



REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

# Debates of the House of Representatives

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## OFFICIAL REPORT (HANSARD)

THE HONOURABLE BRIDGID ANNISSETTE-GEORGE  
SPEAKER

THE HONOURABLE ESMOND FORDE  
DEPUTY SPEAKER

**Wednesday 11th October, 2017**

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

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## CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
LEAVE OF ABSENCE ... ..	517
APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2018) BILL, 2017	
[Fifth Day]	
Second Reading ... ..	517
... ..	643
ADJOURNMENT	
[ <i>Hon. C. Robinson-Regis</i> ] ... ..	643



*Leave of Absence*

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

The House met at 10.00 a.m.

**PRAYERS**

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Members, Mr. Rushton Paray, MP for Mayaro, has asked to be excused from today's sitting of the House. The leave which the Member seeks is granted.

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

[Fifth Day]

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

That the Bill be now read a second time.

*Question again proposed.*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Members who spoke: hon. Colm Imbert, MP, Minister of Finance; hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC, MP, Member for Siparia; hon. Stuart Young, MP, Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West; Miss Ramona Ramdial, MP, Member for Couva South; hon. Dr. Lovell Francis, MP, Member for Moruga/Tableland; Dr. Lackram Bodoie, MP, Member for Fyzabad; hon. Darryl Smith, MP, Member for Diego Martin Central; hon. Anthony Garcia, MP, Member for Arima; hon. Cherry-Ann Crichtlow-Cockburn, Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West, MP; Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan, MP, Member for Tabaquite; hon. Randall Mitchell, MP, Member for San Fernando East; Mr. Barry Padarath, MP, Member for Princes Town; Mrs. Vidya Gayadeen-Gopeesingh, MP, Member for Oropouche West; hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly, MP, Member for St. Ann's East; Mrs. Christine Newallo-Hosein, MP, Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla; Mrs. Glenda Jennings-Smith, MP, Member for Toco Sangre Grande; hon. Maj. Gen. Edmund Dillon, MP, Member for Point Fortin; Mr. Rodney Charles, MP, Member for Naparima; hon. Fitzgerald Hinds, MP, Member for Laventille West; Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie, MP, Member for Caroni Central; Miss Nicole Olivier, MP, Member for La Brea; Mr. David Lee, MP, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre; Yours truly, Mr. Esmond Forde, MP, Member for Tunapuna;

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

Mr. Rushton Paray, MP, Member for Mayaro, and closing off yesterday was Miss Marlene McDonald, MP, Member for Port of Spain South.

I would like to recognize the Member for St. Joseph; proceed.

**The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh):** Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I join the debate to discuss the Bill before us, an Act to provide for the service of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year ending the 30<sup>th</sup> day of September, 2018.

Before I get into my contribution, not because it is customary, but because it is necessary, I would like to thank three people for this year's budget. First and foremost, the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Hon. Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley; [*Desk thumping*] secondly, the Minister of Finance, Hon. Colm Imbert, and thirdly the Minister of Planning and Development, Minister Camille Robinson-Regis. And to let these three honourable people know that I and all Members on this side stand shoulder to shoulder with them as we face the issues that plague Trinidad and Tobago, as we put this country on a footing which will redound to the long-term benefit of all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the hon. Prime Minister has said more than once that we should not be aiming to go to the IMF. He has said that more than once. Whilst we hear all the concerns by the different interest groups, and I congratulate every single interest group—casino workers, maxi-taxi drivers—I congratulate all of them for agitating for their membership, because that is their responsibility and they are to be admired. However, we on this side have a duty to put Trinidad and Tobago on a long-term trajectory to ensure its viability.

I want to talk to every single interest group who has every right to look at their immediate circumstance, but it is better that we take our own bitter medicine and choose our route of administration, because if you leave it to the IMF, the medicine could be 10 times more bitter and you may not like the route of administration. [*Desk thumping*] Let us take our own bitter medicine orally than leave it to the IMF to choose another route of administration, because one of the first things the IMF would do—and I have heard my Prime Minister say that there are approximately 70,000 to 80,000 public sector workers in this country—one of the first things the IMF would tell us is, “Fire 20 per cent of dem. Control your recurrent expenditure.”

What would be the fate of maxi-taxi drivers if all of a sudden you have 70,000 to 80,000 public sector workers—20 per cent of that is between 14,000 to 16,000 people—what is the fate of our maxi-taxi operators if 14,000 to 16,000 people

less are seeking public transport, cannot have a pay cheque at the end of the month to go to a grocery to keep the groceries turning over? I am sure every single casino worker has a relative, a mother, father, brother, sister, boyfriend, girlfriend who works for the public service and depends on the Government to have a pay cheque at the end of the month. So we are taking a long-term view, and long-term views call for hard decisions.

We on this side will be exonerated I am sure in the medium-term to long-term, as you look back on this budget and say at last you had a serious government taking hard decisions in the face of hard circumstances. [*Desk thumping*] I am sure. So yes, we will take the boos and the boots now, but I am sure as we continue to maintain our public sector employment levels, it will redound to the benefit of Trinidad and Tobago. So we are standing firm.

This Minister of Finance is to be commended for standing firm. Because you see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Mother Trinidad and Tobago by whatever name, whether it is mai, Mata, mommy, ma, whatever. Mother Trinidad and Tobago has been kind to all of us for decades. Mother Trinidad and Tobago has fed us, has clothed us, has given us free education, free health care, subsidized water, subsidized electricity, food cards, grants. Mother Trinidad and Tobago has gone beyond the call of duty. Now, Mother Trinidad and Tobago is saying, “Children, you have extracted all of this from me for decades. You have extracted oil, you have extracted gas. We have ploughed the lands to plant sugar for hundreds of years, cocoa, coffee.” Mother Trinidad and Tobago is now saying to us, “Children, it is time for you to grow up and start to share a part of the burden.” That is what we are being called upon to do with this budget. To say, “Ma, Mai or Mata, mommy, we hear you and we are now prepared to grow up and be responsible children.” That is what this budget is about.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the hon. Member for Siparia in her opening address fought the 2015 election all over, but did not mention one paradigm shifting component of this budget. I want to put on record that what she may have missed, I want to put on record now. Why was the housing stimulation not mentioned with its multiplier effect for the construction industry? Why was agriculture not mentioned where we focussed a lot on it? Why was the business facilitation issue not mentioned? Why was the export promotion not mentioned? Why was the thrust for tourism not mentioned?

And they criticized our decision to host Carifesta. That is tourism, that is Caribbean solidarity. But our friends next door know nothing of Caribbean solidarity. Carifesta is Trinidad and Tobago’s commitment to two things:

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[HON. T. DEYALSINGH]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

Tourism, regional tourism, and Caribbean solidarity, and we stand with our Caribbean brothers and sisters. Did not mention the business process and outsourcing. Did not mention the plan for creative industries and did not mention the gas master plan.

But what was most disappointing about the Member for Siparia's contribution was her praise for the former Minister of Finance, Mr. Larry Howai. Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me remind you and this honourable Chamber, it was the UNC that desecrated this same Chamber when there was a Motion to debate Mr. Larry Howai and to investigate his shenanigans in a particular deal. The same Mr. Larry Howai who is being praised as the best Minister of Finance, and this Chamber was brought into the most awful disrepute when our friends opposite planned to have that debate stopped on the particular day. [*Desk thumping*] And a letter that supposedly came from the Judiciary was entered into evidence that the matter was now sub judice, where nothing in fact was the case. It was a letter from Mr. Howai's personal lawyer, which was—I would use the word kindly—misconstrued as coming from the Judiciary, to stop a debate into the investigation of how the Member for Siparia is praising Mr. Larry Howai as the best Minister of Finance to have sat in this country. That is the disrepute that this House was brought into; let that be on the record.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to say at the onset I sought leave from the Speaker to display two items during the course of my debate, so I am letting you know. If you want to double check with her I have no problems with that. That would come later on.

I want to address something that the Member for Naparima said, and it is unfortunate that you still have people who are allergic to the truth. The Member for Naparima said that the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund is going down. The Minister of Finance on more than one occasion and in his budget debate, said he took out some funds from the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, but because of the performance of the fund above market expectation, the hole that was dug by taking out funds has been filled and has been topped up. So the fund did not decline, the fund actually increased, even though we took out funds in accordance with the law. Let that be on the record.

The other misleading statement where the Member for Naparima is allergic to the truth has to do with the Rochard Douglas Health Centre. While he thanked me for repairing it, he said it was only because people protested. The Member did not know that on June 14<sup>th</sup> an Urgent Question was asked by the Member for Oropouche West on June 14<sup>th</sup> of this year before any protest. It is on the *Hansard*,



which I here, where I indicated repairs would be done to the Rochard Douglas Health Centre because it was not a priority for the previous board led by the now Member for Fyzabad, but it is a priority for this Government because the people of Rochard Douglas mean as much to me as the people of St. Joseph. So I just want to correct that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will now get into matters of health to explain what we have done in the past year and where we are going. I will address in my contribution the confusion that the Member for Siparia has over the \$200 million in Arima. But before I go to that, and I have the former Minister of Health here. We have the Member for Fyzabad, who is a former chairman of an authority and the Member for Caroni East. When I look at our health system I am concerned that we have major hospitals in Trinidad and Tobago—San Fernando, Eric Williams, Port of Spain—that do not know whether they are fish or fowl. We are building two new facilities, Point Fortin and Arima, and we have on the cards one in Sangre Grande.

It is my intention to alert this country that we need to have a serious discussion now about the roles of our legacy hospitals, that is, San Fernando, Port of Spain, Eric Williams—those are our legacy hospitals—and how they are supported by the new hospitals being built and the current hospitals in operation, whether it is St. James, Sangre Grande, the new Arima, the new Point Fortin. The time has come, I think, to start a serious discussion where our legacy hospitals should be earmarked for major tertiary interventions and centres of excellence to specialize in certain areas, whether it is cardiology, neurology, nephrology, whatever. Because what we have is a situation where these hospitals provide primary, secondary and tertiary care at present, and they cannot do all three well enough at the same time. So as we build out our existing facilities we are going to have a hard discussion about the role of our legacy hospitals and what role they should be filling in the future.

The hon. Member for Siparia was very confused over the \$200 million for Arima. Let me say up front what that represents. On coming into office, we looked at the contracts for both Arima and Point Fortin. Without touching one square foot of space, without decreasing capacity by one bed, by not decreasing one square foot of construction space, this Government was able to reduce the overall cost of those two facilities by \$500 million. [*Desk thumping*] We saved \$200 million in Arima, and \$300 million in Point Fortin by simply having a discussion with the Minister of Housing and Urban Development, who is responsible for UDeCOTT, and renegotiating UDeCOTT fees. That is all we did.

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[HON. T. DEYALSINGH]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

That is what one calls “value for money”; that is how you cut out waste, mismanagement and corruption.

It boggles the mind to think how UDeCOTT back then between 2010 to 2015 could have agreed to an extra \$500 million in fees which were totally unnecessary, and that is where the Member for Siparia got confused. That \$200 million for Arima had nothing to do with decreasing the size, it simply had to do with UDeCOTT fees. When I said originally it was savings due to mismanagement, waste and corruption, I was asked a question in the Parliament, posed by my colleague the Member for Barataria/San Juan, and I itemized what was due to waste, I itemized what was due to mismanagement and I itemized what was due to corruption. So the Member for Siparia needs to understand how this Government is treating with taxpayers’ money.

As we build out our new hospitals, I want the population to know that in the coming years there are going to be serious job opportunities for people. But job opportunities, not only for doctors, job opportunities not only for nurses—and this is a part of the health-care system that is underserved and underpopulated and underappreciated—the para-clinical services in this country. We need more people to enroll in UTT in programmes like radiography, to become lab techs. These are good paying jobs that call for a degree of commitment, a degree of training. So there is a very bright future for our citizens to get jobs in the health care sector as we move forward.

One of the initiatives that we undertook at the Ministry that would span two years, 2017 and 2018, is the upgrade of our oncology facilities at the St. James Radiation Centre. We have new LINAC which will be installed by the end of 2019. I think the board has met to award a contract. Once that is done we hope to start construction in early January. But what we have already done, which was on the card for many years, was the introduction of brachytherapy services at St. James. I am proud to stand with Dr. Kellie Alleyne-Mike and all her wonderful people there, to bring this type of service to Trinidad and Tobago in the public sector for the first time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the issue of the Couva Children’s Hospital has been one that has been bandied about for a couple of years now. I am on record as saying that contrary to what the Member for Siparia said, we already had a children’s hospital before Couva was built. In case we forget, in case anybody wants to rewrite history, it is called the Wendy Fitzwilliam Children’s Hospital situated at the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. But what is scary about that, in

trying to justify the building of a children's hospital it was said there was this great need. Let me give you the figures.

The Wendy Fitzwilliam Children's Hospital, the first children's hospital in Trinidad and Tobago, has 87 beds. The occupancy rate right now is 70 per cent, which means we have a 30 per cent leeway to play with, which means we have beds to spare. That is what it means. That A&E sees about 7,000 patients a month and is doing quite well thank you very much. What it means is that Eric Williams' Wendy Fitzwilliam Children's Hospital, every child of every creed, every child of every race, can find an equal bed space in Wendy Fitzwilliam Children's Hospital. There is no shortage of beds at the Wendy Fitzwilliam Children's Hospital. Let me put that on the record.

The statistics show that currently there is a 70 per cent occupancy bed rate there, so you have more than enough space. I just want to put that on the record, because they are making a political football out of that facility. I have said it over and over, and the Minister of Finance in his budget presentation said in 2018, and we will stick to our words, we will find a way to incorporate the Couva Children's Hospital or whatever you want to call it, into the national hospital grid.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to talk about our drug supply, and the Member for Fyzabad had asked me to speak about this. In my budget contribution last year and during the Finance Committee phase, I promised this country that we were going to significantly overhaul the way this country procured drugs. The Member for St. Augustine in his contribution last year used a word beginning with "M" to describe the drug procurement process. I will not say that, but he knows we share the same sentiments but my language has to be a little more tempered.

As promised, we have significantly overhauled the drug procurement process for this cycle. I promised there was going to be formula retrimming, that has been done. We have now trimmed down to 800 from 1,000. I promised prescribing guidelines, done. We have done for HIV/AIDS and oncology. This is the big one. I promised we would go to the PAHO Strategic Fund to get cost savings, so said, so done. By using the PAHO Strategic Fund for the purchase of drugs and bypassing local distributors, do you know how much we have saved this country in fiscal 2017? We have saved this country in one class of drugs alone—which is drugs for HIV—TT \$60 million, in one year—in one year—by simply switching supply to the PAHO Strategic Fund.

Let me give you some examples of how this country was being ripped off for years. One particular drug called Neverapine, the tender for that drug was \$2.6

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[HON. T. DEYALSINGH]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

million. Do you know with the same amount of drugs cost from PAHO, \$0.3 million, \$300,000. We were paying 85.6 per cent more for one drug, because we were buying it through tender and not going through the PAHO Strategic Fund. PAHO buys in bulk for the world. We are now trying to push as much of our drug procurement through PAHO.

So all our drugs through PAHO, we have gotten savings from as low as 16 per cent to as high as 85 per cent; from 16 per cent to 85 per cent. Mr. Deputy Speaker, TT \$60 million saved in one fiscal year by simply going to PAHO. [*Desk thumping*] But there is a lot more to be done with the drug procurement process and we are doing that now. We have to smooth out the processes on ordering from the RHA level, how C40 deals with it. That process is convoluted, it is not efficient, so in this year we will be tackling that end of it.

I now want to talk to the issue of the purchase of non-pharmaceuticals, especially for patients who want to access orthopaedic surgeries in our hospitals. It is well known that our hospitals cannot perform the amount of orthopaedic surgeries for patients simply because the RHAs have to buy orthopaedic supplies from local distributors. Orthopaedic supplies, pins, bolts, plates, are not part of the drug procurement process through central tender by NIPDEC. So the RHAs over the years on their own purchased these from third parties.

When I became Minister of Health, I got requests: Minister, why can I not get my orthopaedic surgery done? Why do I have to wait? Why do I have to do this? It is a nightmare. So I said, okay, let me investigate, because this stretches back years.

**10.30 a.m.**

I found out that the four RHAs, especially North West, North Central and South West, together with Eastern—but Eastern is a minor player in this—they spent collectively TT \$26 million out of their allocation simply buying bolts, pins, joints; TT \$26 million from local suppliers.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is where I sought permission from the substantive Speaker to show the country something. [*Member holds up item*] This is a four or five inch titanium plate. Do you know what is the online price for this same plate from the same manufacturer to the same specifications? Mr. Deputy Speaker, this plate is US \$18.

**Dr. Rowley:** One eight?

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** One eight. Do you know how much the RHAs pay a local supplier for this plate?—\$5,800. [*Crosstalk*] This plate, online, is US \$18. The RHAs, not through central tender, pay a local supplier \$5,800. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Silence, Members.

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** That is a factor of 46 times. You see this screw? [*Member holds up item*] You see this screw?—titanium screw. This screw online from the same supplier costs US \$3.50. Do you know how much we pay for this screw in Trinidad and Tobago?

**Hon. Member:** TT \$23.

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** TT \$600. That is factor of 21. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is why you cannot perform enough orthopaedic surgeries in our public health system; we are being ripped off. The same thing with the drugs. [*Crosstalk*] I am not calling names, but this is an absurdity and I am telling the people of Trinidad and Tobago now, as Minister of Health looking after your interest, this is going to be brought under central tender purchase. [*Desk thumping*] NIPDEC has already agreed to do a special tender—[*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Members, the crosstalk over the two sides, please.

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:**—and we will be developing the specifications in conjunction with PAHO. I have already elicited the support of the Trinidad and Tobago Medical Association. They are giving me two orthopaedic specialists who have no connection to any commercial interests, who will only have the interest of Trinidadians and Tobagonians on their mind. [*Desk thumping*] When I saw this, I say “no wonder you have poor patients in Trinidad and Tobago who cannot get their joints replaced”. This is an absolute absurdity. This is the reality that I face as Minister of Health—[*Interruption*]—we.

So, I am telling the people of Trinidad and Tobago, give me six months to a year and I will fix that. The same promise I gave last year to fix the drug supply system, we will fix this. [*Desk thumping*]

A bipolar—this is a long word I cannot pronounce it—a bipolar hemiarthroplasty to repair your hips. Online the price of this particular device is TT \$4,092, I converted it. Minister Young helped me convert it yesterday. You know what we pay for that in Trinidad and Tobago?—\$26,440.

**Hon. Member:** What?

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** Twenty six thousand, four hundred and forty dollars. That is a factor of 6.5. We pay 6.5 times—and this is when you go online to buy one, eh, not in bulk, not through central tender. I sent an email to all these suppliers as an “ordinary nobody” saying that I want to buy one—I want to buy one plate, I want to buy one screw, I want to buy one hip joint. And they sent me back an email in five minutes flat, “Dear Mr. Deyalsingh, thank you for your enquiry. How much you want?” When you want it shipped? [*Crosstalk*] Right? So, we are going to be hauling the RHAs over the coals for this and we are going to be bringing this under central tender. This practice is going to stop. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I now want to come like the Minister of Finance who spoke about a paradigm shift. In health, we must also have a paradigm shift when it comes to our health and the NCD crisis facing Trinidad and Tobago. The *Express* editorial of 7<sup>th</sup> March recognized this. Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean wears a crown. We are first and we happy. We are first in the world in heart attacks, first in this world in diabetes, first in the world in this, first in the world is that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the only thing I want the Caribbean to be first in, the only thing I want the West Indies to be first in is cricket and football. I want Jamaica to be first in athletics. [*Crosstalk and laughter*] “Ah getting blows.” I want Trinidad and Tobago to be first in Twenty20 cricket. But the point is, we must reverse the order of West Indies cricket and NCDs. Let West Indies cricket become number one and let NCDs go to number eight. That is what we have to do, because as I launched this NCD programme, this is a crown I do not want us to wear.

Eric Williams said, the father of the nation said, “The future of our children lies in their school bags”. That is what Dr. Eric Williams said. “The future of our children lies in their school bags”. Well, let me tell you something—

**Hon. Member:** Tell the population what are NCDs.

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** NCDs, non-communicable diseases. Sorry. NCDs, like diabetes, hypertension, cancers, high cholesterol, lifestyle diseases. Sorry. So that is what Dr. Eric Williams said. That vision is now being eroded, not by their school bags, but by their lunch kits.

When I went to Mount Hope Secondary recently to launch the healthy school initiative we found 10 per cent of 61 children hypertensive. Two were so

hypertensive we had to send them to Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex immediately. That is what is going on, but let me give you the evidence.

There was a study done in 2009/2010, cross-sectional study to determine the prevalence of obesity and other risk factors for type 2 diabetes among schoolchildren in Trinidad done by Dr. Yvonne Anne Batson, Dr. Surijpaul Teelucksingh, Rohan Maraj and Brian Cockburn. Let us cut to the chase and go to one scary line in that report. That line said, and before I tell you what that line says, for the people of the population listening to me, tell me if you know anybody who has a dark circle around their neck where the skin is a little bit thickened and you see that dark circle below around the neck. You know somebody like that? Good.

Let the population go home this afternoon, lift up your arms and see if you have dark pigmentation below your arms and dark pigmentation in your groin; dark pigmentation with thickened skin. That condition is called acanthosis nigricans. It is called acanthosis nigricans. And that study of children, of children not adults found that the prevalence of acanthosis nigricans in children seven to 18 was high, and this is a 2009/2010 study. The study was also saying as early as 1960s, type 2 diabetes in children was a problem.

Another report: Obesity in Trinidadian children by Balkaram Ramcharan, Singh, Fernanz, Lynch and Maraj, conclusion: Conclusion:

Co-morbidities known to be associated with obese adults is now reported for the first time in a population of obese schoolchildren in Trinidad.

We have a problem. This whole society sick with diabetes, hypertension, high cholesterol, cancers; that is why this NCD plan is gaining such traction. And the *Newsday* of last weekend, an editorial editorialized this. So all of society is now getting on board with this NCD plan. So the answer is the NCD plan which we have launched in conjunction with the IDB for US \$51.5 million.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is another clear and present danger facing this country. Everywhere I speak on NCDs, non-communicable diseases—diabetes, hypertension, high cholesterol and cancers—I always say we have tackled this problem 10 to 15 years too late. We had the 2007 Port of Spain declaration under Mr. Patrick Manning, but we did not do much with it. But there is another clear and present danger that if I as Minister do not lay down a plan now, a future Minister of Health in 10 years' time is going to come here and say we did not tackle this issue early enough.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, admittedly for effect, if I have everyone just count to three with me in their minds, one, two, three, three seconds. Each minute has 20 three-second components and if I stand up here and talk either sense or nonsense for 45 minutes, 45 minutes by 20 is what?—90? 900, 900? Count it with me. One, two, three. Every three seconds somewhere in the world somebody is being diagnosed with dementia, including Trinidad and Tobago. Every three seconds somewhere, somebody is being diagnosed with dementia; that is the other health crisis that will hit us.

So what we are doing at the Ministry with the help of people like Dr.—I have forgotten her name from university, Dr. Baboolal. Yes, Nadine Baboolal.

**Hon. Member:** Nelleen Baboolal.

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** Right. Excellent person. We are taking her studies and now combining it with our mental health policy to bring dementia, whether it is vascular or non-vascular dementia or Alzheimer's, hopefully under our NCD plan, because there is a body of evidence which tells you that vascular dementia, dementia caused by the blockage of arteries in your brain, has a high NCD component. Diabetes is now linked conclusively to that. So dementia is another health risk that has to be addressed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the same way I recognize and praise the Minister of Finance for his paradigm-shifting budget making hard decisions, this is a tough Government making hard decisions. It is no secret that last year October I read the Riot Act to the North Central RHA after a poor gentleman, Mr. Chang, died, awaiting treatment in the A&E. The Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex A&E has for years been a nightmare, let us admit that. And I read the Riot Act to them and I told them that I want a six months' turnaround, treat it like a business, treat it like a bankrupt business and tell me how we are going to turn around this.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it pleased me again, to read the *Newsday* editorial of 8<sup>th</sup> March which recognized the significant culture change that we have undertaken at Eric Williams. A&E waiting times and throughput is now down 57 per cent. [*Desk thumping*] But I wish I could say that the successes we are now seeing at Eric Williams and throughout the health-care system was due to hard work; it was not due to hard work. It was due to making hard, unpopular decisions.

Because you see, there is something called a status quo that does not want change, and I as Minister of Health, I am prepared to change the status quo and mash toes and mash corns. But I will tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, many doctors



and nurses are now coming out of the woodwork and saying, thank you, Minister, we could now practise medicine the way we want to practise, we can now do surgeries. [*Crosstalk*] Right?

I know they are coming for me. There is a WhatsApp group circulating, you would think I am Lucifer, but thankfully people are dropping out of that WhatsApp group one by one. [*Crosstalk*] Yes. You are right, Member for Chaguanas East, they are coming for “meh”. But the only way to change the delivery of health care is to change the way it is delivered. [*Desk thumping*] It is not more money. I keep saying, health is a bottomless pit of money. You could throw \$10 billion into this system with the same policies and procedures, it would not change it one iota. You have to make serious administrative changes.

**Mr. Hinds:** Starting with a change of Government.

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** That is what is now going on. And I want to congratulate every health-care worker from doctors come down, orthopaedic surgeons who know about this now and are telling me, Minister at last; you have orthopaedic surgeons now saying, at last, because they know about it, they say at last we can operate in the public system as we want to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, some of the other activities we undertook: When I first became Minister of Health, the issue of deaths and fatalities due to seasonal flu was a high one. In my first year as Minister of Health, we had eight people dying due to the seasonal flu. I am not talking pandemic flu like swine flu, avian flu. I am talking seasonal flu that comes from North America. I said, I will do all that I can to reduce that number of deaths.

Last year for the first time we moved this country from delivering 6,000 doses of flu vaccine, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to—you know what?—70,000. [*Desk thumping*] Do you know how many people died this year flu season?—none. We had no recorded deaths for the first time in 10 years [*Desk thumping*] due to seasonal flu because we moved this country from 6,000 to 70,000. And we engaged 33 health centres around the country; every Tuesday and Thursday you go in there, you get your flu vaccine; so, we now have a template moving forward with this.

And I want to thank people like the Member for Princes Town because I offered this service to every MP. The first MP to do it was the Member for Princes Town, [*Desk thumping*] and we vaccinated his constituents. I went into the Chaguanas market where the Member for Couva North and Chaguanas West, that is the boundary between their two seats, we vaccinated people. I went to the

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[HON. T. DEYALSINGH]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

Tunapuna market, your seat, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and the hon. Prakash Ramadhar and we vaccinated people. We went to Gulf City Mall in the constituency of the Member for San Fernando West, we went to City Gate, we went all over the place.

**Hon. Member:** You did not come by me. [*Crosstalk*]

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** We went to Diego Martin too, but we invited you, Mr. Prime Minister; you did not come. [*Laughter*] I always invite MPs. The fact is we went all over the place. [*Crosstalk*] You did not write to ask me to come, but the Member for Princes Town did—twice, and we went. The fact is, it is this on-the-ground vaccination drive that saved lives in this country and I want to congratulate, again, all the nurses, all the doctors, all the CMOHs who helped me on that particular activity. How much more time on original time I have, Sir?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Just under two minutes.

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** Thank you. I now want to come to the Children's Life Fund because I know the Member for Caroni East with his usual self will go on a platform and say, there is no Children's Life Fund. That is what he says.

From September 2015 to now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have approved 80 cases under the CLF at a cost of \$25 million. So I just want the population to know the CLF is alive, up and running, but we have fast-tracked, we are now fast-tracking applications because as you use the system more and more, and more and more urgent cases come, so we now have some innovative fast-track measures.

One recent case, it reached CLF on a Wednesday, it was approved by Friday, I signed it off on Friday, air ambulance took the person up on Saturday, they had their surgery on Sunday and they were back home healthy, wealthy and wise; that is the Children's Life Fund in operation.

And I want to thank Dr. Maritza Fernandes publically. [*Desk thumping*] And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the reason I want to thank Dr. Maritza Fernandes and this is where I think the UNC should hang their heads in collective shame. They made such a political mess out of a case, let the courts decide. Do you know what members of the board tell me? They are now scared to go out in public, they are being abused in public. The same Maritza Fernandes, who was there under the Member for Barataria/San Juan who I left alone—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Your initial 45 minutes have expired. You have an additional 10; care to avail? Proceed.

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** Thank you. The same Maritza Fernandes who was put there by the Member for Barataria/San Juan who I left there is now despairing

because of the ridicule they face in public because the public is of the view that the PNM has cut out the Children's Life Fund. They are of the view, be it by the utterances of people opposite and in the other place that we have something against the children of Trinidad and Tobago. So I want to publically thank and stand with all those people [*Desk thumping*] at the Children's Life Fund for doing the same duty they did in 2012, in 2013, in 2014, '15 and '16 and '17; it is pathetic and to be condemned the way those good people, who are doing nothing more than national service, have to be ridiculed in public. And you know what is worse?—it is now making it difficult to recruit people to serve on that board. People are saying, why should I go on the CLF where there is a political pappyshow.

**Hon. Member:** And they kept the same people there.

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** And it is the same people. It is the same people. My God, let us have some sensibility about the issue.

**Hon. Member:** Put country first for once.

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** Put country first, put the children first, be patriotic. [*Crosstalk*] The UNC needs to be condemned and condemned and condemned [*Desk thumping*] for the way they handled that particular case.

**Mr. Hinds:** They are too wicked.

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, the last thing on health I want to touch on before I go to my constituency is the successes we have been having with insect vector. Zika was a big issue last year, my colleague would have had to face down chikungunya. So what are the figures?—Zika 2016, a total of—between suspected, probable and confirmed, and this is confirmed by lab tests, eh, the figure is going to be much higher because not everybody got a lab test—was 1,579 for 2016; 2017 to date, 499, but of that, only four are confirmed; ChikV 2016, 104; 2017, 10.

Dengue, and this is the important one, and the reason I want to draw distinction between the numbers for Zika, ChikV and dengue is that all the evidence shows that once you are bitten and you get ChikV, you are mostly likely immunized for life, so you cannot get ChikV twice. The symptoms may stay for life.

Zika: the current evidence, whilst inconclusive, points to the fact that once you are bitten and you get Zika once, most likely you are immunized for live. So you cannot put these rapid declines down to the successes of insect vector alone,

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[HON. T. DEYALSINGH]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

but what you could do is look at dengue because in dengue you have two types: serious haemorrhagic or non, and four serologies—A, B, C and D—four different types. So you could be bitten and get dengue type 1, that only gives you some immunity for that one, you could still get type 2, you could still get type 3, you could still get type 4. So that is why I draw distinction between Zika, chikungunya where the evidence shows, once you get it you are immunized for life, but with dengue it is not so.

Whilst the statistics for dengue have been coming down gradually over time, and my colleague, former colleague should be congratulated, he did some good work at IVCD, the past year has shown the most dramatic decrease in dengue. [*Desk thumping*] For 2016, we had 2,301 cases which are suspected, probable and confirmed. For 2017, to date and we are in October just two more months to go, we have 46. That is a huge, huge drop. Right? So I want to really thank insect vector, they are doing a wonderful job and they are to be heartily congratulated.

