



REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Debates of the House of Representatives

5th Session – 10th Parliament (Rep.) – Volume 33 – Number 18

**OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)**

THE HONOURABLE WADE MARK
SPEAKER

THE HONOURABLE NELA KHAN
DEPUTY SPEAKER

Friday 9th January, 2015

CLERK OF THE HOUSE: JACQUI SAMPSON–MEIGUEL

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(TYPESET BY THE HANSARD STAFF, PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY THE GOVERNMENT PRINTER, CARONI,
REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO— 2022)

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*Leave of Absence**Friday, January 09, 2015*

**THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
OFFICIAL REPORT
IN THE FOURTH SESSION OF THE TENTH PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO WHICH OPENED ON JUNE 18, 2010**

SESSION 2014—2015**VOLUME 33****HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES***Friday, January 09, 2015*

The House met at 10.00 a.m.

PRAYERS[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received communication from the following Members: the hon. Winston Dookeran, Member of Parliament for Tunapuna who is out of the country and has asked to be excused from sittings of the House during the period January 05 to January 11, 2015; Mr. Patrick Manning, Member of Parliament for San Fernando East, has asked to be excused from today's sitting of the House. The leave which Members seek is granted.

CONDOLENCES**(MR. MARTIN JOSEPH)**

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, as you may be aware, Mr. Martin Joseph, former Member of Parliament for St. Ann's East and Minister of National Security passed away on Monday, January 05, 2015. Many of us may have had the opportunity to serve very closely with him in either House. I now invite hon. Members to pay their respective tributes. I recognize the hon. Minister of Sport and Member of Parliament for Toco/Sangre Grande. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Sport (Hon. Dr. Rupert Griffith): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we on this side, as I am no doubt sure that the colleagues on the other side and, indeed, the national community, were very shocked to hear of the demise of Martin Joseph. On behalf of the Government we want to extend heartfelt condolences to his family, his wife, his dear children and all of the loved ones and, indeed, Members on the other side and, of course, members of the national community who came to know Martin Joseph.

Martin was born in the inner city of Port of Spain. He was a people's person—there is no doubt about that—easy going and down to earth, who never ran from challenges. In an early incarnation in my life, Mr. Speaker, I worked closely with Martin Joseph, and I remember those fond memories and his commitment to work and his lack of fear to surmountable challenges.

Condolences

[HON. DR. R. GRIFFITH]

Friday, January 09, 2015

Martin was a teacher, a family man, a patriot. Martin operated in all communities, and he did so in such comfort and commitment which spanned Trinidad and Tobago, Washington DC and elsewhere where he completed both his undergraduate and graduate education and began his family, who I came to know very well at one time.

Martin's professional interests included human resource development, management and governance. He mentored at all levels and installed some fundamental principles regarding quality, responsibility and hard work. More importantly, he sought to understand the environmental challenges and developed and applied scientific principles and values using research and discipline.

Martin was a very controlled and abject researcher and this was reflected in his well-reasoned disclosure in Parliament and in successive polls at the electorate. He applied his innovative greatness in service of the people of Trinidad and Tobago and also the entire country.

Martin understood the political risks of his decisions, but stayed the course in doing the people's business. He accepted criticism and responded very often kindly knowing that his own foundation was solid and that his family and relationships were intact. He was humble and strong-willed. He valued relationships, nevertheless, when he faced a fork in the road and had to make an unpopular choice, he rose up and voted his conscience. Martin is gone, but will not be forgotten for he has mentored people and provided services to a caring population who will ensure his legacy continues.

Mr. Speaker, Martin was a father, a teacher at Progressive Educational Institute. He had an associate degree from Southern Eastern University, Washington DC, he had a bachelor degree from George Washington University, a Master's Degree in Agricultural Economics at the University of Maryland. He was employed at the Institute of Marine Affairs and also was a professor.

Mr. Speaker, the nation is poorer today by the loss of this great son of the soil and, therefore, again, I extend heartfelt condolences to his family and all of his loved ones.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Keith Rowley (*Diego Martin West*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, colleagues, it is always a sad moment when we stand in this Chamber from time to time to reflect on the passing of one of our former colleagues, but on this occasion it is particularly poignant for two reasons: one is the sudden unexpected passing of former Member of Parliament for St. Ann's East, Martin Joseph, who is most widely known not only in this Chamber but across the

Condolences

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country, as a former Minister of National Security, particularly at this time where the whole issue of national security remains at the forefront of the concerns of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. For those who only knew Martin Joseph as the Minister of National Security, I am sure in our reflective moments now, we understand that he was a citizen who was prepared to do his duty to Trinidad and Tobago.

In making this tribute, Mr. Speaker, I would like to put on *Hansard* an analogy describing Martin Joseph's service to the public in that particular sphere of national security as described by none other than a person who worked very closely as his subordinate during those very difficult days of the 2007/2008 period, and I refer here to the comments of former acting Police Commissioner, James Philbert, who described Martin Joseph as a conductor of an orchestra who had a job to do in having music prepared and delivered to the public, and in his role of conductor he turned his back to the audience and focused on the musicians so as to ensure that the music was played correctly. That was his tenure that the general public was familiar with, and insofar as Martin Joseph had the attributes as described by my colleague, the Member for Toco/Sangre Grande, he stayed the course. It was a difficult course, but we are better off for it, Mr. Speaker.

Public service in Trinidad and Tobago is not usually acknowledged for what it really is, sacrifice, but the life of Martin Joseph was all sacrifice, both at the party level and at the level of public office; sacrifice for the betterment of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

He was a gentle man, meaning he was not boisterous, not unreasonable, not show off, and he had tremendous faith in his training that anecdotal stories are not the bases for making national policy. I want to repeat that, Mr. Speaker: anecdotal feelings are not proper bases for making national policy. And, therefore, when the policy with respect to national security fell to Martin Joseph, he stuck to that principle. It is a principle that we in the PNM are very familiar with because while most persons only know him in the public life, we knew him better in the party, and we had to face up to his treatment of that theory in dealing with our preparations for elections and in treating with policy and issues: what are the numbers saying? What are the facts as against the feelings? What are the prospects of success as against your expectations? That was Martin Joseph at work.

As a Minister, I can say that the country had been better off for having him and, today, we in the PNM are having difficulty replacing him. But as no one is

Condolences
[DR. ROWLEY]

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indispensable, we mourn his loss and we share this pain with his family and friends who got that very sad news on Monday morning. We acknowledge that in the midst of life there is death, but he was able to have made a contribution to us all, and the nation is grateful.

We express our deepest condolences to his family, to his young children, particularly his young daughter who is scheduled to be married in a few months. The advice which is offered to her by me, as leader of his party, is that she should go ahead and get married in April if she could, because her father would have wanted her to. What all of us would want to do, even though the job is incomplete, is to try and finish the job that he set out to do, both at the party level and at the level of the Government and the country, because that is what he always wanted us to do.

We thank Almighty God for the opportunity for having shared his life and interacting with him and learning from him, and as we move tomorrow to lay him to rest, we could only say, may he rest in peace. [*Desk thumping*]

10.15 a.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I would like to join with my parliamentary colleagues in paying tribute to the late Martin Joseph. Martin Joseph served with distinction as the elected representative for the constituency of St. Ann's East from the period 1995—2002. He also served in the Senate from 2002 until 2010. During his tenure as a parliamentarian, Martin Joseph made noteworthy contributions in debates on Bills relating to national security given his capacity as Minister. Many of his contemporaries have commented on his dignity in the face of heated parliamentary exchanges which is why we can say, he gave meaning to the character which is expected of parliamentary representatives.

Many will attest to Martin Joseph being extremely hard-working, a man dedicated to his responsibilities in public life. Undeniably, the country will remember the often turbulent moments during his years in the Ministry of National Security. It is important to remember his efforts because virtue so often lies in the effort and not in the reward. Martin Joseph was a great teacher and mentor who was always willing to give guidance and assistance, not only to his peers but to his subordinates such as staff and students.

There is no doubt that he made a lasting impact on those fortunate to be under his tutelage. Indeed, Martin Joseph can be remembered as a humble, easy-going gentleman who was dedicated to serving his country in various capacities, and for

Condolences

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that we are forever grateful. I wish to express deepest condolences to the family of the late Martin Joseph, his wife Claire, his children and all other relatives and friends, and sincerely hope they are granted comfort during this difficult moment and period.

I now invite all hon. Members to stand for a minute of silence in respectful observance of his passing.

The House of Representatives stood.

Mr. Speaker: May the soul of Martin Joseph rest in eternal peace. Thank you. Hon. Members, please be assured that I have directed the Clerk of the House to convey, on our behalf, our collective condolences to the family of the late Martin Joseph.

**JOINT SELECT COMMITTEES
(APPOINTMENT OF)**

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received the following correspondence from the President of the Senate, Sen. The Hon. Timothy Hamel-Smith, which reads as follows:

“December 09, 2014

The Hon. Wade Mark, MP
Speaker of the House
Office of the Speaker
Level 2, Tower D
The Port of Spain International Waterfront Centre
1A Wrightson Road
PORT OF SPAIN
Honourable Speaker,

Appointment of Joint Select Committees

Your letter dated November 11, 2014 on the subject at caption refers. Please be informed that at a sitting held on Tuesday December 09, 2014 the Senate agreed to appoint the following Senators to serve on the respective Committees:

Committee on Public Administration and Appropriation

1. Mr. Emmanuel George
2. Ms. Marlene Coudray

3. Mr. Vasant Bharath
4. Mrs. Camille Robinson-Regis
5. Mr. H.R. Ian Roach

Committee on National Security

1. Mr. Gary Griffith
2. Mr. Embau Moheni
3. Mrs. Raziah Ahmed
4. Mr. Faris Al-Rawi
5. Dr. Rolph Balgobin

Committee on Energy Affairs

1. Mr. Kevin Ramnarine
2. Mr. Fazal Karim
3. Mr. Gerald Hadeed
4. Dr. Lester Henry
5. Mr. David Small

Committee on Foreign Affairs

1. Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie
2. Mr. Devant Maharaj
3. Mr. Fazal Karim
4. Mr. Avinash Singh
5. Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir

Committee on Human Rights, Diversity, the Environment and Sustainable Development

1. Mr. Anand Ramlogan, S.C.
2. Mr. Ganga Singh
3. Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie
4. Mrs. Camille Robinson-Regis
5. Rev. Joy Abdul-Mohan

Committee on Parliamentary Broadcasting

1. Mr. Timothy Hamel-Smith
2. Mr. Gerald Hadeed
3. Mr. Devant Maharaj
4. Mrs. Diane Baldeo-Chadeesingh
5. Mr. Anthony Vieira

Committee on Government Assurances

1. Mr. Timothy Hamel-Smith
2. Mr. Ganga Singh
3. Mr. Larry Howai
4. Ms. Shamfa Cudjoe
5. Dr. Victor Wheeler

Accordingly, I respectfully request that you cause this matter to be brought to the attention of the House of Representatives.

Yours respectfully,

Senator the Hon. Timothy Hamel-Smith

President of the Senate”

PAPERS LAID

1. Notification of His Excellency, the President, in respect of the nomination of Dr. Maria Therese Gomes for appointment as a member of the Police Service Commission. [*The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal)*]
2. Minimum Wages Order, 2014. [*The Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development (Hon. Errol McLeod)*]
3. Financial Obligations (Amdt.) Regulations, 2014. [*The Minister of Finance and the Economy (Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai)*]
4. Purchase of Certain Rights (HCU) Regulations, 2014. [*Sen. The Hon. L. Howai*]
5. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Statement of Recovery of Expenses of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs for the year ended December 31, 2012. [*Sen. The Hon. L. Howai*]
6. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Statement of Recovery of Expenses of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs for the year ended December 31, 2013. [*Sen. The Hon. L. Howai*]
Papers 5 and 6 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.
7. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on a Special Audit of the Operations of the Sports Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited with particular reference to the development and upgrading of Sporting Facilities in Trinidad. [*Sen. The Hon. L. Howai*]
8. Annual Audited Financial Statements of Caroni (1975) Limited for the year ended June 30, 2013. [*Sen. The Hon. L. Howai*]

9. Annual Audited Financial Statements of Caribbean Airlines Limited for the financial year 2009. [*Sen. The Hon. L. Howai*]
 10. Annual Audited Financial Statements of Caribbean Airlines Limited for the financial year 2010. [*Sen. The Hon. L. Howai*]
 11. Annual Audited Financial Statements of Caribbean Airlines Limited for the financial year 2011. [*Sen. The Hon. L. Howai*]
 12. Audited Financial Statements of Trinidad and Tobago Solid Waste Management Company Limited (SWMCOL) for the financial year ended September 30, 2012. [*Sen. The Hon. L. Howai*]
 13. Audited Financial Statements of Trinidad and Tobago Solid Waste Management Company Limited (SWMCOL) for the financial year ended September 30, 2013. [*Sen. The Hon. L. Howai*]
- Papers 7 to 13 to be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.*
14. Annual Administrative Reports of the Ministry of Tourism for the year 2013. [*Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal*]
 15. Annual Administrative Report of the Tourism Development Company Limited for the year 2013. [*Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal*]
 16. Annual Administrative Report of the Ministry of Trade, Industry, Investment and Communications for fiscal year 2012/2013. [*Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal*]
 17. Annual Administrative Report of the Trinidad and Tobago Entertainment Company Limited for fiscal year 2011/2012. [*Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal*]
 18. Sessional Review of the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for the Session 2013—2014. [*The Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Nela Khan)*]
 19. Financial Intelligence Unit of Trinidad and Tobago (Amendment) Regulations, 2014. [*Sen. The Hon. L. Howai*]

**STANDING FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT
(Presentation)**

The Minister of Finance and the Economy (Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai):
Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following report:

First Report of the Standing Finance Committee of the House of Representatives for the Fifth Session (2014/2015), Tenth Parliament on the consideration

of proposals for the Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation for the fiscal year 2014.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): There are several questions on the Order Paper today, we will just ask for the questions—we are prepared to answer most, but we would ask that Question No. 14, directed to the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, be deferred for two weeks.

Mr. Speaker: Question—what?

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Question No. 14, directed to the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, for a two-week deferral.

We are expecting the Minister of Education shortly. The questions to the Minister of Finance and the Economy, we are asking that those would also be deferred for two weeks.

Hon. Member: Which ones?

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: The questions directed to the Minister of Finance and the Economy. [*Crosstalk*] Thank you very much. So we can proceed with question number 12, 23, et cetera.

Mr. Speaker: 12—

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: 23, 26, 29, 13, 15, 27, 33, 34—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Deferred?

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: No, we are prepared to answer all of those—49. We can answer, Mr. Speaker. We can proceed with those answers.

Hon. Member: 52?

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: We are awaiting the arrival of the Minister of Education, and I am sure he may be prepared to do that.

Mr. Speaker: Okay.

Miss Mc Donald: Mr. Speaker, just a point of clarification with the Minister. Are you prepared to circulate the questions for written answers at Appendix II in the Order Paper?

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Yes. Mr. Speaker, during the proceedings today we will be circulating answers that require written responses.

Mr. Speaker: Okay.

The following questions stood on the Order Paper:

**Abandoned Petrotrin Lands
(Grant to Retired Workers)**

14. Could the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs state:
- A. When will Petrotrin grant parcels of land to retired workers that have been deemed very uneconomical and as a consequence abandoned by Petrotrin?
 - B. In what areas will lands be allocated to retired Petrotrin employees?
[*Mr. F. Jeffrey*]

**Oil Produced in 2014
(Details of Revenue Earned)**

55. Could the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy state the revenue earned by the State from oil produced in Trinidad and Tobago in 2014, broken down into revenue from oil from Supplementary Petroleum Tax, Petroleum Profits Tax, Unemployment Levy, Royalty, Impost, inter alia?
[*Mr. C. Imbert*]

**Trinidad and Tobago Natural Gas
(Prices Paid by Downstream Producers)**

56. Could the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy state the prices paid by downstream producers in 2014 for natural gas produced in Trinidad and Tobago? [*Mr. C. Imbert*]

**Trinidad and Tobago LNG
(Details of)**

57. Could the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy state the prices earned for LNG produced in Trinidad and Tobago in 2014, and the countries our LNG was exported to, with a breakdown by volume and destination of the exports of LNG? [*Mr. C. Imbert*]

Questions, by leave, deferred.

**Trinidad Tesoro, Trintopec and Petrotrin
(Retirees Pension Upgrade)**

12. Mr. Fitzgerald Jeffrey (*La Brea*) asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs:

When will the retirees from Trinidad Tesoro, Trintopec and Petrotrin receive their pension upgrade in accordance with the agreement signed between Petrotrin or its predecessors and the relevant Trade Unions?

The Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Kevin Ramnarine): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The answer to Question No. 12 from the Member of Parliament for La Brea is as follows: Petrotrin has two pension plans, the Petrotrin Employees' Pension Plan, which has a membership of 4,016 employees and 5,375 retirees, and the Staff Pension Plan, which has a membership of 187 employees and 457 retirees. Petrotrin's pension plans are independent funds operated by a trustee with oversight by a management committee comprising Petrotrin's personnel and representatives of the Oilfields Workers' Trade Union and the National Petroleum Staff Association.

10.30 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, an actuarial valuation is conducted on these plans every three years, and the actuary advises on the plan's ability to pay an increase in pension.

Petrotrin, accepting the actuary's recommendation, paid pension increases on three previous occasions with effect from October 01, 2002, October 01, 2005 and October 01, 2008. The triennial actuarial valuation for the period 2007—2010 confirmed that the plans could not sustain further increases. Petrotrin, in the interest of securing the viability of the pension plans, accepted the recommendations of the actuary and advised that no increases in pension could be granted for the period October 01, 2007 to October 01, 2010.

The actuarial valuation for the triennial period ended September 30, 2013, for the staff pension plan was completed on June 27, 2014, and on November 27, 2014, for the employees' pension plan. With the completion of the valuation of the pension plans, as at September 30, 2013, a costing is being conducted by the actuary to determine the possibility of pension adjustments based on the Retail Price Index increases over the period October 01, 2010 to September 30, 2013, or the triennial period under review, in line with agreements between the company and the respective trade unions.

The valuation reports for that triennial period ended September 30, 2013, have been forwarded to members of the respective management committees which

include members of the representative trade unions.

When the costing regarding pension increases is completed, the actuary and the relevant parties will be advised accordingly. That concludes the answer to question 12.

Mr. Jeffrey: Supplemental question. Hon. Minister, what was the actual value of the Petrotrin pension plan at the time of the merger?

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: At the time of the merger, 1994? Mr. Speaker, I do not have that information readily available. I will be willing to answer that question if the Member files another question.

Mr. Jeffrey: Further supplemental. What was the actual value of the pension plan for the 2010—2013 period?

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Again, I did not walk with specifics on the value of the pension plan at different points in time. Again, I will be willing to provide that information if the Member files another question.

Dr. Moonilal: “File dat!”

Mr. Jeffrey: Further supplemental. Could you provide the House with the dates of the minutes in which the management committee approved to notify the members that they were not going to get any increase?

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: I think you are referring to the triennial period 2007—2010 for which no increase was recommended by the actuary. I do not have the date of the minutes when that decision was taken, but again, I am willing to provide any information that the Member requires, if the member files the appropriate question.

Arouca/Maloney URP Projects (Details of)

23. Miss Alicia Hospedales (Arouca/Maloney) asked:

Could the hon. Minister of Works and Infrastructure state:

- A. The number of infrastructure projects done by the URP in the constituency of Arouca/Maloney for the period 2012 to present;
- B. The location of each infrastructure project;
- C. The name of the contractors for each infrastructure project;
- D. The cost of each infrastructure project;
- E. The start date and end date of each infrastructure project?

The Minister of Works and Infrastructure (Hon. Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to question 23A, seven

infrastructure projects were done by the Unemployment Relief Programme in the constituency of Arouca/Maloney, over the period January 01, 2012 to November 12, 2014.

Information with respect to the projects are as follows: Over the period January 01, 2013 to December 31, 2013: Kingbird box drain, off Kingbird Drive, Bon Air Gardens. The question also asked for the name of the contractor and the project cost, start and finish dates. Contractor, Taa Daa Construction & Maintenance Company Limited, project cost, \$355,488, started on August 26, 2013 and was completed on October 03, 2013.

Over the period January 01, 2014 to November 12, 2014, Danpat Seetal Road box drain. The address of that is Danpat Seetal Road, off Piarco Old Road, D'Abadie, name of company, One Flat Price Company Limited, \$260,245, started on May 08, 2014, completed on September 30, 2014; Red Hill box drain and suspended footpath with slipper drain, Piarco Old Road Branch Road, D'Abadie, Sanbran Company, contractor, \$170,564, started on August 25, 2014, completed on October 10, 2014.

The fourth one, Interlot drain between Ifill and Perkins Streets, location, between Ifill and Perkins Streets, Arouca, Winter's General Contractor Company Limited, \$352,785, started on September 26, 2014, was completed on October 18, 2014; Bon Air Gardens box drain—this is the fifth one—opposite Bon Air Gardens Government Primary entrance, Lakewood Construction Environmental Company Limited, \$331,550, started on September 29, 2014, and was completed on November 11, 2014. LP #15, Waterloo Road box drain, Waterloo Road, Arouca, NLI Construction & Maintenance, \$84,815, started on September 18, 2014, completed on September 28, 2014.

The seventh one, Forde Street Extension box drain, Forde Street Extension, Arouca, Farook Mohammed is the name of the contractor, \$66,900, started on September 18, 2014, completed on October 15, 2014.

Mr. Speaker, there were 12 infrastructure projects done by PURE in the constituency of Arouca/Maloney for the period 2012 to present.

Miss Hospedales: I did not ask about PURE.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Smith Street, off St. Johns Road, Arouca.

Miss Hospedales: Mr. Speaker, I did not ask about the PURE programme. [*Crosstalk*] I did not ask about PURE.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mootilal Moonan Engineering & Construction, \$187,257, started on October 01, 2012 and finished on March 21, 2013; 6th and 5th

Oral Answers to Questions
[HON. DR. S. RAMBACHAN]

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Streets, Dinsley Avenue, West Dinsley, Mootilal Moonan Engineering and Construction, \$135,759, started on January 24, 2012, finished on January 27, 2012; LP No 54, Street East—the third one—corner of Castleton Avenue, Mootilal Moonan Engineering and Construction, \$119,985, started on January 30, completed on January 31, 2012; fourth, Harvest Drive, off George Street, Arouca, Mootilal Moonan Engineering & Construction, \$187,656.43, started on January 02, 2012, completed October 02, 2012; 5th Street, Cane Farm, off Eastern Main Road, Trincity, Coosal's Construction, \$200,000, October 05, 2011, finished on May 17, 2012; 6th Street Cane Farm, off Eastern Main Road, Trincity, Coosal's Construction? \$300,000—[*Interruption*]

Miss Hospedales: What does PURE have to do with the Unemployment Relief Programme? [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan:—started on May 10, completed on May 17, 2012; access road to St. Barbara's Spiritual Shouter Baptist Primary School in Maloney, Coosal's Construction, \$4,177,295.65, started on July 25, 2012, completed on February 04, 2013; Eastern Main Road, from Five Rivers Police Station to KFC, Arouca, Jusamco Pavers, \$1,999,834.60, started on August 21—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member for Tabaquite, may I remind you that five minutes is allowed. You have exceeded that already. I think the Member is protesting over the fact that the answer is not being strictly relevant consistent with our Standing Orders. [*Desk thumping*] But the five minutes are up and we go on to a next question, please. We go on to question No. 26 by the Member for Arouca/Maloney. The five minutes is up for answering question 23, so we go to 26.

Transformed Life Ministries (Details of)

26. Miss Alicia Hospedales (Arouca/Maloney) asked the hon. Minister of the People and Social Development

Could the Minister state:

- a) Whether there are street dwellers housed at Transformed Life Ministries on behalf of the Ministry;
- b) The cost of housing each client there;
- c) The total sum of money paid by the Ministry to Transformed Life Ministries for housing the street dwellers during the period 2011 to present?

The Minister of State in the Ministry of the People and Social Development (Hon. Vernella Alleyne-Toppin): Thank you Mr. Speaker. There are currently 43 street dwellers housed at Transformed Life Ministries on behalf of the Ministry of the People and Social Development.

In answer to (b), the cost of housing each client at Transformed Life Ministries is \$4,000 per month. In answer to (c), the total amount paid by the Ministry of the People and Social Development to Transformed Life Ministries for housing street dwellers, from 2011 to present, is \$5,191,151.43.

Mr. Speaker: By agreement we are going to proceed to Senators who are here with us, and allow them to be asked their questions and allow answers to be given to those questions. In this regard we want to invite the Member for La Brea, and his question is question No. 13.

**Pointe-a-Pierre Refinery
(Status of Offline Units/Plants)**

13. Mr. Fitzgerald Jeffrey (La Brea) asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs:

- A. What is the current status of the units/plants in the Pointe-a-Pierre Refinery?
- B. How many of these units/plants are offline?
- C. How long are these units/plants expected to remain offline?
- D. What is the cost to Petrotrin as a result of these units/plants being offline?

The Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Kevin Ramnarine): Mr. Speaker, the answer for question 13 is as follows: Part A, the current status is that Petrotrin is working toward having all plants up and running, with the exception of the MTBE and No. 1 vacuum distillation unit.

With regard to part B, other than the MTBE and No. 1 vacuum distillation units, the major units that are out of operation are the fluidized catalytic cracking unit, or the FCCU, the alkylation unit, the acid plant, the No. 2 visbreaker, the No. 1 crude distillation unit, the No. 3 vacuum distillation and the No. 2 unifier.

With regard to part C, all the units, except the MTBE and No. 1 vacuum distillation unit will be available for operation within the next two to three weeks. The MTBE and No. 1 vacuum distillation unit remain offline for the foreseeable

future, for commercial and technical reasons.

As I said, we expect those seven plants that are offline, with the exception of the MTBE and the vacuum distillation unit, to be online in the next two to three weeks.

With regard to part D, the answer is: given that the gross refinery margins at Petrotrin and worldwide, outside of the United States, have come down in the last two years, for commercial reasons the refineries throughput had to be optimized, therefore the economic impact of plants that were offline was minimal. In addition, the company has been selling intermediate products, such as vacuum gas oil, and that also earns revenue. That concludes the answer to question 13, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Jeffrey: Supplemental. Hon. Minister, I am asking about the actual cost to Petrotrin. Could you give us a figure?

10.45 a.m.

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Yeah. Given the very complex economics of the refinery, and given the fact that the refinery margins have fallen, the refinery in itself is losing money, regardless of whether all the units are running or not running. Right? So therefore, the point I was making is that whether the units are online or offline, given the fact that globally the refinery margins have come down, whether they are on or off, it will have minimal impact on the overall economics of the refinery. To quantify the exact number is a very complex operation which would require a lot more time. But I am advised that the impact has been minimal, mitigated by the fact that the company is exporting intermediate products and not finished products which are required if those plants are online. So they are still earning revenue from the intermediate products.

Mr. Jeffrey: Further supplemental. But hon. Minister, if it is minimal then you are supposed to be able to have a figure.

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Supposed to—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Jeffrey: If it is minimal, you are supposed to have a figure.

Mr. Speaker: No. No. You ask a question, you do not make a statement. It is a statement. What is your question?

Mr. Jeffrey: Hon. Minister, could you give me a figure?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs.

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Yeah. No, that figure is subject to many scenarios for price and production, and there are 20-something plants in the refinery. There would be no one figure. There would be a figure based on different scenarios which are subjective and probabilistic.

Mr. Jeffrey: Further supplemental. [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Minister, could you tell me how much time you need to be able to supply that answer? [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Mr. Speaker, if the Member files a supplementary question which has more details that could inform the technocrats at Petrotrin as to how to answer that question, I will be willing to answer that question. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Joseph.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Thank you. Hon. Minister, could you tell us how long the cat cracker has been down, and the reason for it being offline as you said?

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Mr. Speaker, the cat cracker went down in April—was taken offline in April 2014, and it is expected to be back online shortly. My information is that there were some safety concerns which were expressed by the workers in the refinery as regards the cat cracker. The company hired Lloyd's of the United Kingdom to assess the safety and the viability of the cat cracker, and those recommendations are now with the company, and progress is being made to restart the cat cracker as we speak.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Further supplemental, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: That is the last one.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Thank you. To the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, is this the same cat cracker that went down in 2011 for over a year due to the incompetence of Petrotrin which cost the country over US \$400 million in lost revenue?

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Yeah. The cat cracker, Mr. Speaker, is a victim of the mass incompetence and failed procurement strategy of the Gasoline Optimization Programme under the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*] That is the same Gasoline Optimization Programme which caused the PNM—the Petrotrin board under the PNM—to have to go to the international market to take two bonds: one for US \$750 million, and one for US \$850 which has now saddled Petrotrin with a huge debt. That is the answer to that question. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for La Brea. Question 15, please.

Relocation of Residents Affected by the Oil Spill

15. Mr. Fitzgerald Jeffrey (*La Brea*) asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs:

When will the affected residents of the December 2013 oil spill in the coastal zone in La Brea be relocated?

The Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Kevin Ramnarine): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Crosstalk*] The answer to question 15 is as follows: no decision has been taken to relocate or not to relocate the residents of La Brea affected by the 2013 oil spill. Such a decision is not within the remit of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs. In addition, this matter is currently before the courts of Trinidad and Tobago. That concludes the answer.

Mr. Jeffrey: Hon. Minister, are you aware that two of your colleagues, the Minister of Housing and Urban Development and the then acting Prime Minister had made certain assurances to the people of La Brea about the whole question of relocation?

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: I am not aware. [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Speaker, I am not aware. I do not have that information. I will consult with those colleagues.

Mr. Speaker: Any further questions?

Mr. Jeffrey: No, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I go on to the hon. Member for St. Ann's East, question 35.

**Riverside Park Development, Santa Cruz
(Details of)**

35. Mrs. Joanne Thomas (*St. Ann's East*) asked the hon. Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development:

- A. What is the Ministry's position on the construction taking place in the Riverside Park Development in Santa Cruz?
- B. What is the Ministry's response to the signed "Objection Form" submitted by the residents?

The Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In response to question No. 35, the Ministry has no objection to the development of land within the area of complaint located along the western property boundary of the Riverside Park Development, Lower Santa Cruz.

Mr. John Yearwood on behalf of the Immortelle Plantations Limited, reference number T2B 0224, 2013 applied for outline planning permission on March 05, 2013 for the subdivision of 39 hectares of land located at Saddle Road, Santa Cruz by excision of 12 hectares to be further subdivided into residential plots. Outline planning permission was granted on July 22, 2013 to the developer, Immortelle Plantations Limited. As such, the development which took place sought to fulfil the requirements of the outline planning permission granted.

Part B of the question: matters of complaint to the Ministry are investigated by the Town and Country Planning Division in accordance with section 16(1) of the Town and Country Planning Act, Chap. 35:01. The following information represents the details and outcome of the investigation on the subject matter. Complaints were submitted to the Town and Country Planning Division on February 07, 2014, and on prescribed complaint forms on April 24, 2014.

The complaints stated that the residents of Riverside Park were informed that the Immortelle Plantations Limited proposed to develop 40 hectares of land; circumvent the construction of a new bridge to facilitate the proposed development by the utilization of the current bridge which was constructed by the State; facilitate the residential development, namely the Riverside Park Development, two schools, recreational facilities and a community centre, and utilize the road reserves within the Riverside Park Development to construct a roadway in order to connect the proposed development to the present bridge which services the existing schools and related facilities.

Two site visits were undertaken during the course of investigation into this matter. The first was undertaken on February 14, 2014, and revealed that two residual parcels of lands existed on the eastern and western property boundaries of the Riverside Park Development. The residual parcel on the west of the Riverside Park Development borders the length of the existing Riverside Park Development, and the other parcel on the east exists along the Santa Cruz river reserve. The cutting and felling of trees were being undertaken along the northern side of the Riverside Park Development and within lands owned by the Immortelle Plantations Limited.

The second site visit was undertaken on April 30, and this included personnel from the Town and Country Planning Division together with the developer from the Immortelle Plantations Limited. The developer indicated that he intended to use the residential lands west of the Riverside Park Development to access the site

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during the first phase of the development. It was not the intention of the developer to utilize the access road through the Riverside Park Development nor the strip of land bordering the Santa Cruz River to access the site as alleged.

A survey plan for 39 hectares was presented to the personnel from Town and Country Planning Division on the day of the site visit which showed access road reserves south and west of the Riverside Park Development. This plan was subsequently forwarded to the division on July 09, 2014. Further investigative research was undertaken which revealed the following information.

In response to the request of the Town and Country Planning Division, the Ministry of Land and Marine Affairs, Surveys and Mapping division provided on October 03, 2014 a cadastral sheet which confirmed that the Immortelle Plantations Limited has legitimate access off the Saddle Road. This access was within the same area that the complainants claimed that access was provided only to the school and related facilities.

The complaint made by the residents of Riverside Park Development was found to be invalid—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, you have exceeded your five minutes by one minute, in terms of the presentation today, in terms of the answer. If the hon. Member would like to ask any supplemental, you can do so now. The Minister will circulate the rest of the answer. So, you can ask supplemental, if you wish.

Mrs. Thomas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, I would just like if you can give me a copy of that report.

Sen. The Hon. Dr. B. Tewarie: Sure.

Mrs. Thomas: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: We go on to question 27, and the hon. Member for Arouca/Maloney.

Chikungunya Cases (Details of)

27. Miss Alicia Hospedales (Arouca/Maloney) asked the hon. Minister of Health:

- A. What is the total number of chikungunya cases nationally?
- B. What is the number of cases by region?
- C. Have there been any recorded deaths due to the chikungunya?

The Minister of Health (Hon. Dr. Fuad Khan): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The total number of chikungunya cases—the nationally confirmed cases—278. Broken down by regions: you will have St. George West—88 confirmed, suspected 1,923; St. George Central—70, suspected 1,616; St. George East—42, suspected 1,450; Caroni East—17, suspected 25; Victoria—11, suspected 221; St. Andrew/St. David—7 confirmed, suspected 143; Nariva/Mayaro—4 confirmed, suspected 86; St. Patrick—2 confirmed, suspected 47; Tobago—32, suspected 28, but that is incomplete; unknown 5 confirmed, and suspected 21. National total confirmed cases 278, and suspected cases approximately 6,160. Chikungunya—there have not been any recorded deaths due to the chikungunya virus.

**CEPEP Contractors
(Details of)**

33. Mrs. Joanne Thomas (*St. Ann's East*) asked the hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Development:

Could the Minister identify the names of the CEPEP contractors in the St. Ann's East constituency and their assigned locations?

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Thank you. Mr. Speaker, question No. 33: the following is the list of contractors and the regions or locations assigned for work.

Mr. Speaker, first A & Karen Building Maintenance, the areas include—their areas of work include Belmont Circular, Norfolk Road, Cascade Main Road, Belmont Circular South, Mckai Lane, St. Ann's Main Road, Hudson Road, Blanca Road, Foncette Road, Breezy Hill and Glory—[*Crosstalk*] St. Ann's East. [*Crosstalk*]

The next contractor, Tallier Maintenance Limited: Saddle Road, La Pastora Road, Blaizy Road, Akal Trace, Foster Block, Caprianna Road. Maracas Bay Enterprises Limited: Las Cuevas to Maracas Bay. Fennix Maintenance Company Limited, Grand Curucaye Road, [*Crosstalk*] how you pronounce that? Grand Curucaye Road—yes—La Canoa Road. Prudential Real Estate Agency Limited: Cantaro Village, Lower—what? [*Crosstalk*] Hololo Road—[*Crosstalk*]

Miss Mc Donald: “Yuh doh know yuh country.”

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, I am familiar with Cuchawan Trace. Mr. Speaker, [*Crosstalk*] please, please, they are harassing me here.

We are also informed that contractors have also completed a number of requests made by the very hard-working Member of Parliament for St. Ann's East. Mr. Speaker, and they have completed work on the request of the Member of Parliament on Ariapita Road, Riverside Road, St. Ann's Main Road, St. Ann's Avenue, Hutton Road, Cascade Main Road, Blanca Community, the Cotton Tree Foundation compound.

Mr. Speaker, contractors continue to be deployed throughout the constituency to satisfy the special requests of the Member of Parliament or any other elected Member of Parliament in those areas.

I just want to make the point that in answering the question why we list the areas of work for the contractors—because the contractors do not work according solely to constituency boundaries. The contractors work for region, and sometimes the region would include two or more electoral constituencies. Thank you.

11.00 a.m.

Mr. Speaker: I want to go back to Question No. 29, which I neglected to deal with earlier. I recognize the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West. The Member is approaching.

**Bridges in Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West
(Details of)**

29. Mrs. Patricia Mc Intosh (*Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West*) asked the hon. Minister of Works and Infrastructure:

Could the Minister state when the following bridges in the constituency of Port of Spain North/St Ann's West will be rehabilitated:

- A. The bridge at the end of Cascade Main Road near to Carlton Savannah Hotel and leading onto St. Ann's Main Road;
- B. The bridge at the other end of Cascade Main Road near to Massy Stores (formerly Hi-Lo) and leading onto St. Ann's Main Road?

The Minister of Works and Infrastructure (Hon. Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The question relates to the bridge at the end of Cascade Main Road near to Carlton Savannah Hotel and leading onto St.

Ann's Main Road and referred to as Bridge B1/1 Coblentz Road, or what is called the Coblentz Road Bridge.

Mr. Speaker, this bridge is scheduled for rehabilitation on what we describe in the Ministry as Phase 1 of the Bridges Reconstruction Programme. Construction is pending due to the confirmation of the availability of funds and funds were requested from the Ministry of Finance and the Economy on November 21, 2014. A contractor has been selected after due tendering and the contract will only be awarded when the confirmation is received from the Ministry of Finance and the Economy.

Mr. Speaker, the other part of the question relates to the bridge at the other end of Cascade Main Road near to Massy Stores and leading onto St. Ann's Main Road. Mr. Speaker, the bridge here is actually located at the corner of St. Ann's Road and Cascade Road.

Now, over the holiday period, I believe this bridge collapsed. There was a big hole on the top of the bridge. This bridge does not fall under the purview of the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure. It falls under the portfolio of the Ministry of Local Government, the Diego Martin Regional Corporation. But, Mr. Speaker, being the very responsible Ministry we are, when the Diego Martin Regional Corporation failed to respond, I instructed that the contractor be moved in there over the weekend, and overnight they moved in and began to repair the bridge. Since then, we have estimated the cost of reconstruction of the bridge to be just over \$2 million and in fact we have placed a contractor to do this reconstruction.

Mr. Speaker, the Diego Martin Regional Corporation should really be spending more time looking at the quality of their bridges and their roads in those areas, which they are failing to do. But I believe that the hon. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West did send out some emails around the place and she would have seen my response also, very quick response, within 24 hours of her sending out her email and within 24 hours we made the bridge accessible once more.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Hon. Minister, I think you are referring to the bridge up at Knights Bridge. There was a big hole up there. I am not referring to that one. I am referring to the bridge at the junction of the Cascade Main Road and the St. Ann's Main Road, which is exceedingly narrow. Cars have to wait. Traffic has to wait for one car to turn and another car. We want it widened.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: I am referring to the Cascade one, the Knights Bridge one because that is a very important one also—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Yes, I know.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan:—which you sent the correspondence on.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: I understand. Thank you.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: But the other one is on our bridges programme and we are doing the surveys and necessary designs and so on and looking at it that, yes. I know the one.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Because that one, hon. Minister, it is not under local government.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Yeah, I know.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Okay, thank you.

St. Ann's East URP Projects (Details of)

34. Mrs. Joanne Thomas (*Port of Spain North/St. Ann's East*) asked the hon. Minister of Works and Infrastructure:

Could the Minister identify:

- a) If there are any URP projects in the St. Ann's East constituency;
- b) If the answer to (a) is in the affirmative, please identify the managers and the locations of these projects?

The Minister of Works and Infrastructure (Hon. Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan): Mr. Speaker, contrary to what the Opposition certainly tries to sell as propaganda, that no work is being done in their areas, there is a difference between propaganda and fact. And with respect, therefore, to Question 34, between the period January 01, 2012 and November 12, 2014, 22 community and core projects were undertaken in St. Ann's East constituency, under URP.

Mr. Speaker, the manager of these 22 community and core projects was and still is Anthony Benneth, Regional Manager of the San Juan/Laventille URP Region #3.

The Member for St. Ann's East also wanted to know the location and other details of these community and core projects:

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No	Project Name	Location	Name of Contractor	Project Cost (\$)	Start Date	End Date
Over the Period January 1, 2012 to December 31, 2012						
1	La Fortune Road Box Drain Culvert & Retaining Wing Wall	La Fortune Road	Jah Simon Zion Lion Promotions	229,601.50	09/10/2012	17/09/2012
2	La Pastora Road Community Project	Cor. Capriata & La Pastora Road	Circo Construction Company Limited	162,810.50	21/08/2012	27/08/2012
Over the Period January 1, 2013 to December 31, 2013						
3	Grand Fond Road Ext. Community Project	Grand Fond Road Ext., Maracas	Pooran Ramsaroop	287,782.44	21/02/2013	27/02/2014
4.	Charles Street Community Project	Charles Street, Cantaro, Santa Cruz	Circo Construction Co. Limited	201,882.50	23/04/2013	07/03/2013
5	La Pastora Box Drains & Driveways	Capriata Road, La Pastora, Santa Cruz	Hadilya Environmental & Transport Services	405,985.00	21/10/2013	12/05/2013
6	Sosconusco #2 Box	Sosconusco Road #2,	Coastline Financial	416,702.50	11/04/2013	01/08/2014

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	Drain & Driveways	La Pastora, Santa Cruz	Services Limited			
7	Maracas St Joseph Community Project	Royal Road, Maracas, St Joseph	Robin Radhay Contracting Services Limited	485,334.50	11/05/ 2013	12/11 /2013
8	Hillview Community Project	Hill View Road, Off Laventille Road, San Juan	Grade A Construction & Services Limited	280,651.65	19/04/ 2013	15/05 /2013
9	Sam Boucaud Road Box Culvert	Sam Boucaud Road, Santa Cruz	Kreecon General Contracting Co. Limited	437,184.00	11/11/ 2013	02/10 /2014
10	Ramkisoan Community Project	Ramkisoan Trace Off Santa Cruz Old Road	Sewma Contracting Services Limited	264,820.01	06/04/ 2013	07/06 /2013

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, we have come to the end of the allotted time for questions for oral answer. In accordance with Standing Order 29(10), the unanswered questions will be postponed to a later sitting. Let us go.

Miss Mc Donald: Mr. Speaker, I just want to get the commitment from the Member for Oropouche East that the questions for written answers at Appendix II, whether they will be circulated today, please.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Leader of the House, would you be in a position to have all those answers circulated today, or would you want to indicate otherwise? Because we would not want you to give an assurance that you cannot meet.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, there are a couple questions that are already prepared for written answers before us and we will make them available.

Dr. Rowley: Which one?

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: But I cannot give the assurance that all the questions for written answers will be circulated today.

Miss Mc Donald: Which are the ones?

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: I will indicate to you as we proceed during the course of the Sitting.

Mr. Speaker: Okay, all right. Let us go.

