundation that was left by the previous administration to move Tobago forward. He met a well-developed Tobago development plan and ignored it. He had money to work with, but what did he do? We will give them no more time to waste our time. The People's Partnership Government and the Tobago Organization of the People will take the assembly in 2013.

They have polarized the Tobago community by openly favouring PNMites and callously despising non-PNMites throughout the years. No opportunities for work; no opportunities for grant funds; no opportunities for accessing government housing, and that, Leader of Government Business, is extremely distressing to people in Tobago. No opportunities to access home improvement grants and loans. Deliberately ignoring all TOP supporters and others; rubbing salt into the open wounds of the needy by telling them they will have to eat salt. Using public funds through nepotism and special favouritism to create overnight millionaires of people who never had a history of business. Using specially selected contractors to siphon off taxpayers' money. Robbing Tobagonians of their natural resources by organized river mining and illicit utilization of aggregate in construction projects and in concrete batching plants. Giving contracts to persons who are unsuitable, except that they are supporters and financiers of the PNM brand.

In education, they have failed Tobagonians dramatically. After 12 years of the People's National Movement rule in Tobago, our students are at the bottom of the

barrel in education. The attrition rate in secondary schools is for the last year: 41 dropouts in Form 4 and seventy-something dropouts in Form 5. In a place where those luminaries that I talked about before have come from, in a place where we used to be third and fourth and fifth and tenth in the common entrance, we are now nowhere in first 300; nowhere. We have many more schools, but we have much less education.

The Minister of Education came with me. We tried to support, we tried to do something. He came with the Minister in the Ministry, and all of our efforts were refused. The Prime Minister came to build a school for the deaf, a school for the differently abled, and all our efforts were entangled in all kinds of political controversy, refused, and our education system continues to deteriorate.

The Scarborough RC School has still not been built after years and years of allocations to build it. I actually visited the Scarborough RC School during the time that I acted as Prime Minister. When I announced that I was coming, somebody decided to build a fence. The fence was built in two days. In that school where that fence was built, the school hangs over the sea, right on the edge of Bacolet. The children would go out to the trees there, hold on to the vines and swing out over the sea and swing back in. They would swing out over the sea and swing back in. Just because they knew I was coming, the fence was put up in two days. Then they say that the school is good.

The assemblyman Whitney Alfred said a week or two ago, "The Scarborough RC School is good, it is fine. There is no need to build another school." There is no need to build a new school, but I see again in the budget, Minister of Finance and the Economy, allocations for the building, for the construction of Scarborough RC School. I also see allocations for the construction of schools that have been constructed for years, and every year it returns in the budget: construction of Mason Hall Government Primary School, construction of Mason hall Secondary School. Every year these schools come back. These schools have been long built. These schools are six years, seven years, eight years old, but every year somebody is cutting and pasting so that they would have money to hand to supporters.

So Tobago has slipped steadily downhill in education, even under the watch of Orville London, an educator himself. Tobago has shown the weakest performance of any education division in the country. I am not proud to say that; it makes me very unhappy as an educator myself. It is not because the students are poor in any way, but our system needs to be fixed. Under-equipped schools, especially the primary schools; improper selection of principals and specialist

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teachers; partisan politics operating through our education system. The education, division, lacks the human resource, therefore, to manage and deliver the curriculum at all grade levels.

7.00 p.m.

Agriculture: he has chaired an executive whose actions and inactions have destroyed this sector. He has produced nothing of substance in 12 years. The PNM-led Tobago House of Assembly owns 33 estates in Tobago. Thirty-three estates that lie fallow. There is no productivity on any of those estates. Twelve thousand acres of land, yet we see the Tobago House of Assembly going down to Shirvan to engage in a BOLT exercise to build an agricultural administrative complex on lands that they must buy for \$12 million, whereas they have 12,000 acres of land, 33 acres of agricultural land idle, fertile land, underutilized, unutilized. Valuable agricultural land is being converted into housing, and piecemeal activities, not agriculture. Friends and family are being given plots of land, 30 acres, 20 acres. Agricultural professionals of substance are “sight blind”, marginalized. Bona fide farmers are deprived of the required support.

I remember in the flooding of Tomas, one farmer received a cheque when his whole farm was washed away, one farmer received a cheque for \$25 in compensation from the Tobago House of Assembly; \$25, a cheque.

Madam Deputy Speaker, government agricultural establishments, the stations, no longer serve as centres for method and result demonstrations, but as places where taxpayers’ funds are used to provide patronage for party supporters with the full support of some branches of some groups that I prefer not to name.

Any agricultural professional with a little common sense knows that importation of planting material must be accompanied by stringent quarantine protocols. One must not import planting materials from regions with diseases. Why would the Secretary of Agriculture import banana planting material from St. Vincent without applying the required precautionary measures? St. Vincent and the Windward Islands are known to have virulent strains of black sigatoka disease, that devastating leaf spot.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I myself studied agriculture and taught agriculture for a while at Scarborough Junior Secondary School. It is difficult to control black sigatoka disease, and this disease decimates banana crops and plantain crops.

Tobago has suffered dramatically from the assemblyman for agriculture, just doing what he very well pleases without any scientific advice, without taking any scientific advice.

Instead of expanding agro-processing facilities to limit waste of primary products, we are faced with a situation where the THA has abandoned facilities in Goldsborough and Speyside, and the THA is utilizing one in Roxborough.

We have what we used to call the farm school, where we have pastures and paddocks organized for grazing. On that land now, we have the THA building a swimming pool in the middle of the pasture, where they could have put that swimming pool anywhere else suited to that kind of development.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I could go on and on—health care, community development, tourism. Our tourism is down to almost zero. Tobago House of Assembly is responsible for tourism. Infrastructure is lacking in many ways. We have the roads at Charlotteville—the north side road from Charlotteville to L’Anse Fourmi has collapsed in some parts, and the repair work is very slow and long in coming. So that road is virtually impassable.

We have the Roxborough-Bloody Bay Road that collapsed again last week—part of it, and that is also quite an uncomfortable journey to traverse. Yet that road feeds the whole north side of the island and brings students from Castara, Bloody Bay, Parlatuvier, L’Anse Fourmi, Moriah—all of those areas—to Roxborough Secondary, Speyside High School and Goodwood High School, and those roads have been sorely neglected, at times cutting off parts of the island.

The other road that you can use, which is the north side road, is falling apart at Runnymede, and the traffic at one part has been brought to a one-lane, treacherous precipice area, and we are here with the THA being in charge of roads.

The Turpin corner in Charlotteville on Back Hill is the site of several accidents. One, two years ago where three people lost their lives, and one a month ago where 21 soldiers were injured when their truck turned over because the driver had to bank the truck. That is another story.

Now the hon. Member of Parliament for Chaguanas West had agreed to come to Tobago and to fix that Turpin corner, to change the direction of it at Turpin’s estate, and to move the road through Cambleton into the village. He was assured by the Tobago House of Assembly that he must do nothing in Tobago because road works in Tobago are the precinct of the Tobago House of Assembly.

But, Deputy Speaker, to everything there is a season and time to every purpose under heaven. And there is a time to win and a time to lose, and a time to keep and time to cast away. And in January, Tobago will cast away the PNM and will keep the People’s Partnership and the Tobago Organization of the People.

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Madam Deputy Speaker, it is the Greek philosopher Socrates who said, “The unexamined life is not worth living”. So, Madam Deputy Speaker, what have I done, and where have I been? How have I used this privilege to serve my country? I will now spend a few minutes to account for my stewardship in the Ministry of the People and Social Development.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I change my focus now to my portfolio, that of Minister of State in the Ministry of the People and Social Development. The hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, Prime Minister of this beautiful and diverse twin island republic, has asked me to serve in this capacity. As a coalition member of the People’s Partnership, I welcome the opportunity and gladly accepted this undertaking with pride.

While I loved working with my beloved family in Tobago, in Tobago development, although some of them conspired with “home boy” here, name unmentioned, to set treacherous traps for me, and to proceed to sully my good name, I love them still. I have found a new home with a new team of young and not so young vibrant people who are enthusiastic about the deliveries of social services to the vulnerable and disadvantaged within our society.

This has inspired me to rise every day and give 100 per cent dedication, without fear or favour, in the service of all of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Thank you. There are 300,000 Tobagonians living in Trinidad, and only 55 Tobagonians living in Tobago [*sic*]. Most of these people in Trinidad are my constituents. I have the signal honour of serving the people of Trinidad and Tobago everywhere.

Mr. Speaker, permit me a moment to pay tribute to my colleague Minister, Member of Parliament for Caroni Central, a fireball of passion and energy burns within this man. [*Crosstalk*] And I am honoured, Madam Deputy Speaker, I am sorry.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member has expired.

Motion made: That the hon. Member’s speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh]

Question put and agreed to.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, before you continue, I would just want to ask you nicely that you should refer to me as Madam Deputy Speaker. You may continue, Member.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am sorry. During this debate, the Member of Parliament for Caroni Central would further detail the plans and programmes that we at the Ministry of the People and Social Development will undertake in the next fiscal year that would carry this country and its people forward. We believe in looking ahead, creating new and innovative programmes that are based on suggestions and feedback from the people we serve, and by the people who served before us.

I had the distinct pleasure of spending time with some of the talented men and women of the Ministry recently. Two days ago we had our—what you call that—family sports and family day at La Vega Estate; fantastic spot, fantastic camaraderie, fantastic event. I want to thank them all and the Permanent Secretary and the various heads of departments for a wonderful day, and for making me feel so comfortable, so much at home and so loved.

Madam Deputy Speaker, when it is time for work, the staff and the executive of that Ministry work hard, roll up their sleeves and get down as a team. There is no task that we cannot conquer together, no challenge too great, no issue too small for us to attend to lovingly.

Some of our parliamentary colleagues on both sides of the House know that very well because we work with everybody. They know that they can pick up the phone and call us, call the Member for Caroni East, call the Member for Tobago East—Caroni Central—and we work with them. And you have heard in this House, Madam Deputy Speaker, two Members of the other side speak of the work that we do with them.

Madam Deputy Speaker, allow me to reflect on—let me move on. But where have I been since I have been in this Ministry? I have been to Chile. I have been to the United Nations. I am to go to Malaysia in October. I am to go Panama in November. As we move to partner with the international community—
[*Interruption*]

Dr. Ramadharsingh: Global leadership.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin:—to partner with other people, other countries to address street dwelling, people with disabilities, ways of bringing the concerns of people to the Ministry. We roll out very soon that electronic data programme, where you can—what do we call it?

Hon. Member: Biometrics.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Biometrics.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Biometrics.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Where you can call in and tell us your problem, we put it into our database, and we come to you at your point of need—Madam Deputy Speaker, state-of-the-art.

Our outreach includes Direct Effect, Direct Impact, Press On, and we have all of these outlined in magazines like these, so that people can understand the work we do.

Poverty reduction, working with the aged, URP social welfare, and we scout every nook and cranny of Trinidad and Tobago, visiting the poor, the differently abled, street dwellers, the sick, the pensioners, the lonely, the mentally troubled and so on. The Member for Caroni Central, and indeed, Ministers in every sense of the word, ministering to our people with our teams from the Ministry.

We have been on the ground walking in the homes, through the tracks and byways and uphill and down the lane, Arouca, Chickland, Rio Claro, Rousillac, Cocorite, Diego Martin, Petit Valley, Grand Riviere, Toco, Argyle, L'Anse Fourmi, Bon Accord, Mount St. George, Charlotteville, Roxbrough, Golden Lane, Laventille, John John, Eastern Quarry, Dan Kelly, Erica Street, Rock City, Pashley Street, Belmont, Cedros, Mayaro, Grande, Manzanilla. Madam Deputy Speaker, according to Trinidad Rio, we have been everywhere.

Hon. Member: Been there, done that.

Hon. V. Alleyne-Toppin: Been there, done that. When I ask for God to increase my territory, I did not know that it would encompass the whole of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker—Madam Deputy Speaker, I am sorry again. The Ministry of the People and Social Development is the engine of the social sector and is charged with the responsibility for coordinating the implementation of Government's social and human development objectives. Its overarching goal is to ensure effective and the efficient functioning of the social sector, towards improvement in the standard of living of all of our nation's citizens, particularly those at risk.

7.15 p.m.

When my colleague entered the Ministry it was a place where you could find statistics, you could find booklets and you could find research, but you could not find action among the people in their homes, in the villages and in the towns. We have translated that into a Ministry of action, helping, empowering, transforming

lives, and the programmes we have designed are there to assist all normally abled, differently abled as well, in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Deputy Speaker, at the computer literacy graduation held recently, last month, at San Juan at our telecentre, one lady came in with a story. She had come in for a food card and we gave her a food card because she was in desperate and dire need, but we also enrolled her in our programme for computer literacy and numeracy, and she testified—she gave a little testimony at that graduation—that she had come in for a food card and she got enrolled in the programme. [*Crosstalk*] After six months she graduated with several certificates in computer literacy and business writing and she has now gone from unemployed mother, desperate and in need, to a secretary in a law firm in Trinidad and Tobago.

Dr. Ramadharsingh: Excellent! Excellent! [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. V. Allyene-Toppin: So, we are not only talking in the Ministry about handing out, we are talking about handing up and we are building a skills component into every handout that we give. Thank you, Sir.

Madam Deputy Speaker, everyone who comes to our doors is helped; there is no wrong door but one open door. We do not discriminate by race, by colour, by social status; there is no discrimination. When the floods hit Diego Martin we served people of all means because there comes a time when circumstances level people, and everybody who went through that flood was scared, experienced the same kind of fear, and people lost their lives, people lost their property. The Ministry of the People and Social Development was there. The Ministry of the People and Social Development set up five assessment centres and went in every day walking in the mud, walking in the boots and handing out cheques, hampers, whatever was needed.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I really need to skip ahead since I do not have that much time left and to say, apart from the fact that we are working so hard in the Ministry of the People and Social Development, I do attend to my constituency in Tobago East, every week, as well as I can. Some people tell me we think you live on the “and” between Trinidad and Tobago because you are always in Trinidad and in Tobago. I live on the boat, I live on the plane, I go backward and forward, sometimes every day in a week.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to thank the Member for Caroni Central for the work that he is doing, for the opportunity to serve with him, for the opportunity to share my ideas and for the opportunity to help to develop and drive policy. I want to thank the Prime Minister, Member of Parliament for Siparia, for her vision in placing us together as a team, and I want to go back again a little bit

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to Tobago. I want to give my constituency the assurance that I will be there for you every moment that I can, and that whatever I do in Trinidad, I make sure that I represent you who are there supporting me in Tobago.

In my budget contribution of 2010, Madam Deputy Speaker, I noted, I likened the THA, the Tobago House of Assembly—in its present incarnation and with its present administration—to a runaway horse. Today, I submit that that runaway horse continues to bolt unfettered, with blinkers now covering its eyes completely. The runaway horse has left its stables at the Calder Hall Administrative Complex, bolted, heading straight for Shirvan Road—*[Interruption]*

Hon. Member: Out of control.

Hon. V. Allyene-Toppin:—bolted past the Cove Estate owned by the Tobago House of Assembly, bolted past the Friendship Estate and bolted straight into Shirvan where the racetrack used to be, and found Milshirv and took 199 years of our patrimony and handed it over in a deal that we cannot yet understand; the assembly that owns 12,000 acres of land in Tobago left all of the land that it owns to start a questionable deal with a company.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to put on record again that the PNM-led THA is indeed a runaway horse. *[Interruption]* I want to put on record that London bridge has broken down.

Hon. Member: Yes. *[Laughter and desk thumping]*

Hon. V. Allyene-Toppin: I want to put on record that the Tobago Organization of the People will take the assembly in 2013 under the astute leadership of Ashworth Jack.

I want to put the assembly on notice that we in Tobago are serious about that \$20 billion that has gone to Tobago—Scarborough—remains a shantytown, undeveloped and underdeveloped, after so many years of PNM rule.

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

The Minister of State in the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure (Hon. Stacy Roopnarine): Madam Deputy Speaker, it is certainly my pleasure to be able to join in this debate. Before I get into my contribution I want to take the opportunity to express my congratulations to the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy for a very well-delivered budget, his maiden speech. *[Desk thumping]* I also congratulate the hon. Prime Minister for having the vision to lead yet another budget in this honourable House.