So, as we try to change the paradigm in health, just like the paradigm in the national economy, I want to remind this country that in my opening statements I spoke about, let us take our own medicine, formulated for Trinidad and Tobago by a route of administration we like, because if we let the IMF come, their medicine is much more bitter and we may not like the injection. Let us work together because, as I say, if the IMF comes the first thing that they are going to do is say fire 20 per cent of the civil service— that is thousands of people less seeking public transport, that is thousands of people less that would have a pay cheque at the end of the month to go to the grocery to spend money, to go to the hardware to repair their house and the economy will crash. This Government actually borrowed money to pay civil servants this year, the Minister of Finance said so. We have gone through extraordinary lengths to keep people working, to keep a pay cheque coming to you every month. So let us band together as one to see these times through.

And I want to thank my constituents of St. Joseph for having me here and say in the past year we have put up some serious water tanks in Caiman, Mount Hope Extension, we opened the St. Joseph Police Station, we opened the Mount Hope/Mount Lambert Community Centre, we are soon going to turn the sod for the Maitagual community centre, Member for St. Ann's East, that community has been waiting for a community centre for about 30 years, we are going to do it. Thank you very much.

We did some serious road works in Mount D'or, we are going to have a WASA project in Spring Valley in Mount D'or where we did some road paving in Farm

Road and Banga. So to come, we have the Maitagual community centre. I think we have started some repair to the Curepe Community Centre. Thank you very much.

One of the big interventions I did with the help of the Minister of Housing and Urban Development was to bring in the residents of the various HDC communities in contact with HDC officials, because what happens as an MP these people who occupy individual units come to you. So, I told them look, instead of you coming to me individually, let us have some panchayats. So we did some sessions at East Grove, Pioneer Drive, Sunrise Courts and Mountain View Terrace to bring the residents and HDC closer together so together they can work through their issues. I want to thank—*[Interruption]*

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

**Hon. T. Deyalsingh:** Okay. I want to thank the Commissioner of Police. When the St. Joseph Police Station was moved, I made an application to have the old police station next to the community centre on Abercromby Street be used as a police youth club, and I want to thank them. The police youth club in St. Joseph, first of its kind, is up and running, very, very nice initiative.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, these are the few words I had today. I hope that the population works with me as we seek to change the culture in the health-care system, and I thank you for the opportunity. *[Desk thumping]*

**11.00 a.m.**

**Dr. Fuad Khan** (*Barataria/San Juan*): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Let me first start by indicating that after reading the budget statement I was at pains to determine what to speak about, because the hon. Leader of the Opposition capably dealt with all matters of the budget that was done by the Minister of Finance. I also want to thank my colleagues who also in their own right and their own speciality, and shadow Ministries dealt with their aspects of the budget.

Now, sometimes you have to thank different people. I would like to thank the Minister of Finance for such a budget. Because you see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that budget is a budget that is going to propel us the UNC back in office. So, I thank him for that. *[Desk thumping]*

Now, I want to just clear up a couple of things before I go to health and the hon. Minister of Health. The Minister of Health spoke for 55 minutes and the only thought pattern that came across my mind is that, my God we left a good foundation. He was able to use that foundation *[Laughter]* to do what he is doing

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[DR. KHAN]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

today. And it was [*Desk thumping*] very good to see that the work that we did between 2010 and 2015, and moved the health centre from where it was before that, into a position where the hon. Minister who has continued most of the projects that I started, and developed it, is now glad to be the Minister of Health doing what he is doing. And I want to say—I want to thank you for looking at the titanium plates and the titanium screws, and looking at that part of it.

We were looking at the overall aspect of it, and we were dealing with C40, we were dealing with the non-pharm items, we were changing the culture of that procurement model because we also saw that there were deficiencies. And I would say something, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and it is for all Ministers. It takes about two years and a half, sometimes, to understand a Ministry fully, and after that you could move forward into different aspects. We were able to put things in place for the C40 drug procurement formulary. In fact, we started the development of the change of the formulary, and the Minister will tell you that. We also started the change of the tendering. Now, I noticed Minister that you have kept the National Hospital Management Committee, which is excellent, because I put that in place to deal with the problems that were going on with procurement of goods and services in the RHAs. And, I know initially you came and you were not happy with it, but I see you have kept it, and with that special purpose company in health one could deal with health in a different manner.

But, while the Minister was speaking, the thought that was striking me, “I wonder if I was in a different health sector”. Because, the RHAs, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are not performing as what they were supposed to perform—how they were supposed to perform. You see, I took an excerpt from the Welch report, I would like to quote it. The Welch report on page 37, lists the concerns of the RHAs, and the first one was the relationship with the RHAs, it is a mix of turbulence, in some instances were not seen to be taking responsibilities; HR practices violated; established positions and grant of leave, and at times be treated in an ad hoc manner.

Now, the third part, the relationship, the signed MOU that we did between the Minister of Tertiary Education, the Member for Chaguanas East, and myself, and COSTAATT, was an MOU signed where the ancillary services such as radiology, lab techs, et cetera, they were going to be put into the RHAs, paid a stipend in year one, two, three and four, and have each year mentoring the other years as we move up. That has not been done. So when the Member of Parliament for Moruga/Tableland and the Minister of Health said there is a shortage of 1,000 nurses, we started a nursing academy—the Member of Parliament for Chaguanas

East, when he was Minister for Tertiary Education—and supported by the Ministry of Health.

However, seeing that there are 1,000 nurses, what we did at the Ministry of Health—and I see that it is not mentioned anywhere, Mr. Deputy Speaker—we started a programme called the Aides to Nursing Programme. The Aides to Nursing Programme is a programme where you took somebody who had basically the caring consideration and practical nursing qualifications, brought them into the system and trained them at different levels to move up to RN nurses. That has been discontinued, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and a lot of these young people have been pushed out into the society with nowhere to go. That would have taken care of the actual nursing pool.

Now, when the Member for Moruga/Tableland indicated that there were 1,000 nurses deficient in the system, that Aides to Nursing programme was attacked by the Trinidad and Tobago Registered Nurses Association for being low standards, et cetera. But, mind if I tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, two years ago it surprised me that the secretary for health in England started a similar programme with the same number of people doing the same thing with mentoring of the qualifications of nurses, moving up the ranks towards RNs. So, we were on the right track.

Another thing I started was the nursing intern programme which a couple of people have graduated, where it gave the nurses a chance to get practical education and move forward. So, we were looking at the nursing pool and the nursing action moving forward. Now, when the Minister of Health starts to speak about the quality and the cost factor of the titanium plates, may I say I understand what he is saying, I understand what he did, but I found out that there are different qualities coming out of different countries, and sometimes the quality of the plates and the quality of the screws, and the quality of the hips are not equal in all aspects. Sometimes sacrificing for the cheaper cost, sacrifices quality. So I want the Minister to understand that. You have to look at it.

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** Thank you for giving way.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member, excuse. I will accept you from your seat, please.

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** Thank you for giving way. Hon. Member, as I said, we did the same plate, same brand, same specs, same manufacturer. So we are comparing like with like. Thank you.

**Dr. F. Khan:** I just brought it up just in case. Because what has happened in the past when they utilised the various hip joints, there was a bit of litigation as compared to the movement of the hips as compared to what—[*Interruption*]

Now, the Regional Health Authorities and the Minister talked about a linear accelerator for the North West Regional Health Authority. That is all well and good. That was in the cards before we left, because what we were doing was building the St. James Radiotherapy Centre while the Oncology Centre was being put in place. There is a small subvention, I see, for the Oncology Centre, but not in keeping with what it is supposed to do. I would like to have found out more, and I hope the Minister of Finance could answer, where is the Oncology Centre at this point in time?

Because that Oncology Centre was being done to promote a certain level of international accreditation of radiotherapy treatment and radiotherapy centres that we could attract external people to that area. There was the development of a cyclotron. That cyclotron would have been a piece of machinery, for \$60 million, given by, I think was, Phoenix Gas, that it would have produced radio nucleotides for export as well as utilising the radio nucleotides to do PETCT scanning in Trinidad—where there is none—as well as for export. So that Oncology Centre was designed and being done for medical tourism as well as local treatment. In that, there were two linear accelerators, there was a cyber knife, there was an ultrasound for high intensity focus ultrasound, and a whole host of other things. I have seen it mentioned in the Welch report, which basically indicated that—I do not think they understood the concept with what was happening. To understand the concept of a cyclotron one has to understand nuclear medicine.

Now, when the Minister of Health spoke about the Couva—and I am very glad you called it the Couva Children’s Hospital eh, by the way. You said that. [*Laughter*] You could look at the *Hansard*, you said the Couva Children’s Hospital—and when he started to speak about the Couva Children’s Hospital, it was the first standalone hospital in the country. So, the Member of Parliament for Siparia was not wrong. The Wendy Fitzwilliam wing, it is a wing in Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex. That is what Wendy Fitzwilliam—whether the Wendy Fitzwilliam is doing what it is supposed to do, and 87 per cent, whatever it is, I am glad. However, Mr. Deputy Speaker, no mention was made of paediatric gastroenterology, paediatric cardiology, paediatric nephrology, paediatric surgical techniques of a higher nature than the run of the mill paediatric urology, which is a speciality in its own right.



Now, when we boast about the Children Life Fund, and sending away a lot of children, and approving fast, what about—who learns? Which one of our local doctor will learn as a result of that? None, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We were putting the children hospital in place to bring down a certain level of excellence where senior practitioners and specialists from abroad would come to Trinidad and Tobago and do the surgeries in that institution as well as teaching our young doctors and residents about the procedures that we were not doing here. [*Desk thumping*] That was the idea with that hospital; not only medical tourism, it is going to be a teaching hospital. And if you look at the Welch report, they indicated everything that was there. Now, when the Minister of Health and the Minister of Finance, two years ago said, we are going to open this with public/private partnership.

I have been on record indicating, that the public/private partnership will take three years or more to even hammer out the legal requirements. You cannot just wake up one morning and do a public/private partnership. It does not work like that. And a public/private partnership does not mean the public system gives you the thing and the private runs it for a profit. It is a whole host of legislation, litigation—legislative methods. So, I believe no matter who—I doubt the Minister of Finance or the Minister of Health will get somebody next year, unless somebody really wants to take it on for a profit. It is a very easy way that we had to open that centre. You do the radiology first, you do the outpatient clinic second, you do the ward clinic third, you do the accident and emergency, after you do the surgical operating theatres, and you bring it in. There are enough people in Trinidad and Tobago who have expressed interest working there.

Now, I come to a number of doctors who do not have jobs. Approximately it is about—these are doctors who have done their internships, cannot get a position in the RHA because there are no positions, and they have what they call “temporary registration” by the medical board. “Temporary registration” by the medical board means you have to work in a public institution to finish your requirements before you are allowed to go out; two years, three years. I would like the Minister to take this on board. The Medical Board Act does not speak about full or temporary registration. It speaks about registration and the approval by the medical board. These doctors have already done a year of internship. They are similar to the counterparts of University of the West Indies. However, the University of the West Indies doctors, they get full registration right after they finish. These doctors do not. So, it is a discrimination that is occurring with these doctors. If they get full registration, Mr. Minister, rather than you having them in

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[DR. KHAN]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

the public sector, they can be absorbed in the private sector, and be trained there by senior specialists and senior “movement”, and that is what could be done. Until the medical board gives them full registration, it would be illegal to have them in the private sector.

And I go to another point which I was hoping the Minister would have touched on. We have the University of the West Indies, UTT, we have different hospitals, which he calls the legacy hospitals, but the University of the West Indies works with San Fernando, Mt. Hope and in Port of Spain to some extent, not in Sangre Grande Hospital—these hospitals are not internationally accredited. They have to be accredited by the examination bodies, and most of them have not been. That is why we have our own exams, the University of the West Indies exams. However, training of specialists in this country is determined by the University of the West Indies, and they take a handful of specialists and they move them forward. If you drop out at any one of those year one, two, three or four, that space remains vacant and nobody can fill it, because you have to start in year one.

We were in the process of doing another system with UTT, where these hospitals private/public, everyone, were going to belong to the specialization loop, and anybody could do a curriculum that is presented by the ACGME, which is the specialist units in the States, the Royal College of Medicine in England, and different international bodies. And where the specialization could take place through the public and private sector. Because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will tell you, a lot of good doctors are in the private sector, do not work in the public sectors because there are no positions, and are willing and ready to teach. A lot of my friends are like that. So we could change the nature of the specialization. And Minister really did not touch on it now. I would like him to at least think about it.

Now, we talked about procurement. We talked about drug procurement. The Minister says he has it down pat now, it is going to be better next year. But still, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there have been problems ongoing with obtaining simple pharmaceuticals. HIV and oncology drugs are very expensive drugs, and I am very glad he is using PAHO for it, because we had started to put that in place before we left. The other part it—

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** You did?

**Dr. F. Khan:** We did. The other part of it, the normal run of the mill tender process was done by Nipdec. We had them on a month-to-month contract, so the Ministry of Health would have developed its own whole system of supply chain

distribution and management, because C40—and I see the Welch report has said that C40, where it is located, how it is done, makes no sense, and it has to be changed.

That supply chain system was going to be run by the National Hospital Management Committee of the Ministry of Health, and distribution this way. Utilizing, guess what? Digitalization. The digital part of this country is not seen much in health. In fact, I wanted to bring something here today—but I forgot it—where the level they have reached abroad is that you could put a device on your chest, by Bluetooth technology you read it on your phone, and that could be sent via, and shared internationally. That is the level digitalization has reached.

The Couva Children's Hospital was earmarked for full paperless digitalization, where you would have no paper and only computer movement back and forth. We need to start looking at that in this system, and I would like the Minister to think about telemedicine, where people could stay at home and they could speak to their doctors, their specialists, et cetera, be it in a central area, or a nursing area, or something, but by means of telemedicine, modular apps, et cetera, move and speak to and get treatment this way. Because if you could upload an ECG of 12 leads, you could upload a pressure, you could upload sugar—you could upload, sorry, diabetic screening, you could upload everything, pulse oximetry and also cardiac status.

So you could stay at home and upload all of these things, speak to a doctor—wherever he is—or a practical nurse—which I will come to—and get your treatment sent that way, without you leaving your house. This is where it is going. Now, the practical nurse, which is the nursing practitioner, was catered to in the nursing personal act that we piloted. The nursing fraternity was supposed to use this nursing practitioner and specialization of nurses to get specialist nurses. However, that needs to come back to Parliament for affirmative resolution of the qualification of the nurse practitioners. I would ask the Minister to see if he could fast-forward that for the nurses, because they have been clamouring for this for close to about 15 years or more, and Jamaica has that.

So, that it was not mentioned, and I just thought I would mention it. Another thing that was mentioned, was the National Health Insurance System. We have heard about National Health Insurance for two years in a row. National Health Insurance System is necessary for certain universal health-care coverage. Nothing was said about it. I have not seen anything in the budget for it. It is time that we start looking at it, because the health surcharge is not enough, and the cost of health care is rising. If you are going to develop a health-care structure, such as

England or Canada, or a mixed package, you need to put things in place for that. So, the National Health Insurance structure needs to be addressed.

Now, I just want to talk a little bit about the NCD programmes, and I am so happy that the Minister sees that as a very good thing. I will tell you why, the Minister—sorry, when I was Minister the IDB came and we sat down and wondered, how we can deal with the problems of the non-communicable disease in Trinidad. And we came across with a plan, we could have a wellness programme through Trinidad and Tobago using IDB funds, and a system involved. It was a larger programme than what is being done now because of the money constraints.

We were going to deal with the full aspect of NCDs with wellness centres throughout Trinidad and Tobago, and develop with that. The Minister now, and the Minister of Planning at that time, the hon. Member for Caroni Central—we discussed it and we went to the IDB and we signed off on it, for the NCD programme. And I am extremely happy to see that it is continuing, because, as I always mention, government come, government go, but the continuity for the people of Trinidad and Tobago is very important. The non-communicable disease in this country, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is a serious problem. I was hoping to see something in the budget about some tax on sugary drinks, heavy sugar drinks; some tax on fast foods, which cause the problems of the NCDs, as well as the sugars, and oils. Unfortunately, nothing was touched.

But, however, diesel prices, et cetera, was touched on to create a certain level of hardship for the general population. If you were to—a lot of countries have started to tax sugary items—sugar drinks—as well as the fast food industry, and there is proof that if you take that money and you put it into a pool to give it to the Ministry of Health, because that is where the problem occurs eventually. That in itself would assist in taking care of the cost factor of the NCD problem. You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for some strange reason the sugar lobby in the United States, the sugar lobby in Trinidad and Tobago, and who runs that sugar and fast food lobby, seems to be untouchables.

Now, it is important that we start thinking along those lines, because when you see children—well, we started the programme and it is the same Minister of Finance who did it. We did it in my early tenure, where we looked at children who were coming to the clinics, and the ones who were overweight, and Mr. Deputy Speaker, we found that these children at the age of five and seven had type 2 diabetes, high cholesterol and hypertension. That is what kept us moving. And what they were doing was dietary. It was a full dietary problem. They were

eating too much of fast foods, too much of monosodium glutamate. I think there should be something in this country to outlaw, or find a way to outlaw MSG, or make people aware of it, that they have been put into food. It is an excitotoxicity and it creates what you call a food addiction. It creates full food addiction worse than heroin. Sugar is now seen as worse than heroin and the level of addiction.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that needs to be looked at. It was not mentioned. When we were in office we got hit with chikungunya, dengue, to a great extent, and we put a plan in place with the insect vector, with the new Insect Vector Complex, and insect vector movement with local government system, as well as the public health inspectors. We started off by going to these abandoned lots, people's houses. It was really a good system working with both the public sector as well as the home owner, and the corporations. We were able to basically indicate to people that the problem with dengue, and chikungunya, and *Aedes Aegypti*, was a problem of dirtiness, nastiness. What you are doing is causing your problem. People bought into it, and I am very glad the Minister is reaping the fruits of that. I am so happy. *[Interruption]* Am I talking—

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** No! No! No!

**Dr. F. Khan:** Okay, what I would like to speak about—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Address the Chair, you were going fine.

**Dr. F. Khan:** I am trying my best to address the Chair without going that way, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I understand you are very strict in that Chair, much “more stricter” than the actual Speaker itself. *[Laughter]*

All right, what I would like to speak about—the Minister did not mention about the opening of the health offices. Health offices, we started opening them after hours, and some 24 hours. But, I would tell you something, I am glad the Member for Diego Martin West is here, and I would like to look at it and see if I could prod the Minister of Health to do something. The Carenage health facility was built as a standalone facility to do emergency services on a 24 hour basis. It has everything in it. It has ultrasound, X-rays, everything. I even got the car park with the Rebirth House moved to Port of Spain.

**Dr. Rowley:** I, we.

**Dr. F. Khan:** Well you, yeah, you or me. And, yes, both of us. *[Laughter]* The thing about it is that when I pass on a weekend and I see it closed, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it really pains me. And when I see the CDA wants to put an emergency centre in Chaguaramas, it makes no sense.

That building as it is could take care of every emergency problem on that north-west peninsula, and decrease the amount of people going to St. James. Because I really—that was done—and the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West, that was going to stabilize patients, and with a sea ambulance move them out to somewhere by the docks so they could get an ambulance straight to Port of Spain without going through that one traffic, if that level of stabilization is needed. I still think it is a good idea, and I still think we need something in this country, because we have a high oil-producing country to have what they call a sea ambulance, and manned by the coast guard. Because it is necessary. Because the north-west peninsula, that is where a lot of activities take place.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if anybody—God forbid—has to move very fast to a centre for rapid care and stabilization, they would die before they reach Port of Spain, because of the one in one out, and the amount of traffic. So, that is the reason we have that Carenage health facility, for stabilization, emergency services, and a sea ambulance right over the road to take them to a bigger centre. Because in the golden hour—the golden hours is what is important in emergency services. And, I am very glad sometimes the Minister says that, “You see, we have the ambulance. There is no problem with the ambulances.” You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am very glad he says that, because when we were faced with the problems of ambulance movement in Trinidad and Tobago, we were able to put something in place where the ambulance providers they would take the risk of bringing the ambulance down—more ambulances—as well as training paramedics rather than just the run of the mill worker, paramedical trainers where they could take care of people on the spot.

So, we put that in place, and it seems to be working quite well, because I see the ambulance moving back and forth. And I understand that the paramedical training is ongoing, and for that I want to thank the national ambulance board, whoever it is, for continuing that. And I see you got a subvention for them—the authority. You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I saw it, that if I could save a life by means of being on target rather than picking up a sick person and moving them to an institution, losing that golden hour—is where most die—then I would have accomplished what I set out to do, because in Trinidad and Tobago too many people die on the spot. An ambulance would pick them up and move, but they would die by the time they reach the hospital. That is what they call the golden hour. And I think a lot more emphasis should be placed on that area. I was going to bring that device where you could take the heart—and all that is part of the whole golden hour telemedicine.

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** Telemedicine.

**Dr. F. Khan:** Telemedicine. You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the hon. political leader gave me full leeway when I was a Minister of Health, with my ideas to try to bring this thing together, and when we did it in such a manner, initially I remember walking into the Ministry of Health and they were buying hardware, and they buying everything else for information technology throughout the system, and I indicated to them there is something called a “cloud” coming, and nobody would believe it. But today the cloud is a matter of fact.

So, we need to use the cloud services, as with medical technology, to move things in the direction that we are trying to do it. Now, the legacy hospitals in this country, Mr. Deputy Speaker, are not internationally accredited. The Couva hospital was built—the Couva Children’s Hospital—according to international standards for accreditation. So, if the Minister of Health is also building the Arima hospital, and the Point Fortin hospital, they are being built along the international accreditation standards. You will never hardly get accreditation approval for Port of Spain, San Fernando, maybe Eric Williams if you beef it up a little bit.

**11.30 a.m.**

So, I would suggest to the Minister, rather than making the tertiary level hospitals—sorry, the legacy hospitals, make the new hospitals the specialist stand-alone centres, because they will attract international patients and you will get international insurance premiums being paid for it. If you do it for the non-accredited centres, the insurance will not pay for that. So you can do a medical tourism that way with the new hospitals.

Now, as I touch on medical tourism, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Tobago, the Scarborough Regional Hospital was done with educational tourism in mind. The PNM started it, we completed it; the Scarborough Hospital. However, it was lacking a MRI Centre, a Cath Lab Centre, as well as a Radiotherapy Linear Accelerator. We were able to put that in, the MRI and the Cath Lab. It is working when I checked it the last time. The radiotherapy centre was not done as yet.

The whole idea behind that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you are doing Sandals. The Sandals group, they take over a system, if you have ever been to Sandals. Have you ever been to Sandals, Mr. Deputy Speaker? You should go. Just to look. They cater to couples. However, when you go to Sandals, you arrive in the airport, you are picked up by a Sandals bus. You are taken to the Sandals Hotel where you sign in and you stay there. You spend three days, five days, how many days you

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[DR. KHAN]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

want to spend there, but everything is kept inside Sandals. You could buy jewellery, you could buy shirts, you could buy everything, you eat there, you play there, whatever it is. You hardly ever get out unless you say I want to go out.

You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the people of Tobago will benefit with employment. Now, if the people in Tobago do not have the level of expertise of hospitality, Sandals will move them out and bring in their own because that is part of what the requirements are and that is what they do. And, it is a stand-alone area with tax-free incentives, et cetera, giving you the indication they are going to take care of a lot. The other, external taxi drivers, everybody else will suffer. Some get tour operators, but most of the things are done Sandals-wise.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will like to propose that the Tobago House of Assembly or the Member for Tobago East look at the Scarborough Regional Hospital for educational tourism, which is an offshore medical school. Offshore medical schools in Dominica, in Saint Martin, in St. Lucia, they have a full city of opportunities—

**Hon. Member:** St. Vincent.

**Dr. F. Khan:** St. Vincent, and all the students come from America, India and they bring money with them. They turn over the economy, the groceries, the taxis, the tour operators, everyone.

So I am indicating that the Minister of Health fell short on not talking about educational tourism. People tend to talk about medical tourism. Medical tourism is not easy to do. Educational tourism is easier to do because you attract specializations, you attract students, you attract everyone to an area and then you can start your medical tourism. So I am looking at the—I would like the Minister of Finance to look at something like that for income and revenue generation.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just want to say a little bit about the other parts of the budget—just one other thing on health. We have the capacity to produce a lower infant mortality and a lower maternal mortality rate. However, what we are lacking in this country is a proper Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. That was earmarked next to the Woman's Hospital. So the Minister of Health said nothing about that, nothing about a burns and trauma unit.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the IDB and the Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development at the time, the Member for Caroni Central, spoke about diagnostic centres in Trinidad and Tobago with the public/private partnerships. Those diagnostic centres are stand-alone centres with the private sector for MRIs, CT



scans, ultrasounds, and you name it, lab services, stand-alone rather than overloading the hospital system. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that was not spoken about.

I also want to ask the Minister, and that would have to be the Minister of Finance now. Why is it the subventions for North West Regional Health Authority was cut by \$123 million, that of the Eastern Regional Health Authority, cut by \$63 million, that of South West Regional Health Authority, \$118 million and also the North Central, 138 million. If you make such drastic cuts there must be a reason; I hope in the Standing Finance Committee we could get some answers on that. Mr. Deputy Speaker, how much time do I have?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** You have 10 minutes of your initial time and then—

**Dr. F. Khan:** Okay, so I still have 20 minutes. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just want to touch on something that the young people have been speaking about in my constituency. Colorado has decriminalized marijuana and Colorado has experienced a surge of tourists into their system, so too Jamaica. The Jamaican balance of payments is rising with that tourist input. Decriminalization of the small amounts of marijuana lends itself to tourism. Colorado has produced scholarships in such an extent. Now, is it time that we look at it before the bus passes us? Most of the smaller islands are looking at decriminalizing small amounts. Now, there is medical marijuana, there is different marijuana. I would like the Member for San Fernando West to look at it, because I know for a fact that there are many people in the Remand Yard who had one joint or small amounts of marijuana who are still languishing in there because of the legal aspect of what marijuana has done.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it can be used as a revenue generation tool if we need to do it. The same country that had the war on drugs has now legalized it, which is America. So why we cannot look at it and to produce our tourist aspect. Now, I am not indicating that we need to have large amounts and trafficking, but recreational use and medical marijuana use.

Tobago is also ripe for what they call women's and men's addiction centres. And the old Scarborough Hospital was earmarked for a rehab addiction centre. So once again, Member for Tobago East, that was earmarked for that. And everything was in place and the Tobago House of Assembly can run with that because they are the ones, I think, own the land.

So, those are some ideas on the health aspect of it. I just want to throw out an idea on the \$100,000 incentive for people to build houses. Now, the Minister of

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[DR. KHAN]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

Housing and Urban Development is now giving out 25—is taking 25 per cent of what the value of the land is for squatting. Why do we not consider giving the people the land to build, see how they build their houses and when they are finished building their houses, a group of four, give them the \$100,000 to start building their houses, rather than giving the persons who are building the houses? I know my friend, the Member for Tabaquite, might not like the idea, but still. Giving the people the \$100,000 as a grant to start building their houses and at the end of the day they will build better houses than somebody for the same value. It is something to look at.

You see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, people could build their houses for less money, get the \$100,000 incentive and build a complex for four in the same manner. Also, the Member for Caroni Central when he was Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development he had a policy of Town and Country changes and I have seen no one mentioning it. The Minister of Planning and Development, the Member for Arouca/Maloney, if you are speaking I wonder if you can think about this, where we were able, where the policy was the higher rises, the smaller lots and more storeys in Port of Spain and certain parts of the city. I do not know where that policy has gone so far. Also, it is a nightmare to get anything done in Town and Country. This needs to be changed. Maybe a board or committee needs to be done.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just want to touch on something. Yesterday, when the Member for Port of Spain South was speaking—I am very glad I was here, because it touched on something very close to me. The Member used to sit here, in the front here as the Chief Whip and I am sorry the Member for Diego Martin West has left. The Member for Port of Spain South fought tooth and nail in those days, and I was here between 2010 and 2015. No matter what was said about the PNM, she got up and defended it. And she brought that back to me yesterday which I had forgotten. And I remember the hon. Member, in the lowest, lowest part of time of the Leader of the Opposition, Dr. Rowley at that time, fighting tooth and nail and I said to myself yesterday when she was speaking, she stood up there and defended the PNM after what has happened to her.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** But she is still a PNM.

**Dr. F. Khan:** No, no, relax, let me finish. She stood up there and defended the PNM. And I said to myself had it been me, I would find it hard to do that. And she was chastised for something—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member, you keep correcting yourself after, the “she” versus the “Member”. Let us get it correct please.

**Dr. F. Khan:** The hon. Member was chastised, lost her Ministry for something that should not have been done to her. Because I just want to say that the Member of Parliament for Port of Spain South, I want to thank you for your intervention yesterday. You brought home to me a certain point, the need to be strong for your party because the Member could have walked and did not. So I just want to say that, after her contribution yesterday, I believe that what was done was admirable.

The other thing I want to touch on before I sit, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you were not around, but 2010—2015, the person who built this complex, who built the Hyatt, who built the Education Tower, the Customs House, the fountains outside, was the Leader of the PNM, Mr. Patrick Manning. I always had great respect for Mr. Manning and it did hurt me when he had to sit down at the other end in that area after he lost election and he was sent out of Balisier House. What I am saying, [*Crosstalk*] no, no, what I am saying—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member—

**Dr. F. Khan:** I am coming to my point.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Hold one sec. I would have given you certain leeway just now with regard to Port of Spain South. I want you to tie in what you are saying with regard to the budget 2018.

**Dr. F. Khan:** The budget is being done in the institution that he built. We have been here for seven years. It is just fitting that this Waterfront Complex be called after Patrick Manning, that is all I am saying, and that is how I am tying it in.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just want to touch on my constituency. The only part of my constituency I want to touch on, because it is the part—and I want the Minister of Education to listen. For too long, the San Juan Girls Primary School has been languishing. The children are going up to Tunapuna and it is not being done. I just want the Minister of Education to please do that for the children before this year is over, because they have experienced severe, severe hardship.

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I want to thank the Members for listening so intently and I do hope that what I say will bear fruit in the future. Thank you.  
[*Desk thumping*]

**The Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Ayanna Webster-Roy):** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, before I go into the meat of my contribution I want to reassure my very honourable friend, the Member for Barataria/San Juan that most of the measures he referred to pertaining to medical tourism, educational tourism for Tobago, they are actively being pursued by our secretary for the Division of Health, Wellness and Family Development. So rest assured that Tobago is indeed heading in the right direction under this new PNM administration. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, as a child I would have had cause to make some regular trips to the doctor. And one thing I learned early on is that a good doctor will never administer medication without first examining the patient. This Government, Madam Speaker, like a good physician has evaluated the social and economic conditions of our beloved country and is now ready to administer the relevant course of treatment that will set us on the path to recovery. All medications have associated side effects, but ultimately they all bring some measure of relief to a patient. Our nation is finally in the hands of a team of physicians with the skills, determination and character to administer the bitter pill that will bring healing and restoration.