Question time having expired, the following questions were not dealt with:

**St. Phillips Government Primary School
(Details of)**

47. Hon. Minister of Education:

- A. When will repairs commence on the electrical, plumbing and general infrastructure (not limited to the roof, yard, flooring, etc.) at the St. Phillips Government Primary School?
- B. Which companies have been contracted to complete the works?
- C. What is the estimated cost for completion of repairs?
- D. What is the projected date for completion? [*Mr. NiLeung Hypolite*]

**Escallier Government Primary School
(Details of)**

48. Hon. Minister of Education:

- A. When will repairs commence on the electrical, plumbing and general infrastructure (not limited to the roof, yard, flooring, etc.) at the Escallier Government Primary School?
- B. Which companies have been contracted to complete the works?
- C. What is the estimated cost for completion of repairs?
- D. What is the projected date for completion? [*Mr. NiLeung Hypolite*]

**Old St. Joseph Road (Bertie Marshall Boulevard)
(Details of)**

49. Hon. Minister of Works and Infrastructure:

- A. When will work commence on the paving of the Old St. Joseph Road (Bertie Marshall Boulevard?)
- B. What is the name of the contractor and the contract price?
- C. When is the estimated date for completion of the work? [*Mr. NiLeung Hypolite*]

**Lower Morvant Government School
(Details of)**

- 52.** A. Could the Minister of Education state whether a contractor has been appointed to rebuild the Lower Morvant Government School?
- B. If the answer to part (A) is in the affirmative, could the Minister state:
- i. the name of the contractor;
 - ii. the cost of this contract;
 - iii. why no work is taking place at this site; and
 - iv. the expected start date of this project? [*Miss D. Cox*]

**Solomon Hochoy Highway Extension
(Details of)**

- 58.** Could the Minister of Works and Infrastructure provide:
- a) the total number of households which were uprooted to accommodate the Solomon Hochoy Highway Extension;
 - b) the number of households compensated;
 - c) the number of households yet to be compensated; and
 - d) the number of the properties compulsorily acquired pursuant to the Land Acquisition Act and how many were acquired by NIDCO through private treaty? [*Dr. K. Rowley*]

FINANCE BILL, 2015

Bill to provide for the variation of certain duties and taxes and to introduce provisions of a fiscal nature and for related matters [*The Minister of Finance and the Economy*]; read the first time.

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

Finance Bill, 2015

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Question put and agreed to.

**FINANCE (SUPPLEMENTATION AND VARIATION OF APPROPRIATION)
(FINANCIAL YEAR 2014) BILL, 2015**

Bill to supplement and vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2014) Act, 2013 [*The Minister of Finance and the Economy*]; read the first time.

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

Question put and agreed to.

**STANDING FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT
(ADOPTION)**

The Minister of Finance and the Economy (Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai):
Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

Be it resolved that this House adopt the First Report of the Standing Finance Committee of the House of Representatives for the Fifth Session 2014/2015 Tenth Parliament on the consideration of proposals for the Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation for the fiscal year 2014.

Mr. Speaker, the Finance Committee of the House of Representatives met at 1.30 p.m. on Wednesday, January 07, 2015, and agreed on the following proposals with respect to the 2014 appropriation:

The committee agreed to:

1. The supplementation of the 2014 appropriation;
2. A variation of the 2014 appropriation; and
3. The write-off of losses approved for fiscal 2014.

The Finance Committee also noted the transfer of funds between Sub-Heads of the same Head of expenditure for fiscal 2013 and fiscal 2014, respectively.

Before I commence, Mr. Speaker, permit me to make a short remark on the fiscal operations for 2014, which have now been substantially finalized. The overall result is a much smaller deficit than previously advised. In keeping with our thrust to get to a balanced budget, the overall deficit for 2014 was just 1.5 per cent of GDP, a matter I shall return to later in my presentation.

Mr. Speaker, the first proposal which had been put to the committee was the provision of supplementary funds in the sum of \$450 million to bring to account

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expenditure funded by advances from Treasury Deposits in fiscal 2014. The second proposal was the variation of the appropriation for fiscal year 2014, in the sum of \$505,056,471. The third proposal was for the approval of write-off of losses in the sum of \$92,724.03, approved by the Cabinet during fiscal 2014. Fourthly, the Standing Finance Committee noted the transfer of funds between Sub-Heads under the same Head of expenditure in the sum of \$1,224,397,568 and also of \$767,434,547 for fiscal years 2013 and 2014 respectively.

Mr. Speaker, the total increase in the Heads of expenditure being proposed is \$945,056,471 and the total decrease is \$495,056,471. This represents a net increase of \$450 million, which is currently being sought by way of the Finance (Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation) (Financial Year 2014) Bill, 2015.

Mr. Speaker, the details of these proposed changes were circulated to all members of the Standing Finance Committee and discussed at the meeting of the committee held at 1.30 p.m. on Wednesday, January 07, 2015, where clarification was sought and provided, with respect to some of the changes to the appropriation for fiscal year 2014. Mr. Speaker, it is also anticipated that during the course of the debate that the proposals contained within the Bill will be addressed by some of the colleagues on my side.

Please permit, me at this time, to advise this honourable House that Head of expenditure for which supplementary funding is being proposed is under Head 69: Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, where an increase of \$450 million is being sought to retire advances made from Treasury Deposits to honour financial obligations associated with the extension of the Solomon Hochoy Highway to Point Fortin.

Members will recall that this matter was discussed at length during the committee stage and the committee voted in favour of the supplementation. Members will also recall that the hon. Minister of Works and Infrastructure provided extensive details concerning the progress of the highway to date and the amount expended to date.

Hon. Members are asked to note that in accordance with section 17(1)(b) of the Exchequer and Audit Act, advances made from Treasury Deposits are recoverable within 12 months after the close of the financial year in which the advances are made. And it is in respect of this, which is to recover the amounts which were advanced from the Treasury Deposit account, that this particular variation and supplementation is being requested.

Mr. Speaker, it is also necessary to have a variation of the appropriation in the sum of \$505,056,471 for the 2014 fiscal year for two main reasons. The first is an amount of \$55,056,471 to realign the provisions in the fiscal accounts in accordance with the new assignment of responsibilities to Ministers and the restructuring of Ministries as effected by the *Trinidad and Tobago Gazette* Nos. 45 and 98, Volume 53, dated April 15, 2014 and July 24, 2014, respectively and these are few in number and they are outlined in the Bill before us. The second is the sum of \$450 million to bring to account in part, expenditure funded by advances from Treasury Deposits.

Mr. Speaker, the Standing Finance Committee also agreed to the write-off of the sums totalling \$92,724.03 for 2014 under Head 63: Ministry of the Arts and Multiculturalism and Head 03: the Judiciary.

In the case of the Ministry of Arts and Multiculturalism, the write-off of the sum of \$36,934.58 represented overpayments to a messenger in the Ministry of Arts and Multiculturalism during the period November 12, 2007 to October 31, 2008. The Minister of Arts and Multiculturalism at that time was of the view that the officer had received a salary in good faith and that the overpayment was as a result of an administrative error and the Cabinet agreed to the write-off of the overpayment.

Finally, the Attorney General recommended, on behalf of the Chief Justice, the write-off in the sum of \$55,789.45, which represented overpayments to Miss Cecelia Roberts, a former Clerk Typist in the Judiciary during the period 1990 to 2007 and increments for the years 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2002. The hon. Chief Justice was of the view that the officer received a salary in good faith and that the overpayment was as a result of an administrative error and succeeded in getting the Cabinet to agree to the write-off of the overpayment. Hon. Members are reminded that full details on all of these write-offs were circulated to the Standing Finance Committee.

Mr. Speaker, I now refer to the transfer of funds between Sub-Heads of the same Head of expenditure. With effect from August 01, 1988, Cabinet delegated its authority to approve transfers between Sub-Heads under the same Head of expenditure to the Minister of Finance, now the Minister of Finance and the Economy, when it agreed, among other things, as follows: request for transfer of funds between separate Sub-Heads under the same Head of expenditure should no longer be submitted for the Cabinet but can be decided by the Minister of Finance and the Economy, on the advice of the Budget division.

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Consequently, in fiscal 2013, and in fiscal 2014, the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy approved the transfer of funds in the sum of \$1,224,397,568 and \$767,434,547 respectively between Sub-Heads, under the same Head of expenditure. The details of these transfers were provided in the documents which came to the Standing Committee and which were also circulated to this honourable House. It should be noted that the transfers were approved by the Minister of Finance and the Economy, based on notes from the respective Ministers requesting the transfer.

Mr. Speaker, it should also be noted that these transfers were requested to reflect changed circumstances in Ministries and departments and a consequential reordering of priorities. They do not increase the total appropriation in any way. Statements showing the transfers approved by the Minister of Finance and the Economy and the explanations for these transfers were attached to the agenda, which was provided to the hon. Members of this House.

Mr. Speaker, hon. Members may recall that at the time of the presentation of the 2014 budget in September 2013, the oil revenues were projected using an oil price of US \$80 and a gas price of US \$2.75. Based on these assumptions, among others, the total revenue projected for fiscal 2014 was \$55,040,000,000. Correspondingly, the forecast for expenditure was \$61,398,000,000 resulting in an anticipated deficit of approximately \$6.3 billion for fiscal 2014.

In September 2014, at the time of the preparation of the 2015 budget, the final revised projection for fiscal 2014 was prepared for inclusion in the Draft Estimates for 2015. The revised revenue was projected at \$59.9 billion and revised expenditure at \$64.8 billion, resulting in an anticipated deficit of \$4.8 billion.

This revised position was laid and presented to the Parliament at the time of delivery of the 2015 budget in September 2014 and these numbers were estimated numbers, given the fact that the fiscal year end had not yet been arrived at and therefore could not be determined.

The fiscal data for 2014 is now substantially finalized and the provisional outturn in central government fiscal operations for fiscal 2014, I am pleased to say, is now a smaller deficit of \$2.7 billion. This was \$2.2 billion less than the final revised projections and \$3.6 billion less than the originally budgeted projections when the budget was done in September 2013. The variance was mainly as a result of lower than projected revenue of \$1.6 billion, the effect of which was complemented by lower than projected expenditure of approximately \$3.8 billion.

I shall now move to apprise this honourable House, as required, of the details of the significant variances, with respect to revenue and expenditure.

Mr. Speaker, as indicated earlier, the revised revenue for fiscal 2014 was \$59.9 billion, whereas the actual amount collected, when we finalized the accounts, was \$58.3 billion. This resulted in a negative variance to the budget of \$1.6 billion. This was lower than the revised projections.

This negative variance was due mainly to lower receipts from taxes on income and profits of \$1.1 billion and under non-tax revenue of \$1.2 billion. These were partially offset by higher receipts under taxes of goods and services of \$475 million, as well as from taxes on international trade of \$158 million and unemployment levy of \$58 million. The net effect of all of these over and under collections resulted in a net variance of \$1.6 billion on our revenue side.

In the category of taxes on income and profits, receipts from the oil companies were approximately \$1.5 billion lower than anticipated mainly because of the non-payment of current liabilities by one state enterprise. This, however, has been now addressed and payments have been effected from October of this current fiscal year.

The lower take was partially offset—this lower take of \$1.5 billion approximately—by higher receipts mainly from other companies of \$196 million and from individuals of \$156 million, and these were mainly in the non-energy sector.

Under non-tax revenue, the lower receipts of \$1.2 billion resulted mainly from the royalty on payment on oil and gas, which was due to a fall in production by the oil companies and profits from state enterprises, \$515 million, which was due to anticipated dividends from the National Gas Company, which were not realized, as well as from the share of profits from oil companies with respect to production sharing contracts.

The lower take from the preceding categories was partially offset by higher receipts from taxes on goods and services of \$475 million, which reflected an increase in receipts from Value Added Tax of \$501 million, primarily due to activities in the energy sector, especially in exploration and production and refining and gas processing.

Secondly, taxes on international trade of \$158.5 million, which was due mainly to an increase in the volume and value of goods imported for local consumption.

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These explanations, Mr. Speaker, by and large explain the major variance, the largest elements, of the causes which resulted in the negative variance of \$1.6 billion, which we experienced on the revenue side of our revenue and expenditure statement.

11.30 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, I now turn to the expenditure side. The revised expenditure for fiscal 2014 was projected at the time of the presentation when we read the budget in 2015. The revised expenditure which we put forward in that statement was \$64.8 billion. The actual amount spent was \$61 billion, which was approximately \$3.8 billion lower than the revised numbers which were outlined when the 2015 budget was read. And again, these numbers which were included in the budget were estimates based on the best information we had at the time regarding expenditure for the year 2014. As you recall, Mr. Speaker, the budget statement was read prior to the end of September and therefore prior to the end of the fiscal year.

The major areas in which expenditure was lowered and projected were as follows: Personnel expenditure was lower by \$352 million. In this category salaries and COLA accounted for \$227 million of that \$352 million; salaries/direct charges accounted for \$24.3 million; and overtime/government's contribution to NIS and allowances for monthly-paid officers accounted for \$32 million, \$33 million and \$28 million respectively. These and other areas of lower expenditure were spread across the various Sub-Items under all Ministries and departments. Expenditure on goods and services was also lower by, in this case, approximately \$1 billion, and this was mainly under the subcategory of goods and services which accounted for \$799 million of that under expenditure, and minor equipment purchases accounted for \$242 million. The lower expenditure in minor purchases was due to delays experienced by Ministries and departments in the procurement processes and some of those acquisitions will possibly be completed during the course of this current fiscal year.

The second area—main area of expenditure—which contributed to the positive variance that we experienced was the variance of interest payments. These were lower than projected by \$102 million. The lower expenditure is attributable to the fact that there was a lower issuance of Treasury Notes and Treasury Bills than were anticipated in the revised projections, mainly as a result of the fact that there has been an overhang of liquidity. We had anticipated that the Central Bank would perhaps need to be more active in terms of open market

operations during the course of 2014. It turned out that there was no need for the Central Bank to do so and this resulted in a lower level of interest payments to the extent of \$102.8 million.

Mr. Speaker, current transfers were also less than projected by \$477 million. This was attributable mainly to lower levels of transfers to various organizations as well as to pensions and gratuities by \$125 million, to the IDF \$1 billion since supplementary resources allocated during the year were not fully utilized. The Tourism Business Development Company and Atrius Life Insurance Company also did not spend the allocations by the amounts of \$50 million and \$46 million respectively.

With respect to transfers to statutory boards and similar bodies, these were less than projected by \$451 million. Under the Tobago House of Assembly, expenditure was less than the revised projections by \$100 million since a number of non-cash transactions were not finalized, and under local government bodies a total of approximately \$348 million was not spent, mainly as a result of administrative delays in effecting payment of arrears of wages and COLA and allowances for daily-rated workers under the regional corporations. The Development Programme expenditure was also lower than projected. The expenditure was lower under the Consolidated Fund by approximately \$955 million and under the IDF by approximately \$410 million. So, Mr. Speaker, these were the main variances which accounted for the reduction in expenditure below what was originally anticipated resulting in a lower level of expenditure of approximately \$3.8 billion.

In summary, as I indicated previously, revised revenue amounted to \$58.3 billion for fiscal 2014 and revised expenditure amounted to approximately \$61 billion. This resulted in an overall deficit of approximately \$2.7 billion or 1.5 per cent of GDP, much lower than the original estimate which we had done when we read the budget at the start of the year when we were proposing a deficit of approximately 4.3 per cent of GDP.

Mr. Speaker, during the course of 2014 the Government was able to achieve its goals in respect of the continuing development of our economy and our society, notwithstanding the lower level of expenditure. Revenues have continued to increase and while it did not achieve the target which we had set at the start of the year, coming in approximately \$1.6 billion below budget, nevertheless the growth in revenues was commendable and was more or less in line with what we had anticipated. As a result, Mr. Speaker, as I said, the economy was able to

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achieve most of its results, and then when we speak to the Finance Bill later we will then seek to perhaps expand on the number of different areas in which the achievements were recorded during the course of 2014.

So, Mr. Speaker, in closing, I think we have clearly outlined the reasons for the variances by and large and we have indicated that the Standing Finance Committee of this honourable House had approved the supplementation and variations noted, and the write-offs, and noted the transfers which had been made during the course of 2014. I wish to reiterate for the record that the Standing Finance Committee met at 1.30 p.m. on Wednesday, January 07, 2015 and agreed to the supplementation of the 2014 appropriation, the variation of the 2014 appropriation, the write-off of losses approved for fiscal 2014, and noted the transfers of funds between Sub-Heads of the same Head of expenditure for fiscal 2013 and '14 respectively.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Dr. Keith Rowley (*Diego Martin West*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There is a very famous, well-known statement on the Roman Empire reflecting the behaviour of Nero as the flames reached for the skies and that was: Nero fiddled while Rome burnt. We are not Rome, Mr. Speaker, and the Minister of Finance and the Economy is no Nero, but what is happening in Trinidad and Tobago today is that Trinidad and Tobago is smouldering while the Government praises itself. There is smoke and there could be fire behind. [*Desk thumping*]

We have just listened, Mr. Speaker, to a highly acclaimed Minister of Finance and the Economy, only acclaimed last night by the Prime Minister, giving us a number of numbers, most of which are questionable and challengeable. But, I only have forty-five minutes on the floor of the Parliament and I would simply want to just touch on a couple of issues, not for the benefit of the Government, because this Government is beyond recall. “Stick break in their ears.” I will make it for you, Mr. Speaker, and for the population of Trinidad and Tobago, which cares to pay attention to our circumstances—we do not expect the Government to denigrate itself, we also do not expect the Government to spend our time and our money praising itself. What we expect from the Government is truth, clarity and a response to our problems—we are all in this together.

Mr. Speaker, none of the numbers that the Minister of Finance and the Economy mentioned a moment ago really should exercise us this morning. What should really exercise us is that request to put to book a \$450 million which the

Government issued Treasury Bonds for, to fund a project for which no proper funding had been put in place—and I will come back to that—and that very item characterizes the Government's treatment of us in the Parliament and the population, in that the Government does things; small things, major things, important things, damaging things and purports to govern in secret.

Had there not been a requirement for the matter of this \$400 million to be brought to the Parliament in order to allow the Minister of Finance and the Economy to close the accounts for 2014, the population would never have known, that over and above all the expenditure that we discussed in September in a national budget, saw a debate for days and nights in this House, numerous Government spokespersons led by a Minister of Finance and the Economy—and the other place, Members of the Opposition, Members of the Government, Members of the Independent Senate, not one of them, not one of us were able to address this matter, because it was only known to certain persons in the Government.

Public servants knew because they had to carry it out, but the political directorate knew what they had done, over and above the numbers that we discussed here in September, where you would have expected that the Minister of Finance and the Economy would have come clean and said, “listen, we have had to do this, we have taken \$400 million, issued Treasury Bonds and we have paid the contractors during 2014”. Not a word.

But now the law has forced them to come here, and that is the first time that we would know that they did that and we are now having to agree to what they have done. And you know how they explain that? Not that they did not tell us what they had done, you know, but like everything else, “the PNM did do that too, you know; the PNM had issued Treasury Bonds.” That is not the issue. That is not the issue.

The issue here is, a project which is the largest single project in the history of Trinidad and Tobago was improperly entered upon. It is now common knowledge. We started the Point Fortin highway before financing was in place. We know that. We are now happy to hear of all the benefits of that highway for the south, and how it will open up the south, and how it will do this, and how it will do that, all of those were the same benefits that were to be had when that project was conceptualized by the PNM. But, at that time, my friend the Member for Oropouche was leading a no highway group, he was emperor of the no highway group. *[Interruption]* Today, there is a man in this country dying and asking him to keep his word—

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, please, Standing Order 48(6), I led no anti-highway nothing. You are misleading. You are misleading and imputing improper motives.

Mr. Speaker: All right, the Member is saying that he led no such highway group and therefore you are imputing improper motives, so do not go there, please.

11.45 a.m.

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, let me rephrase my statement. There was opposition to the highway, led by certain politicians, among them my colleague from Oropouche East—[*Desk thumping*—]—when it was a PNM project.

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, 48(6).

Mr. Imbert: “Sit down nah man.”

Mr. Speaker: The Member is denying that the statement, in terms of his name being part of that opposition, I would ask you to refrain from referring to the Member if he is denying it. [*Crosstalk*] The word of the Member is his honour.

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I do not want to spend much of my 45 minutes, and I hope I get that injury time for the job—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal: He is lying. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, please.

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, I withdraw, I withdraw that, but do not spend ill-time—

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

Mr. Speaker: Please, Members, please.

Dr. K. Rowley: The concept and the existence of the highway is not the issue before us today, and I would engage him on another time, at another place. I will move on. I am saying that the project required the Minister of Finance and the Economy to inject \$400 odd million. We were not told that. That is the point I am making. We were not told that. We expected that our Minister of Finance and the Economy would have shared that information with us, because it represented an increase in our outlay. Because you see, Mr. Speaker, last night I heard the Prime Minister in an advertised address to the nation, praise herself and her Government. Her major achievement for her stewardship, was curbing wanton

spending in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Laughter*] I simply want to put that statement against the background that is the same Prime Minister and the same Government that has been responsible for five consecutive budgets in this country which were the five largest budgets in the history of Trinidad and Tobago.

And again, Mr. Speaker, if you listen to them, that sounds great, record breaking expenditure. I want to draw to the attention of Trinidad and Tobago what the International Monetary Fund has been saying to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, not only the Opposition is saying or David Abdullah or whoever, the International Monetary Fund. And the reason why I go to the International Monetary Fund, because if this Government continues pussyfooting and pretending that we are the only oil and gas economy which has no problem with that collapse of the oil price, then we are going to end up before the IMF, and therefore we need to know what the IMF thinks of us now.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, with your permission I would want simply to just go through the Article IV Consultations, as far back as 2011, because one of the things that the Government will tell us, if they have not told us already, is that this situation has come up on us, suddenly, we are surprised by it and our circumstance to respond to it is something we could not have done anything about. That is what they will tell us. Mr. Speaker, Article IV, Consultation, March 2011 talks about the strategy, the Government gave a strategy to the IMF.

“The strategy is based on partially reversing the recent large increase in transfers without withdrawing support to the most vulnerable, and containing expenditures on goods and services, while maintaining a high level of investment to support diversification.”

Mr. Speaker, that was 2011. That did not happen. The 2011 budget and others just kept on growing. Article IV Consultation 2012, and this is the IMF talking to and about Trinidad and Tobago:

“The adjustment strategy...”—so the IMF was talking to the Government about an adjustment strategy since 2012.

“The adjustment strategy should focus on rolling back transfers and subsidies to pre-boom levels while better targeting social benefits to vulnerable groups and strengthening the tax effort.”

That was the IMF. What did the Government do? Ignore that. They grew transfers and subsidies, they created the likes of LifeSport for more wastage in that area, and of course, they gave tax amnesty for properties and other things.

In 2013, Article IV Consultation, the IMF is very concerned now. And listen to the IMF talking to this Government:

“There is an urgent need to reengineer the composition of spending. Subsidies and transfers are on an unsustainable path, eating up a rapidly growing share of total spending, from 45 percent in...2007/08 to 53 percent in...2012/13. While some subsidies and transfers can be justified as improving equity and fostering positive externalities, others are poorly targeted at rich and poor alike and some may impose negative externalities.”

Put it in there. Put LifeSport in there. That was their prize. There was a Motion in this House to censure the Minister, the Prime Minister defended him. The Minister gave us a dissertation and it ended on the *Hansard*, “Great is LifeSport”. And today, they are coming here to bramble us with meaningless drivel and spurious accuracy on numbers, and the country is going to hell in a hand basket. The IMF goes on to say:

“The authorities agreed that subsidies and transfers needed to be reined in, but cautioned that this would be done over time to ease adjustment costs.”

Well time has caught up with us and the collapse of our revenues is now catching up with us.

What is the Government’s response? The Government’s response is business as usual. So we heard the Prime Minister’s address last night, addressing not one of the fundamentals that we expected, because if you admit now that you have admitted that there is a problem with revenues, any response to a reduction, not to mention the ameliorated terms that the Prime Minister used to treat with the situation, she talked about oil price moved, not collapsed you know, moved and downward trend. The whole world knows that oil price has collapsed. But in Trinidad and Tobago to have a “feel good” feeling for an impending election we are not using the real words of the real issue. The oil price just moved and the oil price is a downward trend.

But permit me, Mr. Speaker, to tell you where we came from on this matter, June 16, 2014, I am just going to run through the headlines here. The Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs who is the chief “misleader” telling us all is well in the energy sector, all is well. Collapse of oil price. Producers—*[Interruption]*

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: I think you cannot say a Member is a “misleader”. I understand what you are attempting to do but, please.

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, the statement of the Minister of Finance and the Economy which would have not comforted the informed in this country, by June 2014 he was reinforcing that investment in energy is at the highest since the downturn. Great! But what does that have to do with treating with the collapse now in our fiscal arrangements? And he is forever repeating to us that we have given acreage for drilling in the deep water. Even if we are successful in the deep water and we hope we will be, the first effect of that on our problem is 10 years away. Hands off the steering, cut the brakes and mashing the gas, that is what they are doing, and telling us about what we are doing in the deep water, and that is June, so we are comforted by that.

We come now to October, 2014, headline:

“Concern over drop in global oil prices”

We come to October 29, “Minister”, and I am not going to name any Minister because he would jump up again and take my time:

“Minister: oil price fall won’t hurt revenue”

These are the same people who are telling us now trust me. Reminds me of the fish tank with the little fish in there and the cat putting his foot in and the sign says, “Trust me, trust me”. They told us before, trust me.

“Minister: oil price won’t hurt oil revenue”

That was October, we are now in January. October 29, a Minister in this Government was headlined in this country telling us that the collapse that you are seeing on CNN and in all the oil markets in the world would not hurt us. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Please, please.

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, he would have his turn to respond. So we are guided by that. We have been told last night, trust me, I have the experience, I was there when oil was \$9 a barrel. Mr. Speaker, I never know that the Member for Siparia was part of George Chambers’ Government. Never knew that. To the best of this country’s record and the record in the oil world, oil price went to \$9 when George Chambers was the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] When George Chambers was the Prime Minister, and, Mr. Speaker, as a result of that, our challenged circumstance, George Chambers went on to have a very bad result at election later on. I was surprised last night, in an address that

meant to bring comfort to us and to trust the Prime Minister, we could not get the accuracy on a simple matter like that, that could be checked so easily.

Dr. Moonilal: Could I ask a question?

Dr. K. Rowley: No!

Mr. Imbert: “Sit down nah man.”

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, he is trying to distract me. He has the opportunity to speak after. Why is he trying to distract me? All I am saying, I was unaware that the Member for Siparia was a Member of the Government of George Chambers when the oil price went to \$9. Why is he attacking me? If he is aware of that he can say so. I am simply saying I was not aware that she was part of that Government.

Mr. Speaker, what has happened though, is that they have made that statement so often in their political discourse that they actually turn around now and believe it and repeat it in an address to the nation. That is what happened there.

But I go on, Mr. Speaker. By November the Minister of Finance and the Economy was telling us there is no need to worry, gas prices are up. That was the Government’s response to the global collapse in the energy sector, because they were believing that oil could collapse and go down to \$50, but gas price will remain high, and since we are now a gas economy, as was reinforced last night, gas will remain high and oil will go low, and since we are now selling seven times more gas than oil we are safe. What a complete misunderstanding of our situation. Oil and gas are linked as fuel in the world market and if oil collapses it is only a matter of time for gas to follow, and last night the Prime Minister confirmed that not only has oil collapsed, not only that gas has been following, but the Point Lisas Industries are also in line to report lower revenues to us. That is where we are.

And against that background—next we come to—we reach November 28: Howai says, the budget will not be revised in reaction to the steady decline in oil price. So why is the country surprised today that the Prime Minister addressed the nation last night and has not addressed the expenditure issues in this country? The Minister of Finance and the Economy told us a categorical statement, reported in the newspapers, Minister of Finance and the Economy, Larry Howai, says the budget will not be revised, and comes here today trying to bramble us with numbers that he does not know what he is talking about. And what he should have been telling us, Mr. Speaker, right, is how do you respond to our expectation for expenditure in 2015.

We had a budget here recently, and you, Mr. Speaker, I must commend you because you played a key role in guiding us to this place, where we brought the Parliament through review to the point where this year for the first time as part of the Standing Orders of the House we were able to sit here for days going through line by line item of what they propose to spend based on what we propose to earn in that record budget of 2015. And on many occasions I led that argument, Mr. Speaker, showing the Government where they had put increases in the budget which they could not justify.

There was one particular point in the proceedings where my friend from Pointe-a-Pierre, acting Prime Minister at the time, or sometime around then, he was answering questions, and it was clear that he and other Members in the Government were not sufficiently seized of the details of the numbers which were coming out in that examination. But the interesting thing is, at the end of the process they used their parliamentary numbers and annulled that process. Not a single dollar was changed; not a dot, not a comma, not a “t” was crossed; exactly as we went into the exercise showing where all these spurious increases were loaded, they passed the budget without making a single adjustment and now we have the commitment of the Minister of Finance and the Economy that there will be no adjustment, none.

12.00 noon

So now we come to a point where we are forced by external circumstances. Anybody in this country who is aware of world news—you do not have to be an energy expert, just listen to the news of what is happening outside, not only in our country but across the world, especially those countries that are energy exporters—hydrocarbon exporters—there is serious concern. In some cases there are crises acknowledged and in some areas even panic.

The President of Venezuela has gone abroad to try to get help abroad for Venezuela, which is one of the largest—I think it is the second largest oil exporter in the world. They have gone for help elsewhere. Russia is the largest exporter of gas to Europe. They are in trouble. The ruble is now hitting rock bottom, but in Trinidad and Tobago, “God is a Trini”, and the Government’s position, if one is to draw any conclusion from last night’s statement by the Prime Minister, is that this is only a temporary passing cloud and things will bounce back very quickly to a price of \$60-odd or \$70-odd.

Now, if that happens, then okay. Then we would not really be in too much difficulty. We will mosey along as we have been doing for the last year. But what

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if that prediction does not come true? Just think for a moment. So the Government should have been looking at a worst-case and a best-case scenario. The Government is looking at a scenario where “God is a Trini” and therefore we do not have to do what we are required to do in looking at the expenditure.

How should the Government have begun to look at this expenditure, Mr. Speaker? Mr. Speaker, there were a series of Heads in the budget we just passed where there were increases. Given what we are facing now, what is wrong with the Government looking back and rolling back our operations, let us say for argument’s sake, to the 2014 level? So, therefore, all the increases that we projected to engage in for 2015 because we expected to earn more money, why could the Government, since October to now, not be in a position to say to us, specifically, that those increases would be foregone because the revenues are not there to support them?

Even when the oil price was projected at \$80, the revenues would have been forcing us to fund those expenses by a huge deficit, which would have been operated by borrowings. Now the Government cannot deny that the revenues are way below what they were projected to be in September, and the Government still wants to maintain the projected increases which came to life in 2014/2015, September. This has to be madness. So I say to the Government today, one of the first things this Government must do is to pay attention and take action to forego the vast majority of increases. Let me give you an example.

Mr. Speaker, you know, a simple item, Sub-Item 62: Promotions, Publicity and Printing, the Prime Minister said to us that we are going to fund the essentials. True. But have we determined what the essentials are? In any serious government, the essentials would have been known. You can look at the text, go on the Internet, look at other governments. Essentials can be established, and therefore you know what you were talking about when you say essentials. In this Government, essentials mean promotions, publicity and printing, and therefore, this Government cannot tell us that \$250 million that is scheduled to be spent on that across Sub-Head 62, will be curbed, cut, curtailed, removed. No. So we are talking about budgeting at \$45 a barrel but remaining in the budget is a quarter billion dollars, for printing, publicity and promotions.

That is just one example. The Government says not a word about any action to deal with waste and corruption which are, in fact, the hallmarks of this Government. If the Government had said that, you would get a feeling that maybe something can be done.

Mr. Speaker, let me give you an idea of what is happening that has to be addressed if we are going to survive this. We have NGC—I came here before and I spoke to this country about the money at the NGC, which this Government is raiding when they did that waste water Beetham project there. I showed this country where \$400 million, which could have been saved, have been spent on that project simply by choice of contractor. I brought the documents here. What was the response of the Government? We had a Minister of Sport responding to an issue which involved the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs and the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources.

The Prime Minister oversaw a Minister of Sport responding, and telling the Parliament—I am not using the word, “mislead” because he will get up again—that the estimates at WASA did not include the pipeline but the price to the contractor includes the pipeline, and that explains the \$60-odd million that is in the contract. I went to the President of this country with the documents and the complaint and the *Hansard*. Mr. Speaker, I have not even received an acknowledgement. But the oil price out there is going down whether we like it or not and we have no control over that.

But then NGC not only has gone into building waste water treatment plant in that way, they are now the repairer of minor recreation grounds around the country. I have a list here. Three-quarters of them are in Siparia and Penal, in the Prime Minister’s constituency. But I will give you an example of three of them. These are contracts issued all in one day by a company called—contracts received by a company called Phoenix Project Management and Designs Limited.

Hon. Member: Oh my God!

Dr. K. Rowley: Phoenix Project Management and Designs Limited. This company, which was formed in 2011, received in one day, three contracts from NGC: one for \$3.5 million, one for \$5.5 million or thereabouts, and one for about \$9 million. But the interesting thing, Mr. Speaker, is that the company, having linked up with NGC to get those three contracts to upgrade three minor recreation grounds—one in Cumuto, one in Dubison Park and one in Gasparillo—the company does not want the country to know—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Diego Martin West and Leader of the Opposition has expired. Would you like to—

Dr. K. Rowley: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the question is that the speaking time of the hon. Member for Diego Martin West and Leader of the Opposition be extended by 15 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

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

Dr. K. Rowley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

So this is about 15—we are the sheikhs of the Caribbean, the oil barons. We could afford to spend \$15 million upgrading these three recreation grounds in ways that you could—when you examine the details, you will see how we do it: you know, 20 benches in a pavilion, \$7 million. Twenty concrete benches in a pavilion, \$7 million! We could afford that, man. We are Trinidad and Tobago. “God is a Trini”, right? But the company, when it was formed in 2011, the address of the company was 23 Rivulet Road, Brechin Castle, Couva.

Mr. Imbert: Where is that?

Dr. K. Rowley: SIS compound.

Mr. Imbert: “Ah know dat.”

Dr. K. Rowley: That is the same contractor that was building a house for a major government official and was moved to paint off the name of the contractor off the equipment. They now form a company, 23 Rivulet Road, Brechin Castle, getting those contracts I just described. They are kind of worried, you know, that the population might find out, so they went now and changed the address. The company’s address changed to 15 Kino Crescent, Fourth Avenue, Orchard Gardens, Chaguanas. Same company, same directors. But they are not sure that they have hidden it deeply enough. One month later they go and they change the address again to another location. So by changing the address of the company they believe that they are hiding from the population what is going on with the raiding of moneys out of NGC to these individuals.

When you look at the directors, the directors are employees of SIS.

Mr. Imbert: Imagine that.

Dr. K. Rowley: SIS employees.

Hon. Member: “Dey ha no shame.”

Dr. K. Rowley: That is how the money is being shovelled out of the state enterprises into these situations, and that is only one scratching of the surface. As

I speak to you now, the NGC cannot come before this country and tell us, with a straight face, that they have been properly managing the \$12 billion in their account. They have opened the door for the Government to advise them how to spend it. That is how it is being spent.

Then last night we heard the Prime Minister talking about NGC's subsidiary, Phoenix Park, being sold. Not only has the Government not addressed this issue of expenditure in profligate budgets, but they are now saying to the country, we can afford it. Not only are they saying that this thing is very temporary and it will blow away and we will get over, and we have the right people in office because they were in Chambers' government, they will get over, they are saying, "Do not worry, we have assets that we can dispose of".

And the disposal of those assets, as mentioned last night, should worry the people of Trinidad and Tobago because the worst time to try to sell these assets is in the current market environment, and the worst time to do it is under a Minister of Finance and the Economy whose last attempt at an IPO was a public scandal at FCB which, today, is the subject of criminal investigation, but the Prime Minister says it was a resounding success, and we are now going to have an IPO at Phoenix Park. And, of course, if we try to sell Phoenix Park now, the value of Phoenix Park has to be a reduced value because of the current outlook in the energy sector.

What kind of mad people are these in charge of our affairs? So what we are being offered is not an assessment and candid statements about policy and actions about expenditure to cut our cloth to suit what we have, but we are talking about a potential fire sale of state assets to create money to be consumed in the current account to maintain the status quo.

Mr. Speaker, I warn this Government that if we continue along this road, we are going to end up in the clutches of the IMF and the IMF is going to tell us how to rectify it. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, in one of these articles that I read last night, listen to what the Directors of the IMF recommended to the Government because they are looking at us, you know:

"Directors recommended developing a medium-term fiscal framework that strikes an appropriate balance between consuming, saving and investing energy revenue, with a view to resuming net savings of energy wealth for future generations. Containing real increases in transfers and subsidies, strengthening tax collection efforts, and broadening the tax base would facilitate a gradual return to fiscal surpluses and further improve policy buffers."

Those are the prescriptions that the IMF has for Trinidad and Tobago. They have already advanced them to this Government. This Government has ignored every one of them. Every single one I have just mentioned, they have been ignored. The Government is now boasting about what they have done, and they never did this about tax and never did—they are not telling you that if things do not go well for us, these are the prescriptions.

They tell us that we have a—the response to the collapse in oil price is a reduction in the gas subsidy because lower oil price means lower gas subsidy. But, obviously, it is a zero sum. It also means lower revenue. The same thing that brings down the gas subsidy has also brought down the revenue, so you are in no improved position by pointing to the reduction in the subsidy. There is still a huge subsidy. What we want to hear is the attempt to reduce the subsidy by pegging premium fuel at the world marked oil price the last time out. What has happened with that?

12.15 p.m.

Now that oil price has collapsed, what is the formula being used to keep that price where it is in the local market? Tell us that. No conversation on that. These are the policies that we live by. These are the dollars that we spend. They are not there at all. They are completely focused on elections and on their own survival—the impossibility. And the issue that should form our national conversation, let us take foreign exchange. I had to hear the Prime Minister last night talking about preserving stability in this country.

Mr. Speaker, this Government appointed nine people to the Central Bank Board so as to be able to have no objection to the Governor of their choice. As I speak to you now, the Governor's tenure is marked by two accomplishments: one, destabilize the foreign exchange market and, two, he printed a UNC \$50 bill painted yellow. Right? They print their own money now. But the trouble is this: when we had a fairer and stronger foreign exchange inflow, a foreign inflow that was stronger from better revenues, we had a foreign exchange problem and a destruction of confidence.

The future quarters—next quarter and the quarter after—I am projecting to you now, Mr. Speaker, that notwithstanding the Government's attempt to tell the country all is well, the business community is already saying they are stressed by an inability to access the required foreign exchange. That is going to get worse because the Government has not addressed that problem of our external balance. They have not addressed the problem of the lower inflow of foreign exchange, but

what they will do irresponsibly is to draw down on the reserves in the Central Bank for the months that they have left to pretend that all is well and to tell us that the exchange rate has remained stable. They are not telling us it is by the edict of the Governor of the Central Bank who one morning revalued the currency. When this problem started with the shortage of foreign exchange the currency started to move, and how was it dealt with? The Governor got up one morning and with his pen just revalued the currency back to where it was in 2010. That is their management of our economy and everything is okay.

Mr. Speaker, I went to the bank a few days ago to get US \$900 to pay a bill. I was told I could not get more than US \$500. And I was talking to a colleague on the phone, the same day, he is in the bank trying to get US \$50—fifty dollars he cannot get. But the Government is telling us about the stability that they preserved in this country. The one thing that we did not have in Trinidad and Tobago for years, for 15 years, was concerns about the availability of foreign currency for domestic use and small business use and for the big bank use in Trinidad and Tobago. The Governor of the Central Bank has changed all of that.

So this country could believe if they wish that this country is in good hands from people who cannot even tell you where they were when oil was \$9 a barrel, from people whose record are record-breaking budgets, from people who admit that there is a problem with our revenue—a serious problem—where we are now pitching our revenue expectations with oil at \$45 a barrel, but not addressing the issue of expenditure.

Mr. Speaker, throughout the budget, throughout this document, there are series of columns in every Head where this Government in the last four months set out to spend more. All I am asking the Government to do is to start with that. Roll back those projected increases of the budget of 2015. Just roll them back, and when you do that, Mr. Speaker—and it does not have to be *carte blanche*—prioritize, but prioritize in a way to acknowledge that we do not have what we expected to have.

Listen to this thing, Mr. Speaker. When this Government came into office the highway from Point Fortin to Mayaro was more advanced in its preparation in terms of an ability to go forward with the contract. In fact, if my memory serves me right, Member for Diego Martin North/East, there might have been a contractor already lined up for that contract, and the engineering and all of that might have been in place. It was ignored for four and a half years. The Government embarked on the highway to Point Fortin as its number one priority as a continuation of what was going on there. Okay! Now, that project started

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without finance. Last night, our Prime Minister told the country that what the Government will do is to stop all projects for which financing is not in place. Well, project number one for which financing is not in place is the Point Fortin highway. Should I interpret that to mean that the Government intends to stop the Point Fortin highway? Because if she says no and if he says no, then the statement last night was not a truthful statement because that is project number one for which there is no financing.

In fact, only Wednesday the Minister of Finance and the Economy admitted that, and worse insofar as it was being financed he admitted from day one and now it is being financed from current account inflows. This collapse of oil price depresses those inflows and, therefore, we need to hear something categorical from the Government about this major project against the background of these inflows and its location for funding. Not a word about that. So I am calling on the Minister of Finance and the Economy now to tell us when he is winding up, address that issue against the background of what the Prime Minister said last night; or I expect that the Prime Minister will enter the debate and explain what she meant by that because that is not the only project. There are other projects, but that one is the one that is the largest and standing out. Are we going to slow it down? Are we going to adjust? Are we going to stop it? But you tell us projects for which there is no financing in place will not be proceeded with knowing that that project is the poster child for such projects. And, of course, Mr. Speaker, all the leakages that are taking place in the system, like LifeSport, like the SIS contracts through the various companies in various addresses, how are we going to stop that in a situation where we do not have the revenues?

This Government has not addressed the country's problems. What we got was a campaign speech for which we will address every item in there because we too will have our platform to respond, but in the meantime that is not the issue before us. The issue before us is how we balance our revenues and our expenditure to try and preserve the economic and social stability of Trinidad and Tobago. This Government is out to lunch, the Prime Minister is off to Mars and their supporters are in cloud cuckoo land. Trinidad and Tobago is in grave danger of losing all the gains that we have made. I call on the Government to address the expenditure issues starting with the increases that they put in the budget three months ago and all the waste and corruption that is associated with this Government.

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

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, had the hon.

Member allowed me to ask him one question when he was on his legs it would have saved this entire contribution, but he could not and did not permit me to ask him one simple question when he was on his legs, and I will begin with the one question and then go to my contribution. Is the Member aware that in December 1998—and I want to get this absolutely right now because, you see, he is not aware, and not being aware you have the capacity to mislead yourself, your party, your country and the world, and this is from someone who is aspiring to be Prime Minister and head of Government of this country.

In response—and I will take it slowly—to a statement made by the Prime Minister last evening, the Prime Minister said—and I want to quote her as well—in her statement and I quote:

“It is noteworthy to recall that when I was a member of the Government in the 90’s the oil price fell to as low as...\$9 per barrel, yet the economy was kept strong, investor confidence remained high and stability was maintained.”

This is the Prime Minister last evening.