Mr. Speaker—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hon. S. Roopnarine: Madam Deputy Speaker, my apologies. I want to tell you that the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure continues to deliver its key focus, and that is of bridges, roads and landslips.

As you know, the Ministry would have been split where the transport portfolio was taken away and thereafter the drainage portfolio has now gone to the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, and this now leaves us with a very key area of focusing on the road infrastructure and that of traffic management. We have an allocation of approximately 749 million, which comprises both the Consolidated Fund and the Infrastructure Development Fund.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to start by speaking a little to the major infrastructure projects that will be delivered under the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Minister of Finance and the Economy in his budget statement would have indicated that the Government is exploring some infrastructure projects under our PPP model. I heard the Leader of the Opposition indicate in his speech that there was no detail as to how this arrangement would work. But, Madam Deputy Speaker, if anyone would google what a PPP model is, the information is right there.

So, for the benefit of those who do not know, like the Leader of the Opposition, and perhaps, for the benefit of the wider community, let me just say that a public/private partnership describes more or less a Government service or a private business venture funded and operated through a partnership of the Government and private-sector company or companies. This is something that is certainly not new to the global community. In fact, there are other countries which have adopted this model very successfully; one such example is in India. Public/private partnerships have been very successful in developing infrastructure, in particular under their National Highways Authority of India.

In Canada the P3 model is significant. They have actually created in 2009 PPP Canada Incorporated as a crown corporation with an independent board of directors reporting to the Parliament through the Minister of Finance. I say that, Madam Deputy Speaker, to emphasize the point that what we are doing in Trinidad and Tobago is actually being done successfully in other countries and we expect to adopt a similar model in executing these projects.

So, let me just tell you what some of these projects are as the Minister of Finance and the Economy indicated. He spoke to an alternate access from Cocorite to Chaguaramas. Madam Deputy Speaker, we know that heading into the Chaguaramas region, for many years there has been a problem of traffic. This is solely because of the fact that there has been a lot of development in that area and there is right now one road in and one road out, and therefore there is congestion. So, the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure is currently exploring the possibility of the construction of 12 kilometres of road at an approximate cost of \$6 billion, which will improve access to the western peninsula.

Another project that was spoken about in the budget is the dualling of Rivulet Road from the Couva Interchange to the Point Lisas Roundabout.

Miss Ramdial: Good project. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Roopnarine: Madam Deputy Speaker, this project is being proposed at an approximate cost of \$350 million over a three-year period of approximately six kilometres of road upgrade.

Madam Deputy Speaker, at present during the peak traffic hours there is a queue of an excess of 500 metres as one approaches that roundabout, and therefore what we are proposing is that the existing two lanes of road be converted into a four-lane dual carriageway, commencing at the Couva Interchange in the east, to the Point Lisas Roundabout in the west, and this will alleviate the problem of congestion. not only for the residents but also for those who are accessing the goods and services in the Point Lisas Industrial Estate.

Thirdly, Madam Deputy Speaker, another project that we are looking at is that of the Churchill-Roosevelt Highway extension from Cumuto to Manzanilla.

One of the critical road networks in our country is that of the highway network, and this is constantly in need of upgrades. We are constantly looking at ways and measures to improve the traffic flow on these roads. I want to tell you one of the initiatives that we have taken over the last year or so is the very recently completed Port of Spain access project. This involved the widening of the Beetham Highway from market overpass to the lighthouse, to three lanes, plus shoulder both eastbound and westbound and, of course, associated drainage works. We also cannot forget that we completed the dualling of the Churchill-Roosevelt Highway from O'Meara to Santa Rosa. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to make the point, Madam Deputy Speaker, under the previous regime this highway had been languishing for six years.

Hon. Member: “All yuh good you know.”

Hon. S. Roopnarine: You all do not like to hear it, but that is what you did.

7.30 p.m.

Therefore, today—[*Crosstalk*]—a mound of dirt, it was an eyesore when you passed along the highway. And today the Leader of the Opposition wants to come in this House and talk about traffic in this country. Well I say, Madam Deputy Speaker, that what he should have said was what they did in their regime to alleviate traffic. [*Desk thumping*]

Miss Cox: That is why he spoke about the rapid rail.

Hon. S. Roopnarine: I am coming to that. I am coming to the rapid rail, hold on. I am coming to that.

Hon. Member: Racket Rail!

Miss Cox: Come to it. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. S. Roopnarine: Another major project we did was the Aranguez overpass. What about the Balmain/Couva overpass; the current Grand Bazaar to Chaguanas Interchange. We paved the southbound lane of the Solomon Hochoy Highway to Tarouba; an addition along the Uriah Butler Highway from Chaguanas to the Bird Sanctuary, nine kilometres of road; the MovieTowne intersection upgrade, and not to mention the long-awaited Maraval access roundabout.

It is a pity the Member for Diego Martin North/East is not here because I would ask him why is it that, what took him 11 years to plan in the Ministry of Works, took the previous Minister of Works and Infrastructure, the hon. Jack Warner, nine months to implement? [*Desk thumping*] I hope in his contribution—I look forward to the explanations, and the people of Diego Martin also look forward to the explanations of what they did for this 11 years of planning this roundabout. Therefore, Madam Deputy Speaker, it is in this context I would like to outline some of the measures that we are putting in place in terms of upgrading our highway infrastructure as we move forward.

It is my pleasure to announce in this honourable House that we will begin the Valencia Bypass from the Churchill-Roosevelt Highway to the Eastern Main Road. [*Desk thumping*] This project will cost approximately \$100 million over a period of one and a half years. I think this is something that is long overdue. It is something that the people of the South-East will benefit. I want to spend a few

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minutes talking about some of the projects in Diego Martin in particular, as this is one of the areas where we experience a lot of traffic because of the increased development that has taken place.

Firstly, we are constructing a vehicular overpass crossing the Diego Martin Highway in the vicinity of Powder Magazine and doing some related road improvement. This is estimated to cost \$42.6 million over a two-year period where we would be looking at eliminating the unsafe turnaround on the Western Main Road, while at the same time alleviating traffic congestion and improving the connectivity from Diego Martin to Carenage.

We are also looking at the extension of the Diego Martin Highway from the Wendy Fitzwilliam Boulevard to the Diego Martin Main Road. [*Desk thumping*] This involves design and construction of a two-lane highway over a length of 1.7 kilometres.

Thirdly, we are looking at the dualling of the Diego Martin Highway from Victoria Gardens to Acton Court. This project involves the creation of a northbound two-lane carriageway, abutting the southbound Diego Martin Highway and bypassing the currently congested commercial area in the vicinity of Four Roads.

I also want to say that in this fiscal year we will also begin the Indian Trail Overpass upgrade for \$20 million. [*Desk thumping*]

Miss Ramdial: Finally.

Hon. Member: Very good.

Hon. Member: Connectivity

Miss Ramdial: They cannot say we “ent wukking”.

Hon. S. Roopnarine: Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to turn my attention to a programme that has been the reason for many smiles across Trinidad. It is the Programme for the Upgrade of Road Efficiency. I want to tell you that this programme really brought relief to persons across Trinidad and Tobago. Prior to this Government taking office, let me tell you that there was a cry from every corner: in the south, north, east, west, central for that of proper road and drainage infrastructure.

When I took office in 2010, as a Member of Parliament, I soon realized that every single road in the constituency of Oropouche West was in a deplorable state.

Mr. Samuel: You were in Arima or what?

Miss Ramdial: Ask them if they know where that is.

Hon. S. Roopnarine: When I took office as a Minister of State in the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, I realized that this problem was not something only in Oropouche West.

Miss Ramdial: All over.

Dr. Moonilal: That is the legacy of the PNM.

Hon. S. Roopnarine: That is the legacy of the PNM, thank you Member for Oropouche East. So, Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to tell you that we are seeking to rectify the wrongs of the PNM for over 40 years. People in this country in rural areas have been neglected for far too long and therefore when we took office, the Prime Minister gave a directive to all of her Ministers that we should serve the people and deliver to the people.

Hon. Member: “Yep”.

Hon. S. Roopnarine: The then Minister of Works and Infrastructure, the hon. Jack Warner, took this directive and took the services of the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure to every corner of this country. I want to say that the current Minister of Works and Infrastructure has certainly carried on this trend in ensuring that there is an end to rural neglect and that no longer persons who live in rural communities will face a geographical bias.

Miss Ramdial: Very good.

Hon. S. Roopnarine: I want to tell you of some of the roads that we have repaired and you will see that it is throughout the country.

In the south:

- Pointe-a-Pierre Road, Vistabella;
- Alfred Street, Point Fortin;
- Forres Park Trace in Tabaquite;
- School Hill—we did a stabilization project there. We paved the entire Scotts Road network, Rock Road network, Gopie Trace, Tulsa Trace, Suchit Trace, Debe Trace, Pond Street.

In central:

- Pierre Road and Cacandee Road network off Caroni Savannah Road;
- Chaguanas Main Road;

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- Edinburgh Road;
- Sampson Road;
- Rock River Road.

In the north:

- Piccadilly Street, Laventille;
- Rehabilitation of the Blanchisseuse Road;
- Macqueripe Road.

Madam Deputy Speaker, if I stood here and listed road after road after road, I would certainly take my time and other Members' time as well.

Mr. Samuel: You go ahead.

Hon. S. Roopnarine: I want to summarize and put on record in this honourable House, that from May 2010 to present, 926 projects at an estimated cost of \$2.3 billion utilizing 223 contractors, paving over 500 kilometres of road across the country was completed. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, as we continue in this new fiscal year, we are proposing that at least a billion dollars would be spent on continuing this road rehabilitation programme under the PURE programme of the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure. Some of the major projects under PURE include:

- Widening of the Caroni Savannah Road from the Uriah Butler Highway to the Caroni Bridge on Southern Main Road, and the Southern Main Road from Caroni Bridge to Washington Junction;
- We are also doing walkovers in MovieTowne and Wrightson Road respectively at a cost of \$10 million and \$11 million each;
- The widening of Saddle Road;

Miss Ramdial: That's good. Road safety.

- Barrackpore Access M2 Ring Road;
- M1 Tasker Road, St Madeline to Princes Town;
- La Paille Access, Ciperio Road to Manahambre Road.

You know, I heard the Member for Laventille West speak about Beecham Coco Road from Lady Young Road to Holder Shop and I give him the assurance that it will be done under the PURE programme.

I want to go now to an area that is very critical to some of our Members of Parliament here and that is the issue of landslips. Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to tell you that this problem of landslips is certainly very serious in our country today. It is a priority for the Ministry and I give the assurance to Members of Parliament, in particular those of the southern region, Moruga area, Princes Town area, Madam Deputy Speaker, Naparima and so on, that we are embarking upon an aggressive landslip repair programme in the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure. I want to tell you that we have repaired many landslips. Some of the key landslips that we have done include: the Fort George landslip in Moruga. This landslip had cut off access to Fort George and Carew Trace, forcing vehicles to use the Samuel Cooper Road and Fort George Branch Trace as alternate access. So, I am very pleased to say that this was one of the projects that we completed.

The Member for Arima will tell you that one of the projects that we embarked upon in his constituency was the Mount Pleasant landslip. This road provides an alternate access from Arima to Blanchisseuse Road, but was inaccessible to vehicles for 28 years. This example, alone, really shows the neglect that the people not only of Arima, but the people of our country have faced. Twenty-eight years and this bridge in Arima could not be fixed. In less than a year the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure was able to complete this bridge. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Indarsingh: How many years did the PNM control Arima for?

Miss Ramdial: Forty.

Hon. S. Roopnarine: So, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure has recognized that there is a need, certainly, for a more focused programme dedicated to that of landslip repair. It was to this end that we launched the Landslip Repair Programme where we expect to repair 630 landslips at an estimated cost of \$1.75 billion over a five-year period. This programme started in June 2012, with the award of five design/consultancy contracts for 33 critical landslips. The design documents for 26 of these were completed at the end of September and construction is expected to commence in February 2013. The design for the remaining nine structures are expected to be completed in October and scheduled to begin in March 2013.

Just to give you an indication, Madam Deputy Speaker, some of these include landslips along the Saddle Road and also along Paria Main Road. I also want to put on record that with respect to landslips, the PURE division is also looking at the reinstatement of landslips along the Papourie Road, which has five landslips in that area; six landslips on Mount St. Catherine Road, 10 along St. Julian Road; and 12 along Moruga Road.

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Madam Deputy Speaker, we recognize that there is also a need for bridge development, improvements in bridge infrastructure. Therefore, I would like to advise that while we have done a number of them under the PURE and the Highways Division, we still need to have a more dedicated focus on the bridges. Just to give you an indication of some of the bridges that we have done: we have done along the Southern Main Road the widening of three bridges where we upgraded two bridges by use of a box culvert and the third bridge by the use of a u-channel system.

We also did the Assaraff Road Bridge, replacement of the Marianne Bridge in Blanchisseuse, and we have also deployed Bailey bridges in areas where communities have been cut off for many years. I give you an example of that in Seepersad Trace where the communities of Tulsa Trace and Gaya Trace have been separated for something like 40 years. We have implemented, Madam Deputy Speaker, a Bailey bridge that has now joined that community so that they are no longer disconnected. [*Desk thumping and interruption*] Coming to that, Minister.

7.45p.m.

Madam Deputy Speaker, as we have recognized the need for this, the Ministry has launched its Bridges Reconstruction Programme and I would like to advise that there are 92 bridges listed for repair between the period 2012—2017 at an estimated cost of \$1.35 billion.

Phase 1 commenced in March 2012 where the designs for 26 structures commenced and tenders for the construction of 10 of these bridges were issued at the end of September and an additional one will be issued shortly. Some of these bridges include bridges along the Talparo Main Road, Camden Road and Papourie Road. I also want to put on record that the PURE division will also be looking at bridges along the Southern Main Road, Cunapo; Eastern Main Road, D'Abadie, and also in the Freeport area.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to move now to an area of concern and that deals with our road safety. As you know, in 2010, the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure introduced its first cable barrier system, and we would have implemented 10 kilometres of these high tension cable barriers on the median of the Solomon Hochoy Highway in the vicinity of Claxton Bay. We recognize that there is an increasing need to implement these barriers and, therefore, I would like to advise that through the Central Tenders Board a formal contract in the amount of 5.5 million was awarded in September for the placement of 25 kilometres of high tension cable barriers on the median of the Solomon Hochoy Highway. That contractor has mobilized and work is now ongoing.

But, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to say that while these measures can indeed prevent road carnage, I also want to call on the population for responsible driving. I want to ask citizens to ensure that we drive within the road traffic laws; that we obey the speed limits and that we be responsible citizens when it comes to our driving.

Madam Deputy Speaker, during the 2010 fiscal year, the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure would have also installed 330 safety barriers, that is the New Jersey-type barriers, along the median of the Churchill-Roosevelt Highway in the vicinity of the San Juan river bridge, and this year, Madam Deputy Speaker, under our PSIP allocation, a contract was awarded for 1,450 metres of reinforced concrete New Jersey-type barriers at key locations along the median of the Churchill-Roosevelt Highway in Trincity between Savannah Drive, and we will also continue with these initiatives of cable barriers and New Jersey-type barriers.

But I also want to state that looking at the statistics from “Arrive Alive”, it is shown that in 2010 there were 206 deaths from road accidents, while in 2011 this figure had decreased to 181. So while we hope that this figure will continue to decrease, it also shows that mechanisms that we have put in place are working in bringing down the total number of road fatalities in the country.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I also want to advise that the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure is also responsible for that of traffic management, and it was to this end that we deployed the national traffic management system. You would recall that prior to May 2010 we gave a commitment to the people of Trinidad and Tobago that we would start utilizing camera technology at our traffic lights and traffic intersections, and last year we commissioned the Intelligent Transport System, which is basically a traffic surveillance and control system, at the Ministry’s head office. This system is part of a new traffic management plan which is designed to reduce traffic congestion. Today, Madam Deputy Speaker, 11 major intersections are now being monitored through this system. That includes Ana Street, Woodbrook, to the Grand Bazaar Mall at the intersection of the Uriah Butler and Churchill Roosevelt Highways.