Madam Speaker, for those Trinbagonians who listened to the diatribe of those on the other side and fall into a state of despair, I urge them to hold fast to the reassurances of Jeremiah, chapter 11. [*Desk thumping*]

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

Madam Speaker, the measures presented by the hon. Minister of Finance filled me with hope and reassured me that indeed Trinidad and Tobago has a bright future ahead. [*Desk thumping*] The budget statement demonstrated our Government's commitment to a shift in paradigms and spreading the burden of adjustment as we work towards Vision 2030. Our Vision 2030 Policy Framework requires that each and every one of us as individuals, regardless of our political affiliation make some difficult but necessary adjustments if we are to achieve the positive outcomes we wish to enjoy in our social and economic circumstance.

Madam Speaker, I am resolute in my belief that this PNM Government will continue to display sound understanding and effective governance in these difficult times and safely see us through this period of adjustment. We are not working towards the next election. We are working towards restoring social and economic stability so that our children and our children's children will have a

better quality of life. We are brave enough to make tough decisions because we have a clear vision for our country. Our backs are broad enough to take the blows and we are willing to take the blows because we know in time to come Trinidad and Tobago will understand and future generations of Trinbagonians will thank us.

Madam Speaker, I extend sincere heartfelt congratulations to the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Planning and Development and the staff of their respective Ministries for a well-crafted budget. I congratulate my colleagues for their ability to do more with less and for doing their part in helping to take us further along this Vision 2030. I congratulate the hon. Prime Minister for his astute leadership. He has truly demonstrated that he is the man for this season.

Madam Speaker, I thank all the Permanent Secretaries, public servants and staff across all Ministries and especially those who work in the various units of the Office of the Prime Minister for their hard work and the contribution they are making towards restoring Trinidad and Tobago. I also extend gratitude to the staff of the Parliament for their unwavering support.

Madam Speaker, I am ever mindful of the fact that I am privileged to be here by virtue of the support of the people of Tobago East. So please indulge me as I address my constituents. I wish to reaffirm my commitment to the people of Tobago East that I will work with them and for them as we strive to a meaningful development to our constituency.

Madam Speaker, I live and raise my children in rural Tobago East, so my constituents' challenges are my challenges; their fears are my fears and their aspirations are my aspirations. This drives me to be always fair, honest and objective in my representation of the needs and the aspirations of the people of Tobago East. I wish to take this opportunity to thank all the members of my constituency office staff. I want to thank my small team for their hard work and the service to the people of Tobago East. I want to reassure them that by God's grace we will continue to find the measures and the means to continue to serve Tobago East effectively.

In the last fiscal period I would have continued my roving office day under the theme, "Make full use of your MP".

I have visited Hope, Charlotteville, Parlatuvier, Roxborough and Goodwood. I will like to thank all those organizations that came on board with me on those roving office days to provide service for the people of Tobago East. I wish to thank the Tobago Regional Health Authority for sending the nurses out to do

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[HON. A. WEBSTER-ROY]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

health screening, Eastern Credit Union, Guardian Life, Republic Bank and Crime Stoppers for always being ready and willing to serve the people of Tobago East during my public days.

Madam Speaker, we partnered with the Heliconia Foundation and hosted a free legal clinic in the Argyle Community Centre. In addition, as the MP I partnered with a host of various organizations at the community level to ensure that Tobago East always had meaningful sporting, health and wellness initiatives and other initiatives to bring meaningful development to the people. I understand and I appreciate that development starts and ends with the people at the centre.

Madam Speaker, there are a number of things that we could feel proud of in Tobago East and I want to acknowledge some of them. Madam Speaker, I celebrate the upgrade works at Northside Road, Mason Hall, the ongoing upgrade works at Belmont Farm Road; coastal protection works ongoing along the Windward Main Road; the significant work done to curtail erosion at Hampden; the commission of the long-awaited Argyle Street Mall.

Madam Speaker, I want to thank T&TEC for the infrastructural works they are doing to bring electricity to people in Lambeau, and also WASA for the work they are doing in Charlotteville to upgrade the water supply there. Madam Speaker, I want to congratulate the Minister of National Security in his absence, the construction of the Roxborough Police Station has started, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, the Member for Couva North asked about agricultural roads. I can attest to the fact that a number of agricultural roads are being developed in Tobago East. Just about two weeks ago, I would have visited a new one that is going, that will connect Roxborough and Louis d'Or/DelaFord via what we call "Fox", Madam Speaker. As a child growing up that was high forest so when I was able to drive part way along that road I felt really proud, because I recognize that our Government is working, the Tobago House of Assembly is indeed servicing the people of Tobago East.

Madam Speaker, I want to make mention of the expansion going on to the Hope Anglican School, the extended operating hours at the walk-in centres and the upgrade of the Studley Park Quarry under new management. Madam Speaker, just recently the sod was turned for the construction of the new Belle Garden community centre. This is something that people of Belle Garden have been waiting on for years and I want to commend the THA for really working to bring change and development to Tobago East.

Madam Speaker, in 2018 I want to assure the people of Tobago East the development will continue. Dwight Yorke Stadium, even though it serves all of Tobago, resides in Tobago East. And I want to thank the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, and thank the Minister of Finance for the \$5 million allocated for the refurbishment of Dwight Yorke Stadium. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, I am truly, truly, grateful. Additional wells are being drilled by WASA. There is one plant for Roxborough. In 2018 we have the construction of the Moriah Fire Station coming along, also the upgrade of the Roxborough Fire Station.

We also have T&TEC committed to improving street light and access to electricity in a number of our communities. Madam Speaker, I want to thank the Minister of Works and Transport. We have had problems with bus service in Tobago East, particularly around the north-eastern side of Tobago East. There is a firm commitment that by the end of this year we will have a new bus to suit our terrain and this will bring a measure of relief to the people of Charlotteville, L'anse Fourmi, Parlatuvier, Castara; and for that I am proud and I am truly grateful. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, the road ahead may present obstacles but I wish to reassure my constituents if we continue to work together we will be able to transform Tobago East, one community at a time. I now want to turn my attention to Central Administrative Services, Tobago.

Madam Speaker, earlier this year we would have commissioned the new building. This facility would have been started under one administration, continued under another and it was completed under this PNM Government. For World Day we were able to facilitate hundreds of schoolchildren from across Tobago. When this facility is fully upgraded and when we have all the equipment in, the MET building will be able to contribute towards making our airport, the new one, one of international standard and will contribute towards the diversification thrust.

Madam Speaker, in 2016/2017 we had an allocation of \$500,000 for NGO grants. We were able to facilitate 19 non-governmental organizations, six community-based organizations and five faith-based organizations. A total of 30 organizations were assisted in their social development programmes through the Office of the Prime Minister, Central Administrative Services, Tobago. We have a facility that allows for patients traveling to Trinidad and a companion to receive the full cost of airfare to Trinidad if they are referred for medical treatment not available in Tobago.

During the fiscal period, five persons would have accessed this facility. We hope that through our public sensitization and education efforts more Tobagonians who are in need of this facility will be able to access it. In keeping with our mandate to partner with the THA to facilitate human capital development we provided job opportunities during the summer period, the July/August holiday period, for a number of tertiary level and sixth-form students. Madam Speaker, we facilitated 14 tertiary level students and seven sixth formers. A total of 21 young Tobagonians were able to learn essential skills while earning towards their school expenses.

Madam Speaker, on Republic Day, for the first time in decades, we were able to facilitate the Republic Day Parade in Roxborough. [*Desk thumping*] Tears literally came to my eyes when I saw the uniformed crews marching through Roxborough, because I know little children would have experienced the joy that I felt as a little girl every Republic Day to see your friends, your family in their uniforms parading proudly through Roxborough. The Central Administrative Services was able to do that for the people of Tobago East and I am thankful.

Madam Speaker, we partnered with the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries and the Tobago House of Assembly to facilitate the surveillance exercise for the Citrus Greening Disease in Tobago. We are aware that it was identified and we have the commitment that the Tobago House of Assembly, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries and the Office of the Prime Minister will continue to work to ensure that this particular disease does not eradicate our citrus crops in Tobago.

Madam Speaker, we also partnered with the Arthur Lok Jack Graduate School of Business in introducing the Masters Institutional Innovation and Effectiveness in Tobago. The Office of the Prime Minister, Central Administration Services, is working hand in hand with all stakeholders to ensure that Tobago continues to have meaningful and sustainable development.

Madam Speaker, please permit me now to turn my focus to the important area of HIV and AIDS Coordination. The national response to HIV and AIDS is multi-sectoral and requires all hands and all sectors to be committed to achieving the end of the HIV epidemic by 2030. Since my last budget presentation, the National AIDS Coordinating Committee or NACC has developed and has been implementing their work plan.

I wish to highlight some of these critical areas in which the NACC has been called upon to achieve. NACC convened two NGO meetings, one in Trinidad and



one in Tobago. These meetings have resulted in improved appreciation for the need for NGOs to collaborate and work together as opposed to operating in silos. We are using the information gathered to develop capacity-building plans for our civil society partners. For fiscal 2017, a total of \$76,000 in grants was distributed to NGOs for activities implemented for World AIDS Day in 2016 and for Carnival Sensitization and Awareness Programmes in 2017.

**12.00 noon**

Madam Speaker, prevention is being approached through a combination of biomedical interventions, such as the promotion of uptake of HIV testing, condom use promotion for adults as well as through behavioural and structural interventions. Madam Speaker, the thrust of the NACC is to coordinate the implementation of programmes targeting our vulnerable populations.

We have implemented a short Carnival campaign targeting the general population. This multimedia campaign reached more than 100,000 persons through the use of television and radio ads, electronic billboards, print and social media. The NACC has collaborated with other key partners, such as the Ministry of Education, civil society organizations, and our development partners in the UN system: UNICEF and UNFPA, in the roll-out of the health and family life education curriculum in Government secondary schools. The NACC was also able to provide financial and technical assistance to support the roll-out and implementation of the health and family life education activities throughout both Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, as I listened to colleagues on the other side, one thing I recognize is that we are guilty of something on this side, and we are guilty of not boasting enough on what we have been able to achieve. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, to date there have been three workshops, two in Trinidad and one in Tobago, with at least 207 teachers trained in 69 schools in Trinidad, and principals being sensitized. The NACC secretariat has also commenced a review of the human rights desk which would result in a model or a mechanism for reporting on cases of HIV-related discrimination and providing redress.

The NACC secretariat has updated the national HIV/AIDS monitoring and evaluation plan, in collaboration with key stakeholders, such as CARPHA, the Ministry of Health, the Central Statistical Office and the NGOs. The secretariat will continue to work on the finalization of the HANOS, HIV/AIDS NGO Online System. Other achievements include the compilation of statistical bulletin on the trends and statistics of HIV and AIDS for the period 2010 to 2015. A separate fact

sheet has also been prepared by the secretariat as a request coming out of the NGO forum held in Tobago.

Madam Speaker, in terms of defining a national HIV policy and providing sectoral guidance, NACC has been successful in mobilizing technical resources from our strategic development partner, USAID, who is assisting in the development of this very critical policy which will have significant implications for not only persons living with HIV and AIDS but also persons affected, that is our key and marginalized populations, including our youth and women. Other significant achievements in the policy arena include the launch of the National HIV policy, which the NACC secretariat had the opportunity to contribute towards its finalization. In this regard, Madam Speaker, I wish to congratulate Minister Baptiste-Primus and her team at her Ministry for this very significant achievement. The NACC secretariat and the policy unit have also commenced the adaptation of the National HIV Workplace Policy for the Office of the Prime Minister. It is expected that by the first quarter of 2018, the Office of the Prime Minister would have its draft HIV Workplace Policy.

Madam Speaker, on the issue of identifying training gaps and building capacity for stakeholders to mount an effective and sustained response to HIV and AIDS, NACC has undertaken three capacity-building activities. The First activity was an orientation for the NACC members who are new to the field of HIV and AIDS. NACC also facilitated two additional capacity-building activities in the areas of advocacy and leadership development, as well as treatment, adherence and nutrition which targeted persons living with HIV and AIDS and their support networks. Madam Speaker, in fiscal 2018, NACC would focus on the following: policy development activities which will include finalization of the national HIV and AIDS policy; finalization of the NGO funding policy and the Office of the Prime Minister's HIV Workplace Policy.

In terms of prevention strategies, we will conduct development and implement a behavioural change campaign targeting risk reduction behaviours. We will review and implement the behavioural change communication strategy, targeting marginalized youths. We will have community-based interventions to promote awareness to address the structural deterrents of HIV, such as poverty, gender-based violence, stigma and discrimination. Madam Speaker, we will also focus on peer education. Madam Speaker, the NACC really started operating sometime around February and the small team would have been able to achieve quite a lot, even in the midst of us having one Permanent Secretary being transferred to a Ministry, then dying, and always having different people coming

to the secretariat. They have always worked diligently to ensure that our mandate is achieved.

Madam Speaker, in terms of patient care and treatment, NACC will focus on the establishment of a multi-disciplinary, psycho-social support team. There will be continued capacity-building for persons living with HIV, their support networks, NGOs and HIV coordinators. NACC will also undertake an evaluation of the National Strategic Plan for HIV and AIDS, 2013 to 2018. Madam Speaker, as I move off from NACC, I want to once again commend the team, to thank all the permanent secretaries and the staff at the secretariat and the committee for their hard work, their diligence and their service to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, I now turn my attention to matters pertaining to gender and child affairs. I noted the issues raised by the Members for Siparia, Oropouche West, Couva North and Cumuto/Manzanilla, pertaining to the state of women and children in this country. While their concerns are legitimate, I wish to reassure the hon. Members, as well as the public, that projects we are undertaking at the Office of the Prime Minister and across Ministries are aimed at society-wide behavioural change. We want to enable people to provide for themselves so that their needs and rights from housing to decent work, to security, to education, are realized and effectively and continuously guaranteed to the people of this country.

At the Office of the Prime Minister there are programmes that target men and women in keeping with their different needs and their current environment. Men and boys need to be empowered and educated simultaneously so that they do not hurt women. Women and girls need to be empowered and educated simultaneously to ensure that they are self-sufficient so that they can contribute towards development in whichever ways they choose. Our children need the right policy framework in place to guarantee their safety and well-being. This is what we are working towards at the Office of the Prime Minister (Gender and Child Affairs).

Madam Speaker, let me focus on our children, the most vulnerable group in our society. In terms of our large community residences, I wish to report the following achievements: the establishment of a memorandum of understanding between the University of Trinidad and Tobago and the St. Michael's School for Boys. The UTT provided remedial academic development in Mathematics and English. Additionally, an agro-preneurship programme took place. This programme included the propagation of crops along with lessons in entrepreneurship. Madam Speaker, a few weeks ago I got a picture from one of the workers at St. Michael's School for Boys and they had beds of lettuce—

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[HON. A. WEBSTER-ROY]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

healthy lettuce—and I felt really happy because I recognized that even though some of our boys may be in institutions, that we have not given up on them; we did not lose hope, Madam Speaker, but we are providing them with an opportunity to build capacity so when they transition out they would have options to be able to sustain themselves. And I want to commend the UTT for partnering with us, and I want to commend the boys at St. Michael’s for, you know, taking the opportunity to develop and to grow and to learn. Madam Speaker, even though we do not boast, we have been working surely and steadfastly to improve Trinidad and Tobago and to improve circumstances for all. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, a Memorandum of Understanding was developed with the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts to ensure quality care at the St. Michael’s School for Boys. Sessions were held with staff members to develop the programme, and I want to thank my colleague, the Member for St. Ann’s East. A cost per child payment system was implemented to ensure that all children have access to quality care in every community residence in Trinidad and Tobago. Equitable payment was offered to all community residences. Twenty-four community residences with 381 children accessed this funding and the other community residences are in the process of meeting the necessary criteria.

Madam Speaker, in 2017, we focused on building the capacity of persons to care for these vulnerable children. A nine-month community residence “Train the Trainer Programme” was held in collaboration with the Children’s Authority based on research on the training needs and gaps within community residences. One hundred trainers were trained, who in turn trained staff within their community residences. A total of 41 residents were involved in this training and over 17 topics were covered. A three-month caregiver training programme was held in collaboration with the Trinidad and Tobago Registered Nurses Association to provide caregivers with the needed skills for employment within community residences.

Madam Speaker, oftentimes we hear the horror stories coming out, but we do not hear the good news. What we recognize, Madam Speaker, is that not every and anybody could work in a community residence or work with children. In order for us to have the right outcomes, we need to have the right people in those spaces. So we have been building capacity. We have been empowering our employees so that they in turn can impact meaningfully on the lives of the children who, by no virtue of their choice, are forced to live in community residences.

Madam Speaker, a total of 31 caregivers were trained and prepared for employment within community residences. At the graduation ceremony, in my address to the caregivers, I made reference to St. Jude's Home for Girls, just to remind them that when we are working with children, we cannot just look at it as dollars and cents, or just making some money, but we have to look at it as though we are creating future leaders and transforming Trinidad and Tobago for the better. I have a very close relationship with those girls at St. Jude's. I actually call them my girls. And this year they had the opportunity to come to Tobago for a short time during the August vacation period, because the girls were able to do well. Some of them do well in their CXC's, Madam Speaker.

So we hear those on the other side talking about children who run away and children "who doing this, and children who doing that", but hear the good news, hear the good stories, hear about the girls who, despite the fact that they are institutionalized, are still able to do their CXC's and do well. [*Desk thumping*] Hear the good news about the girls, and even some of the boys who do the SEA and pass for the prestige schools in Trinidad. Yes, Madam Speaker, we have been working quietly but we have been working diligently.

Madam Speaker, in terms of work done on the National Child Policy, I am happy to report that 14 focus groups comprising of adults and children were held in Trinidad as well as Tobago. A data analysis report was completed on these focus groups. A consultant was recruited, aided by UNICEF, to draft the policy incorporating the voices of our nation's children and a first draft of the National Child Policy was completed.

Madam Speaker, our child abuse awareness initiatives were far reaching. Two hundred thousand anti-child abuse text messages, with reporting contact numbers, were sent to mobile devices throughout the nation. And I want to thank bMobile and TSTT for partnering with the Office of the Prime Minister on this initiative. We installed nine anti-child abuse messages on nine buses nationwide, featuring powerful anti-abuse paintings done by children. And, Madam Speaker, all these different paintings, when I looked at them, some of them you saw images that would evoke emotions such as fear and sadness, but in some of the paintings you saw depictions of images that would evoke hope and pride and joy. Madam Speaker, all children in Trinidad and Tobago are truly gifted and they just need the right environment and the support of all of us to be able to achieve their fullest potential.

Madam Speaker, we continue to work on our National Children's Registry. The National Children's Registry is essentially a Government data management

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[HON. A. WEBSTER-ROY]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

and sharing system that will capture and securely hold information on all our children. To date, the design phase has been completed and it is awaiting final input and approval to begin the implementation and building phase.

The Office of the Prime Minister, in collaboration with the Ministries of Health and Social Development and Family Services and the Office of the President, initiated the first parent caregiver skills training programme for families of children with developmental disorders and delays. I remember one of my colleagues on the other side say that we were not doing enough for children with developmental disorders and children with disabilities, but we have been doing the work. We have been partnering with all segments, including the Office of the President. Fourteen master trainers were trained by representatives from the World Health Organization and Autism Speaks in August 2017.

Madam Speaker, roll-out of this programme commences shortly. In our unite against child abuse strategy we trained over 100 coaches and police officers on child abuse, in collaboration with UNICEF and the Trinidad and Tobago Cricket Board. We trained 174 bus, taxi and maxi-taxi drivers on child abuse in collaboration with UNICEF and the Public Transport Service Corporation. Madam Speaker, I am proud to say that we would have launched this national programme in Tobago. We are working across the seas in collaboration, and no segment of society will be left out, including Naparima. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, we distributed two extra-large information posters on the types of child abuse and how to access help to all health facilities and primary and secondary schools in Trinidad, and we will be doing the same in Tobago. We distributed over 10,000 Child Rights books to primary schools across the country, and over 7,000 informational brochures distributed to the general public on child abuse.

Madam Speaker, the “Return to Happiness” initiative is a project led by UNICEF, and sponsored at regional level, that seeks to provide psychological interventions to children after a natural or man-made disaster. We have been fortunate that—knock wood—we have not had any major disasters, but even though we are outside the hurricane belt we have been taking the opportunity to prepare ourselves. Under this initiative, four trainers from Trinidad and Tobago were trained by UNICEF, fourteen facilitators from various organizations were trained by the trainers and an emergency response plan was developed. So in the unlikely event that we may have a natural disaster we have persons trained in Trinidad and Tobago to be able to ensure the psychosocial needs of our children are well taken care of.

Madam Speaker, in response to increased bullying and suicide, an inter-ministerial committee was established. A strategy was developed and is currently being incorporated into a national overarching suicide prevention strategy championed by the Ministry of Health and PAHO. Madam Speaker, I wish to congratulate the office of the Attorney General and all who contributed to the passage of the legislation that now forbids child marriage. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Attorney General, I thank you on behalf of all the children of Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, this was a landmark achievement for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, permit me now to turn to Gender Affairs and what we have been doing. The Government continues to advance its legislative agenda to ensure that gender equality is achieved by 2030. We are focusing on identifying major pieces of legislation which present some measure of inequality and inequity for men and women, boys and girls, for amendment. We are starting building out our agenda machinery. Gender focal points in various Government Ministries and agencies have been established. This will be used to advance gender issues in collaboration with the NGO community.

Madam Speaker, capacity building for the central registry on domestic violence continues. Twelve stakeholders, including directors and data entry clerks of the safe homes, as well as the National Domestic Violence Hotline, participated in a one-day training held on the 26<sup>th</sup> of April, 2017. The overall objective was to improve data quality and understanding of the central registry software on domestic violence in an effort to improve our interventions. The Gender Affairs Division collaborated with a network of NGOs of Trinidad and Tobago for the advancement of women and the Equal Opportunity Commission, and we hosted a three-day capacity-building workshop on the CEDAW convention.

Madam Speaker, we recognize that in order for us to really move this agenda forward we have to ensure that people are aware of the various things we sign on to and they are able to really, fully contribute towards the process. We continue our programmes aimed at re-socialization of our men and boys to address misguided notions of masculinity. I cannot remember who it was, but somebody on the other side was saying that, you know, we are going to continue to have all these issues of violence against women and abuse, and linked everything to the economy. Madam Speaker, it goes beyond the economy; it goes beyond employment. We have to reshape and refocus the way we think as a people. We have to help our men and boys to process masculinity and what it means in a different way. We have to teach our women and our girls to be able to—while

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[HON. A. WEBSTER-ROY]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

they advance and they excel—to be able to support the men and boys [*Desk thumping*] so that they, in turn, would be able to support them.

Madam Speaker, 80 participants graduated from the Defining Masculine Excellence Programme. This holistic training programme targeted men from the ages of 14 years and onwards. This year's training was done across three venues: at the Point Fortin Borough Corporation auditorium we facilitated the general public, at the Prisons Training College in Arima we facilitated members of the Trinidad and Tobago protective services, and at the Old Fire Station Building in Port of Spain we facilitated the general public. We also provided food preparation and home management training for men and boys in the following communities: St. Barbs; Central Diego Martin; Morvant; Jerningham Junction, Cunupia; Sobo; Vistabella; Gasparillo; Maloney; Mount Pleasant/Calvary Hill, Arima; Esperanza; Mayaro; Sangre Grande and Fifth Company, Moruga. Madam Speaker, we tried to touch almost every corner of Trinidad [*Desk thumping*] and we intend, going forward, to partner with the THA to bring some of these very dynamic and impactful training programmes to my beautiful island and hometown.

Madam Speaker, before I move on, we recognize in Trinidad and Tobago that, yes, we have victims of domestic abuse and we have to provide safe spaces for them. We have been working towards that. NIPDEC has advised that the facilities would be ready for handover by December and the Ministry of Works and Transport will deliver on the other facilities by March 2018. What would stand out when we finally establish our safe houses is the fact that in some of the safe spaces we will ensure that our women could go with their children, particularly their sons. It makes no sense that someone has to leave a situation that is unsafe and when they are running they have to leave their children behind. Madam Speaker, we are trying to ensure that whenever we provide the intervention for women, we cater to the children as well.

Madam Speaker, I now want to turn my attention to a very touchy area, the National Policy on Gender and Development. And I say a touchy area because I know civil society is waiting patiently to hear me say something about it and I will be heavily criticized. But as I said, our backs are very broad on this side. Madam Speaker, the National Policy on Gender and Development was referred to Finance and General Purposes Committee for consideration in February 16, 2017. A subcommittee was established comprising of Cabinet Members. My colleague for St. Ann's East is also on the committee and my colleague for La Horquetta/Talparo, when he returns, by God's grace, would also be continuing to serve on that committee. We have had a number of meetings and I would say to



*Appropriation Bill, 2017*

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

the public that we are making meaningful progress and hopefully in fiscal 2018 we would be able to advance the work some more and have something concrete to lay before this honourable House.

Madam Speaker, in 2018 we intend to roll out our specialized training for men and women in communities, training particularly focusing on young girls and young boys to change mindsets to address the issues around domestic violence. We are fully aware of the influence of calypso and other cultural expressions on our society, and in this regard, we will undertake a gendered analysis of calypso through collaboration with TUCO, in observance of Calypso History Month, 2017, on the theme: “What’s Wrong with the Song - The Portrayal of Women and Men in Calypso”.

Madam Speaker, sometimes when I—“I doh really play de radio often at home, eh, and sometimes I hear my children coming from primary school and they singing some songs, and I am wondering: do you all really understand what it is all yuh saying?” And sometimes I wonder if people writing really have any common sense. You hear songs talking about “Kick een ah backdoor” and what? “Ben it over.” “Wha” we really trying to do, Madam Speaker? We really need to critically look at the things we put out in song and different cultural expression, because subconsciously it changes people’s perception and get people to act in ways they do not intend to act. [*Desk thumping*] So we have to be very mindful.

Madam Speaker, we will also continue our international observances throughout the fiscal year to ensure that there is sustained public education and sensitization and messaging that could change mindsets in Trinidad and Tobago. If we really want Trinidad and Tobago to advance, we have to focus on changing the way we think, changing the way we process things, changing the way we treat with each other. [*Desk thumping*] That is very, very, very, crucial. Madam Speaker, in our thrust to ensure that we reduce the incidence of violence against our women, men, boys and girls, we will continue to engage our youths across the nation and target institutions both public and the private sector.

Madam Speaker, for one of our programmes this year Massy would have reached out to the Office of the Prime Minister and asked us to facilitate their staff at their own cost, but we would have provided the training framework and the facilitators, so we would have brought a meaningful programme to a corporate entity. I want to encourage all of Trinidad and Tobago to know that the Office of the Prime Minister, we are here to work with you and for you. If there are things that we can assist, please reach out to us. Corporate Trinidad and Tobago, yes,

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[HON. A. WEBSTER-ROY]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

you may have to bear the cost, but we will provide the information and the facilitators to guide us in helping to reduce the incidence of violence against our men, women, boys and girls, and changing mindsets.

Madam Speaker, I wish to now briefly turn to the work of the Children's Authority. A new board was recently installed and they have been charged with the responsibility of addressing those policy gaps at the Authority, which emerged from the two investigations—

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Member for Tobago East, your original time is now expired. You have 10 more minutes. If you wish to avail yourself of it, please proceed.

**Hon. A. Webster-Roy:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, despite the financial and human resource challenges that the Authority faces, 49 new members of staff were recruited in fiscal 2017, enabling the Authority to better respond to the needs of clients. We have seen the establishment of the Sangre Grande Assessment Centre, commencement of the expansion of the Children's Authority into Tobago including an assessment centre and place of safety.

**12.30 p.m.**

Madam Speaker, the authority completed 29 forensic interviews, 242 forensic medical examinations which aided in the collection of police statements and medical evidence to support criminal investigations of the child protection unit. The authority completed 125 full multidisciplinary assessments, which allowed 125 children in need of care and protection, to benefit from social work, medical and psychological evaluations. The foster care unit received 162 expressions of interest which included walk-ins, telephone calls and email interests. Seven new foster parents have been approved by the authority and that is commendable. [*Desk thumping*] That was just a brief snapshot of some of the achievements of the Children's Authority. Under the leadership of the new board, the authority will continue to address those internal and external concerns that prevent the authority from achieving its full mandate.

Madam Speaker, as I close, the road ahead may be difficult, but I am sure we will emerge from this journey stronger and a more resilient people. I call on my colleagues on the other side to change their language. I am one who believes in the power of the spoken word and speaking things into being. We do a disservice to the people of our country and our God, when we, as leaders, use this

honourable House to tear down rather than build up. Instead of cursing our land, let us proclaim blessings over Trinidad and Tobago. Our children are looking at us, Trinidad and Tobago is looking at us.

Madam Speaker, the ball is in our court. The ball is in our court. We have the ability. We just need the will to change paradigms. Madam Speaker, I call on each and every one of us in this honourable House to do better to be better, to speak more positively about our circumstances in Trinidad and Tobago. I call on my colleagues on the other side to collaborate meaningfully with this Government so that we could really have Trinidad and Tobago in the place we want it to be.

If we work together, if we put aside our differences, be it religion, be it race, be it whatever, and truly work together in the best interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, there will be meaningful change.

Madam Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to contribute and I ask God to bless each and every one of us and our country.

Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. Tim Gopeesingh** (*Caroni East*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I believe this is my 14<sup>th</sup> budget contribution, eight in this place and six in the other, and I am very pleased to be able to contribute to this 2018 budget this afternoon.

First of all, let me offer sincere congratulations to our Opposition Leader whom I consider made a brilliant methodical dissection and a detailed analysis of the 2018 budget, and one which the Leader herself indicated was a brutally bankrupt, biased, a pauperizing budget, long on rhetoric, short on substance, filled with false and fake promises once again, and betrayal of the trust of the people. There were repeated blatant untruths and misleading statements from the Minister of Finance in this 2018 budget. So congratulations, hon. Leader, on your precise, clinical, surgical incision of this 2018 budget, [*Desk thumping*] also pointing a way forward for the continued development of this country and for ensuring sustainable development and an improvement in the well-being of all our citizens.

Let me also congratulate all our colleagues on this side who made significant contributions in their relevant portfolio areas and who also did analyses of the budget, many of whom did also financial analyses. [*Desk thumping*] Let me take this opportunity on behalf of the Opposition, since congratulations are in order, to sincerely congratulate the Trinidad and Tobago football strike squad team on their magnificent victory last night against the United States. [*Desk thumping*] I was in

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[DR. GOPEESINGH]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

the Hasely Crawford Stadium in 1984—that is 33 years ago—when the United States put water in our eyes.

**Hon. Members:** '89.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** '89.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** He was there in '89?