In response to that the Leader of the Opposition caught immediately and jumped up like a muppet to make a statement immediately after the Prime Minister’s speech, said—and he is quoted today in the *Newsday*, page 5, January 09, and repeated it again in the House as if the intention is to repeat and repeat and repeat what is wrong. Came even more frivolous this morning to state that the Prime Minister did not know whether she was in the Government in the 90’s or Chambers’ administration in the 80’s. The quotation in the *Newsday* is the Leader of the Opposition saying to his knowledge, “the only administration in this country which experienced an oil price of...\$9 per barrel was that of the...George Chambers...”—administration, and this morning asking in his cantankerous way, whether the Prime Minister was serving in George Chambers’ administration.

Mr. Speaker, as a Leader of the Opposition you have at your disposal researchers, you have at your disposal information technology, you have at your disposal, I imagine, a group of economic advisors because you are aspiring to lead a country. Anyone of them could have checked with the United States Energy Intelligence Agency which would have told you that Brent North Sea Crude traded at \$9.10 per barrel in December 1998. You could have checked that, but you were not interested. But said once, said twice, said three times, it was the George Chambers’ administration had to face \$9 a barrel of oil. That was July 1986 the price of oil was nine dollars (\$9.00) a barrel—July 1986. In December 1998 when Mrs. Persad-Bissessar was in the administration of Panday, it was

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\$9.10. The US Energy Intelligence Agency—you should have known that. He should have known that. He was a Member of the Opposition then. Brian Kuei Tung was Minister of Finance in the year 2000, and in Brian Keui Tung’s budget presentation on August 28, 2000 he said and I quote:

“Oil prices this year”—Mr. Speaker, had been—“\$16 per barrel”—that is 2000—“oil prices only two years ago dropped to \$9 per barrel”—1998.

So you were wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong. You were wrong and then tried to repeat it 100 times to portray that the Prime Minister was in George Chambers’ administration. So admit now immediately that you were wrong. You were wrong, admit it.

As Leader of the Opposition of this country you were wrong and I could say it worse, but it will be unparliamentary that you were wrong. And if you were wrong with that point which you play as a record and try to beat up, then you will be wrong in almost everything again.

Mr. Speaker: Please, please, please.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Say you were wrong, Okay. Moonilal correct you. You were wrong. You were wrong, so let us begin there.

So you could apologize to the Prime Minister and the country at some other time. I really do not have time for you and your apology on my time. You were wrong! Do you know what is frightening? You could have checked this easily. When you heard it last night you could have said, “Well George Chambers regime, let me just check between 95 to 2001 if under that administration the price of oil fell”, and you would have found out instead of coming and making a gallery of yourself and really, it is unbecoming. You cannot even return as Opposition Leader with that type of approach. With that type of approach you will not even aspire to be Opposition Leader.

Mr. Speaker, having dealt with that I want to continue here. The Leader of the Opposition also spent a few moments on a matter that I really never needed to, I do not want to deal with it because you know, I do not get involved with these petty fights with this serial hunger striker that we have here. I do not get involved in that. I move on. I have enormous work. I do not have time for that type of thing. But you know, the serial hunger striker and his team speak about the Member for Oropouche East being in the leadership and stopping the highway. When I was in Opposition I think the Sunshine man also says the same thing, stopping the Opposition, I was opposing the highway and I led—

Mr. Speaker, when they said that, sometime I check myself just in case because in public life you could actually be saying something and five, 10 years down the road you forget. I checked the record—in fact, I checked the pictures too. I checked record and I checked my album.

12.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, when the constituency of Oropouche, then it was Oropouche, I represented those people in the areas affected: Gopee Trace, Tulsa Trace, Banwari and so on. I represented those people. When the matter of the highway came about under the former administration, they sent people—one morning, the people of those areas wake up and “they see ah man in ah jumper suit over dey fence by the duck pond, dey see one by the fowl coop, dey see people pulling all type ah wire and pulling tape and just jumping over dey fence in boots and thing” and they did not know what was happening. Nobody told the community that we were going to build a highway and we are doing surveys and all that type of thing. They came to me, I jump in.

I wrote the Ministry of Works. I think around that time, the Member for Diego Martin North/East was the Minister of Works. If not him, the current Chairman of the PNM. There was a guy by the name of Steve Garib Singh. I think he is still there. Ronald Nurse was at Trintoplan. He left now. Mr. Speaker, I wrote them. I wrote for information. When I led a demonstration at Trintoplan in Trincity—I have the pictures of the placards—we were saying we want information. What are you doing? Share the information with us. Which highway you are building? Where it passing? Nobody knew. Mr. Speaker, I went to Trintoplan with a protest.

Then, members of that community—a few of them who are now aligned with the serial hunger striker—came to me. They said, “We have an alternative route”. I said, “Well, this is brilliant you have alternative route”. They said, “We have a route that will have less impact on environment, less impact on human dislocation”. I said, “Brilliant, bring that plan”.

Mr. Speaker, they came to my office in Debe Junction. I have pictures. We put up map of this new reroute plan. I called in the engineers at the Ministry of Works, the technical people. I called in Trintoplan. I called in colleagues of mine who I knew were from the university. I said, “Look, the villagers have a plan”. They went and they took months and they did an independent assessment of these plans. They came back to my office for a meeting and they said, “Listen, Mr. MP, we want to tell you, we have checked these plans and so on, it cannot work”.

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I then asked the author of the plan—the gentleman who is now with these reroute people. I asked him, “Tell me something, by the way, what is your qualification and how you draft up these plans?” He say, “Listen, I am really a retired daily-paid worker in the Ministry of Works” and for six months, “he sit down and watch the rain fall and six months, he observed the rain falling and where it running, in which drain and canal” and he came up with the plan. I said, “Well, thank you very much”.

I called in lawyers, including the Member for St. Augustine and other lawyers. I said, “Let us work with the community so that we can get the compensation issues clear so that if people have to move, they can be properly compensated. That is what I did. Prakash Ramadhar was one lawyer, there were many others.

So we were working with the communities on compensation after our initial grievance of not having information on the highway and that was it. To say, “I stop highway and I block highway and I was blocking highway then and supporting highway now” is rubbish. I allowed them to say that for a few months, eh, because is not everything you have to correct people. There are times when people could be wrong and really, there is no purpose in helping them. But today, the Leader of the Opposition comes on *Hansard* and puts information that is wrong—not one piece, several pieces. I am coming to them now. So, Mr. Speaker, I just dealt with that, I want to move on again.

Mr. Speaker, today when we expected the Leader of the Opposition to come to this House and tell us, recognizing that there is a challenge—clearly there is a challenge with the fall in oil prices and the impact on revenue and a further impact on deficit. What is the plan that the Leader of the Opposition come with? What is the plan? What is the economic plan we heard? The Leader of the Opposition took about five reports from the IMF and starts telling us what the IMF say. So, are we now to conclude that the PNM’s economic plan for this country is being dictated by the International Monetary Fund, and it is a PNM IMF economic policy that this country could expect, God forbid, they return to office? Because there was no economic plan; there was no economic policy but to repeat Article IV Consultation Reports for the last three years.

So that the population must understand that the PNM will implement policy proposals of the IMF and all the implications that go with that, because they did not consult Lester Henry or whoever else they does consult and so on—they did not consult them. They did not tell us what their economic team in the Opposition office is telling us. *[Interruption]* No, no, no, they tell us what Article IV of the

IMF is telling us and the key proposal of the IMF: transfers and subsidies, transfers and subsidies. Watch that, cut it, deal with that.

That is the approach historically of the PNM. That is the approach and the Leader of the Opposition jumped over that nicely. I like that, man, I like the words. He said, "We have to roll back operations". What is roll back operations? That is cut subsidies. They are on record already as saying they will dismantle the Ministry of Local Government. They are on record as dismantling the Ministry of Tobago Development. By election time, they dismantle about 10 more Ministries. Thousands of citizens will be out of employment, out of a job. So when you dismantle local government, where the people will go to work? On Mars?

So, Mr. Speaker, they are going to dismantle local government, dismantle Ministry of Tobago Development. That is what they are doing. And hear the code words today from the Leader of the Opposition: "we have to roll back operations". "Way you rolling back? Which operation you rolling back?" According to what the IMF said. That is what they do. But where is the policy? Where is the proposal coming from the Leader of the Opposition that, having faced this here, what will we do? Where will be the areas that we are cutting? They have no proposal. All they have to stand up on is the IMF and the IMF policy proposal which is to look at transfers and subsidies. That is what they have.

Then quoting the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs or any other Minister to say, in October, the Minister says oil prices will not affect revenues. But in October, the price of oil was above \$80 a barrel. So if it was said in October, the price of oil was above \$80 a barrel which was budgeted for, but by January, the price of oil, it is different. It is 40-what? Eight?

Mr. Cadiz: Trading at 50 today.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Trading at 50 today. So there is a fundamental difference between a statement made in October in that context and what is made today. Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition, without any economic plan and any economic policy, comes today with Article IV IMF. That is the PNM manifesto: Article IV of an IMF Consultation Report and that, Mr. Speaker, is where we have to go with them.

Then they addressed the issue of that highway and the financial plan for the highway. But you see, borrowing is something they do well. They borrow well, Mr. Speaker, and anytime they borrow, who paying it back? Who paying back? Always is a non-PNM Government and the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago have to pay back because you would not be there. I always liken them to a dinner

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guest: you eat and you drink. You start off with appetizer, you go to the main course, you have dessert, you have brandy and when the bill comes, they jump up and they gone to the washroom. They left us with bills. The contractors, over \$2 billion we had to pay.

When they left us—they do not like to hear me but I have to say it, I am sorry—with a \$20-billion crisis with CL Financial and HCU which we had to face, which we managed. [*Crosstalk*] It is your—you are asking if it is the PNM? But it is your Minister of Finance—the former Minister of Finance on Old Year’s Day. “Yuh want meh go through the story again?” [*Crosstalk*] “Yuh understand.” That was the level of deception. When a Minister of Finance of their administration gone on Old Year’s morning—how she was dressed? In “ah duster, ah petticoat with curlers in she hair when she should be home preparing for ah dance in the evening. Went down dey, bail out she money, call back. De mother went and bail out dey money too. Ah Member opposite went and bail out dey money too, one ah them.”

Mr. Cadiz: But one did not.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: “Buh one did not.” One bail out and she had authority from high powers to bail out the money but another one did not have the authority from high powers to bail out their money.

Hon. Member: Who is that, boy?

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: So right here—right here in the House, “woman gone bail out because the authority”.

Hon. Member: She forget to tell the next one.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Yeah, the one who used to talk to God tell her go and bail out “she” money. And the next one, when she went, she say, “Well, ah ha money too”. He say, “Nah, nah, doh worry, you leave that. Things go look better in a little while.” There, they controlled the Treasury. Their Minister of Finance went and bail out “dey” money and one of their colleagues sitting with them went and bail out their money too. And when the next one come, they say, “No, you wait”. And they know who I am talking about, they know very well, but that was their management of the economy.

When the Point Fortin Highway sod was turned, the Member for Chaguanas West—my friend from Chaguanas West, I understand, most people are leaving him around now. The former Vice-President of the Senate walked out. “Is ah bare Jack we left with standing there.” But my friend for Chaguanas West, we went to

the end in Golconda—bare Jack—and we turned the sod. Big, big backhoe and tractor and thing come down there. We turned the sod, you know, with the Member for Chaguanas West, Minister of Works—and I think—Transport at the time. The Member, of course, left us. Today, synchronizing and aligning his thinking with the Member for Diego Martin West. So if you have questions to ask about the financial structure and financial plan for the highway, ask the Member for Chaguanas West.

Dr. Rowley: “Is you bring him here.”

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Ask him. You wanted him out until you embrace him now. So, Mr. Speaker, let them ask the Member for Chaguanas West: where is the financial plan? Where is the financial structure for the Point Fortin Highway? Where it is? [*Crosstalk*] Where it is? [*Crosstalk*] “Yuh see?”

So, we embarked upon the San Fernando to Point Fortin—[*Crosstalk*] I have the speech right here with me. I do not want to read it at length. But I have the speech by the Member for Chaguanas West when that highway—the sod was being turned for that highway and the benefits on how he—the Member of Chaguanas West condemned the former administration for promising this and never delivering and so on, and indicating that financing is in place and we have a financial plan to execute works for the San Fernando to Point Fortin Highway. We are paying the money. The money is coming from the Treasury. It was felt that we can finance that highway from the Treasury. There was no need at the time to go and borrow because when you borrow—“they like paying interest. They like paying interest.” Interest is what they do.

This is why I have to repeat that when they were undertaking the Government Campus, they had to borrow the \$2.4 billion in 2006. [*Crosstalk*] No, but they wanted you to go and borrow—how much for the highway to Point Fortin? Five billion, eh. Two point four billion dollars they borrowed. They made a deal with FINCOR in Trinidad and a company called Bear Stearns in the United States. Bear Stearns is the company that collapsed; \$2.4 billion. The net effect of that, Mr. Speaker, when that deal fell apart in 2008, is that FINCOR had to take up the slack and today, because of those arrangements, the taxpayer is paying \$1 billion in interest on the Government Campus plaza. À la PNM. [*Crosstalk*] And you are right. To outfit that alone is “ah” next billion dollars. We are outfitting one million square feet of office space at the tune of over \$1 billion. But they borrowed for that because they like borrowing.

So when they borrow—[*Crosstalk*] I will tell you who building my house, the same one who “fix yuh Jacuzzi”. [*Crosstalk*] “Yeah, the same one who fix yuh

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Jacuzzi. The same hardware in Marabella yuh does buy from, right dey, dey fixing mine too.” [*Crosstalk*] “We go talk about that.” Mr. Speaker, Bear Stearns collapsed on them. “Ah billion dollars” in interest payments, this Government and the taxpayers have to foot now because of those arrangements they went in borrowing to build the Government Campus.

Mr. Speaker, the International Waterfront, I will come to that because you see, Mr. Speaker, there is an interesting thing that happened here. “I ent going to talk about anybody who dead and so on, eh.” But the Ministry of Housing was always “ah pet” Ministry to the PNM because the former General Secretary was there as well.

12.45 p.m.

In the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development today, is also the Property Division. The Property Division and Real Estate was previously in the Ministry of Public Administration and Information, headed by a then Chairman of the PNM. So a lot of the business that they did—the Member for San Fernando East, he did through the Ministry of Housing and the Ministry of Public Administration, and there was a reason why that was done. It was because the Chairman and General Secretary of the PNM were the leaders of those two Ministries.

So that, Mr. Speaker, the International Waterfront project today, under our Ministry—because the Property Division is with us—we have to foot another massive multi-billion-dollar bill on the International Waterfront Complex, under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, that they embarked on because they like borrowing, and if they come back, God forbid, they will borrow and borrow and borrow, and run up interest and interest and interest.

So we are trying to build the highway to Point Fortin from the Treasury, and as we collect revenue, we build. As we collect, we pay. We owe money. You are always owing money in this business. You owe contractors money, \$200 million here, \$200 million there. We will pay and we will get the highway done. They want to tell us to borrow money as they did with the Government Campus, which God alone knows when “we paying off for dat”.

Mr. Speaker, the International Waterfront, the project there, for the International Waterfront project, we are paying on that a commitment for \$3.4 billion. This is done by 29 semi-annual instalments of \$170 million for 14½ years. The taxpayers will pay 29 semi-annual instalments of \$170 million. So before you even start about the price of oil and what it reach “an ting”, just put money aside to pay on those massive loan commitments that they undertook, and now telling us: “Go and take more money, borrow more money for the highway to Point

Fortin”, that is their position. [*Interruption*] And the price of oil, when they borrowed that money, we should check. Well, he “cyar check”, because he did not know, Mr. Speaker.

And to hear them come today, and talking about NGC and we “trying to raid de Treasury” and raid NGC. The Leader of the Opposition telling us that NGC is now repairing grounds and pavilions and so on. NGC is doing that today and this is our way of, you know, raiding something.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin West, before he was fired was a prominent Member of the Cabinet. The late Awong, Keith Awong was Chairman of NGC, I believe under their administration. NGC was always involved in upgrading recreation grounds and pavilions. In my constituency when the PNM was in power, they developed and built the Hillpiece Recreation Ground, Hermitage; NGC. NGC did a ground in Barrackpore when the administration was the PNM. They have a policy called Fence-Line Development, that in areas where their gas lines run, they will help communities in those areas and so on, where the gas lines run.

So the NGC was always involved in that, but today, you talk as if this is something new. NGC just started to fix pavilion yesterday, that is what they do. Then they again, fingering one contractor to the next. So when the PNM was in power, it did not have contractors. No, no. The contractors were from Mars and Venus. It had none. It had no contractors then, but every time you see a contractor today, a new contractor, this is their modus operandi now, you run to the Registry. They are on the Registry’s doorstep every morning to check and see who is the director? Who is the owner? Who is getting this? Who is getting that? It had no contractors before, eh. It had none before.

Mr. Speaker, the NGC facilities—the Rivulet Road was built 1990 to ’91, it was funded by the NGC. Do you know the Brian Lara Promenade in Port of Spain right here, the NGC paid—the majority of funds were from NGC? Today, every time they open their mouths, this Government intends to go to the NGC and use funds from the NGC to do A, B and C. Mr. Speaker, a Government the Member for Diego Martin West was involved in, they running a gas line—I do not know if it has a gas line under the Brian Lara Promenade here. I do not know if they have gas lines there, but the NGC paid the majority of funds for the Brian Lara Promenade. They contributed to UWI, building sports grounds. I want to give him this one: do you know 10 years ago the NGC built the Cocoyea Recreation Facility in the constituency of San Fernando East?

Dr. Rowley: No. I did not know that.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: You did not know that. You did not know the price of oil was \$9 a barrel in 1998, December. [*Laughter*] What else you did not know, ah? You accused the Attorney General in this administration of going to New York and making racist statements. You did not know that too? You came with emails, in a court in the United States, “Dey say these emails are bogus.” You did not know that too? What else did you not know? And it is not frightening that you are proposing yourself to be the Prime Minister of the country, and we could put a slogan on you: “I did not know”. [*Laughter*] “I did not know.”

So you did not know NGC built the Cocoyea Recreation Ground in San Fernando East? He did not know that one? Did not know that NGC built a swimming pool in Black Rock, Tobago five years ago? Did not know that one? Did not know that NGC built a pavilion in Shore Park eight years ago? Did not know that? Did not know NGC built and refurbished 42 basketball courts throughout Trinidad and Tobago 10 years ago? Did not know that? Today, we talk as if, you know, this using NGC is a sin; using NGC. [*Crosstalk*]

Go and assault the Registry department to find out the name of every director in every company to see, you know, what is bobol. So you have a company located in Couva; that is a crime. They should have a next address, because you see, I want to make the point, the Leader of the Opposition and the PNM are on a campaign to terrorize certain businessmen in this country. [*Desk thumping*] They are on a campaign to terrorize the business community in this country.

Miss Mc Donald: Mr. Speaker, I rise, Standing Order 48(6), please.

Mr. Speaker: Yes. [*Motions for Dr. Moonilal to continue*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, the campaign of the Opposition is to launch certain attacks on selected contactors in this country. That is what they have been doing, and that is what they will continue. The same SIS that they want to kill, did a Christmas function in the Beetham. It had a headline in the newspaper: Best Christmas Ever in the Beetham. Thank you SIS. This the Beetham, you know; that was not Penal, that was not Barrackpore. It was the Beetham. In San Fernando as well, they would not say that. In their own constituency, but they will come to criminalize certain businessmen, and they are attacking them as part of a campaign, Mr. Speaker.

The business community should take stock. I want to warn members of the business community, if you think you are safe, today they will attack one, the next day they will attack the other one, and the other day they will train their guns on others.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Development has expired. Are you interested in a—

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Very much so.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, the question is that the speaking time of the hon. Member for Oropouche East, and Minister of Housing and Urban Development be extended by 15 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you colleagues. I will just close that point by warning the business community in Trinidad and Tobago, take note of the sustained attacks on selected businessmen in this country. Do not feel that you are safe because your “name eh call yet” by Members of the Opposition. Do not feel you are safe. It is an attack on the business community, hard-working men and women who work on public holidays, Saturday, Sunday—get up four o’clock in the morning to go to work, employ people, citizens. This attack on those businessmen will continue.

Mr. Speaker, so they recommend roll-back operations, then they recommend forego increase. The Member for Diego West is telling the Minister of Finance and the Economy forego increase. What increase to forego? Is it the 80 collective agreements that were signed by this Government? Eighty collective agreements were settled by this administration. We became the first administration in the history of this country to have settled twice in a five-year term, public officers. [*Desk thumping*] Twice in a five-year term public officers have been settled by one administration. You think they want this administration to go? Why they did not say wait, we want to see the next Government? “Dey say no, no, no.” Anybody who is anybody today, Mr. Speaker, telling us, settle us fast, fast, we are scared. We want to settle with you, because we are scared, and that is the situation.

What do you mean by forego increases? The Leader of the Opposition must tell us. Is it the increase in wage? Is it the wage increase given to the public officers? Is it the wage increase given to the state enterprise sector? Is it the wage increases given to the daily-paid workers? The Member has prescribed that this Government forego increases, and be bold enough to tell the workers, the working class in this country that, God forbid, you are returned to office, you will not pay the increases in salary that they have agreed to under the collective agreements; be bold enough to say that. So the workers in Trinidad and Tobago must understand that somebody who is proposing himself to be Prime Minister is

saying our policy is to forego increases. Then go on to tell us about a lot of money in promotion, publicity, printing and so on.

Mr. Speaker, in my Ministry, I heard this thing from the PNM once, I called up the people in the Ministry. “I say, tell me something, you see all this thing with publicity, printing and thing, leh me see what we doin’ here.” Why this figure is what it is? Mr. Speaker, Ministries publish a lot of job opportunities, advertisement for jobs and so on. Every time you open the papers—you see in my Ministry there was a time when I saw almost a supplement of jobs. We pay for that, that comes under publicity, promotion and printing. It is not Moonilal. We are advertising for jobs. You have to put it in the papers. Sometimes there are statutory requirements that you advertise, but they make it out as if we are wasting and squandering money on publicity and printing and so on. When we took a cheaper approach to put a billboard, well, “dey vex with dat; dey nearly watch de picture and run off de road”.

Mr. Speaker, the newspaper advertisement takes money, and in publicity, printing and promotion, in budgets in the Ministry, 60 per cent or more of that is advertising for jobs, recruitment opportunities for which we have to do it. You know, Mr. Speaker, if we “doh do dat, wah happen?” If we do not spend money on advertising for jobs, “dey come here and dey”—during the budget: Did you advertise for that? When did you advertise? Did you advertise? Was this done through open advertisement? You spend the money, “dey say, okay, yuh wastin’ money now”. That is the hypocrisy we have to deal with. You see, Mr. Speaker, the time is coming when they will also have to come with their plan, and the Member for Siparia and Prime Minister will take her case to the country as she did last night.

Last night the Prime Minister with a great deal of courage gave an assessment of the economic conditions in this country, and came flat out and said we are revising our budget assumptions. The Prime Minister indicated—and this is what the Leader of the Opposition did not hear, clearly did not hear, Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister indicated that we are revising our assumptions with oil and gas prices, reducing one to \$45 and one to \$2.25. Although, Mr. Speaker, the leading and most reputable agencies in the world Standard & Poor’s, the US Energy Intelligence Agency and Moody’s had their estimates way ahead between \$62 and \$75.

Hon. Member: Seventy.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: And \$70. So Moody’s, Standard & Poor’s, US Energy Intelligence Agency estimating \$62 to \$70. Trinidad and Tobago Government, the

hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar say, listen, we will be very conservative. We will plan with \$45, although it is \$48 or \$50 today as the case may be. We are planning with \$45. The Prime Minister went on in her address to say listen, we understand the deficit this will create, and we are working between the Ministry of Finance and the Economy, Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development, and individual Ministers looking at projects, infrastructure projects for which funding has not yet been confirmed, so that we will revise our timetable for implementation. We will reprioritize and reschedule those projects for which finance has not been confirmed. The Prime Minister said that last night.

The Prime Minister said that we would look at goods and services to see if we can shave off 15 per cent there, so goods and services, 15 per cent. Infrastructure projects where finance has not been confirmed yet, we will work to see if we can clear \$4.5 billion there. And then we have another segment, the \$1.4 billion, which is the fuel subsidy savings. So a subsidy savings will be \$1.4 billion; infrastructure \$4.5 billion, 15 per cent on goods and services, shaving down.

1.00 p.m.

The Prime Minister was very clear. And then the Leader of the Opposition said: well, we did not hear anything; that was politics. If he only knew. Anyway, Mr. Speaker, the politics will come.

The Prime Minister was very clear on those issues. The Prime Minister went on to indicate, as she did, that the IPO where we will consider a further IPO offering by NGC of 49 per cent shareholding that they have in Phoenix Park Gas Processors to raise additional revenue, which is something that could be done.

A point made last night, the Prime Minister also indicated that the economic fundamentals are strong. This is a country that today faces a challenge with cash flow. It is a cash challenge. It is not an economic crisis because the economic fundamentals have never been stronger for this economy.

Today, we have single digit inflation. In single digit inflation, our import cover, I believe, is 13½ months, which is way above international standards. Unemployment, I believe, is 3.6 per cent. So unemployment is there at 3.6 per cent. Foreign reserves stood at \$73 billion, almost 30 per cent higher than what it was in 2010—foreign reserves, \$73 billion, 30 per cent higher than 2010.

Import cover—we spoke about that already; unemployment, low; Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, an increase of 65 per cent over 2010. Today, \$5.5 billion in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, 65 per cent higher than it was in 2010.

Our debt remains comparatively low with public sector debt at 40.6 per cent. We have an A credit rating from Standard & Poor's. Our balance of payment is robust and the dollar is strong. These are the economic fundamentals that we spoke about, the Prime Minister outlined yesterday.

There is a cash flow challenge which we are meeting and the Prime Minister outlined that—very clear. Now, I want to make the point because the Opposition, one of their spokesmen—well the only spokesman they have, the guy who walks around with a towel in his pocket and every morning hosting a show on TV. He “does be like ah host” to say it was a political statement and we did not get details.

The Prime Minister gave an overview of the economic challenge and gave the prescriptions how we are going to meet the shortfall. Last night was not meant to be a next budget address. That was not a budget speech that you will talk and give every single sector policy and programme. It was an overview of the economic situation and a prescription as to how we are going to meet the deficit given the fall in the oil price. She was very clear, but they are speaking as if they expected a budget speech and even if you give them the budget speech, they will say: look, you did not say enough.

Mr. Speaker, how much time?

Mr. Speaker: You have four more minutes.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, I want to get to a critical point here because 'tis the season. More and more the national community will be hearing from those on the other side. And those on the other side are compelled at a moment like this to tell the country what their proposals are, what their plans are and what their policies are to match and to confront challenges of the day—economic challenges, social challenges and so on. They cannot continue to hide behind the IMF, otherwise we will interpret it to mean that the IMF has inspired their policies. That is what they are doing.

Their manifesto for the next election is Article IV Consultation of the IMF. That is what they are. God forbid they return to office, they will cut subsidies to the state enterprise sector, which will lead to massive employment fallout, job loss, retrenchment. They will close down Ministries. Daily-paid workers will be on the breadline if you try to do that.

They know, the George Chambers administration, when late Prime Minister Robinson came in 1986, he said that they were running the Government on an

overdraft from the Central Bank. But that is how they know it. And, Mr. Speaker, the final sting in the tail is that they must tell us whether they intend to increase taxes. Because if you have this myopic and simplistic view of revenue/expenditure, revenue/expenditure and you want to get revenue up to expenditure, the PNM solution has always been to increase taxes and they will tax and spend. Tax, spend, borrow—that is the PNM mantra—tax, spend, borrow.

Today we want the population to take note. Take note of these statements being made by the Opposition Leader to roll back operations, to forego increases, to rely on IMF prescriptions. Take note of that, and when they were doing that when they were in office, they precipitated economic collapse after collapse. To hear the Leader of the Opposition of all people talk about wasting money, corruption, waste, mismanagement; that was the Member of Parliament who was Minister of Housing. Las Alturas is there. We will deal with that in a few days.

I want to remind him, those towers that stand as a monument of shame in Chaguanas; those Chaguanas towers under the HDC, as a monument of shame that they embarked upon in the period. They embarked upon that project in the years 2007, 2008, when they gave out contracts to the tune of \$114 million for those towers that today are a symbol of shame on PNM housing policy, where, when we got in, we realized they had severe problems with engineering, with their structural engineering plans, with their design of those buildings.

They were building apartments with five walls. A bedroom had five walls. When you looked at the door, a bed could not come in the bedroom. This is what they designed in Chaguanas, costing \$114 million. Carlsen Field Housing Estate—I will end by reminding them that at Carlsen Field Housing Estate, they built houses on a gas line and after spending \$200 million, then discovered there was a gas line, you have to redo the entire site; you have to redraft and redesign for roads. It cost another \$75 million. I will have more details on that another occasion, Mr. Speaker. I do not want to give them too much today.

Mr. Speaker, all I want to tell you in closing, my address today on what we need to fear from the PNM is to be continued. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, it is a good time for us to pause and to have lunch. This sitting is now suspended until 2.10 p.m.

1.08 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

2.10 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Jack Warner (*Chaguanas West*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to begin by saying I have no intention in getting involved in picong, mauvais langage or trivia. This debate is too important and impacts on the lives of people of this country for us to be involved in trivia. So I want to say very early I have no intention of going down to the level of picong, trivia and, of course, inanities.

I will make two points based on the last speaker because—I will say again—I do not want to get involved in non-issues—two points, however. The last speaker said that the Minister of Works and Transport at the time, Jack Warner, was involved in the construction of the Point Fortin Highway, the initial phase, and he told the Member for Diego Martin West if he has any questions to ask, ask him.

Mr. Speaker, I want to tell this House and, by extension, the nation that no Minister can decide on spending taxpayers' money without Cabinet approval. And having gotten Cabinet approval, then the Minister of Finance and the Economy has to release the money. So Jack Warner by himself could in no way at all start the Point Fortin highway without the collective decision of the Cabinet. What is even worse, the very speech that was referred to, that I made, I made it next to the Minister of Finance at the time, Winston Dookeran. So, therefore, he was totally in sync and agreement and supported whatever was done or not done. That is the first point.

The second point, I heard a contractor threw a treat on Beetham Estate and made plenty people happy and how good this contractor is. If I am a contractor and in three years Government gives me more \$2 billion in contract, I will throw a treat in every village. In three years, over \$2 billion in contract to one contractor and he threw a treat at the Beetham Estate. So what is wrong with that? He got \$1.2 billion to build the Beetham Waste-water Treatment Plant, which he subcontracted and therefore to throw a treat and give some balloons and play Santa Claus, is time to, of course, play smart with foolishness.

Mr. Speaker, this debate is a very timely one. In fact, for me, it is one of the most important debates that will take place in this House. And what I am happy about is that the people who are following this debate they are insightful and they are informative, so you cannot fool them.

In fact, let me make one more correction. I heard the last speaker, the Member for Oropouche East, at pains to frighten businessmen what will happen when their Government is changed and they have to beware. Any Government that comes after this one, corrupt businessmen have to beware. Any Government coming after this one, corrupt contractors have to beware. That is all. So anybody who is

afraid and frightened and so on, they know who they are and to put fear in the minds of businessmen is again I say, for the second time, playing smart with foolishness.

What this debate this afternoon is showing us is the process by which the Government goes about cutting and fitting money here, there and everywhere. What the public understands is that the promises which the Government made in its budget of 2015 was when oil was \$107 per barrel. Now oil is in the forties and is \$48.71, at up to one minute ago, people want to know what to do; in what direction will the Government go? Mr. Speaker, and that is why the Prime Minister's TV—how you call it?—address to the nation has failed so many persons. She fell short.

2.15 p.m.

What this committee, the Standing Finance Committee on Wednesday last demonstrated is how lofty promises can be turned from cheese to chalk and, therefore, everybody sat down in their homes to find out what to do, what is our direction—there was a time when Eric Williams went to address the nation, everybody ran in their house to hear Eric Williams, because he was so infrequently and whatever he said had substance and, in fact, the same for every other Prime Minister before this one. And, therefore, I must confess that I was not among those who listened last night, but I was among those who I spoke to this morning and, Mr. Speaker, it was replayed on the radio so I heard it. I am saying again, every man who is serious in this country is disappointed.

What people feel is that the Prime Minister last night took a cowardly approach to a serious matter, to very real issues. There was no specific information that she gave last night to help the people to prepare themselves for down the road, so to speak, to tell them how they must bear the burden of the global drop in oil. As the Member for Diego Martin West said, Russia is worried; China, the best economy in the world, they are worried; all of Africa is worried, but in Trinidad, no cause for worry. As we say, "God is a Trini". Right? No cause for worry. I am saying, therefore, what is gratifying is that this population will not be wooed into a false sense of security. They will never hold false expectations of this Government especially in a year like this one, but I would leave this for another time.

All I would say now, however, is it falls upon leaders of this country; it falls upon the few remaining independent political commentators and economists to stand up and speak; it falls to entities like the ILP to stand up and speak and to tell the citizens what is happening—let the public understand, as it were, what the

Government will have to do, or else it will come to them as a thief in the night.

Let me make one thing clear before I continue about savings. Last Wednesday and again this morning, the Minister of Finance and the Economy talked about savings. I want the public to understand what is savings for them is not savings for the public. Mr. Speaker, when you have a project to do, and by some skill of yours or some personal action you save money on that project which you have completed, then you make a savings, but if you have money for a project, and which by your own incompetence the project did not start, “You eh make no savings”.

If you have to pay a bill in 2014 and you pay 10 per cent and the balance in 2015, “You eh make no savings, Mr. Speaker” and, therefore, the mistake people are making about savings cannot be correct. But, you see, in Government where you do not spend money for all kinds of reasons, they call it savings and most times it is incompetence.

The 2014/2015 budget had a deficit of \$6.3 billion. What the Government should have done—and somebody say: “Tell me what you will do!” I will give one point, for example, two at this point. Any serious Government—deficits are deficits and what is foreseen in this budget would be to stop giving contracts of the magnitude to their favoured contractors. Mr. Speaker, they would begin to cut waste and corruption, and that has not been done. In fact, when you look at the transfers that have been made, they pulled money from here, there and everywhere so as to pay—to pay what?—electricity, to pay light bill, to pay phone bill and so on. Mr. Speaker, they splurge and when time come, of course, to be serious, they cannot.

Moneys have been transferred from vacant posts in the Government. I heard this morning of a 3 per cent unemployment. That is artificial; artificial unemployment of 3 per cent, because you see, that includes thousands and thousands of Government-made projects and workers. These people have absolutely no job security whatsoever. There are thousands of people, university graduates who have degrees and today cannot get a job, but you take people and lump them in CEPEP and URP and you say, “Unemployment is down”. You have people who have education in all fields of endeavour who are unemployed. They are trained; they are trainable, but they are unemployed and government Ministry after Ministry is sending back money because of vacant posts which have not been filled and, why? Why have those vacant posts not been filled?

For four and a half years of UNC rule, they are saying the posts have not been filled because persons are not qualified to fill the posts. Nobody who is serious takes that seriously because the reality is that those whom they want to fill posts as their friends, their family and even their girlfriends, they, of course, appoint them to those posts, and when of course they do not want to fill the posts, they leave it vacant. In the public service—I should say they had several millions of dollars to fill those posts in the public service, but those positions were not filled and, of course, when they were not filled they take the money and they say, of course, let us put it somewhere else.

Mr. Speaker, let me also add before I give some examples, that even people who were hired on short-term contracts had their contracts renewed again and again, and they were not put in the vacant posts they had. This contract employment is something I would deal with at another level which is wrong, totally wrong, in terms of the contract employment.

Mr. Speaker, the vacant posts which they had, let us take some figures, and watch this Government after four and a half years, what they did with the money for vacant posts, and people are unemployed—UTT, UWI, COSTAATT, you name it—unemployed. So let us take one. The Judiciary had \$761,000 to fill vacant posts, not one. What the money was used for? Overseas travel facilities, transferred to.

The Statutory Authorities Service Commission had \$108,000 to fill vacant posts, what they did with it? They sent it to other contracted services. The Ministry of Finance and the Economy had \$202,600 for vacant posts, what did they do? They sent the money for repairs and maintenance of buildings, furniture and furnishings. The Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development—what a disaster—had \$459,000 to fill vacant posts. What they do? They paid telephones and official overseas travel. The Ministry of Arts and Multiculturalism, \$500,000 to fill vacant posts. What they do? They give it to NCC that got \$34 million and want \$9 million more and the Minister says, “Carnival would not be affected. Oil downturn or not, Carnival would not be affected. Leh we fete and leh we party and so on.” [*Crosstalk*] No problem.

Do you know something, Mr. Speaker? I remember previous Prime Ministers sometimes for what they said like, for example, the late George Chambers would say, “Fete done, back to work” or of course, Robbie, sorry—the late Arthur Napoleon Robinson, he would say in his darkest moment, “Attack with full force”. You know, I do not know when this Prime Minister leaves what people can say she has said, you know.

Hon. Member: The party now start.

Mr. J. Warner: Except, of course, that the party now start. Thank you. The party now start. So you take the money, you see, from of course filling posts—\$500,000—and give it to the NCC. Not to escape, the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development took \$2 million to fill vacant posts in that Ministry. A new Ministry had \$2 million to fill vacant posts. What did they do? They host annual vacation camps. Well, of course, you must have Christmas party. Some of the biggest hampers you have seen and some of the biggest parties you saw was last December, but I know all good things come to an end.

The Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development, to fill vacant posts they had \$910,000. What did they do with that money, Mr. Speaker? They paid telephone, training and other contracted services. The same Ministry had another \$350,000 to fill vacant posts. What did they do? Overseas official travel. The same Ministry, under the CSO which is, of course, underfunded, what did they do? They took a million dollars from the CSO and then send it across to other contracted services, and that is why today people still figure the figures which they get from the CSO are bogus figures, because the fact is they are under-resourced, underfunded. I wish that was the end, I wish that was the end. The same Ministry, the Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development, for a section called Project Panning and Reconstruction Division, took \$1 million, no vacant posts filled. Money given for vacant posts to be filled, none filled.

The Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, I wish I could have passed this straight, but I cannot. The Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, the Highways Division which is critical in terms of traffic and transport, they took \$2 million and gave to other contracted services, and the list goes on and on. Take again, the same Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, the same Ministry, you know, \$2 million in one Head and then \$2.4 million otherwise. So, \$4.4 million and no posts have been filled.

Mr. Speaker, in the Highways Division, I am advised there are 44 vacancies—I borrowed that from somebody, right—not one has been filled. And, of course, the Ministry of National Diversity and Social Integration, \$600,000 and that went to overseas travel. The question therefore is: where are we going in terms of these transfers?

What I said here to you amounted to \$17.78 million that could have been used to create permanent employment in the public service; could have given people stable jobs—not just jobs, but people's careers would have long-term benefits for

the workers and they frittered it away because God is a Trini. Almost every Ministry is short-staffed and then they blame—they say, “Oh, the people doh have suitable qualifications.” Well, if after four and a half years you have not channelled your education system to get the kind of people you want, then something is wrong; something is wrong.

They say also that the service commission and, of course, the Chief Personnel Officer are to blame. When you check with them, they tell you that the service commission and the CPO are also understaffed and, therefore, that is why they cannot move fast enough. They are understaffed.

2.30 p.m.

What they could have done is to bolster these departments with proper staffing, but that is not the priority. Mr. Speaker, you hear also too about public service reform and one of the reasons why they have not filled these vacancies. Public service reform, that is another excuse, but I am saying to them, if that is the case, then why not put in place the resources to complete the reform exercise? Over the last four years they did nothing.

The *Express* of May 10, 2014, quotes the Minister of Public Administration as saying, I quote:

“...with respect to the number of vacancies that exist in the Public Service—as at December 31, 2013, I am advised that there were 13,709 vacancies on the permanent establishment and...5,863”—among the contract workers.

Mr. Speaker, almost 20,000 people—almost 20,000 vacancies remained unfilled and they sent back \$17.78 million to pay telephone and light bill and overseas travel.

Mr. Speaker, Dr. Kamla Mungal, a leading academic from UWI, and I should say, from the Arthur Lok Jack Graduate School of Business—I say that with tongue and cheek when I say it. Mr. Speaker, I quote her, she says—this is in the *Guardian*, July 11, 2013:

“The slow pace of public sector reform is hampering T&T’s ability to move up on the international competitiveness index...”

She is complaining. She is complaining about public service reform. In the last four and a half years, could they not have found the funds to reform this exercise? But, you see, what they found funds for were to give their favourite contractors where one, I say again, got over \$2 billion, because “whatever maamoo wants

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[MR. WARNER]

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maamoo gets”.

Mr. Speaker, even National Security had a balance of \$16.5 million. National Security had a balance of \$16.5 million which they did not spend. They said that money was given to them to purchase explosives, ammunition and so on for the regiment, but that the Government did not have to pay the full amount right away and, therefore, they made a 30 per cent down payment, and the \$12.5 million, the balance of the money, they took it to pay for food for the Defence Force, to do some repairs to buildings and to buy uniforms for the Volunteer Defence Force.

Money for explosives, you paid 30 per cent, suppose, by chance, those had been delivered by 2014, what would happen to the Defence Force and their rations? What happened to uniforms, Mr. Speaker? Last night the Prime Minister spoke and she said something about infrastructure projects. She said those that have not begun, for which of course moneys have not been allocated, those of course shall be axed, or words to the effect.

But I want to know from the other side, there are some projects going forward, which of course total \$16.5 million, they were announced in 2015; I want to know from them, today, in the debate, if these projects I am going to call now shall be of course kept on the cards or shall be shelved. I am talking about roads and bridges rehabilitation in Moruga, La Lune and Toco Main Road; reform of the Highways Division, the weigh stations and road authority, that is \$3 million, the one in Moruga is \$8 million.

Land acquisition for the San Fernando to Princes Town Highway, \$2.8 million, Maraval access project, Member for Diego Martin North/East, \$500,000, and the Churchill-Roosevelt Highway to be redefined, \$2.2 million. Please tell me and tell this House which of these projects have reached the stage of no turning back and which of them have not reached that point. You see, Mr. Speaker, those are the questions which contractors and their employees want to know. They want to know that. Because they know already the Government has its preferred contractor, but they want to know if these projects shall be shelved and if these projects shall affect them.

It is important, Mr. Speaker. It is important. Just last year, in the deep south, there was serious flooding, a lot of farmers lost their crops, these farmers want to know how Government is going to treat with the infrastructure work that needs to be done to prevent another flood from reoccurring. Will they cut those projects and will they have more flooding? Because if they cut those projects, Mr. Speaker, then it means that you have to find a way to protect the farmers, because

the farmers do not have to plant their crops and wait for the floods to wash them away or save their strength, their money and their patience and do nothing.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Government, in light of the oil decline, what is your plan? What is your plan? Russia has a plan, China has a plan—I mean, the whole African continent has a plan. What is our plan? Will you reduce your 29 Cabinet posts to 16?—which is the most sensible thing to do. Mr. Speaker, 1.3 million people with 29 Ministries, would you not go there first and cut it to 16?—because some of them do not even know what they do in the Ministries. Some of them do not understand as yet what the Ministry is about, National Diversity and something integration. [*Laughter*] They do not know, right, so cut it down and make it 16 and, therefore, show the nation that you are serious.