This system comprises of a national traffic management centre, a centralized traffic signal control system, a central corridor traffic management system, closed circuit television subsystem, variable message sign subsystem, vehicle detection subsystem, communication subsystem. And we are also planning to improve on this technology in terms of including: red light enforcement system, automatic speed enforcement system and radio frequency identification readers. This is all part of a bigger plan together with the Ministry of Transport where we are looking at that transformation of the licensing office.

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Madam Deputy Speaker, in terms of traffic management, we have successfully launched a new traffic scheme in the Endeavor Flyover. This was done at the end of 2010, and this really improved the travel time in that region, where drivers have indicated that a 30-minute drive was decreased to five minutes, and these are the sorts of measures that we are looking at and we will continue to look at. As you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, it was under this Government that every single traffic light, from the Golconda area to Port of Spain, was removed and therefore there is now a free flow of traffic into the capital city.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in terms of traffic management, traffic alleviation, we also sought to introduce into our system a traffic wardens programme. As you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, in March 2011, we were able to see 77 traffic wardens graduate successfully and they are now on our streets. But what I cannot understand, Madam Deputy Speaker, is that this programme was being planned for 18 years in the Ministry of Works and Transport—18 years. When we came into office we were able to do what they could not do in 18 years, in just nine months, and that shows, Madam Deputy Speaker, that there is no commitment from the Members of the current Opposition to the people of this country.

So they talk about traffic alleviation and the Government has done nothing to alleviate traffic, and traffic is at its worst and so on, but you had, sitting in the Ministry, all these plans and never pushed them forward. We are talking about plans there for 10 years, 11 years, 18 years. You have heard it in my contribution, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Member: That is not true.

Hon. S. Roopnarine: It is very true. Members are saying it is not true. Perhaps they were not there at the time. It is quite true. The records are there in the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure. So they did nothing and then come today to say that this Government is doing nothing for traffic. Well, I just outlined what this Government has done for traffic and what we continue to do. [*Desk thumping*]

I told you about the traffic wardens; I told you about the national traffic management system, camera technology; I told you that every single traffic light was removed from Golconda to Port of Spain; I told you about the Maraval roundabout that took the Member for Diego Martin North/East 11 years to plan; I told you about the Couva/Preysal Interchange that has alleviated traffic in that area, but you choose to spend \$485 million on a pre-feasibility study for a rapid rail.

Miss Ramdial: A racket rail.

Hon. S. Roopnarine: And, you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, I am really amazed that the Member for Diego Martin West would come back in this honourable House and tell the population that two and a half years later the PNM plan is to come back with this failed rapid rail project. Two and a half years later we are coming back with the rapid rail. The population rejected that and they did so in May 2010. So if you come back with it, it can only work in our favour, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I heard the Member for Laventille West talk about the document from Nidco and so on, but what he did not say was what were the result of this feasibility study and designs that were done by the then contractor.

Mr. Hypolite: Because you all came into office after.

Hon. S. Roopnarine: You should tell the population what the outcome of that was, and if you do not know, the outcome of it said that the project is not feasible. [*Desk thumping*] The cost of the project would have been in excess of US \$7 billion—costing the taxpayers of this country over US \$7 billion. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member for Laventille West, can you allow the Member for Oropouche West to continue in silence, please?

Mr. Hypolite: Very well, Ma'am.

Hon. S. Roopnarine: The project would have been feasible if it was under \$3 billion or \$4 billion. You were coming in at US \$7 billion, and you expect the population now to accept that failed rapid rail project?

Miss Ramdial: No way! No way!

Hon. S. Roopnarine: Madam Deputy Speaker, while we are looking at measures to alleviate traffic, we are also looking at projects that can be done to alleviate traffic on a greater scheme, and that is the building and construction of new roadways and highways. I spoke to a couple of them before, but let me take the opportunity to update the Parliament and the wider community of one of our signature projects, and that is the Point Fortin Highway.

As you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Prime Minister turned the sod for this highway in January of 2011, and when we turned the sod, the Prime Minister gave a commitment that 40 per cent of all labour—skilled and unskilled—would be local, and that at least 40 per cent of the use of materials, equipment and supplies would come from our local industry.

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You see, Madam Deputy Speaker, it is our belief that the local contractors and suppliers must benefit from a project of this size in our country. Today I am pleased to report in this honourable House that the current contractor has hired a staff of 85 per cent local persons. [*Desk thumping*] In addition, there are 23 signed contracts with local suppliers and contractors with a further 15 companies currently in negotiations.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I do not need to reiterate the benefits of this project. We all know that it is to improve the transport network for those travelling from Point Fortin to Port of Spain and vice versa, and we have been creating jobs and stimulating the economy. There is now a greater demand for materials, including that of aggregate, sand, cement, bitumen and asphalt. This has also resulted in several downstream industries, stimulating the transportation industry, service contractors, small entrepreneurs who provide food and other services.

To date, Madam Deputy Speaker, I am advised that at least 60 per cent of Phase 1 has been completed, that is to say, the Golconda to Debe and Dumfries Road via Paria Suites to the Godineau River and that the contractor is continuing with the design and build of the highway.

I would like to take the opportunity to announce, Madam Deputy Speaker, that within the first quarter of the year 2013, Phase 1, the segment from Golconda to Debe, will be officially opened. [*Desk thumping*] I want to say, Madam Deputy Speaker, that there have been concerns raised by various groups and segments in our society with respect to the highway, that is to say, concerns of drainage in the environment, and I want to tell you that Nidco, together with the drainage division, which now falls under the Ministry of Environment and Water Resources, have undertaken a study of the Oropouche basin. This study, Madam Deputy Speaker, will certainly identify some of the major threats in this low-lying area and, of course, how we can mitigate against them.

I also want to put on record that this highway has already received the necessary certificates of environmental clearance and we have been working very closely with the EMA to ensure that we adhere to the standards and recommendations of the EMA.

8.00 p.m.

In addition, Madam Deputy Speaker, there is an environmental plan, as well as a waste management plan for the entire highway. There are also plans per phase, such as: flood, water quality and sediment management plan for the Golconda to the Debe area. Therefore, it is in this context I give the assurance that

there is indeed proper planning and that the Government is indeed looking at how we can address issues relating to that of drainage and flooding, as we do recognize that we are building a highway in low-lying terrain. Therefore, one can anticipate that certain mechanisms to treat with flooding would have to be put in place.

Madam Deputy Speaker, there has been a lot of concern about consultation on this highway. I want to say that it was since October last year we have had a lot of consultations with residents, where Members of Parliament and Ministers were present. We continue to be a people-centric Government, and therefore, it is important that we continue to consult with the people, communicate with them and gain feedback from them. It was to this end that Nidco, the National Infrastructure Development Company who is responsible for completing this project under the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure opened a community outreach office in Debe, so that persons who are affected by the highway do not have to go all the way to Port of Spain to get information or to do the necessary paperwork.

I also want to advise that Nidco has also embarked on community outreach initiatives. Their very first project, I am pleased to say, was completed in the Bakal recreation ground in the vicinity of Gopee Trace in Penal, where they installed a play park so that the children of that community can benefit from it. This is their first community outreach initiative and it is planned that Nidco will continue to have such services provided in other areas that are going to be affected by the highway.

We also have the issue of compensation and land acquisition. I would like to advise that to date Nidco has settled 13 claims and we have received over 200 claims from persons who are willing to negotiate with the Government via a private treaty negotiation. This shows, Madam Deputy Speaker, a willingness from the population to work together with the Government to resolve the issues and negotiate to settle with the Government.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we recognize that there is certainly a large number of persons to be relocated with this highway and we understand that in the Debe to Mon Desir segment alone, we have approximately 300 households that will be displaced. So, we are committed that we will compensate properly and at the same time we would assist with the rebuilding of communities. It was to this end that we have acquired land in the Petit Morne area which can be made available to the residents as residential lots. We are also pursuing now aggressively, we are pursuing lands to allow farmers and squatters to have access to that under the relevant policies of the Government.

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You see, Madam Deputy Speaker, we are a committed Government, we are a responsible Government, and therefore, it is our responsibility to the society to ensure that if we are displacing persons—and a large number of persons—to ensure that we are rebuilding communities as well, because we understand that there would be temples affected, churches affected, mosques affected, we would have schools perhaps, we would have community centres and so on. Therefore, it is our responsibility to assist with the rebuilding of these. We hope that we can work together with the citizens to find the necessary ways to resolve these outstanding issues with the Point Fortin Highway.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to turn my attention now to the Port of Spain, East-West Corridor transportation project. I would like to advise that this project was aimed at reducing the congestion along the East-West Corridor, in particular, the construction of the Churchill-Roosevelt Highway and Uriah Butler Highway Interchange, what we term in the Ministry as Package C. When completed, Package C will result in the removal of the existing traffic lights at Churchill-Roosevelt Highway and the Uriah Butler intersection and the lights at Cipriani Bamboo No. 2. The final designs provide a free flow in all directions and made provisions for access to Bamboo No. 1, No. 2 and No. 3 together with Grand Bazaar and Nestle.

Package C was broken into seven construction packages. I would just give a brief update on where we are with these packages. Package one commenced in February of 2011 and was completed in July of 2012. I would like to say that this project was completed approximately five months ahead of schedule, within budget and with no claims.

The second contract, Madam Deputy Speaker, is a design-build. It was awarded in February 2012 and to date it is approximately 20 per cent complete. We are looking at a completion date of August 2013.

Contract three was also awarded in May of this year and we expect it to be completed by April next year. Contract four, also awarded in May, expected completion date January 2013. Contract five is expected to be completed by July of next year. Contract six by September of next year and contract seven by June of next year. So, we are actually ahead of schedule with respect to that project. We expect to continue in that same vein as we move forward.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin Central raised an issue, he said there was a developing sinkhole on the Diego Martin Highway in the vicinity of Crystal Stream. I want to say that this issue along the Diego Martin

Highway was actually brought to the attention of the officials of the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure by the hon. Minister himself. As you know, he is from the Diego Martin area, and it was he that took a proactive approach when he told the engineers of the Ministry to immediately look at that as he thought it would be a potential issue.

So, the Ministry undertook together with other agencies such as WASA and TSTT, as WASA had to do some repairs in that area. That repair has since been completed and the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure has done work in that area. The only thing that is left to do is actual compacting but we had to ensure traffic flow because of the heavy traffic in that region. So I do not know where he is from, where he lives and so on, but work is progressing and we expect that to be completed very shortly.

I want to turn my attention to that of drainage. While this portfolio has moved to the new Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, I am sure that my colleague from Couva North will deal with that adequately. I just want to say that we have done a lot of work. [*Interruption*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member has expired.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. S. Roopnarine: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and thank you to my colleagues for giving me some more time.

Madam Deputy Speaker, as I was saying, I want to turn my attention to that of drainage. I want to tell you that the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure over the last year has certainly done a lot of work in this area, in particular some of these are the detention ponds in South Quay and Bamboo Village. We commissioned a new water pump at the cremation site, Cacandee Road in Felicity; the dredging of rivers including Sea Lots, Maraval and East Dry River; the clearing of many rivers in south Trinidad, rivers that have not been cleaned for 40 years, the Teemul Channel and the Trinidad River; the cleaning of underground drains in Port of Spain to alleviate flooding. I am convinced that the new Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources will certainly continue this initiative.

I heard the Members for Diego Martin Central and Laventille West saying that we said there would be no flooding. Madam Deputy Speaker, every country in the

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world is faced with the perennial issue of flooding, but as a responsible Government what you have to do is ensure that you put measures in place to decrease flooding. I do not know if people recall the days where five minutes of rain and Port of Spain floods or the days where five minutes of rain in Woodland and people's houses were under water.

Hon. Member: Um hmm

Hon. S. Roopnarine: So, flooding is not a problem that can be eliminated but it is certainly something that year after year after year you can look at measures that you can put in place to decrease flooding. I have outlined some of them, such as the pump systems and detention ponds. I am sure that that Ministry will continue to put those measures in place over this fiscal year.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, before I move to my constituency, I want to touch a little bit on the issue of youth development in Trinidad and Tobago. You know, the Member for Laventille West went on about how there is nothing in the budget for youth and "tra la la". Well, I do not know what budget documents he read but let me tell you of some of the programmes that we have implemented and will continue to implement to benefit the youth of our nation as we move forward.

As you know, the National Youth Mentorship Programme was launched. This programme was launched by the hon. Prime Minister herself, a programme under the Ministry of National Security which will keep our youths on the right path and they would have proper mentors to mentor and guide them, to keep them on the positive path.

The Minister of Sport mentioned his Life Sport programme. This allowed actually 20,000 at-risk young men an opportunity to develop skills, and sports have been proven as one of the measures which keep young people away from crime and unto the right path. We also have launched the Hoop of Life programme which was launched in Beetham Gardens in June 2012. We are continuing youth training programmes such as that of YTEPP, HYPE, YAPA and so on.

It is my pleasure to also advise this honourable House that you would recall that prior to May 2010, this Government gave a commitment that we would review the National Youth Policy in an attempt to make it more relevant to today's youth, that policy being well over 10 years old. I am advised that under the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development that a committee was set up to review this policy. That committee went out to the youth population for consultation and they have since completed a draft which is now before that

Ministry for further action. Therefore, this shows that this Government is committed to delivering on our promises and to delivering to the youth of this nation. [*Desk thumping*]

The Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development has also launched the National Youth Volunteerism programme. We also heard earlier on that the GATE programme continues to be expanded. We also have the OJT programme being expanded and that programme facilitates quite a number of graduates who are now coming out of university, and that gives them a couple years of experience, so that they can make an easier transition coming out of the schooling system into the world of work.

8.15 p.m.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I have outlined some—just some—of the initiatives for the youth of our country and, therefore, there is no basis to the statement made by the Member for Laventille West that there is nothing in the budget for youth. Perhaps, he needs to go and read his documents.

Hon. Member: Again!

Hon. S. Roopnarine: It is on *Hansard*. Before I close this afternoon, I want to speak to the people of Oropouche West, whom I am very grateful for, as they have chosen me to represent them in this august House and, if not for them, I would not be here today.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the theme that the Leader of the Opposition spoke about, in his response to the budget, was that the Government cannot be trusted. He spoke about deception and untruths. Let me tell you the truths of the people of Oropouche West.

We have seen roads paved. I have mentioned some of them earlier, but I want to tell you that this is something that is really in the hearts of the people of Oropouche West, because they feel neglected by government after government after government. So, I take the opportunity to apologize, on behalf of the previous regime, for the neglect that they have been made to suffer because of their geographical location; perhaps, because of their political bias and so on, which was really unfair. I would like, when the Member for Diego Martin North/East stands up to make his contribution, that he explains to the people of Oropouche West why is it he could not pave a single road in Oropouche West during his regime—during his term as the Minister of Works and Infrastructure. He must answer to the people.

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I also want to tell you—the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara spoke about the Member for Diego Martin West talking about this ministry for rural development. I do not understand that; it was the PNM that created rural neglect. If it were not for that we would not even have this problem of rural neglect in our country today. So, now he is coming to say, “Well, we would come with this ministry of rural development”. For what? Every single Ministry should be fair and serve the people of Trinidad and Tobago regardless of their geographic location. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Very good.

Hon. S. Roopnarine: I want to tell you, Madam Deputy Speaker, of the neglect of the children in this constituency. The Tulsa Trace Hindu School had collapsed in 2008. The then Government refused to reconstruct the school for these children; 250—300 children; refused. These children, and their teachers, were forced to operate out of the annex of a neighbouring temple; when rain fall, they would get wet. These were the conditions under which the children were made to suffer.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it is my pleasure to announce that this year, June 2012, the hon. Minister of Education, Member for Caroni East, opened the newly installed Tulsa Trace Hindu School. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Good work, Minister.

Hon. S. Roopnarine: In the constituency of Oropouche West, T&TEC lights, WASA lines—all these things were very hard for people to access. I want to tell you today that since we have taken office, 71 new street lights were installed. [*Desk thumping*] We have newly installed water mains in the areas that have never had water lines before: Baig Trace, Banwarie Trace, Mathura Avenue, Santa Cecelia Trace, and the list goes on. Such was the neglect of the PNM.