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** I was there in '89. Yes. They put water in our eyes when our goalkeeper was blinded by the light and obviously did not see the ball. United States, I understand, has been there for almost every World Cup, but now they have been thrown out of this World Cup by Trinidad and Tobago. So sincere congratulations to all the members of the strike squad, all the medical team, all the players, the managers, et cetera. Congrats from our Opposition team, and I am sure from the Government and the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, this budget remains being described as bankrupt of ideas, bankrupting the people and the country and we have a debt of over \$100 billion in local debt now, and when you divide that by 1.4 million people, each one of us now owes our future generation almost TT \$70,000. What we have experienced in these two years, the Government borrowed \$17 billion in the midst of a pathetic governance, mismanagement, corruption and waste by this Rowley-led Government. That is the “we time now” Government and dangerously red and never ready Rowley-led Government. People say Trinidad and Tobago is now governed by widespread deception and gross incompetence at the highest level, and down through almost every state institution and special purpose companies, [*Desk thumping*] namely, like the Airports Authority, EFCL, HDC.

The reality on the ground, Madam Speaker, is that this Government is clueless, and directionless [*Desk thumping*] and inept. It is the people who are saying that, Madam Speaker, and I am just echoing the sentiments of the people. [*Desk thumping*] The Government is inept, is directionless and it is clueless. They do not know how to manage and where to go. It is a Government people do not trust and respect. There is widespread distrust and disrespect. People feel deceived, betrayed, and see the Government as arrogant and condescending. [*Desk thumping*]

I just heard the Member for Tobago East asking for respect by all Members of Parliament and for us to say decent things in the name of God, but here is what your colleagues have been saying. “We raised gas prices and they ain’t riot yet. Ha ha ha ha. Didn’t come here to engage in sterile debate and academic

discussion.” Telling people to “shut your mouth”, and when confronted by the general public they say “We are telling the Opposition to shut dey mouth”. But, Madam Speaker, I have been in politics 21 years now and 385,000 people in Trinidad and Tobago voted for this Opposition. [*Desk thumping*] So when you tell the Opposition to shut their mouth, you are in fact telling our 385,000 supporters to shut their mouth. That is extremely disrespectful and I would expect better from an hon. Prime Minister to be telling the quarter million children in this population, and for those words to be echoed from the head of Government is very distasteful.

You would remember in 2010 when we started to give out the laptops he termed the children as dunces, then he himself called the children monsters, then some one of them called the children behaving like hyenas in a jungle, and our people as alligators in a murky lagoon. Even last Friday, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West subliminally introduced a race talk, and race talk emanates by the People’s National Movement on the political platform. It is disgraceful when you seek to divide the population by your rhetoric on the platform. People are listening to you and hear our colleague, the Member for Tobago East, a very decent lady, appealing to Parliament to bring some decency and order back into the country. I want to tell the PNM, that is what they should be considering.

You remember the Calcutta ship? Yes? You remember when “yuh” say when you build your house in a lagoon it will flood?

**Hon. Members:** That is true.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** And when they get caught in all of this, they are saying it is a communication glitch. And then the head of Government seems to have a predilection for the female anatomic configuration in his speeches, but then again perhaps I am being naive to expecting decency, Madam Speaker. After all, according to the old age saying, “a leopard cannot change its spots; a zebra cannot change its stripes; a Rottweiler cannot change its loud obnoxious vicious nature; neither can a pompek change its small, useless, irritating yapping.

Madam Speaker, I have a few points to make on the finance aspect of the budget, but I must respond immediately to a statement made yesterday by the Member for La Brea, and I want to just quote from the newspaper today. I did not get a *Hansard* transcript, but this morning newspaper, *Daily Express*, Wednesday, 11th October, the Member for La Brea is quoted as saying:

“‘UNC policy fuels school violence’

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[DR. GOPEESINGH]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

LA BREA MP Nicole Olivierre, has blamed surging violence and high drop-out rates in schools on the United National Congress...saying yesterday those issues were mostly the product of education polices spearheaded by Opposition Leader Kamla Persad-Bissessar.”

It was “a ‘manifestation’ of UNC education policies, which included Persad-Bissessar’s decision to remove corporal punishment from schools and her implementation of a system that places all children in the secondary system.

When corporal punishment was removed, Olivierre said, no alternative methods of discipline were put in place.”

Let me bring some clarity to this. Trinidad and Tobago became a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and most of the leading nations and the developed nations signed in on that Convention. So when you sign in on a convention on the Rights of the Child, you must bring it into law in your country and so we made it into law. The law banned corporal punishment and, therefore, it was necessary to ban corporal punishment from schools. If you cannot understand that, Member for La Brea, I feel very sad. Was that a failure of the education system?

Then, Madam Speaker, if a parent is caught punishing a child unnecessarily, is there not a legal criminal charge against it? So you “cyah” do it in your home, so you “cyah” do it in your school, and anyone of you there would like to have your child in a school where the teacher now beats your child—you do not know what type of flogging—and psychologically that child becomes troubled and scarred? So it was removed because we signed onto the Convention of the Rights of the Child, a UN declaration. Therefore, Madam Speaker, we acknowledge that there are difficulties in schools. All this issue of discipline, and indiscipline, and school violence goes back many, many years in our school systems. From since 1985, the now deceased, God bless his soul, Clive Pantin, and Minister Garcia will tell you that there were a number of stakeholders’ consultations on what you are doing about indiscipline in schools.

Minister Garcia will tell you as well that when we served together in 1997 on the National Advisory Committee on Education, Minister Garcia was the TTUTA representative, I was the deputy chairman of the National Advisory Committee on Education, Clive Pantin was the chairman and Sister Paul D’ornellas was there as well—a very distinguished educator—and we had decided to put a number of things into place. When our team came on in 2010 we had research on almost all

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

the task forces and action plans from the Ministry of Education on the issue of school violence and indiscipline. Mr. De Coteau, who was with me at the time for the first two years, took the bull by the horn and he did a tremendous job in that, and I will tell you some of the policies that we initiated and implemented.

We had thousands of teachers trained and retrained in ADR and mediation; we brought up the full complement of student support services from 300 to 700. [*Desk thumping*] I remember the hon. Prime Minister telling me, “Minister, bring a Cabinet Note so that we can increase the amount of people in student support services”. So we brought student support services to close to 700. We had educational, behavioural, clinical psychologists, school social workers, guidance counsellors, guidance officers—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Garcia:** That is correct.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:**—and that went on very strong and well in reducing the indiscipline and school violence.

What we also did, we worked with the Teaching Service Commission to have the full complement of required deans of discipline; we had ensured that security officers and school safety officers have two handheld scanners in every secondary school; we put in CCTV cameras in schools; we subjected the students to walk-in body scans; we employed over 170 school safety officers in secondary schools with at least two of those officers for Government secondary schools and five district coordinators; we had the full complement of security officers. Three to 7 in all secondary schools and there was a minimum of three security officers during the day with some secondary schools benefiting from up to seven security officers during the day. I am sure Minister Garcia is carrying that on and Minister Lovell.

We had a zero tolerance for indiscipline, bullying and gangs; we had a very strong school-based management team in every school. I hear the Minister speaking about a school-based management team and that you are continuing that. That is very good for the education sector which comprises the principal, the vice-principal, the dean of discipline, student alumni, school supervisors, et cetera. And so, we ensured that every school has a strong school-based management team to manage the school. What is very important, there was an absence of local school boards, and the Prime Minister, being a former Minister of Education, questioned me on it and instructed me to bring a Note to have 82 school boards placed for the schools—local school boards. [*Desk thumping*]

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[DR. GOPEESINGH]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

The local school boards comprised at least three members of the national community, the principal, two PTA representatives, one from TTUTA, et cetera. A seven-member team. So by doing that you would assist the students being taken care of and guided by these local school boards who will be working with the schools to help support the discipline around. My colleague, former Minister Karim, the Member for Chaguanas East, being high up in the education sector, would remember and understand and appreciate the consequences of when you implement this what will happen.

We had one teacher to every 14 students in the primary schools, and one teacher to every 12 students in the secondary schools. Way better than the gold standard around the world. We made sure we had 250 remedial teachers in the schools, 300 substitute teachers, and we worked with everyone else to ensure that we had the full complement of teachers in the schools. We implemented a system where we had motivational speakers conduct sessions throughout many of our schools. We were also working with the Ministries of National Security and Gender, Youth and Child Development in implementing other programmes. Former Minister Karim, Member for Chaguanas East, and myself, with our respective technocrats, brought together a career guidance theme, two-day workshops on career affairs for every year while we were Ministers in education [*Desk thumping*] and we conducted this in all education districts to over 80,000 students in just a three-year period for students in Forms 3, 4 and 5, and my colleague, Member for Chaguanas East, can bear us out on that.

Parenting: Member for La Brea, you made no mention of the role of parenting in the issue of discipline of children. Parenting. Was it Mahatma Gandhi who said it takes a village to raise a child, or is it Nelson Mandela? One of them. It takes a village to rear a child. So long ago we would have the entire village looking after the children and taking care of the children when they are moving to and from school. But if there is violence in society and marked violence, and in the villages, and the children are seeing this, their minds become overworked with what they are seeing before them and some of them will adopt the habits. I remember while I was in the Senate Minister Martin Joseph was speaking about 85 gangs operating in the country, and I ask if you know 85 gangs operating—that was before 2010—what are you doing about it? Why can you not do something about it?

Now, the present Minister of National Security says there is a proliferation probably close to over 120 gangs operating in Trinidad and Tobago. So we know that and we know that gangs are operating in schools. So it is the responsibility of



the Ministry of National Security and the Government to take charge of the security systems and the security apparatus in the entire country, and to rid the schools of the gangs as well. [*Desk thumping*] So we had more than 20,000 parents participating in over 300 workshops in “Parenting in Education” throughout the country in just one year in the last year, and a parenting academy was established with support from the student support services of the Ministry of Education. I hope both Ministers are taking note of it and will check to see when they go back whether these things are working.

We launched a first national student hotline, Member for La Brea, free talk, 800-4321, to provide professional counselling to students with confidentiality; we relaunched and reformatted our national school code of conduct; we established a “Circle of Hope” where students have a special session on a weekly basis where they speak with teachers on issues they may have; we had the full complement, of course, of student support services—I mentioned that before—and we were partnering with the various Ministries to ensure that what we did was relevant.

Literacy and numeracy. The Minister in his 55-minute contribution, Minister Garcia, Member for Arima, said that we will provide literacy and numeracy that the students will be efficient. But hon. Minister you said, we will do this, we will do that, we will do that, but we did it and you are still trying to do it. We had significant improvements in literacy. If you have any programme to improve the literacy and numeracy, I commend you and your colleague because we are all in this together for education of our children. We are here because God has been good to us and gave us an education so that we can represent our people. You said that no one must be left behind, no child must be left behind. It was the mantra of our political leader and Prime Minister at the time [*Desk thumping*] that no child must be left behind, and no one must be left behind, and her discipline and watchwords were “serve, serve, serve”, and we worked, and I am sure that is your thinking as well, but sometimes I feel there is some degree of inactivity and whether—[*Interruption*]

**Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:** And disconnect.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Well, I do not know whether it is some incompetence. Management incompetence—management incompetence. You all might mean well, but the issue in this country and I am sure my friend, the Member for Laventille West, will agree with me—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Hinds:** Leave me out of the racist talk.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** I am not talking about that—is the management issue. It is a management issue in this country. You can have all the ideas, but if you are not able to manage you will not get anything done.

So we had significant improvements in literacy and numeracy nationally, with the highest academic performance in history in 2014 in all three exams, SEA, CSEC and CAPE, and we even bettered it in 2015. The support for literacy and numeracy proficiency with universal after-school homework and study centres, Madam Speaker, I am saddened, we are very saddened to know, hon. Ministers, why have these 400-plus homework centres in these schools, that were working to help support the parents and children who are having difficulties in schools during the day, to allow them a two-hour session in the afternoon from 15 minutes after school close—*[Interruption]*

**Mr. Garcia:** Would you give way?

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Yes, sure, Minister.

**Mr. Garcia:** Madam Speaker, I would like to bring to the attention of the Member for Caroni East that the homework centres that he has been talking about for the longest while came to an end in May 2010 during his tenure. During his tenure, it came to an end. Thank you.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Okay. So, Madam Speaker, in May 2010, schools closed in June 2010, election held in September 2010, we would expect that a very honourable and decent thing as having homework centres would be continued automatically. We did not have to go back and do that again. So why did you not consider—many of you are parents here and you have children who went to school. Is it not a nice thing that you know that children who are having difficulty in school can be in school for two hours, supervised and educated by two of the best in the schools? That was only costing \$300 an afternoon. For four days a week, \$1,200 per school per week. So, why was it not considered?

We had a Dial-a-Teacher Programme providing toll-free help in maths and English for SEA students, and maths, English and integrated science for CSEC students; we had employed over 280 remedial teachers and close to 300 substitute teachers in primary and secondary schools in different subject areas; we had a coaching programme for secondary Form 1; 69 coaches we hired, trained and deployed; approximately three out of four students were now getting more than 50 per cent; two out of three students receiving more than 60 per cent SEA passes, and 94 per cent of the students taking the CAPE examination passed in 2014; approximately 2,000 new teachers were hired between 2010 and 2015, 900

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

secondary and 700 primary, and 400 ECCE teachers; and we gave almost 2,000 scholarships, open and additional, awarded to CAPE students during the last five years. Do you know what it was in PNM time? In 2008, they gave 48 scholarships then.

Madam Speaker—[*Interruption*]

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Member. Members it is agreed that we will take the lunch break now. We shall resume at 2.00 p.m.

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

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

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Caroni East.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Let me now evaluate what the people are saying in Trinidad and Tobago about the performance of the Government and I want to refer to the Louis Bertrand poll, a very good pollster, on September 07, 2017 in the *Guardian*. Direction in which things are going in Trinidad and Tobago, 83 per cent said wrong direction. So what changing paradigm and what transformation process has this Government undertaken in the budget to illustrate that there is something that they can do to change the direction where 83 per cent of the population say you are going in the wrong direction? What is the most pressing problem? Gross violence, 66 per cent. The people are telling the Government, two out of three people, telling the Government the most pressing problem here now is the violence. What has the Minister of National Security done? What has the Government done about reducing this violence? [*Desk thumping*] Absolutely nothing.

Performance on crime and violence, very good, 1 per cent; very bad and bad, 75 per cent. That is what the people have—the people who were polled—said about crime and violence: 75 per cent said that the crime and violence, it is terrible. What is the opinion about the hon. Prime Minister as a leader?—66 per cent unfavourable. What is the performance on corruption?—79 per cent of the people are saying, seeing corruption at every level in this Rowley-led Government. What is the confidence that the Government will be able to solve unemployment?—69 per cent of the people, two out of three, said little or none. Performance on unemployment: very bad and bad, 83 per cent said they have no confidence in this Government on providing employment. Twenty-five thousand lost their jobs already, more than 6,000 of the casino workers will be losing their jobs. They are

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[DR. GOPEESINGH]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

protesting heavily outside because they are very unhappy with what the Government is doing. [*Desk thumping*]

The Nigel Henry poll in *Daily Express*, September 07, 2017. Do you approve or disapprove of the job that Dr. Rowley is doing as Prime Minister?—58 per cent disapprove. Then, confidence in the national institutions. When I said that almost every institution in this country is crumbling under the PNM Government: police, 14 per cent of the people have confidence; judicial system, 16 per cent; the public service, 16 per cent have confidence in the public service. In the health institutions, hon. Minister of Health, 20 per cent. In the financial sector, for the Minister of Finance, 23 per cent. So this country is at a standstill. It is waiting to exhale. It is being suffocated. [*Desk thumping*] There is no economic activity taking place, no infrastructure activity. When you speak to the people outside there, this country, they say “the country dead”.

Where is your much-touted public sector/private sector partnership? They cannot say one area where they have implemented a public sector/private sector partnership. It remains a model. What has happened to the Couva hospital private sector/public sector partnership? Two years have gone, “yuh come into Government, yuh say yuh gonna have and then yuh come and yuh say, well yuh cyah find the people to do that” because you do not have the brain power to tell you [*Desk thumping*] that that is not going to work. So when you try to come to fool the population and say that a private sector/public sector model will work, you know fully well it will not work.

Then what is happening in the country? You have Ministers of Government, senior Ministers of Government threatening the banks and I just want to quote what one of the Ministers said, Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, and I want everybody listening out there to know that we will not succumb to threats. So threaten as high, threaten as low, we are not going to succumb to it. And then he says, “And a media have a responsibility to carry these stories”. “So he threatening people. Yuh cyah threaten the media. He telling the media you have a responsibility to carry these stories. And then yuh threatening to lock up people every day. Yuh coming to Parliament to say yuh locking up people.” I understand, Madam Speaker, there is a senior Minister of Government who has been on the telephone with police officers telling them where to go with the warrant and asking them, “if dey reach the place yet and why haven’t dey served the warrant”. [*Desk thumping*] I want the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, if he knows anything about that, to answer.

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

So, the Government now is becoming an arm of the State and we are becoming a banana republic [*Desk thumping*] where within the Ministry, you have the senior people within the Ministry, Ministers saying, “Well we seize dey computer, we seize dey telephone”. How is it that within—“a Minister seizing a computer and a Minister seizing a telephone, a Minister talking to people who—on issuing warrants? What is happening to this country? [*Desk thumping*] This is where we have reached at this time, Madam Speaker? And they create distractions when “dey back against the wall like the “ferrygate” and the *Cabo Star* and the ocean princess.”

Over \$150 million in multi-million-dollar scandal when the fake oil is \$100 million and the Prime Minister with his friend in south and “dey romping and dey roaming”. What is happening? Massive distraction. “Yuh know wais dey distraction? Dey full 10 jeep load ah police officers and dey gone down south and dey want to lock up somebody”, [*Desk thumping*] a former Minister of Government. Just as they did Mr. Panday, just as they did with the Chief Justice and they have all the telephone numbers. Yeah.

And now they are blaming everyone for their failures. “They blaming the police on crime; they blame the acting CEO of the port, Mr. Leone Grant; they blame the acting General Manager and they blame them on the corruption on the port wanting to take the heat away from the Ministers.” And yesterday, we had the Member for Laventille West blaming the prison officers when they are telling them every day, we want protection and we want help. That is the most flagrant type of irresponsibility to blame people who are protecting the country. The prison officers are protecting the criminals from getting out of jail.

Then, this third budget presentation and the fifth finance presentation to Parliament, because the hon. Minister of Finance had two midterm variation and appropriation. I say the gross incompetent and still OJT Minister of Finance still blaming the PP Government saying the Treasury was empty when they came in and that is a gross untruth, perpetrated and perpetuated by this Rowley-led Government. And the facts: Within one month when they came into office, they got \$3.8 billion in payment from TGU; they got half a billion from NGC; they got funds from Clico; they got \$4 billion in taxes; \$1.5 billion from Phoenix Park. Nearly \$12 billion they collected within the first month and they are saying that this Treasury was empty. “They say it had no money”, trying to deceive the population. Telling them “band their belly”, “tighten yuh belt” because the PP Government spent out all. How grossly untrue, [*Desk thumping*] blatant untruths being echoed from this Rowley-led Government.

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[DR. GOPEESINGH]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

And the Minister of Finance said that the PP Government left nothing. We left over close to TT \$120 billion in savings, [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, when we demitted office. My colleague from Naparima alluded to that yesterday. And the Minister of Finance said that we had enough money to cover us for two years in Trinidad and Tobago. So who left that money for them? “Is the PP Government left that for them to cover for two years.” [*Desk thumping*]

And you know, when we came in, in 2010, you know what we met? Member for Caroni Central will tell you. We had a \$23 billion hole in Clico; a \$5 billion owed to contractors; \$12 billion in Petrotrin debt; over 140 wage settlements to work with, and have to pay billions of dollars in arrears and we had a big, massive civil case against us with World GTL. If we had lost that case, we would have had to pay close to about \$12 billion.

So this Rowley-led Government inherited over TT \$120 billion in savings in 2015 from the PP Government. We took the HSF from US \$3 billion to \$5.7 billion. About TT \$15 billion in five years, we put into the HSF. We had foreign reserves of up to about US \$12 billion, 11 months of import cover. Now it is US \$8.5 billion. Two years later, they have used up US \$3.5 billion in two years. Close to TT \$24 billion they have used up in foreign reserves in two years. Then, they used up nearly \$700 million of the HSF fund which is about TT \$5 billion. So that is what they used in summary: \$17 billion borrowing in debt, \$5 billion HSF, \$24 billion in foreign reserves, all from the savings of the PP Government. So did we, the PP Government, leave this country in any financial difficulty? Absolutely no. [*Desk thumping*] Forty-six billion dollars, and then they used up in a short period of two years when we had saved over \$120 billion. Shameful and disgraceful.

People are saying “dey hands” now deep down in the trough, spending and spending and they accused us of spending. And in your decision of the one-off sales, you were selling off your cash cows. So what would you have to be bringing dividends to the State when you are disposing of them? It shows no brain power, no brain across there. [*Desk thumping*] You tell me three people in that Government who could think for the future direction of this country; I am trying to find it.

When the Prime Minister has to leave, and he left about 17 times and he spent 106 days out of this country, it is only one person he can put to act for them. That is the OJT Minister of Finance. [*Desk thumping*] He has no confidence in anybody else. But when Prime Minister Bissessar left Trinidad, she had “ah whole heap ah

dem that she coulda put” to act for her. A whole heap of people with the competence and the trust and the capability to act for her.

Then, the PP Government, we raised the debt to GDP from 32 per cent to 45 per cent, 13 per cent in five years. This Rowley-led Government has raised the debt to GDP from 45 per cent to 62 per cent; 17 per cent more in two years, when in five years, we raised the debt to GDP 13 per cent. And you know the debt to GDP is expected to be 75 per cent by 2020 just like Jamaica. Jamaica has no raw material, they have no oil, they have no gas. Jamaica debt to GDP is about 75 per cent. We reaching Jamaica debt to GDP pretty shortly. This Rowley-led Government is vastly out of touch with the poor and vulnerable in this country [*Desk thumping*] and this is reflected in the harsh IMF-like budget pains your Government has been inflicting on the citizens of this country and even more so, on last Monday’s budget statement.

While making the cavalier declaration that we all must make adjustment and “tighten yuh belt”, you then went on to mercilessly place the majority of the tax man’s adjustment burden on the lower and middle income classes. Single parents are now scared of the future because they just simply cannot cut back anymore. Lower income families are pondering how to survive and eke out a living. Fuel prices now, the fourth increase by this Rowley-led Government. This undoubtedly leading to a multiplier effect in all aspects of daily existence; increased costs everywhere and for everything. Transportation cost, food cost, every cost is rising.

And then the agriculture, they speak so much about agriculture and diversification. Agriculture has once again been given the lowest allocation. “So what yuh going to do? So put your money where your mouth is. Yuh saying something and yuh doing something else.” The maxi taxi associations were complaining that they were never consulted on the removal of all restrictions on banded maxi-taxis. The small casinos are closing down, 6,000 jobs are going, 25,000 have already lost their jobs, and thousands more scared and depressed and even some suicidal in thinking about their possible job loss and their families’ existence. Middle-income earners are severely affected.

These are just some of the unhealthy ramifications flowing out the Minister’s simmering cauldron of budgetary restrictions from the Lord of the Rings budget, the Colm Budget. So Minister of Finance, you must not be allowed to repeat deliberate, misleading and gross untruths. Some people say it is pathetic, it is disgraceful. Still trying to allocate blame on the PP Government after five financial presentations in two years.

And the country must be reminded of the taxations of the PNM Government. Corporation tax gone to 30 per cent; green fund increased by 300 per cent; business levy increased by 300 per cent; individual tax to 30 per cent; gas price hike three times last year; VAT put back on, on 7,000 food items; 7 per cent online shopping; and the population fought out the property taxation. This year, diesel increased by 50 per cent; increase in super gas, corporation tax, bank tax, land tax and so on. Tax, tax, tax. We ran the Government for five years without a single taxation. [*Desk thumping*] So same old, same old clichés, false promises, vacuous statements made in the manifesto and every budget statement.

I want to come to the education sector for my last 12 minutes. One hundred and 10 minutes of presentation by both Ministers of Education, not one thing they can tell this country about the achievements and their accomplishments in the Ministry of Education. [*Desk thumping*] People are saying that one particular Minister has gone into the Ministry of Education on retirement and besides retirement, he is in deep slumber. So he is both in retirement and in slumber because they are seeing nothing happening in the education sector, and all the gains that we made in the education sector, over the last five years, are precipitously being reversed and carrying this country back to 20 years. And so they cannot pronounce on any accomplishment.

I would just give you some examples. They said in the budget statement of September 30, 2016: a comprehensive ICT in education plan will be rolled out in the next fiscal year—failed, not done; the establishment of an overarching ICT in education policy—failed, not done; training and professional development of teachers and other educators—not done, failed; provision of adequate and appropriate ICT infrastructure in school—failed, not done; curriculum reform to include ICT-infused lessons plan for students—failed; establishment of a ICT steering committee—failed, not done.

They said their new plan will provide for laptops for each form level at each secondary school. Laptops will be used during class sessions that require the use of ICT-related tasks and will remain the property of the Ministry of Education. And the Minister now coming saying in his presentation that an error arose at the CTB that caused the programme to be paused. What is that error? Two years, “yuh gone with CTB and picking up an error now, yuh have to tell the country what is the error” [*Desk thumping*] and students are still awaiting their laptops. Contrast that with the PP. Your gross incompetence, neglect, lack of care and inability.

When we came into office in May 2015, through the same Central Tenders Board and a seven-person inter-ministerial team, the laptops came into this



country in three and a half months, [*Desk thumping*] same through the CTB and that—

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Member for Caroni East, your original speaking time is now expired. You are entitled to 10 more minutes if you wish to avail yourself of it. Please, proceed.

**Dr. T. Gopeesingh:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. And that shows the brain power of the PP Government, the management skills, the competence, the willpower, the determination, the smart work and the transparency and accountability which this PP Government possessed when we were there in 2010 to 2015. In fact, people are saying it is the best performing Government ever in the history of this country [*Desk thumping*] and they are saying that your Government is the worst Government that this country has ever seen.

So we purchased over 98,000 laptops for students, principals, schools supervisors, teachers, all through the CTB. All through the CTB, year after year and they cannot, to this day, find any semblance of any irregularity whatsoever in this procurement of laptops costing nearly \$290 million. You can go and do audit upon audit and you could spend \$31 million in audit and you can go to Ernst & Young and pay them \$21 million in audit fees. And we understand, it has come to our attention that a senior Minister of Government, who has been asking for these audits to be done, has a close member of family in one of the auditing companies. [*Interruption*] Yeah. Ernst & Young is the company. So you cannot find any semblance of any irregularity.

Students writing CSEC and CAPE will soon benefit—this is what they say—from the bring-your-own-device policy for those who would like to see their own device for SBA. Programme has failed. You encouraged a class differentiation to tell the students bring your own device who could afford it. What about the poor child who cannot afford a laptop and he is seeing his friend next door to him has a laptop doing his SBAs and he cannot? “Yuh depriving yuh students” of what they are supposed to receive.

And when I tell you about the performance of our Government in the ICT area, we became a world leader in ICT in education. Approximately 98,000 laptops provided to students in Form 1 to 4; 4,000 laptops to teachers, principals, and school supervisors; computer labs provided in each of our 125 secondary schools and 337 primary schools; 150 computer labs for the primary schools were being installed when we left. We partnered with Samsung for 20 schools with 21<sup>st</sup> Century smart classrooms. There was a publication and communication technology teachers manual to integrate ICT into the classroom instruction.

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[DR. GOPEESINGH]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

Trinidad and Tobago became the regional centre for virtual education in Latin America and the Caribbean in partnership with the OAS. [*Desk thumping*] And the Member for Caroni Central would have felt very pleased that we were moving with ICT as being a leader and carrying digital information and knowledge to our students. Thousands of teachers were trained at varying levels for use of ICT instruction in the curriculum. We provided Smart TVs in schools. One hundred and two Ministers of Education in London met about four years ago and they said that if you—two things you cannot leave out of education: ICT is one and science.

Madam Speaker, you know, nearly 400,000 citizens benefited in homes—98,000 laptops multiplied by four members of a family and siblings. So 400,000 citizens in Trinidad and Tobago will have benefited from the provision of 98,000 laptops. You know what that has done for information technology, knowledge and ability in this country, Madam Speaker? [*Desk thumping*] Families and students became empowered with education and knowledge at their fingertip and two years later, the Rowley-led Government, PNM “Promises Never Materialize”. [*Desk thumping*]

The infrastructure: We built 104 new schools, 67 ECCE Centres, 31 primary schools, six secondary schools. We left 78 schools under various levels of construction. Not one of these schools has been completed by them, not one. “They doh care.” And look what they did to Shiva and Parvati. Is there a conflict with the Minister of Finance and Mr. Elias who is constructing the Parvati Girls’ school? He has not been paid a cent and the hon. Minister of Finance had decided probably not to pay him a cent because “he sue him” and \$65 million jumping up and Mr. Elias say “he wah he \$65 million”.

“You know how much schools they build in 11 years?” In these two years, they built two prefab schools, two, and in 2002 to 2010, they built nine primary schools. So nine schools, they built in 11 years. We built 104 plus 78 others under construction, [*Desk thumping*] and we did over 5,000 repairs in schools—5,000 repairs and maintenance in schools. They “cah” get schools going. Yeah. They “cah” get schools going.

I have a list of schools plagued with major infrastructural and administrative issues in 2016/2017. They have over 39 of them. Every year or every term, the Minister come and say, “We opening all we schools on time and every school will be open”, [*Laughter*] and two days later, all the schools closing down. Thirty-nine schools—I do not have time to read the list—from Arouca Anglican, Brazil, Chatham, Edinburgh, Iere High School, Mayaro, Montrose, Point Fortin. And hear the schools in Point Fortin. The Member for Point Fortin, the Minister of

National Security will probably—all his schools were closed there: Guapo Government, Vance River, Brighton, La Brea, Point Fortin A.C., Point Fortin R.C., Point Fortin ASJA, Holy Name Convent, Point Fortin East, Vessigny Secondary, Point Fortin West Secondary. You do your own colleague that? Oh my God, 12 schools closed down and “yuh say they opening.” [*Crosstalk*] I have three more minutes.

EFCL: There were gross irregularities in the awarding of contracts with alleged bid-rigging and insider trading. Expedited payment to selected contractors. The Minister’s personal assistant, they said the Minister’s personal assistant was going with a contractor for him to collect some money. That is not called for. Employees’ contracts not renewed. EFCL bonds were almost defaulted. The Chairman quit. A new board was put into place after the people of this country revolted. Dismissal of board members.

The ECCE: They have destroyed the Early Childhood Care and Education centres system. [*Desk thumping*] They destroyed the continuous assessment component, moral values, ethics, citizenry development, character development, agri science, physical infrastructure. All these things have been removed from the curriculum. We put in those after consultation. Two national consultations and eight district consultations; 5,000 educators said that we must have that in our primary schools, we put it in. The students were being assessed in it because what is not examined is not taught. “They mash it up, they mash it.” [*Desk thumping*] The Minister is the best woodsman in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Laughter*] He was 10 years in the CVQ and he cannot say one thing he has done for the schools in the CVQ process. With the active support of the then Minister of Tertiary Education, we moved from 42 schools to 102 schools doing CVQ. [*Desk thumping*]

And now we want to change the date of the SEA examination and TTUTA and NPTA say “but allyuh mad”. All the educators say in Trinidad and Tobago the students need more time for their curriculum, for the things to be completed, but you want to push it back, back to March. “And why yuh say that?” Because the markers would not have enough time to finish their marking and then make sure that the students are placed in school. Six months you need for that? We did it when exams were in May and that shows the incompetence of this Government.