Those contracts you gave out, willy-nilly, bring them back in, Mr. Speaker. Corruption, that is almost now on a national scale. Stem it and let the public know what you do. Take a bold move, make a bold step, say something. I felt sorry this morning when somebody told me that the Prime Minister did not have her glasses last night—she did not have her glasses—and I was saying to myself, “She lacked her vision”. She said so, she lacked her vision, but I want to tell you, Mr. Speaker, the country right now is also lacking vision. The country also—these visions, Mr. Speaker, “de country eh seeing at all” and we are in serious trouble.

Mr. Speaker, even those people who are on pension, those pensioners, retirees, the \$500 you promised to give them, “dat ent cutting it yet”, and it is November, now December, it is January. Even that you cannot touch, so what will you touch?—because those pensioners, their medicine bill is almost twice the money, the pension they receive. So you cannot touch that. Tell the country what you will touch. Will you close down some embassies from overseas and bring some people back home? Because, right now, about five of them for the last eight months have nobody of substance, not even London. Not even London, not even Costa Rica, not even Canada, nobody of substance. So that being the case, shut it down and save X and Y dollars, because you want to know what we will do, well, I am telling you what you can do, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, health care, my good friend, the Minister of Health, they transferred \$87 million. How did this money come about? It came from the RHAs and, therefore, I want to find out from the Minister, when he is speaking, how were you able to curtail these services? Did you, of course, get this money back from not paying private institutions? Tell us what services were curtailed and tell us, of course, if because of that, the RHAs now are withholding their service. That

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is all I have for the Minister of Health at this point in time, because I know in Chaguanas West a constituent of mine, went for a scan at Mount. Hope, and that was last November, and they gave him March, 2016, for the scan. So tell us, of course, what is happening in the health institutions so we will know—
[*Interruption*]

Dr. Khan: I will tell you—

Mr. J. Warner: I know you would. I know you would, Minister, I know you would.

Mr. Speaker, I am making the point that this population is not fooled. The people here, Mr. Speaker, are very wise and they know about the deeds or the misdeeds of this Government. They know by the Government friends, which friends are no secret, because those deeds and misdeeds were done in broad daylight with all the arrogance you can think about, without shame, with impunity it was done. This population today is a most disappointed population, Mr. Speaker. They are disappointed because of the last four and a half years they did not see the change that they were promised. They did not see, of course—in other words, I know the whipping talk is to beat PNM, PNM this and PNM that. I do not go in that space.

The fact is the people remove the PNM and they put a new Government in place, and you tell them about the PNM. You are wasting people's time. You there, you have to act. You have to say what you are doing and you have to keep the promises you gave the people, and no amount of going back to the past—“and Karen Teishera, and had it under her duster and curlers in her hair”, so what? What does that do to tell the people today about the fact that the budget cannot be balanced? What that has to do with it?

Mr. Speaker, what we saw so far and we are seeing is PR propaganda. I want to end by reading—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Chaguanas West has expired. Would you like an extension?

Mr. J. Warner: Yes, Sir.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the question is that the speaking time of the hon. Member for Chaguanas West be extended by 15 minutes.

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

Mr. J. Warner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would not take the whole 15 minutes, I promise you.

Mr. Speaker, I want to end by taking a quotation from the *Second Book of Nephi, The Book of Mormon*, chapter 28, verses 7 to 11. I want to quote it into the *Hansard*, into the record, what that verse says about those who spread false beliefs. Mr. Speaker, I am quoting now from that book:

“Yea, and there shall be many which shall say: Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die; and it shall be well with us.

And there”—are also those who—“shall say: Eat, drink and be merry; nevertheless, fear God—he will justify in committing a little sin; yea, lie a little, take...advantage of one because of his words, dig a pit for thy neighbor; there is no harm in this; and do all these things, for tomorrow we die; and if it so be that we are guilty, God will beat us with a few stripes, and at last we shall be saved in the kingdom of God.

Yea, and there shall be many which shall teach after this manner, false and vain and foolish doctrines, and shall be puffed up in their hearts, and shall seek deep to hide their counsels from the Lord; and their works shall be in the dark.

And the blood of the saints shall cry from the ground against them.

Yea, they have all gone out of the way; they have become corrupted.”

Mr. Speaker, that came from the *Second Book of Nephi, The Book of Mormon*, chapter 28, verses 7 to 11.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, let me say that the day of judgment is nigh. I ask this Government, I urge them, I beg them, to put a financial tourniquet on the wounds of their spending, because failing that, this nation shall bleed to a financial death.

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

2.45 p.m.

The Minister of Works and Infrastructure (Hon. Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It was very interesting to listen to the commentary of Members of the Opposition this morning, and now the Member for Chaguanas West, who always wants to clothe himself in white and clothe everybody else in a different colour.

Listening to the Leader of the Opposition this morning, it dawned upon me that he had already begun to write the way that they are going to govern this country if, God forbid, they were to return to office. The way he relied on the IMF report and the IMF prescriptions, and the way he started to read out those IMF

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statements, indicated to me clearly that they had already decided that they were going to bring pressure to bear upon the people of Trinidad and Tobago, just like they tried to bring pressure with the Revenue Authority, and we had to have the “Axe the Tax Programme”.

Mr. Speaker, I would like the Leader of the Opposition and the PNM, the Opposition as a whole, to tell us what they would have done, had they found themselves with lower oil prices. Because whether they had lower oil prices or whether they had higher oil prices, they never managed this country well—they never managed this country well. This is why when the NAR came into power in 1986, they had already taken the country down a road where the IMF was only waiting to come through the door. They destroyed their hopes and aspirations prior to 1986, and when they saw the writing on the wall by how they had mismanaged again prior to 2010, they decided to call an election in 2010, and they were rejected by the population. Then we had to come and clean up the situation.

When Dr. Moonilal, the Member for Oropouche East, spoke this morning, he only spoke about a few of the things that we had to clear up and debts we had to meet. Like the \$2 billion-plus contractors’ debts that had to be met; the \$20 billion-plus Clico/HCU debt that had to be dealt with. Mr. Speaker, can you imagine that all of those things happened under their watch, when they were earning some of the highest oil prices this country had ever seen? Where did that money go? How did you spend that money? How did you spend it? If you ended up in so much debt with those buildings you built in Port of Spain, occasioning the kind of interest payments that occasioned—but where did the money go?

Why is it that the rural communities remain underdeveloped? Why is it that the schools and the physical infrastructure of the schools were in such a bad state that Dr. Gopeesingh today is building over those schools, and being one of the most successful Ministers in terms of school buildings, has built over 80 schools and he has about 60 to open right now, on commission in Trinidad and Tobago? That is to tell you how we are spending the money.

So when you talk about mistrust, and do not trust this Government, the population will trust this Government because they are seeing visible evidence of how the money from this country is being spent in order to improve the quality of life of the citizens, and assuring the future and the potential of the children of this country.

I would like to ask the Leader of the Opposition and the Member for Chaguanas West: What would you do? If you were faced with a situation like we are faced with, what would you do? What would you do? We have said that there is a \$7.4 billion gap that we have to meet and a gap we have to close; there will be a gap. We have indicated where \$4.5 billion is coming from. We have indicated where another \$1.4 billion is coming from. We have said we are going on a continuing process of revising and looking at where we could adjust expenses on non-critical items a further 15 per cent. So to say that we do not have a plan, to say that we do not know what we are doing is to be stranger to the truth. That is just being political on your part, rather than facing the truth.

The one thing that this country knows, and the one thing that this population knows is that because they are seeing the work of this Government and they are seeing the visible evidence of the projects being delivered, and the manner in which those are beginning to affect the quality of life, they are beginning to trust this Government more than they ever trusted the PNM. [*Desk thumping*]

The PNM will have to tell us whether you would bring back the Revenue Authority. You will have to tell us whether you are going to cut GATE. Tell us whether you are going to do that, or whether you are not going to do it. Tell us whether you are going to stop the computer distribution in schools, where today every student in Forms 1 to 5 has a computer.

I remember in the first year we talked about the computers, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West was very vehement and angry in terms of giving out computers to the children in the schools. Today, the performance of our children has risen so well because we have brought them into the age of technology, and Dr. Gopeesingh and this Government can boast about that. [*Desk thumping*] Are you going to stop the computer distribution programme? Are you going to stop giving computers also to the teachers in the schools, that has improved their ability to teach and research and to deliver knowledge on a faster basis to the students? Are you going to do that?

Tell us what you are going to do, because it seems to me that you are talking today about cutbacks and you are talking about being stern with the people in the country. It seems to me that you want to bring pressure to bear on the people of Trinidad and Tobago. What we are trying to do is to help the people ease during the situation, so they do not find that kind of burden and pressure, and that families—because we are preserving jobs, there will also be family security in Trinidad and Tobago; but you are not about that. You must tell us.

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You must tell us whether you are going to cut off the house grants, whether you are going to shut down the Self-Help Commission. Tell us whether you are going to cut public service jobs. When you talked this morning about the increases, are you saying that you are not going to have any wage increases in the public service or in the public sector? Tell us that, because that is the message you have sent here today. You had no prescription whatsoever. You got up here to speak, but what you sent was a message that was negative and a message that was intended to show that the PNM will bring pressure upon the people of Trinidad and Tobago, if they ever come back into office. You must tell us that.

You must tell us in this situation whether you are going to increase the price of diesel, or the price of fuel as a whole at the pumps, and as a result of that you are going to increase the cost of transport, and then all other related costs were going to go up. That is what you were going to do if you were faced with this situation. But look at the road we have taken in this situation.

We have decided that we are going to find the projects that we can at this stage, reschedule. We are not cutting them all out, we are going to reschedule them and we are going to tide over this turbulence, and we are going to overcome it. This is a cash flow problem, and we are going to be there and our people are going to be safe. [*Desk thumping*] Our people are going to be safe, because as far as we are concerned, as the Prime Minister said, we have to take care of the vulnerable. We have to ensure that we protect jobs. When you protect jobs in a situation like this, what you do is protect families, and by protecting families, you protect communities, and by protecting communities, you protect the nation of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, these are the things that the Opposition should tell us. Tell us what you would do. But instead they come here and are preaching a kind of doom and gloom, when in fact they are not only the prophets of that doom and gloom, but they are going to be the creators of that doom and gloom for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

They do not want to admit that the economic fundamentals and the financial fundamentals today in Trinidad and Tobago are the best ever in the history of this country. They do not want to admit it. That could only have happened because of the way that Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar as Prime Minister and this administration have managed the resources of the country. This is why people are trusting this Government, and that is reflected in the polls that are saying that the Prime Minister's rating continues to increase, way above that of the Opposition Leader—way above. [*Desk thumping*]

This Government has achieved what no other administration has ever achieved, in terms of management of the economy. Show me an administration that inherited a \$20 billion problem, was able to turn it around in the space of two years and regenerated this economy to the point where the unemployment rate went down to 3.6 per cent, and the inflation rate is in single digits. Show me somebody who has managed this economy to the point where today you have close to 13 and a half months of import cover, and you have 11 point—some billion dollars of foreign exchange in the country; the highest in the history of the country. That just could not come about by mere wishful thinking.

The Member for Chaguanas West said that we did not have a plan—no, Sir. These things come about because you have an economic plan. It does not just happen like that. We have a plan and we have stuck to the plan. We have remained focused, despite the attempts to detract us from the job, which is to turn around this country and to make the people of this country prosperous, because our goal is prosperity for all in Trinidad and Tobago; not prosperity for a few, as happened under the PNM, but prosperity for all. That is why there are so many more people thriving today in this country under the People's Partnership, compared to the era of the PNM.

This Government has, therefore, achieved in a manner in which no other government has ever, ever achieved. The Prime Minister, in my view, was very clear last night—very, very clear, in terms of her understanding of the situation in the country and what has to be done. What she did last night was lay out the parameters within which right action will be taken to alleviate this situation, as we move into the future.

I heard the Member for Point Fortin say, while the Member for Chaguanas was speaking, “De party now start”. Well, the party of performance started in 2010. [*Desk thumping*] That is when it started; it was a performance party. Mr. Speaker, I will give you some elements of that performance: the teaching hospital in San Fernando and the addition of 218 more beds in San Fernando. When people walk into that facility, they will tell you that it is equivalent to any international world-class facility, and that is a tribute to the Minister of Health. [*Desk thumping*]

The Nursing Academy—you had a building in El Dorado in which there were a very few people, building going to waste. The Minister for tertiary education took that and turned it around, and today we have a functioning nursing academy, giving our girls and boys an opportunity to be trained as nurses, so they can come out and serve their fellow citizens in Trinidad and Tobago.

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Sangre Grande—people from there had to come quite into St. Augustine or Port of Spain to go to school at COSTAATT. Today, over 1,200 students are enrolled in COSTAATT in Sangre Grande, opening up education, at a lower cost, in terms of transport and living accommodation, to that segment of our population, a lot of them who would not have had the opportunity because they come from a rural community and a low-earning agricultural community also. You tell me that we are not working in the interest of the people? The people are very intelligent in this country, and they know who to trust, and they know how to trust Mrs. Persad-Bissessar and this administration. [*Desk thumping*]

Are you going to tell me that if in a situation like that, you are going to close down the Oncology Centre that is being built, that you could not build for so many years, in a country and a world in which cancer cases seem to be increasing? For how many years that Oncology Centre sat there with some steel sticking out of the ground rusting, and today that Oncology Centre—were you going to also say, “Cut that project”? Were you going to cut the Children’s Hospital project?

One of the things I know about certain Members of the Opposition is that you do not like children. You do not like children getting toys for Christmas and being happy. You did not like children getting computers, so I would not be surprised if the PNM would say, “Stop the children’s hospital”.

Would you close down the Children’s Life Fund, where 100-plus children have now benefited and perhaps saved their lives under the Children’s Life Fund? Tell us if those were the things you were going to do, but we are showing you a plan where we are not doing anything like that, to cut jobs or to threaten jobs or to take away pensions from people, or the Baby Fund. You are just standing there and pontificating, but we have a plan, and the people understand that we have a plan.

That is why the Prime Minister could have stood last night with so much courage and confidence, and speak to this country about what we are about in this situation. And we will manage this situation and we will lead Trinidad and Tobago to a higher level of prosperity at the end of all this. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, this is the Government that they will trust and they are beginning to do that.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Chaguanas West spoke about CEPEP and URP, as if they are contributing nothing to the country. Let me just repeat for the record only. In 2012—2014, the URP programme, under community projects, completed

approximately 1,700 projects in this country—1,700 projects. The projects do not only include box drains, you know; box drains, jogging tracks, pavilions, the repair of NGO buildings and what have you throughout this country.

This morning I was asked a question by the Member for Arouca/Maloney and the Member for St. Ann's East about URP projects, and the Member for St. Ann's East opened her eyes very large when I said 22 projects were done in her area, because we do not discriminate. We do projects in every part of this country.

3.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I do not know if you have had the privilege of driving from Grand Bazaar to Debe recently, and whether you saw the work that CEPEP is doing on the highways now. For the very first time in the history of this country, not only is the median being cut, but at least of the six to eight feet on the other verges, that when you drive you begin to see the first-world highway and country in front of you—CEPEP. And today we pay tribute, under Dr. Moonilal, to the CEPEP workers [*Desk thumping*] for their commitment. But at the same time I have to say, you know, that there are people who just do not respect that cleanliness, and they are still taking their tires and dumping them in the middle of the median and throwing their beer bottles in the median and so on. We need a revolution also in terms of thinking and attitudes.

Speaking about that, the Member for Chaguanas West was making so many comments about public service reform, but the Member for San Fernando West who is Minister of Public Administration will tell you that there is a programme called the Diamond Certification Programme which is to improve the ability of Trinidad and Tobago to become competitive and to deliver higher quality service in the public service. And the first cohort, I believe, is graduating this month. That is part of the ongoing process of public service reform. Public service reform is not a one and done thing. It is a continuous effort. You have to admit that we have been doing much better than you want to claim.

The ease of doing business in Trinidad and Tobago has improved under Mr. Vasant Bharath in the Ministry of Trade, Industry, Investment and Communications. It takes you two to three days now to register a company when it used to take you 45 days—the Single Window. Trinidad and Tobago recently won a big award TTBizLink, the UN award. So, you cannot say that we are not engaged in public service reform. To have won an award, TTBizLink—to have won an UN award says something about our public service reform. It says that we are reaching international standards, and all we have got to do is strive to be a little better at what we are doing.

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So do not come here and decry the public servants. Because when you talk about public service reform, you are not decrying a government, you are decrying the public servants. But you see, one of the things that I did not ask the Leader of the Opposition was whether he was going to cut public service salaries or whether he was going to stop recruitment of public service workers altogether, in a situation like this. Right.

Mr. Speaker, [*Crosstalk*] there is so much that this Government has done in this country. The Member for Chaguanas West talked about bridges and bridge reconstruction. Mr. Speaker, at the moment there are 14 bridges under construction for which contracts have been awarded. He talked about Toco. In Toco there are one—two bridges being built right now. One is 78 per cent complete, one is 54 per cent complete. In Mayaro/Guayaguayare there is a bridge there that is 44 per cent complete. In Valencia there is also a bridge that is 58 per cent complete. All of these projects—what is interesting, Mr. Speaker, none of them so far are outside of the time limits that we have set nor are they outside of the budget that we have set. [*Desk thumping*] None, Mr. Speaker. They are on time and they are on budget.

Mr. Speaker, you talk about the performance of this Government. Today, because of the performance of this Government and because of the vision of this Government—you see vision is not sufficient, you know. Vision plus action is what is important. Many people will have vision, but this Government has the propensity to act in the right way. When we acted on the vision of removing traffic in Valencia, we cut that bypass road. Today, traffic has been reduced to zero. [*Desk thumping*] Zero, Mr. Speaker. Zero. Zero. Traffic has been reduced. People tell me, and an Immigration Officer told me he lives in Sangre Grande, and he has cut down his time by 45 minutes coming into Port of Spain simply because of the traffic pile up that used to take place at that location. We will show you about vision.

In the constituency of Arima we will be cutting a road that many people spoke about that will even create a better traffic flow when that is done, and that will be done within the next two months. Next two months.

So, we not only have vision, you know, we have action behind it. We are a doing government. We are a doing government, not a talking government, a doing government, and that distinguishes us. And why are we a doing government? Because we have a leader whose ear is to the ground. We have a leader who is concerned, not only about the macroeconomics, but she is concerned about the people—about the people. This is why in this situation, in which we face this

period of turbulence, it is country first and people first. [*Desk thumping*] Country first and people first. That is what it is about. Country first and people first. This is why the Prime Minister said what she said last night, because it was all to make sure that people do not suffer in this period of turbulence, but that we use all the means that we can use to ease burdens, especially upon our children, our youths and what have you.

Mr. Speaker, they talked about the highway to Point Fortin—the highway to Point Fortin. Tell us, if you were in this situation, are you going to stop the highway to Point Fortin? Are you going to stop it? Tell us when you are going to stop it? Tell us whether you are going to stop it? Do not just say—do not just stand up there and make all kinds of statements. You tell us what plan you would have had. We have a plan, and we know that our plan is going to work, [*Desk thumping*] because we have been there and we have done well in the past and we are going to do well in the situation that confronts us. But you tell us, were you going to stop the highway to Point Fortin. Tell us what you are going to do? Do not “steups”. Tell us what you are going to do. Tell us what you are going to do. Were you going to stop the hospital in Point Fortin, Member for Point Fortin? Would you accept that? [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Rowley: You need more broclax.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Would you stop that? [*Crosstalk*] Would you stop that? I can tell you something, Leader of the Opposition. I am a very healthy human being, and you who stood in this Parliament and criticized me and my looks, today I am looking a thousand times better than you look. [*Desk thumping and laughter*] I can deal with my situation.

Dr. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I crave your protection. I am in no competition with my colleague from Tabaquite. [*Laughter*] What is he calling me into his parade for?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: I do not want to call you into my terrain.

Dr. Rowley: If he wants to show off himself, do that. But—

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: I do not want to call you into my terrain. I have protection against Rottweilers, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Please. Please.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Rowley: If you want to show off your big belly—

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, I am very proud of what I am able to do. I am very, very proud.

Mr. Speaker, so they would not tell us whether they were going to stop the highway. But if I know them well, they were going to stop the highway because they do not care who they punish, you know. They do not care who they punish. For years they represented Point Fortin and La Brea and they have not improved the conditions of the people of Point Fortin and La Brea. For the first time in the history of the country the people of La Brea, Cedros, Icacos and Point Fortin are getting an opportunity for economic transformation in their areas, getting an opportunity, but they did not care.

How much money did you spend in the development of Point Fortin and La Brea? How much money have you really spent, when you had money to spend when oil prices were \$150? How much money did you pour into those areas to improve the quality of lives of those people? How much did you spend? But no, you created a debt in Port of Spain with the big buildings, you created a big debt because you wanted to be part and parcel of some global leader being seen as—*[Crosstalk]* Image. Image. But at the cost of what?—of the underdevelopment of the majority of the people of this country. That is what you did. *[Crosstalk]* Yeah. They would have cut the hospital for Arima too. Because you realize what has happened here. They have stood up there and all they have talked about is telling us, cut, cut, cut, cut. What they are doing is telegraphing what they will do with the people of this country. That is why Dr. Moonilal this morning, the Member for Oropouche East was very right also in warning the business community that they are selecting and targeting certain businessmen in this country—and this is only phase one. Phase two, they will target others, and then they will target others.

Hon. Member: To cut.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Yeah. To cut. Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you that the Point Fortin highway will not be stopped. It will not be stopped, Mr. Speaker. And the hospital will not be stopped. And the children's hospital will not be stopped. It will not be stopped. And the oncology centre will continue. It will continue.

Mr. Speaker, speaking of that, are you going to tell me that you will also stop the programmes recently introduced by this Government which is the programme to extend the hours of service in the health centres? Are you also going to stop that? So that when people get ill at night now they have an opportunity to go and have a doctor and a nurse and to get quick attention. Are you going to cut that

too? [*Crosstalk*] Forty-five health centres operating extended hours. [*Desk thumping*] First time in the history of this country.

That is why the Prime Minister last night could have said, people first, country first. Country first. Everything that we have done as Government since 2010 has been directed at improving the position of our people in the country, the citizens of this country. The question we ask as a government, how will this improve the lives of our citizens? How does this add value to the community in terms of what we are doing? That is why the people's trust in this Government is growing. That is why it is growing and growing and growing. That is why they are trusting less and less the Members of the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, they talked about the \$900 million that had to be placed in NIDCO to carry on the highway. Mr. Speaker, you know, you do not borrow money all the time. Sometimes it is better to use the money that you have because it is there, and you may put it in an interest account and get less than 1 per cent and you use it. But if the time comes and you have to borrow, you have to borrow. That was 2014. On December 24 last year we finalized a loan for \$1.5 billion to continue the highway to Point Fortin. Therefore, those who are saying that there is no money to continue the highway to Point Fortin, I want to disappoint you. There is money to continue the highway to Point Fortin. [*Desk thumping*] There is money to continue the highway to Point Fortin.

You will be happy to know that the highway cannot continue because you are prophets of doom and gloom, and you do not care about the position of that young lady, way down in Cedros, who has to travel every morning to San Fernando—and she still won an open scholarship, I believe, or a national scholarship. And the other young lady—again from Cedros—who had to live in San Fernando and face the trauma of separation from her family. You are not concerned about that. You and the PNM are not concerned about that at all.

Would you tell me if you faced a situation like this, and the house of a family with three children and a wife and husband and a grandfather, and the house burnt down and they had nowhere to stay, that you would not go in, you were going to cut out the help being given to them? Like we are giving help to that family in Claxton Bay who needs help because the house has totally burnt down, and now they have somewhere to stay. That you could have gone there and given them the hope that we were going to construct something of a starter house for you. You tell me you would have cut off the people in Williamsville where three daughters and a mother were brutally wounded by an enraged father. You were going to cut that out too?

Dr. Rowley: What is he talking about?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Tell me if those are the things that you are going to cut out and put pressure on people.

Dr. Rowley: What is he talking about?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: You see, the PNM would not know that, and the Member, the Leader of the Opposition would not know that because he is an absentee Member of Parliament who is not in touch with the problems of his constituents. He is not in touch. They do not see him in his constituency therefore he does not know what a poor man feels, and he does not know what people who are under pressure feel because he is not on that basis of touch with them.

Miss Mc Donald: Mr. Speaker, 48(6), please. You cannot say that. He is at his constituency office every single day.

Mr. Speaker: Apparently the Member is taking objection to your statement. [*Crosstalk*] Well of course, the Member for Port of Spain South.

Dr. Rowley: It is irrelevant.

Mr. Speaker: Okay. Yeah. So, Member, please.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Sure. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I am guided. It is my view, and a growing opinion in this country, that the only Government capable of managing the affairs of this country beyond 2015 is the People's Partnership Government under Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, on the basis of the management and the leadership of the country from May 2010 to date, the people have had a fair opportunity to examine the— [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Tabaquite and Minister of Works and Infrastructure has expired. Member, would you—?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the question is that the speaking time of the hon. Member for Tabaquite be extended by 15 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

3.15 p.m.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Yes, Mr. Speaker, they have called into question our ability to manage this country. But what I am saying, Mr. Speaker, is that on

the basis of the management and leadership of the country by Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar and her administration, from May 2010 to date, the people of this country now had a fair opportunity to examine the capability of this Government and the performance of this Government. It is a performance that is unmatched by any previous administration. [*Desk thumping*] It is unmatched. And this includes the several PNM teams which governed this country for a period between 1956 and 2010. Without any hesitancy on my part, I can say with confidence, that Mrs. Persad-Bissessar as the Prime Minister has far outshone the PNM in leadership and management of the national resources. [*Desk thumping*] Today also Trinidad and Tobago—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Please! Please! There is a Member who is using, I think, the drawer. Whoever is doing that, I want you to stop that immediately. If you want to support a Member you can, but not the drawer. Please, it is the second time I listened to that unnecessary interruption and disruption. Continue, hon. Member. Please!

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Khan: He is using his drawers.

Mr. Speaker: It does not matter. Please, do not do that!

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, today also the global profile of Trinidad and Tobago is at its highest—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Please!

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan:—with the world showing more than a passing interest in Trinidad and Tobago as an investment destination and as a global partner, and there is ample evidence to show the extent to which Trinidad and Tobago is respected globally.

Mr. Speaker, this started in 2010 when the hon. Prime Minister assumed the position of Chair in office of the Commonwealth and she held that position in 2010 and 2012, and ensured that this small Commonwealth country was recognized as an important leader in initiating and leading change, especially related to the position of women and girls and their right to equality of opportunity and to education in particular. And if anyone has led a mental revolution in the Commonwealth in terms of improving the position of women and girls, and in particular the right to education of girls, it is Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar when she was Chair in office of the Commonwealth. [*Desk thumping*]

Under her leadership, Trinidad and Tobago became more active at the Organization of American States as well as at the UN. Mr. Speaker, it is important to note that we do not live independently of the world, and therefore the development of global partnerships is important for our growth and our survival, and while she managed the domestic economy she also managed the global partnerships that Trinidad and Tobago needed to manage. She had to revamp the image of Trinidad and Tobago so that it became a place of attractiveness for investors, that is why investments have returned to Trinidad and Tobago, that is why drilling has gone up, and that is why the oil sectors are seeing more investments.

Mr. Speaker, every day the hon. Minister of Trade, Industry and Investment, Mr. Bharath will tell you that people are coming to this country with proposals that they wish to invest more and more in Trinidad and Tobago. Our hon. Prime Minister has led us well not only in terms of the domestic economy, but also in terms of our global objectives and international relations. As a point to note, Trinidad and Tobago has generally achieved the millennium goals set by the UN, and we have gone even further through the fine efforts of Dr. Tim Gopeesingh as Minister of Education to establish the conditions for universal early childhood education. [*Desk thumping*] And we will be one of the few countries in the world or in the Commonwealth where you will have universal early childhood education also, as we have primary and secondary.

Mr. Speaker, having established that, we saw the visit to Trinidad and Tobago by several world leaders including those from Japan, China, the Vice-President of the US, the Governor General of Canada, the President of Cuba, and Panama amongst others, because we had an objective also of being the gateway to Latin America and making Latin America the new vista for us. All of this has been achieved.

Hon. Member: What! Gateway to Latin America?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, such visits are not spontaneous, but as a result of the recognition of the leadership and vision of the Prime Minister of this country as well as the role that the country is perceived as being capable of playing in the context of global issues.

Mr. Speaker, I say with pride and my colleagues join me in saying that the Prime Minister of this country, as much as she has earned the respect of this country in terms of the management of the local economy, she has earned the respect of the global community. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt in my mind that this administration has managed the country well between 2010 and 2014. The country has been brought back to a positive growth from a negative growth. And I want to repeat again, the negative growth did not start in 2010, it started when the PNM was there and they had high oil prices, and that is why I asked the question, what did you do with all this money? You talk about corruption, well, tell us what you did with the money and then we will see where the real corruption was. You stand there and you accuse, make all kinds of allegations of corruption. But you tell us. Stand up and tell us there. Tell us. Why is it that you have to pay a billion dollars in interest? Why all the cost overruns we have had when you were in office? And how come you had so many cost overruns on almost every project that you did in this country? You had cost overruns. Where did the money go? And projects were not finished and you ended up still leaving us with \$2 billion plus of debts to contractors. Tell us where it went? How did a 250 stadium end up a billion dollars? How did that happen? Really tell us, how did it happen?

Dr. Gopeesingh: The Tobago hospital 120 to almost 800 million.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Tell us how it happened?

Hon. Member: Tobago?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Yes, Tobago hospital 120 to 700 million. Tell us. You know what is interesting, Mr. Speaker, we have done so much in this country, we have created so many new institutions, so much new infrastructure, repaired infrastructure, but not one single penny has been added to the income tax of people. [*Desk thumping*]

We have not put a tax burden on people. That has to say something about how we have been prudent in terms of our management. Mr. Speaker, even now, with the turbulence that faces us, we have not said that we are going to impose any new taxes on anyone. If there are any taxes to be imposed they are taxes that have to deal with deviant behaviour, like the way you drive on the road, like drunken driving and what have you, and we need to do something about that, because people sometimes have to suffer consequences or they do not learn.

So, Mr. Speaker, no new taxes have been introduced despite the heavy development programme. We shall see massive improvements. You know, they scoff at the 80-plus labour agreements that have been settled by the hon. Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development. They scoffed at it. But why were you offering people zero, zero, zero and zero, zero, one and how come we came in and having dealt with Clico \$20 billion, having dealt with the \$2

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billion to contractors, we were still able to increase the wages of people and to settle these 80 agreements. How come we did it? [*Desk thumping*] How come we did it? That tells you something about the competence.

And today if people have to trust a government they will trust this Government, because when they wanted you to solve the labour agreement problem you refused to do it. You refused to do it, but they now begin to tell me and spike up in my mind, whether it is you all had already run the country bankrupt and you did not have the money to settle the labour agreements. Is it possible that you were happy to get out of Government in 2010 because you had run out of prescriptions and run out of answers to the people's problems? But this Government came in and whatever were the challenges we faced them with courage, we faced them with strength, and today 80 labour agreements, whether you scoff at it or not, have been settled by the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development. Congratulations to the Minister and the Member of Parliament for Pointe-a-Pierre. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to tell you something, if PNM returns to power and you have a situation like this, CEPEP workers and CEPEP contractors, goodbye to your jobs; URP workers and URP small contractors, goodbye; special companies will be targeted, people will be targeted by the PNM. There is no doubt in my mind about it, they will be targeted.

Dr. Moonilal: Businessmen.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Yes, targeted. The financial group in the west who is now supporting the PNM will be the beneficiaries of everything. A single group will be the beneficiaries of everything, so let us know that.

They would not support procurement legislation. They talk about corruption but they voted against procurement legislation. When this Government was moving to improve governance in this country, and the perception of governance, and real governance by bringing procurement legislation, they voted against it, and they are talking about corruption today.

How did the Member for Chaguanas West vote on the matter for a procurement Bill? I do not know if the Member was even here. I have to check that.

Mr. Warner: You should have seen. I would not even answer you.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, you will listen one day. You will listen very soon. You will listen very soon.

Mr. Warner: You big? You big?

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Do not interfere with me, you know, because there are some things I have to say that I have not said. Do not interfere with me.

Mr. Speaker: Please! Listen, let us not get into that. Deal with the issues!

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: We are not dealing with the Member for Chaguanas West. Please!

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: Mr. Speaker, PNM does not have a vision. They talk about vision. They are recycling a 2020 Vision into 2030 and they are talking about a vision, and today they have modified that to the IMF vision for Trinidad and Tobago. Trinidad and Tobago is nowhere close to inviting the IMF, but they are at the doors of the IMF already. It shows you the paucity of management skill and leadership vision that you have in the PNM. It shows you.

Mr. Speaker, it is very interesting the kind of partnership they are forming on their side. They criticized the Government for giving grants to the churches for Christmas. This Government is a Partnership Government, we understand the work of NGOs, we understand the work of the churches in this country. There are things we can do and there are things that others can do better than us, and we cannot do the things that churches are doing, and therefore this Government has every reason to support the churches because the churches are the repository also of great human values. And there are problems in this country that they can handle better than us, and therefore if the Government chooses to support them, why begrudge the churches for getting that assistance from the Government? Why begrudge them?

You know how difficult it is to raise money to do things, and if you can help them along the way—you are talking about youth falling through the cracks, and the churches are the ones who are trying to bring the youths back into mainstream society, and you are saying, do not help them. Why are you saying that? What do you have against the churches? What do you have against religious institutions? What is it you do not like about that? That is a non-political act on the part of—
[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: They do not like churches.

Hon. Dr. S. Rambachan: They do not like churches, they do not like children, they do not like people, they do not like development.

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Mr. Speaker, there is every reason why the people of this country will continue to build their trust in this Government, build confidence in the Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar, and why they will make sure that there is this Government in power after the election of 2015.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Colm Imbert (*Diego Martin North/East*): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also will not respond to trivia from previous speakers, but it is just necessary to correct the record.

The previous speaker told us that their Government had done such a fantastic job in stabilizing and turning around the economy, and that the economy of Trinidad and Tobago is where it is now because of them. Let me deal with some facts. In 2001 when this country had the misfortune of being governed by Members opposite, the GDP of Trinidad and Tobago was \$45 billion. This is at constant prices. In 2010 the GDP was \$90 billion. So that under the tenure of the PNM, between 2001 and 2010 the GDP of Trinidad and Tobago doubled, and that is at constant prices.

Let us look at the debt now. Mr. Speaker, when the PNM demitted office in 2010 our total public debt was \$45 billion, our total public debt is now almost \$90 billion. So let us look at PNM performance. The PNM was able to grow the economy and double the GDP by 100 per cent in the period 2001—2010. The UNC was able to grow the debt and double the debt by 100 per cent between 2010 and 2015. [*Desk thumping*] That is performance UNC style.

3.30 p.m.

Miss Mc Donald: Facts, facts.

Mr. C. Imbert: Those are the facts, Mr. Speaker. They double the debt, we double the GDP. Now let us deal with taxation.

I heard the previous speaker make a lot of noise about screaming and ranting and raving, and what disappointed me too in his fulsome praise of the Prime Minister, as told to us by the Member for Chaguanas West, they have to practise, they all go in a room and they are all told what they have to say, these wonderful things they have to say about the Prime Minister, otherwise “crapaud smoke dey pipe”.

Mr. Warner: That is true.

Mr. C. Imbert: And this came straight from the horse’s mouth, from someone who used to have to do that. [*Laughter*] So he actually wrote it, Mr.

Speaker. I do not mind if somebody extemporising or they are ad-libbing and they feel they want to retain their seat in Parliament or something, and they throw out a “lil” praise for the Prime—“ah doh mind”. But when you write it down and you are reading from a prepared speech about how fantastic and wonderful the Prime Minister is, God’s gift to humanity, Mr. Speaker, “I cyah take that”. But let us deal with facts.

Mr. Speaker, the current taxation rate in Trinidad and Tobago is 25 per cent, and if you were to listen to them you would think that this taxation rate of 25 per cent somehow occurred during the regime of the UNC. Nothing is further from the truth, Mr. Speaker. I am reading from a *Guardian* article of February 02, 2012. It is reporting on the history of taxation in Trinidad and Tobago. And it reads as follows:

“In the 2006 fiscal year, the amount of personal income taxes collect by the Government declined by 26 per cent from \$4.25 billion...to \$3.15 billion.”

Why, Mr. Speaker? Because in the previous year, in the 2006 budget, then Minister of Finance, Prime Minister Patrick Manning reduced personal taxation from 30 per cent to 25 per cent.

The PNM also increased the personal allowance in that budget from \$25,000 to \$60,000 per year. By those progressive taxation measures, Mr. Speaker, even though the year after there was a decline, every single year after that, from 2007 to the present day, collection of personal income taxes has increased because of that visionary, far-reaching, forward-thinking move on the part of the PNM to reduce income taxes in this country and to increase the personal allowance for taxpayers.

In fact, by increasing the personal allowance to \$60,000, 30,000 taxpayers were taken out of the tax net, everybody earning \$5,000. That is a fact. That is PNM. It is PNM that reduced taxes in this country; we reduced taxes, not you. So that deals with this nonsense about taxation and this nonsense about the economy. We double the GDP, you double the debt. We reduced taxes. [*Desk thumping*]

But, Mr. Speaker, let me now deal with some more substantive matters. I had no intention of listening to the Prime Minister last night. I had better things to do with my time.

Mr. Warner: You are like me.

Mr. C. Imbert: In fact, I caught some winks; went and slept. I had better things to do with my time. But when I glanced at the—[*Crosstalk*] yes, I went and I took a sleep so I could get up a little early this morning and do some research.

So, Mr. Speaker, when I listened to what the Prime Minister had to say—I actually have a copy of her speech—well the Prime Minister will tell us that they have estimated a shortfall in revenue of \$7.4 billion and they are going to make it up somehow. There is going to be a reduction in the fuel subsidy, one and a half billion or something so; they are going to sell Phoenix Park and as the Leader of the Opposition has pointed out, this is the worst possible time to sell a natural gas processing facility. The worst possible time, when energy prices are volatile; when the profitability of all petroleum companies is up in the air. This is the worst possible time to sell a natural gas processing facility. Well that is what they are going to do. Oil prices cut in half you know. Natural gas plummeting by 25 per cent but they selling a natural gas processing facility, the crown jewels of Trinidad and Tobago. That is their solution.

So they say fuel subsidy will go down, they are selling Phoenix Park and then they have another four and a half billion, they will cut it somehow. No details. The Minister of Works and Infrastructure screaming at us, “what the PNM go do”. PNM is not in Government, you know. They are in Government. They are cutting the expenditure by four and a half billion. What are they doing, Mr. Speaker? Where would these cuts take place? It is for them to tell us what they are going to cut, not for us. We are not running the country, they are. And you see that was what was so disappointing about the Prime Minister’s presentation last night. You say you are going to cut expenditure by four and a half billion, where are you going to cut it? We want to know, we want to know, we want to know. [Crosstalk] I have a copy, Mr. Speaker, I will not bother with the soon to be, the forgotten former Member for Chaguanas East. I read a copy of the Prime Minister’s speech, it was sent to me. I did not have to watch that fake on television last night and get vex.

Now, Mr. Speaker, let me move on to more important matters, because one of the problems with this administration, I do not know if it is incompetence, I do not know if it is laziness, I do not know if it is a lack of intellectual capacity, I just do not know what it is. But they do not explain anything to the population, and every time you ask them a serious question they duck and they run. I asked the Minister of Finance and the Economy to tell us how much money this country earned from oil last year. And I asked him to break it down into petroleum profits tax, supplementary petroleum tax, petroleum impost, royalties, unemployment levy all of the taxes that we collect on oil—duck and run. I asked him to tell us what prices we are getting for LNG because we need to know.

I understand our revenues from LNG have halved, Mr. Speaker, in the last three months, have cut by 50 per cent. LNG is one of the largest contributors to income in this country, government revenues. But they would not tell us. I say, what prices are we getting for LNG. Where are we selling our LNG? Would not tell us—duck and run. I want to know what price you are selling gas for to the industries at Point Lisas because they have been crying. They say they lose over US \$1 billion because of the incompetence of the Government over the last four years. That is what the Point Lisas industries say. No answer.

It is the same thing with the Apsara restaurant, Mr. Speaker, that they pay \$40 million for, with a valuation of \$20 million. I asked the Minister, he duck and run. He let the question lapse. Every time you ask them a question that is serious, they duck, they run, they do not answer. So it falls to me and it falls to the PNM to explain to this country the whole structure of oil and gas taxation in this country so that the population would better understand what is happening rather than those platitudes that they were treated to last night.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I have in my possession—[*Crosstalk*] he could not teach me even to walk. I have in my possession the 2014 Global oil and tax guide for Trinidad and Tobago published by Ernst & Young. And for those who wish to know, Mr. Speaker, for those who wish to know, you can go on the Ernst & Young website and you will get the fiscal regime for oil and gas for every country in the world in their Global oil and tax guide. And I have the data for Trinidad and Tobago. And in Trinidad and Tobago the fiscal regime for oil and gas is comprised of a number of taxes as follows:

“Petroleum profits tax (PPT), 50% of...profits

Unemployment Levy, 5% of...profits

Supplemental Petroleum Tax (SPT)”—it varies based on the price of oil, and I will come to that in a little while. “Petroleum production levy—...4% of income...

Petroleum Impost

Royalties”—which is a variable rate as well and some small allowances—green fund and so on.

What is most important in all of this which really is what we are supposed to be hearing from the Minister of Finance and the Economy and the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs but they would not tell you, and as I said, I do not know if it is laziness, or a lack of capacity, I just do not know what it is, but the rates of supplementary petroleum tax in Trinidad and Tobago are as follows:

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Between an oil price of zero and \$50 the SPT is zero.

And as my colleague from Chaguanas West just shared with me, I had it up on my laptop as well, the latest price for oil is \$48. So we are below the \$50 rate. So we are receiving zero supplementary petroleum tax at this point in time. Zero, and we get billions of dollars in supplementary petroleum taxes every year, in a normal year, billions of dollars.

So we are losing billions of dollars just through the fact that we are below the \$50 limit cap set for SPT or the price at which the SPT kicks in, Mr. Speaker, and after that between \$50 and \$90 the SPT varies between 18 per cent for deep water and 33 per cent for marine, 25 per cent for land. So we are already losing all of our supplementary petroleum tax. And these are the things people need to know.

Royalties: what is royalty and how do we earn royalty in this country, Mr. Speaker? Royalty is charged on the gross price of oil. It varies from 10 to 15 per cent. So if the price of oil is \$100, you get \$10 in royalty. If the price of oil is \$50, you get \$5 in royalty. So our royalties between June of this year and now have been cut by 50 per cent. Royalties collected on oil in 2014 were \$2 billion. So that is a billion dollars gone. And these are the things that the population needs to know and understand, where we have royalties are cut in half, SPT disappear, petroleum profits going to be drastically reduced, because what oil companies do when they find themselves in this situation is that they adjust their capital expenditure framework and they will claim capital expenditure in this year of income 2015 and pay less petroleum profit tax. These are all of the things we have to look out for.

We have to look out for transfer pricing, where oil companies will charge expenses overseas and thereby because of double taxation agreements they will avoid paying income tax in Trinidad and Tobago. These are the things I want to hear from the Minister of Finance and the Economy. And what is bothering me too, Mr. Speaker, you know, the University of the West Indies, you know, sometimes I feel like giving back my degree, because the University of the West Indies is in a sorry state. Where are the economists in the University of the West Indies educating the public, debating, speaking about these issues? There should have been forums at the University of the West Indies for the last six months, Mr. Speaker, bringing thinkers and economists and oil experts together to talk about these things and to chart the way forward for Trinidad and Tobago. All you are hearing is a deafening silence.