I want to tell you that this year, for the first time, the constituency of Oropouche West hosted sports camps from the Sports Company of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] They had never had access to this before. We had two sports camps in the Bakal Grounds and in the Evergreen Grounds, and the children were very grateful; they said, “You know MP, we never had the opportunity to access this before”. Therefore, we must not come in this Parliament and take for granted that what persons in the south have access to, is the same that persons in the Port of Spain region would have access to. We are now seeking to rectify that wrong.

We have had the Direct Impact Programme under the hon. Minister of the People and Social Development, Member for Caroni Central. We have had infrastructural development on some of our sporting grounds; we have had lights installed in the Antilles Grounds; we have had lights installed in Sunrees Road Recreation Grounds and currently, the Evergreen Recreational Ground is also getting lights. These are grounds that never had any lighting infrastructure before. We continue to have programmes such as YTEPP, and so on, implemented in the constituency.

I say this in the context that it seems that the PNM is trying to create a mantra of the Government not being trusted and I want to say to the population that if you look at the delivery of this Government, to date, there is no issue of trust. There is no issue that this Government is not for the people and of the people.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we have shown our commitment by providing a people-centric budget because, as the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara said, we love people, and this budget is for the people; and, as long as we remain in Government we will continue to have people-centric budgets, people-centric governance.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it was my pleasure to be able to speak in this honourable House and I thank you for this opportunity. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member for St. Ann's East. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Joanne Thomas (*St. Ann's East*): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for this opportunity to contribute to this budget debate.

Before I respond to two of the Members who spoke before, firstly, I just want to commend the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy on the presentation of his first budget. I also want to say that I know the goodly gentleman very well, having come from the banking sector as well—him at First Citizens Bank and myself at Citibank.

I would tell him he comes from an industry where he is well respected in the financial sector, but I caution him that this step he has taken to come into politics, with this regime, that he would know that this is what would remain with him for the rest of his life. His performance during this time is what would remain with him for the rest of his life. So, despite having had a very good reputation in the financial sector, that would become null and void based on how he performs in the political arena. Of course, we already see how it has begun.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to refer to my colleague, the Member for Tobago West. She spoke a lot about her Tobago and how Tobago is in a dilapidated condition under the THA. I sat there and I listened to her. Now, I

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cannot talk for Tobago—I did not grow up there, or even lived there—but, recently, I have been going to Tobago quite often during the week. Would you believe—what she said about Scarborough, I can tell her that I drive by Scarborough; I drive by Mount Marie Road, Breezy Hill, up town Scarborough where Unit Trust and all the other banks are. [*Desk thumping*] I go to Shirvan Road—I am now getting to know Tobago. I go to Buccoo by Shirl’s where I buy Shirl’s chicken and chips and fish and chips.

My first comment was the roads in Tobago, I cannot believe it. What are the people complaining about? [*Desk thumping*] The garbage is picked up at 3.00 a.m. Sometimes I am sleeping and I hear—at 3.00 a.m. I must tell her that since I have been there I have seen one vagrant. I am amazed; one vagrant, one day on Mount Marie Road in Scarborough; first time.

I hear her talking about her country and her people and saying these untruths; and I say, “I cah believe this”. [*Desk thumping*] I am there, I see it. So, how could she come out and say this? I say, “Would you do this to your country and your people just to find something about the THA administration?” That is not right. [*Desk thumping*] I respect her as a God-fearing person, but today I have doubts; I really do have doubts. It is a pity she is not here because I wanted to see her facial expression when I am saying this.

Hon. Member: Tobago nice!

Mrs. J. Thomas: Madam Deputy Speaker, I hear the Member for Oropouche West; in all her contributions she talks about for 40 years, “the PNM do this and the PNM do that” and she was not there. I must say she is an educated young woman, and I wonder under what administration she got her schooling. [*Desk thumping*] I wonder, because the way she talks it is as though the PNM has done nothing. She spoke about the constituents of Oropouche West that they have been neglected and it is only now they are being attended to. I tell myself, maybe she is adopting the same approach; that is why the PNM areas are not getting attended to. [*Desk thumping*] So, you talk about serve all the people, but it is like “you do me, so ah doing yuh back”. Even if she has to look at it, that is not Christian, that is not fair.

The thing is: what I find with this administration is they get on as though this is their personal business; this is their personal cash and they do whatever they want and do not tell them anything. This is the thing that gets me really annoyed. This is taxpayers’ money.

Hon. Member: “And they doing what they want with it.”

Mrs. J. Thomas: Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to just focus a bit on the tourism aspect of the budget. I want to refer the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy to the PP Government's strategies in respect to the development of the tourism sector. Let me look to their first strategy—Madam Deputy Speaker, allow me to read this:

Exploration and expansion of all of the various tourism products including, but not restricted to, recreation, sport, health, leisure, business, festivals, culture and eco-tourism.

Again, one of their strategies:

To critically examine the recently developed national tourism policy of Trinidad and Tobago with a view to implementation after modification to achieve sustainable expansion of the tourism sector.

Madam Deputy Speaker, if I can just highlight to you, the tourism policy of Trinidad and Tobago calls for the roll-out of increased visitor arrivals; a strong contribution to GDP; improved quantity and quality jobs and the multiplier effect of tourism throughout the country.

8.30 p.m.

We look again, continuing with their strategies—this is their strategies for tourism, Madam Deputy Speaker. Another one of their strategies was to strengthen and develop local tourism centres across rural Trinidad to enhance local tourism and to achieve a more diversified range of tourism products in order to support a rural industrialization thrust. And, of course, lastly, to work collaboratively with the House of Assembly and the tourism sector in Tobago to ensure that tourism is sustainably developed in Tobago. The Minister of Finance and the Economy did not touch anything as regards these strategies that the Government indicated for themselves and how he plans to deal with it in the budget. He just bypassed this.

Madam Deputy Speaker, if I could just also remind the Minister of Finance and the Economy that his former colleague, the Member for Tunapuna, in his budget statement, he articulated specific initiatives: the establishment of a Sugar Heritage Village and Museum at Sevilla House in Caroni—nothing was said about that—the construction of a 251-room Radisson Hotel at Piarco and another luxury resort in Tobago, and then providing guaranteed seats to airlines in order to encourage direct flights to this country.

Madam Deputy Speaker, you know, you wonder, all these things that they outlined that they want to focus on for tourism in Trinidad and Tobago. You

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know, when you look at this and you see nothing about this in the budget, you tell yourself, “No, dey just feel dey could just put down anything looking nice to make the people feel good” [*Desk thumping*] and that we would not even remember that they made these promises to us.

Madam Deputy Speaker, permit me to quote something in the Minister’s remarks. He said:

“...the Government is committed to building a dynamic and diverse tourism sector.”

And then, of course, he goes on to describe some of the tourist attractions—the Pitch Lake, the unspoilt beaches and so, but what is most interesting, he said:

“The fact that such a tourism sector has not been achieved to date results from a lack of investment in time and energy.”

This Government has been in office since May 2010.

Miss Hospedales: That is correct. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. J. Thomas: Madam Deputy Speaker, and if that is not all, this is what he said:

“With the appointment of our new Minister of Tourism, this has changed.”

What about the previous Minister of Tourism? [*Desk thumping*] Is it that he is just “dissing” what this Minister did? [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Exactly!

Miss Hospedales: Very disappointing!

Mrs. J. Thomas: You know what somebody would call that? All for one and one for all, PP style. That is what anybody seeing this—I mean, how could you—you are just here in Government a couple of months and already your own colleague, the former Minister of Tourism, you are saying, “With the appointment of the new Minister of Tourism, this has changed.”

Miss Hospedales: Very unkind.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Awful!

Mrs. J. Thomas: But, Member, all I can say is, you know, I feel for you with a comment like this.

Hon. Member: “Stay with yuh own people!”

Mrs. J. Thomas: Madam Deputy Speaker, you know what is becoming more and more evident to the people of this country? The untruths; just untruths—more and more untruths. [*Desk thumping*] The thing is, it is happening day, by day, by day.

Miss Hospedales: Every day! Shame!

Mrs. J. Thomas: Madam Deputy Speaker, look at for example—to further endorse my point, let us look at the statistics for crew ship arrivals. The number of crew ships coming into Trinidad and Tobago fell to 59 vessels in 2011 from 85 vessels in 2010, representing a decrease of 30.6 per cent, and this led to a 40.7 per cent decline in total crew ship passenger arrivals. The yacht arrivals reached a low of 52 landings in November 2011, a decrease of 21.1 per cent from one year earlier. We all know that one of the major contributors to this is our crime issue.

Miss Hospedales: Yes. Where is the Minister of National Security?

Mrs. J. Thomas: You know, what was glaring to me is that whilst the Minister of Finance and the Economy was doing his presentation, and they were talking about crime, the hon. Prime Minister blurted out: “Not one murder in Laventille for 20 days”, and of course, the Minister of Finance and the Economy just echoed exactly what she said.

Now, tell me, Madam Deputy Speaker, can we go and tell the visitors who we want to come in this country, who we are doing all these plans for, that it had no murders in Laventille so it is okay, they could come? “Ah mean, oh gosh, yuh doh expect professional people to talk like this.”

Mr. Peters: Why not?

Mrs. J. Thomas: I want to take a look now at some of the allocations for 2013. An overall allocation of 60.6 million is appropriated for use by the Ministry of Tourism. The focus for this money, he says, will be on product enhancement, service delivery, safety and security, and physical upgrade.

Madam Deputy Speaker, \$17.6 million will be provided for use by the Tourism Development Company in some major initiatives. I just want to highlight some of these initiatives to you.

- The reimbursement of 25 per cent to a maximum of \$12,500 per room to hoteliers as an incentive for the upgrade of hotel and guest room stock in Trinidad.

When I saw that big figure—\$12,500—because this exact initiative was outlined by the PNM Minister of Tourism, but the figure was \$1,200 per room—do you know what came to me? Which hotels does this refer to? Then I said to myself, “I know which hotel—Chancellor Hotel. Because, yuh know why?” A key person at the TDC has shares in that Chancellor Hotel.

Hon. Members: Ooooh!

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: This is why.

Dr. Griffith: Standing Order 36(5). She is imputing improper motives. She said that a key—*[Interruption]*

Miss Hospedales: On whom?

Dr. Griffith: The chairman of TDC.

Mrs. J. Thomas: No, no, I did not say *[Crosstalk]* chairman. I said a key person.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, contain yourselves please.

Mr. Hypolite: It could be the driver!

Dr. Griffith: It is not the driver, she said a key person at TDC.

Miss Hospedales: She never said so!

Mrs. J. Thomas: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I said a key person. The messenger is key; everybody is key to the operation of a business. *[Desk thumping]* Every member of staff is key. So I mean, Madam Deputy Speaker—

The other initiative—what is amazing—the initiation of the Penal/Debe doubles pavilion project.

Miss Hospedales: That is for tourists?

Mrs. J. Thomas: That is part of the initiatives. You know what I want the Minister to tell me: what percentage of tourists visits that doubles pavilion in Penal/Debe? “Just ah percentage.” Just give me the percentage of tourists that visit that to spend money on that initiative. Then you tell yourself: what about the doubles vendors in Curepe junction? *[Desk thumping]* “Dey there long time.” *[Desk thumping]* One of the things that I would mention is: what about the bake and shark vendors in Maracas? I mean, there are tourists there all the time.

Madam Deputy Speaker, look at the Chaguanas Development Authority. They will receive \$20.3 million to pursue several of its capital programmes. Four of these programmes would be:

- upgrade of sewer facilities and recreational spaces and establishment of additional restroom facilities at Chagville beach area.
- the continuation of refurbishment works to the CDA Administration Building comprising replacement of windows, roof repairs and general painting.

And then:

- the minor upgrade works to the existing public restroom facilities on the peninsula.

And part of this 20.3 million would also go to procurement of consultancy services to facilitate negotiations and contract execution for a joint venture initiative for the Chaguaramas Convention Centre.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I do not dispute that some of these initiatives will assist in some measures in enhancing some of the tourists' facilities, but what I have not seen in the plan: what is the marketing strategy to get the tourists and visitors to come back? You know, after you do all these upgrades, unless you have a plan to woo people to come back to Trinidad, then it does not make sense. It does not make sense, and that is what I want the Minister to tell me in his response—what is the marketing plan to woo people back to Trinidad and Tobago?

Madam Deputy Speaker, it is no secret that this Government continues to knock the PNM's 2020 vision over and over, but what is most amazing is that most of the initiatives indicated are straight from that document. Despite all the talk, they know that the PNM is really the only true party capable of running this economy; the only true party. [*Desk thumping*] I just want to highlight, again, two plans outlined by the PNM administration which the citizens and the business community of this country are asking for, and I just want to remind the Minister and advise him of it, so in his whole planning, he could think about it, that is, first, to strengthen and improve quality standards in the tourism sector.

One of the things that was done by the PNM was the establishment of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Tourism Development Company and the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards for the administering of the Trinidad and Tobago Certification Programme.

8.45p.m.

That is something that the PNM did and I just—he should consider looking at that. This is something that the public is asking for, and to further upgrade the skills of our tourism operators. One of the mechanisms established to do this was the small tourism enterprises programme and this allowed for training in areas such as customer service, housekeeping, hospitality education and occupational health and safety. With this type of initiative, our people will be customer service ready for when tourists and visitors come to our country. All I am asking the Minister is if he could please follow through on some of these initiatives.

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One of the things I think the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy must be mindful of is that the more we invest in tourism, the more we will continue to generate sustainable employment and in addition, the more we can earn foreign exchange for Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, I just want to focus a little bit on my constituency because a major part of my constituency is the north coast, which is the tourist hub of Trinidad—Maracas and Las Cuevas—because everyone knows any visitor coming to Trinidad, before they go back to their home, must, must, as the young people say, “bong tuh mus” go to Maracas Beach or Las Cuevas Beach. Some attention needs to be given to that area.

Just last weekend, I went to my constituency to meet with the residents and when driving up in Maracas—I do not know when last any of the Members here went to Maracas Beach, but all the bush is now coming into the road, making the road become more narrow. The Maracas road is a road which you have to make sure and maintain because any accident there, “yuh going straight over”.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Risky.

Mrs. J. Thomas: One of the reasons, of course, the road is like this is because they take all the URP and all the CEPEP from all the PNM constituencies, not looking at the bigger picture, because this is where the tourists come, “yuh know wha ah mean?” I want to use this opportunity to ask the Ministers responsible for CEPEP—I believe there are three Ministers—if some focus could be given, and some CEPEP gangs be placed again in Maracas and Las Cuevas. Let us keep the roads clear. Let the tourists coming into Trinidad and Tobago feel a sense of safety when they are going to the Maracas Beach and the Las Cuevas Beach.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

One of the things I also want to ask him to look at, which the prior Minister was working on, is the car park in Maracas Bay and the vendors. The same way a pavilion is being considered for Penal/Debe, maybe they could consider a really nice pavilion because everyone could see how the bake and shark vendors operate—under a tent. There are no toilet facilities for them. It is right there under the tent they have to do everything. “Ah mean yuh talking bout tourists from all over de world coming Maracas Bay.” At least let us upgrade ourselves. Right?

I know the former Minister, I must admit, really did give a little focus on my area but I do not know if the current Minister is following in that pattern, because, as you see, the Minister of Finance and the Economy just “dis” the former Minister of Tourism and he is putting so much hope in this new Minister. Because it really bothered me—this is a team together—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: It is supposed to be.

Mrs. J. Thomas: And this Minister of Finance and the Economy “just come and how he could jus say all this would change with the appointment of the new Minister of Tourism? Oh gosh man. I not on that side and I feeling sorry fuh him. Yuh know what ah mean?” You have to give people respect and you have to give recognition to people’s contribution, and the previous Minister of Tourism, he did contribute in some measure to the tourism Ministry.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: He did.

Mrs. J. Thomas: Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity as well, in Las Cuevas one of the requests I made was the refurbishment of Fort Abercromby. Work is ongoing and, again, I want to thank that former Minister of Tourism for that. A lot of work still needs to be done, but again I want some focus—when I would have discussed it with him—with regard to the employment in that Las Cuevas area. We really need some attention there, because when I went up there, one of the contractors was there, the electrical contractor and he was like, all he was told is to come and do this. He is not really concerned with whatever and one of the things I did ask in the initial stage is to remember the persons living there and give them, include them, in that whole restructure that is taking place at Fort Abercromby.