So, Madam Speaker, in conclusion, it is evident from this budget no provisions to protect the poor and vulnerable from the onslaught of taxes and increases. The middle-income group is being wiped out. No evidence of creating sustainable revenue streams, weak attempt and just old talk of diversification of the economy. This budget is clearly bankrupt, a fake prescription given by an

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[DR. GOPEESINGH]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

unqualified doctor whose name is “Doctor Kill” and cannot cure. Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Adrian Leonce** (*Laventille East/Morvant*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. First of all, I would like to thank you for having me to contribute. I would also like to thank my constituents because without them, I would not be here.

Madam Speaker, I have a lot of respect for the Member for Caroni East. I do, I do. But I would have to tell him that the nation is not confused by pelting numbers all over the place: \$1 million here, \$12 million there. The population is not fooled by making figures up as it pleases you. [*Desk thumping*] The population has understood that information is at the fingertips, so trying to fool persons with false information is no longer accepted in this nation.

### **2.30 p.m.**

Shifting the paradigm, Madam Speaker. The nation must understand that it is not business as usual. [*Desk thumping*] We are in a place now where we have to focus on productivity. Our attitudes must change.

Madam Speaker, unfortunately the nation has been shifting away from productivity because we were blessed with money, with high oil products. We were blessed with having money to do a lot of stuff, which is why the Member could stand up and speak about a lot of things that the nation would have been able to accomplish in the past. But, let us be real and honest to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We have a responsibility in this House. We have a responsibility in this House to lead this nation and protect this nation from foolish perceptions. Let us not use politics and antics that can damage people and families just because we are trying to get back into Government. [*Desk thumping*]

Let us—I respect the Opposition and we need to have an Opposition in this Parliament, but we also have to understand that being in Opposition does not mean trying to mislead the population into negativity. Let us have a positive attitude. We are faced with financial difficulties, financial challenges. Let us come together as a Parliament. You would have things that you may not agree with in the budget, but let us not paint “the sky is falling”. [*Desk thumping*] Let us not do that to the population. [*Desk thumping*]

We have to change as a people, with respect to punctuality, with respect to respecting time. There are a lot of things in our nation that we have grown accustomed to. We have grown accustomed to coming to work late sometimes, leaving early and being paid in full. Madam Speaker, this is what we are talking

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

about when we say shifting the paradigm. [*Desk thumping*] Things must be dealt with differently. We need to change, and we here in this honourable House must set the example.

We have to understand the effect of production. We have to explain to the nation that a fair day's work is required. No longer can we accept going to work at seven and leaving at 10 in the morning. We cannot continue like this. Productivity is important for us as a nation to be able to come out of this challenge that we have now facing our nation. We have to be honest with the work that we do. We cannot expect pay, Madam Speaker, when we have not done an honest day's work. That is a crime and what we are doing is shifting that paradigm. [*Desk thumping*]

The burden of adjustment lies on all our shoulders, from the Prime Minister, to the cleaner, to the housekeeper to the taxi driver. The burden lies upon all of us. No one escapes that burden. And as a nation we have to understand that, let us not sit down and cry and expect that within tears solutions will come about. We are a resilient people. Trinidadians and Tobagonians stand and we have gone through this before. We have gone through this and our nation climbed and we are looked upon by the rest of the world as a small island that is doing so well and we are supposed to be proud about that.

Let us come together. Let us be serious about the things that we say. We have to be very careful of the things that we say because people are listening and people would not understand that some things that are being said have a political twist and they would take it as truth. We have to be serious with what we are doing. This is serious business and the paradigm shift is a serious way forward for this nation.

Fiscal prudence, the way we used to spend we cannot do it anymore. So, if we built skyscrapers in the past, we may have had enough money for that. Now, we have to consider the livelihood of people. I have heard the Minister of Finance talk about not being able to pay salaries. Madam Speaker, that is a serious thing; not being able to pay salaries, putting persons on the breadline. I applaud the Minister of Finance for being able to balance this budget to keep public servants working. [*Desk thumping*] We have to be patient and we have to face this with courage. Trinidadians and Tobagonians are courageous and strong people.

I have heard everybody talking about what is shifting the paradigm. It is not just about saving, or the way we spend but it is also about our lifestyles. We have to start patronizing local. [*Desk thumping*] It is so important. We as a people, we

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[MR. A. LEONCE]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

are proud. I am sure everyone in this House stands proud when they go abroad, you know. Everybody loves your accent, “Yuh know. It so nice. It sexy.” Right. And we have to be proud.

But being proud also means being able to support our locals. We have local entertainers. There is a concert tomorrow by a local singer. He is a gospel artiste, Jaron Nurse. “Allyuh go and support de boy.” [*Desk thumping*] We have local artistes like Isasha. We have Chucky, who is also one of my constituents. Let us support local entertainment. We have to support our local entertainment. It encourages the persons that want to get into entertainment to see that there is some light in this way and they do not have to leave the country. I know people, entertainers left Trinidad and Tobago to go abroad because they make more money there. Let us support local. This is also part of this paradigm shift.

Clothing, I have to commend my sister, the Member for St. Ann’s East, for supporting local designers. Right.

**Hon. Member:** And Princes Town.

**Mr. A. Leonce:** [*Desk thumping*] And Princes Town. Yeah. [*Crosstalk*] “Well, yuh know, I cyah call everybody. But we—no, I have to commend the Members for Princes Town and St. Ann’s East [*Desk thumping*] for supporting local designers and being able to show—[*Interruption*]

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** If you do not commend Arouca/Maloney.

**Mr. A. Leonce:** And, Madam Speaker, Madam Speaker, I must, must, must, commend the Member for Arouca/Maloney.

**Miss Mc Donald:** “And whu ‘bout yuh neighbour here?”

**Mr. A. Leonce:** Oh gosh. No, but Madam Speaker, we have a lot of talent that resides in Trinidad and we have to support that talent. [*Desk thumping*] That is paradigm shift. That is paradigm shift.

Food, Madam Speaker, food, local food. We have an import bill that is ridiculously high. And that import bill is due to the choices that we make. We the people, we are the reason for the food import bill being so high. Let us support and choose our menus a bit differently. It will help with the forex right. We are complaining about not being able to get enough US for exchange. Cut down a little bit on some of the choices. I mean, I cannot force anybody in what you want

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

to eat, but consider local food, right. That also is a paradigm shift. “Because young children not accustom” to eating local. Let us bring that back. Let us bring back that.

We also have to ask the business community, with respect to the forex, to stop hoarding. Stop buying up the foreign exchange in anticipation of the dollar “going and devalue”. Come on, this is Trinidad and Tobago. Let us allow this place to continue. We are having a lot of persons recommending that the dollar be devalued. I do not know to whose benefit it will be. But let us let things go, as it comes. Let us not try to stifle the country, in terms of how we produce and what we do. It is about being proud of what we are, who we are, and where we are going.

And as I spoke about food, those of you who know me, know that food is something that I enjoy very much. [*Desk thumping*] I am strong because of the way I grew up with my food. My food was home-grown. My breakfast was in the backyard. Yeah. So, I would wake up on a morning, go and pick two green fig, grate it, make porridge. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Karim:** We are going there again.

**Mr. A. Leonce:** Yes, yes. And this is the paradigm shift that we need, because the young generation do not know about that. They do not know about that. And we have to start bringing back that kitchen garden. [*Desk thumping*] You know, in the foreign countries, there is this new coin called organic food. We grew up eating organic food, and we have to bring that back. This is the shift that we require within this time of financial challenges that Trinidad and Tobago is going through.

I have to commend a couple of groups that came into my community and assisted me in bringing this initiative to the primary schools, because the children, I believe, are our greatest resource for a successful development in our nation. The children have a lot to do and what we teach the children has a lot to do with where we would be in the future.

We have started, or we have launched home-grown food development within the schools, and the university, Angostura, WAND, they came together and we are doing aquaponics. You know, in my community, not everybody has space and land, so the aquaponics is a nice technology that would allow anyone to be able to grow their own food and have it there. And it is something that we should encourage, right. Because the challenge that most parents, especially single parents, are having is being able to provide food. The schools provide the food

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[MR. A. LEONCE]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

when they are in school, but in the morning, although they have breakfast, sometimes you want to prepare your own meal. “But when yuh reach home” and having that food at home would help and reduce your bills, your grocery bills

Now, as we are on agriculture, young adults in my community, they are very interested in agriculture. We have some areas within the community that have land and we can plant and grow some food, but a number of young adults came to me. They brought their names and they are very excited about some of the initiatives from the presentation, in terms of growing food, “and dey say dey willing to plant on state land”; anything to support Trinidad and Tobago, in terms of food production, you now. The Member for, I think, Naparima spoke about the Ministry being named the ministry of food. We support food production. And our constituents, we are eager, excited and willing to get into this initiative.

Madam Speaker, is there a Standing Order against speaking about food for too long? [*Laughter*] Because I want to talk about a soup kitchen initiative. There is a soup kitchen initiative that we have launched also in my community and a lot of persons have supported this initiative. I remember that there was an evening I spoke on the radio and the following day “de place was full” with groceries and market produce. Everyone was excited about it, you know, and the soup kitchen is something that we actually were able to get the persons in the community who do catering, who come out on a Friday and sell food. They were the ones that prepared the foods. “So it not only help” feed persons who were less fortunate and may not have had a proper meal in a long time, but it also encouraged persons who are accustomed cooking food to come together and help feed our community. That is the paradigm shift that we are looking for. [*Desk thumping*]

The last thing on food, Madam Speaker. Because of the effect of this soup kitchen, it brought a certain level of love, a certain level of hope with the constituents, you know. It showed a certain level of understanding, empathy. We are going to build a structure for a soup kitchen [*Desk thumping*] and the community is going to come together to build that structure. [*Desk thumping*] So, anybody listening and want to donate blocks or things, we all welcome.

Madam Speaker, “I sure I could stand here and get de full support of everyone here that Trinidad and Tobago is de best place in dis world.” [*Desk thumping*] The second, the third, the fourth and the fifth are also our Caricom brothers and sisters. [*Desk thumping*] This region is a region, a special region, that holds a certain level of serenity, a certain level of purity that the world looks upon and admires, and when “everybody looking tuh relax, dey come to the Caribbean”. Right?



*Appropriation Bill, 2017*

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

And with respect to the crime, there are a few bad apples that spoil the barrel; a few bad apples. And because we are on local food, we are talking about pommecythere. “Few bad pommecythere that spoil de barrel.” And we have to reject them. We have to reject. We as a nation must be able to identify them and reject them. Madam Speaker, that is part of the paradigm shift. This nation has, for too long, seen these elements or negative influence and turned a blind eye. Now we reject them. We want purity. We want cleanliness. We are rejecting anyone that incites violence. You know, it was so sad that some persons, after hearing the budget, started to talk about inciting violence and disruption of the nation. It shows to me that there is a sense of, one, lack of understanding and a sense of a lack of pride for the place that “you born and grown in”.

Trinidad and Tobago, a bit delayed, but we remember 1989, and it shows a level of patience that we as a team wait from 1989 to now to “beat” [*Desk thumping*] USA and remind them “dat we doh want tuh see Dwight Yorke crying again”.

We reject the negative comments of persons that would have said anything negative when our Prime Minister welcomed the persons from Dominica and those affected nations to come in here. [*Desk thumping*] We reject that. We reject that.

I would like to say that every week my office sends stuff to Dominica, every week, every week. [*Desk thumping*] And the contributions come from my constituents, and we all know my constituents are not of high financial strata. So, the fact that we understand that there are people in worse off situations and there is a sacrifice that can be made, so even if it is one case of water to send to our less fortunate brothers and sisters in distress, we can do that. And this is what we mean by setting the example for the rest of the nation to understand that in challenging times, one, it could have been worse, and two, we are resilient and we can overcome. [*Desk thumping*]

Shifting the paradigm, Madam Speaker, is also shifting the way we govern things. I was heartened to see my Prime Minister sit down before a joint select committee as a witness and being questioned by both Opposition, Government and Independent persons. [*Desk thumping*] To me, it shows a sense of humility and it shows a sense of being able to, reaching out and saying: “Listen, let us talk this through. Let us get over these misconceptions and miseducation and misinformation.”

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[MR. A. LEONCE]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

Being able to have conversations with the population, even when things are bad, even when you know persons are upset, still being able to come out and have conversations with the people, I respect that. [*Desk thumping*] I respect being able to—not hiding, not hiding and having that conversation. Because talking to the people and telling the people the truth is very important. We are not going to hide the truth; things are bad, or not as good as it was, hide that and have persons trying to live or expecting to live the way things were before. There must be a paradigm shift. There must be a paradigm shift and we are here to talk about it, to express it and let us come up with solutions. Let us come up with valid solutions in the way we can make it better.

Now, the revenue authority, I heard the Minister of Finance talk about it also and I look forward to that being something that is in full operation. Because for far too long a lot of businessmen, they have a way of manoeuvring through paying taxes. But the small man, they do not have a way to manoeuvre through taxes. They have to pay their taxes. So, the revenue authority, to me, is the defender of the taxpayer, the good taxpayer, against the shady taxpayer. And I look forward to that, and I hope we have the support of all Members in making this pass. [*Desk thumping*]

There were some incentives for young businessmen that I got excited about. One with the housing, and also with respect to agriculture. And what I saw, I saw an opportunity for the small businessmen, or the persons who want to get into business, to get into business and have some tangible results.

Changing employees to employers is also a shift in the paradigm. [*Desk thumping*] Because when you become an employer, you start understanding things that you may not have understood before. You start understanding time, the importance of time. You start understanding that money does not grow on trees and you need productivity to be able to make your business sustainable and viable. It also helps in the development of financial control, the way you spend money. So I look forward to getting a lot of the young entrepreneurs in my community and constituency, with part of these incentives that were presented in the budget.

We as leaders in our society, we have to be innovative and—they always talk about a Trinidadian knowing and finding a way to get around certain things. They say we are tricky. But a bit of that is we are very innovative. We are very innovative and we can be innovative for positive. Let us be innovative in seeing some small problem, you know.

Madam Speaker, as an engineer, an engineer is supposed to identify a problem in society and design some solution, design a product or a system that can solve the problem. Let us be innovative and let us come up with some solutions that can mitigate, reduce or even eliminate some of the challenges that we are having in our community.

Let us contribute to this nation in a positive way. Let us also be patriotic, as I believe we all are. [*Desk thumping*] I remember the Pledge, saying the Pledge every day in primary school, and one of the things in the pledge we would say: “I dedicate my life to the service of my God and my country”. And I think just that one line in the Pledge, a pledge is a promise. A pledge is a promise, and if we dedicate our lives to the service of God and our country, we would not be having a problem as we are having today. [*Desk thumping*]

**3.00 p.m.**

In the Pledge also, there is “Honour your teachers, honour your elders, honour your leaders” and those are the things that we see in the schools having challenges. And it starts with not leaving those things alone, not pointing fingers and blaming persons, even parents. Let us be able to mentor a child or mentor a youngster. It does not have to be your child. The parents may not possess the skill, or the will, or they may have their own issues. But let us not look at it and walk away. Let us make a decision to get a child or get a youngster and mentor, just one. Make a change in one person's life—and that is infectious. It is infectious. The good you do to people, spreads and if we start changing the way we treat each other, it would spread. The children need love, and sometimes the persons that they look up to, the leaders, if we take time to just show these children love, it will go a long way.

Being an MP, as we all are here, especially elected MPs, is no easy task. It is difficult to manage. The expectations of the constituents are very high, for me at least. I do not know if you all share the same thing—[*Desk thumping*—it is high. So, we in this House understand the challenges that we all face, and as such we need to be able to support each other in solving these issues, not creating a situation where the expectations of persons which are unrealistic, tell them things like “You see your expectations, the reason why you are not getting it, is because your MP doh like you or because your Government bad”.

Some of these expectations are unrealistic, and we as MPs, we face these challenges. So we have to help each other in educating the public in terms of the truth and what is reality, as opposed to what is wish. We have to differentiate

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[MR. A. LEONCE]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

what we need, as opposed to what we want. And these are the decisions that we have to make and stand on. These are the things that would shift the paradigm because most of us in this House would have experienced the last depression in the financial economy, so we would have gone through a period of difficult time before. So it is not so difficult for the older members to adjust or to readjust, you know. The point was made earlier in the debate by the Member for Moruga, where there is a whole generation of people that never had a difficult time, they never had a difficult time, so it is almost incomprehensible for you to tell them you cannot have this. We need to start educating this generation, we need to start talking to them, maybe going back and saying how things were before, and how it was not bad, it was just different.

You know, I heard someone in Tobago speak about why we have to go back to eating dasheen. And it hurt me to think you think that is going backwards. That is actually healthy. The corn curls and the soft drinks not healthy. Look, the Minister of Health spoke earlier today about all these diseases that we have now in our society, and a lot of it has to do with the way we eat. So, let us support each other in terms of how we operate as Members of Parliament, let us communicate better, and let us work together for a better Trinidad and Tobago.

There are a few initiatives that I am trying to get off the ground in my community, and there are a few that have been very successful. We have done a music initiative where we got help with the Roy Cape Foundation, the WAND Foundation again, the Ministry of National Security and the village council where we were able to—and FEEL—we were able to bring music, the clarinet, the trumpet, not just the pan, but all different types of musical instruments and get these youngsters to go in and learn the music, learn the theory and it was amazing. They had a recital. It was amazing to see these young children express themselves musically, you know, and I think that initiatives like this would also assist in our crime issue. Because there is so much different ways that you can express yourselves that the youngsters do not know, and you have to encourage them. All that energy they have, some of it is anger, some of it is sadness, some of it is depression, some of it is frustration, and you can use music to help express yourselves differently so that energy is, that negative energy can now be converted into something positive, where we can share and appreciate, we can appreciate it.

I saw a parent with her eyes filled, seeing her child playing trumpet, you know and it was moving to me because so much things I saw in that parent's heart. I saw pride, I saw hope, I saw success, I saw that change in which we are looking to

move in, in this paradigm shift. And initiatives like that—that is what I mean about being innovative—let us be innovative, see some of the issues we are having.

There is an initiative that I want to do next year, where we are going to do sports, we are going to do basketball, football, cricket, and netball. I know I will get support from the Minister of Sport, and any of the NGOs or any of the groups or anyone that is willing to support a sporting initiative allowing these youth to focus their energies or to express themselves in a sporting way. Sport is something that has always been a big thing in my community. We have excelled; we have represented the country in all levels. We have brought medals; we have gone to the World Cup and sport is something that I see as a solution in terms of occupying the youth into something positive.

So again, if you have a cricket bat, extra balls that you want to drop by my office to support that initiative, we welcome it, right. And the theme of that initiative is “Erasing Borders”, because with that initiative, we are going to be pulling youngsters, different groups, from different areas in the community, throughout the constituency and there would be no borders with that initiative, “Erasing Borders”, and I look forward to the support for this initiative.

I generally look forward. For this year, I am very optimistic, I reject doom and gloom, I am very optimistic and I look forward to development within the community. Things have been slow for the last two years. There are some real issues, you know, persons are upset when they do not get things in the right time. But I look forward to upgrades in the water infrastructure, the water network; I look forward to upgrades with the drainage infrastructure; I look forward to getting some retaining walls done; I look forward to getting some roads paved; I look forward to developing more recreational facilities for the youth, and we all have to look forward to that, and even if our ability to do is just one, then I look forward to just that one but I wish for all.

Because the residents of, and the constituents of Laventille East/Morvant, we are a resilient group of people like the rest of Trinidad and Tobago and we look forward to working together with this Government. We look forward to making that paradigm shift and adjusting and we look forward to a better Trinidad and Tobago. Thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Fazal Karim** (*Chaguanas East*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for allowing me this opportunity to join the 2018 budget debate. Madam Speaker, let me also begin by congratulating the Leader of the Opposition, Mrs. Kamla

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[MR. KARIM]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

Persad-Bissessar, for what I will describe as an erudite, eloquent, educational, exemplary and well executed response—[*Desk thumping*—] to a budget presented by the Minister of Finance, one which is filled with little hope but quite a lot of hardships. Madam Speaker, let me also congratulate my colleagues who have all spoken so very well, excellent and edifying with considerable research. And let me also as I am thanking, thank the constituents of Chaguanas East who have placed their trust and their confidence in me and particularly the members of my office staff who continue to work so well.

Madam Speaker, the reading of an annual budget is primarily to assess the performance of Government's use of national assets and taxpayers' funds, and the question that is always asked as a measure of the budget presentation is: Have their lives been improved over the last year or the last two years? My colleague from Laventille East/Morvant just alluded to the fact that things have been very hard, very difficult and very slow over the last two years.

Madam Speaker, if I may just make a few comments on my colleague's presentation, I want to also say that his presentation was well mannered, very charitable I could have noted, well intentioned, benevolent, an engineer by profession and I quite often wonder why they have you sitting so far from the rest of them. [*Desk thumping*] And I know for a fact that I will take your advice, because now we are not only going into guava season, it look like we going into fig season, so I will have to grate the fig and eat some porridge. I take your recommendation. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker, my colleague the Member for Laventille East/Morvant seems to be so different from the colleague from Laventille West. They look very similar but they behave so very differently. Madam Speaker, I will continue with the rest of my presentation entitled "Changing the Paradigm" and may I remind this House that those on the other side who came into Government, promising hope and a better life, I want to remind the national community, and said they spent five years and three months preparing policies, programmes waiting to get into Government and this is what you give the country after two years.

### **3.15 p.m.**

Madam Speaker, under the cloak of "Let's us do this Together", their priorities were—and I want to remind this country. They said that the red and ready brigade would reduce crime, failed; improve health care, failed; become an economic powerhouse of the Caribbean, Trinidad and Tobago, failed; alleviate poverty but instead reversed it, failed; eradicate corruption, the evidence is there,

that too failed; transportation on the sea bridge—the air and the sea bridge—failed; laptops in classrooms, failed. They said that they will better serve the people, serve business, serve the working class, serve the unions and serve the public sector, all failed. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, they promised a wider distribution of services and public spending, yet all we have seen so far is tax, tax, cut, cut, zero, zero, which I would show just now.

What about flooding, Madam Speaker? Today we have seen some of the worst floods—from Maraval to Claxton Bay, from Penal to Sans Souci, all have failed. The energy sector and fake oil, failed. Let me just say, as I refer to fake oil, I just want to indicate to my colleague, the Member for Port of Spain South, the hon. Member, when she spoke yesterday made mention of the similarity of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and that of Trinidad and Tobago and Nigeria and other oil exporting countries and indicated that we, like Saudi Arabia, were going through similar difficult times because of the falling price of oil. But I want to also say that while in the case of Trinidad and Tobago we may have seen low prices impacting on various sectors of the economy, in the case of Saudi Arabia, I want to indicate what is different.

What is different, Madam Speaker, is that Saudi Arabia has adopted recently a 2030 economic diversification plan finalized and set for approval. Madam Speaker, do you know what is very similar too? It reminds me that the previous Vision 2020 was also very similar to another country up in that area called Malaysia. They had a Vision 2020. So Malaysia, Vision 2020, Trinidad and Tobago Vision 2020, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Vision 2030 and Trinidad and Tobago Vision 2030. But I want to indicate to my friend, colleague, the Member for Port of Spain South what is different. What is different is that for two years, unlike the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, you did absolutely nothing about the diversification programme. [*Desk thumping*]

Saudi Arabia, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as wealthy as it is, 80 per cent of their revenue is coming from oil and gas, they have embarked on the KAEC, the King Abdullah Economic City. They are pursuing alternative sources of energy: solar, wind. They are going into technology as never before. They are also providing incentives to the private sector. But what are we doing to the private sector in Trinidad and Tobago? We are taxing them and, therefore, making them less competitive. Madam Speaker, investments in schools, in housing and communication.

I want to also indicate that this is being presided over by the Deputy Crown Prince, Mohammad Bin Salman. I make mention of that so that we will see the

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[MR. KARIM]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

significance and the importance, but the point I really want to make about the difference between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Trinidad and Tobago, for example, when you compare, you must also look at the downsides in terms of those comparisons. If you were living in Saudi Arabia, and you were found with fake oil to the extent of \$100 million you can be sure that your penalty will be sure, it will be swift and it will be severe. [*Desk thumping*]

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I indicated as well, my colleague, the Member for Port of Spain South mentioned yesterday—and I sat here and I felt “ah how” as they say, to know that she was indicating that some of the projects in the PSIP were being placed in UNC constituencies. That was the kind of intonation that was coming, that there was a bias and a discrimination. Well I want to remind my friend, the Member for Port of Spain South and I want to remind the national community that when we were in Government—you see you must never only put on your party blinkers. You must make sure you see the entire panorama of what you survey—where do you think COSTAATT Diego Martin is, in a UNC constituency? [*Desk thumping*] Where do you think YTEPP is in Diego Martin? In a UNC constituency? Where do you think MIC Diego Martin is? In a UNC constituency? Where do you think the UTT, John Donaldson Technical Institute Campus on Wrightson Road which we beautified and improved considerably in terms of curricular and development is? What about the UTT in Tobago?

**Hon. Member:** Tell them.

**Mr. F. Karim:** What about the Diego Martin Highway, the St. Joseph Bridge, the university south campus, the San Fernando Hospital expansion, the NESC drilling school, [*Desk thumping*] Tobago Technology Centre, Arima Hospital, the Point Fortin Hospital and the El Dorado nurses training centre, which you had as a girls’ training youth camp and did nothing? You were sleeping; 200 people inside of there, abandoned, and we took that and we developed it into the Nursing and Allied Health system of COSTAATT and UWI in El Dorado, [*Desk thumping*] a capacity to train 1,200 nurses. And, therefore, when we look at what is happening, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we see that this PNM Government has failed on all fronts. They are instilling confidence in this economy, that is what a government is supposed to do, but when you look at what is happening, it is very little confidence.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, every constituent—whether you are from the UNC, COP, PNM, PDP, any political party, whether you live from Charlotteville to Icos,



every one of you—we are seeing the kind of fear that we never saw before in this country. People are afraid of crime. They are afraid of losing their jobs. You could see them outside. Every day they are protesting in front of this Parliament, afraid to lose their jobs, losing their homes, and high food prices.

The education tax: let us not make any mistake. This new GATE policy is an education tax [*Desk thumping*] because it tells you about different levels of income and, therefore, that is how you are taxed also in income tax. If you are less than \$10,000, they say you are going to get 100 per cent, if you are between \$10,000 and \$30,000 you pay 25 per cent and if you are more than \$30,000 income monthly well you get to pay 50 per cent, but I will deal with GATE in a while.

But also when we look at what is happening in terms of people living in fear, people are living in fear because of political victimization—health, prisoners are living in fear too and prison officers too. Young graduates are unable to complete their studies; young graduates cannot find jobs and I will deal with that shortly with respect to the OJT programme. Poverty abounds—businesses folding up, businesses running high overdrafts. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do not know if you are aware, but I have spoken to a number of people who have to dip into their personal savings to ensure that their businesses survive. That is what we are facing in this country, broken homes and the consequences of that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, and what do we do? After two years of PNM in charge and \$100 billion of taxpayers' money spent, Trinidad and Tobago is on the brink of bankruptcy. After two years of PNM in charge and \$12 billion dollars of taxpayers' money spent by the Ministry of Education, not one school has been built from start to finish [*Desk thumping*] but what are we seeing? We are seeing highways, \$178 million in road rehabilitation. We are seeing a new highway, another one for \$400 million and we are seeing a golf course upgraded for \$3 million. Those three items alone, \$581 million. Mr. Deputy Speaker, there was a time in this country when there was a slogan which reminded me of “horses before houses” and it seems as though we have come to a situation of golf before jobs. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the political leader has made reference frequently to the bankruptcy of ideas, of competence, of integrity, of morality, of humility, of care and of political will. As a matter of fact, some people are even saying that they have never seen such arrogance and hubris like they are seeing from some of my colleagues on the other side.

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[MR. KARIM]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

Mr. Deputy Speaker, after almost three and a half hours, to be exact, three hours and 22 minutes of the presentation by the hon. Minister of Finance, the PNM has said nothing on early childhood education and primary education, nothing on secondary education, nothing on vocational education and absolutely nothing except a paragraph and a half on the other page with respect to GATE. And, therefore, when we look at what is happening here, we see a situation where the emphasis is different. We see a situation where what was said before is coming home now to remind us that this Government has no plan, no clue.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, earlier on yesterday morning, we heard a contribution from the Member for Point Fortin challenging us to be patriots. Well I want to tell you it is very clear after this budget that every patriot is under pressure in this country. When you look at what is happening in terms of the budget cuts—and I will deal with those in the portfolio I held previously—COSTAATT, Chaguanas Campus, cut; Tobago Technology Centre, cut; MIC Point Fortin—as I talk about MIC, I will speak about the NESC. I could not understand—but I would have to give you the figures to back it up shortly—why you were closing down three NESC centres in three of the constituencies that you control. One person is saying in a letter to the employees, that we are unable to continue with these centres because of financial constraints, and the Minister is telling us that they cannot continue with these centres, would you believe, because they have saturated the training market in those areas. So Point Fortin NESC is closed, Palo Seco NESC is closed from the constituency of La Brea and Moruga NESC is closed, but I will come to that and give you the figures to tell you how many—and let me say it one time now.

Of all the schools that feed into those centres, the secondary schools, when we calculate, almost 1,600 to be graduates from Form 5 CSEC, will be unable to access any of those three centres. You are improving works in Moruga, nothing is wrong with that. You are going to build an industrial area in Moruga. You have the port facility at Grand Chemin. You are going to tell me that in the heart of the oil belt where we are looking to resuscitate the energy sector, you are closing down three NESC campuses, National Energy Skills Centre, across the entire length and width of the southern peninsula. What is going to happen? I want to tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, had I continued as Minister of tertiary education, the NESC would have had a place in Guyana and Suriname as we speak. [*Desk thumping*] That is why I have always indicated that “talentism” is the new “capitalism”.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me go to the GATE programme. The records will show that when we entered office in 2010, we inherited a broken GATE

programme. It was poorly designed by the PNM; it was mismanaged; it was poorly audited; inefficient and relied on paper-based systems; understaffed, causing delays; misaligned to national development needs; approving new programmes without labour market studies—that is what we were finding, that is what we experienced—riddled with student programme hoppers—people were going from one degree in the day and doing a next degree in the evening—rampant with institutions over-invoicing the Government; paying double and triple the cost for regional programmes, and do you know what? Students paying variable cost for the identical programmes at different institutions.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we immediately decided that since education is the foundation of our nation it is not something that you could tinker with, that you could experiment with, it is something you had to get right from day one and, therefore, we improved the minimum student grade point average. We ensured and insisted there was an obligatory service of students who would have signed that contract and that institutions were monitored closely in terms of receiving GATE funding and delivering to the expectation and holding their side of the bargain. We expanded, as never before, GATE into technical and vocational education and training.