What has happened to the University of the West Indies? What has happened to it? Intellectually bankrupt, Mr. Speaker. And what bothers me as well is that we can no longer have any confidence in the data that is given to us by the Minister of Finance and the Economy and the data that is given to us by the Ministry of Finance and the Economy. And I use no less a source than the Governor of the Central Bank.

I refer to a statement made by the Governor of the Central Bank, on December 01, 2014, “Monetary policy presentation for November 2014”, to the Chaguanas Chamber of Commerce by Jwala Rambarran, Governor. And hear what he has to say on page 4 of this statement:

“Recent economic developments”

This is just a month ago, you know. You “eh” hear nothing like this from them, you know.

“I’ll begin with a brief overview of domestic economic conditions. Following no growth in 2010 and in 2011, our economy recovered by approximately 1½ percent in 2012 and grew by 1.7 percent in 2013. In early 2014, Central Bank expected the Trinidad and Tobago economy to have continued its recovery, with growth projected at 2½ percent.”

Now, the Minister came to this Parliament in September of this year—

Hon. Member: Last year.

Mr. C. Imbert: Well, last year, well this fiscal year and told us that growth for 2014 would be of the order of 2 to 2 ½ per cent. Listen to what the Governor is telling us in December 2014, one month ago.

Dr. Rowley: And he knew that then.

Mr. C. Imbert: And he knows, “eh”.

“Central Bank’s latest economic review of the year now indicates economic growth is likely to be a modest ½ percent”—0.5 per cent—“for 2014.”—0.5 per cent.

So the economy was flat in 2014. We all knew this. Anybody who is in business, anybody who is outside there in the real world will know that the Trinidad and Tobago economy struggled in 2014 despite all the old talk from all of them. So the Governor is now confirming what we know, that there was a modest half per cent growth in 2014.

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“This...is well below our forecast for economic growth, made at the making of the year...So what accounts for this...? How could we the experts, as well as other agencies...and our own CSO, get it so wrong?”

At least he is admitting they got it wrong.

“The unexpected slowdown in the economy was caused by a dismal performance in the energy sector...”

3.45 p.m.

Now, I heard the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs bleating about things are so nice! The economy is strong! [*Interruption*] Yes. Listen to this: Ramnarine, January 08, 2015, eh. This is after Rambaran talked, eh. The Governor talked in December, but one month later, the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs is trying to fool the population:

“Energy sector strong

As global oil prices continue to decline, Energy Minister Kevin Ramnarine is maintaining that the local energy sector remains... ‘strong’.”

Look what the Governor had to say:

“The unexpected slowdown in the economy”—in 2014—“was caused by a dismal performance in the energy sector, with declines most pronounced in natural gas and LNG production.”

Dr. Rowley: Who to believe?

Mr. C. Imbert: “Ah ha tuh believe him.”

Dr. Rowley: “Yuh takin a chance.”

Mr. C. Imbert: “Ah ha tuh believe him because I feeling it.” I could feel that there is no growth in this economy, Mr. Speaker.

So no economic growth in 2014. No wonder the revenue projections were out of whack; no wonder there was a shortfall in revenue of \$1.5 billion because there was no growth in the economy. The Minister misled the Parliament when he told us about a 2 per cent economic growth, and I cannot believe that the technocrats in the Ministry of Finance and the Economy did not tell him what the truth was.

Dr. Rowley: He knew it.

Mr. C. Imbert: I cannot believe. I find that hard to believe. I suspect that he had some idea that there was no economic growth in our economy in 2014. But I think we also need to understand, as a country, what is really happening with this oil price because you heard the Minister of Works and Infrastructure talk about

how it is a temporary phenomenon; it is a cash flow problem.

Well, let us not talk about the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs. I mean, oil prices dropped 50 per cent and “he say it strong—it strong!” Which oil company will invest in oil exploration and production with an oil price of \$40 or \$50? Which? The oil company may already be committed to their 2015 exploration and production programme because that money has already been committed, but certainly not in 2016 and not in 2017. There are going to be severe cutbacks in terms of exploration and drilling with this oil price collapse.

But let us educate the public on what is the problem. The problem with oil in the world is a very simple economic equation, and I know that you will understand this, Mr. Speaker. It is just supply and demand. There is an over-supply of oil in the world and there is a decreased demand, and it is very, very simple. You have countries—the BRIC countries—and you have China, India. Their economic growth is slowing. They have lowered their demand for petroleum products, so there is simply not sufficient demand for oil in the world.

And what some of the economists tell us, right now global oil production is 30 million barrels of oil per day, and what we are told is that if oil production increases or decreases by one million barrels, that could affect the price of oil by \$10. So if production is dropped to 29 million barrels a day, the oil price goes up by \$10. If it is dropped to 28, the oil price goes up by \$20.

And what we have to understand in this country is that we are cockroaches in this fowl party, Mr. Speaker. You know the saying, “Cockroach have no place in fowl party”? This is geopolitics playing out at a global scale. It has nothing to do with Trinidad and Tobago. You have all sorts of things going on. You had production declines in Libya. Libya has come back on stream. You have the US production of oil has gone from four million barrels a day to eight million barrels a day.

In fact, the United States is now the second largest producer of oil in the world, just behind Saudi Arabia, at 10 million barrels a day. So you have Middle Eastern countries which have been affected by conflict. Their supply had gone down. Their supply is now coming back on stream. Libya is coming back on stream. Iraq is coming back on stream, causing more oil to be put onto the market. And then the United States, because of the high prices, because the oil had gone to \$145 and then a drop to \$35, and then had gone back up and crept up and remained stable at \$90 and \$100, and at \$90, Mr. Speaker, it was adequate for the shale oil producers in the United States to start doing horizontal drilling and fracking and all of the things that are necessary to produce shale oil, and they

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have been able to boost their production from four million barrels of oil a day to eight million barrels of oil a day.

So Saudi Arabia reacted to that by driving the price of oil down in an attempt to destroy the US shale market, and we have no idea how long this will go on. OPEC met in November. There was no decision made. There was a request to cut production to allow prices to stabilize. They could not reach an agreement. Saudi Arabia “say no”. So that is what has caused this calamitous—this tumultuous decline in the price of oil.

OPEC has said they are not meeting again until June, Mr. Speaker. “So we ha tuh take dis pressure for de next six months”, and we do not know where this price is going to go. If you listen to what the Saudi Oil Minister had to say—I have an article here from the BBC, dated December 23—not too long ago:

“Opec oil output will not be cut even if price hits \$20.

Saudi Arabia’s oil minister, Ali al-Naimi, has said oil producers’ cartel Opec will not cut production even if the price falls to \$20 a barrel.”

The problem is that Saudi Arabia is worried about its market share. It wants to control the world production of oil. It produces about one-third of the world’s oil right now and it wants to keep that market share of 33 per cent, and it will attack any country that it feels is threatening its market share. And what Saudi Arabia has done is built up a reserve of \$800 billion in its heritage fund. It is equivalent of our heritage fund—\$800 billion! So Saudi Arabia could keep that price down there for a year or two if it wants to, Mr. Speaker, and we, in Trinidad and Tobago, need to understand this.

It is possible that this thing may last for a year. It is possible it may last for six months, but it is also possible it could last for two years, and we need to plan. And, you see, I am fed up of the official spokesmen of this Government just uttering glib platitudes and superficial statements about energy and oil. I had the misfortune to turn on the television the other morning to see the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs carrying on about shale oil and saying, “he get ah telephone call from somebody in the United States that tell him that they could produce shale oil at \$30.”

Mr. Speaker, that is not how you run a country. “Yuh doh get a telephone call from a producer in the United States that tell you that he could produce oil at \$30 so in your mind now, you feel that shale oil break-even price is \$30.” It is not. The break-even price for shale oil is about \$60/\$70. Saudi Arabia knows exactly what it is doing. It is trying to destroy the US shale oil market. It is trying to give Russia pressure because Russia was also increasing production, and there are

other producers coming in from the African continent. So this is a war of global proportions. The only saving grace for Trinidad and Tobago—the only saving grace for Trinidad and Tobago—is that many of these oil-producing countries have pegged their budgetary estimates—their expenditure patterns—on a high price of oil. That is the only saving grace for us.

I read from another BBC article, and in this BBC article, they looked at the price required to maintain the budgets of oil-producing countries, the ones that make a difference. We are not even a member of OPEC. We are a cockroach in the world of oil and we want to play in that league as if we are somebody.

Now, let me just go through the prices of oil that are required to maintain budgets. The oil price needed to balance budgets: Libya, \$184; Iran, \$131; Nigeria, \$123; Venezuela, \$118; Russia, \$105; Saudi Arabia, \$104—the same Saudi Arabia that is willing to allow the oil price to drop to \$20 because it has a sovereign fund of almost US \$1 trillion. It could run on reserves for the next couple years. They need \$104 to survive. Iraq, \$101; Kuwait, \$78; Qatar, \$77.

That is the only saving grace, Mr. Speaker. But because Saudi Arabia, which is the major player in the world energy market, has made a decision that it is going to try and wipe out all the competition—because when you do the reading you will see in the last oil price collapses, there were oil price collapses in the 1980s, 1985, 1986. Oil price collapsed again in 2007, 2008. Saudi Arabia reacted to the drop in oil price by cutting production. So it cut production, oil price went back up, but they lost market share. So you have to listen to what these people are saying, you know, not what Kevin Ramnarine says. You have to listen to what the Saudi Arabian oil Minister is saying. He said, “The last time that we cut production in order to boost prices, we lost market share. We are not doing that again.” So they have decided that they are going to fight this war to the bitter end, and since OPEC is not meeting until June, we are going to be in pain until at least July of this year.

One of the things that bothers me as well, you know, every other country in the Caribbean: Jamaica, Barbados, the price of gasoline at the pump—*[Interruption]* Mr. Speaker, would you tell the Minister for whatever—Oropouche East—to stop muttering? He is disturbing me.

In every other Caribbean country, the price of gasoline—*[Interruption]* Be quiet! The price of gasoline at the pump varies based on the ex-refinery price of gasoline. You would not believe this, Mr. Speaker, but the price of gasoline in Jamaica—Jamaica, an impoverished country, a country that is in the clutches of

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the IMF; its currency is over \$100 Jamaican to one US dollar. The price of gasoline today, as we speak, in Kingston, is less than in Trinidad and Tobago. You know why? Because they have pegged the price of gasoline, like any responsible democracy would do—they have pegged it to the ex-refinery price based on the oil price and the refined product, so that the population receives the benefit of lower oil prices.

Mr. Speaker, currently in the United States, premium gasoline—the equivalent of our premium gasoline—is selling for US \$2.15 a gallon. That works out at TT \$4.39 per litre. That is the true cost of premium gasoline, and that is because the price of oil has dropped from \$100 to \$50.

So why are motorists in—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East has expired. Would you like—

Mr. C. Imbert: Of course, I want an extension.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the question is that the speaking time of the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East be extended by 15 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: You may continue, hon. Member. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. C. Imbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, why are motorists in Trinidad and Tobago paying \$5.75 a litre for premium gasoline when the true price is \$4.39? That is not a subsidy. That is a tax! You are taxing motorists more than \$1 per litre for every litre of premium gasoline that they buy, and it gives you an idea of the “vaps” approach of this Government to governing this country. There is no subsidy on premium gas anymore. But did we hear the Prime Minister talk about that? No! “The Prime Minister tell us dey go save \$1 billion.” They are not going to save. “Dey go tax de citizens” of this country in terms of the price of gasoline.

So what we need to do in this country, we need to get serious. I am so glad we have this energy committee. I was not listening properly at the start of the session but I hope one of those committees that the Senate has responded to us, is the energy committee because we need to have a properly functioning energy committee in this country. We need to because we need to look at our fiscal regime, we need to look at gas pricing.

4.00 p.m.

If you talk to bp, we have a shortage of gas going to the downstream producers, to Atlantic LNG, to the petrochemical companies. There is a supply shortage of about 10 per cent. These companies are running at 90 per cent capacity or less. We are losing billions of dollars, Mr. Speaker, in revenue as a country; billions and billions of dollars in tax revenue, because the Point Lisas companies, Atlantic LNG and so on, are not operating at full capacity because the National Gas Corporation, through the same Phoenix Park that we want to sell at a fire sale, cannot supply them with the adequate quantities of gas, Mr. Speaker.

And do you know why the gas companies are doing that? Do you know why they are doing it? Because for four and a half years this Government has sat on its hands and refused to negotiate with the gas companies in a timely and meaningful manner, in order to come up with a new long-term contract for gas, Mr. Speaker.

In case you did not know, the long-term supply contracts for natural gas in this country are about to expire within the next two to three years, in case you did not know. And what the oil companies have been doing—because the Government has been sitting on its hands for the last four and a half years and doing nothing but talking. They would not come to the table and negotiate with them. So what the gas companies have done—and this is before this crisis occurred, this is before the profitability and the viability of natural gas production went up in the air—they have been saying: “Well all right, you do not want to talk gas price? You do not want to renegotiate long-term contracts with us? Well we are not producing gas.” So you hear a lot of talk about Juniper field and so on. The oil companies are deliberately not monetizing and bringing that gas into production because they cannot get the Government to the table to discuss a reasonable framework for negotiation of law. And that is something, if you want to know what a PNM government will do, that is one of the first things we will do. We will deal with the chronic natural gas shortage in this country because we are serious people. [*Desk thumping*]

We are not going to waste five years procrastinating and burying our heads in the sand and blaming UNC. “We ain go do dat.” One of the first things we are going to do is to go to the table with the gas producers and discuss new long-term arrangements that will be in the interest of all concerned, in the interest of the upstream producer, in the interest of the downstream producer, in the interest of the country, in terms of the cost of electricity, and so on. We will sit down and negotiate with them in a transparent manner so that everybody could see and

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everybody will know what is going on, because there is too much secrecy in this country, too much secrecy.

The population needs to know what is going on. The population needs to know that the long-term gas supply contracts are running out in the next two years because the Government failed to do anything about it. They need to know that. And we will sit down with the oil companies. We will sit down with the producers of heavy oil on land, because there are billions of barrels of oil that are trapped on land in Trinidad and Tobago, and with the correct incentives, small producers would be able to start boosting production of oil on land, Mr. Speaker. These are some of the things that we are going to do. “Yuh hear any ah dat from dem? All yuh hear about is de PNM fault, is de PNM fault.” Yes, it is the PNM fault.

Let me come now to the highway. I am shocked that we came to this Parliament here—when it was on Wednesday?—and a big “to-do and a tra la la and a carrying on about: We do not need to borrow any money. If yuh borrow money yuh have tuh put in de bank and pay interest. Yes, we have money.” Carrying on at a rate when we asked the Government why have you not taken a loan for the Point Fortin Highway? The Member for Oropouche East said: “Ah, yuh want we tuh pay interest.” The Minister of Finance and the Economy is supposed to be a banker, telling us: “Oh, we not going to borrow money and put it on deposit and have tuh pay interest.” Nonsense! Who borrows money and puts it on deposit and pays interest? When you negotiate a construction loan you only pay interest on the money that you draw down. You do not pay interest on the whole thing. I have never heard such nonsense. When you negotiate a loan from the IDB, from the World Bank, you do not pay interest on the amount of money that you have not drawn down yet. You pay a commitment fee. You may have to pay a continuation fee, a small fee, but you do not pay interest until you disburse, until you get the money. I never heard such nonsense.

And after all of that old talk, the Minister of Finance and the Economy telling us we did not borrow money because we did not want to put it in an account and pay interest. Not true! “And de next one saying: all yuh like tuh pay interest?” We hear the Minister of Works and Infrastructure tell us today that NIDCO has already negotiated, since December, last month, a \$1.5 billion loan for the Point Fortin Highway. And he said they are not doing it and the Minister of Works and Infrastructure told us they did it since last month. How does one deal with all of this? How does one deal with all of these things?

“Dey want tuh know how we go balance de budget?” You know, we used to hear this. In the past, we used to hear it and we used to think that it is just a trivial

comment, but I have to agree with my colleague from Chaguanas West and the Leader of the Opposition, stop “de tiefing”. [*Desk thumping*] Because when you—stop the corruption—award a contract for the Beetham Wastewater Plant for \$1 billion, when you could have gotten it for \$600 million, then you have just lost \$400 million. The people of this country have lost \$400 million. I am certain—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Rowley: They had a Christmas party in return.

Mr. C. Imbert: Yes, as the Member for Chaguanas West say, for that \$1 billion and \$400 million gift, “dey throw ah \$400,000 party on the Beetham and give out toys and trinkets.” Talk about wasteful expenditure on propaganda? What was the figure I heard, \$250 million?

The ones that I find most annoying are the advertisements from the Ministry of National Security. “All kinda nonsense about how dey buying drones. Ah hear dey just lease two helicopter and dey buying armoured vehicles and battleship and all kinda thing.” That is what we have to hear every day, repeating it in our ears. You turn on the radio, you turn on the TV you are hearing the Minister of National Security going on and on and on about how they are doing such a fantastic job. And in the first four days of 2015, 11 murders; a record. “It must be hit 20 so far.” I am talking about by the 4th of January, between the 1st of January and the 4th—[*Interruption*] I know, but I am saying between the 1st of January and the 4th of January, 11 murders in four days; 11 murders. And one of the most absurd comments I heard from the Minister of National Security, was why are we focusing on the increase and explosion of murders in the first week of 2015, why “we eh” look at de reduction in murders in the last week of 2014? “I hah tuh hear dat?” I have to listen to that? They were 403 murders in 2014.

Dr. Rowley: Four hundred and eight.

Mr. C. Imbert: Well whatever it is. It was virtually the same amount as in 2013, no change, and then an explosion of violence and crime in 2015, and I have to listen on the radio to “Your Government working for you”. And when we did the budget exercise here, when you did that first historic examination of the estimates, we pointed to the fact that in the Ministry of National Security alone, over \$10 million for propaganda and we asked him why. He said you have to put it in people’s minds that we are doing a good job. That was the answer from the Minister. So that he could spend all those millions of dollars on these foolish advertisements to try and convince people that we did not have 11 murders in four days, that they are not cutting off people’s heads, that they are not shooting at

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babies. They are going to try and convince people that these things are not happening. *[Interruption]* I tell you, not happening.

Mr. Speaker, it is time for the Minister of Finance and the Economy to get serious about his job. He just comes into this Parliament and he says whatever comes into his head. We are not borrowing money because we have money. We are not borrowing money because we have money. That was Wednesday. The Prime Minister came on Thursday and said we are short \$7 billion. Imagine that! The Wednesday the Minister of Finance and the Economy tells the population we do not need to borrow money for the highway because “we full ah money, we have money, we could pay it out of our current account”. One day later, the Prime Minister says we are short \$7 billion, and I have to listen to that. And then one day after that we hear from the Minister of Works and Infrastructure that “dey done arrange” to borrow one and a half billion dollars for the highway, since December.

Mr. Speaker—*[Interruption]*

Dr. Rowley: And when you asked him if they did, he said no, they did not.

Mr. C. Imbert: Yes, and he said they did not. Yes they did, no they did not; yes they did, no they did not. When you go into the commentary—when I looked, I heard the Member for Oropouche East carrying on about how some issue about the price of oil in 1998. Mr. Speaker, oil “must be dip” below US \$10 for about five seconds in 1998—*[Laughter]*—and is Brent. It was not West Texas Intermediate. Because our oil forecast is based on West Texas Intermediate. You feel people “doh know nothing in dis country. You feel we doh know, but we know.” If you do not know we know, and I have here oil prices and in 1998, the price of oil averaged \$12, that is the yearly average. And do you know what the budget was based on? It was based on \$14. So there was a 10 per cent reduction in the price of oil in 1998; a 10 per cent reduction, a blip on the radar screen. It did not affect them, because in 1999, the price of oil went to \$17. So they budgeted in 1998 at \$14. It dropped to \$12, and in 1999, it went to \$17 and in 2000, it went to \$27.

So one year later, the price of oil had doubled, Mr. Speaker, and then almost tripled. They never had to experience what George Chambers experienced, what the Manning administration experienced in 2008, and what they are now experiencing today in what we are all experiencing now, in 2014/2015. That story about how they remember when oil prices went to \$9 in 1998 and how they coped with that and how they show how—nonsense! The price dropped for five seconds and the average for the year was \$12.

Dr. Rowley: West Texas never went to—

Mr. C. Imbert: And West Texas never dropped. Mr. Speaker, in the following year the price of oil nearly doubled and in the following year after that it nearly tripled. So they never, the UNC never, had to face the challenges that this country faces now and that the Chambers administration faced in 1985 and the Manning administration faced in 2008.

Do you know what is beating me, Mr. Speaker? November 21, the Minister is saying: “there is no problem, we cool man.” And even an economist from UWI, “some fella” called Roger Hosein, “everything is good man”. The budget price is good. And this is why I talk about the intellectual bankruptcy of UWI. You get the impression that the only people who speak up there are Government mouthpieces. There are no independent thinkers anymore left at UWI. And I call upon the University of the West Indies to stop that. [*Desk thumping*] Stop that!

Mr. Speaker: You have 30 seconds more.

Mr. C. Imbert: Yes, Mr. Speaker. This country is facing a serious problem and it needs serious people to deal with it, not flippancy, not superficiality, not untruths and not misleading information and “ducking and running” from this Government.

We need to sit down as a country. We need to sit down as a Parliament and fashion a solution to this problem, because that is likely to be the situation. We are likely to be in this problem for at least the next six to 18 months. So I call on the Government, get serious and stop fooling the population. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Terrence Deyalsingh (*St. Joseph*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the few minutes I have before the tea break, I want to respond to two contributions, one by the hon. Member for Tabaquite, which I found quite sad and it gives me no pleasure to have to response to one particular issue, and I will respond to the comedy of the Member for Oropouche East.

Mr. Speaker, I have always blamed the PNM for not explaining to this country its achievements over the years, and it is because of that vacuum, it gives people like the Member for Tabaquite the opportunity to come to this country and speak about the education of girls and young women, as if girls and young women were never educated in Trinidad before 2010.

Mr. Speaker, I grew up with parents from the country and I remember a time when, if you wanted a teaching job in Trinidad and Tobago, you had to renounce your religion and take a Christian name.

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I remember a time when—up to New Year’s Day—one of elder uncles recalling his school days said that his father in Marabella had to come up with \$16 a term to send him to school. And to find that \$16, his father had trouble and had to pay his school fees in instalments. That is the history that faced this country in 1962.

In 1962, and thereafter, with the advent of Dr. Eric Williams and the People’s National Movement, no one had to renounce their religion. No one had to change their names and all Members opposite and on this side were able to acquire a secondary education free of charge. It was not reserved for people—*[Interruption]* I am coming to that, Member for Diego Martin West. It was not reserved for those of African descent, European descent, Chinese descent or males.

I do not mind taking away 10 minutes of my contribution to address this issue because it is important. Recently, the Nobel Prize for peace was shared with Malala Yousafzai. And her biggest contribution in her land, Pakistan, was fighting for the rights of girls to acquire an education. Let me tell this country, through you, Mr. Speaker, girls of any religious persuasion, girls of any ethnic persuasion, and girls of any racial origin have been getting free world-class education in Trinidad and Tobago forever. So if you want to give a Nobel Prize, give it to the PNM of 1962. *[Desk thumping]* But I have to hear the Member for Tabaquite talk today about the hon. Prime Minister fashioning education for girls and young women in 2015. My God! My God!

Mr. Speaker, when one looks at the University of the West Indies, it is populated mainly by what sex?

Dr. Rowley: Female.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: Women, females. That did not happen overnight. The teaching service is populated mainly by whom? What sex? What gender? Women. That did not happen in 2010. But the revisionism of this Government will have you believe that women were downtrodden up until 2010. I have no problem with taking some of my time.

The second thing I want to address, Mr. Speaker, is a very comedic statement made by the Member for Oropouche East and I place the Minister of Finance and the Economy on notice that he has no choice in his wrap up but to respond to me on this policy question.

The Member for Oropouche East, in seeking to defend and explain the Government’s position on financing the highway from Treasury Deposits, is

putting to the country that it is prudent to finance a singular flagship, \$7 billion capital project, the biggest capital project in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, your flagship project, from reserves from cash and I want to ask the Minister of Finance and the Economy, is that Government policy where all such capital projects are going to be financed from Treasury Deposits? Because that is the thesis put forward by the Member for Oropouche East today.

So, Mr. Speaker, I now come—I have spent five minutes talking about that. Mr. Speaker, the genesis of this debate has to do with the financing of the Point Fortin Highway. But let me give you a backdrop. One would remember, in the run-up to the campaign for the 2010 election, we were hearing terms on the campaign trail, the economy was—what?—on the verge of a precipice, a chasm. And we told the Government, when it came with its first budget, the theme was: facing the issues, turning the economy around; not to turn the economy around, because the economy was going fine.

Mr. Speaker, there are two scenarios that a country faces or two choices in deciding to finance a \$7 billion project. If you have a buoyant economy, very buoyant, plenty cash reserves, fine, you can probably dip in it. But if you are on a precipice, as put forward by the then candidate for Tunapuna, who became the Member of Parliament for Tunapuna on the campaign trail, you would remember him saying the words precipice, financial precipice, Treasury empty, we are broken.

Mr. Speaker, I had to hear last night the hon. Prime Minister no less a person speak about our Standard & Poor's rating. I want to quote a document which this Government cannot deny, talking about T&T's credit ratings, and I quote:

Moody's Investment Service in June 2010—this is June 2010, a mere three months after they came into power—maintained the current credit rating for the economy of T&T at Baa1 for government bond ratings in both foreign and local currency and A1, in June 2010—they met that—and Baa1 for foreign currency, bonds and notes.

This is June 2010.

The outlook at this time remained stable due primarily to the diversified energy sector—so they inherited a diversified energy sector—low-risk exposure—you inherited low risk exposure—and listen to this—low levels of public debt and other external debt indices.

That is what you inherited.

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Moody's—let us give an historical picture—July 2006, Trinidad, A1 stable; October 2007, A1 stable. Who was in power then? December 2008, A1 stable; June 2010, A1 stable. So when I had to hear last night that we are A1, “ah say: but wait ah minute dis is news tuh me.” Maybe we were in dire straits before. But we have been A1 stable since July 2006. Standard & Poor's, August 2008, A; April 2009, A; December 2009, A. Our economy has always been solid. You inherited good ratings. You inherited good ratings. [*Desk thumping*] But I had to listen to a Prime Minister take credit for an A1 rating. CariCRIS, the Caribbean rating agency, 2008, Cari AAA 2009, Cari AAA and 2010, AAA. That is the history of the economy you inherited.

But, Mr. Speaker, the genesis of the financial irresponsibility is this, you have no way of financing the highway but to dip into Treasury Deposits. These are short-term financing measures. And any banker worth \$10 million will tell you, you do not borrow short to lend long. You do not finance a long-term multi-year project of \$7 billion by going to Treasury Deposits because those have to be repaid and that is the genesis of the financial irresponsibility of this Government.

But I have to hear that if I want an explanation ask the Member for Chaguanas West. I am asking the Prime Minister because the buck stops with the Prime Minister, on the advice of the Minister of Finance and the Economy. That is what I want to know.

Because when this project was conceived, not under the PNM, was given the go-ahead for construction, you had no financing in place. But last night I had to hear the Prime Minister say all new infrastructural projects are going to be stopped if there is no financing. What madness is this? So you started a \$7 billion project with no financing in place. And we are here today and we have to listen to this diatribe, utter diatribe!

Mr. Speaker, all the Government is doing is taking advantage of a timing delay from the Ministry of Local Government and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development. They talk about deferrals. I want to go to page 4 of the document, and listen to the lunacy, the accounting and financial lunacy.

Funding was provided—they are talking about savings—in fiscal 2014, to meet one installment Re: principal payment to UDeCott, \$3.4 billion long-term bond. However, this payment was not due until fiscal 2015.

If you knew my friends, it was not due until fiscal 2015, why did you put it into your 2014 accounts? And if you put it into your 2014 accounts, does it mean that you are not going to have to pay it? Is it a deferral, which you have to pay, or

is it a saving as you claim? Because deferrals in accounting and in finance, deferrals my friends, are not savings. You are simply putting off the payment. And that is the type of lunacy we have to listen to here today: smoke and mirrors, financial misconduct, financial irresponsibility and financial recklessness. That is the only way to describe the initial funding of this highway.

Mr. Speaker, again I had to listen last night to a Prime Minister say for the past 20 years we have been a gas economy. Who put this country on the gas economy trajectory? They will blame PNM for everything, but they will not say it is PNM policy that has saved the day for you. [*Desk thumping*] It is PNM policy that made this economy a gas economy, not the UNC, not the NJAC, not the MSJ, not the TOP. It was the PNM, starting from the days of Dr. Eric Williams, continued by Mr. George Chambers, and I will now give credit to somebody. I might get some licks, but I will give some credit now to Mr. Basdeo Panday, because when he inherited government, he got the Atlantic Trains ready to go. It was a PNM project. But some of my colleagues opposite who sit in the Parliament today went to Mr. Panday and say: “scrap it, it is a PNM thing, it no good.” Mr. Panday, to his credit, and I will say it, listened to Professor Ken Julien and disregarded all the advice from Members sitting opposite me to scrap Atlantic Trains 2, 3 and 4. If Mr. Panday had not continued with a PNM policy, today we are dead. [*Desk thumping*] But Members opposite advised Mr. Panday, cajoled, to scrap it because it is a PNM thing.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, it is now 4.30, but because we took a late lunch and normally when we have a sitting at 1.30 we break at 4.30, so we do three hours of work. I would like, with your indulgence, to allow the Member for St. Joseph to complete his entire contribution and then we will take our tea break at five. Is that agreeable?

Hon. Members: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you may continue.

4.30 p.m.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So that is the type of advice that they give people. So when I hear my Prime Minister last night talk about a gas economy, that is where the gas economy comes from and that is what has saved this country today—Dr. Eric Williams, Mr. George Michael Chambers, continued by Mr. Panday much to the annoyance of people sitting opposite me today.

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Mr. Speaker, if this Government was serious about funding it would have taken some of its own advice when they were campaigning, because when they were campaigning they portrayed themselves to be the business class, they know how to run big business. We do not know about business. They have all these people abroad waiting to come back to run the country. If the AAA rating that you inherited—what does that mean? That type of rating means your country is a solid credit risk, it can repay its loan obligations and you can lend that entity money. Therefore, there was no good reason with the A rating you inherited which you spoke about last night, which would have prevented you from getting international funding because any prudent banker, any prudent economist worth its salt will tell you, you want an orderly flow of funds matching your construction schedule. This is a multi-year construction schedule. So you go to the IDB, you go to the World Bank, they look at your procurement policy, they look at everything and lend you money and we repay it over 20 years.

Mr. Speaker, anybody who buys a house and a car—the average person buys their house through a mortgage. They do not take all their savings, build the house and then have no money left for electricity, water. Most people take a loan to buy their car. They do not buy the car cash and then have no money to put gas and buy insurance. You spread it out, you amortize it over 20 years, but not this Government. This Government takes cash flow, Treasury Deposits, sink \$7 billion, and now we have no money left to do other things and run a deficit. That is why you call it—and that is why now we have to be shifting money from housing, shifting money from local government because we have these Treasury Deposits which had become due. These short-term mechanisms to fund a long-term multi-year project, and that is why I call it “fiscal irresponsibility”.

Mr. Speaker, I just read from a document which spoke about the economy they inherited in 2010: low public sector debt, A ratings, but I want to put into the *Hansard* an answer on Prime Minister’s question day of November 19, 2014, where the Member for St. Joseph asked the following question:

“Question No. 16, could the hon. Prime Minister state Government’s reason or reasons not to seek external loan funding for the Point Fortin Highway?”

And this is the answer from the hon. Prime Minister to my question.

“At that time it was considered”—by the Cabinet, eh—“by the Cabinet”—so this is a collective Cabinet decision—“and by the Ministry of Finance and the Economy that it would be funded through Treasury Deposits...”

Mr. Warner: By Jack Warner.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: No, no, it did not say Jack Warner. It was a Cabinet decision, and the buck stops with who? The Prime Minister as the constitutional head of the Cabinet—she can blame no one else. No one—and she will be acting on the advice of the Minister of Finance and Economy. Those are the two persons around whom this disastrous debacle now rests. And I asked a following question:

“Does the Prime Minister consider that decision to be prudent for such a large capital expenditure project not to seek external loan funding?”

Do you know what the Prime Minister said? Remember I just read a document which said they inherited low external debt? Mr. Speaker, do you know what that document is? Their 2010 budget statement. So in their 2010 budget statement they are talking about low external debt. Remember the Member for Diego Martin North/East just said under their tenure debt increased by 100 per cent?

Mr. Imbert: Doubled.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: Doubled? This is what the Prime Minister is now saying in November 2014 about external debt:

“And if so...yes, the external debt is already so high.”

But your first budget document speaks to what? Low external debt, and four years later you are telling me your external debt is so high. So under your tenure external debt goes up.

Mr. Speaker, the prudent way to finance this highway was either through local funding. If the local system cannot give us \$7 billion, go to external funding. Trinidad and Tobago is a member of good standing of the IADB or the IDB. You could have gone to their lending policy 302 which talks about preparation, evaluation and approval, and all this debate we are having and all this controversy about funding will have been avoided if you had followed simple procurement policies and procedures under lending policy 302 from the Inter-American Development Bank. I will tell you something. With the collapse in oil prices now, who is going to fund this for us now? It means every so often we are going to have to dip in to Treasury Deposits, take away money from circulation which could be used in the hospitals, which could be used for goods and services, which could be used for transfers and subsidies, which could be used for social programmes to continue the construction of a highway which was badly financed from day one, and that is the problem we are faced with. That is the problem.

But the Member for Oropouche East spent a lot of his time and fury speaking about the fact that it is bad policy to borrow. That is why I am asking the Minister

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of Finance and the Economy to tell me today whether he agrees with the Member for Oropouche East that it is bad policy to borrow to finance a \$7 billion capital flagship multi-year project; and if the answer to that is yes, well God help Trinidad and Tobago. If it is your policy that capital projects of this size should be financed from the current account and Treasury Deposits, well heaven help me. This is untidy and ineffective procurement; untidy and ineffective financing.

Mr. Speaker, you know, with this \$450 million do you know what we could have done with this money? We could have had several LifeSports. Heaven help us. But look at where this Government has spent some money on, LifeSport. How much money we spent there?

Dr. Rowley: Four hundred million dollars.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: Four hundred million dollars. Colour Me Orange, how much we spent there? Three hundred and fifty?

Dr. Moonilal: Five.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: Five? Good! Five and four, nine. Hoop of Life, how much we spent there?

Dr. Moonilal: Three billion.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: Three billion? Good!

Dr. Rowley: That is a joke for him.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: It is a joke for him.

Dr. Moonilal: You are talking rubbish.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: All of these projects—

Mr. Speaker: Please, please, please!

Mr. T. Deyalsingh:—LifeSport, Hoop of Life, Colour Me Orange, what long-term tangible benefit has that brought to any of the targeted communities? Absolutely none!

You have wasted a windfall. Absolutely wasted a windfall, and that is your legacy—Colour Me Orange; LifeSport; 34 million to Adolphus Daniell for doing what? For doing what? Not a computer, not a piece of chalk, not a whiteboard; not a copybook whether it is big line or single line or checkered line, nothing to show for LifeSport, but Adolphus Daniell gets \$34 million and we clap for that.

Mr. Speaker, when we had that first finance committee about the moneys for LifeSport, I put the question then to the Minister of Finance—he was sitting in the second chair I believe—I said Minister, can we recover all these hundreds of millions from LifeSport? The then Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara chimed in, he said, “Deyalsingh, St. Joseph, you are assuming there is illegal activity there.” But that was before the audit, before the contract to kill people and I pose the question to the Minister of Finance and the Economy again: in light of your own forensic audit, are you seeking, hon. Minister, to recover any of those moneys from Dustbin Terriers, from Adolphus Daniell; and to recover any of those \$400 million squandered and wasted on LifeSport for a programme that has done nothing to benefit Trinidad and Tobago? Nothing! Nothing!

Mr. Speaker, I want to take off a little bit on the Member for Diego Martin North/East there. Remember I said earlier that there were Members opposite advising then Mr. Panday not to continue with Atlantic Trains 2, 3 and 4, not to continue with a PNM project because it was a PNM project, and—*[Interruption]*

Mrs. Seepersad-Bachan: That is not true.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh:—God help us if he had listened to them. You will have your turn to talk—well sorry, they are not picking you again. So I am sorry. I done picked. This Government has masked the troubles facing this country because gas and oil production under their tenure has dropped significantly. Mr. Speaker, do you know what Point Lisas is currently running at? About 50 per cent capacity because they have wasted five years and Point Lisas is now running at approximately 50 to 60 per cent capacity. But a lot of their problems and their drop in production of both oil and gas was masked by the fact that you had buoyant energy prices. Now that the prices—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for St. Joseph has expired. Hon. Member, you want to guide the Speaker—

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you. I will require my extension, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the question is that the speaking time of the hon. Member for St. Joseph be extended by 15 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

Visitor

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**VISITOR
JOE DANIEL**

(Member of Parliament Canada)

Mr. Speaker: Before you continue, hon. Member, may I just bring to the attention of hon. Members. In the Speaker's gallery at this time, there is a parliamentary colleague from Canada who is visiting our country and he has come to take in the sitting of the House of Representatives. His name is Mr. Joe Daniel. He is the Member of Parliament for Don Valley East in the House of Commons in Canada. Could we warmly welcome Mr. Daniel? [*Desk thumping*] He is accompanied by one Mr. Al Baksh from the Trinidad High Commission in Canada.

You may continue, hon. Member.

4.45 p.m.

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(ADOPTION)**

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you. And formally, I would like to welcome our colleague from Canada. Hope he has a wonderful stay here. I know his country has been touched by a very unfortunate incident a few months ago and Paris is now undergoing similar traumas, but good will triumph over evil.

Mr. Speaker, what has masked this Government and saved it, in the face of declining oil production, declining gas production, were buoyant prices. Now that those prices are no longer buoyant, you have been unmasked. Your slip is now showing big time and we are in problems. You are now panicking and I do not know where you are going to find the testicular fortitude or the ovarian rectitude to correct the mess that we are now in.

We have now had—[*Crosstalk*] You want me to say it again? I hope you find the testicular fortitude or the ovarian rectitude to correct the problems. Because after five years of deficit financing, we are now in a tailspin. You have had a windfall and you have wasted it. Wasted it. And let me tell you what you could have used that windfall for. You see all these murders we have now?—even if you did not like the OPVS, you could have bought the vessels from China that you saw there and you fell in love with. Even if you did not like the OPVs, you could have done something, but if you had stuck with the OPVs, 14 lives might have been saved in 2015. But such is your spite for PNM policy and your blindness of hate for PNM policy, you cancelled a programme and you boast about a saving, but transferred that to the savings of people's lives.

Now, in 2015, the big story, after your manifesto promise of 100 and—90-day crime plan. The 90-day crime plan. What has become of it? Why is murder and crime still the main issue in 2015 after five years of your governance? Why is murder and crime still the number one issue facing every single citizen? We have had no economic diversification. Invader's Bay is stuck in a rut because of this Government's incompetence and intransigence and unwillingness to divulge an opinion which says that it was legal to bypass the Central Tenders Board. Where is the East Port of Spain growth pole? Where is the North Coast growth pole? All we have had is foolish talk, foolish rhetoric. East Port of Spain is no more developed five years after your ascension to the throne. But foolish talk and glib talk is par for the course.

Mr. Speaker, you remember the campaign trail, the pension promise of \$3,000? That pension promise was going to add \$7.5 billion to expenditure. You could not deliver. So what did you do? You blamed Ernie Ross and say it was "ah misprint". That is how you operate: "Is not me. Is not me in the video. Is not me in the second video." You all have all this evidence in your face. And when the man say, "is not my wife, is your wife, well, not your wife, is my wife, is not me. Is not me in the mirror in room 202. Is not me. Is never alyuh. Is Ernie Ross." Ernie Ross was a misprint, he had no right to say you were giving everybody \$3,000. It was a misprint. Resmi Ramnarine was "ah misstep". The state of emergency was "ah mistake". Misprint, misstep, mistake. That is what this country is being run by. "Ah set of mis-es": mistake, misstep, mischief.

Mr. Imbert: Misconduct.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: Misconduct.

But, Mr. Speaker, you know, societies have a way of churning up or throwing up good people from time to time. India had Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi; South Africa had Mr. Nelson Mandela; United States had many good people; many good people. Mr. Speaker, this Government has been steadfast in its denial that this highway has hit a raw nerve with Trinidadians and Tobagonians.

There is somebody called Dr. Wayne Kublalsingh. When a citizen of a country, of a developed democracy, when a citizen decides to fast until death over an issue, whether I agree with him, whether I support his cause or not is irrelevant. But when somebody of the stature and ilk of a former university professor, a Ph.D—this is no madman, this is no fly-by-night person. This is a learned, erudite individual who takes up a social cause and decides to fast until death, and this Government makes fun of him and calls him "ah serial faster". The Member for

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Oropouche East says he does not want to get involved because all of this revolves around the highway. But when this Government singles out the Kublalsingh family and spews venom and hate on them, I have to stand and take notice.

Mr. Speaker, November 28, 2012, the *Guardian*, at a UNC meeting—a report of a UNC meeting. The Member for Oropouche East:

“Kublalsingh’s family a cult...”

And then there is a pun on words. I hope I pronounce the word right or spell the word right. He goes on to say:

“There is...”

[*Crosstalk*] Yeah, and you see, you call this cleverness but the world looks on at us and you are a major spokesperson for this Government.

Mr. Imbert: The main.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: So when you say the Kublalsingh family “a cult” and I hope I pronounce the word right or spell it right—you, my friend, are representing the views and thoughts of the Government. And you go on to say:

“There is something surreal about this family.”

Surreal means bizarre, other-worldly. When the Kublalsinghs decide to support their son in an issue of such importance, whether I agree with the man or not is irrelevant. I have never met the man. I have never met the family. But when a citizen in a developed democracy decides to fast to the death over an issue, all of us, regardless of political persuasion, should pause, should pause.

Dr. Browne: “Have ah heart, man.”

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: And as my friend is saying, “have ah heart, have ah heart”, but not my friends across there. Not my friends across there!

Mr. Speaker, I am coming to the end of my time. This Government inherited an economy in 2010 by their own budget document which speaks to an economy that had a Standard & Poor’s rating of A. The Prime Minister, last night, boasted A. It is the same rating. With that rating and by their own admission of low public debt, they could have financed and funded this highway through external funding or through local funding amortized over 20 years and drawn down in tranches. So when you are doing the Penal Interchange, you draw down; when you do the first part from Golconda, you draw down and you pay interest on that part.

Mr. Imbert: Exactly.

Mr. T. Deyalsingh: So, in closing again, I want to ask the Minister of Finance and the Economy: are you in agreement with your colleague's assertion that it is more prudent to fund multi-year, highly capital-intensive projects from current cash flows and Treasury Deposits? Tell us, Minister of Finance and the Economy, what is your position. Give us \$10 million worth of advice today.

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

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I think it is a good time for us to pause. This sitting is now suspended until 5.30 p.m.