Mr. Speaker, the questions I have asked, I want to ask the Minister—and even the questions we on this side have asked—is that he gives us an answer and not respond like his colleague, the Minister of Planning, when the people of this country asked him how much money was paid to Machel Montano to make that CD and he was like, “he doh have tuh say dat”. Does that Minister understand this is the people’s money?

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Taxpayers.

Mrs. J. Thomas: And the people want to know. So, again, it is just the attitude “boy”, the way they carry about themselves, as though “doh aks meh nutten. I could do what I want.”

Dr. Gopeesingh: That is not us.

Mrs. J. Thomas: I just said, about the Minister of Planning, how he responded to that question. I just said that. I know the Member for Caroni East would not do that. He is experienced and he has respect for people’s portfolio. He has respect for the Parliament. He has respect as regards representing people. But I think—[*Interruption*]

Miss Hospedales: At least we think so.

Mrs. J. Thomas:—what the experienced ones need to do is they need, when these new ones come in, to give them a little training. Go through an induction with them first before they come and want to talk in this highhanded manner. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I just want to end my contribution with—you know there is a song “Tonight is the Night”. A lot of the oldies might know this particular song.

Mr. Peters: “Sing it leh we hear yuh.”

Dr. Gopeesingh: Come on Joanne.

Mrs. J. Thomas: But I just want to end with this. You would probably get what song it is. This refers to the Minister of Finance and the Economy.

I like the words, the articulation is good, the length short and sweet, but “ah know de hardship eh done”.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of State in the Ministry of Finance and the Economy (Hon. Rudranath Indarsingh): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, as I join this debate on the fiscal presentation for 2013. I want to assure the Member for St. Ann’s East that all the Members of this Government of the People’s Partnership are quite committed towards a strong sense of accountability and transparency and humility in the way that we go about the people’s business. And, at the end of the day, all my colleagues are prepared to be accountable to all the stakeholders of the society and, of course, I am sure too that in keeping with the parliamentary process and procedures and so on, if the Member wants to seek additional responses, she can file the appropriate question to get additional information.

More importantly too, “doh matter how much kuchur” she may attempt to infuse amongst the members of the partnership, the partnership that is led by the Member for Siparia and our hon. Prime Minister is solid as a rock and we would continue to be solid as a rock as we march to 2015, and that sense of cohesiveness, that sense of collectiveness and standing side by side—as we carry out our roles and responsibilities on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago—will never be shaken by the antics and the “grand charge” of the People’s National Movement. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I am sure that the issues which have been raised by the Member for St. Ann’s East, as they relate to the tourism sector, will be answered and answered very adequately by the Minister of Tourism and the Member for

Chaguanas East in his contribution. Also, to remind the Member for St. Ann's East that, in his delivery of his first budget presentation in this august House, Minister Howai made it very clear that he will leave it to the individual line Ministers to outline their programmes and policies, as they relate to giving a sense of accountability to not only the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, but giving a sense of accountability to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, in terms of what is expected over the next 12 months. Also, take into consideration that his fiscal package must not be seen in the context of a 12-month programme, but it must be seen in the context of development in the medium-term and the long-term framework of development for Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, as I have risen, it gives me an additional sense of pride to participate in this particular debate, taking into consideration it is the third budget presentation of the People's Partnership Government, led by our very astute, decisive and visionary Prime Minister in the person of the Member for Siparia, and taking into consideration now that I am in the Ministry of Finance and the Economy.

9.00 p.m.

I want to read into the record my greatest sense of commendation to the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy, Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai, for his groundbreaking, progressive and focused budget presentation, taking into consideration that he only assumed the responsibility approximately three months ago and had to involve himself in very intense discussions and deliberations to formulate this fiscal package for 2013.

Dr. Rambachan: "Yuh sure right." [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. R. Indarsingh: And in this scenario, taking into consideration where he was three months ago, and where he is today, I think the entire country of Trinidad and Tobago owes him a great sense of gratitude for the fiscal presentation, a presentation which has been widely accepted throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Speaker.

I am on the ground. I am all over Trinidad and Tobago. I am all over central Trinidad and so on, and I could say without contradicting myself that this fiscal presentation, this budget presentation, was widely received and applauded and commended by the stakeholders of Trinidad and Tobago. Even those on the opposite side, the members in their respective constituencies, their supporters and so on, have accepted the budget presentation. I think the only condemnation of this budget is coming from the 11 on the opposite side of us in this Chamber.

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Mr. Speaker, it is important to see that this budget presentation will build solidly on the foundation's pillars and achievements of the last two budget presentations of the People's Partnership administration. We must see it in the context of, as we go forth collectively as the most dynamic and astute Government which has presided over the people of Trinidad and Tobago since Independence, we must see it in the context of building on the 2011 theme of "Facing the Issues, Turning the Economy around and Partnering With All Our People"; in 2012, the theme of From Steady Foundation to Economic Transformation; and in 2013, "Stimulating Growth and Generating Prosperity". So, what we are seeing unfolding in this third year is a work in progress and building solidly on the foundations and achievements of the last two budget presentations.

Mr. Speaker, where we are in 2013 is an indication of a Government that is focused on delivering to the people and continuing its delivery to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. That is why this budget has been dubbed the people's budget in terms of displaying that sense of connection with the citizenry of the country, one where we will continue to partner with the people and continue to build on that sense of trust, that sense of confidence and that relationship, and that contract that we developed with the people prior to May of 2010.

As we continue on this march of delivering to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Speaker, we will ensure that whether it is the Tobago House of Assembly election, whether it is the local government election, whether it is the general election when it is constitutionally due, we will decimate the PNM—whether it is in Tobago, whether it is in the local government election or the next general election whenever it is called in Trinidad and Tobago, because that sense of delivery, that sense of focus, that sense of focusing on the people of Trinidad and Tobago, is the focus and drive of the People's Partnership.

Mr. Sharma: Very good point.

Miss Mc Donald: "Yuh eh even understand it."

Mr. Sharma: "Dat is why it is ah good point."

Hon. R. Indarsingh: Mr. Speaker, I also want to take the opportunity to join Minister Howai in commending all those at the Ministry of Finance and the Economy, in terms of the staff, the technocrats and the advisors, who have played a very pivotal and a very critical role working beyond the call of duty, working

long and extended hours in the furtherance of service to country and in furtherance of that sense of dedication and commitment to nation building and patriotism that is most important if we are to go forward beyond our 50th anniversary of being an independent nation.

This being the 50th anniversary of our independence, we have risen in that sense of patriotism and love for the red, white and black. In that regard, we have seen it and seen it unfold in a very clear way from the support staff and the support that we have gotten from the officers of the Ministry of Finance and the Economy. In this regard, Mr. Speaker, I want you and this Chamber to understand that there are public servants who will continue to labour in the vineyard to bring about that change we collectively want in the interest of Trinidad and Tobago.

The Member for St Ann's East, like all other previous speakers—they have given little advice, little direction, little focus, little depth and substance as it relates to where we want Trinidad and Tobago in the next five, 10, 15, 20 years and have given little substance and advice in terms of their sense of analysis of the 2013 fiscal presentation.

The budget presentation of 2013 must be seen in the context of the People's Partnership framework for sustainable development which takes into consideration, as I clearly outlined, that sense of people-centred development, that sense of focus on the people of Trinidad and Tobago, also with a strong focus on national and personal security, poverty eradication and social justice, the need to have technological connection and development throughout Trinidad and Tobago, and to link it in an international context, taking into consideration the importance of ICT and technology as we continue to operate in the global village.

Also, to build on the native and creative genius of our people, to ensure that there is continued good governance in the context of people's participation, and as I said too, from a national or a domestic point of view, building our country so that it continues to occupy a space and its rightful place in the regional and also in the international context of the global village.

Mr. Speaker, the budget presentation of 2013 must be seen too as I said, as a continuation of this Government's continued work in terms of being a work in progress, and I reiterated that it must be seen also as we celebrated the 50th anniversary of our independent nation of laying the foundation as we march collectively to the 100th anniversary of being an independent nation.

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We must be cognizant of the fact that we have a true sense of responsibility to nation building, and that true sense of responsibility to nation building must be seen in the context of giving support to fiscal presentation, budget presentation that has a sense of focus in taking the country to the place of development that we all aspire it to be.

I am sure that when the history books are written—when there is a sense of reflection in terms of 2012 and the 50th anniversary of our independent nation, those who will do their sense of analysis—it will be said that Minister Howai and the People's Partnership administration understood what was needed to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago developed its foundation in the context of where we are today.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Trinidad and Tobago, as I said, have placed their confidence in this administration prior to May of 2010, and in that context, we will continue as a Government to work with all the stakeholders in the society. We will continue to work with the rank and file, the working class, the poor and the vulnerable, the dispossessed and those who are in need of critical support so that at the end of the day, all the stakeholders of our society will see the Government's focus in relation to the following: stimulating growth, which will result in increased revenues for the private and public sectors; refocusing Government's expenditure to create more value for money; and of course the very critical issue of building a competitive economy through focused investment and a targeted reform agenda.

It is of critical importance that the conversation among stakeholders in Trinidad and Tobago changes as it relates to building a competitive economy for the future of Trinidad and Tobago if we want to survive in the global village and we want the returns not only for the business community, but we want the returns for the labour movement, we want the returns for the non-governmental organizations, and we want to see a standard of living and a quality of life unfold—and unfold where we could all continue to see what we want to exist in.

Mr. Speaker, the Government's vision and direction are as clear as crystal in terms of what has been enunciated or announced by the Minister of Finance and the Economy in terms of—it is designed to focus on growth. The Government, through the Minister of Finance and the Economy, has taken a deliberate decision to operate a deficit budget this year, and to move towards a targeted balanced budget over the next couple of years and to achieve this, with all things being equal, by 2016.

9.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance and the Economy has formulated a budget that was based on a very deep, intense and focused process of consultation. That deep sense of focus, that widespread consultation that unfolded in the last three months at the Ministry of Finance and the Economy, shows the importance that this Government places on social dialogue and getting that sense of feel from the stakeholders and the ordinary man in the society.

The records will reflect that the Minister and the Ministry of Finance and the Economy received over 700 recommendations as it relates to the different views of people in terms of where we were—in terms of the economy of Trinidad and Tobago; and what were the thought processes and what were the agendas of interest groups and so on—in terms of where they wanted Trinidad and Tobago to go over the next 12 months and taking into consideration the medium and long term.

This budget presentation is very different in the context of—our Minister has made it very clear, in keeping with that process of continued dialogue and an open-door policy, that there will be an ongoing process of consultation as we move towards achieving that aim, that goal of realizing a balanced budget. It is very important in the context of wanting to achieve that goal that we have all the stakeholders and that we have all of Trinidad and Tobago reading collectively and singing out of the same page as it relates to what we want to achieve.

I just want to amplify that sense of commitment to dialogue, that sense of connection to the people of Trinidad and Tobago by quoting from the budget presentation.

“It is my intention to continue, even after this budget is read, this process of engagement with the various stakeholders and organisations which preceded the budget presentation exercise.”

We will develop our reforms in a thorough manner so that, with the implementation, the impact on the most vulnerable within the society would be mitigated. Our approach will be even-handed both for the individuals as well as for businesses, whether they are in the private sector or in the public sector; but let me emphasize that it will be undertaken in consultation with the affected stakeholders and it will be done on a gradual basis.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, in that context, we have consulted with the representative unions and we have given the undertaking that these share issues will be linked and will not be offered to international investors.

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So Mr. Speaker, it is clear that the Minister of Finance and the Economy has signalled to the population that the conversation to realize the growth dynamics and to improve the efficiency has to be now. It is in this regard that we must collectively see the importance of what we want to achieve in the next couple of years as we move towards the realization of a balanced budget.

This budget and the fiscal package which has unfolded have seen a number of initiatives which have focused on the ordinary man in the society and which give that sense of protection and delivery in terms of ensuring that what we promised as a Government in that social—prior to and in the realization of—that social contract to ensure that we continue a sense of delivery to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

In that regard, Mr. Speaker, I want to take the opportunity to focus a bit on the Clico/CL Financial situation and that of the Hindu Credit Union Cooperative Society Limited. This, as has been outlined by the Minister of Finance and the Economy—he has indicated in a very clear way that this will be resolved by the beginning of 2013 and it is important to note that the collapse of these two institutions has caused a tremendous amount of psychological pain, trauma, discomfort and a sense of instability in the planning and development of families, of businesses and, by extension, threatened the very stability of the financial system of Trinidad and Tobago and the economy of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to see and understand that what will unfold over the next three months as it relates to this particular scenario is a further indication of the Government's willingness to listen to the pulse of the people and to the recommendations and concerns of groups in the society and so on in relation to this particular issue.

Today, as I stand here, the records will reflect that by the middle of September 2012, 25,115 short-term product holders—inclusive of two important components of the society or stakeholders of Trinidad and Tobago from a people-based point of view, a small-man point of view, from the ordinary workers and the working class of Trinidad and Tobago—have accepted the Government's settlement offer. This includes the trade union movement, a number of trade unions and a number of credit unions. So the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, through the Ministry of Finance and the Economy, has played a very critical role in stabilizing two of the most important sectors of the country in terms of the trade union movement and the credit union movement; these two movements being what we would term people-based organizations or the people-based sector in the country.

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It is clear that the Clico Investment Fund will be launched on November 01, 2012 and by January 02, 2013 trading will begin on the Trinidad and Tobago Stock Exchange for the unitholders who exchanged their 11-to 20-year bonds for units in the Clico Investment Fund.

I just want to reiterate what the president of the Clico Policyholders Group said about the initiative rolled out by Minister Howai. It states, and I am reading from the *Daily Express* of October 02, 2012. The headline states:

“CLICO group: It’s about time
...Policyholders welcome solution”

It goes on to say, Mr. Speaker:

“Chairman of the CLICO Policyholders Group Peter Permell said yesterday members, ‘welcomed the news with a feeling of relief and vindication...’”

I want to reiterate that:

“members ‘welcomed the news with a feeling of relief and vindication...’

He told the *Express* by phone that policyholders were happy they would benefit when the CLICO Investment Trust, which will contain CLICO’s \$5 billion or so worth of Republic Bank stock, is set up on November 1 and shares start trading on January 2 next year.”

This is something that we, as an administration, have been dealing with in a very decisive and clear-cut manner since we came into office. In fact, the only thing I can remember—and the Member for Oropouche East and Leader of Government Business dealt with this in a very responsible and clinical manner during his contribution, but it is important for me to continue to remind the population of Trinidad and Tobago of the type of leadership that we had under the PNM.

The PNM, when faced with this particular situation as it relates to Clico, CL Financial and the Hindu Credit Union Society Limited, had not a sense of vision and not a sense of direction in grappling with this particular issue, which threatened the very financial stability of this country. The only track record of the PNM I can recollect on this particular issue is one where the former Minister of Finance moved with a sense of alacrity to withdraw her funds and those of her relatives on an Old Year’s evening. With such speed did she move that she even failed to inform the Members for Port of Spain South and, I think, Diego Martin North/East who had investments in this particular financial entity.

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What is important to understand, too, is that we must never forget they entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with Clico and CL Financial and they went into that Memorandum of Understanding being fully aware that those business entities under this conglomerate at the time did not have what we would call up-to-date audited financial statements.

9.30 p.m.

In addition to that, they entered into this Memorandum of Understanding not fully cognizant of all the critical issues, the in-depth issues, and not knowing what it would have cost the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago in terms of the cost. Today, Mr. Speaker, we are burdened with that sense of responsibility of having to find \$19.7 billion to iron out all the complexities and the scenarios as it relates to this particular issue.

It is important to note under this particular arrangement, the People's Partnership administration is ensuring that the investments and the commitments that we made will be delivered. [*Desk thumping*]

In that regard, I could say that the unitholders are those who had what we would call Short-Term Investment Products and so on under \$75,000. That has commenced in terms of the repayment process; and also as it relates to those over \$75,000, it will commence from November 01, 2012; as it relates to the Hindu Credit Cooperative Society Limited, and those under 75,000, payments have commenced and it will cost the taxpayers of this country approximately \$184.9 million. As it relates to Clico and CL Financial, those who have opted to accept so far, this has caused the Government and taxpayers of this country in excess of \$10.2 billion.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear that from a financial point of view we are delivering in terms of the commitment that we made in the context of our manifesto. If you go back into our manifesto, it demonstrated very clearly that we said, when we assume the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, we will deal with this matter in a very decisive way.