We would have had a lot of expansion in various institutions throughout Trinidad and Tobago but, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to deal with one particularly now—I am so sorry that the hon. Minister of Finance has left the Chamber—and this has to do with aviation. I want to make this point very clear, why I am dealing with aviation now, it is because that UTT campus, the first of its kind we have built in Trinidad, and the first of any of its kind in the English-speaking Caribbean, UTT Aviation in Camden, Couva, is a gold mine waiting to earn foreign exchange [*Desk thumping*] for the creation of jobs. I want to tell you that while we came up with this idea, it is when we looked at, we researched, we found out that the PNM had something as well in mind but did not deliver. I want to read from the PNM's 2015 manifesto, 2015. Under the heading trade and industry, page 37 and I read with your permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker:

“Specifically, there are certain industries which we have identified as having many of the ingredients necessary for successful penetration of international markets, which the PNM Government will support, including:

Aviation Services-aircraft maintenance and repair”.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as if that was not sufficient. In 2016, the PSIP on page 85, and I read—this is the PNM's document. On page 85, item number 346 and I read with your permission again:

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[MR. KARIM]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

“The University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT), with an allocation of \$166.5 million, will upgrade and commence...works at various campuses.”

Listen to this part:

“Upgrade work will be undertaken at the following campuses:

- Aviation Institute at the UTT Camden Campus with construction of the Hangar, Administrative and Teaching Buildings, Simulator and Workshop Building will be constructed in Phase II of the project”.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in Phase II of the project, zero, not a dollar. I go now to the PSIP, 2017, page 97, item 289:

“The UTT will continue upgrade and construction works at various campuses”—again—“throughout...with an allocation of \$145.9 million...in fiscal 2017 to the following projects:

- The Aviation Institute—UTT Camden Campus, located at Couva is a”—now it gone from Phase II—“three-phased project aimed at improving Trinidad and Tobago’s global competitiveness in the Aviation Industry.”

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this one I think takes the cake. This is the best of all, and it says, PSIP 2018. That is the document we just got here about two weeks ago. Page 69, and I quote under “Aviation Institute” with your permission. Item number 187:

“The Aviation Institute will serve to support the aviation industry”—and hear this part—“and help reduce expenditure for the training of nationals abroad.”

I ask the Government and I ask the Minister of Finance to be patriotic. The taxpayers have invested \$63 million already [*Desk thumping*] open the UTT Aviation Campus. If you want me to tell you why—[*Interruption*]

**Hon. Member:** Tell them, tell them.

**Mr. F. Karim:** I would tell you why. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do not think very many people know that that hangar at Camden is one of the largest hangars in the Caribbean. It is 39,000 square feet. It will hold five ATR aircraft, 10 AW139 helicopters and a Boeing 737 jet. And, again, I remind you, PNM manifesto, we will. PNM document: allocation, zero dollars, but guess what? I ask the Minister of Finance to allocate that \$3 million—remove it from the golf course and send it to the aviation campus. We have all the furniture, we bought all the equipment.

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

Open the Aviation Campus and make some money. [*Desk thumping*]

Let me just conclude by telling you about that aviation campus, why it is so necessary that we should pursue that, because we are hearing from all the speakers across the table here on the Government side that things are hard—we have to eat fig, we have to eat dasheen. Nothing wrong with that, that is good food—but we have opportunities on our doorsteps and we are not taking advantage of them. I ask the Government to engage in *carpe diem*, seize the day and seize the opportunity. [*Desk thumping*] And how will you do that? I want to read this for you with your permission again, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is from Reuters. I know you may want to ask me the source, so let me indicate that want time. Reuters Business News, September 15, 2017 and it says:

“Brazil’s government has approved a plan by American Airlines Group Inc...to build a maintenance center at Sao Paulo’s...airport, a \$100 million investment that will help the U.S. carrier consolidate its South American operations.”

Out of that US \$100 million, \$50 million will go for a hangar, a hangar that we have and the other \$50 million will go for tools and parts and equipment. We have tools, yes we could have imported the parts.

But, you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have an aircraft sitting there. We have a Boeing 727 jet that would have been used for practicals and I would come to practicals just now. I want to say to you and I want to say to the Minister of Finance and the Government, I want to ask them to reconsider the decision to allocate zero dollars to the Aviation Institute, and I would tell you why. If I were in their position, I would have been knocking on the doors of 433 Amon Carter Boulevard, Fort Worth, Texas. You might want to ask me, where is that? Well it is very simple. That is the headquarters for American Airlines. I want to say that we have the advantage of being an *entrepôt*, a hub. We have aircraft of different types that utilize our Piarco International Airport.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you ever go to Guyana, I ask you to visit the Ogle International Airport and see where a small facility, servicing over 20 airships in Guyana, what that facility that we invested in if that facility in Camden could land a Boeing 727 jet the ATRs can land there and other aircraft could land there. And, therefore, the point I am making to you is that we seem to be sitting down and complaining about oil price when we could have been utilizing our energies, our talents and our resources for the benefit to create jobs for the people of this country and to earn foreign exchange. [*Desk thumping*]

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[MR. KARIM]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to say why as well I think that hangar has come of time because many years ago, in 2008 in fact—I am going back to 2006. I do not know how many people, but I know some of my colleagues on the other side on the Government Bench will remember an aircraft built by Bombardier. It is called the Global Express XRS jet aircraft, and that was the aircraft on which one of my colleagues on the other side went with some other persons from the PNM at that time on a flight, on a demonstration flight, in September of 2006. And guess what? They wanted to have at that time an aviation maintenance facility. Well we have one in Trinidad. I ask the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to make use of it, but that is not all.

I do not know if you are aware as well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that under the PNM, in the budget speech of 2010, you would have heard—in fact, let me just make reference to another document before that, the vision of 2020, Budget Statement 2010. I have a copy of it here and I want to read:

The Government”—of Trinidad and Tobago—“has initially identified four projects which will provide considerable mutual benefits for Trinidad and Tobago, Grenada, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Dominica.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I continue.

“Caribbean Airlines is reviewing the possibility of expanding its business into aircraft maintenance services since this industry had proven to be a tremendous success under BWIA.”

Do you know where the PNM Government in 2006 wanted to put this aircraft maintenance facility? At Point Salines in Grenada. We have the facility here. I want to ask the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, is it that you are starving that Aviation Campus? You said UTT is yours, you built it. The Minister of Finance was the Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education in the year 2004 when he personally, with the Prime Minister, launched the University of Trinidad and Tobago. I want to ask: why are you starving it? Are you starving it because of where it is located in a UNC constituency [*Desk thumping*] or are you starving it because you do not like the slogan “from cutting cane to flying plane”? [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, “I know some people does say they does hut yuh in yuh kareja”. I know the language is English, but I know it is hard. And, therefore, I want to ask the following questions. I know that the media are here and they too would probably want to get answers. I ask the question today, why has water, electricity and the sewerage system not been connected at the UTT Aviation

Campus in Camden? Why are you leaving it in bush after \$63 million, according to your document, has been spent on phase I? That facility is open and can be opened for students. I want to say that the UTT Aviation programmes are the most responsive. They are the most popular programmes of UTT right now, the UTT Certificate in Aviation Technology and for the first time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago under, the UNC and Mrs. Bissessar, we launched the degree programme in aviation management and technology. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to also suggest, if you do not have the money, as you are saying you do not have money, things hard, well I want to give you an idea. I want to give the Minister of Finance an idea as to how he could get money. We paved the runway, so why do we not use the assets we have at Camden and use that money, that revenue you can get from it and invest it in the aviation campus? What revenue am I talking about Mr. Deputy Speaker? Why do we not charge all the aircraft owners and operators who use the airstrip, as we speak, without any pay?

I want to remind the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Education maybe he does not know, but there is a Cabinet Note and a Cabinet Minute that assigns the aviation runway at Camden to the University of Trinidad and Tobago, and people must stop flying in and out like a taxi stand and they should be paying fees as they pay in Piarco to land and use that fee to upgrade the facility. [*Desk thumping*] So the use of the runway, we could put in an instrument landing system, an ILS and we could also sell fuel and maintenance services. It is all there.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to just briefly go into the GATE programme and, therefore, I would have seen quite a lot of—we would have heard from the Minister of Education. He talked about the GATE programme. He talked about it for three minutes, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If you check the *Hansard* you will see he spent three minutes on the GATE programme and four minutes on the vocational sector. That is the kind of importance that this PNM Government ascribes to education and training in this country. I would not go into the whole concept of the slush fund but, you know, we are often promised so many things in this Parliament and outside and the Minister of Education—and I am reading here with your permission from the *Sunday Express* of Sunday the 17<sup>th</sup> of July, 2016, and item number 10, and he was saying—it is headed: Consideration of alternative funding arrangements. So you do not have money, you are going to get money to support the GATE programme. Yes, and therefore he speaks about the fact that Government should consider funding education savings bonds; Government should establish a national education savings fund; private sector organizations should also be encouraged by tax incentives to make financial

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[MR. KARIM]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

contribution and so on and insurance companies and credit unions. You see why my friend, the Member for Naparima say, performance beat old talk all the time. [*Desk thumping*] You talk, we do. That is the big difference.

**3.45 p.m.**

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to get into some discussion now with respect to the vocational sector because that is a very important aspect of education and training in this country. But before I conclude, I want to make it very clear that when we return to Government, which we will very soon, [*Desk thumping*] I want to say that this punitive and discriminatory means test will be removed. [*Desk thumping*] We are going to cater for second-chance students. Right now students at the universities and the tertiary institutions are going to school in fear of getting a letter called, RTW, which means, required to withdraw.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you may not know—I want to ask the Minister of Education some questions here—he must tell this country how many persons have availed themselves of 100 per cent GATE financing, how many at 25, how many at 50 per cent. He must tell the country that because we are going to make sure that we align this programme.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to remind the Minister, sometimes when they give you, as a Minister, something to sign, it is always good to read it, because you may want to give the impression that you know so much and when the public reads it they realize that you are short on knowledge. I picked up, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with your permission again, a *Quality Assurance Month Supplement* just Sunday gone, and the hon. Minister of Education was giving a statement on it, and towards the end he was talking about STREAM—S-T-R-E-A-M—but many people would know about STEM, and many people would know about STEAM. And, yes, there is in fact an acronym called STREAM, but the hon. Minister, I do not know if he read it or probably did not know, but the person who wrote it may not have realized, but they missed out the E. So they had—well they had science—well, let me just go through it—they had science, technology, they had research, arts and mathematics, so the engineering was missed out. I just said that, not to make any fun of it, just to say that sometimes when we use these terminologies we have to be very careful as to what we are saying.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we talk about the GATE programme I just wanted to conclude with that by saying, that on a CNC3 *Morning Brew* programme with Hema Ramkissoon, entitled, “We Matter Too”, she had a discussion on Monday



*Appropriation Bill, 2017*

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October with respect to the students at the University of the West Indies. And you would not believe that many of them were saying that they filled out the means test questionnaire, they filled it out, but guess what, up to today they do not know what is the response and the result of that questionnaire. So we are allowing these students to go through the tertiary system, you had sufficient time to put things in place—and let me just indicate that they boast about an electronic system, that electronic system was done under the UNC. It was called the GATE e-service. [*Desk thumping*]

But you know what is very lamentable about all of this, the fact that up to now we find it so very difficult to find out what is the national needs list. You say that you are not financing postgraduate studies; postgraduate studies are very important in terms of new information and knowledge, research and development, but it should be focused, in my view, on applied research and, therefore, that application of the research is, what can that new knowledge bring in terms of the creation of new industries, the creative sector, and so many areas and opportunities for jobs and economic development?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to quickly move to give some information with respect to the nursing shortage. My colleague from Moruga/Tableland, he is not here, he indicated that from his information, or what was told to him, that there were approximately 60 per cent of nurses in the country who were over the age of 60. But I want to tell you something—

**Dr. Moonilal:** What he said?

**Mr. F. Karim:** He said that 60 per cent of the nurses in the country are over 60 years. Well, even if that is so then the PNM would have adopted the plan that I presented to the Cabinet and it was approved, RRW, Retirees Returning to Work. [*Desk thumping*] But the figure I want to give you so that you could conclude, and I will show you what the figure is, I know he is an economic historian and not a mathematician. So with respect to the Eastern Regional Health Authority, the total number of nurses, 504; number over 55, 107 and so on, and it gives you for the NWRHA, the SWRHA, the TRHA, and so on. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the figures I have here, it works out to 18.8 per cent of the nurses who are over the age of 55, so you can include 60 in that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we talk, just now I mentioned about jobs and the young people; I just want to ask the question, what is happening to the OJT programme? You have cut the OJT programme from \$374 million to \$212 million.

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[MR. KARIM]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

What about all these graduates from COSTAATT, where my friend from St. Ann's East used to be attached to at one time? What about all of these people from UTT, from UWI, from all the private institutions, from CSEC, from CAPE? What are they going to do? And you are criticizing when we talk on this side, and when we use the words, we never said it will happen. It is not a confession so that there would be a possession. It is in fact a potential that can happen if you do not take care of these young people in our society.

I want to ask the question: what happened to the 35,000 jobs that we were promised for people to go and drive truck? This was really, in my view—and this is how you manage the patriots. We must be patriots but you are finding 35,000 jobs for people to go and work in Canada. So I just want to ask the question, what happened to this big-bang theory, this real sophisticated theory of job creation in Canada through a company called Hire Pro Drivers since October 2016? I want to ask how many people have gotten these jobs. How many people have gotten jobs through the OJT programme?

And I ask the question here as well—I want to ask the question here as well, what has happened to the Graduate Recruitment Programme? [*Desk thumping*] In 2016, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the first budget, the Minister of Finance came here and told us, “I will allocate \$55 million to having about 500 persons per Ministry”—or is it 50?—50 persons per Ministry employed. Why does the Minister of Finance not give us an account of how many people were hired, and how were they hired? How do we know how they were selected? And, therefore, do you know what is the allocation for this year's budget, Mr. Deputy Speaker?—\$1 million. So what happened to the \$55 million? [*Crosstalk*] And therefore, again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the amount of the persons—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member for Princes Town, tone down, please.

**Mr. F. Karim:** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was speaking about the whole importance of technical and vocational education, and training as well. I would like to give my friend from many years ago when he was President of TUTTA, now Minister of Education, the MP for Arima, I will share with him two publications that he will do well to read. I mentioned that you were closing down these facilities, but vocational education is an opportunity for diversifying your knowledge base and for self-employment. [*Desk thumping*] I just want to, with your permission, extend the invitation to the Minister of Education to read these two publications, and one is entitled, *Vocational Education and Training in Times of Economic*

*Crisis* and that is written by Matthias Pilz. And in case you want to get a good role model, you might want to read a book by Law Song Seng, *A Breakthrough in Vocational and Technical Education: The Singapore Story*.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the hon. Minister of Education in a consultation with the hon. Prime Minister at St. Augustine Secondary School indicated that he did not want to talk much about the vocational education under the last administration. They gave the impression that that was something that was more or less abandoned, that we did not do much with it; nothing can be further from the truth. [Desk thumping] Nothing. And, therefore, I just want to remind the Minister, the MP for Arima, he must remember that as a former teacher in the vocational sector it might be good for him to ask the Teaching Service Commission to tell him how many vacancies exist currently in the teaching service for teachers in the technical and vocational education and training system. I want to also tell you, it is my information that when people retire or resign from the teaching service, vocational teachers that is, there are no replacements.

And, again, I want to stress the importance, because he said in his conversation that this Government, the PNM Government, is putting TVET, tech-voc on the front burner. Well I want to make a suggestion to the hon. Minister of Education, and also to the Minister of Finance and to the Prime Minister—the hon. Prime Minister, Member for Diego Martin West—I want to suggest that this Government seriously consider, every child in the secondary school system, given the economic circumstances that we are facing in the country now, given the difficulty and the challenges of job creation, given the difficulty and the shrinkage of the market, I call upon the Government to consider that every child in secondary school must do a CVQ—[Desk thumping]—a vocational qualification by the time they graduate five years from the day they start school.

What that will do is that every single pupil that is coming out into our workforce will be better equipped and trained, and if they do not get jobs, they can create their jobs. They do not have to be employees, they can be employers. [Desk thumping] This is the kind of empowerment that we are talking about. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to—[Interruption]—I am hearing—I am so sorry if I heard correct, but I heard that the hon. Minister steups and said, “stupidness”. [Crosstalk] I hope I did not hear that. I hope I did not hear that, because that will be a significant condemnation of what he has been saying about the education system. [Desk thumping] Mr. Deputy Speaker, I know him well, and I know him better than that, I know that he is a good teacher. He might be something better than what he is in another capacity, but I do not know about that aspect, but I can

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[MR. KARIM]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

tell you I know he means well, and he will take the advice that I have just given him and ensure that every child does a CVQ upon graduation five years from when they start. Mr. Deputy Speaker—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member, your initial 45 minutes has expired, you care to avail yourself of the additional 10?

**Mr. F. Karim:** Yes.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Proceed.

**Mr. F. Karim:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to go right now into some very serious questions I wish to raise in the tertiary sector. Mr. Deputy Speaker, much has been said about UTT. I have a quote from the hon. Prime Minister when he was in Opposition talking about UTT and saying that we are proud of the University of Trinidad and Tobago, and that you all should do nothing to dismantle it. Well I want to ask the following questions today. I hope that the Minister of Education will find some answers, because I am sure the media will ask him these questions after. [*Desk thumping*] And, therefore, I want to ask the following questions about the University of Trinidad and Tobago. I am advised, and therefore I am asking, are there consultants, several of whom are employed at the University of Trinidad and Tobago and who have compromised their work in the management of that institution? I want to ask whether at the faculty, UTT faculty, Centre for Education, that somebody is running their own education school.

I want to ask the question of the Minister of Education to find out whether there is any truth that faculty members are out of the country for periods between one to three months on full-time pay and perhaps doing privately paid work. I want to ask the question whether the faculty is being promoted to full professorship, whether there are any person or persons at the University of Trinidad and Tobago who have been promoted to full professorship not having met all the progression criteria. I want to ask the following question: Is there any member of faculty being salaried at a level above their academic qualifications? I want to ask the question: Is there any faculty who has been interviewed without public advertisement for the position and without any shortlist of other applicants?

I want to ask the other question: Is the Minister aware that the University of Trinidad and Tobago has entered into a new tenancy agreement with O'Meara Industrial Estate, knowing very well that the plan is to move to Tamana? I want to ask the Minister of Education to also indicate to us how many staff members at

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

UTT have been redirected to the office of the chairman of UTT without any internal advertisements or interviews. I want to also ask, is the personal secretary of any person on the Board of Governors now on the payroll of the University of Trinidad and Tobago?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to ask with respect to Tamana, I want to ask when will classes at Tamana, UTT Tamana, commence? I want to ask, what are the programmes after; you have spent \$2 billion in Tamana, what are the programmes that you are going to put on at Tamana? How are students going to get to Tamana? I want to ask, what investors would be located at that e TecK park? What is the final cost for the e TecK park? I want to also find out, and I want to ask the media as well to ask the Minister of Education, is there a cover-up of a fatal accident of a Chinese worker at the Tamana estate? I want to ask, who is the employer representative or representative engineers at the Tamana campus?

I also want to tell you about something else that I noticed is happening, and that is with respect to—the Minister of Finance in his budget speech had one paragraph on the left side of a page, just only that paragraph where he talks about a certificate in tailoring. I would like the country to know who is the person or the professor, where is he from? Is he from Trinidad? Or is he a Trinidadian living somewhere else who is going to be conducting this certificate in tailoring? I want to find out what is happening to UTT fashion department. We have a degree, a Bachelor's in Fine Arts, a BFA, and what is this certificate all about? And the Minister of Finance, somebody gave him to read it and he does not know the truth, and he must check his facts. He has been given to read in that budget speech, Member for Arima, that a certificate in tailoring will be conducted at the University of Trinidad and Tobago. And when I investigated it, it appears as though that particular person who is delivering the programme he is not a qualified and competent person certified to teach. He may be a practitioner, and that course is certainly not accredited by the Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago.

As I ask that, I want to find out what is the status of accreditation with respect to the University of Trinidad and Tobago. What I am indicating to you now, and you can find the facts, I am made to understand that that certificate in tailoring, part will be done at John D. and part will be done at the MIC Institute of Technology in Macoya, where the life skills and the numeracy will be taught there. So how you could read—are you misleading this population? You are saying that there is a certificate in tailoring?

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[MR. KARIM]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to tell you that much has to be said, but, you know, I want to say as I enquire into that, I want to indicate, I want to call upon the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the Minister of Education to ensure that the University of the West Indies Penal/Debe campus is opened. [*Desk thumping*] We gave you a cheque, all the money to build the campus. But I think one of the things I want to be proud of, and I want to say, for us in Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we must all be proud to know that we have gone up the scale of the GCI, the Global Competitiveness Index, and the research will show that one of the single pillars that caused this improvement in our GCI standing is education and tertiary education. [*Desk thumping*]

And therefore, they talk about investments. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to move quickly now to business process outsourcing. Business process outsourcing is not something new to Trinidad and Tobago. We did that under the TTIFC, the Trinidad and Tobago International Financial Centre, where 1,500 jobs were created. I want to say that that is nothing new, just like the Eximbank is nothing new. So you are bringing things here—Mr. Deputy Speaker, could you tell me how much more time I have, please?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** You have roughly three minutes.

**Mr. F. Karim:** Three minutes, okay, I have enough time to finish up. And, therefore, I want to close by talking about some of the concerns for the constituency of Chaguanas East. We had a visit from Minister Rohan Sinanan, we are still awaiting works to be started. We are looking at the traffic situation around the roundabout. A promise was made to build a ring road in Chaguanas to alleviate the traffic congestion, we cannot see the ring, we cannot see the road, “it look like two ah dem ting divorce”.

And therefore, we are looking as well in terms of the police station. The Member for Point Fortin visited with me, and I want to thank him for inviting me, we walked through Enterprise, and he committed here in this very Parliament, he answered the question in the Senate, that a police station will be built in Enterprise. We are still awaiting that police station after we walked on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March, 2017, but maybe that is how long it takes for the PNM to get to some action. I want to also say that we eagerly await the Laventille school improvement project for which we commend the Government and the people of Laventille. We want a similar project in a similar environment in Enterprise, because the circumstances are similar there.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to tell you our country needs a lot of help and patriotism; yes, that is so. I want to tell you we need a new vision for our society. I want to tell you that that new vision must be fuelled by knowledge, education. I want to also tell you that if you want to see where your workforce is, where you want to see what you prepare for, let me give another book to my colleague to read, *The Future of Work is Already Here*, by Professor Lynda Gratton from the London Business School.

I could also give you another book for the PNM to read, and I will describe that book in three sentences, it is good for them to read it, it is called, *The Reputation Economy*, because the PNM has a fundamental problem with their reputation and their integrity in this country. [*Desk thumping*] And Michael Fertik says—in three lines I will tell you—question number one, what people think of you; question number two, whether people will work with you; but most importantly for them, question number three, whether they will work for you. And, therefore, it is important to read because reading “maketh a ready man”.

Therefore, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I conclude, I probably have just a minute and a half, let me say that the question has always been asked about patriotism—my friend from Point Fortin made a hue and a song and a dance about patriotism. Well, I want to say, you really do not get it. You do not realize that when you come to this Parliament, when you are listened to on the radio, watched on the television, not only at home, but when the world is seeing and taking note, and of your sometimes despicable behaviour, of your allegations of untruth without evidence, of your disrespect, even for the Presiding Officer—the Madam Speaker, and you, Mr. Deputy Speaker—when, for example, there are utterances in Parliament that are bordering on attitudinal challenges and difficulty, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to tell you, we do not need a paradigm change—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member, your speaking time has expired.

**Mr. F. Karim:**—we need a change in Government. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** I recognize the Member for Tobago West. [*Desk thumping*]

**The Minister of Tourism (Hon. Shamfa Cudjoe):** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to thank you for this opportunity to make a contribution in this budget presentation. This is my eighth contribution to—my eighth year as a parliamentarian, so it is my eighth budgetary contribution, and I want to extend the greatest gratitude to the people of Tobago, and more

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[HON. S. CUDJOE]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

specifically, the people of Tobago West for giving me the opportunity to stand here as their Member of Parliament, as their representative.

I want to thank the hon. Prime Minister for his intelligent and inspiring leadership over the past two years and working so diligently [*Desk thumping*] in our efforts to restore order to this country. I want to salute the Minister of Finance for delivering what the people call, a good budget, a reasonable budget. We are all very mindful of the state of the economy, and I was very pleased to see that even against the backdrop of trying economic times the Minister of Finance found a way of stretching the dollar, and stretching the different opportunities available, especially to young people, young business owners, and we are indeed very pleased to see that.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when I listened to the Opposition I wonder, I wonder because it was only two years ago that they were in Government. And I listened to the Opposition Member for Barataria/San Juan earlier today, and he spoke glowingly about the ideas they had and the things they would have planned to do, and all these things that were in the works while they were in Government, but, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am here to say that you plan and you have ideas, but we get in Government and we do. Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and if you had all these plans and you did not get the opportunity to deliver them then what exactly did you do with the money that you spent during that time, because you talk about all these plans and things you had planned to do, these ideas, these wonderful ideas. Now everybody has the answers to the problems of the country, then what did you do while you were there?

It was interesting yesterday to listen to MP Lee, the Member of Parliament for Pointe-a-Pierre, and he said, yes—something to the effect, yes we gave away the \$16 billion from the NGC; yes, we used up the money and we gave it away, with no kind of shame whatsoever. Shameless. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will not utilize my time even responding to the opposite side, because as far as I am concerned there is nothing to respond to. I have been here in this Parliament for the past three days or so listening to the debate and I am waiting for the juice, for the substance, and it is much to be desired as it relates to the contributions from the opposite side.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will go right ahead into my contribution, and I will speak about tourism first. Tourism remains one of the fastest-growing economic sectors in the world, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and we here in Trinidad and Tobago, we have taken the decision to look at tourism; also, invest in tourism as a main player as it relates to our economic diversification and expansion because of its



multiplier effect, its ability to affect and improve the other sectors that support the tourism industry; the ability to generate jobs, foreign exchange, revenue generation, wealth generation, poverty alleviation. And year after year, time after time you would hear different countries, different people speak glowingly about the possibilities and the endless opportunities in the tourism industry. So this Government has identified tourism as one of the key players in our development agenda to diversify and expand our economy.

Now, as it relates to the global performance, last year, 2016, you would have seen 1.2 billion arrivals across the world—at least 1.2 billion arrivals—and a growth rate of 3.9 per cent, and the UNWTO expects a growth rate of up to 3.8 per cent up to the year 2020. For us here in the Caribbean, last year we would have broken our own record and welcomed over 29 million tourists, and we had a growth of 4.2 per cent here in the Caribbean, and we expect—which is over our growth from the previous year of 3.9 per cent. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, tourism is growing within the region. Later on I would explain our position here in Trinidad and Tobago.

As the sector continues to grow, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Government intends to increase our contribution, the tourism contribution to the GDP up to 15 per cent by the year 2020, and to do that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this would require major investment in the sector as it relates to improving our business environment, enhancing our suite of incentives, better or improved cooperation with the stakeholders, public education, a more aggressive marketing campaign and strategy, a greater investment in airlift, improving our services and, last, but certainly not least, improving our product offering.

And to that end, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just want to touch on some of the projects that we in the Ministry of Tourism would have done over the past fiscal year. As you are well aware, during the past fiscal year the Government, the Cabinet would have taken the decision, after doing an investigation or studying and examining the current structure and the landscape of tourism here in Trinidad and Tobago, the region and the world, and we felt that it was necessary to dissolve the Tourism Development Company and establish our new structures in order to treat with tourism advancement in Trinidad and Tobago.

#### **4.15 p.m.**

So for the most part the announcement was made in March of 2017. For the most part of the fiscal year, the Ministry of Tourism would have had to take up the slack or, should I say, do the work that the Tourism Development Company

would have previously done, to the best of our ability with the resources that were available.

I must place on the record that for the Ministry of Tourism, what I found very interesting, is that this was the very first time that the members of staff and the entity itself, the Ministry, had participated in doing some of these projects and executing some of these programmes, because when you look at the structure of the state enterprise and that of the Ministry, the Ministry would have primarily participated in policy development and most of the technical and academic work, whilst the Tourism Development Company or the state enterprise would have been doing all the implementation. From construction projects to standards and quality programmes, you name it—that was the kind of activity taking place at the TDC. So we would have been charged with the responsibility somewhere in the middle, even closer to the end of the fiscal year, to try to carry the load as the Ministry of Finance would have worked on dissolving and wrapping up the TDC.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to touch on some of the physical or the construction projects that we would have embarked on. I want to start with the Maracas Beach Community Tourism Project, also known as the Maracas Fishing Village Project. We would have embarked on refurbishment work, where we would have completed the installation of two automatic vehicle gate barriers—these were installed—guard rails, and weather proof surveillance cameras were installed there.

So for the most part, on the different sites we improved the parking facilities, installed cameras in order to ensure safety and security and just try to bring the different sites up to standard, so they look good and the stakeholders could take their visitors there, and the people who would visit the different sites daily or weekly for whatever reason could be safe and comfortable.

I want to move on to the Las Cuevas Beach Enhancement Project. We would have done some work there on the parking area, putting in guard rails and so on, security cameras and a number of other construction work. We will continue to do construction work and refurbishment work at Las Cuevas in 2018. I have a little bias for Las Cuevas. I prefer Las Cuevas of all the beaches that I would have seen so far in Trinidad, and I think it could become just as great as Maracas, but of course we cannot handle that kind of activity over at Las Cuevas because it is meant to be an eco-friendly, more clean, more quiet kind of beach, so I just wanted to highlight that.

Manzanilla Beach Enhancement Project—we would have improved the parking facility there, installed new LED-type lights, surveillance cameras, do refurbishment works on the facilities there, trying to bring these sites up to par, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Vessigny Beach, the same thing goes. I do not want to spend too much time on that.

The La Brea Pitch Lake—one of the more interesting pieces of work that was done there we would have installed a wheelchair ramp, so especially the differently abled would have been able to access the museum, and we would have fixed the lighting, installed proper lighting there and surveillance cameras, and done refurbishment work to bring it up to standard.

I want to touch a little bit on the Maracas Beach facility works, the bigger Maracas Project. This project is now being handled by NIDCO under the Minister of Works and Transport, and PURE is also offering some assistance. As the national community is well aware by now, the project has been broken up into three parts and construction is well on its way dealing with the drainage, installing a new sewer system. We would have experienced some challenges over the last couple weeks where due to the vibration of the equipment being used there, the roof of the bathroom facility would have fallen in. So a temporary restroom facility was established, and we have also done some work down at the Maracas Fishing Facility project site at the parking lot in order to provide parking in the meantime whilst the major, the bigger beach project is being done. So construction is well on its way, and we are really trying to work diligently to make sure that we get this Maracas project completed, hopefully in time for Carnival next year.