4.56 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.30 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

The Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development (Hon. Errol Mc Leod): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I listened very carefully to the hon. Prime Minister last night, and I read a couple of times, the full text of her statement to the country. And I am of a view that is fundamentally different from that expressed by Members opposite. [*Crosstalk and laughter*] It was not about singing either, it is about being very objective and subscribing to country and people first. That is the theme under which the hon. Prime Minister addressed us.

Mr. Speaker, there is a story about a licentious farmer who it is said would have gone about, particularly on the Friday and Saturday evenings frolicking—
[*Interruption*]

Miss Mc Donald: Watch your words, please.

Hon. E. Mc Leod:—and committing—Watch my words?—all sort of crimes which were essentially kept secret. So recognized was he, that he was sometimes considered to be given responsibility as a dean of discipline even at schools. This licentious farmer would have committed many crimes on a Friday and on Saturday, and then quite “hypocrittakally”—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Hypocritically.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: Hypocritically, thank you very much teacher.

Dr. Griffith: Principal.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: Yes, principal. On Sunday morning he runs to church and prays for a crop failure. I feel certain that if one were to examine very, very clinically the past—that some of us will not be allowed to forget—we will find

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licentious farmers, some of them wanting to occupy high office. I will have more to say about the licentious farmer at another time.

This afternoon or was it this morning, we had a hoodlum priest, claiming to know scriptures better than those who might be considered to be righteous and really God-fearing. There is very little difference, if any at all, between the licentious farmer and the hoodlum priest. Hoodlum priests, Mr. Speaker, when they recognize that they are coming to the end of their days, read more scriptures than they would have ever done in earlier incarnations.

Mr. Speaker, we hear that it is the PNM who grew our country's GDP by 100 per cent 2006 to 2010. I think that is the period over which—or is it 2002/2010? And that might be so, that might well be so. But in 2008, the oil price was at \$140 and I think that most of us who would have kept in tune with what was going on in our oil economy, our oil and gas economy, we would have known where the oil price was positing from time to time. The point which I wish to make is that at a high of \$140 per barrel, West Texas Intermediate in 2008, workers and their unions were denied any decent offer of a wage increase, and an improvement in their terms and conditions of employment. It was zero, zero, zero, and in one or two cases, it was zero, zero, one.

It was said here, that the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development is considered a disaster; that is recorded. And as bad as I met it, I never considered it a disaster, but if it was a disaster, it is that side. Today however, the hon. Member for Chaguanas West, yes—[*Crosstalk*]

We established an environment in which all of those collective agreements that were being starved of any attempt to settle them, we set the environment that facilitated settlements at the bilateral level, and settlements at the level of conciliation, some of which I would have myself superintended over. Eighty-five collective agreements, Mr. Speaker, 85 of them, and I think I would use up whatever time that I have allotted to me, to identify each one. [*Desk thumping*] Eighty-five collective agreements were settled. There are those that have not been settled, but we have moved from no settlement in any—at the close of 2014; 85 old ones. For the triennium 2008 to 2011, 2009 to 2012, and there was one, outstanding since 2005 that we also settled.

Mr. Speaker, Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, monthly rated workers, 2005—2007, settled; Betting Levy Board, 2008—2010; Caribbean Airlines, pilots; CARIRI, three bargaining units, 2008—2010; Central Bank, three bargaining units, 2000—I better come back to that one—2009—2011, Central

Regional Health Authority, 2008—2010; Chaguaramas Development Authority, 2008—2010; Chaguanas Development Authority again, another bargaining unit there, 2008—2010; Government daily rated employees, 2010—2012; Civil Service and Statutory Authorities, monthly paid employees, 2007—2009. I think I might come back to this.

I am prepared to send around a copy to each Member of this honourable House, and to those who have now been becoming bedfellows with Members opposite—unions I am talking about—I will also send to them because some of them have been challenging the authenticity of the statements that we have been making, when we had settled 35, when we had settled 60, when we reached 73. Indeed, some of them, unaware as to the number of unions and the number of bargaining units that we have in Trinidad and Tobago, some of them were saying: “But we do not have so many bargaining units”, because they do not know and they did not care.

Mr. Speaker, you know what? So well we have organized the environment to facilitate a closer working together between unions and employers, most of them, that we have 21 collective agreements which I am identifying as agreements that have been done in a second round. It is the first time in Trinidad and Tobago that we have had two sets of negotiations with the same parties taking place in one 4½ year period. [*Desk thumping*] In one 4½ year period—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Seemungal: Without any protest.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: Well, there had been little steps and so on. For the first time and those I want to register now on the record, Mr. Speaker. Negotiations settled for a second round: Central Bank, 2014—2016; Chief Personnel Officer and the National Union of Government and Federated Workers for government daily-rated employees, 2013 to 2015; the next Government is not going to meet the kind of backlog that this Government met in 2010. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Mc Intosh: The next Government?

Hon. E. Mc Leod: The next Government. After every election there is a next Government. You are very likely to see these same faces forming the next Government, however. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Mc Intosh: No way. By design, by design.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: Your phone will stop ringing. [*Crosstalk and laughter*]

5.45 p.m.

- Chief Personnel Officer, San Fernando City Corporation, Contractors and General Workers Trade Union, 2013—2015;
- Tobago House of Assembly, Chief Personnel Officer, National Union of Government and Federated Workers, daily rated, 2013—2015;
- Chief Personnel Officer and the Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers Association, 2011—2014;
- And, Mr. Speaker, I want to put on the record congratulations to both the employer and the teachers and their union for the very disciplined manner in which they conducted these negotiations. [*Desk thumping*]
- Naparima Bowl, National Union of Government and Federated Workers, daily rated, 2008—2011. Am I reading the correct thing here? That one is supposed to be the old case;
- National Helicopters Services Limited, Oilfields Workers Trade Union, Bargaining Unit 1 and 3, 2013—2016;
- National Insurance Property Development Company and the Estate Police Association for their precepted staff, 2013—2016;
- National Petroleum Marketing Company Limited and the EPA, that is the Estate Police Association, precepted security staff, 2014—2016;
- National Quarries Limited and the Union of Commercial and Industrial Workers, Bargaining Unit 3, hourly rated, 2012—2015;
- Point Lisas Industrial Port Development Corporation, Seamen and Waterfront Workers Trade Union, hourly rated, 2015—2017. Now, this one is also a little bit of a history making in that these negotiations were concluded two/three months ago, for 2015—2017; and similarly for the monthly-rated workers at PLIPDECO, 2015—2017;
- Supervisory bargaining unit also at PLIPDECO, Seamen and Waterfront Workers, 2015—2017;
- Sugarcane Feeds Centre, All Trinidad General Workers' Trade Union, hourly and daily rated, 2014—2016;
- University of the West Indies and the West Indies Group of University Teachers, 2012—2014;

- Water and Sewerage Authority, 2014—2016.

Mr. Speaker, and there are very strong indications that those other bargaining units that are supposed to represent the period 2013—2016 are well on the way to settling a number of outstanding collective agreements.

In fact, we have been doing all of this without the level of staffing that we should really have. And what has been happening in the Conciliation Division of the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development is that there is a serious shortage, it seems, of people who are really experienced and who are taking time to train properly for the job of conciliation services and so on. This is so, both on the part of the employer and the trade union. I say this without making apology.

I came up at a time in the trade union when you had to learn the business. You had to understand the process of collective bargaining. The leadership of the trade union ensured that we had competent staff who would do a measure of economics, who would understand balance sheets and so on, who could analyze financial statements and who had a capacity to develop arguments on a particular point—and this was both the employer and the trade union.

Nowadays, you meet people who abuse the word “no”. The trade union says, “This is my position”; and the employer says, “No”. The employer says, “This is my position”; and the trade union says, “No”. There is no informed argument. There is no substantiation of the positions that are being put forward and so on and that makes the job of the conciliator difficult sometimes.

So those conciliators who are exposed to both sides of the argument and who would read a book or two, and who would engage in some discussions and who would be willing to spend extra hours in a meeting that really is not on his schedule but he wants an opportunity to learn what is happening here, how is this conciliator handling this issue and so on; and after two years of that training and so on, because of the—I would say it—inferior terms and conditions that have always plagued the public service, they go on to the private sector. And what is happening, too, is that the private sector is hiring a lawyer for every little case. Everything is seen from a legal standpoint, going contrary to what was established at the level of the Industrial Court when we had such Presidents as Isaac Hyatali—was it?—and Mr. Brathwaite.

So this is an area with which we are battling and, as you would be aware, Mr. Speaker, as hon. Members would be aware, we are working assiduously at the social dialogue process to meet some mandates that have been established by the

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International Labour Organization and this perhaps is one of those great opportunities that we have, given the challenge of a declining oil price, given the challenge of a gas price, both of which we do not control.

Trinidad and Tobago is a price taker. Our production is nowhere near that of those who can determine whether the price increases tomorrow by their cutting back on their massive production levels or, the price falls tomorrow on their opening up their valves—like in the case of Saudi Arabia, open up the valves and you flood the market a little bit more.

We are not in that fortunate position and what we would require at a time like this—and we do not know what tomorrow holds really—we would require the coming together of all hands on deck, addressing our refinery margins and trying to get the greatest benefit of the most cost-effective measures that we need to be employing to ensure that we do not threaten our job security and our enviable level of employment at this time.

We committed—in the Prime Minister’s address to the nation—to maintaining the strong fundamentals of our economic situation. We committed to doing all in our power to hold our unemployment level at below 5 per cent—it is currently at 3.6 per cent—and at the end of December 2014—and this was said earlier; I say it only for repetition—our foreign reserves stood at US \$11.3 billion, that is TT \$73 billion, an increase of almost 30 per cent from 2010 and the highest in our country’s history. Whatever anyone might say, this is a fact. It is the highest in our country’s history, and perhaps because of our economic fundamentals being strong, we were told that we will maintain our personal incomes and the social programme, our pensions and so on.

Earlier, we laid on the table the Minimum Wages Order, 2014, taking minimum wages from \$12.50 to \$15. There are those who are arguing that what we need is a living wage. What is a living wage? How do they determine a living wage? And we have heard this especially from some unions perhaps, that do not know better, and some unions which perhaps are not sure about the role of the unions.

Now we have a level of unionism that is somewhere 19 or 20 per cent or thereabouts. Enough work is not being done educating the workers and organizing them into trade unions, and where you think that the business is doing so well enough that workers ought to have a better deal, you organize those workers and you engage in the collective bargaining process and you see now your role as having to assist with developing the business as you develop the workers because

you could not really advance the workers to the point where the other side suffers. They must both grow. If you did not have a business that is doing well, then your workers' job security is threatened and sometimes we fail to recognize that.

6.00 p.m.

So, Mr. Speaker, we are committed to guarding the job security of those who are employed, engaging in activities that would have us subscribe to increasing our productivity levels—and this is not just the worker. There are some systems—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre and Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development has expired. Would you want to guide me, hon. Minister?

Hon. E. Mc Leod: Yes, Mr. Speaker, thanks.

Mr. Speaker: You would like an extension?

Hon. E. Mc Leod: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the question is that the speaking time of the hon. Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development and Member of Parliament for Pointe-a-Pierre be extended by 15 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Microenterprise development, in that regard, we are doing quite a bit of work too.

Mr. Speaker, I do not intend to take the full 15 minutes because the point has been made already, and I needed to just mention that for the year 2014, in another programme that falls under the portfolio of the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development—that is, the Commonwealth Caribbean Seasonal Agricultural Workers Programme or the farm workers programme as it is better known—for 2014, we had 1,015 workers from Trinidad and Tobago engaged in the seasonal farm programme in Canada. So important is this programme that for that period 2014, as at September, our workers had earned approximately Can. \$8,470,112.33 which comes out at \$47,547,290.27.

Many of these workers are maintaining their families quite comfortably on the basis of their engagement in this programme. So well we have done, that there are three workers, three former workers, one of whom I came to know, and who is from Rio Claro—today after 20 years of his engagement in this programme, today he owns the farm on which he was employed. It is an 80-acre farm and he is growing the best celery and pimentos and so on in Canada, and employing some 27 workers. So that, all is not bad for Trinidad and Tobago.

The Prime Minister and her Government did not see the sky caving in on us, and I do not know how many of us would have realized the absence of panic as we try to deal with this situation of lower than preferred oil prices. I know an old worker who would have said to us when we were engaged in some struggle or the other that, listen, you make sacrifices beginning with the training of your mind, and that you must understand that flies lived before jackass got sore.

Miss Cox: Jackass! That is parliamentary?

Hon. E. Mc Leod: Well, I do not know that it is unparliamentary, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Members: Do not repeat it.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: Flies lived before donkey got sore. [*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: That is better.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: That is better?

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Yes.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: You prefer the donkey?

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: That is right. [*Crosstalk and laughter*]

Hon. E. Mc Leod: Mr. Speaker, you know, and I think that it is because we have become so fixed on oil and gas that even as we do things in our diversification thrust, many of us sometimes refuse to recognize what is developing in other areas. Oil contributes just about 35 per cent of Government's hydrocarbon revenues, I prefer to put it that way. Gas contributes some 65 per cent, and at \$48.71 per barrel at this time and a gas price of—where the gas price is?—\$2.00 and—well, it is not down to \$2.25.

Hon. Member: Henry Hub is \$2.85.

Hon. E. Mc Leod: \$2.85—we can survive by improving our productivities in the areas outside of oil and gas, and ensuring that we raise the value of our investment and our contributions generally in the oil and gas sector. As much as we diversify, still for a long time to come it is my belief we will depend on oil and gas to make substantial contributions to our economic and other ways of life.

The strength of the economy of Trinidad and Tobago depends on all of us as workers, as employers, as managers, as journeymen, recognizing that Trinidad and Tobago and our people must come first. After we have established that and

we demonstrate it, we can then take our different sides at different times when there are opportunities to do so, but recognizing after we have taken our different sides politically and otherwise, in the interest of the country, we must come together and address those situations, particularly the ones over which we do not have any real control or even influence.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to compliment the hon. Prime Minister and Member of Parliament for the constituency of Siparia on her astute leadership of the affairs of Trinidad and Tobago, and we look forward to her continuing to serve us in the manner in which she has been serving us so that we can continue to go forward ever and backward never.

Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Paula Gopee-Scoon (*Point Fortin*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and let me say that it is good to be back after the holidays to do the work of the people. Firstly, let me add my sentiments and pay homage as well—just a few words—to the late Martin Joseph whom I worked with in the Cabinet, and just to say that the country is poorer for his passing, as he was someone who dedicated most of his professional life, not just to the PNM, but to making Trinidad and Tobago a better place and the people of this country as well.

So that this debate has gone a little bit askew, but I am going to try to speak in segments, but first here to deal with the Bill to supplement and vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2014) Act, 2013. Much has been said, and I just want to make two particular points, this is on the Point Fortin Highway because it concerns the people of Point Fortin, and there is another matter which was raised on UDeCoTT in the discussions on Wednesday at the committee meeting which preceded today's events that I want to address as well.

I think much has been said about the method of financing of the Point Fortin Highway and so on, and the fact that it is unorthodox, and especially for a large project being one of capital expenditure, \$7.5 billion coming from a current account, it is not likely that this is the preferred method. I am quite disappointed. I am surprised and disappointed that the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy as a banker chose to accept what he met when he came into office, but I am also disappointed in the former Minister of Finance, Mr. Dookeran, who also was in agreement with the \$7.5 billion which was being financed from the current account. It is absolutely wrong.

The point about it is—and it was well explained by the Member for St. Joseph—that any kind of expenditure like that—whether you are buying a car, a home or so or whether you are a manufacturer and you are buying a piece of equipment—it is better that this is placed on a loan over a medium or a long-term basis so that at least you will always have funds to finance your current expenses and so on, and so it is with countries when you are making these large purchases and, in this case, we are talking about spending large in terms of a highway.

So that I need to understand, I need clarity as to whether we are or we are not borrowing. It has been concluded that we are, but I think it is only because they found themselves in a bit of a conundrum with the shortage of revenue on account of the falling oil and gas prices.

So, here we are, but I want to emphasize again—and I looked up to see what was the standard laid down by other countries in terms of infrastructure financing, and I was happy to find an article by PwC Global, and it spoke to emerging economies continually needing new infrastructure and sanitation, water, roads, et cetera.

In terms of developing countries, even though they have infrastructure, after a while it becomes mature and it needs substantial refurbishing and so on and, therefore, many governments before would seek to do it from cash, but following the global crisis as well of 2008 and 2009, I think the prudent thing that most governments are doing is looking for financing elsewhere to support existing maintenance of infrastructure and new infrastructure as well because the model of financing from cash is no longer sustainable. Many countries have deficits as well and debt levels which are not sustainable and, therefore, it is not the way to go.

The World Bank export credit agencies and other multilaterals along with local banks and state-owned banks as well will, therefore, continue to play an increasingly important role in financing these infrastructural projects as well. And, of course—somebody may have mentioned it, someone may have—also the model of the PPPs which we have spoken about in this Parliament ought to be used to finance these projects as well.

This Government has spoken about these public/private partnerships, but I do not think that there is one, or the Minister of Finance and the Economy can perhaps correct me. I do not think that we know of any strong PPPs that have gained any traction at all in terms of giving the private sector a chance to invest in

infrastructural projects, and in terms of also helping the Government in terms of its financial stability and so on.

6.15 p.m.

So, this is just to strengthen what we have said all afternoon that the preferred measure of such a large project will always be long-term financing, at where, as well, you would have the ease of a moratorium and also where you would have very preferred rates, I am sure, at 1½ and 2 per cent, and that kind of thing. But, Mr. Speaker, I do not believe that the Government was so thrilled, and I do not believe that the current account was so large that it felt that, you know boy, there is so much surplus here that we must just do everything from this account—no, because we were borrowing to support other projects. But I believe that—and I am not going to point this at the Minister of Finance and the Economy—I believe that the Government chose to do so because I do not think that they wanted to subject themselves to benchmark capital project monitoring and reporting standards, the kind which one will find across the globe.

So that I, and again, I went to the Internet—it is such a useful tool—to look at the whole question of capital project monitoring and reporting to see what kind of standards and whether or not, with regard to this highway, the Government has been meeting those standards, and clearly they have not. Because even, again, in the discussions on Wednesday last when we made enquiries about the financing of the highway, where we are, what is to be spent, the Minister attempted to give us—and this is to the public; we are speaking to the public when we are in here—some simple arithmetic, and expected that to be enough to satisfy us, the public, us here—I am the public as well, we here—that that is enough information for us.

The point is, and coming after the debate on procurement, this Government has not been transparent, and they have chosen not to be transparent. I am putting it to this Parliament that they have chosen not to be transparent about the spending of that \$7.5 billion on the highway for whatever reasons that there are.

I looked and there is a standard, and I looked at one which was put out by the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada, and it goes in detail and it speaks to the background where such financing of such capital projects would require substantial commitment of organizational time and resources, and that Government should establish policies and procedures to support effective capital project monitoring and reporting to mitigate such risks.

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“Such efforts can improve financial accountability, enhance operational effectiveness and promote citizens’ confidence in their government.”

Well, I am saying that the Government has not been accountable enough in terms of the expenditure of \$7.5 billion on the highway, and this is the reason, and there is a reason why they, therefore, hedged from committing themselves to a loan arrangement where they would be forced to be accountable to the lending party, and also to the public at large. But there are recommendations in terms of identifying external and internal stakeholder information needs, identifying and incorporating legal and fiduciary requirements, the planning and designing, regular monitoring and capital projects, financial and project activity information, and it goes on to talk about the review of project-related financial transactions to support budget review, auditing and asset management, reviews of expenditures, both in relation to current budget and so on, and over the life of the project, review of encumbrances and estimates of planned expenditure activity, confirmation of continued availability and appropriateness of revenue resources, confirmation of the adequacy of cash flows in relation to project requirements, review of the timing of investment maturities, review of sources and project uses of bond proceeds and grants, et cetera, and results compared to established measures of performance, and it goes on to reporting on the project status and activities.

Now, there has been some reporting but it has been thin in terms of project status and activity. It has been thin, and I am saying that the Government has not been transparent enough on the expenditure of the \$7.5 billion. Again, we asked the Minister of Works and Infrastructure about the fifty, he said to us that 47 per cent had been spent of the \$7.5 billion to complete 43 per cent of the works, and one expected, because I was quite alarmed as to how are we going to finance the next 57 per cent, and one expected that he would have come here today with a detailed breakdown of where we are, of where the financing is at, and he has avoided that again.

So that, today, I have no confidence as to where we are in terms of the project financing of the \$7.5 billion. All we know is that \$3.7 billion has been spent to date, but I do not know if that has been spent on the actual contract. I know that \$700 million has gone to compulsory land acquisition, but I could not tell you—he said, as well, another \$2.8 billion went directly to OAS, but it is not adding up. All I am saying is I am not accusing you in terms of the figures that you gave, but the figures that you gave are not enough, and you should be coming to the Parliament monthly to give us precise figures in terms of the phases that have

been completed, the amounts that have been paid to the OAS, the contingencies, the escalation costs, the land acquisition, the other expenses; we should be getting month by month reports in this Parliament. This is a \$7.5 billion project and that is what we should be getting, because we too will have concerns as to whether it will actually finish. I do not know that it would finish, I am told that is going to begin from Point Fortin shortly, but begin from Point Fortin but I do not know if it is going to meet up in the middle, right—*[Interruption]*

Dr. Rambachan: You know it has started, why are you—

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: No. No. No. No. No. *[Interruption]*

Dr. Rambachan: We could start it from Dunlop, you know that.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: No. No. No. No. No. All I am saying to you is, your reporting has not been good enough and you should be coming here, owing to the quantum of funds involved, you should be coming here and giving us details on escalation, contingencies and that kind of thing. And I know that the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy is used to that, because had he been in the banking sector, and had they been a party to lending any part of this money, this is what they would have been insisting on, on a monthly basis. Minister of Finance and the Economy, am I not right?

These are the kind of standards that you all would have stuck to,—*[Interruption]*

Dr. Rambachan: Give me two minutes and I—

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon:—those would have been the conditions. No, but you had your time, and we raised those concerns and you chose not to—*[Crosstalk]*—put a statement out in the papers and convince the public about it. So that is that, so I am waiting on you to improve your reporting to the public. *[Interruption]* Sorry?

Dr. Rambachan: You are a “confusionist”. You are a “confusionist”.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: I am not a “confusionist”.

Mr. Speaker: Please. Please.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Mr. Speaker? Right.

Then with regard to UDeCoTT, again—*[Interruption]* No. Sorry.

Mr. Speaker: Members, please, allow the Member to speak and stop throwing these words across the table because you are in disagreement. Allow the

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Member to speak and show respect as the Member is speaking. Continue, please.
[*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Thank you very much. And then we had a discussion on Wednesday as well about UDeCoTT in the Finance Committee as well, and the Minister of Housing and Urban Development spoke to projects which were never completed and, of course, those projects were not completed because of a decision taken by this Government, and I want to strongly bring that across. I am speaking to the Government campus and so on—those projects were not completed on account of a decision taken by you all to stop anything that was being done by the PNM. So you stopped the OPVs, you stopped the Alutrint smelter plant, you stopped the Government campus as well, and that is the reason why that project remained as it is.

So when the Minister came here and started talking about this billion dollars in interest expense that he had to cover and sought to blame the PNM for that, he cannot blame the PNM, they are the ones to have been blamed on this. If they had looked at the project when they came in, saw that it was good, saw that it was needed—I mean, when one looks around at the kind of offices that Government staff are now occupying and the standards of those offices, and the exorbitant rents which we have to pay, it was a very prudent decision by the PNM Government, and if they had looked at it and taken a decision to finish the Government campus—[*Desk thumping*] there is no reason why the interest cost would have escalated in the manner in which it did. So that billion dollars is not on account of the PNM Government, it is on account of the decision which you took, which this Government took when it came into office. [*Crosstalk*]

I will tell you something. Had they done it, by now, that building surely, after a year or two, would have been tenanted to other Government offices. There is no way it would have been tenanted—The revenue would have been coming in from the Ministries. The loan would have been converted to a loan instead of an ordinary loan or demand loan with interest accumulating, with no payments being attached to it. That loan would have been converted and the interest cost would have stopped and the loan payments would have started from Government revenues, but that did not happen, and that is why the billion dollars in interest cost is there. It is on account of them.

In addition to that, the people of this country have suffered, not only because of the loss in terms of the billion dollars that have gone down the drain, they have suffered as well because of the service which has deteriorated from many of the Ministers, because, you know, that Mr. Duke was dissatisfied with the condition

of many offices, and that they have not met OSHA standards, and so on. So they have also suffered on account of service. Had that building been completed, things would have been all right, but it is because of the decision to not continue anything that was associated with the PNM.

Then, of course, the Minister as well went on to talk about Bear Stearns, and to give the impression that the PNM exercised poor judgment in seeking to get a loan from Bear Stearns, and that Bear Stearns was a financial institution which collapsed and therefore, again, big error of judgment on the part of the PNM. You know, I am very disappointed when the Member for Oropouche East makes these statements because I know him to be smarter than that. He has his doctorate and so on, I know him to be smarter but, at the same time, he gives the impression that, of course, it is a PNM failing, when in fact he knows that during the crisis of 2008/2009 there were several institutions around the world that suffered, and many of them were in fact acquired. In the case of Bear Stearns, it was acquired by JPMorgan Chase and so on, but Bear Stearns is known to be a very credible New York bank.

So, to give the impression, again, that the judgment of the PNM was wrong in choosing Bear Stearns is entirely wrong. There were many institutions that went down even in terms of—you would recall Fannie Mae—I think this is the one which most people would know—Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac; of course, Merrill Lynch, New York, and they were bought over by Bank of America. There was Lehman Brothers, American International Group, Washington Mutual, Seattle Washington, Lehman Brothers again, Fortis; all across Europe as well, Fortis in the Netherlands, taken over by the Government of the Netherlands, Dexia and so on. The Minister knows, and even, I think, in Antigua, there was another bank that suffered, I believe—what was the name of that bank?

Dr. Rowley: The Bank of Scotland.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: The Bank of Scotland, as well.

So, it is very distasteful that this should come from a Minister when he ought to know better as to what is going on in the global environment—very, very disappointing. So just those two particular remarks with regard to the supplementary Bill that is before us.

6.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I notice that everyone has looked at the Prime Minister's statements on the economy. I just want, on behalf of the people of Point Fortin, to add my bit about it. I thought it to be highly political and, as a matter of fact, I

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found it to be very dim in reality to the true circumstances of what is happening in Trinidad and Tobago and, therefore, I find it very reckless and irresponsible of the Government. I believe that the Prime Minister had been ill-advised by her senior people around her, the choice people around her, into making that presentation.

Of course, when the public sits waiting—and I am sure everyone was glued to their televisions last night—waiting to hear what kind of actions that they should be taking as individuals, what kind of actions they should be taking as a Government, and they do not hear that, the question is: who can depend on this Government? Who can trust this Government? Who can trust the leadership of this country under Kamla Persad-Bissessar and this PP Government? It cannot happen.

It was very clear to me that they are resolute about one thing and one thing only, and that thing is seeking another term in office. That is what last night was about. It was such a weak statement, that it was very evident that the Government was not prepared to face the truth—not prepared to face the truth. And the Prime Minister was very right when she started by saying, “I need my glasses because I need enhanced vision”. Clearly there was an absence of vision as to what was expected by this population. It really leads me to come to the conclusion that the hon. Prime Minister—because the hon. Prime Minister is the Minister of everything—that is the thing about a Prime Minister, the buck stops with her. You could be prime Minister of nothing or you could be Prime Minister of everything, but you really ought to be Prime Minister of everything, and the Prime Minister clearly is not. She is not conscious about what is going on around her. She does not know about the economy, about the boom and bust cycle. She does not understand her role. It is very, very, very unfortunate.

I recall her talking about the 1980s when oil was \$13 a barrel and so on, and we survived, and expects that to go down the throats of citizens here, like a little dose of medicine, a little dose of some cough mixture, but that is not so. I want to remind this country that after the 1980s, it took us seven years before we returned to economic growth. It took us seven years—that is what is going to happen in this country. It is not going to be easy. And they want to make it look like “Don’t worry be happy”, that is not a case for that.

This is what happens, and you cannot compare the 1980s with now. The macroeconomic circumstances were entirely different; your rate of foreign exchange was different; your GDP was different, less than half of what it is today. So you cannot glibly say, “Well it was 13 and we were fine, so therefore if we are 50, it must be okay”. It cannot be. They must be dreaming. The Prime Minister

and her team are dreaming.

But I will tell you of a different circumstance, Mr. Speaker, and it was in 1994. After going through the horror stories of the late eighties and the early nineties, it was from 1994 when this country really started to see continuous growth, but it was under the PNM. It was under management of the economy by the PNM. We were averaging something like 7 per cent per year. And, Mr. Speaker, I will have you note that I read that this was an unbeaten record in the Caribbean and all of Latin America as well.

It is not as simplistic as the Prime Minister would want the country to believe; this is serious business. It is not going to stop now. We are not going to recover easily at all. But I suppose when the PNM comes into power by the next election, latest September 07 of this year, we will begin to fix things as only the PNM does. [Desk thumping]

It does not matter where—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: You will not be there.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: No, let me make the point, because I stand here and I get a lot of comments about not being there when we return to power. It matters not. Member for Chaguanas East, I joined the PNM in the year 2000 when the UNC was in power. I did not join as a result of becoming an MP. [*Interruption*] On my own volition I went into Balisier House and became a member, because you all were a hapless government which needed to be removed, and that is what I did.

Mr. Deyalsingh: “You look for dat!”

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: As I said, I am concerned because the Government seems to be clueless about these economic cycles. They do not understand what a country like ours, being an energy country, is susceptible to, and that what they should have been doing when the oil revenues were high from 2010—they are very lucky—to now. The growth that they experienced was only on account of the high revenues from oil and gas, that is all; not for any other work done by them, or any diversification or anything like that. It is on account of high revenues; that is the only reason.

What they should have understood is that despite the high revenues, their task should have always been building resistance to unexpected shocks, and they did not do that. They continued to spend, and it has been more than \$200 billion of expenditure, with nothing to show for it—\$200 billion of expenditure and nothing to show for it. And do not come here and tell us about the macroeconomic figures

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being all right and so on, because that is how we left it as well, and you have just built on that. But in terms of savings accumulated or so, out of high oil prices, in terms of projects materialized, in terms of benefits to the public, we have not seen that. In other words, they have not built the country for any unanticipated shocks that could have happened, given the nature of our economy.

What has happened, and what I expected last night, was a recalibration of the figures by the Prime Minister, because my understanding—and the Minister of Finance and the Economy could tell me otherwise—is that we are losing something like \$30 million per day. Mr. Speaker, \$30 million is not joke money; \$30 million translates into close to \$1 billion a month; \$10 billion per annum. Therefore I expected some kind of recalibration of figures. I wanted her to say to us, can we cover our transfers and subsidies if they leave them as they are, this is what the public was expecting. What are the precise areas of expenditure that are going to be affected by the lowering of the oil prices? We never got that at all. It just seemed to be business as usual, happy go lucky.

Again, the figure of the total deficit, I do not think that came out last night. I think that came out today, right; again, we did not get that figure from them. Then when the Prime Minister said that the debt to GDP was at 40 per cent, I still cannot compute that one. I need the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy to be very clear—44 per cent, and I believe it might be more than that, but the Minister—*[Interruption]* could be more than that.

Mr. Imbert: It was 44. It was more than that.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: It was 44. So when the Prime Minister said yesterday 40 per cent, I knew that was incorrect. I want the Minister to tell us, including contingent liabilities, what it is. What is the true debt to GDP ratio, because it has, in fact, increased and there are concerns about that, and here they are about to borrow once again.

So my own view on this economy is that it is in a very troubled state. I am even more concerned about oil production, because I believe it is at the lowest since 1958. I believe the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs was here to speak before me but is going to speak after, so there are some questions which I will put to him as well.

Again I say the economy is in a troubled state. Oil production is very, very, very low. The inflation rate might appear to be comfortable, but I am still concerned about the food inflation rate. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the Member for Point Fortin has expired. Member, would you want to guide the Speaker?

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Thank you, may I speak again?

Mr. Speaker: You would like an extension?

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: Yes, I will. Speaking time of the hon. Member for Point Fortin be extended by 15 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

Mrs. P. Gopee-Scoon: As I said, food production has not expanded significantly as well and, of course that impacts the foreign exchange as well. It has a tremendous impact on it as well. So these are the kinds of things that I would have expected, and the country would have expected, that would have been addressed yesterday.

Then I must speak as it relates to the people of Point Fortin, what the Prime Minister said yesterday. In her statement she said that no new infrastructural projects, for which funding has not been agreed on, will be started. Clearly, what that means is that the Point Fortin Hospital will not be built. I have not gotten any assurances from the Minister of Health about this Austrian/Trinidad and Tobago government to government arrangement, for which there has been no memorandum signed. No memorandum has been signed, and I am sure I am right. Based on what the Prime Minister has said, where funding has not been agreed on, there will be no infrastructural projects. So the people of Point Fortin ought to know that there will be no Point Fortin Hospital, no Teck park, because that has not been agreed on, no Point Fortin Civic Centre, no Coronation Park extension, no water taxi service, and I do hope that the Point Fortin Highway would, in fact, be completed.

But I do note that last night—you have not even dealt properly with the financing of the Point Fortin Highway, and yet still there was mentioned—politically of course—by the Prime Minister, about the highway from San Fernando to Princes Town. How are they getting the money? Where are you getting the money from to do that? She mentioned that, the Highway to Princess Town. In other words, I think she was saying, “Let us hold on to the seats we have”. I know that is what was behind that statement.

Anyway, I want to run a little bit to the Energy Minister, because he is going to come here and I need him to answer some questions.

The Member for Diego Martin North/East spoke about his concerns for the SPT sliding scale and the fact that any oil prices going below \$50 will certainly

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impact the SPT, the zero coming from the SPTs of course, and zero revenue coming from the SPTs, supplementary taxes. But, at the same time, Mr. Speaker, in addition to that I am concerned about everything that is happening within the energy sector. I am happy that Mr. Ramnarine is coming to speak and he could address some of my concerns.

Looking again, oil production, it is the lowest since 1958. Next, we are in a gas crisis. They have not addressed the gas crisis which we are in. Atlantic is short of shipments, the revenues for Atlantic and therefore the revenues for the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, are much shorter than expected, and they did not address that at all. As it is, since this Government has come in, revenue from the energy sector has declined, so, therefore, with the prices as they are, I do not know where we are going at all, but the Prime Minister has said nothing about that. Companies in the Point Lisas area are deeply affected by these gas challenges as well, so I expect that there will be less taxes coming in from them, as well.

With regard to methanol, methanol prices are also down, so I am expecting that there will be less taxes coming in from them. Obviously if gas and oil prices and commodity prices are down, therefore I expect revenue to NGC will also be down, so I am also concerned about that. Maybe the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs could speak to that as well. Overall, the sector is in crisis.

I am concerned about Petrotrin. The Prime Minister said nothing about it. This is the largest state-owned asset, and with falling revenues. Already from 2013 they were in a loss, at \$15 million before taxes, and a further loss by 2014. Now, with energy prices further down, I do not know where Petrotrin is headed. My understanding is that Petrotrin does its anticipated budgets for the next few months, and it has come to my attention that there is absolutely a cash shortage for the month of February. There is no money to run the refinery in February, and I expect the Minister of Finance and the Economy and the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs to speak to that as well. We had the Chairman last night speaking at the conference saying that the Prime Minister did well, but yet still they did not address the question of what is happening at Petrotrin, and the fact that they are truly in a mess with a cash shortage and, quite frankly, we do not know how the refinery is going to be done.

6.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, there was a loss from 2013, and yet still they made these sweetheart payments to the VP of refinery and others as well. Sweetheart

payments, I understand, almost to the tune of \$10 million. They could not go to \$10 million because that was reserved for a particular person, but sweetheart arrangements, despite the fact they knew that they were in a loss position as well.

I understand that they have resorted to bringing in another foreigner to manage the finance area. The Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs has to speak to that. I understand he is to replace the VP Finance, Carl McLean. So, I want to know, are they selling Petrotrin out gradually to foreigners? But I know that the refinery is being run by a foreigner and so is the finance area as well. We want to know about that.

We have serious concerns about the Gas Optimization Programme. The Minister earlier on, in a response to the Member for La Brea, spoke about the Gas Optimization Programme and the high cost of it. But the point is, they never completed the Gas Optimization Programme, and whichever projects within there that they completed, they never operationalized any of them. So it is one thing to complete and another thing to operationalize. They have just not done that today.

The South West Soldado project as well—No progress on it at all. It is really, really in a mess. The refinery is in a mess. It is chaotic, wages are high. I know that they cannot meet their expenses as well. The Minister, when he came in, said that he will give all of his attention to oil, he has not done this, and this is why we are in a crisis as well.

NGC's revenues are going to come down, but notwithstanding, we have to fix NGC, and it cannot continue in the model that it is now. It must be altered to give some kind of benefit to the takers. Right? As I said, LNG taxes are down as well. They need to come clean, clean, clean, clean with the public as to the impact of the loss in oil and gas revenues on the public purse as well. These people, the Government has been fortunate with \$230 billion revenues, and there is nothing to show for it but box drains, Mr. Speaker. So, I am very, very concerned.

It comes down to one set of conclusions—that there are really serious gaps in the country's economic performance, and I want to say that it is a leader's responsibility to ensure that the country's economic performance is strong. The gaps are evident. The leadership in this country is currently under-capacity.

I think that this Government does not have the kind of skills that are associated with successful political leadership and so on. I think that there is a lack of vision. I think there is a lack of purpose and direction. I think there is a lack of judgment and discernment. I think that there is a non-application of proper human resource principles in building a proper team. I think that there is a

practice of divergent politics as well.

So, Trinidad and Tobago is not in a good place with this Government. I think there is an inability to formulate good policy and to execute good policy as well. I think there is a lack of management experience. I think there is no business sense as well, and therefore, the leadership is in question. [*Crosstalk*] The leadership is in question. I am talking about all of you when I say the leadership, and of course, the person with whom the buck stops, the Prime Minister—under-capacity. When you look at the kind of statements that were shoved down the throats of the public yesterday, the Prime Minister is clearly under-capacity and cannot cope.

So in a case like that, Mr. Speaker, what do we do in a crisis like that? We leave it to the population to put a halt to this and to decide what kind of management is needed for this country, and obviously it is only the political leadership under the PNM that is going to bring this country back to where it was, and certainly set it on a closed path forward in terms of political, economic and social stability. Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

Dr. Amery Browne (*Diego Martin Central*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and it seems the Government has run out of fuel in this debate, but I want to assure them that we on this side are only just getting started in dealing with their deficiencies.

Mr. Speaker, this has been a bit of an unusual debate thus far, and I suspect that has been triggered by the fact that just a few hours ago the Prime Minister gave a much-heralded statement to the population. So, we are sort of speaking in the shadows of that particular much-heralded statement to the public.

I listened to speaker after speaker on the Government side today in chorus of praise for the Prime Minister for her speech that she eventually was able to read for us.

Hon. Member: Without her glasses.

Dr. A. Browne: No. Well I would not get into that because I also have some eyesight—I wear glasses as well. So, I would not dwell on that. But I listened to the speech very carefully, Mr. Speaker. The same speech that they have been praising, and also many citizens of Trinidad and Tobago sat in anticipation and listened to that same speech that was praised here today, in amazement and also in disappointment. Many citizens reflected disappointment.

Mr. Speaker, this was the head of Government speaking to a small twin-island nation that is currently being plunged into a crisis that it is not prepared to treat with. It is clear after her statement that she and her Government are also completely unprepared to treat with the crisis that we find ourselves in.

Well the Prime Minister—well she looked good. She dressed very futuristically and so on, but the words that were coming out of her mouth gave no guidance or inspiration to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, and in tough times and impending tough times, that is really what we need and what we expect from our head of Government. I was not one of those expecting that from her at this stage in 2015, and certainly we did not receive that at all.

But, Mr. Speaker, I listened to those who went before on the Government side, and sometimes when elephants fight, all that happens is the grass is being trampled, because still to this point, the Minister of Finance and the Economy had an opportunity to correct the deficiencies in the Prime Minister's address. The Member for Oropouche East had an opportunity to correct the deficiencies in the Prime Minister's address. And Member after Member, I only heard the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre make an effort when he referred to the issue of productivity and so on. That to me was a little signal that there is—you know about SETI search for extra-terrestrial intelligence—there might be something over there that recognizes the citizens need something from us. They need guidance. They need leadership on a number of particular issues at this particular time.

The Prime Minister gave us none of that. But the question is, what did she give us? What did she offer to the citizens? I think that the overall sentiment that she came with was, we are okay and we are the best Government that Trinidad and Tobago has ever had. Mr. Speaker, we could not imagine more ridiculous words, more ridiculous words.

The Member for Caroni East reminds me of the audience that she chose to have physically present for that. She did not come to the Parliament and make an address at this crucial time, you know, with 55 per cent drop in the prices of our petrochemicals. She did not choose to come here. She did not choose to have a press conference or a conversation with people when she invites all these groups up to the Diplomatic Centre. She chose an exclusive room with a few members of the media and all of these fine people. [*Crosstalk*] Exactly. And have them clapping and cheering and so on. That was—[*Crosstalk*] yes. Enthusiastic! Bubbly in their seats.

But, Mr. Speaker, even the greatest actors among them could not feign inspiration because they themselves could not have been inspired by what they heard. But that was the audience that she chose for herself, but there were viewers on the national television programme sitting in amazement. Again, the appearance was very futuristic, but the words were very disappointing. So when I heard Members here praising that address, it really told me that there is a complete

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disconnect. There is cognitive dissonance in the Government of Trinidad and Tobago today.

I am afraid that they are missing the point because the citizens who tuned in did not just want empty reassurance—you are okay, we are okay, everything is fine. They wanted guidance at leadership. I want some Member to stand up and point to any area of that address or anything that has been said here today that has given this country a road map or a formula to negotiate the tough times that—let us admit it—are upon us today. That is the truth. If we do not want to deal with realism, well maybe we are in the wrong place altogether.

So this thing about UNC and talking about the mistakes that the PNM made. We heard another litany. I mean, I was wondering if we are in a time machine here today. On the eve of a general election in a few months, they are still speaking as if they are still in Opposition, and they are addressing the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. Well if they keep doing that, I am afraid well—I am certain—that reality will come to pass in the fairly near future. So, they are still talking as if they are in Opposition. But a country in crisis, especially a small country like ours, even the big ones are sobering up and dealing with this new reality. A small fragile nation like ours, we just hear this empty reassurance with the absence of guidance.

I listened, Mr. Speaker, and you know some of the things I wanted to hear—and I wrote down a little list. I wanted to hear advice to families in Trinidad and Tobago. What should you be doing differently in this year and the year to come that you have not been doing before. There was none of that. I wanted to hear advice about alternative energy and fuels. It was all hullabaloo in the budget, but at this critical time there was none of that coming from the Prime Minister or any of the speakers today. I wanted to hear advice to the private sector. We have been relying on them. I mean, it is the lifeblood of the country. We will have to rely on them even more, and all of us will have to facilitate their work, by legal means, more and more. There was none of that. None of that!