This is why Minister Howai has said that by the beginning of 2013 this matter will be disposed of in relation to all those persons who felt a sense of loss, a sense of despair, and a sense of not knowing what next to do because they felt betrayed. They felt abandoned by the People's National Movement and the Government at that time, not knowing and realizing that their Memorandum of Understanding was simply guided by a track record of wanting to satisfy their friends and financiers.

Mr. Sharma: Well said, well said!

Hon. R. Indarsingh: Mr. Speaker, continuing to focus on the sense of connection with the ordinary man in the society, Minister Howai has said, in order to move towards a balanced budget and the overriding policy position of this administration is that there is the need to understand the needs and the aspirations of the working class and the labour movement. He has made it very clear that the conversation has to continue. There is the critical importance in ensuring that there is industrial relations, peace, stability and harmony so that collectively we could continue to focus on the continued development of Trinidad and Tobago.

We must never forget what the track record of the People's National Movement administration was as it relates to the settlement or the resolution of industrial relations disputes. In fact, this administration inherited a backlog of industrial relations disputes in this country. In fact, we must be able to understand that this Government remains fully committed to the collective bargaining process.

If I could recollect very clearly, Mr. Speaker, that we have not as a Government and in terms of all the entities that would fall under the ambit of the State, we have not shut the doors on the collective bargaining process. We remain committed towards upholding the collective bargaining process which is clearly outlined by the Industrial Relations Act. We have ensured within the last three months, and since we have come into Government, that there has been a continuous and progressive process of settling outstanding collective agreements which date back to the period 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010.

If we dig further, and we dig deeper into that era of collective bargaining in this country, we will see that the PNM at that point in time, their offer to the working class, to the labour movement via the collective bargaining process did not go beyond 1 per cent in terms of a wage offer. I want to reiterate that. The offer in terms of the collective bargaining process at that point in time did not go beyond 1 per cent. We must ask the question why in a period of boom, in a period when oil prices were high and the price of natural gas was high, why did the Government at that point in time fail to ensure that the principles of good collective bargaining and bargaining in good faith were upheld and upheld to the point where there was a thorough sense of understanding of the needs of the working class and the needs of the population at that point in time.

I am sure, as I focus on this particular issue of the settlements of wage disputes and the whole collective bargaining process, the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre and the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development will have much more to say in his contribution as it relates to the settlement of

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disputes and the number of collective agreements which are being signed off at the level of the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprises Development and under the ambit of the Chief Personnel Officer of Trinidad and Tobago.

Today, there were many who were saying that the Government was interfering in the collective bargaining process, and the Government was stymieing the growth and development of the economy and we were acting in bad faith. I cannot recollect that the Government or its agents, in terms of the collective bargaining process, walking out of negotiations, behaving in an arrogant manner, in an anti-worker manner, in an anti-union manner and so on.

Go back and research and I am sure that they may want to deny it, but it is their administration which moved on two very important trade unions in this country. Ask the current leadership of the Communication Workers Union, and ask the current leadership of the Transport and Industrial Workers Union which Government—*[Interruption]*

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. R. Indarsingh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to express my sense of gratitude to my colleagues for extending my time. As I was saying to the House, it was the last PNM administration which threatened the very existence of the Communication Workers Union, and the Transport and Industrial Workers Union, when they attempted to go and use the judicial process to decertify the Transport and Industrial Workers Union and the Communication Workers Union as a result of being at loggerheads in the cut and thrust of industrial relations and the collective bargaining. That is the track record of the PNM in terms of being anti-worker, anti-labour and anti-people. *[Crosstalk]*

If we go further back in history from the Industrial Stabilisation Act to the IRA to the 1970s, and those who may be old enough and would have read about bloody Tuesday and so on, the PNM approach to the labour movement has been very consistent in this country. It was demonstrated even in the 1980s, even during the tenure of their last administration. So, we must never forget that the People's National Movement has a track record of being anti-people, anti-worker, anti-union as it relates to the collective bargaining process. *[Crosstalk]*

Mr. Sharma: Anti-children too!

Hon. R. Indarsingh: I am reminded by the distinguished Member for Tabaquite and the Minister of Local Government: anti-children too. [*Laughter and crosstalk*]

Mr. Sharma: No toys for Christmas!

Hon. R. Indarsingh: No toys for Christmas! Being against the Prime Minister's initiative of the laptop and Children's Life Fund. I could go on and on in terms of their lack of feel for ordinary people and so on in the society.

Mr. Speaker, we must never be misled by the theatrics and the "postulation" and the hypocrisy of the People's National Movement. In that regard too, as we focus on the industrial relations climate and that political will and decisiveness that we are displaying as a Government, I want to remind this House that as a result of what was stated in the budget presentation, in addition to what has already been given to the officers of the law enforcement agencies throughout Trinidad and Tobago, all special reserve police officers, effective October 01, 2012, will now get this special duty allowance in keeping again with that theme of delivering and continuing to listen to the needs of the wider population.

We continue to advance our cause in terms of meeting and treating, listening and analyzing what needs to be done, weighing the consequences, the implication, balancing the cost implications and so on and then taking it to the next level in terms of implementation.

I would have heard the Member for St. Ann's East being very concerned about how the Minister of Tourism would get airlifted back into the country, and how we would attract tourists back into Trinidad and Tobago and so on— [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Sharma: You serious? "Dey din do nothing fuh tourism!"

Hon. R. Indarsingh:—and being concerned about the whole question of confidence. We have been working very assiduously and decisively in restoring that sense of confidence in all sectors of Trinidad and Tobago based on what you destroyed during your reign as the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. In that regard, you only have to read very clearly into the budget presentation which focuses very clearly on crime-fighting initiatives, which are clearly spelt out in terms of 32 community police stations, 18 new community police centres, 18 new police stations, a reduction in taking off VAT on CCTV cameras, the range reduction of the highway patrol and a commitment to reduce all serious and violent crime by 50 per cent over the next two years and so on. That is the focus

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in terms of restoring that sense of confidence to continue to want to return to Trinidad and Tobago, Member for St. Ann's East.

9.45 p.m.

Also, to take into consideration that as we continue to deal with crime in a very decisive manner, Mr. Speaker, it will also reduce the cost, the economic cost to businesses as a result—you know, as a result of serious crimes, and so on, businesses incur additional costs of having to hire security, transportation costs for workers and transportation for night workers, and so on.

Once we deal and we roll out these crime-fighting initiatives and we arrest serious crime by 50 per cent, certainly that will also stimulate the economy. It will create a further sense of confidence amongst the business community locally, and also those investors from a regional point of view, and an international point of view, who want to come to Trinidad and Tobago in terms of doing business, stimulating the economy, and ensuring that there is growth and the creation of jobs, and so on, Mr. Speaker.

So, in that regard, Mr. Speaker, this is the overall cut and thrust of the People's Partnership Government as it relates to a number of initiatives. And I just want to say to this House that the public policy decision to reduce the fiscal deficit by 1 per cent of GDP on an annual basis to 2016 is geared to ensuring prudent financing with the associate benefits from good fundamentals. The fiscal space is being utilized through a well-targeted Public Sector Investment Programme at a cost of \$7.5 billion or 4.5 per cent of the GDP of Trinidad and Tobago, which would cover more than 600 communities in this country.

We would now see new and ongoing projects by the THA road and drainage programmes. You would have heard from the Member for Oropouche East: the construction of buildings, the development of lands at Caroni and Orange Grove, in the context of residential land for agricultural purposes, 4,000-plus two-acre plots would be developed. In addition to that, lands for the state farms and so on, all part of the Government's thrust of arresting the food import bill and dealing with the development of the agricultural sector in Trinidad and Tobago. And, of course, the construction of new health facilities, the Debe campus at the University of Trinidad and Tobago, the construction of 18 police stations, and so on, in relation to the Public Sector Investment Programme, Mr. Speaker.

In addition to the public sector investment programme, the developmental thrust, the construction, the infrastructural development and so on would be in tandem too, with the utilization of the private/public partnership model which is a

key component of the country's transformation agenda. We will continue to ensure that when this private/public partnership is rolled out, it will be done; the Government will ensure the following:

- careful preparation of the project through the use of consultants undertaking rigorous analysis of the economic, social, environmental and fiscal implications of the proposed project;
- design of a comprehensive, clear and well-structured PP contract, competitive and transparent procurement to select an appropriate partner;
- sound contract and relationship management over the project lifetime to ensure value for money.

This private/public partnership model would see a development in the context of the Ministry of Local Government, the Ministry of Transport, the La Brea Port, and as I said, what has been outlined by the Member for Oropouche West in the context of the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure; the Ministry of Justice in terms of the four building complexes for accommodating High Courts in Trincity, Carlsen Field, Sangre Grande and Penal, with a view to increasing the decentralization of the court system and, of course, the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training.

In that context, too, Mr. Speaker, the thrust of this Government is to ensure that we develop the workforce of Trinidad and Tobago. In terms of a budget of 58-plus billion dollars, the largest allocation has been given to the area of education and training, \$9.1 billion. We want to ensure that when we focus on the development of the workforce in Trinidad and Tobago, we are building a productive base that would contribute to the economic development of Trinidad and Tobago, and that is being seen in the context of what is happening in programmes under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training.

Only last year the Prime Minister would have launched the Workforce Assessment Centres throughout Trinidad and Tobago with the flagship headquarters at the National Energy Skills Centre at Rivulet Road in Couva, which was formally the tractor shed or the Field Engineering Department of Caroni (1975) Limited.

Mr. Speaker, in that regard, we are focusing a strong sense of direction on the human capital development of Trinidad and Tobago. We must never forget, Mr. Speaker, that the mantra of those on the opposite side prior to the 2010 general

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election, and even now on the eve of this fiscal presentation, would have been that GATE would be shut down, entities such as UTT and NESC would be shut down. In fact, Mr. Speaker, the deception of the PNM continued and we would have heard it with the passage of time, and we would continue to hear it, about CEPEP and URP, and so on. And today we are seeing an expansion of GATE, we are seeing an expansion of programmes at UTT and NESC, and CEPEP and URP being structured in such a manner that they would contribute to the productive development and the economic base of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, the hon. Prime Minister launched the Workforce Assessment Centre last year at Point Lisas, and within a short space of time, over a nine-month period, 1,200 young persons graduated from the training programmes of the National Energy Skills Centre, and a day after this budget was read in this House, NESC took under its wings a further 1,200 young persons in terms of focusing on the skills development of this country, and shifting, shifting the paradigm whereby we are focusing on the intellectual and academic development of this country through the Ministry of Education.

In terms of technical/vocational, we are developing that intensity through the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training, so that—and having a sense of collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro-Enterprises Development in terms of labour market surveys, and so on, so we are finding the right mix for the future economic development of Trinidad and Tobago in terms of the skill set. The skill set which is needed for the continued growth of this country from an economic point of view, and also, Mr. Speaker, creating a second window of opportunity for those of our citizens who would have fallen through the cracks of the established educational system and those citizens who would want to expand their revenue base in terms of the development of their family structure and so on, taking into consideration that sense of development by retooling and re-skilling themselves, and so on, to remain relevant to the demands of the economy, and also ensuring that URP and CEPEP, too, are now being streamlined in such a way—

Hon. Member: URP is a new URP, you know.

Hon. R. Indarsingh: It is being streamlined in such a way that it is increasing the skills competence of this society, which can only augur well for the future productive and economic base of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: Pause, pause; you did fantastic points there.

Hon. R. Indarsingh: As I speak on this particular issue of what the physical assets of Caroni now are doing for Trinidad and Tobago, we must never forget that when Caroni (1975) Limited was shut down in 2003, many wondered what would have become of the physical assets such as the field engineering departments at BC and Woodford Lodge, and so on. Today, I want to report to this House that in Brechin Castle where NESC is housed on Rivulet Road, it is now producing the first-ever drilling school in the Caribbean. The other tractor shed at Woodford Lodge has seen NESC partnering with the Automotive Dealers Association, to establish the NESC Automotive Technology Institute for producing automotive technicians, and NESC Tracmac CAT Training Centre to provide training in heavy equipment operation and maintenance.

That is the vision of this particular administration. We are not leaving the assets of Caroni (1975) Limited idle. In fact, Mr. Speaker, the CEPEP headquarters is now located in the Ste. Madeline on physical assets that belong to Caroni (1975) Limited, and saving the taxpayers of this country \$400,000 a month in rent in terms of utilizing the assets, the physical assets of Caroni (1975) Limited, and the Mon Jaloux farm is now playing a critical role in the development of the agricultural sector through the Ministry of Food Production. Transformation, the transformation agenda of the People's Partnership Government is very clear.

Mr. Speaker, the track record of the PNM, when they shut down Caroni (1975) Limited, they abandoned every possible physical asset that was there. They left hundreds of millions of dollars in citrus and fruits, and so on, just to waste and rot. That is the track record of the PNM in terms of even the development of the agricultural sector, Mr. Speaker.

10.00 p.m.

We are now utilizing even the land assets of Caroni (1975) Limited to add to the housing stock of this country and also to add to the agricultural development of Trinidad and Tobago and to reduce the food import bill. That is the track record of the People's Partnership Government as it relates to the physical assets of Caroni (1975) Limited, Mr. Speaker.

In addition to that—the people, this budget—and I am sure that my colleague, the Minister of the People and Social Development and Member for Caroni Central will touch on it, but I will just say my bit as it relates again to the focus on the small man—focus on delivering to the people and that sense of connection. We are seeing increased national insurance benefits to the people of Trinidad and Tobago and the beneficiaries of this system. And, again, that is fulfilling our sense

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of—that contract with the nation and carrying through on the commitment that we made to enhance the national insurance benefit when we campaigned, when we went to the people in 2010, Mr. Speaker. Just to say from a statistical point of view, Mr. Speaker, that in excess of 155,000 persons will benefit from the proposed increases in the national insurance system of which over 81,000 are already receiving the minimum retirement pension of 3,000, Mr. Speaker.

Just to amplify it in terms of monetary figures—the maternity grant, the current benefit is 2,500, this will move to \$3,750, and 6,885 persons will benefit. In terms of the funeral grant, this would move from 5,000 to 7,500. And just to give a few examples as it relates to focusing on the small man and focusing on the ordinary man in the society, Mr. Speaker, and, as I said, my colleague will deepen on this during his contribution as it relates to the improvement in the social security and the national insurance system of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Crosstalk*] Well, more than your “bandara”.

Mr. Speaker, we have continued to build on that sense of delivery and that sense of trust with the people of Trinidad and Tobago. And just to say from the point of view of the constituency of Couva South, Mr. Speaker, since the delivery of this budget presentation, I have been to virtually every part of Couva South, in every nook and cranny, and they have said to me that Minister Howai’s budget presentation certainly will stimulate the appropriate growth and generate the prosperity that is needed at a critical juncture in the economic evolution of this country. And in that regard, Mr. Speaker, we welcome the dualling of the Rivulet Road from the Couva interchange to the Point Lisas roundabout, which is estimated to cost \$350 million.

And, again, a work in progress, we built the Couva interchange for \$75 million. We eased the entry and exit into and out of Couva, and we have seen the importance of developing the road network into the Port of Point Lisas, understanding the economic benefits to the economy of the country, and creating that sense of ease and that need to deal with the traffic congestion in one of the main ports of entry in Trinidad and Tobago.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, from a developmental point of view, the constituents of Couva South welcome the initiative of the aquatic centre, the velodrome centre, the proposed children’s hospital in Couva, which would bring into the mainstream, in addition to the children’s hospital, an adult hospital and a burns unit.