Allow me to move on now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to some of the work we would have done in marketing. I start with one of my favourite projects, which is Go Trinbago. Go Trinbago is an app. Go Trinbago was launched in January of this year. It is the first tourism app for your smart phone, for your iPad, so that visitors and locals can know more about Trinidad and Tobago. You can explore sites, attractions, book tours, book a taxi, book a hotel. Anything that you want to do, anywhere you want to go, even trying to find a place to eat, you can do so on Go Trinbago.

Go Trinbago is one of the top applications in the Google play store and also in the Apple App Store, and we would have experienced close to 80,000 downloads, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in over 76 countries throughout the world. The application can be found in Spanish, in English and in German, and that helps a lot for the

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[HON. S. CUDJOE]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

German market that is more prone to looking at exploring sights and attractions and the offerings of Tobago.

I want to share with you some of the top sites or places that are visited by the people who would have downloaded the application, and that is the food: doubles, dolphin boarding, birding at Yerette, HYATT Regency Hotel, Trinidad All Stars Steel Orchestra and chocolate tasting. So there is a good variety of offerings on the app, and it is something that we are very proud of.

Lime 365—Lime 365 is a rolling calendar where we showcase to the world that there is something to do, some place to go, something to get involved in, in Trinidad and Tobago 365 days a year. It is based on the “liming” culture of Trinidad and Tobago, and we have worked with, and continue to work with, community groups, events planners and everybody that makes the calendar active and exciting. We have provided support to the different artisan markets, concerts, cultural events, festivals, even parties, sporting events and celebrations for religious and public holidays.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have worked with community groups like the Lopinot Country Style Community Tourism Group, the Blanchisseuse North Coast Jazz. We would have contributed to making that event a success also. We worked with the community of Brasso Seco. We would have contributed and assisted in taking the Camboulay celebrations to Europe. I got the chance to see Camboulay for the first time this year in February, and I was very impressed. I said this is something that we as Trinbagonians ought to pay to see, so I was very pleased to see the group that was responsible for the street show take Camboulay out to the rest of the world. The Ministry of Tourism was very happy to support.

We would have also supported the Laventille Steel Band Festival. We supported the CDA with the Curry Festival in Chaguaramas, the Food Truck Festival which had its second episode this year and the National Parang Association. For Tobago we would have supported the Jazz festival, the Buccoo Goat Races, the junior golf tournament, the junior chamber of JCI in Tobago and the conference that they are hosting, the Mason Hall Folk Performance, the Golden Lane fisher folk and their celebrations, the Tobago game fishing competition that is held year to year in Charlotteville. So the list goes on and on.

We continue to work with community groups and even the Regional Corporations. Right now we are reviewing our community tourism policy and we would have embarked on a number of consultations throughout Trinidad and Tobago. A couple of weeks ago, about two weeks ago we went to the South. We

invited the MPs, we invited the regional corporations, and MPs like MP Lee I heard was at the tourism consultation. The MPs who were not able to attend, sent their representatives. So I want to thank both the Opposition and Government MPs for supporting this community tourism initiative. [*Desk thumping*]

During this year I did a number of visits to the small tourism accommodation properties. Last year during my first year as a Minister, I did visits to some of the larger accommodation entities and this year I focused on the small ones. I paid a visit to a number of them, it is about 20 registered entities with “Stay At”, to get a one on one experience of what it is like and the kind of services that they offer, and to continue to strengthen the relationships with our different stakeholders. To that end the Government, of course, would have proposed a number of incentives in order to assist accommodation entities and stakeholders, and that I will treat with a little later on.

As it relates to marketing, again, during this fiscal year, we would have embarked on two regional road shows that I want to share with you. The first one is to St. Lucia and Curacao, and we supported stakeholders mainly from Tobago. We had Ms. Carol Ann Birchwood-James from the Tobago Hotel and Tourism Association; Mr. Hewlett Hazel from Tobago Hospitality and Tour Operators Association; we had Mrs. Mitchell-Andrews from TOBSCA; we had a representative from Caribbean Airlines and one from Suriname Airways also, taking Trinidad and Tobago to the rest of the region.

We did a second road show in November of 2016, and on that one we supported THRTA, that is the Hospitality Restaurant and Tourism Association; T&TITOA, which is our incoming tour operators and Stay At. So we continue to work with our stakeholders in order to provide the necessary assistance to market Trinidad and Tobago. That second road show I believe was a tremendous success, because I had the opportunity to experience visitors from Martinique. A group from Martinique from the French Caribbean came in, and we were able to host them. I want to just really say kudos to Mrs. Lauren Pouchet from T&TITOA for her efforts in—

**Mr. Ramadhar:** From COP?

**Hon. S. Cudjoe:** Yes she is from COP; so yes we support. So we support stakeholders, no matter what background or what political affiliation. [*Desk thumping*] This is all about tourism, and at the end of the day our business is to fly the flag of Trinidad and Tobago and to leave this industry better than we met it.

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[HON. S. CUDJOE]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

So yes, we support people of the COP, of the UNC, people who are not politically affiliated. At the end of the day we are Trinbagonians just trying to do our best and fly the flag of Trinidad and Tobago high.

But we would have gotten involved in and supported a number of other initiatives that are closer to my heart, that I was more excited about. For instance, we partnered with E! Entertainment for a filming of their *Wives and Girlfriends of Sports Stars*. Last year, Ms. Sasha Gates—she has roots from Trinidad and Tobago and she is married to an American football player—came in with the crew from E! along with other cast members, and they came in for Carnival. I am pleased to say that the Ministry of Tourism, through the Tourism Development Company, would have provided the necessary assistance and support in order to make that possible.

The show was broadcast sometime in September in about ninety something thousand American homes, actually 94 million households and 1.1 million—94,000 sorry. I want to get it right. The audience reach is approximately 94,296,000 households and the past season peaked at 1.12 million total viewers. I am pleased to announce that this year we are getting ready to work once again with WAGS, the *Wives and Girlfriends of Sport Stars* and, more specifically, with Sasha Gates because they want to do another part of the show here in Trinidad and Tobago, and this time she is getting ready to bring more of her friends and people from the cast and the entire crew to do more work here in Trinidad and Tobago. She has partnered with *Fantasy Carnival* and has gotten her own section in *Fantasy*. So we expect bigger and better things for Carnival 2018.

About a couple of weeks ago, about two weeks ago we partnered with Mr. Costas, who is a sports writer from the United States of America, in covering the Tobago Cycling Classic, and that was to promote Tobago on ESPN and on NBC Universal, to give more exposure to Tobago as a sports tourism destination. We have also partnered with the Ministry of Sport for CPL cricket and a number of the other sports events that—the Ministry of Tourism trying to promote sports tourism for Trinidad and Tobago.

Governments past and present would have contributed much resources to developing our assets as it relates to facilities for sports tourism, and we are pleased to be able to utilize these facilities and do the necessary refurbishment and development to make it better. Development is a process, and we go from one stage to another making Trinidad and Tobago better, as a good place to “lime”, a good place to relax, a good place to party, a good place to play sports.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to move now to the support we would have provided to the national culinary team. I think we sleep on our culinary ability, because Trinidad and Tobago would have won the Taste of the Caribbean competition six times. So we in the Ministry of Tourism partnered with the THRTA and we would have supported the national culinary team to go out to the United States of America in June to defend their title as champions. [*Desk thumping*] We won in some categories, and we did not win in some categories, but I want to really congratulate Mr. Adrian Cumberbatch who would have headed the national culinary team for the wonderful work that he is doing in flying the flag of Trinidad and Tobago high.

We would have also contributed and partnered with the Siparia Diatonic Pan Institute on their trip to take pan to Asia, and we understand that that was a success.

Conferences—we hosted the Society of American Travel Writers, that is through the TDC, and about two to three weeks ago—not last week, it was September 29 and 30—we partnered with the Medical Associates and the Ministry of Health. They brought in a delegation of specialists and doctors, surgeons and so on, to do a medical tourism exercise in Trinidad and Tobago, working on NCDs, the non-communicable diseases and lifestyle diseases that my colleague, the Minister of Health would have talked about earlier. We are now working with COSTAATT who is bringing in 500 delegates for a conference in a couple of weeks.

We established within the Ministry, a Stakeholders Relations Unit as a go-to desk for stakeholders to have their issues dealt with. Well that is so in the meantime until the new entity is fully up and running, hopefully by the end of November, and the unit will be established there under the new entity. But they assisted greatly in the “Stay at” visits and our Stay to Get Away programme, our community tourism initiatives with Lopinot, Brasso Seco and Matura and so on.

What is very important, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we proceed from a place of being comfortable, being an economy dependent on oil and gas, now this economic situation has forced us to pay more close attention to the non-energy sector and, more specifically, tourism. I see it as a blessing in disguise that we are going through this transition at this time, and I really think that the real energy of Trinidad and Tobago is the warmth and hospitality of the people. So this gives us the opportunity to really invest in that and use what God would have blessed us with.

But in order to succeed in our efforts, we have to get to a place of changing the culture, changing the mindset, changing the perspective. I believe that that starts with each and every one of us, and we must make a special effort in order to teach our young people to have a different mindset towards careers in tourism and being good assets or ambassadors to Trinidad and Tobago's tourism.

To that end, the Ministry of Tourism would have held its first Tourism Youth Symposium on July 4 of this year. I am pleased to let you know that over 23 schools came out to support our youth symposium, and we would have worked with over 300 young people who would have shown up to participate in this conference. They were exposed to learning about tourism, careers in tourism, and that is something we at the Ministry of Tourism intend to make a yearly event.

We continue to do the roving school caravan, where we go from school to school promoting tourism, the essay writing competition, the art competition that showcases tourism that is supported by the Caribbean Tourism Organization and the Cruise Association. The interesting thing is the establishment of the Tourism School Club. We had our first Tourism School Club established at Manzanilla Secondary School under the leadership of the former Junior Minister of Tourism, Mr. La Quan Pearie. This year our new Junior Minister of Tourism came from Naparima Girls' High School, Ms. Lee Ann Telesford.

She won the debating competition that was hosted by the Ministry of Tourism. We had 15 young people participating, and now she has moved on to the Caribbean competition out at CTO where she is going to compete with the other Council of Ministers. But Ms. Lee Ann Telesford, a young lady of whom I am very, very proud. I think she is a Form IV student at Naparima Girls' High School. I had the opportunity to visit the school last week and really encourage the young people and show our support for Ms. Telesford as she goes out to Grenada this week to compete. She will be responsible for establishing a Tourism Youth Club in her high school, and to conduct a tourism project, bringing young people closer and closer and more involved in our tourism advancement and development.

I want to talk a little bit about Stay to Get Away. Stay to Get Away is a domestic tourism campaign, where we encourage locals to know more about Trinidad and Tobago, to support our local events and offerings or hotels, to put heads in beds and so provide business during the calmer or less active season in the tourism calendar. This year I am proud to say that Stay to Get Away has been a tremendous success. We would have worked with stakeholders both in Trinidad and Tobago in providing all kinds of different innovative tours. I am pleased that the stakeholders, especially in the rural communities would have voiced their



opinions and shared their commendation on how excited they were about the programme.

I want to share the story of Nature Seekers at Matura. Nature Seekers would have increased their activities by 100 per cent, and they were able to provide more jobs for the people of their community. They were able to employ young women from the community to turn garbage into jewellery. This is an interesting project, because this project got the assistance of former Minister of Tourism, Mr. Joe Ross, and he would have made that investment in the people of Matura somewhere in 2008. And now a project that started as a couple of young people going down to the beach volunteering their time to help leather back turtles or help in the conservation of leather back turtles, has turned into a restaurant, a kayaking business, a recycling business where they turn garbage into jewellery, and a host of other activities generating economic activity and much revenue and employment for the people of the Matura and Salybia communities. I was very pleased for them to participate in Stay to Get Away this year.

Another group that would have provided their feedback to the Ministry of Tourism is the National Trust. They would have gone from 63 tours in the month of July, to 261 tours in the month of August, and they were able to increase their membership by 129. *[Interruption]*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member, your initial 45 minutes have expired. You have additional 10, do you care to avail yourself?

**Hon. S. Cudjoe:** Oh wow!

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** That is yes?

**Hon. S. Cudjoe:** Yes, the time goes by fast. I want to speak about the project at Gasparee Caves. Part of our Stay to Get Away programme included the CDA and the Gasparee Caves' tours. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is one of our more popular tours, but some of the people who participated or some of the patrons would have complained about the state, the deplorable condition that the Gasparee Caves are in. The Ministry of Tourism has now partnered with the CDA, the Chaguaramas Development Authority to do a refurbishment project to bring back Gasparee Caves up to standard. We are very pleased to announce that these development works would be completed by the end of the month of October.

I want to touch a little bit on cruises because we are approaching cruise season. We will open cruise season next week Sunday, October 15, with the Caribbean Princess. The Caribbean Princess will bring 3,400 passengers and a

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[HON. S. CUDJOE]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

1,200 crew. We expect 24 calls this cruise season, and we expect about 60,000 cruise passengers which would give us an 80 per cent increase over last year. I want to place on the record also that in light of the recent hurricanes that would have taken place in the northern Caribbean, we were able to work with the port agents here, or the port agents had been able to assist us in bringing to Trinidad and Tobago 24 additional cruise calls that would provide much business for our tour guides and the different stakeholders in Tobago. Tobago alone got 23 out of the 24 calls.

I want to place that on the record because Tobago is better positioned to access these larger cruise ships, because of an investment made by the People's National Movement Government in 2004 to prepare the port and the harbour in Tobago to facilitate larger ships, and that is something that we on this side are pleased about. So we are ready for cruise ship season. We have opened our office on the port, and we are fired up and ready to go. We have our launching on Sunday. I want to touch a little bit on investment.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, could you give me an idea of my time please, because I find that 45 minutes went fast. Are you sure it is not 35?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Actually with the assistance of the procedural clerk, I would have erred and your completion time is 5.01. I would have erred initially in the 45 minutes, so you have until 5.01. [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. S. Cudjoe:** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As I said this is my eighth contribution, so I got a little vibes that something was off. [*Laughter*]

Allow me to touch on investments, because you would hear stakeholders—I do not want to say complaining, but voicing their concerns. There are so many people out there who believe that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, whether past or present, does not provide any support whatsoever to stakeholders. I want to place on the record that we in the Ministry of Tourism, and governments of Trinidad and Tobago past and present, there are a number of incentives for our stakeholders, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

#### **4.45 p.m.**

For instance, we have tax benefits, those are tax exemptions for a period of seven years, tax exemptions on building material. We have exemption on customs and excise duties for building materials and for the different items that you would need to furnish the business place for tourism and tourism-related entities. We have tax incentives on tourism transport service vehicles, a reduction in the

payment of customs duties from 20 per cent to 10 per cent; an exemption in the payment of motor vehicle taxes for tourism taxi drivers. And I found that very interesting because I learnt about some of these incentives when I became Minister of Tourism.

As a matter of fact, we have a problem here in Trinidad and Tobago where there are some people that were accessing the incentive programme who were not certified tourism taxi drivers. They had managed to get letters from taxi corporations saying that they are members of the corporation, when really and truly some of them had not been. So we are looking at cracking down that practice so that these incentives go directly to the people who need them.

But I am making this point to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that there are a host of incentives for the people who are doing the water scooter, the jet ski, the jet ski business, the people who are bringing in these different appliances and so on for the tourism trade, there are customs duties, tax exemptions in order to help them with their businesses.

I want to move to the Tourism Development Act and items like the Trinidad and Tobago Tourism Accommodation Upgrade Project. Now, this project was established in 2009 under the astute leadership of the People's National Movement. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this provides an incentive for people involved in the accommodation sector for registered businesses to get 25 per cent reimbursement when they upgrade their rooms and their facility, whatever money they spent to upgrade their rooms and their facilities. And for the small accommodation entities those with five rooms and under they get 20 per cent off.

Now this Government, now this kind and caring People's National Movement Government and this kind and caring Minister of Finance has gone the extra mile in this budgetary package, even against the economic challenges, to now improve this incentive, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and we are now providing 50 per cent reimbursement; [*Desk thumping*] 50 per cent reimbursement for rooms six to 150 rooms, and it is not just bedrooms, not just hotel rooms, your kitchen, your gym and for the bed and breakfast. And there were some people who were opposed to providing the incentives to the bed and breakfast because those with five rooms and under they do not pay taxes.

But this Minister of Finance and this Government have gone the extra mile to even provide 40 per cent reimbursement to these stakeholders from this year onwards, [*Desk thumping*] because this is all in an effort to improve our tourism

offerings, to improve our product, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We compete against the more experienced, the more focused Barbados, Bahamas. And when you look at the quality of their offerings even the number of rooms, you have Barbados with over 12,000 rooms. You have Dominican Republic with 50,000 rooms, and here we are grappling with 7,700 plus rooms, some for the most part that are not the proper quality in order to attract the tourism spend.

Over the last year, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the accommodation sector within the Caribbean region would have contracted and we are now grappling with competition from the shared economy, from the Airbnb, from HomeAway and even the villas that are not registered.

For instance, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you would hear Tobagonians complaining occupancy is low and so on, but we have to ask questions as it relates to the quality of these rooms and why is it easier to choose to stay at a villa than to stay at a hotel.

There is another challenge—I think we are experiencing the same problem as Barbados that would have been stated in a study earlier, done by the Barbados Tourism Association that over 40 per cent of their visitors are not staying at entities registered with their association. So, we have to improve our data collection capacity in order to capture all this information, form relationships with the different stakeholders, the Airbnb, the HomeAway even the Uber that are now becoming big players in the tourism industry.

I want to touch a little bit on the Government's loan guarantee programme because the Government loan guarantee programme has been in operation since about the year 2014 and I hear people getting in the media and crying out, "oh meh business closing down and we doh have any help". Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is the Government loan guarantee that has been operating since the year 2014. It took some years before it got off the ground, but Mr. Deputy Speaker, you have 18 successful applicants that are utilizing this loan guarantee programme.

And here the Government provides a security, pretty much, or signs as a guarantor to provide support to these entities to prevent them from closing down or even in the setting up of new accommodation and tourism-related businesses to the amount of \$10 million per applicant. So, we are working with the banks in Tobago, and this is specifically for Tobago stakeholders.

So over the years you have people who would have participated in the government loan guarantee programme, some participated and got through once, twice and some in right now for a third round. And then you have people who refuse to use the government loan guarantee programme. There are people who thought that you do not have to pay back the money.

And then there are people who are not keeping books properly and this is the kind of service that associations need to be providing to their stakeholders. The association has to do more than just crying out. Yes, it is your duty to cry out, to speak out for your constituents if you may, but you have to provide, just like in the other countries, some kind of assistance, some kind of help, some hand holding.

I will tell you another story, Mr. Deputy Speaker, under the previous Government there was a relationship between the Trinidad and Tobago Tourism Business Development Company Limited where they had an office in the Tobago Chamber of Commerce. And there was some kind of discrepancy where the TTTBDCL was kicked out, so now the Tobago representative who is now there who had been placed there to help the Tobago applicants to prepare their books is now operating out of her home. But this Government, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is working on putting this officer in an office and providing the necessary services.

In addition, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Tobago House of Assembly would have provided a fund to assist the association in Tobago in helping their members improve their capacity to do their books so that they could access this programme and that provision was not properly utilized. So we are calling on the association members to step up, step up to the plate and provide the necessary service and the necessary information to their members. This is a partnership, the Government has its work to do and you have your work to do also.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is not just about improving the quantity of rooms, but we are also trying to improve the variety, and last, but certainly not least the quality, because the whole environment, the tourism environment has changed tremendously. Marketing strategies that would have worked for you five, 10 years ago are not working anymore. Before, the average family would get up and have a vacation in the July/August period and they would travel as a family. Now you have single women, people who are just fed up with work and decide to go for a weekend, people taking the long weekend holidays and they are doing that from their iPads, from their phones. The landscape has changed tremendously.

No longer are we expected to pick up ourselves and go out to a trade show to get business, you could do that. Grenada does much of its marketing over the Internet. So the landscape has changed on us. This is a dynamic industry, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and we have the duty to step up to the plate and change and improve our structure to suit the time that we are living in, if we are to remain competitive, if we are to remain attractive and relevant in the tourism industry.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to that end we are establishing or we are well on our way with the Tobago Tourism Agency. They have appointed their board of directors and the advertisement for the CEO is already out. And in Trinidad we have appointed the Tourism Trinidad Limited Company which also known as the Tourism Trinidad Destination Management Company, we have appointed our board headed by no other than Mrs. Janelle Penny Commissiong-Chow, a woman of substance, a leader and somebody who is going to help us to transform this sector. And we have some young vibrant young people who are trailblazers in the business environment and so on assisting. Mr. Deputy Speaker, and they are going to help revolutionize this tourism industry and to provide aggressive marketing.

And I hear stakeholders complaining that since last year October we have not had overseas marketing representatives out there in the market. Yes, that is so because we felt the need to start a new process, and that new process would have started in February. The process would have collapsed very close to the time when the decision was made to dissolve the TDC and to start afresh with a new entity.

So we are going to engage the stakeholders and we are going to go out to select overseas marketing representatives once again. Tobago is going to be responsible for their representatives, Trinidad for theirs and we are going to coordinate it with a tourism task force from the Minister of Tourism. So, we are working diligently to restructure, to retool our strategy and re-engineer our structure because there is much work to be done, and in order to get different results you have to do things differently.

As it relates to improving service quality, we are extending the service quality programme and we are ramping up, we are reintroducing the hospitality, a short programme, because I have travelled from hotel to hotel and entity to entity and some of these hoteliers do not have training programmes for their staff in customer service or even programmes to promote their staff from one stage to the next. So, we are changing the way that we do business and we are working to make things better for Trinidad and Tobago because we would have had a

decrease in last year's arrival figures and we would have had a decrease the year before also. So, all these signal the need to change the way we do business, to change the way we see our sector and to promote Trinidad and Tobago better, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Let us look at even Carnival. We are now competing with Barbados and Jamaica that are neck to neck with us as it relates to the quality of their Carnival experience, so we have to work on developing our products and improving our standard. And to that end in improving our standards in our hotel rooms and so on and throughout the whole sector we are working on establishing the regulatory authority, and we have an entity the Arthur Lok Jack Institute that is out right now speaking to the different stakeholders and getting their views.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, can tell me how much time do I have left?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** You have three minutes.

**Hon. S. Cudjoe:** Three minutes of my original time?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Your total time.

**Hon. S. Cudjoe:** Well then in those three minutes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, allow me to turn then to Tobago.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have a duty to improve the quality in Tobago and that is why I am excited about the whole Sandals project. I was talking to a stakeholder a couple weeks ago at a charity event and he was telling me, "Well, we cannot wait for Sandals to get here because it would help us to improve our standard". We do not need to wait for Sandals to get here to improve our standard if we are serious about tourism. But I am excited about what Sandals can do for Tobago in improving our economy, in providing jobs.

I heard an off example, an example made by the Member for Barataria/San Juan that when Sandals comes everything just stays inside and you do not get to experience the destination. But when I read, and I have experienced Sandals for myself twice, you get the opportunity to go out and see what is going on. And as a matter of fact, the products and the services sold at the entity are provided by the people of the country, the training programmes. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you have a country like Barbados now going in for its second Sandals, why Sandals "aint" good for Tobago too? [*Desk thumping*] If you have—Sandals has been in operation in St. Lucia since 1993 and it is going out for its fourth, St. Lucia is going for its fourth Sandals, so Tobago not good enough for Sandals? We need this kind of business in order to up the ante and to raise our level of

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[HON. S. CUDJOE]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

competition in Tobago. We like to compare ourselves to Barbados and The Bahamas and so on and they have Sandals, they have big name brands and Tobago deserves that too. [*Desk thumping*]

On that note the Government continues to make the investment in the desalination plant to provide water for Tobago for the electricity plant at Cove to provide more electricity for Tobago, the south-west wastewater project to deal with wastewater down in the south-west part of Tobago.

The Dwight Yorke Stadium when \$5 million was allocated to improve our sporting facilities. [*Desk thumping*] And the work that we are doing in Tobago West: the bridge at Lambeau, the Old Grange Police Station, Scarborough RC School is finally being built, Mr. Deputy Speaker, [*Desk thumping*] the relocation and the upgrade of the Scarborough Market, Canaan Bon Accord Health Centre now open from 8.00 a.m. to 8.00 p.m.; the community centre in Bethel, and I want to thank the—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** You will probably have to list it, hon. Member.

**Hon. S. Cudjoe:**—and Heliconia everybody that would have helped in my constituency. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** I recognize the Member for St. Augustine.

**Mr. Prakash Ramadhar** (*St. Augustine*): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would just allow me a moment to ensure that I am not on roaming whilst I am [*Crosstalk*] Come now, oh shocks.

Let me just say, to hear “meh friend”, the Member for Tobago West speak of all these wonderful ideas it lifts my heart, but it does not move me to actually visit Tobago yet because I am not sure if I can get on a flight or on a ferry to Tobago, and if I do get there I can return.

I was at pains when earlier this year I saw what happened to our friends, our family in Tobago, when without a thought of the consequence of an action a most vital link was broken without a plan to replace it before and if not before, immediately. So to say all these grand plans for Tobago, unless we can be assured that there is a reliable transportation system to and from Tobago we literally will be spinning top in mud.

In relation to Sandals, I want to say, nobody in principle will deny that an international chain coming to island will improve the image of the island, but what we have had here in Trinidad and Tobago is an uncertainty. Our capacity as



to what exactly is going on with the Sandals deal because I hear different versions from time to time [*Desk thumping*] and that is where the problem is.

At one time we were learning that lands might be sold to Sandals. At another time you are hearing that the land will be given to Sandals, and then the latest iteration is that our money will be used to build Sandals. So, I really do not know which of their plans that the population of Trinidad and Tobago will be asked finally to be able to absorb, because at the end of the day it matters not how much you have, what quality of location that you produce, if it does not make money for our people, that is at the end the most important thing.

And when I look at the history of tourism in Tobago it is unfortunate that so much money has been spent on the past, Heritage, which is wonderful to develop locally. You have the Jazz Festival and a number of other efforts that have generated almost no income for Tobago. What it has done however, is to ensure that we do maintain a lot of the heritage which is so important for a culture in Tobago and in Trinidad. But we must move to the other step.

I want to give you a little story which is a factual thing. I was then Minister and we had gone to do one of our Cabinets, out of respect to the people of Tobago, in Tobago, and that morning I remember coming down to the restaurant, I did not wish to have breakfast, but I said I would like to have a coffee to go. The waitress told me I cannot. "Yuh have to sit down." I said, I do not have the time, I am leaving for another meeting. She said, "Well you have to sit down".

Now being Minister or whatever it does not really matter, but it is, you know, it was an affront to me as a person to ask for a coffee to go and to be told in a restaurant in the hotel that we were staying in, that I had to sit down before I can get the coffee. And that is one example.

I remember even before then having gone to a Church's Chicken and having lined up for about 20 minutes to get to the cashier to order a small meal, I was "bouffed". "Dat is all yuh ordering?"—after 20 minutes. Now, I am serious about this. So notwithstanding all of these things, I still love Tobago dearly and I want to see its success for all of us, [*Desk thumping*] but unless we deal with the issue of customer service, as referenced by the very admirable contribution from the Member for Laventille East/Morvant, I think Trinidad and Tobago will not have a future in any of the service industries unless we get into our minds that we are not there to bully people, we are not there to insult them, we are not there to ridicule them, we are there to nurture them and to bring their money and their business here.

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[MR. RAMADHAR]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

How do we do these things? Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you have heard Members from our side, the Leader of the Opposition with her surgical brilliance in her contribution; you have heard the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre with his solid grounding in his contribution, you have heard the flamboyant Member from Princes Town in the best of ways, the Member for Fyzabad in his very dulcetic, calm, cool and very supportive way of the country, we have heard the professorial disposition from the Member for Caroni Central, we have heard the voracious Caroni East, the passionate Member for Oropouche West.

**Hon. Member:** “Mamaguy.”

**Mr. P. Ramadhar:** Not “mamaguy”. I want to tell you, you may not always agree with what some of our Members say. But what I have observed with the PNM is this, that if they “doh” agree with “yuh”, you are not patriotic. [*Desk thumping*] And we must get rid of that fallacy. Because I think there is a misconception as to what patriotism is. Patriotism—[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Members, silence.

**Mr. P. Ramadhar:** “Meh friend”, there he goes. I like him, I admire him, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, but every time he comes to this Chamber he threatening to lock up somebody. [*Crosstalk*] The passion with which he had come into the Chamber has now transformed itself into a level of hate, anger and animosity, and I want to warn that a person with such capacity must and will do better in the future, I imagine, but we will not leave it at that because it is a dangerous thing when we have a PKG, sorry, a KPP and I will explain what that is later. Yeah. Yeah. We will come to that in a while. A mentality where anything other than PNM is less and not worthy of government, and even now not even worthy of Opposition, and you will hear them mutter about what is true, what is true. The self-righteous, pious approach to things when an election campaign in 2015 promised this nation that one of the first things they would do is whistle-blower legislation.

One of the first things I actually attended in great hope and anxiety because work been done before, the present Attorney General when they were in Opposition helped us with it, the campaign and party finance reform met somewhere at the Hyatt, procurement legislation which we, the People’s Partnership, took great pains to bring against every hope and expectation of those who wish of steal from our country, we the People’s Partnership brought procurement legislation to this country. [*Desk thumping*]

What have you done in the two years to ensure that this landmark bit of legislation is implemented? When we demitted office the implementation of that was in the hands of a committee headed by the very noble and well-respected Timothy Hamel-Smith, former President of the Senate. I do not know what happened, did they disband this thing? Why would it take two years for a next step that will dramatically change the way we do business in this country, why has that not been the highest priority, the first thing? I ask.

When we are regaled on a daily basis of the very things you campaigned about, about corruption, everything was corrupt under the People's Partnership, according to you. But what do we see? Not one iota of evidence of it. But when we have that fairy tale going to Tobago as clear as it is, as clear as it could possibly be, there was wickedness in the entire machination as to remove one and replace it with something that enrich, not the people Trinidad or Tobago, but of a very few. And I look forward for the day when those who are responsible for criminality and for stealing and for corruption, those who are truly responsible, face the courts and not just the propaganda put on all who oppose the PNM. How could it be possible, citizens, members of St. Augustine constituency are asking me.

Now, we could have been at this in point in time when we have had, and I want to commend the Member for St. Joseph in his efforts in health and in particularly breaking some of the mafia [*Desk thumping*] that we have spoken about on this side and I had worked with him bringing to his attention some of the—when it passes a certain point it is no longer profit, you know, it is blood, greed that certain persons—and there was a dedication, I spoke to the Minister of Health long before. When we were in Government he had started to look at these things. A tablet that could cost \$2 was being sold in this country for \$400. So there is no shock and no surprise, but these are the things, these are the well-entrenched powers that be in the society, and institutions have been built around them to protect it, and that we with the procurement legislation would have had a hammer and chisel at the old way of doing things.