So when the captains of industry that wasted their time to listen to the television last night, I do not know what they would be thinking now. They would have to act as their own personal Prime Minister and make those types of decisions and guide their workforce because it is not coming from the leadership that we have elected in this country. The public servants, the labour sector, people tuning in—there is a crisis. Where are we going? Empty assurances. We are the best Government, everything is hunky-dory in Trinidad and Tobago. Young people, our students, people preparing to enter the job market. They are entering a

different world that I would have entered, and some of these Members here. This is a new reality that has dawned.

I am wondering, Mr. Speaker, if the Prime Minister may be so distracted, and the Government so distracted with their electioneering and their billboards, you know, “gearing up” for campaign and all those other things, that maybe the reality has even escaped them as to what has changed on planet earth for our petrochemical-based small economy like Trinidad and Tobago.

So, the issues that were missing I would say—the issue of productivity. We heard a mention of it from the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre today. There was none of it yesterday, and none of it in the debate thus far. The issue of innovation. The issue of hospitality and tourism, and a change that we have to embrace in this country, given what has happened since October/November last year in terms of the prices of the products that we sell, that we offer to the world. Then the big one—what sacrifices do we have to make in this country? Can anyone answer that question after listening to the Prime Minister? Raise your hand. No one can, Mr. Speaker, and there is a reason—because she could not provide us with that guidance as a country. So then, what did we get? What did we get? I am just wondering. Somebody needs to tell me. Everything is okay. Everything is hunky-dory.

Imagine a family, Mr. Speaker, that has just lost half of its income. Mummy has lost her job, daddy has lost his job; and there are families that have experienced this in this country. Half, in fact it is more than half. It is 55 per cent of the family’s income that has evaporated due to circumstances beyond their control. Then, the parents gather the children—we have to talk, we need to talk. The children run into the living room. I mean, mummy and daddy want to talk to us. And what do you hear? Everything will be fine. Your allowance—we just raised your allowance. You will get your higher allowance. Carnival is coming up. You could go to your fetes. Everything will be fine there. We paid tithes in church. We are paying more tithes now—\$55 million in tithes. Everything is fine. There are no changes to be made. Your life will go on as normal.

That is the message. What is it? Magic, Mr. Speaker? Fifty-five per cent reduction in revenue. Is it magic or is it just fooling the population, hoping that the tin could be kicked down the road until there is a new government in place—new parents to deal with that burden when the time comes?

7.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, that is the highest level of deceit with which you could engage a population that is entering difficult times, and that is why I used the word,

“disappointment” to describe my overriding emotion in listening to the Prime Minister last night. No sacrifices were even intimated or pointed out to the population.

Then I listened to some of the contributions in this debate. The Member for Tabaquite, oh boy, he was at his shrill worst today. His shrill worst, and I invited the Member for Arima, with whom I have some conversation, I said just lean over and turn his volume knob down a bit, turn it down a bit because he was out of control and he said some very outrageous things with very little support. To begin with, Mr. Speaker, he turned to the Member for Diego Martin West and unleashed some rhetoric and rhetorical questions, and he kept asking, what will you do? What is your policy? What will you cut? What will you cut? And the questions he was asking the Leader of the Opposition he never asked his own Prime Minister. He never asked her those questions, because she has not answered them to us. I do not know if she answered him those same questions in private, but then he could have shared the answers with the country today.

This debate—that speech last night and this debate today, is not just about the PNM and what the PNM would do. There is a country in 2015 and a Government in place with a responsibility, and if you cannot answer those questions, Member for Tabaquite, through you, Mr. Speaker, I think it is outrageous and ridiculous for you to spend so much time shouting at us here today, asking those same questions of the Leader of the Opposition, and I wish you had the opportunity to speak again so—actually, no, I do not wish you have the opportunity to speak again because we would just hear more of the same.

Then he praised the Member for Caroni East. And, you see, this Government, I think the Member for Diego Martin North/East has made the point before, that they sometimes just throw figures out. And a figure is not a fact, you know, Mr. Speaker, I think they have equated the two. They just throw figures out in the hope that they would not be challenged, it will be accepted, and if you keep repeating it, somehow, people will feel that it is the truth.

So, we heard some outrageous things. We heard that we have reached several of our millennium development goals already, as if the process of advancement to the MDGs began in 2010, and it is ridiculous. It is almost in some of these sectors as if you have a runner with a baton and just before they reach the finish line in some of these sectors—and a good example is in the education sector—the baton is handed over, the last runner takes two steps to the finish line and then he says, “I won the race, just praise me.” And that is the kind of attention the Member for Tabaquite directed to the Member for Caroni East, congratulating him for all

manner of things, including building 80 schools. And I ask the question, how many of these schools are above ground? How many of them are elsewhere?

Dr. Gopeesingh: Eighty.

Dr. A. Browne: Right. Mr. Speaker, he is saying that again. But I know them a lot better than some of them even know themselves. And you know what? If they put a tap—if a school is 99.9 per cent completed and it is just to put a tap in a sink, the pipe is there, just to put the tap on the pipe, they build the school.

That is a constructed school for this Government; tick, tick, and they come here and they count it. Mr. Speaker, if the school is already constructed, it is just to put the gate in front of the school, they build the school, and that is how they add their statistics. And they come here to the population—they come here to the Parliament and engage in that type of exercise, and the Member for Tabquite is the master of that kind of creativity with figures and with statistics. He is the master of that. So, we need to start tracking what he says a lot more closely because it is dressed in a lot of empty politics.

Even worse yet, referring to the education sector, and I really want the Minister of Education's attention on this issue, because a number of school principals have been communicating their concerns to us, and there is a new development—*[Interruption]*—Mr. Speaker, could I get your protection, please?

Mr. Speaker: Member for Diego Martin North/East, Member for Port of Spain South, I have to rise to the protection of the Member for Diego Martin Central, you all are disturbing his flow. Continue, hon. Member, please.

Dr. A. Browne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and—

Mr. Imbert: I apologize.

Dr. A. Browne:—I did not realize the Member for Caroni East was in the Member for Diego Martin North/East's way.

Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, there is a new development that a number of the school principals are concerned about, and it has to do, of course, with the education sector, and there is a sinister development where the teachers and the principals are now being utilized. There is an effort and a project to utilize them to extract information and data on the parents and members of the community from which these children are drawn. And a number of the concerns that are being directed to us at this stage include the question, are our schools now being used to extract canvassing data from the communities in which they are based?

Mr. Speaker, I regard that as a very sinister development and I am certain that the principals and teachers will be saying more about that in the future. They are

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getting some brand new requests now, very new forms asking information about ethnicity, religion—[*Inaudible*—]—yes.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Show me that form.

Dr. A. Browne: Yes. Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Please! Please! Direct all your questions to me. Forget the Member for Caroni East, we are not engaging him, we are engaging the Chair closed. Continue, please.

Dr. A. Browne: Thank you, I have forgotten him already. I just want to flag that as he was being praised by his colleagues.

Mr. Speaker, then I also listened to the Member for Oropouche East, who has disappeared from the debate at this point.

Mr. Cadiz: He is sitting in the back. [*Laughter*]

Dr. A. Browne: He disappeared from the debate, and as usual he came armed, and, Mr. Speaker. I am sure he has a little briefcase with just anecdotes and jokes. I mean, this is a very unusual debate.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Comedy.

Dr. A. Browne: Yes. Every week he needs to have at least three little stories to share. They are usually quite empty, they are usually a bit humorous, and from time to time he would recycle them. Today he was a bit desperate and he brought out the duster story, which he finds—it amuses him but it offends anyone with decent sensibility in this country. Because he chooses to attack someone who is not here in the Chamber, repeatedly with the same story about the ex-Minister of Finance with the duster and Cutex, and referring to the ex-Minister's mother as well, and creating an entire charade about what happened one night and who went down to do what.

Mr. Speaker, but we have heard that time and time again from this Member. When he runs out of ammunition he resorts to that, provoked by some of his friends, and he smiles because he is enjoying it. That gives no inspiration to any citizen at this point. We have heard it all before. It does not contribute to it. So, he had nothing to say except that duster story as far as I am concerned. I listened carefully because whenever the Member for Oropouche East talks about the Point Fortin highway some of us sit up and listen, because he has a bit of unusual history with this highway. He gave us a very sanitized—I would not say clever—version of that history today, and I will address some of those aspects on another occasion, including the—you know, he referred to Dr. Kublalsingh in a very

derogatory manner, and he was not making those types of references several years ago. But I will deal with that a bit because it seems politics has sometimes created some strange creatures. Yes.

Mr. Speaker, but besides that, his answer to the questions, the legitimate questions we have been asking about the financing, or lack thereof, for the Point Fortin highway, guess what the answer was from him? Ask bare Jack.

Hon. Member: Imagine that.

Dr. A. Browne: Bare Jack and he laughs. *[Interruption]* Yes, you said it.

Dr. Moonilal: Well, who is that?

Dr. A. Browne: That is the Member for Chaguanas West. Mr. Speaker, I am going to talk to you. That is who it is. *[Interruption]* Yes, let us not fool ourselves, this is not the Prime Minister talking, fooling herself, let us be realistic. He was talking about the Member for Chaguanas West. We are asking the Government for answers and his answer, his response is, ask bare Jack. Mr. Speaker, what is that? How is that even permissible or tolerable? *[Interruption]* All right, you want me to address you.

Mr. Speaker, I have a news flash for the Member for Oropouche East and every Member of the Cabinet of this Government in 2015. Bare Jack and the Member for Chaguanas West is no longer a Minister in the Cabinet of this country. He no longer has that constitutional responsibility to account to the Parliament on decisions made on behalf of the citizens of this country. I hope the Member is aware of that. So, in his glib response to legitimate questions about the most expensive roadway in the history of planet earth. The streets of El Dorado cost less than this highway, he is telling us, ask bare Jack, forget the Cabinet of this country. And, Mr. Speaker, that to me reeks of irresponsibility and incompetence on the part of the Member for Oropouche East—reeks of irresponsibility and incompetence.

He is no longer the Minister of Works and Transport. We do have a Minister of Works and Transport. He is no longer the head Cabinet Minister or whatever they used to call him. We now have a new one. We need answers from them as opposed to from any bare Jack. Do not give us bare Jack, give us the answers and give us the truth. And a very legitimate issue was raised earlier in the debate, the Prime Minister is indicating that projects will be sacrificed for which financing has not yet been finalized, then she needs to clear the air on the future of that Point Fortin highway. Because it certainly satisfies that criteria for falling off the

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edge of the table. No answers were forthcoming since then.

And then we look at some of the other outputs of this Government. On November 20, 2014, the *Trinidad Guardian* had a headline “Ramnarine still not worried about oil prices”. Mr. Speaker, since 2013 *Forbes Magazine* and a number of other publications have been telling the world that the petrochemical prices will fall, and when they fall they will stay low for a long, long time. On November 20, 2014 our brilliant Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs says he is still not worried about oil prices. This is while they were falling by the way. He is not worried. And then the *Trinidad Express*, November 06, “Govt ‘concerned’ over falling oil prices”. So, I do not know if he is a part of the Government or not. So, the Government is concerned, the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs is not worried about falling oil prices.

And then, Mr. Speaker, I got a gift from the Member for Tabaquite, and I am so glad he shared it with me. It is the first time I have ever looked at this rag-tag publication called the *Voice Today*. Of course his image is plastered all over it, so I know where the editor’s hands fall in this matter. But I looked at the editorial. Now, this is the voice, rag-tag publication of Friday, January 02, 2015, and there is an editorial so there is some editor somewhere. Driving a buoyant economy is the title of that editorial. As deluded as the Prime Minister was yesterday, and this is how the editorial starts:

Many people are driving around this Christmas season with new vehicles. Thousands of shiny brand new vehicles were driven off showrooms. This follows a couple years in which there were also good vehicle sales.

This is the logic this Government is offering to citizens of this blessed country.

High vehicle sales are signpost of the performance of a national economy. There are several others, of course, such as unemployment and inflation rates, poverty levels—it mentioned these in passing—balance of payments, savings culture, foreign investments, but vehicle sales—this is the big one, vehicle sales is their indicator—reflect the relative comfort of the society since it is largely an indication of disposable income and in addition to the high number of purchased vehicles their respective values are also of note.

Mr. Speaker, this in an era when our revenues have fallen by 55 per cent and counting, this is what the Government is offering to the citizens.

Driving a buoyant economy—many people are driving around in new vehicles, therefore everything is hunky-dory, everything is hunky-dory.

Mr. Speaker, that tells me that we are confronted with a Government that is completely disconnected from the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Because if you talk to the citizens, you know what they are talking about, not driving shiny new vehicles for Christmas, but the fact that maxi-taxi fares have just gone up to \$20 from Arima to Port of Spain and \$20 from Port of Spain—

Hon. Member: It has gone up by \$7.

7.15 p.m.

Dr. A. Browne: Sorry, it has gone up by \$7? It is seven dollars. Okay, I stand corrected, but it has increased. Has it increased? [*Crosstalk*] No, well I would admit if I make an error immediately, you have been making errors for four years, Member for Oropouche East, you have not admitted one as yet.

Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is, instead of talking about shiny new vehicles to placate a population, the fact of the matter is, the burden on their pockets is rising all of the time, it is rising all of the time. It tells me that this Government is completely disconnected from the realities facing our citizens. And then the Prime Minister came and gave us a speech that lacked imagination, lacked foresight, lacked vision, lacked guidance, analysis or any sense of realism. So there is a lot boasting and campaigning when really the country should have been sat down and given a bit more of a reality check.

Dr. Rambachan: You will put pressure on the citizens.

Dr. A. Browne: No, that is a reality check. Mr. Speaker, that is the insight there you know. We do not want to give them a reality check because that will put pressure on the citizens. There is a message to this Government, you know, they are not going to escape from this reality for very long, you know. They are not going to be able to escape from this reality very long, right.

Countries as large as Russia—[*Crosstalk*]—you want me to be your Prime Minister? You already have one and she is failing you. I cannot give him the answer as he wants. He needs to ask the head of his Cabinet, Mr. Speaker. That is who he needs to ask those questions of, come on. He is thirsty for guidance. He needs to ask his Prime Minister the same questions he is directing across here and he is doing the same thing now, come on.

Mr. Indarsingh: Tone down. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. A. Browne: Okay, I will, I will, yes, yes. Mr. Speaker, and, you know, he is coming with this old talk again, and I have observed something. The politicians that spend the most time talking about who getting what seat and who coming

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back, and not coming back, listen, are the ones most likely in my opinion to head to jail in this country at some point. [*Desk thumping*] I will say it again, that is my opinion, the politicians on all sides who spend the most time talking about who getting what seats and who going to what seats on all sides, are the ones who are most likely to go to jail in Trinidad and Tobago. Mark those words down, we shall see. And look, they are identifying themselves. Who the cap fits—a seat in jail—let them wear it.

Dr. Gopeesingh: You are telling your own people.

Dr. A. Browne: That is not my people. All right, Mr. Speaker, let us move on. The Prime Minister said all is well; the Member for Oropouche East said all is well; the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre said all is well; the Minister of Finance and the Economy said all is well. If you ask the citizens they will tell you all is not well. If you pick up the newspaper today you will recognize in this country all is not well. There was very little reference to the reality that we have confronted in this country, where we have 15 brutal murders. Mr. Speaker, there is an effort by a Member who has come a little closer deliberately to distract the speakers on this side. I would want you to monitor that. That is a deliberate effort.

Mr. Speaker: You have my full protection.

Dr. A. Browne: Thank you. Just watch him. [*Laughter*] Yes, keep an eye on him. [*Crosstalk*] Exactly. Well, why is he coming to distract me then? [*Crosstalk*] Eh, that is why? Come on man, come a little better than that.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central has expired. I need guidance, Member.

Dr. A. Browne: Yes, please.

Mr. Speaker: I need your guidance.

Dr. A. Browne: Yes, please, I would like an extension.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Memembers, the question is that the speaking time of the hon. Member for Diego Martin Central be extended by 15 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: You may continue, Member.

Dr. A. Browne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So this message that all is well is not going to last us very long, because if you tune in to any news broadcast in this country, if you open any newspaper, you would recognize all is not well. We have had how many murders thus far and they can make jokes about it, but if you look at the type of brutality and lawlessness that is being unleashed in this country it should bring no one any pleasure. It certainly brings me no pleasure whatsoever because there—but for the grace of God could be me or a member of my family or someone living on my street or very close to me.

So all is not well and I have been—now we are not having any coffins being dragged in the streets. I am not seeing anybody with black jerseys marching up and down, but the level of lawlessness, brutality and violence is at an all-time high.

Mr. Speaker, just today, and a lot of that violence for some reason is being directed against our womenfolk; horrible, brutal, disgusting murders. People being found in shallow graves. Home invasions of a—it seems to be a new chapter now associated with pure rage and homicidal violence. Persons being robbed, beaten, tied up, mothers, fathers, children. So how could all be well? And, Mr. Speaker, my concern, my big concern is if this society is behaving in that fashion when revenues are decent and the economy is not doing badly, what do we have to look forward to when times become really, really tough? What do we have to look forward to, Member for Arima, when times in this country become really, really tough? And again the Government is not giving us any guidance and they are saying only the Lord. I am not going to disagree with that, but there is a role to play by the leadership of a Government and they are not playing that role at all. So we must be very, very concerned. You are seeing open shoot-outs, persons feeling comfortable shooting police officers who are very poorly protected, poorly armed, some of them poorly trained and my heart goes out to them, because we recognize we are in a time of crisis in this country—far less for when our revenues fall even further.

Mr. Speaker, and just one other point on that issue of crime, because I see the Government has an anti-crime programme on television and I have no problem with that at all, with a policeman and other things, that is fine. And then there are others on another station who were formerly associated with the Government doing the same thing. But I realise of recent vintage they are using video evidence, closed circuit camera footage, covering crime scenes, such as that Vietnam Bar horrific scene, putting it on the television and using that, asking members of the public to identify potential bandits and to come forward with that

identification to members of law enforcement.

Mr. Speaker, I endorse that. But I am trying to establish the connection with the same Government and the same Prime Minister being confronted with a video of higher quality, in some cases, a video of a former Government Minister, engaging in unlawful activity which appeared to many to be abuse of narcotics on camera and the same Government and the same Prime Minister defending this Minister fully and saying he cannot be identified based on the video. So on one hand, because it is one of them, video evidence is of no value. But when it comes to a crime scene the members of the public are being asked, please identify these persons because they are armed and dangerous. Well, I suspect armed and dangerous probably characterises that former Minister by now wherever he—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deyalsingh: Armed with two Colombians. [*Laughter*]

Dr. A. Browne: Wherever he might be. Well ask where those Colombians are today. Anyway, I am not going to dwell on that much further, Mr. Speaker.

Then the Prime Minister tries to persuade us that she and her Government are more than qualified to govern this country in times of low oil prices, and of course, they draw some very weak references to try to make that case. They are more than qualified to govern this country with extremely low oil prices. But, Mr. Speaker, I think we need to just analyze that a little bit more, because of course they are obsessed with the elections and so on. But they have had four and a half years with relatively high oil prices and we need to look at what they were able to do during that period. [*Crosstalk*] No we need to look at that to be able to gauge what they would do when oil prices are very low.

In 2015, in my opinion, they have wasted over four years of Government in this country. [*Desk thumping*] They have wasted it. And I want to ask the Prime Minister and the Government through you, Mr. Speaker, in the remaining time that they have and the time that they are asking for, with lower oil prices and lower revenues, is it that they are more or less likely to provide our police officers with body armour and proper protection with lower revenues? Is it that they are more or less likely to fulfil that responsibility? I have my opinion of the answer. And I think it should be obvious to any citizen. Is it more or less likely with over 55 per cent reduction in revenue that they would be able to put cameras on the dashboard of the vehicles used by members of the protective services? Is it more or less likely that they would be able to do that during this period? Is it more or less likely that we would be able to provide essential anti-cancer drugs to patients in Trinidad and Tobago with a 55 per cent cut in our revenues? Is that more likely

now or less likely now? Because they are claiming they are eminently qualified to govern a country with low oil prices.

So I am just asking a few questions. Is it more or less likely that they would provide our coast guard with the required vehicles to come back and protect us from the drug barons that are invading our shores on a daily and nightly basis? Is that more or less likely now than it was before? They are eminently qualified to run this country with low revenue? That is the Prime Minister's claim, but I would love to hear her responses on these particular matters.

Is it more or less likely that the Minister of Health would be able to provide proper psychiatric care, not just to the gentleman on the wheelchair but to all the citizens in need in this country? The formula is out there, the right staff is out there and there are some very, very good psychiatrists in this country. Do not mind the little squabbles and personal wars that he loves to trigger, the framework is there. He knows what I am talking about. The framework is there, Mr. Speaker, I am not going to get distracted, but with lower revenue, vastly lower revenue, is it more likely that we would be able to provide that service properly to our citizens or less likely? The answer is obvious. So I do not know what the Prime Minister is trying to persuade us on. I really want to know.

Is it more or less likely that we would be able to find staff for the hospitals and some of the new beds they are always boasting about? Less staff, more burden, more illness. Is it more or less likely that we could satisfy those needs and to motivate them as well? I realize over the Christmas, out of the blue, there is a—I do not know, we sometimes create controversies in this country, you know. There is a whole war going on in San Fernando Hospital about nurses picking on nurses, who is there for Christmas and who is missing for Christmas and so. Is it more or less likely that we could motivate some of those hard-working officers now, with a 55 per cent cut in our national pocket, more or less likely? I do not know. The Prime Minister apparently has the answer to that question.

In this era, is it more or less likely that we will operationalize that Children's Authority that some of us worked very hard to put a foundation in place? They are silent. The Minister said from September they will be operationalized. Silence since then. We do not know what is going on.

Is it more or less likely that we will start monitoring our fishing ports where sometimes it is not just fish coming in? I could tell you there are other things coming in at night. Are those same ports—we are spending money on them, you know, on the port. Is it more or less likely that we will be able to monitor those areas properly including the north coast? I am really wondering. Is it more or less

likely with a 55 per cent cut in our revenue that we will be able to solve the traffic crisis in Trinidad and Tobago? I understand what their plan is, they feel they can pave their way out of this traffic problem. They cannot. It is impossible. You cannot pave your way to a solution to this traffic situation. But they criticize any prospect of a solution; they bring nothing to the table in that regard. Mr. Speaker, how much more time do I have?

Mr. Speaker: Five more minutes.

Dr. A. Browne: Oh, that is wonderful. That is perfect. Mr. Speaker, is it more or less likely with a 55 per cent cut in our revenue that we will be able to protect our citizens from infectious diseases, such as, Chikungunya, and those that are to come? Is it more or less likely? Because they have had relatively high oil prices, high gas prices and they have not been able to do their jobs. The Prime Minister is telling us she is eminently qualified to lead us in times of low oil prices.

7.30 p.m.

Mr. Deyalsingh: No foggers. No foggers.

Dr. A. Browne: We are not seeing the evidence of that. No equipment! Public health inspectors, an endangered species in this country, but they are eminently qualified.

Is it more or less likely that we will have better salaries for our nurses and our teachers, doctors, policemen and service members? I really want to know.

Is it more or less likely that we will get our HIV programme to some level of decency once again at this time? Is it more or less likely? I really wonder. We just had a very unfortunate death. Is it more or less likely we will have more lifeguards to protect our bathing citizens and those who are enjoying our seashore? Is it more or less likely now than before? I do not know. I am curious as what the Prime Minister would have to say on this.

Is it more or less likely that we would actually start building houses for our citizens, instead of making noise about the PNM's houses that were actually built? Is that more or less likely now with a 55 per cent cut in revenue? Yet the Prime Minister is trying to persuade us otherwise.

Mr. Speaker, this Government, this team that we have in office, should never have been given a chance at all in 2010. They should never have been given a chance in 2010 because many of them were tried before and they failed. But guess what? They got the chance. They were given that chance in 2010 to manage this economy and to lead Trinidad and Tobago. And guess what? They failed yet

again. And here we are today, and they are trying to deceive the country.

But in this season—and this is the reality check—all of the experts are telling us this is not just a transient lapse in oil and gas prices. This is going to last a long time. That is the reality confronting our country, and the Prime Minister did not tell us that. This is a new season. We always talked about it. There were talks about the oil and gas will run out one day. They used to say that. And then the price is not going to stay high all the time. They used to say that as well. But guess what? The future has arrived. It is now and we are confronting it. They have given us no formula, no road map, no guidance whatsoever.

The new era has actually begun. It is going to last a while and I am very worried on behalf of the citizens. They met an economy that had not collapsed and in my opinion, the economy still has not collapsed. That is the truth. It has not. But there is a new chapter that we have arrived at and they are behaving as if we are still in the old chapter.

The Prime Minister gave a few hints. She gave no details. We can identify not a single programme that will be different now than it was before. Not one.

Hon. Member: Or project.

Dr. A. Browne: Or project. Not one. And yet they shout questions across here: “What you would cut? What you would cut?” Begging for answers, begging for hope, begging for guidance because they need it. Trust me, I know they need it.

Mr. Speaker, they fail to deliver in times of high prices. All that money that went through LifeSport and all of those things, not a single block can be identified. Nothing remains for the citizens of this country, but they are eminently qualified, according to them, to govern when revenue sources are low—

Mr. Speaker: Thirty seconds.

Dr. A. Browne:—yes—and when the economy is beginning to lag.

They fail to deliver in times of high prices and nothing our Prime Minister told us last night would give me or any right-thinking citizen, any confidence that she or her Government has the capacity or the ability to lead or govern Trinidad and Tobago in good times or in bad times.

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

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for San Fernando West, Minister of Public Administration. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Public Administration (Hon. Carolyn Seepersad-Bachan): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to make a brief intervention into this debate. First of all, Happy New Year to all of you on all sides of the House. I would like to join with my colleagues on both sides of the House in expressing my condolences for the late Martin Joseph, former Member of Parliament here in this House, and of the other place, and a former member of the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, I rise on this occasion—really, it was not my intention to make a contribution, but because of the issues raised by the Member of Parliament for Chaguanas West, I thought it is important that I respond to the issues that he raised.

The Member of Parliament for Chaguanas West started by speaking to the number of vacancies. He raised a number of issues related to public service transformation, but the first issue that he raised dealt with the issue of vacancies, and he quoted a number—sums of moneys that were transferred from various votes, for example, from employment votes, to other votes, so these moneys were redeployed for other purposes, and the reasons he cited were because there was just no employment. He said that Government had this duty to make sure that we fill these vacancies. Mr. Speaker, in that context as well, he also spoke about the issue of the many vacancies in the establishment based on an answer to a question that I, as Minister of Public Administration, presented here in this House in May of last year.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to go back to the budget debate of last year when I spoke to the issues of public service transformation and I spoke to the issue of the programme called Gold to Diamond, which is a 10-year journey starting in 2012 and ending in 2022, and it is the public service transformation plan for the Trinidad and Tobago public service.

I also want to go back to that particular committee stage. I do not know how many Members here would recall that committee stage. Almost every Minister that sat here in this House, the questions asked would normally be: why is it that there are so many vacancies? Or why no money is spent in this area on the establishment? And in every case—and this is why I want to remind this House, on every occasion the Members had to respond. The Ministers responded by saying, based on advice given to them by their HR directors and their permanent secretaries, it is because those areas where we have those vacancies, in most cases, 90 per cent of them is because these jobs are no longer relevant and they

are obsolete. They are outdated job descriptions and in some cases the terms and conditions for these job positions on the establishment are no longer attractive and therefore not competitive with the private sector.

Mr. Speaker, this is why, in the budget debate, when I spoke to Gold to Diamond, I spoke of the many new jobs that were created at the middle management level of the public service. We have spoken to—and I explained to this House as well—that we have changed out all the various jobs at the clerical level into what is called the management support office series, and that is ongoing. It has been classified by the CPO's office—the Personnel Department—and we are moving forward with that particular one.

But what has happened for years—almost two decades—is that we did not keep up with the many new professions that came out, and when the Member of Parliament for Chaguanas West spoke to the number of people coming out of the university and having the various degrees, when you look at that situation you will realize that there are no opportunities in the public service because there are no such opportunities on what we call the establishment—established positions.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I quoted almost 49 new job specs that were sent from the Ministry of Public Administration to the CPO's office for classification, and these jobs will allow for more professional employment in the middle management area and involve, for example, in the area of information and communication technology, monitoring and evaluation, new areas in legal, new areas in project management, which would be a surprise that in a public service we have no positions for project management on the establishment; for procurement; for programme management, which is so important if we are going to move towards a results-based management system.

Facilities management—every Ministry has a whole department for facilities management, a facilities management director and facilities management officers, but yet still none of these are on the establishment, and they have to be hired by contract. Areas such as in knowledge management, Mr. Speaker—and the list can go on.

So, Mr. Speaker, the Gold to Diamond, while we talk about the diamond shape is because we are widening the middle management, the centre. The middle layer of the public service is going to be widened to be able to allow all these new job opportunities and allow all these new fields that have emerged for the 21st Century, and such people who are graduating in those areas, to be absorbed, but not just absorbed in contract positions, but absorbed into permanent positions,

pensionable positions in the public service.

So, that is the first point I wanted to make in response to what the Member of Parliament for Chaguanas West raised and that is the issue of, not because we say vacancies—and this is why, you know, we talk about the times, we talk about falling revenues. When we are talking about employment, we have to be smart about employment. We want to be smart, not just because we are employing for employing sake. We have to employ the right type of disciplines, the right types of people, so that we can become more productive, and this is why we have redesigned the human resource architecture of the public service to allow for that productivity.

Mr. Speaker, the second issue he said is that, you know, we sometimes say the Service Commissions Department, the Public Service Commission and the Personnel Department—that is the CPO's office—is at fault for not getting the terms and conditions, or classification, going; classification meaning, the establishment of the positions. And he is saying, but you know, they are under-resourced. Again, I want to make the point that, you know—and we have made it time and time again here—that the framers of our Constitution, in their wisdom, wanted to ensure that there was no political interference into the employment for public officers in the public service and that there will be no interference, politically, in the determination of terms and conditions.

Therefore, they are independent agencies where that is concerned. We cannot interfere. So although they may be under-resourced and they may not have staff, they have full control to hire and to ensure that they are properly and adequately staffed to carry out the duties and functions given to them under our Constitution.

But you see, the issue there—and I want to even now speak on behalf of the issues that are affecting these various institutions: the Service Commissions Department, Public Service Commission and the Personnel Department—the CPO's office—because the solution to the problem is not employing staff. It is not additional staff. The problem that we are facing is that we are dealing with institutions that were designed, and are still using a number of outdated and antiquated type of processes and procedures, and this is why we have taken on the task and we have had discussions with these institutions, on how to actually modernize these institutions, and how to actually redesign them.

So we are talking about a whole reengineering exercise for these institutions and finding a new role—a modern role—for these institutions. And we have, as part of the Gold to Diamond journey, actually awarded two consultancies that will

deal with the institutional strengthening of the Service Commissions Department and the institutional strengthening of the Personnel Department. In fact, recently at an employee appreciation ceremony of the Personnel Department, I spoke to the members of staff there, and also at the Service Commissions Department. I had the opportunity, you know, to again appeal to members of staff in those organizations that they need to come forward during these institutional strengthening exercises to ensure that they themselves absorb enough and be able to move forward with a modern institution for a citizen-centred 21st Century public service.

Mr. Speaker, in fact, we have been speaking to now, Personnel Department, what we say as 3.0 because one of the issues here is what will be the new role of a Personnel Department which will be responsible for ensuring that the organizations, the Ministries themselves, can actually get on with the job of ensuring that we not only determine terms and conditions in a dynamic, responsive way, but at the same time they are able to audit and ensure that there is accountability when terms and conditions are, indeed, established. So, Mr. Speaker, those exercises are on the way and I thought that I should mention that again in response to the issue raised by the Member of Parliament for Chaguanas West, and the issue of the understaffing in those institutions.

The other issue that was raised by the Member of Parliament for Chaguanas West, he spoke about an article by Kamla Mungal of the Arthur Lok Jack Institute, and this was an article in 2013. He mentioned that Dr. Mungal was speaking about the issue of the public service being an impediment to the ease of doing business and the Global Competitiveness Index. We recognize, yes, the public service is the largest employer in Trinidad and Tobago. We recognize, as well—and it has been published, as stated in the Global Competitiveness Report, that one of the issues is the public service itself and in terms of making sure that there is ease of doing business and that we are able to continue with investor friendliness.

7.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, on that basis, in 2013 in fact, we launched—and I spoke to this extensively in the budget debate—what is called our Diamond Certification Programme. It is a flagship project of our Gold to Diamond journey, our Gold to Diamond plan. The Diamond Certification Project was designed based on what was revealed in the Global Competitiveness Report and the Ease of Doing Business Report, and in the areas that we saw where there were weaknesses for Trinidad and Tobago, we actually addressed those issues, and what was required

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of these agencies is now services.

So these services that are delivering services to the public, they are now required to become certified, and when they are certified to become certified they have to engage in the establishment of what is called a service charter, and that service charter speaks to what they are going to promise to the public in terms of their level of service. So, for example, how many times I will take 24 hours to respond to an email; I will answer the phone after four to five rings; I promise to be courteous to you; I promise to be able to get back to you; you will be able to get your passport renewed in x-days. And as result of that, by not meeting those requirements on their service charter, there will be penalties by that particular agency.

Mr. Speaker, the process involved, one, that they not only establish that service charter, but they had to develop what was called a “service improvement plan”, and most of the agencies that participated in the pilot stage of this was 34 agencies. Several agencies that participated had to address eight areas and had to be evaluated in those eight areas including their customer service, their physical layout—you know, the whole issue now in modern times is that there is supposed to be no glass cages or anything of that sort—you are supposed to be able to interact with the citizens on a one on one, the use of technology, how much of the technology is actually being used, how much information goes out through your websites, can we start the process from home, what about your communication. And very important in there are two areas that I like most, and one is how they engage their citizens in the process itself and, therefore, the user panels are involved in the process itself of improving the service.

So, for example, Mr. Speaker, San Fernando General Hospital, this is one of the services that has been participating on the pilot. They have what is called the Friends of San Fernando and they form part of that user panel and make recommendations as to how to improve the service, and that is on a continuous basis. The whole issue or partnership, how can I share with another sister agency in offering the same service; or can I start that service together from now with my partner agency?

So, the reason why we developed these eight criteria is because it was based on what was revealed to us when we analyzed the Global Competitiveness Report and the Ease of Doing Business Report. Mr. Speaker, I want to say—because as the Member of Parliament for Chaguanas West raised the issue and it was Kamla Mungal he referred to from Arthur Lok Jack—in order for these agencies—and the Member for Tabaquite mentioned earlier that the first cohort, this process was

launched in June of 2013. They went through their service improvement plans, implemented their service improvement plans and then they were assessed by independent assessors.

These independent assessors were also audited and there is what is called an independent advisory panel comprising only members from the private sector. It is chaired by Mr. Gary Voss and I am pleased to say that Ms. Kamla Mungal from the Arthur Lok Jack is a member of that independent advisory panel and is right now in the process of certifying and selecting for the awards on January 21, which is two weeks from today. I think many were invited to that function where the first set will be selected and will be certified and, as a result of that certification, they will be allowed to actually put up a diamond over the door to say that they are certified. Within three years they have to be re-evaluated, but they are constantly evaluated to make sure that they continue to keep the standards because if they do not keep the standards, the award can be removed and they can be asked to re-enter. So I thought I would mention that.

Mr. Speaker, in the other issue of the public service transformation, the Member of Parliament for Chaguanas West spoke extensively to that issue of what we are doing about the public service, and I agree. At times like this I think the opportunities present themselves. We need a more efficient and more effective public service to ensure that we can be as productive as we can be.

The e-governance platform: again, I spoke to this in the budget debate because public service cannot transform—when we speak about modernizing public services we must speak about e-government. We have been talking and the Minister of Science and Technology, the Member for Toco/Sangre Grande, has been carrying this mantel and we have started up the e-government platform. In fact, Mr. Speaker, we would be implementing a foundation software, a very, very important module that will be able to allow these e-services to roll out quickly.

In fact, we are re-engineering the way we work to allow for e-government services in such ways that will allow, for example—and I spoke extensively again to this, Mr. Speaker, in terms of the new hardware and software required to modernize the operation of the Gen Tax e-service. This is the Inland Revenue Division which will allow for electronic filing of taxes. That is expected to roll out over the next 12 to 13 months. It is a long project. Public service transformation is not an overnight job. It takes time because it is not only about technology, it is about retraining and reskilling of people, it is about new jobs, it is about new processes that have to go into effect, sometimes even a new physical layout to allow for those new processes. So this is why when we speak to the

transformation of these services, it involves all three and it is not just one aspect of it.

But important in there, Mr. Speaker, for e-government—and the Member of Parliament for Point Fortin spoke to these expensive facilities that we have in the public service right now and the expensive rents. We recognize that and one of the issues in dealing with that is how do we reduce the amount of rental space we need because it is important as well that when we do provide rental space for public officers that we provide them with state of the art facilities. So every cubicle as you would know it or every desk that you have should be properly equipped if a public officer is supposed to be productive.

But the e-government platform, Mr. Speaker, we are designing is to allow as well what we call flexitime as we would say, or telecommuting. Because all over the world, you know, most public services have moved towards where you can actually stay home one or two days of the week and work from home. So therefore, you can have a public officer cubicle or desk fully equipped and it can be shared. It does not have to belong to any one public officer. That also is because we are speaking to as well public officers who are on the field, and because of the e-government platform that you have and being able to work from the field itself, we can get more field officers out on the field or case managers as the case may be with the Social Welfare Department.

So we are working towards flexitime, we are working towards telecommuting, and with the flexitime it means, therefore, we might be able to get public services, which is our intention, to allow for public services to have extended hours, because if you have some public officers being able to come in six to two or seven to three or eight to four or nine to five and 10 to six, you can have extended hours. But the problem that you have they sound very simple, but the issue that you have is that you have to redesign all your work processes to allow for independence of work, because once you have that direct command and control type of environment, it is not going to allow you to be able to develop this kind of environment for flexitime and for telecommuting.

So that is why when we talk about this, we are reengineering the work processes right now to be able to allow for that type of flexitime and for telecommuting. So that is how we intend to work smartly towards transforming the public service. In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, I should mention and I mentioned this the last time because, you know, we hear a lot about rapid rail and all of that because of the congestion problems, and what we are trying to achieve, Mr. Speaker, is that it will also ease up your traffic problems because less people

can be on the road, less people will be on the road, and more than that too, can you imagine the impact on the quality of our family life.

As I mentioned before, we are working as one of the examples that I quoted, the Inland Revenue Division. Mr. Speaker, as I come to a close—as I said, this was a very brief intervention and I really wanted to respond to the issues raised by the Member of Parliament for Chaguanas West. I really wanted to say—oh, and there was an issue raised by the Member for St. Joseph. He talked about Trains 2 and 3 and the Panday Government did not want to continue. I feel sometimes when we come to this House we must make sure we come with our facts. You know, if we want to be role models and be examples to our citizens in this country and to young students, we must be well researched.

Mr. Speaker, Train 1—let me just educate for the—I know the Member for St. Joseph is not here. But Train 1—the negotiations for Train 1 were completed in 1996/1997, and Train 1 was built during the period '95 to 2000. [*Desk thumping*] Right after that as Train 1 was completed, Trains 2 and 3, negotiations started and agreements were signed off for Trains 2 and 3 during—well it was completed in 1999/2000. In '95 to 2000, that happened. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, it was completed and it was signed off. However, I would agree the construction started in 2000/2001 and was completed during that period under the PNM administration, and yes, Train 4 now continues and that is what is the beauty of this country. This is why we are considered to be an investor-friendly country because every administration continues the work, especially in the energy sector. I want to make that point because when the Panday administration came in, '96, they did not stop and say no Train 1. In fact, they expedited the work of Train 1 in order to complete it and it was constructed. But, Mr. Speaker, you know, I thought I would just mention that because I have heard so much misinformation and we need to stop this misinformation and get more on the issues if we are to really have sensible debates.

Mr. Speaker, as I close I just wanted to make one more point, and that is in terms as we move forward, I really wanted that for us to appreciate— [*Interruption*] As we move forward, I know that this is a time that everyone has been talking about the falling of revenues, et cetera, but it also presents great opportunities for us to become more effective and efficient, and it presents opportunities for our public officers to rise to the occasion and they are willing to do so. Therefore, I am not all this doom and gloom about where we are, at least from the perspective of the Ministry of Public Administration. I see us being able to be presented with the opportunity for us to move forward and to probably

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expedite our Gold to Diamond journey in order that we will transform the public service of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, as we move forward to that effective and efficient 21st Century citizen-centric public service, I know that the House as well in accordance with the revision of the Standing Orders that we now have a public administration committee and I look forward to the contributions by all because I think the public service is too much of an important establishment. Being the largest employer of Trinidad and Tobago, given its role, the impact on citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, on the services and how we engage citizens, I am of the view that it is important that we move forward as well in that light to ensure that there are inputs from all sides of this House.

So, Mr. Speaker, as we move forward going into 2015 in the implementing of our Gold to Diamond Programme and that we will move forward in terms of our Gold to Diamond programme and then our Diamond Certification Programme. As we complete the Diamond Certification Programme, Mr. Speaker, and the first cohort we do on January 21, another set has already joined on to start. And as we go forward, I want to say that these are pilots—I want to thank them, all the pilots who participated. And these pilots range from the hospitals, the medical institutions to schools, to national security agencies, Ministry of Legal Affairs, and I really want to thank my colleagues for their support in this particular programme “from Gold to Diamond” I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

8.00 p.m.

Miss Alicia Hospedales (*Arouca/Maloney*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I listened to the Member for San Fernando West and she said that whenever we come to this House, we must come with the facts. I just want to say to you, Member for San Fernando West, that you must give advice to your colleagues and particularly Members of your Government who are seeking to make statements to members of the national population, and let them know that whenever they go to make statements to the population, they must go with facts and they must also tell the truth.

Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to the speech of the Prime Minister and in her closing, she basically advised the Minister of Finance and the Economy to pay special attention to the state of the economy. Look at it, look at other impending threats, et cetera. I would like to say to the Prime Minister: too late, too late is the cry.

The reason why I am saying that is because there would have been advice coming from many circles around in terms of the business sector, the Chamber of Commerce, even the IMF. They would have given advice indicating to the Government that they should exercise caution with reference to the spending—to the way that they have been spending. The IMF foresaw the impending threat with reference to the decline in oil and gas prices. But you know what happened? The Government did not listen.

Mr. Speaker, in a report submitted by the IMF in 2013, Elie Canetti said to the Government that the:

“...government must rethink its spending so that choices about its level and composition ‘are put in the appropriate long-term context of the natural reduction in energy reserves’.”

He gave significant recommendations with respect to reforms that the Government needed to look at in terms of making sure that in the long term that the economy would be a stable one, despite the fact that there would have been a reduction in oil and gas prices. But, the Government, again, did not listen, they did not take the time out to listen to what anybody had to say.

The IMF spoke to the fact that they needed to look towards investing for future generations. How much of that has occurred over the last four and a half years? If we were to take a deep examination of what the Government would have done over the four and a half years, we would see that there have been little or no investments for future generations. They spoke about the need to reform the Government’s non-energy revenue policies. Was this ever done? Was there any examination? Was there any strategic thinking or think tank with reference to some of the things that needed to be done in terms of the reform of the non-energy revenue policies?