I want to reiterate that: a burns unit, a unit that the stakeholders on the Point Lisas Industrial Estate and, I think, the wider society of Trinidad and Tobago,

have been calling upon successive governments to construct. [*Desk thumping*] And it is the vision—it is only through the vision of the People’s Partnership—led administration of Kamla Persad-Bissessar that we are seeing this becoming a reality, an initiative of \$1.2 billion. [*Interruption*] You failed to build it, you failed to build anything of development as it relates to the development of the health sector in central Trinidad, in south Trinidad; we had to complete it in Tobago for you all. So, Mr. Speaker, you have to understand—

Hon. Member: Thank you. [*Interruption*]

Hon. R. Indarsingh: Member for Port of Spain South, you would not like what I am saying because it shows up the inefficiency, the failure to connect with the people, the inability to develop the health sector, Mr. Speaker, so this would be that sense of concern. We are delivering and ensuring that we address the health sector development of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, we are seeing the benefits of development also to the constituency of Couva South. The importance of these developments will also impact upon the national development and the quality of life of all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. And as we continue to develop and improve the standard of living for all the citizens of this country, I want to assure those on the other side, Mr. Speaker, come hell or high water, when the general election is called, when the local election is called, when the Tobago House of Assembly election is called, it will be People’s Partnership all the way—

Hon. Member: Anywhere. Any election.

Hon. R. Indarsingh:—throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Moruga/Tableland and Minister of National Diversity and Social Integration.

The Minister of National Diversity and Social Integration (Hon. Clifton De Coteau): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hon. Members of the House, I thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this budget debate. I know you would want me to keep it short and sweet—

Dr. Ramadharsingh: But you cannot promise.

Hon. C. De Coteau:—but I cannot really keep that promise.

Dr. Ramadharsingh: Keep it sweet, then.

Hon. C. De Coteau: I would like to applaud the work done by the Minister of Finance and the Economy, the hon. Sen. Larry Howai in his budget presentation for fiscal year 2012/2013. I would also like to applaud the efforts of the former

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Minister, the hon. Winston Dookeran, towards revitalization of our economy. Also, I would like to extend my congratulations to the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, for her astute and visionary appointment of Mr. Howai, for her philosophical underpinnings which support decisions made by this administration and for her guidance during the budgetary process and all policy-making functionalities.

I would like to compliment the last speaker, the Member of Parliament for Couva South, for his contribution. I think he was very informed and it had a lot of information, and I say congratulations to you, Minister of State in the Ministry of Finance and the Economy.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, my brother.

Hon. C. De Coteau: Members, I consider it an honour to be representing a Ministry which represents the fabric of our society—*[Interruption]*—a Ministry, Member for Couva South, that represents the fabric of our society—

Dr. Ramadharsingh: Port of Spain South. *[Laughter]* *[Crosstalk]*

Hon. C. De Coteau: Port of Spain South—a Ministry which represents every citizen. Take note. This Ministry is the salt of all Ministries—

Hon. Member: Oh, yes, man.

Hon. C. De Coteau:—because we are in everything. *[Desk thumping]* It is a Ministry which can make a difference. It is a qualitative Ministry, qualitative as opposed to quantitative. You understand. Some Ministries you go and you get things, this Ministry is giving you a quality of life. *[Crosstalk]*

Dr. Ramadharsingh: Oh, yes. *[Desk thumping]*

Hon. C. De Coteau: It is championing our patriotism.

Dr. Ramadharsingh: It is giving you qualities, too. *[Crosstalk]*

Hon. Member:—throw away your roots.

Hon. C. De Coteau: Mr. Speaker, it is a Ministry to embrace who we are. It is a Ministry—*[Interruption]*

Dr. Ramadharsingh: To the higher level.

Mr. Speaker: I know it is a bit late and maybe people have to make, you know, some noise to stay awake, but I would like to hear the hon. Member for Moruga/Tableland. And could you give him your attention?

Hon. Member: My apologies, Sir.

Hon. C. De Coteau: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, continue, Sir.

Hon. C. De Coteau: Qualitative, qualitative.

It is a Ministry to embrace who we are despite our differences, no matter what race, religion, gender, age, nationality or disability. It is a Ministry that encourages citizens to reflect and learn about different cultures and ideologies, to recommit ourselves to our watchwords: discipline, production and tolerance, more so the words “Together We Aspire, Together We Achieve”.

Mr. Speaker, it is evident that the moral fabric of our society that once held us together as a collective and multifaceted people has been eroded. It is even so present in our daily newspapers and televised news reports of crime and violence, child and adolescent neglect and other social ills. Mr. Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago as a society is quickly losing those bonding elements and mechanisms of national pride, love for their fellow brothers and sisters and, as a result of this, the younger generation is being adversely affected by these harmful and destructive elements. I heard someone saying that our alphabet in Trinidad now is A for apple, B for bat and “C for yourself”, and we have to move away from that kind of alphabet. Right? What it means, it is resulting in a disregard for our heritage, culture, natural resources.

Dr. Ramadharsingh: Antecedents.

Hon. C. De Coteau: The environment, the laws of the land, ethnic diversity and national monuments—we have neglected them, and I do not want to cast any aspersions and say that my friends on the other side, the former administration, neglected them, but the evidence is there to see.

So, along with the hon. Sen. Embau Moheni, Minister of State in the Ministry of National Diversity and Social Integration, we have been granted the remit to champion diversity in every aspect of society by forging and harnessing a greater sense of patriotism and nationalism in the minds and hearts of the nation’s citizenry. To that extent, I want to congratulate the Member for Couva South because, without you knowing it, you did give a lot of discourse on cognitive diversity and its impact on behavioural diversity—how people think, how the other side thinks.

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You know, you give lip service saying “we care”, but your behaviour manifests something else. Think about it. Member for Port of Spain South, I know you will research it: cognitive diversity, which is the “buzz thing” in diversity now and behaviour—how it impacts, how it impacts on the lives of politicians. You know something? Think about it.

10.15 p.m.

So, it is also the view of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago documented in the national policy document which reads as one of the goals:

“Our Government will embrace the richness and beauty of our people’s great diversity to nurture a more humane and cohesive society. Unity in Diversity will inspire the harmony which is so vital to national progress.”

The Ministry has under its mandate and responsibilities the following: citizens’ facilitation, civil society engagement and national heroes. I just want to pause briefly on this: national heroes. As a party, the People’s Partnership, we have demonstrated something that you have never seen before. I went to the awards function, and when I heard the name Eddie Hart called and George Chambers, I felt happy for them because I know their own people would not have given that to them. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Sharma: That is true! That is true!

Hon. C. De Coteau: The founding father of the nation, I do not think he got any posthumous thing, even though he deserved it. It shows that we are not as vindictive and spiteful as they may want to paint us. We have that forgiveness. It is that thing that says, pastor, “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” We are forgiving, and we recognize who are our heroes.

For the first time our national heroes were able to bond with the community, but hear what they say: “Doh leh dem use all yuh boy, doh leh dem use all yuh boy”. You should have seen that joy. Throughout the country—Tobago right through—you should have seen that joy. You should have seen that joy when those young heroes went to Diego Martin and were helping those people down there, all over. But we still have to determine a national heroes policy.

Protocols of the State, ecclesiastical affairs: the members of the IRO come under this Ministry, and although they have been in existence—Member for Port of Spain South—for a long time, they do not have a home for themselves. There is absolutely no subvention for them. You know, the PTA has a subvention and they have a home now. [*Desk thumping*] They are within our Ministry.

Mr. Sharma: Good point! Good point!

Hon. C. De Coteau: And we would not interfere with them as such. Museums come under us. *[Interruption]* I know you would smile because one of the community museums is in your area. It was only named by the last administration, and they did nothing. I want to assure you that we will do some work on it for you. *[Desk thumping]* Archives, national trusts—*[Crosstalk]*

Dr. Ramadharsingh: It is a work in progress.

Hon. C. De Coteau: The Ministry's goals and objectives include:

- to facilitate a more accessible and effective interaction between the citizens and the Government;
- to develop a civil society engagement framework. This will outline the ways in which the Government will engage with civil society to attain national development objectives. *[Interruption]* The teacher in me would say, ignore the direction of the sound. *[Laughter]* So, I excuse you. *[Laughter]*
- to transcend cultural, ideological, ethnic, religious and other differences toward the promotion of unity and diversity;
- to establish a council for the development and integration of a national diversity policy; and
- to create a greater awareness in the population of the importance of the preservation of the national heritage.

I want to repeat that: to create a greater awareness in the population of the importance of the preservation of the national heritage.

Sad to say, thousands of persons are not even aware of the significance of our colours. If I should ask you, Member for Arouca/Maloney, to stand and explain to us the colours: what the red means, what the black means and what the white means, I would want you to go and research it. *[Crosstalk]*

Mr. Indarsingh: They have a feeling that everything is PNM.

Miss Mc Donald: Red is the PNM colour.

Hon. C. De Coteau: You see, she said red is the PNM colour. But the red—you know sometimes people see us energetic, warm and friendly; the red represents that friendliness, that warmth, that energy, the vitality of the land and

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the people. It is the warmth and energy of the people, of the sun, [*Desk thumping*] and it reflects the friendliness of the people. The white—you might say the vestiges of colonialism. What is the white?

Dr. Ramadharsingh: She might get the white correct.

Hon. C. De Coteau: It is the sea by which these lands are bound, the cradle of our heritage. [*Crosstalk*] I want to have it on the *Hansard*. I am reading it into the *Hansard*. [*Crosstalk*] What about the black?

Mr. Sharma: Ask La Brea.

Hon. C. De Coteau: Tell us about the black! What bounds us together? It is the strength of our nation. Do you understand that? My brothers and sisters, Members—

Dr. Ramadharsingh: That is an education.

Hon. C. De Coteau:—our watchwords: discipline, production and tolerance hold such meaning that they were granted by the father of the nation, the first premier of our nation, Dr. Eric Williams. Do you know what he said in a message to the youths of the nation? Dr. Eric Williams, at the independence youth rally, Queen's Park Oval, on August 30, 1962, on the eve of our independence from Britain said: "I have given to the nation as its watchwords: discipline, production and tolerance."

Mr. Sharma: "Yes, man, well said!" [*Desk thumping*] Someone original! [*Laughter*]

Hon. C. De Coteau: Members of Parliament, we were on a crest of euphoria when the Olympians came back, but you know what? I felt saddened when people call out and say, "Wear red, wear black and wear white!" I said, "Oh my gosh!" What nationality is this? It is to build the nation, not to destroy it. It is to build the nation. We have to get our young people, our students and even some of our senior people to understand what we are about. We have to get them to learn some of these national songs and be meaningful about it.

I would tell you, once we build that patriotism, the volunteerism would come easily. The crime would go down because when you love your community and you love your country, you would not want to do anything foolish.

Mr. Sharma: Good point! Good point! [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. De Coteau: And the tourists would come. The place would be clean. [*Crosstalk*] I would tell you something, the production and tolerance is there. We went up to the same area, and do you know what I admire about the young people up there in Trou Macaque and even in my community as well? They are willing

to work, but we, the elders, we just—as we would say—“dis them”. We forget how we were when we were youths. For instance, you may say, “Look at them, they are wearing their earrings and so on”, but if you were a youth in that given period, trust me, you probably would have adorned yourself with all kinds of piercing.

Mr. Sharma: La Brea used to wear earrings!

Hon. C. De Coteau: La Brea is a pastor if you do not know. He is a man of the cloth. [*Crosstalk*] Yes, he is a lay minister. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Sharma: He used to sell cloth?

Hon. C. De Coteau: Mr. Speaker, these watchwords of discipline, production and tolerance—

Miss Mc Donald: Minister, please. Through you, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Minister, I know we are trying to make light of, you know, but I am really listening to you, because I am very interested in this new Ministry. You are trying to have almost like a shift in how people think, in the mindset of people. Could you tell me—because I am struggling with that—and this honourable House—maybe the others know—but for my own personal edification, what mechanisms are you going to use to inculcate these new values, especially in the young persons? Thank you.

Mr. Sharma: That is a very good question.

Hon. C. De Coteau: Could I answer it?

Miss Mc Donald: Sure.

Hon. C. De Coteau: I am going to tell you what. We are on a patriotism drive. We had a patriotism month and we are going out to the schools, because they are the foundation. There will be the school competition; you will have the most patriotic school. There will be patriotic songs, patriotic quiz and patriotic jingles and there will be development throughout. But you have to understand the bedrock of our nation is the foundation, the school, and once we have it in the school—you know, Member for La Brea, we have to get them to internalize it down there and they will grow with that commitment.

Mr. Sharma: Good point. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. C. De Coteau: In the same way, as you would say, cleanliness is next to godliness, and we internalize it and practise it; they have been growing up without it; probably this whole Common Entrance tick approach. So we have to go back to basics. Member for La Brea, as a pastor, you know that. We have to go back to these basics to build the fabric of our nation. We have to go back to these things.

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So as we celebrate the jubilee year and the anniversary of our independence, we reflect on our journey as a nation. The goals and mandate of the Ministry are strongly aligned to the national development policy and its several interconnected pillars. The Ministry of National Diversity and Social Integration has identified the following three pillars as being closely related to the vision, mission and mandate of the Ministry:

- (1) people-centred development;
- (2) poverty eradication and social justice; and
- (3) good governance, people's participation.

You have to understand that Trinidad and Tobago's strategic development plan is engineered and strategized on the principles of directives of the national development policy, which guides the attainment of the goals of each developmental pillar. This is designed to create and implement constitutional and social transformation toward sustainable development of the country, and is built on the premise of the national development policy—that is, prosperity for all. As I said, we are qualitative, but the prosperity of the mind would give great reward for the material prosperity. That is why I say it is knitting the fabric of the nation.

So, the alignment of all ministerial posts, Ministries and agendas to the developmental pillars, including this new Ministry of National Diversity and Social Integration, are crucial for measuring citizens' satisfaction and success. So, the strength of the Ministry would be based on the delivery of its desired outputs and growth alignment and would be supported by evidence-based policy making and decisions meeting outlined objectives which are in keeping with the developmental plan.

Members, our uniqueness: it is really amazing. We wait until Archbishop Desmond Tutu comes down and say, "You are such a rainbow country", or some other person comes down and then say: "You all are unique, you all are so understanding." I am sure when you listen to the news that is going on in Syria and so on, you say, "Oh, we are blessed", but we take it for granted. We never really had a Ministry to focus on this great thing that we have here in Trinidad and Tobago. I know you all would say that we should always say, "Trinbago", but I do not know for what reason we cannot use the term, "Trinbago". I do not know if we have to say, "Bagotrin" or what, but I always feel to bring about that.

So we have to embrace the diversity of our population. You tell me where you will find something marked "Halal chicken" and the Christian man and everybody going and purchasing it? I was going to make a comment, but it would be adversarial. If you go to the "doubles man" they are lined up and buying.

Mr. Sharma: “No planass!” [*Laughter*]

Hon. C. De Coteau: I did not hear that. So we have the shared cultures, the traditions, the shared ideologies, historical fragments and shared ambitions and work toward developing a more connected and proud patriotic people embellished in pride and love for one and all, Trinbago: Where every creed and race really does find an equal place. [*Desk thumping*] We have to embrace that.

10.30 p.m.

Sometimes it is really good when you see the East Indian brother, for Emancipation Day, dressed in the African sartorial elegance, and when the African brother dresses for Divali—this is togetherness. These are things that we just take for granted, but these are the things we should champion, and this is what we, as a Ministry, have to do. So while this Ministry is new for Trinidad and Tobago, it is not so in other countries.

You have it in Mauritius; they say the Ministry of Social Integration and Economic Empowerment has a vision to lead to the creation of an inclusive and more equitable society; you have it in Denmark, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration is responsible for the central administration of the Danish social security. The Ministry attends to Denmark’s social policy, cooperation with other nations—for instance, the conclusion of the agreements in the social security area. You have the vision of the Ministry of National Languages and Social Integration in Sri Lanka. You have the Ministry existing in Australia, America and other areas. So we have to understand our Prime Minister is well known for out-of-the-box thinking and maternal mentality, so that the intrinsic passion for unity of our nation requires nurturing, encouragement and management.

Mr. Speaker, hon. Members of the House, the Ministry is of the view that the policies, programmes and projects proposed for fiscal year 2012/2013, would provide a distinct platform for the engagement of citizens to cultivate an inclusive and cohesive society.

What are some of our plans? The Ministry proposes for fiscal year 2012/2013 to complete several innovative projects; seek to amend/revise a number of the Ministry’s guiding policy documents; and to seek legislative reform where needed for the programmes under its remit and responsibilities, which are as follows: the restoration and running of the Heritage Centre on Nelson Island. Mr. Speaker, here we have a place, Nelson Island, an area full of possibilities, an area rich in our history, an area where we had our East Indian ancestors coming into the area. Over—Is it 200-and-something thousand?