That is why I ask of you, Attorney General, Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, my friend, work on this, please, so that we could move forward. When citizens ask in this time of hardship of fig, I understand, and "guava season" and whatever, that we are willing to put \$400 million of our dollars to build how many kilometres of road—five? When did it begin to cost the citizens, myself a taxpayer, \$80 million per kilometre? Let us pause for a moment. A kilometre is 1,000 metres, 3,200 feet. Eighty million dollars, I could only

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[MR. RAMADHAR]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

imagine if you put dollar bills along will pave the entire kilometre and more. Let us put things in context. And then when it is questioned the response is, “oh well, everything was done according to proper process and procedure”. Wow! [*Crosstalk*] Forget—we will deal with the funding. One thing I know my taxpaying dollar paying for “dat”.

No, Mr. Deputy Speaker, something is horribly wrong to ask our citizens to pay this sort of thing, \$400 million for a five-kilometre piece of road into nowhere. When we attempted to put a road down to Point Fortin we were met with objection, some of it legitimate, but a lot of it pure political gameplay, that will connect the people of Point Fortin and all of the south land, because no one understands the pain they have to face, two hours in traffic from Point Fortin—the Member for Point Fortin is not here, but I have traversed it— traffic to get to San Fernando and then another hour and a half sometimes to get to Port of Spain. Recently, of course, you hear this over and over, people dying en route for medical attention in San Fernando. But the People’s Partnership put a hospital in Point Fortin.

And we spent money, of course, we spent money. There was money to be spent, but it was spent to the benefit of our people. In every community, [*Desk thumping*] we ensured that their public space was made available, grounds that had never seen anything other than bush and vermin and snakes. So people finally coming to it as we paved the grounds, created walking tracks, health facilities, gyms, lit the grounds.

**5.15 p.m.**

That is what good governance is about. I am not saying it was perfect. There would be miscreants in every government project unless you are very, very alert, and you will learn the lesson, if you have not yet, that Ministers would be accused of things you have no knowledge of, by those whose responsibility it is to protect you and to protect all of us. And the Prime Minister made the point that this country has been failed by its professionals. That is not a new statement. That is a historic truth, that all laws—shall I say consultants, and engineers, and quantity surveyors who are there to ensure that every dollar spent on a project you get good value for. Something has gone totally wrong. We are literally off the metre in terms of the costing of these projects, and we need to fix that.

But it is not easy, Minister of Housing, you are in a very dangerous Ministry, you know. Because every dollar you spend, there are those who are accustomed to

the old feeding way, dating back two generations onwards. And I repeat that institutions have been built around the protecting of those persons, and it is now as we move forward with procurement, which is a chisel and a hammer, so that old paradigm, this paradigm shift you are talking about, procurement legislation must be the flag bearer to this thing.

So, we could jump high, jump low, budget, who spend what, who “tief” what, that will go on under the Partnership, allegations would be made. It would be made against you. But unless we put things in place to ensure that we do not come chasing after the crooks, but prevent them from being crooks in the first place, then we would not be serving our people well.

The other issue: Campaign and party finance reform. If we do not have this, this is the other end of the game, because in a small society like this when we have no control of who finances the political party and what happens after you win an election, then you will have a situation like the fake oil scenario, where a close friend of our Prime Minister, there is an allegation of \$100 million in fraud. I do not know what the truth is. We wait with bated breath for a final investigation into this, but those are the allegations. But he is close to the Prime Minister who has not denied that this person may have supported his party. But in an election in this country that sometimes—I understand the PNM spent \$400 million in 2015. Where did that come from, and then who is going to pay for it? [*Desk thumping*]

So, it is no shock and no surprise that these are the things that we will live in the year 2017. We have lived in from 2010, 2015, and long before then, from the 1980s. Boom after bust after boom. It took courage to take it on manfully. Procurement legislation, we started the work, campaign and party finance reform. And the reason it is important, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is this: You cannot tell a person who supports you that they are not entitled to participate in the business of the nation. What is important, however, is that we must know who you are, what you gave, and that if ever you should put yourself forward to find favour with a proper and transparent means of allocating contracts, then you would have been justifiably entitled to it, and not from political favouritism. Otherwise, whatever good you do or whatever bad you do in a world now opened up to the cynicism and to the suspicions of all, that every single move you make, good or bad, would be deemed to be bad, highly suspected and you lose the trust and confidence of a people.

And this is where Trinidad and Tobago now finds itself, where those who wish and they campaigned feverishly to win a government, but then after having

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[MR. RAMADHAR]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

won the government they lose the people. And that is a danger to our democracy, because if the people do not trust those who are in power, and because this has become almost a two-party sort of political game, you choose one side, expecting that if your side get a chance, it is okay. But it is wrong for the other side to get a chance because you think both of them “tief”, it is a question of who “tief” more or who “tief” less. That cannot be the definition of politics or political office in this country. And as much criticism as you have pointed towards the People’s Partnership, I want to tell you sitting in the Cabinet, that every decision that was taken there on the face of it to our knowledge was always with the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago as beneficiaries. [*Desk thumping*]

I am not saying that everything was perfect. I repeat this. We have had some awful experiences, but the Prime Minister of the day, Kamla Persad-Bissessar always warned her Cabinet members, anyone caught in corruption she will deal with them, and she has proven that over and over and over; where there are allegations serious enough for her to have taken action, of course, she would have taken action. And I want to tell you something, “All yuh talking ’bout the COP, the COP, the COP.” When I stood almost singularly in relation to Jack Warner and said he should not be in the Cabinet I was condemned left, right and centre. I was proven to be right, but they attacked me relentlessly on that point.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** “Who they? Who is they, boy?”

**Mr. P. Ramadhar:** A lot of you, your friends too.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Our Prime Minister said—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Silence!

**Mr. P. Ramadhar:** And I want to also maintain that we in the People’s Partnership, and I congratulate the Prime Minister of the day to have maintained that whenever there was sufficiency in an allegation of seriousness, then you should remove yourself while an investigation is in progress. To do otherwise will be too really muddy the waters, at the end of which nobody would trust what investigation would have come. And that standard has been set. As much as you do not want to, the population is going to force you ultimately, and if you do not listen you would feel it come next election. It is as simple as that. So we move forward, campaign and party finance reform is a must-do together with procurement legislation. The sooner we do it, the better for all of us who are honest and decent, and who care about this country.

Now, talking about patriotism. Remember I started talking about blaming the Opposition, when we were in Government they said we were not patriotic. We in Opposition now, they say we are not patriotic. What in the world you are talking about? What is the example you use to delineate who is patriotic and who is not? The fact that what, we did not go—I did not go—to some invitation to Independence Day, was it? “Wow”, I went once as a Minister, and not because I do not care about it. But really, I believe patriotism is much more than showing up. Patriotism is about doing work, improving the lives of your community and of your country. Not to wave flags alone—and that too could be important—not just to be part of a cocktail circuit. No. All these are parts of it. But true patriotism is about sacrifice.

And that when we came in in 2010 in the floods an example was set, that the Ministers, not yet properly sworn in, and the Prime Minister of the day was down with the people, and we have followed that throughout. Every time there was an event where there was human suffering and pain, the Prime Minister and/or her Ministers would be there with the people, empathizing with them, helping as much as you could. I am not saying you do not have patriotism, you know. But I am saying that you put too much on the show and not the action. Do not tell me about patriotism Attorney General, my friend for 20- odd years. When you bring legislation to this Parliament that clearly requires a constitutional majority, and worded in such a way that you say it does not require it. Where are you protecting our constitutional protections for the rights of our citizens? That is undermining the Constitution. That cannot, with all due respect, and I know you do not intend it.

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** Go to court.

**Mr. P. Ramadhar:** Well, go to court. Who will finance it?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member, please address the Chair.

**Mr. P. Ramadhar:** Of course. I am sorry. As advocates together, you know, it is easy for me to engage him. Take it to court. Take it to court. Take it to court. That is irresponsible, because full well there are persons who will be aggrieved in a society but do not have the wherewithal, because you have to go up against the State. I could tell you something, I have a judgment against me, it is not nice. And I know the Minister of Finance has a far bigger one, but it is not nice to go to court as a defendant, or as a litigant, or as a plaintiff when one does not know in an environment where the respect for the Judiciary has almost all gone, you do not know what outcome you will have.

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[MR. RAMADHAR]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

And if you do not have the reserves, the wherewithal, and the ability to go to the Privy Council, then, you know, the crapaud could literally smoke your pipe. Talk to Tim Gopeesingh about that.

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** I spent a million up.

**Mr. P. Ramadhar:** A million dollars spent on a fraudulent charge. Not charge for fraud, you know. A charge not even known to law. And I would not go into that painful episode again. One million dollars, and that was when the US was \$4.80 to \$1. Was it not?

**Hon. Member:** Yeah.

**Mr. P. Ramadhar:** Yeah. Real, real money, so do not tell me about taking it to court. You brought FATCA. The law in its principle was great, but in its expedition before this Parliament it was atrocious and we took a decision under the leadership of the Leader of the Opposition that we could not support it. It was wrong, it was bad, and it will cause us great pain and suffering. [*Desk thumping*]

What did we do? We had no choice. It was cast as a constitutionally majority and you had no choice but to put it in a joint select, out of which came a workable, reasonable, rational law that we all supported. Marriage Act. These are traps, and I do not know if it is the intentional of all of us. The Opposition's view was, nobody wants a child marriage. No! But, that it is a constitutional issue, because it affects the constitutional rights, your right to religious freedom and expression, and therefore you must bring it as a constitutional majority law, but practically we were told it does not need it. How could I or anyone of my brothers and sisters on this side support legislation unless you actually—they put you in a position, “oh gosh”, if you do not support it, you are a paedophile”. Imagine that in this Parliament? You know what they have done then? [*Crosstalk*] Could we—my friend.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Members, again. I know it is late in the evening, right, but let us hear the Member for St. Augustine. And again, let us listen in silence.

**Mr. P. Ramadhar:** Thank you so much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. These are truths that will create a discomfort in the seats of those who truly understand what has happened here. They put you in an impossible kind of position, because they do not want to encourage this thing about undermining our Constitution, so you say, I cannot support this law in its present form, make it a constitutional majority, and yes, you have the support. You know how that went. Choosing of the Commissioner of Police, once again, the constitutional majority required.



**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member, again, I have given you a certain amount of leeway. Right? Remember we are on the budget debate, and, you know what I mean, let—tie in whatever you are saying with regard to the budget debate what would have been presented on October the 2<sup>nd</sup>.

**Mr. P. Ramadhar:** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is so obvious that if you do not have the confidence of the people, you could pass what budget you want, and they will never be happy with it. [*Desk thumping*] It will never protect the people. Because budget is not just about money, you know. Budget is about institutions, about protecting the history and certainly the future of our country.

And therefore, it is painful to hear it, but we must. With the other bits of legislation, but I will move on. There are so many examples of lack of patriotism. When I saw in the newspaper recently, a high-level meeting with Ministers and the head of the security forces and so, that an instruction was given by a Minister to charge someone, and the head of Special Branch refused and he was transferred [*Desk thumping*] I asked a question about—up to today there has been no response to that. When Ministers start believing that they have power, because “they in charge now” and they can do with—

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 48(6).

**Dr. Gopeesingh:** “What all yuh talking about?”

**Hon. Member:** Name it.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** We have been—[*Inaudible*]—talking about a Minister of religion.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Again, Member, move on, please!

**Mr. P. Ramadhar:** I would move on because there is so much more. There is just so much more. What is a lack of patriotism? A lack of patriotism is when you do not do the things necessary to protect the institutions.

And hearing this highly regaled thing called, the what? Revenue Authority. Sounds good on paper, but then you hear this part. Articulated from the mouth of the Minister of Finance that this new entity called the Revenue Authority which will have enormous powers for good, but enormous powers for wickedness, because it can go after persons, hound them if they wish, if it is politically controlled. That this new entity will have its own authority to develop its human resource requirement. What does that mean? It means it bypasses all of our constitutional protections now that we have for the hiring and placement of office

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[MR. RAMADHAR]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

holders. This is an entity that will be a power onto itself. Clearly, I expect to be appointed politically from its head, and then that head will have its authority to choose and develop its own human resource requirement.

Not unlike the SSA, where a Minister gets to choose a person who can listen to your telephone conversation and mine. [*Desk thumping*] These are not acts of patriotism. These are just opposite, but clothe in an environment and with words with which my friends have an enormous ability to put forward. Words, in the most articulate manner. Sounds good, sounds great. But I want to assure one thing, that if insults, if throwing shade was real hard currency, this country will have no problem economically. Because that is what we have been reduced to—insult, throwing shade, sterile and academic conversation, “shut up”. It cannot be that we will go in this way.

Because, when you do these things it makes anyone who wishes to participate in a common effort that, some of the Members on the other side spoke to, but all of the Members on this side know, a common purpose. Nobody wants to be in a common purpose where you are getting “bouffe” left, right and centre. The first—what shall I say, instrument of war, or conflict—you know, the first instrument that is drawn, you know what it is? Language. And someone spoke about that today. I think it was the Member for Tobago, not West, East. Absolutely right. If we do not know how to communicate at this level, what do you expect on the street? How do you expect us to be moved to participate in something that you do not feel you are welcome in? That you cannot speak your mind, that you have no right of audience if you disagree. You shut up, or that you are speaking academic and sterile things. The first weapon drawn in any conflict is language. Let us get this right, and then we move forward.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are on a budget debate, and it has been long, and I do not expect to be as long as some of the others, but what I will tell you, is this: this country is in trouble, but we can fix it. But it requires a different type of leadership, all embracing, compassionate. Because on Saturday I went to full gas and I felt that blow.

**Hon. Member:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. P. Ramadhar:** Yes, I felt it, like many others who are protesting. Sometimes we forget that there are persons who have children. There are persons who have families who have mortgage, who have rent, who are working. Working hard, and because of circumstances they are already on the, you know—what

shall we say?—the edge of disposable income, and that any change for those who are not insulated can have a meaningful effect on them.

**Miss Cudjoe:** When you are in Miami you do not feel it?

**Mr. P. Ramadhar:** When you are roaming—

**Hon. Member:** You go to Miami.

**Mr. P. Ramadhar:** Yeah, I go everywhere. I travel.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Silence!

**Mr. P. Ramadhar:** Let me get something clear, right? I would not be distracted, but it is important, because they like to throw things on those who have worked hard and succeeded. [*Desk thumping*]

So, something is wrong if I have succeeded? I am not boasting about it. It came not from me alone. From my grandfather and grandmother who worked day and night. [*Desk thumping*] From my father and mother and from myself. And nothing is wrong if I wish to go and see other places and experience the quality and standard that we in Trinidad and Tobago must have. Throw words for me. Eh!

**Miss Cudjoe:** I am asking, do you feel it there?

**Mr. P. Ramadhar:** I feel it everywhere, and that is why—

**Miss Cudjoe:** Good.

[*Mr. Deputy Speaker stands*]

**Mr. P. Ramadhar:** Deal with her, Sir.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Member for Tobago West, please, you had your opportunity. At this time I am listening to the Member for St. Augustine. And again, address the Chair, please.

**Mr. P. Ramadhar:** I did not go Sandals, as I hear my friend went to all the Sandals already. Whatever size, size one, two, three or four sandals fit good for you. But, anyhow, back to basics. [*Crosstalk*]

So that we are on the point, that there are people who are truly suffering there. And you know what touched me a lot, and it is so significant. The fishermen came and they protested, because the price of diesel—the Member for Moruga/Tableland, I want to tell you, you had some very important and useful things to say in your contribution.

**Dr. Francis:** I also thank you—.

**Mr. P. Ramadhar:** Yes. [*Laughter*] You know what they said? That, how am I going to be able to work, because the fish I catch I have to sell. Yes? I have to pay for ice, I have to pay for everything else. I have to pay for everything else.

You know what was not their first instinct? A pause. You know what was not the first instinct of the fishermen? To raise the price of fish. Because they have to deal with these people, these families and sell to them, and they already know how hard it is for them to buy fish, so that if you hit me on the diesel, I cannot just pass it on, unlike some other businesses where the small man always at the end of the day pays for anything in terms of taxation.

**Dr. Francis:** And they use regular gas. [*Crosstalk*]

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

**Mr. P. Ramadhar:** Madam Speaker, and apparently we have a little disturbance on the left. I ask for some protection. [*Crosstalk*] So, what my friend from Mayaro is saying is that the fishermen came here and lie.

**Dr. Francis:** The fishermen take regular gas.

**Mr. P. Ramadhar:** Right, that they do not use whatever it is.

**Miss Olivierre:** They do not use diesel.

**Dr. Francis:** They use regular gas. [*Crosstalk*]

**Mr. P. Ramadhar:** Everything went up. [*Crosstalk*]

**Madam Speaker:** Please continue, Member for St. Augustine. [*Desk thumping*] And that word you just used I consider it unparliamentary, so I know you can use another word.

**Mr. P. Ramadhar:** I am suggesting that they did anything but that, and that they responded to an immediate and natural pain that they felt.

Now, my friend the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, threatening the banks, "not a hair", I love that kind of language, but not here. In [*Inaudible*] "not a hair", whatever! Do not threaten the banks. You know better than that. Legislate. Let me tell you why. What you can legislate? We have a Central Bank Act that gives Central Bank certain powers, but not the necessary parts. Before the Joint Select Committee—and I want to congratulate—well, under your stewardship, Madam Speaker, the Joint Select Committees of this

Parliament, I think we should all give them a thumping now, please, [*Desk thumping*] the kind of work that has been going on, because in Legal Affairs Joint Select Committee it was obvious, my friend the Member for San Fernando East, that the banks act with impunity in terms of the rates and charges they can apply anytime, anywhere, and there is not a legislative control over it.

**Mr. Mitchell:** Oligopoly.

**Mr. P. Ramadhar:** It is an oligopoly, and therefore you are putting a tax on them, from 30 to 35, “dat sounding good”, well, put pressure on them, everybody smiling because they know full well in the banking industry. They are going to pass that on to the small man, unlike the fishermen who came. So, do not threaten, legislate. Give the Central Bank the authority to look over and look at the fairness of the bank charges, or the unfairness, and be able to give them guidance on it.

Now, talking about—my friend from Tobago gone, and I want her to hear this one. While I was in Florida I had worked with a true patriot of this country, a person by the name of Ralph Hart, an activist in the politics for long, but he is not known, and he had introduced me years ago to a person by the name of Ann Wilesby, who had lived in Trinidad. She is an American citizen, but she loves this country. She lived here for a long time, and had gone back to America. And we had started working—because, you know, everybody talking, talking, talking, but we believe in taking action to do things to bring wealth to this nation. And I want to put on record my gratitude to the Member of Parliament for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West. Because what we did, when I say we—and this is as the American say, on my own dime, we arranged meetings in Chicago, and with the help of the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, we were able to get Ambassador Spencer to visit Chicago—and I also want to put on record, a true patriot, a young man by the name of Nirad Tewarie, who came also as a representative of AMCHAM.

Now, these are privately organized things, and we had met there with the business community, the Chamber of Commerce of Illinois, and several other businesses. And I also put on record the ambassador did yeoman service to Trinidad and Tobago, by his presence and his presentation. Nirad Tewarie was fabulous on the floor, and together with investTT, which we had an audiovisual hook-up, we were able to light the room up with the possibilities of Trinidad and Tobago. And I remember having to speak to this group, small as it was, and tell them about the beautiful country from which I had come, of the wonderful weather, beautiful land, gorgeous ocean, the greenery, the people of different races coming together in harmony—and many are now trying to disrupt that—and

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[MR RAMADHAR]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

to tell them of the opportunities for business in Trinidad and Tobago. And I felt so proud. Because standing out of Trinidad and Tobago then you have a sight of who we really are. Looking in, this country is a paradise, but every day we are trying to destroy this thing. That is what we are doing.

Because, if you really appreciate what we have, you will value it, and that every word that comes from our mouth would be about building this country, condemning that which is wrong, but also giving ideas. For instance, when the Member for Mayaro spoke, I thought he was absolutely brilliant in his contribution about creating a Point Lisas to agriculture. That is what we need. That kind of thinking. Anyhow, to cut a longer story short, we had an understanding there in Chicago that we will work towards having a trade delegation come to Trinidad. And immediately in that meeting there were persons there who were big in the business, for chocolates, and we were able through the ambassador to give an immediate hook-up with suppliers of our cocoa.

Meaningful, direct. We were also able then to have the possibility, because we visited their film festival too, and to have members there who showed great interest in coming to Trinidad to do film work here. I see the Attorney General is leaving. Some time ago.—I am a friend of the manager for Red Chili Peppers. I do not know if you know who that is. That is Shah Rukh Khan's business/organization. He was in Trinidad, and we attempted to have a meeting with the Prime Minister, and to be fair it was a very short notice. That meeting never materialized. So that we could have for Tobago and Trinidad locations that would be seen throughout the world. And there is a growing rich in the Middle and Far East, that now is creating a whole new tourist plank, that what they see on the big screen they like to visit. If Shah Rukh walk here they have to be there.

And these are opportunities that we cannot allow to pass by. I want to also tell you, Madam Speaker, I had the opportunity to have audience with the Secretary of State Mr. Jesse White, who is a phenomenon in Chicago, and he gave us some ideas of things, of how we could cooperate and so on. I will speak to the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, because he had a programme there for youths at risk. Chicago is one of the murderous cities in the world. And he had started years ago something called the Jesse White Tumblers, that allowed young persons who are disenfranchised or whatever, give them a training in their acrobatics, like the Harlem Globetrotters from basketball, this is for gymnastics. And we want to participate and bring a crew here, and to share some of the stories.

I also had the opportunity to speak to J. B. Pritzker. He is running for Governor. One of the wealthiest men in America. They are the owners of the

Hyatt chain. And I had to tell him, because he is very keen and interested in universal child care, Early Childhood Education. And I started to tell him about what we had done in the People's Partnership, under your Ministry, Member for Caroni East, and under the guidance of the Prime Minister of the day. Talking early childhood education centres throughout this land. And what they were taken aback, they were taken with, was the computer for every child, and then I realized, oh my God, I was looking in the review mirror. I was looking at what was and what is now, and I feel almost embarrassed, because Mr. Pritzker may very well come to Trinidad and find out that we have stopped the computers to children. That the early childhood care centres, as my friend the Member for Couva South—Sonny Ladoo Trace is falling into disrepair; across the land these things are falling apart.

**5.45 p.m.**

But this is where the investment of the future must be. We have done and they must do. [*Desk thumping*] And then—where is the Member for Arima? Schools in St. Augustine, particular, and I begged him. He said it here in the Parliament that they are going to fix it, Curepe Presbyterian. We built a whole wing, a whole new school, but it was like 90 per cent completed, there is 10 more to finish. We took away the children's playground, and in that effort, whenever it rains they cannot get to their washroom. They did not complete the new one, the old one falling apart. I now had to raise some funds from the generosity of the people of St. Augustine to get desks. I did not know that one of these little old time desks, Madam Speaker, I do not know which school you went to, but we in the country, the old wooden desks, you know, the one you lift like this, \$1,600 for one. So I say that is mad, we need to find a better price. I asked somebody to go. Guess what?—\$2,200 for one. But, these are the things, and I ask and I want the Prime Minister to intervene now in St. Augustine to help me with this school and many others.

Having said all that, this is a budget debate. If we do not invest in our future and by investing in our future we must have a plan, we must have a timeline, we must know what the plan is, what we want to achieve, how we are going to achieve it, and when we are going to achieve it. I have not heard any of that. We are shooting in the dark. The one good thing I have heard, if at all, is this issue of the Eximbank.

Now, having some authority to determine who shall get US dollars, because they must show then that that US dollar will go towards investment, because if we

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[MR RAMADHAR]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

do not invest, not just for local consumption but for export, so that they could earn the almighty US dollar, then having regard to our expenditure in the past, then the lifestyles of this country will change and change dramatically and not just the lifestyle, business itself will fall.

But with flippancy, with absolute flippancy, the Minister of Finance spoke in derogatory terms and held on to this thing and said, “Boy, this is real horrible, wha Kamla an dem do?” “You know, wha Kamla an dem do?” They say we borrow.

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Member for St. Augustine, your original 45 minutes are now spent. You are entitled to 10 more minutes if you wish to avail yourself. Please proceed.

**Mr. P. Ramadhar:** No, I cannot negotiate more so I will take my 10 minutes. [*Desk thumping*]

You know what the complaint was, that they do not understand or do not care to tell the truth, that, yes, we borrowed, but we put the money in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund in US dollars, [*Desk thumping*] the very money that now acts as a buffer to the economic storms that we now face. Had we not borrowed and put there—you see, this thing about borrowing, borrowing, borrowing, what do you think the People’s Partnership borrowed money for? It is about the people and had the foresight then to put the money in a savings, in a US dollar account that you could rely upon and draw down on as you have. Had it not happened, we would have been in a much more dire circumstance.

So we are getting blamed left, right and center, but the truth has no relevance to your blame. Blame Kamla propaganda, BKP, blame Kamla propaganda, blame Kamla propaganda. And that is what we were regaled with. I felt ashamed for some of the allegations that had been made when we were in Government and some of the allegations we made against you. [*Crosstalk*] Some of them might be true. I am hearing you. You know about the fake oil, you know that. The very day you were removed things went wrong from that Ministry. [*Desk thumping*] So you lucky, when you thought—Joel Osteen always says, “That what you think is a stumbling block is a stepping block”. The Member for Port-of-Spain South, you know that.

My friend, the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West who I admire. I admire you, not for all the reasons you think. [*Laughter*] But, you know yesterday I heard you say that you signed an MOU for the removal of life certificates. Wow! We signed



that in 2013 and instituted it in 2014. [*Desk thumping*] So I do not know— [*Crosstalk*] no, you do not know, that is the point. Something went wrong. When Government change, something went wrong with them.

**Hon. Member:** Shut down.

**Mr. P. Ramadhar:** They shut it down. So now they are telling you that they have to sign a MOU. “Doh worry with dem.” I had to literally, almost cuss somebody to get that done. Because sometimes it takes a manful approach to things, leave it up to the kind of bureaucratic speed, nothing happens. “So doh let dem fool yuh with that.” Check it and see. We had instituted that. And I want to commend you for furthering it, but you do not need to go back to an MOU. We have it working and operational. Just put it back, plug it back in.

So, Madam Speaker, here we go. My friend, the Member from D’Abadie/O’Meara, how kind and considerate you were to enquire of my well-being yesterday, about what is happening with me in the COP and everything else. And I appreciate that. But let me tell you what was happening. Well, the COP, instead of dealing with things and letting the public, you know, determine its fates in the court of public opinion, they have now allowed the opinion of a court to determine its future. But when I was leader of that very robust and noble party there were many efforts for me to leave the Partnership, to break a Government and I resisted and I told people over my dead body. [*Desk thumping*] And they attempted, not in physical terms, but in every other way to assassinate my character, reputation and good nature. But I knew then that had the Partnership broken and the Government did not sustain itself for five years, what would have happened? The very same thing that has happened in the last two years, [*Desk thumping*] where crime has gone to an all-time high, employment and wealth has gone to an all-time low; where people are bereft of hope, where there is fear and anxiety in almost everything we say and do and I could not in all conscience allow a good Partnership that work on behalf of the people, not perfect, I repeat, but did everything working on behalf of the people to fall for the fears and the slander and propaganda of a few. [*Desk thumping*]

As we move forward there is no problem without a solution, but every solution requires a scientific approach with a gentle heart and a sharp mind. Unfortunately, in relation to crime, “yuh doh have ah Gary Griffith”; in relation to education, “yuh doh have ah Tim Gopeesingh”; in relation to planning, “yuh doh have ah Bhoewarrie”; [*Desk thumping*] in relation to health, “yuh doh have ah Fuad”; in relation to works, “yuh doh have ah Suruj”. I could go on and on and

*Appropriation Bill 2017*  
[MR RAMADHAR]

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

on. [*Crosstalk*] But, what is important for me to remind you is that the Leader of the Opposition has written to the Prime Minister and has indicated help is available if you want it. Just ask and it shall be given.

**Hon. Member:** No, thank you.

**Mr. P. Ramadhar:** Of course, no, thank you. That is the answer. No, thank you, no, thank you. So that, I unfortunately had some hope because you are the Government and I wish you well and your success is the people's success, your failure is our failure. Give me the first part, "nah".

**Hon. Member:** What is that?

**Mr. P. Ramadhar:** Success, "ah lil bit self". And it can be achieved still. Damaged as you are, that you have started—you know, Madam Speaker, every driver knows that the last thing you should do when you are driving is to keep looking in your rearview mirror, because that is what this Government has been doing to itself. Every single thing they do is in the rearview mirror. What Kamla did? What the Partnership—"bam" you are going to run off the road and you almost have. And as you are becoming more and more paranoid because you realize the Opposition was coming closer on your tail, now you know what has happened? We are no longer in the rearview mirror. Look to your right, Sir, we are overtaking you. [*Desk thumping*] The population is not going to accept the language of politics and the blame game. "That done" a little while now, get with it. Every day it pains me to see people outside this Parliament for good reason or for bad, they are there and they are hurting. [*Crosstalk*] I have to bring it. We are here about the people, "yuh doh like to hear about their pains".

So that—Madam Speaker, how much more time do I have?

**Hon. Member:** Time up.

**Madam Speaker:** You have three minutes.

**Mr. P. Ramadhar:** Thank you so much. The long and short of my submission is simply this, we will work with you if you are straightforward. We will help you if you say and do the right things. Do not say that the Opposition is not supportive of things and non-patriotic when you bring bogus law; [*Desk thumping*] do not say that the Opposition is unsupportive and unpatriotic when you bring bad plans; do not say that the Opposition is unsupportive and unpatriotic when you act with a flippancy and a lack of care that resonates throughout the length and breadth of this country. You can do things, but the manner in which you do it is important.

*Appropriation Bill, 2017*

*Wednesday, October 11, 2017*

There seems to be an arrogance that has descended very quickly upon you, that whatever you do is like the word itself, and that everybody must just fall in line with what you say and if you should dare raise your voice in criticism, then you are to shut up and to be disregarded. That is not how a society is brought together. Because when things get bad, even in a family, basic decency and the common values that we had learnt when we were children growing up is what will keep it together. But now when you take away respect, you take away dignity and in all the offices we now suffer that.

There is no office in the country—[*Cellphone rings*—as a classic example—there is no office in this country that has remained with all of its dignity and respect intact. But if we should restore those foundational values to our society where we could be trusted, where we can be believed, where we can show the past and people know, yes, step by step we can achieve it, then together we can really do it. Not from the campaign propaganda, “We will do this together”. Because the “Red and Ready” has now become the “Red and Ridiculous”. They are not prepared, unfortunately, and as I have offered help, again, I am hearing the other side saying, no thank you, no thank you. Well then, I guess for the next period until the next election we just have to band our belly and hope. But there is a God, there is more good in this nation than there is bad. I am a firm believer in the resilience, as the Member for Laventille East/Morvant spoke to that, we will get through whatever difficult times. And sometimes you just have to ignore those we have given power to.

God bless this country and I look forward, Madam Speaker, to a healthier, more refreshing approach in the way we conduct our business in Parliament. Thank you very, very much. [*Desk thumping*]

#### ADJOURNMENT

**The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):** Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Thursday, the 12<sup>th</sup> day of October, 2017, at 10.00 a.m.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*House adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 5.57 p.m.*