Mr. Hypolite: Fifty-two.

Hon. C. De Coteau: Yes. You have it right.

Mr. Hypolite: Okay.

Hon. C. De Coteau: Thank you, my brother.

Mr. Hypolite: You are welcome.

Hon. C. De Coteau: This is an island compared to Ellis Island. If you have been to Ellis Island—and I did talk to the Member for Port of Spain South—you would realize the possibility that Ellis Island has. You would realize that for some reason Nelson Island was neglected. Nelson Island, as we say, is really of tremendous importance to the East Indian ancestors. Some people say, “Have you ever toured Nelson Island”, you would have heard a total of 147,542—thank you, my brother from Laventille West—

Mr. Hypolite: Do not worry.

Hon. C. De Coteau:—people going through that area, but more so, some people feel that when you think about Nelson Island you only think in terms of the East Indians who passed through, but the building was built by whom?

Mr. Sharma: Rawan!

Hon. C. De Coteau: The Africans. The Africans built it. So it is a history, an island that is pregnant with history, not only for the East Indian brothers and sisters, but for the Africans as well; the Jews came through as well.

Mr. Sharma: “Marlene, yuh go down the islands? Yuh does go down dey?”

Miss Mc Donald: Who me?

Mr. Sharma: It is African and Indian.

Hon. C. De Coteau: Oh, yes. My labour colleague is reminding me as well, that it was an island that was used to—we have the Butler house in that area. The Member for Pointe-a-Pierre may have escaped by the skin of his teeth going down there. Did you spend some holiday there?

Hon. Member: Yes, I did, in the Butler house, it was real perfect.

Hon. C. De Coteau: Yes, it was?

Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. C. De Coteau: It is being refurbished. “It eh totally refurbish” because, you know, but it is interesting. It is interesting when you go to Nelson Island you still have the projection where they had the outhouses, where they used to go when nature called.

We will also be looking at the completion of the Virtual Museum of Trinidad and Tobago—and as I said, this would interest the Member for La Brea—the complete restoration of the old Magistrate Court in La Brea, the establishment of community museums—and I will be inviting Members of Parliament to make the suggestion as to if they have an area in their place, and that will be beginning with Moruga/Tableland; of course, charity begins at home. The implementation of an integrated archival management system, and they have been trying with this for the longest while, the automation and digitalization of national archives. It is really sad when you see where the archives have to operate from—the old TTC building, part dilapidated so you are doing some restorative work there now.

The revision of the national heroes policy, and I would like to publicly thank the Member of Parliament for Arima, because under the Office of the Prime Minister, as the Minister in the Ministry of the Prime Minister, he did a lot of work in this and I thank him for passing on those works for me. The development of an ecclesiastical affairs policy; the formulation of a national policy for diversity; the facilitation of the Civil Society Board; legislation of National Archives; the establishment of the National Archeological Society; restoration of the facility upgrade of St. Andrew's; restoration of Hummingbird II; the outdoor maritime exhibit, and a purpose-built archival facility.

Members, it is really sad when you see the La Borde, the Hummingbird, how it has deteriorated, it is really sad. When you look at our Magnificent Seven, that is not really magnificent, it is sad. It is really sad, and we ask, "What have we been doing?" What have we been doing that we allow this amount of deterioration to take place? You know, as a Ministry we hope to ensure that all citizens, young and old, can visit the heritage site, appreciate our history and return to their respective homes reflecting on where we once were, what we once experienced and what our future holds.

I will tell you something. There is a site called the Banwari Man—I do not know if you have heard about it—a site that is near and dear to the Member for Oropouche West because it is in her constituency.

Mr. Sharma: "That is she grandfather?"

Hon. C. De Coteau: No, it is not her grandfather. The Banwari Trace archeological site, where the remains of a man from 5000 BC were found, is the oldest in this part of the hemisphere. And what? We have to stop the Siparia Regional Corporation from doing what they thought was good work, because they were more destroying the thing, and even though they were told to hold their hand, they continued.

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There are over 302 heritage sites, but it is like the situation where we have the letter written by Michael Anthony, the letter of the day, where they spoke in terms of the destruction of the McLeod house, where the people say that they have been asking for years for the Government to step in—but the 302 sites. You know the problem? Over 12 years now efforts were being made to have them listed and once they are listed they will be protected.

Hon. Member: But they are not listing them.

Hon. C. De Coteau: But they are not listed.

Hon. Member: So, you could mash them up?

Hon. C. De Coteau: So, we have taken it to the AG, and we know that with his kind of energy, we will have these sites being listed soon so that there will be some degree of protection because we have to come to terms—someone has a valuable place and they want to sell it and the children take it, “they go sell it”.

Mr. Sharma: Quite true.

Hon. C. De Coteau: So, we have to protect the sites and at the same time be able to compensate the owners so there would not be any great loss. So we do hope with this great effort—I mean, I know that we are not supposed to call the President—we feel that if attention was given, focused attention, where you had a Ministry, a specialist Ministry, championing the cause of our heritage sites, the roof of the President’s House would not have fallen.

Hon. Member: That is serious thing you know.

Mr. Sharma: You let the PNM in, anything could happen.

Hon. C. De Coteau: Well, I do not want to say that.

Hon. Member: Exactly.

Hon. C. De Coteau: I do not want to say it.

Mr. Sharma: The PNM will collapse anyway.

Hon. C. De Coteau: I do not want to say it, but the point is we have it there on paper, and that is all. The intention is there, but we never really implemented it to prevent these things from happening, and now that the Ministry is formed some people would say, “Wha dat is for boy?” But it is to protect our heritage, our valuable assets.

So, as we embrace our national trust and its objective in raising public awareness of the importance of the historic preservation, as I say, the trust is responsible for heritage property and listing to include architectural monuments,

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colonial fortifications and natural sites, such as the savannahs, wetlands and the forest reserves. You know something—the Toco Lighthouse—Mr. Balick came and said, “Listen, do you know that is one of our sacred sites?”

Hon. Member: Who?

Hon. C. De Coteau: It is a sacred site.

Mr. Sharma: Which part?

Hon. C. De Coteau: The old Toco Lighthouse. So as we reflect on the travesty which took place with the McLeod House—this lack of attention, negligence—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: Not Partap house in Oropouche.

Hon. C. De Coteau:—poor state of dilapidation. The national museum—and I do not know how many of you have visited the national museum—is aimed at fostering public awareness, understanding and enjoyment of Trinidad and Tobago’s human capital and cultural heritage, through the collection, preservation, research, presentation and interpretation of comprehensive collections of that heritage.

Hon. Member: “They go mash up Nariva too.”

Hon. C. De Coteau: No. There is a matter I have to address in this. There is a growing local artist collection, as also, it is embracing the arts, expression in passion for the imagination. We have been on numerous tours of the national museum along with our experienced project manager, and we have envisioned an improved national museum for all. As a matter, when you think where the national museum is, it probably should be relocated to some other area.

Hon. Member: Moruga?

Hon. C. De Coteau: We do not have the space in Moruga, and if you carry it to central, “dey going to say discriminatory act now”.

10.45p.m.

The National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago is the repository of official non-current records, as well as the records dating from 1797 to present day. It is responsible for acquiring, preserving and providing public access to the documentary heritage. You all should visit the National Archives, it is amazing. When you see those people putting together little pieces of paper to a book, it is really amazing. It is fantastic.

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The digitization project is exciting, and entails the creation of a digitization lab, purchase of digitization machines and digitization of newspapers. Those of you who would have visited other places—I know in India, when you go, you sit in an area and the whole Gandhian history rolls across, it is modernized.

Mr. Sharma: You have been to India?

Hon. C. De Coteau: I have been to India on three occasions, Sir; one courtesy of the Government and the other two on my own. That is why I can speak with such authority. That is why when the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West went, and we rode together for the two weeks' duration, I pointed out to him—he said, “Coteau they have no jhandi in India”, and I was able to explain to him why we had the jhandi in Trinidad.

The work done by the archives is most appreciated, and it is showcased in the airport, the University of the West Indies, head office and other areas.

Mr. Speaker, something was mentioned here about the sugar museum—Member for St. Ann's East. The project is seeking to salvage the buildings once used as the home for the nation's most powerful founding industries, that of the sugar industry. This is a collaborative effort—Member for St. Ann's East—between the Ministry of National Diversity and Social Integration and the Tourism Board. As a matter of fact, we are working together.

So you noticed they would have gotten a grant, Member for Toco/Manzanilla, and they have a powerful committee. We have been working with them with the new Tourism Minister along, because we are going to get the sites ready for them, and they are going to bring the visitors.

Mr. Jeffrey: That means “yuh coming to La Brea just now, nuh?”

Hon. C. De Coteau: Certainly.

Mr. Jeffrey: “Yuh have de tower and ting to see bout.”

Hon. C. De Coteau: Yes, certainly. The point is that we have to champion, we have to sell Trinidad and Tobago. When you go on tours, you go to some places and you would reflect and say, “Buh wait nuh, we have tings more interesting than dem.” This is what we have to market. [*Crosstalk*] This is the purpose of our Ministry. In addition to getting people to live together—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: You have to get some rope to tie “de” goat. [*Laughter*]

Mrs. Thomas: Get a rope for Mr. Sharma.

Hon. C. De Coteau: So in addition to the restoration of the Sevilla House, with its majestic hacienda style, a red-tiled roof and fancy burglar proofing, there will be a sugar heritage village which will contain artifacts from the industry. So that when you go you would say, “This is how it was.” You could get the copper and show them how they used to boil and whatnot. And again, it is something for not only our East Indian ancestors, but our African brothers and sisters as well. [*Crosstalk and laughter*] When they came, sugar was there. King sugar was in all its glory. Who laid the foundation? Our African brothers and sisters. So it is not a one-sided something. We have to understand that. [*Crosstalk*]

We need to really work together. This is something that cannot work by itself. [*Interruption*] Member for Couva North, I know you are saying cut and so on, but this is the strength. [*Laughter*] We cannot take this lightly. People ask me, “What is this diversity Ministry?” It is a serious Ministry. It is the salt of the other Ministries. [*Desk thumping*] It is for each one of you. No, serious, I feel passionate about this. It is for each one of us here. “It eh have no partisan politics in dis.”

Hon. Member: Take my hour and talk. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. C. De Coteau: It is for you, it is for you, it is for you, [*Minister De Coteau points to Members*] to champion the cause in your area. It is for you to get the students in your community to know their history. [*Interruption*] [*Laughter*] “Why dey name de village”; why it was named; who are the ancestors. “Dis eh no partisan politics.” We have to work together in this. Because today we might be here, tomorrow you there, today we—you know how it is. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: That is it!

Hon. Member: Now “yuh wake up.”

Hon. C. De Coteau: You know how life goes. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: Not a Ministry of Dreams!

Hon. C. De Coteau: I will tell you something: that is cognitive diversity, when you can think a particular kind of way, you have the thought, but it does not really make a reality. [*Crosstalk*] The point is, I would want you all to really take this seriously. As I said, it is something qualitative.

How many of our people—going through Port of Spain, the streets are named after royalty: Prince and Duke—but people do not understand it. They do not know. You are living on a street and you do not know why it was named. They

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say Cuchawan Trace and so on. Why was it named Cuchawan? Most people in Princes Town would know the history of Princes Town. Before being called that, it was Mission de la Savana Grande, based on the Capuchin brothers who came. Right where the Catholic Church is in Princes Town, it is there they were. When the two princes came, after that they called it Princes Town.

Hon. Member: Five thousand BC.

Hon. C. De Coteau: Wednesday, January 20, 1880.

Mr. Sharma: “Mango Rose name after Marlene?” [*Laughter*]

Hon. C. De Coteau: I do not know if Mango Rose was named after the Member for Port of Spain South. You have courthouse clothes. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, I have spoken, but I do not think I could ever talk enough with a passion about this particular Ministry. [*Interruption*] No, no, after this “we going home”. [*Desk thumping and laughter*] Sorry, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Khan: “Doh worry with dem, you talk.”

Hon. C. De Coteau: It would be remiss of me, if I did not talk about the landslip capital of Trinidad and Tobago, the constituency of Moruga/Tableland. I know that when the Member for Laventille West went to a meeting up there, he met me, I think it was in PriceSmart, he said, “Oh, God De Coteau, ah ha tuh tell my people, all yuh think all yuh place was bad, all yuh see Moruga.” Member for Port of Spain South, you saw it as well. I think you probably got vertigo or some kind of sickness going up there. It is bad.

Dr. Khan: “Dat is de Pitch Lake.”

Hon. C. De Coteau: There is more landslip than roads. Mr. Speaker, 202 landslips in the constituency and it is growing. There seems to be an incestuous something with the landslip. “As soon as rain fall one go.” It is causing tremendous pain and suffering to the residents because when the rain falls it starts to cause erosion and so.

Dr. Khan: “And dat is where Columbus land, eh.”

Hon. Member: “Dem landslip have bad mind.”

Hon. C. De Coteau: The Member for Oropouche West, when she visited in her capacity as the Minister in the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, she said, “You know Minister, we gave you money, we spent money up there. I did not know it was so bad.” It is, really. You may take it as a joke.

I went up to Toco, and they said, “Boy, landslip”, and I said, “You making joke; dat is baby little things.” It is like comparing the rivers in Trinidad—
[*Interruption*]

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

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

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. C. De Coteau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am happy to let the members of my constituency, although they know, that it was once said if Columbus should return to Moruga—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: And he see you—[*Laughter*]

Hon. C. De Coteau: He would be very familiar with the place, but he would be shocked. There is an early childhood centre being built in the La Rufin area. We are getting a new library, thanks to the Minister, the Member for Mayaro, when he was in that capacity. We are having an upgrade of the health facility to a 24-hour facility, with a resident doctor. I want to say thanks to the Member for Barataria/San Juan for making it possible. [*Desk thumping*]

For the fishermen, the area has been upgraded. As we speak now work is being undertaken. We are not only getting one landing site but two in the Gran Chemin area. I want to publicly thank the Minister of Food Production. I also want to thank the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs because a similar landing site was also done in Mayaro, and he has promised to help with one in Moruga. We are grateful for that.

I want to thank the Minister of National Security because after years a police station is being built; grounds are being cleared at the moment. We are going to get a library. We have to find an area for it. So that good things are happening. More so, I thought that my esteemed Minister in the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure would have said it, but apparently she left it for me to say, there would be a new highway from Princes Town to Moruga. [*Desk thumping*] I think we are eternally grateful for that.

Mr. Speaker, I am excited about the new Ministry. I believe that we can make a difference with our whole attitude as people of Trinidad and Tobago. We must not leave out Tobago. We look forward to an initiative that was started by the

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Member of Parliament for Arima in his capacity as Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office, where they were working on a project that we are going to continue, where we will have on the hill, on the steps hopefully, embellished: discipline, production and tolerance, up on that Lady Young Hill, emblazoned. We hope to get it in San Fernando and in Tobago as well.

We have to do things where people would feel proud to be here. We have to do things where the children would have little puzzles they can use, probably from the same lunch boxes—that we could put little jigsaw puzzles and have our heroes—because in our country you are a hero, and sometimes you are disrespected, “Who is he? Wha he do so?” We have to champion this. We have to get a different kind of thought.

You as a Member of Parliament in your area, the respect must be given to you for the public service you are doing. We have to lift the bar, all of us. The easiest thing to say is politicians are crooks, and we have to change that kind of cognitive diversity thinking. We have to be different. They would say, “You want to be a politician?” “No, no, no.” We have to lift that. We have to demonstrate it here, the way we treat with each other. It is very easy to “lick up” a man as they say, but probably I am not a politician, because I cannot do it. Even if I want to do it, I cannot do it.

So we have to generate that respect. The same kind of comradery we share in the tea room, we must share it sometimes here. There is life after politics. There must not be the hate. So that we have the passion, we want to achieve something, and we say, “Any Machiavellian means of achieving it”; I do not subscribe to that.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

Motion made and question proposed: That the house do now adjourn to Monday, 08 October, 2012 at 10.00 a.m. [*Hon. Dr. R. Griffith*]

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 10.59 p.m.