Mr. Speaker, the IMF also stated that they needed to raise more revenue to limit distortions that impose significant efficiency costs. I am sure they have not even thought of it. It has not been a plan or vision. It has not been documented in terms of some of the things that they could do. They also spoke about the structural reforms and the fact that the public service needed to become more efficient and to reduce impediments in doing business. I know the Minister just spoke about some of the things that they are doing to try to make the public service a little more efficient. But, again, she tried to indicate that some of the money that would have been transferred from certain Heads with reference to staff, the payments of staff would have been justified moving it to another Head.

You know, if the Minister—I am sure she knows of the extreme shortage of staff in the public sector and some of the problems that they have been encountering in terms of service delivery. I hope that in looking, taking a second look at some of the transfers that they would have done, they would reconsider re-transferring, because, I mean, some of the transfers are not totally justified. So they would reconsider re-transferring in some instances where there is need—urgent need for staffing.

I will talk about the Central Statistical Office, Madam Minister. The Central Statistical Office is in dire need of getting staff and I remember seeing a report by the IMF which talked about the fact that the Central Statistical Office is not functioning. It does not have sufficient staff, the lack of data, you know, data that are readily available to make critical decisions. And they even spoke about the fact that the data are lacking to the point that the Government does not have information at their fingertips, I am saying, that can readily inform some of the decisions that they are making.

Despite all that has been said by the business sector, by the economists, by the Members of the Chamber of Commerce, by Members of this side, because many of us stood here budget debate upon budget debate, debates upon Finance Bills, debates upon so many other Bills, highlighting to the Government, the need for them to take a critical look at what they are doing with reference to their spending, the issues of corruption, lack of transparency. We have talked so much about the issues of accountability and the lack thereof where the Government is concerned, and over and over and over, we have—we are like the voice crying in the wilderness because they refuse to listen to us. They refuse and even after so many pleas—

You know, I heard our political leader talk about, you know, “stick break in dey ears”, I said that he actually took the words out of my mouth because when I was thinking about this debate, I said, you know, stick really had to have broken in their ears because of the fact that they refused to listen. They did not listen to anyone. And in the 2014/2015 budget, they went ahead to allocate or to say that they are going to spend \$64.66 billion. Mr. Speaker, that has been recorded as the largest deficit budget in the history of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, not only did they not listen, they also failed to tell the truth. Some of their Members, I am saying, those who were appointed as the spokespersons of their party and of their Government, failed to tell the truth. I was appalled when I read the Prime Minister’s speech. So I heard part of it and I read all of it. I was appalled when I read in the actual verbatim of her speech, it says

that:

“In the past four-and-a-half years, we have managed to reverse economic decline, to bring stability, to restore confidence, and to return to a path of growth.”

She also went on to say far better than the economy we inherited in 2010. And you know, the Minister, again, the Member for San Fernando West, said when we come here to the House, we must come with the facts. And again, I want to re-emphasize not only when we come here but when we go to the national population and when we go to the national population, again, we must also speak the truth.

Mr. Speaker, you know, in looking at this particular statement, I am privy to a statement made by the then Senator, Mary King, who was the Minister of, I think, Planning and sustainable development, I believe, at the time or Minister of Planning and Economic and Social Restructuring and Gender Affairs. This is what Mary King had to say about the Prime Minister’s statement: that it was disingenuous when she claimed that in 2010, her Government met an economy that had collapsed which today is strong due to the efforts of their Government. She indicated that in her first contribution in the Senate at the start of the parliamentary term in 2010 to 2015, she piloted the Motion: the State of the Economy, and the thesis was that the economy at the time could not be considered a basket case.

I remembered sitting here and hearing the Member for Tunapuna, who was then the Minister of Finance, talking about the gloom and doom of the economy which was not true. They inherited a very, very, very strong economy. He also talked about that there is need for good “husbanding”—I do not know where he got that word from—of the economy. We had to tell them over and over of the need for them to speak the truth, to talk well about the strong economy that they inherited. And this is what Mary King had to say. She said our debt position then was below 50 per cent of the GDP. Our international credit ratings were good. This is a Member of the Government speaking well of what they had inherited from the People’s National Movement: a strong economy. Our reserves give 12 months of import cover and stood at \$9.1 billion. Inflation in April 2010 was 7.2 per cent and unemployment was 5.8 per cent up from 5.3 per cent in 2009.

Mr. Speaker, this is a Member of the Government coming here and telling the truth about what the state of the economy was at the time, despite the fact that Members of that Government—of the Government—would have been saying that

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the economy failed, the economy was not strong, it was in shambles, name it, whatever they said, gloom and doom over the economy. But the truth and fact is that the economy was very strong, it was not in a grave situation as indicated by Members of the Government. The Treasury was, I mean, overflowing to the point that they overspent, they mismanaged, and they squandered the money.

Mr. Speaker, she also went on to say that the balance of trade was positive because of the reduction in oil and gas prices. *[Interruption]* Yes, yes, I really need to highlight it because, you know, the Members of the Government, again, we heard Members here talking about the Government not—the PNM Government, they inherited a bad economy, and look at the Prime Minister’s speech, not speaking the truth to the public. You know, she—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Listen, you cannot say a Member is not speaking the truth. That is like saying a Member is telling—*[Interruption]*

Dr. Browne: Lies.

Mr. Speaker: That is unacceptable so be guided accordingly.

Miss A. Hospedales: Okay, Mr. Speaker. I just really wanted to highlight the falsehood in all that have been said.

The previous Senator and Minister even mentioned the fact that deficit budgeting was very low compared to the high deficits that we have experienced over the last four and a half years. It is really a shame on the Government to be coming here and to be talking about this very, very insecure or unstable economy that they have experienced under the PNM.

Mr. Speaker, the economy basically is currently in crisis and, again, instead of the Prime Minister going out there and telling people, wait, we need to tighten our belts, we need to manage our budgets, you know, the money that we have, well, do not overspend, save something. Instead of her going out there and telling people that, she continues to demonstrate to the members of the population that the Government cannot be trusted.

Again, going back to the speech, the Prime Minister stated:

“...in four-and-a-half years, we have managed the economy and our resources with great care and dedication to ensure that our people are always first.”

Is that really true?

“...this administration has curbed wanton spending and redirected resources in the best ways.”

Dr. Browne: You could imagine?

8.15 p.m.

Miss A. Hospedales: Is this really true, when \$400 million was spent on LifeSport? Mr. Speaker, \$75 million or maybe over \$75 million spent on Colour Me Orange. Seventy million plus, plus, plus spent on Hoop of Life; \$442 million spent on the Unemployment Relief Programme. You know, the Member for Tabaquite would normally talk about, “oh the URP is working”, seven projects between 2012 to 2014, only seven projects have been done in the Arouca/Maloney constituency. The reason I asked about those projects is because URP does not exist. I would like to, as a Member of Parliament, be driving around or walking around the community and see URP working. They had sanitation workers cleaning, hoeing, you know—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: Hoeing?

Miss A. Hospedales: Yes, you know, doing work around the community, because they are supposed to be contributing to the community. Mr. Speaker, I would like to drive around the community, the constituency of Arouca/Maloney and see construction workers working. Not seven projects in how many years? [*Interruption*] Seven projects in how many years? URP in Arouca/Maloney does not really exist. I really would like to see URP, this \$422 million that is being spent on URP, better utilized.

When they say over \$300 million spent on CEPEP, yes, at times, in some communities, I know some Members on this side “doh even know” where CEPEP teams function in their constituencies, they do not know. Some of them do not have CEPEP functioning in their constituencies, and \$300 million has been spent on CEPEP to date.

Mr. Speaker, the Government is talking about delivery in a time when oil prices were high, and talking about deliveries when oil prices are low. Can they really deliver? I mean, if they cannot deliver, you know, construction jobs, sanitation jobs under the URP, if they cannot deliver, you know, if they could not deliver under the LifeSport Programme, and we know that the LifeSport Programme is, you know, riddled with a whole lot of corrupt deeds. The thing is, we have heard that this file went on to the DPP or whoever for investigation, but nobody is made to account. No one is made to account for some of the crimes that have been committed. I know one of the Members mentioned the \$34 million assigned to Adolphus Daniell. [*Interruption*] No one has been made to account for all of this money, \$400 million gone.

Mr. Speaker, the Government talked continuously about diversifying the economy. I would like to say, how? You know, even the IMF talked about the need to invest in the non-petroleum sector to diversify, to look at new—explore new ways, be innovative. I would like to know how the Government diversified the economy, when there are still empty industrial parks across the country. The Tamana Industrial Park, what has happened with that? Where are the investments? Where is the diversification? Where is the foreign investment in those parks? The Cove Industrial Estate, the Airport Business Park, where has the diversification taken place? I would like the Government to tell us, to list for us all the diversification efforts. How much money has been, you know, raised through those diversification initiatives? You know, it is really a shame when the Government comes here and tells us, or even goes to the population and tells us things that are not true.

Mr. Speaker, there is one thing I would like to raise—the Minister of Finance and the Economy, just before the close of Parliament for the Christmas, came and gave a statement, and said that Ministries will therefore be required to review their budgets, to determine areas where expenditure can be suppressed to make up the shortfall. I really want to ask, did this occur in any serious way? The reason I am asking the question is because today the Member for Tobago East, Minister of State in the Ministry of the People and Social Development came here to answer a question that was filed to the Minister of the People and Social Development, who happens to be the Prime Minister and Member for Siparia.

I asked her whether there were street dwellers housed at Transformed Life Ministries. Transformed Life Ministries happens to be located in the constituency of Arouca/Maloney. Since 2011, I have highlighted complaints about that particular facility with reference to its ability, the management's ability to provide services to homeless persons or drug addicts or any other type of person.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister came here and she said: "Yes, there are 43 persons housed at that facility". I asked again, the cost of housing each client there, and that is the cost per month, she said "\$4,000 per client, per month, to be housed at that facility". I even asked how much money the Ministry has paid to the management of that facility to date. And she said, "\$5 million". Why I am raising this particular issue, in the Ministry of the People and Social Development, there is a facility built by the Ministry called New Horizons, which is a facility that was constructed in the year 2009 to house street dwellers or homeless persons, to rehabilitate them, to have them reintegrated back into society.

Mr. Speaker, I am saying the Minister of Finance and the Economy said, that Ministries would therefore be required to review their budgets, to determine areas where expenditure can be suppressed to make up the shortfall. I am saying, did the Ministry of the People and Social Development review their budget? Because if they did, what they would have done is, remove the 43 clients that they have at Transform Life Ministries, that they are paying \$4,000 a month for one client, and place them in the facility at New Horizons where they can be there for free.

So I am really not, you know—I really do not understand when the Minister says, that Ministries are reviewing and they are cutting back. Is this an example of cutting back, Mr. Speaker, if 43 clients at \$4,000 each a month are at Transformed Life Ministries, when there is a New Horizons facility in Piparo, where they can go for free and be rehabilitated and reintegrated; the same service? I would not even say the same service, because as far as I am aware, at Transformed Life Ministries there is not a structured programme. Whereas in New Horizons, there was a structured programme, there were staff members in place.

I remember during the Standing Finance Committee and even during the budget debate, I stood here and I asked, how many clients are there at New Horizons? There were none at the time. A facility constructed for 100 persons, 100 homeless street dwelling persons, left vacant, unattended by the Ministry, and this is money that could be saved. Over \$2 million when you really check it. Two million dollars given over to house street dwellers at Transformed Life Ministries, when these individuals could be housed at New Horizons, Mr. Speaker, you know. So, I really do not have faith in the Minister and even in the Prime Minister, and Members of their Government, when they say that they are cutting back, saving money, but this is one good example of money not being saved.

The other issue I want to raise is—this one, I think, you know, I was totally amazed at where about—on December 30 it was reported in the *Newsday*, that the Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development announced that the \$410 million that would have been allocated to the Constituency Fund, would not be given priority considering there were economic challenges being faced by the country.

Mr. Speaker, and to my amazement—so the Minister said that it was not going to be implemented because we are in an economic crisis. I could not understand it when approximately, must be a week later, or less, a few days later, the Prime Minister came and she said, “no that is not so; we are going to ensure that this is implemented because it is important”, despite the fact that we are in an

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economic crisis. The Prime Minister bypassed the decision of the Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development, and said that it was still going to be implemented.

So, I am saying that they are not really very serious. They are not—you know, I saw an article, remarks made by our political leader with reference to the fact that the Prime Minister and her Government did not seem to be fazed in any way with reference to the economic crisis, you know. So they are just going about business as normal. It cannot be business as normal, because we are in a crisis. There has to be some measures, you know, some measure of cutbacks, some measures, you know, of readjustment in terms of the spending.

Mr. Speaker, so when we hear that the constituency development—the Prime Minister is saying that the Constituency Development Fund is revolutionary, democratic and urgently necessary for every constituency, including those represented by the PNM, and that the fund was, you know, still going to be made available. We say this is cause for concern; \$410 million. We already talked about the millions lost in LifeSport and URP. The millions lost in Colour Me Orange and Hoop of Life. She wants to still implement the \$410 million. This is unbelievable. I cannot believe it. I cannot believe that they are actually serious, you know. As I kept saying, they need to bring the facts and also be truthful to the members of the population.

The other cause for concern that I had, was with reference to the Minister of Local Government. When she said that money would have been transferred from under Contracted Services on to another Head. I am saying, when you look at the draft estimates, and the draft estimates, it explained to us what Other Contracted Services are. Under the Ministry of Local Government, that would represent scavenging, repairs to roads and bridges, maintenance of watercourses.

Mr. Speaker, over \$4 million has been removed from under the Ministry of Local Government, under the heading Contracted Services to—that, you know, this money, I am saying is so important to local government, scavenging—we have problems in some communities where they do not have a regular garbage collection, and garbage piles up for days. This \$4 million is important for scavenging purposes, the repairs to roads and bridges. I am sure many of us on—Members on the Government side and the Opposition side, we have numerous challenges in terms of potholes in our constituencies. The Minister is justified in saying that this money is not needed. It is not needed in local government, so we would move it and put it under another Head.

Mr. Speaker, the issue of maintenance of watercourses, we are entering the dry season. During the dry season, I think, I do not know what happens, like everybody goes asleep. It is only when the rain starts to fall, then people wake up and begin to clean the drains. This money is needed. The money is needed to clean all drains and watercourses. So that when the rainy season comes, there would be limited or reduced problems with reference to flooding.

8.30 p.m.

So, Mr. Speaker, again, the Government just does not seem to know what they are doing—lacking vision, lacking planning, lacking so many things because they are just all over the place, vaille-que-vaille.

So in one instance they are not cutting back; particularly in the Ministry of the People and Social Development, they are not cutting back. They are spending money that they need to save and they cannot save by sending those street dwellers to New Horizons in one instance; and in another instance, where they should be saving and keeping the money so that it would be properly utilized under the Ministry of Local Government, they are putting it elsewhere. It just does not make any sense. You know I am sure many, many, many individuals in the population are still amazed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Arouca/Maloney has expired. You want to guide the Speaker?

Miss A. Hospedales: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I would like to continue.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the question is that the speaking time of the hon. Member for Arouca/Maloney be extended by 15 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

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

Miss A. Hospedales: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I really do not think that the Government is serious. They are not very serious, serious about managing the current dilemma that we are in, serious about sharing with the members of the population the need for them to, as I say, tighten their belts, manage their money well, save. I do not think they are really serious about providing direction. It is really a case of, you know, I do not even want to say the blind leading the blind because we have blind people in this society who lead the blind very, very well.

They lack vision. It is the visionless leading the visionless. It is really a very, very troubling time for this country. They can boast oh, that they have managed the economy well for four and a half years, but for four and a half years we have had the biggest deficit budgets in this country. For four and a half years, we have

had wanton spending, squandermania, corruption to its core. The thing is if they think that the members of the population are not taking note, they are. They are taking note.

A survey that was commissioned by the *Trinidad Express*, that was conducted by Market Facts & Opinion in 2013, revealed that almost nine out of 10 people perceive corruption as widespread—and not just corruption in terms of business, but corruption by the Government. Seventy per cent of those individuals held the opinion that there was more corruption in Government now than ever.

The thing is they are thinking that the members of the population are foolish or they are blind or, as the Member for Diego Martin North/East was saying, “dotish”. They are thinking all those things—just pull wool over their eyes and they will follow them like the Pied Piper, who blew his flute and the rats followed after. They think that the people of this country are like that, but they fail to realize that they are not like that at all. They are wiser than you all think, eh. They are wiser than you all think.

Mr. Speaker, 27 per cent of the population was dissatisfied with the way the country’s finances were being handled by that Government; 57 per cent of the people were dissatisfied with the way the Government was spending the money. Overspending. It was like a free frolic for all. So many things that they have done and they think that the population has not taken note.

On behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, we the people are in search of a government with a vision, are in search of a government who will be honest, who will be transparent, who will be accountable. We, the people of Trinidad and Tobago, deserve better and I say to the current Government that the people of Trinidad and Tobago deserve a PNM Government. Mr. Speaker, I thank you.
[Desk thumping]

The Minister of Finance and the Economy (Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai):
Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I rise to bring these discussions and deliberations on this Motion before this honourable House to a close.

The debate certainly has been a long one. It has meandered through areas that perhaps did not touch on the Bill itself, but I think that quite an important amount of information was put out that perhaps we may need to respond to in one way or another. I would not take much time of this honourable House in doing so but, for the record, I just want to deal with a few matters which have been raised. The first relates to the Point Fortin highway.

First, there has been a lot said regarding the matter of the financing of the Point Fortin highway or the lack thereof and the fact that the funding came from the Treasury Deposits and from the cash flows of the Government. It is not something that is unusual I should say, because I want to say, for the record, that TGU itself was financed by cash by the former administration to the extent of about \$4½ billion, so it is not something new that was done.

Nevertheless, the Government has taken the decision to, in this fiscal year, borrow to complete the financing and the total amount of \$1.5 billion was raised. *[Interruption]* I was pointing out that the TGU was financed by cash, too, in the event that you may not have been there.

I want to say, too, that the whole issue of debt—there was a point made about debt, that in 2010 debt was \$45 billion and I think now it is \$90 billion is the number that was called. Ninety billion dollars is not the number for the total debt. Total debt at the end of September was \$73 billion. At the end of December, it had increased to \$76 billion, which is not the figure of \$90 billion that was quoted. What happened is that the \$90 billion may include the bills that have been issued as part of open market operations, which is not normally counted as part of the total debt stock.

It is correct that the growth figure is \$90 billion inclusive of the open market operations. What happens when you do open market operations, the deposits are placed in the Central Bank and then it is offset. So I just wanted to correct, for the record, that in fact the total debt was not \$90 billion.

The issue was raised concerning Phoenix Park and this is the worst possible time for the issue. I want to say that, with respect to Phoenix Park, we are proceeding with the issue and we know the price that we want to get for it. The price is guided by the price that had prevailed for a recent exchange of shares which occurred during the course of 2014. If the market does not pick it up at that price, that is fine with us. I expect that everyone will buy at the price that we determine is the price that we would like to get out there.

There were some issues relating to the question of the supplementary petroleum tax. That matter had been raised and again, just for the record, yes, it is true and the fact is that once the price does fall below \$50, there is no supplementary petroleum tax and that fact was taken into account when we computed the overall deficit position or the reduction in revenue that would occur as a result of the fall in price.

Transfer pricing was raised as an issue and certainly transfer pricing is something that this country has not paid attention to over the years, I have to say. Actually, since I came in that has been an issue that I have put high up on the agenda and there is a programme now to establish a unit which will be charged with implementing a regime for managing and monitoring transfer pricing.

The issue of the energy sector itself, I just want to make the point that the energy sector continues to remain strong and the—[*Interruption*] No, the output for this year was lower than it should have been. They used an unfortunate term of “dismal”, but the fact is that the energy sector continues to attract investment. [*Interruption*] Well, the important thing is that even where prices are declining on a global scale that, in the recent review that we did with the energy sector companies, all of the companies have indicated an intention to continue their investment programme, which is good news I think for the country and I think that we need to—and it is very important for us to continue that programme of investment in the energy sector. The impact will take time. That is understood, but I am saying the fact is that they are continuing to invest in the energy sector and I think that that is very important.

There was a small point which was made concerning the US being the second largest oil producer, which is not actually correct. Russia actually produces more than the US and perhaps the Member could correct me and get some information that corrects that.

There was also a suggestion, perhaps in speaking loosely that there is a 55 per cent reduction in the revenue. There has not been a 55 per cent reduction in revenue. Certainly oil prices have come down by 55 per cent, but there is not a 55 per cent reduction in revenue. I just wanted to be sure that we understood that it was not a 55 per cent reduction in the revenue of the Government.

In respect of Treasury Deposits, a statement was made that using Treasury Deposits means that the funds cannot be used for hospitals and so on. That is a position that is correct if there is capital rationing. There was not such a situation that existed during the course of the year. There were not any schools and hospitals that we had to say that we could not do because we were funding the highway. So I just wanted to make sure that some of those points were made with respect to some of the comments which were made.

A lot of the comments related to the statement which the Prime Minister made yesterday, but was not part of the substance of this Bill, so I do not want to go into that now. We have another Bill that we have to commence the debate on so I

would prefer not to spend additional time on that.

I am sure, during the course of the debate on the Finance Bill, we will all have a lot of opportunity to continue that discussion and perhaps to explain more of what was actually said and what are some of the things and perhaps provide further clarification in respect of some of the matters which were raised.

So, Mr. Speaker, I have tried to summarize this as far as possible. There may be one or two statements which may have been made that I have not picked up on, but I am sure during the course of the next debate, we will have the chance to do so.

With those short words, Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this House adopt the First Report of the Standing Finance Committee of the House of Representatives for the Fifth Session (2014/2015), Tenth Parliament on the consideration of proposals for the Supplementation and Variation of Appropriation for the fiscal year 2014.

8.45 p.m.

**FINANCE (SUPPLEMENTATION AND VARIATION OF APPROPRIATION)
(FINANCIAL YEAR 2014) BILL, 2015**

The Minister of Finance and the Economy (Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai):

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move:

That a Bill to supplement and vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2014) Act, 2013, be now read a second time.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Mr. Speaker: Nobody? The hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy. [*Mr. Imbert on his feet*] Please. I put the question, no one rose on your side that is why I asked the Minister, but—the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, are we talking about the Finance Bill, 2015?

Mr. Speaker: No, we are dealing with the supplementation.

Mr. Imbert: Oh, I am so sorry.

Mr. Speaker: That is the one that we are dealing with. We have not introduced that Bill yet. So, I can proceed? Good. I now call on the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy. [*Desk thumping*]

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The Minister of Finance and the Economy (Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai):
Mr. Speaker, there being no issues having been raised, I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Question put and agreed to: That the Bill be read a third time.

Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.

FINANCE BILL, 2015

The Minister of Finance and the Economy (Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai):
Mr. Speaker, I beg to move:

That a Bill to provide for the variation of certain duties and taxes and to introduce provisions of a fiscal nature and related matters, be now read a second time.

Mr. Speaker, before I make my presentation on the Bill, I think it would be helpful to set a context in which I propose to speak on the matters relating to this Bill. During the course of the last year, our economy, with the exception of the energy sector which continues to be affected by maintenance work offshore, has shown considerable resilience. The non-energy sector has been the engine of this expansion; and the various sectors, with one or two exceptions, showing growth across the board on a consistent basis. In fact, the overall macroeconomic data for the year for the non-energy sector remain relatively strong.

As at the end of 2014, the non-energy sector showed growth of 2.8 per cent with construction showing growth of 3.7 per cent; distribution, 3.7 per cent; finance, insurance and real estate, 4.4 per cent. The energy sector is the one which was most affected with other petroleum showing a contraction of 2 per cent, and overall the energy sector showing a contraction of 1.7 per cent. The non-energy sector has shown growth over each of the years, moving from contraction of -2.6 per cent in 2010 to a gradual turnaround to 1.8 per cent growth in 2012; 3.5 per cent in 2013; and 2.8 per cent in 2014.

The construction industry, which was in the doldrums and, in fact, was contracting and in fact had contracted by 28 per cent when we assumed office in 2010, has shown growth over the last two years at 3 per cent in 2013 and 3.7 per cent in 2014. The finance, insurance and real estate sector has shown consistent growth over the period from 2010 to 2014.

As had been indicated by the hon. Prime Minister when she spoke yesterday, our unemployment and our overall macroeconomic data continue to remain relatively sound. Unemployment, as indicated, is 3.6 per cent, one of the lowest levels on record; inflation, a lot of which tends to be imported, did increase toward the end of the year to 9 per cent but remains within single digits. Foreign exchange reserves, as the Prime Minister indicated, remain strong.

US-dollar deposits in the banking system continue to increase, and actually has now increased to over US \$3.5 billion in the banking system. So, there is a considerable holding of US-dollar deposits by the private sector and various organizations in the local banking system, and that reflects the continuing build-up of wealth within Trinidad and Tobago. It also reflects the continuing growth in deposits or parallel growth in deposits in the TT dollar deposits in the banking system, which has grown from \$74 billion at the end of 2010 to approximately \$100 billion today. So, again, this reflects the continuing increase in dollar value of wealth of individuals in the economy.

Debt to GDP is now just over 48 per cent, and as I had indicated before, growth investment in the energy sector remains buoyant. With the recent reduction in the price of oil and gas—and gas is coming down although oil has been the hardest hit over the past few months—we have projected a reduction in revenue of \$7.4 billion which is approximately 12.5 per cent of our budgeted revenue. On this basis, we have projected a \$45 oil price and a \$2.25 netback price for our gas.

Our expectation is that oil and gas prices would perhaps average a little bit better than this year, but given where it is now, which was about \$48 when last I looked at it, we prefer to be a little bit more cautious in terms of where we establish the benchmark. We have, as had been indicated, projections considerably more optimistic than that, but we need to see how things pan out over the remainder of this year. The expectation is that for 2016 prices would firm up a bit more than they have. In fact, in 2009, the price did actually dip below \$40 for a brief time, and that is therefore something that we need to keep our eyes on as we go forward.

We recognize also that given the changing fundamentals in the energy sector, in the energy market with the advent and the development and more robust development of shale oil and shale gas that, perhaps, the correction when it comes would not be the same as had occurred after 2009 when prices went back to over \$100 per barrel for oil after the recovery began and prices began to firm up. We

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do not expect that prices would go back to those levels, and we are in our medium-term forecast using price levels of between \$65 to \$70 for oil.

Currently S & P and Moody's have projected prices at \$65 to \$70, and also the US Energy Information Administration has indicated or has projected prices of \$62 to \$70 for this year, an average, using WTI and a slightly higher figure for next year. So, we have been guided by some of those. We have seen what has happened in the past and we are putting those figures in our medium-term forecast which we are currently reviewing.

The Prime Minister, when she spoke of her fiscal measures of the priorities of the Government, she did indicate that there would be no cutback on programmes which affect the poor and the disadvantaged, and there will be a continuing focus on crime and on health, particularly, as we go forward. The question is: how do we address the challenge of falling oil and gas prices? As I indicated, we expect that prices will firm back up, and eventually we are looking at that occurring toward the next fiscal year—that is from October of this year going into next year—and we have therefore used a much lower number for this year.

We have identified a number of initiatives, the Phoenix Park IPO as we indicated. We expect to realize well over a billion dollars for that. We have not put the exact figure out and would not do so until we have received the approval of the SEC with respect to the pricing.

The question of the acceleration of the PPP programme and the reduction in selected categories of expenditure have been indicated by the Prime Minister. The use of sale and lease-back arrangements are some financing options that we would have to consider as the Government has quite a considerable amount of assets which are free, and which we may be able to use under sale and lease-back arrangements to strengthen our cash position going forward as well as the conversion of certain facilities to BOLT arrangements which will also generate a certain amount of cash and the deferral of selected capital projects and, of course, as indicated, a continuing process of gradual adjustment to bring our fiscal position into balance without dislocating the economy.

What has been the fiscal outcome so far this year? For the first two months, the performance of this fiscal year has been better than budgeted. I have not seen the number for December, but the preliminary indications are that we have again performed a little bit better in December than we had originally projected. For the first two months, revenue realized was \$5.6 billion versus a budget of \$5.8 billion. We had a negative variance of \$200 million. On the expenditure side, however,

expenditures were below budget by \$996 million and this resulted in a positive variance of \$700 million for the first two months of this year.

So the point I am making, Mr. Speaker, is that notwithstanding the concerns that have been expressed and notwithstanding the falling prices that we have experienced starting towards the end of October through November, the actual figures that we have shown show that we performed better than expected and it is our expectation, as I said, that December would also follow that trend. Therefore, we expect for the first quarter to the end of December, notwithstanding the turbulence we have seen in the market, that we should end up with a slightly better than expected or budgeted performance for the first three months.

9.00 p.m.

Now, that is not to mean that that would continue through for the remainder of this year, and that is why we have projected the reduction that we have made, but it is just for information that in fact the overall performance for the first three months will be better than the originally budgeted projection. It is against this background therefore that we are submitting, for the approval of this House, the following package of fiscal initiatives.

The Bill before this House contains 26 clauses and includes measures which were announced in the budget presentation in September 2014. These initiatives involve measures which treat with the Social Safety Net, pensions, agriculture, affordable housing, protection of the environment and reduction of the subsidy, and developing among our road users, a greater sense of responsibility.

In addition, the Bill contains provisions that allow for greater efficiency of the Unit Trust Corporation and further development of the capital market. Further, the Bill contains provisions promoting tax administration which, it is believed, will allow for increased collection of taxes, as well as provisions for improved compliance relating to the filing of documents to be provided to the Companies Registrar. Mr. Speaker, the Bill also provides for other measures approved by the Cabinet which did not form part of the 2015 budget measures. These include amendments to the Petty Civil Courts Act, Chap. 4:21, and the Proceeds of Crime Act, Chap. 11:27.

Mr. Speaker, the Bill contains certain other provisions that I would term “clean-up measures” and which also did not form part of the 2015 budget measures. The measures facilitate, among other things, the proper working of tax incentives relating to the construction sector as they relate to residential housing.

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In addition, other clean-up measures deal with the parity of treatment of the Arthur Lok Jack Graduate School of Business and the St. Augustine campus of the University of the West Indies, as it relates to the exemption of value added tax.

I shall now examine the clauses of the Bill before this honourable House. Social Safety Net measures: Mr. Speaker, clauses 12 and 19(b) will be examined together. The Government has identified the wellness of all the citizens as a primary objective and, in particular, the development of an environment where basic and special needs are adequately met. At the present time, persons certified with a permanent physical and mental disability receive a monthly amount of \$1,500 per month. Mr. Speaker, it is proposed at clause 12 to increase this amount by \$300, allowing for a disabled person to now receive \$1,800. This measure will be deemed to come into force on October 01, 2014.

Mr. Speaker, in a similar vein, the purpose of granting a personal allowance is to provide a tax-free income which would support a minimum standard of living, particularly for those individuals who need this benefit most. Recognizing the special needs of senior citizens, whose disposable income will generally be reduced upon retirement, it is proposed that, with effect from January 01, 2015, individuals who have attained the age of 60 years will be entitled to an enhanced personal allowance of \$72,000 per annum. The enhanced personal allowance will also be granted to non-resident individuals over 60 years who are in receipt of pensions accruing in or derived from Trinidad and Tobago; clause 19(b) will provide for this measure. Mr. Speaker, it should be noted that the personal allowance for all other individuals will remain at \$60,000 per annum in ascertaining the chargeable income of those individuals for year of income.

I turn now to pension measures in the Bill. Mr. Speaker, you may be aware that existing pension arrangements for public officers do not provide for the indexation of pension benefits and, as such, there is no measure of relief against the effects of inflation. These retirees receive a fixed income and experience difficulties in maintaining an acceptable standard of living since their purchasing power is severely eroded by inflation. In order to provide relief to our senior citizens, whose disposable pension income would have been eroded by inflation, it is proposed to increase the minimum pension payable to retired public officers, and where provided to their widows and orphans in respect of service under the

Government of Trinidad and Tobago or other public service, from \$3,000 per month to \$3,500 per month.

Mr. Speaker, this measure, it is expected, would benefit approximately 35,000 public officers. These measures are found at clauses 3, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 15 and 16, and will be deemed to come into force on October 01, 2014. Mr. Speaker, it should be noted that in certain respects, for example prisons officers, statutory instruments in the form of regulations or an order are required to give effect to the measure increasing the minimum pension for retired public officers. In this regard, I wish to report that the necessary procedures relating to the making of the statutory instrument were completed so as to allow for publication of the instrument by October 01, 2014. Mr. Speaker, the increase in the minimum pension for public officers is in alignment with the proposal to increase the Senior Citizens' Pension to \$3,500 per month, which came into force on October 01, 2014.

Mr. Speaker, another pension measure is related to the approved deferred annuities made available to resident individuals. These annuities are a type of savings plan used by individuals looking for long-term growth and protection of assets usually needed upon retirement. Contributors would pay certain stated amounts and receive periodic payments or a lump sum in the future, usually upon maturity of the plan or upon retirement of the contributor. One advantage of purchasing a deferred annuity approved by the Board of Inland Revenue is that the contributions are tax-deductible, thereby reducing the contributors' tax liability in the year of income.

Under section 28(15) of the Income Tax Act, Chap. 75, in ascertaining his or her chargeable income for a year of income, a resident individual is limited to an aggregate tax deduction of \$30,000 in respect of contributions to an approved pension plan or deferred annuity plans, or retirement plans. It is proposed that with effect from January 01, 2015, the aggregate tax deduction that may be claimed by a resident individual under section 28 of the Income Tax Act be increased from \$30,000 to \$50,000. Mr. Speaker, this proposal is found at clause 19(d) of the Bill.

Agriculture and measures that affect the agricultural sector: praedial larceny, which is basically defined as a theft of agricultural produce or livestock from a farm or estate, is widely acknowledged within the Caribbean region as a practice that continues to impact negatively on the development of the agricultural sector

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and is the single greatest disincentive in the sector. According to a study conducted by the FAO, the Food and Agriculture Organization, in collaboration with the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency, praedial larceny is no longer viewed as a petty crime but one of the most pervasive and entrenched crimes affecting business and livelihood in the region.

This crime has moved from the theft of small amounts to large amounts of produce, posing serious dangers to farmers and their workers. [*Crosstalk*] Offenders operate in a complex social and economic environment, encompassing varied groups of individuals who have developed a livelihood and businesses from the stealing of agricultural produce, equipment and materials. Each group has developed its own dynamics in a distribution chain where the crime enters undetected into the normal processes of legitimate industry of especially the domestic fresh-food distribution system. Conservative estimates are that 18 per cent of the value of farm output regionally is taken by thieves resulting, according to the FAO, in millions of dollars in losses annually.

In Trinidad and Tobago several strategies have been utilized to reduce the incidence of praedial larceny. The Praedial Larceny Squad has been revived. This squad was established in collaboration with the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service as part of the Government's aim of creating a food-secure nation. In order to enhance the effectiveness of the squad, the Government has decided to increase the fines associated with acts of praedial larceny. As part of the strategies to tackle the scourge of praedial larceny in the country, it is proposed to increase the fines under the Praedial Larceny Prevention Act by 50 per cent. This proposal is found at clause 6 of the Bill and comes into force on January 01, 2015.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to turn now to measures relating to affordable housing. In 2003, a special allowance of \$10,000 per year was introduced to benefit resident individuals who purchased or constructed their first homes on or after January 01, 2003. In the Finance Act 2010, the special allowance was increased to \$18,000 per year with effect from January 01, 2011. Under the existing law, the \$18,000 relief is granted for a period of five years from the year in which the house is purchased or constructed and can be shared by several individuals holding joint ownership of the property as a residence. In light of the continued challenges facing individuals as they seek affordable housing, the period of already high domestic property values, and given Government's objective of making housing affordable for all citizens, it is proposed to increase the first-time homeowner allowance from \$18,000 to \$25,000 per household. The allowance will continue to be available to the first-time homeowner for a period

of five years from the year in which the house is acquired. [*Desk thumping*] This measure is found at clause 19(c) of the Bill and, similarly, comes into force this month.

Mr. Speaker, another matter in this Bill relating to making housing available to individuals deals with a tax incentive provided for in the Finance Act, 2013. Mr. Speaker, this is one of the clean-up measures that I spoke about earlier in my presentation. This particular incentive allows for the exemption of income tax until the year ending December 31, 2015, and this was revised in the Finance Act of 2014 to December 31, 2018, on the gains or profits derived from the initial sale of a residential house site being part of a land development project. The incentive is given to the landowner provided that he or she produces a certificate from the Minister with responsibility for housing in support of the claim for exemption. This exemption was an additional incentive to those already provided for under sections 42 to 46 of the Income Tax Act, relating to the construction of houses.

Mr. Speaker, the tax incentives for the housing measures require input by way of regulations in our company forms from the Minister with responsibility for housing and the Housing Development Corporation. In 2005, Part VIII of the *Trinidad and Tobago Housing Development Corporation Act*, which gave the Minister and the HDC their respective powers, was repealed. The effect of this was to remove the regulation-making powers of the Minister and the HDC under the *Trinidad and Tobago Housing Development Corporation Act*. The repeal of the Act also made the regulation and forms existing under the Act at that time of no effect. The result is that claimants for the tax incentives, including the one provided for in 2013, have found it difficult to access the incentives.

Mr. Speaker, in order for all the tax incentives under sections 42 to 46 of the Income Tax Act, relating to the construction of houses to become operational, it is necessary to provide, in the Housing Act, for the regulation-making powers of the Minister and the corporation under that Act. In addition, it is necessary to provide for the regulations and forms relating to the tax exemptions provided for under the Income Tax Act. Mr. Speaker, the necessary amendments to this Act are found at clause 13 of the Bill.

Mr. Speaker, I turn now to environment protection and subsidy reduction measures. Mr. Speaker, from as early as 2010, tax incentives for vehicles manufactured to use CNG were introduced and formed part of several incentives used in the promotion of the protection of the environment energy efficiency, as well as the reduction of the subsidy. In an attempt to continue in a similar vein, it

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is proposed to provide tax incentives to encourage the use of hybrid and electric-powered vehicles. In this regard, clauses 17(j) and 20(b) of the Bill allow for the removal of motor vehicle tax and value added tax on new and used hybrid and electric-powered vehicles for a period of five years.

9.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, it should be noted that the exemption is limited to vehicles with engine sizes not exceeding 1799 cc, and 1.79 kilowatt for the hybrid and electric powered vehicles respectively. In addition, the age of used vehicles imported under this measure will not be older than four years from the year of manufacture. At a later date, we would want to suggest some amendments that we would want to make to this particular measure—at a later stage of this Bill.

I turn now to road usage measures. Over the period 2007—2014, there were approximately 1,566 road fatalities in Trinidad and Tobago. A number such as this is unacceptable for a country as small as Trinidad and Tobago. With a view to developing a greater sense of responsibility by drivers and to curb the level of irresponsible driving on our roads, it is proposed to increase the fines by 50 per cent under the relevant legislation relating to driving offences, including driving under the influence of alcohol; having fraudulent motor vehicle certificates of registration and ownership; driving without a valid permit; driving over the speed limit and driving without a valid insurance. These measures are at clause 17(a) to (i) and clause 18 of the Bill, and will similarly come into force this month.

Tax administration measures—in earlier years, but as recent as 2010, an amnesty was granted to give a one-off opportunity to taxpayers who had failed to file returns, to bring their tax status up to date. The concessions were offered to all resident individuals and companies and were applicable to all interest and other penalties payable on outstanding liabilities to income tax, corporation tax, business levy, Green Fund levy, property taxes and value added tax due and payable. There was a tremendous response to these amnesties and it is now proposed that there be a similar amnesty for late filing of income tax and corporation tax returns for years of income up to and including the year 2013. This amnesty is recommended because it is believed that the taxes which the State stands to collect far outweigh the penalties and will encourage taxpayer compliance.

In order to benefit from the concessions, the taxpayer must have filed outstanding returns and paid all outstanding taxes on or before March 31, 2015, failing which, the interest and other penalties would be revived after that date.

The following measures are therefore proposed:

1. The amnesty will be offered to all resident individuals and companies who have not filed returns of income for any year up to and including the year 2013;
2. All interest on outstanding taxes, including business levy and Green Fund levy due and payable, as at December 31, 2013, will be waived, where such taxes and levy are paid during the period September 08, 2014—March 31, 2015;
3. All interest charged on any payment made prior to September 08, 2014, in respect of any tax and business levy and Green Fund levy due or payable as at December 31, 2013, will be waived;
4. All penalties, further tax and additional tax due and payable on outstanding taxes, including business levy and Green Fund levy, as at December 31, 2013, will be waived, where such taxes or levy are paid during the same period of September 08—March 31;
5. Penalties, further tax and additional tax in respect of taxes, business and Green Fund levy due and payable as at December 31, 2013, and paid prior to September 08, 2014, will be waived, where such penalties, further tax and additional tax have been paid;
6. Penalties on outstanding returns for the years of income up to and including the year 2013, will be waived, where such returns are filed during the period September 08, 2014 and March 31, 2015. Similarly, penalties which are due, where the payments were made prior to September 08, then those penalties would be waived.

For the avoidance of doubt, the concession shall not apply to taxes, levy, interest, penalties, further tax and additional tax paid prior to September 08, 2014. Where any returns, taxes and levy remain outstanding after March 31, 2015, the penalties, interest, further taxes and additional taxes which would have been payable on such returns, taxes and levy, shall be revived and become payable as if the waiver had not been granted.

Mr. Speaker, this amnesty is meant to give citizens the opportunity to honour their tax obligations to the State, without the cumulative penalties and interest accrued over the years. After the amnesty period, the State will utilize the full extent of its legislative authority to ensure that compliance with the relevant taxation Acts is followed, as Government seeks to make good on its tax

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receivables and broaden and diversify its tax base. This measure is found at clauses 19(f) and 20(a) of the Bill, and will expire on March 31, 2015.

Clause 23 of the Bill allows for the waiver of taxes under the Property Tax Act. This has become necessary, given the several issues involved in the proper implementation of this system for Trinidad and Tobago. We need, therefore, to provide the waiver so that citizens would be protected from this particular piece of taxation.

I turn now to compliance requirements under the Companies Act. I now turn to compliance relating to the filing of documents under the Companies Act, Chap. 81:01, which is found at clause 21 of the Bill. The Act at section 516 provides that the Registrar is entitled to collect from a person or company a penalty of \$100 for every month, in the case where there is failure to deliver or file documents. The primary purpose of the penalty prescribed is to encourage companies' compliance with the legislation, so that the Registrar of Companies is, as far as possible, furnished with accurate and current information in relation to companies.

The records contemplated are required, inter alia, in furtherance of law as well as other enforcement objectives, as a means of assisting in financial investigations as an aid in assessing the soundness of financial investments and as a means of record keeping of employment. For instance, the annual return that is required to be filed pursuant to section 194 of the Companies Act is a snapshot of the key company information which is available to members of the public in the verification of details, such as the company's directors, registered office address, shareholders and share capital.

In keeping with the general intention of these disclosure provisions, and to facilitate companies which have not complied with filing obligations for which the cost of accumulated penalties may be a deterrent to filing returns, notices and other documents, it is recommended that a waiver be granted in respect of all penalties outstanding or chargeable by reason of section 516.

The proposed waiver is to be applicable until March 31, 2015, provided always that companies are not absolved of their obligation to file and deliver any forms or documents to the Registrar of Companies, and the relevant filing fees as they currently apply, in respect of each form or document, are paid.

Mr. Speaker, I turn now to the Unit Trust Corporation and some of the measures we are putting in place to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the corporation. In my 2015 budget presentation, I signalled that legislation would be brought to the Parliament to bring the Trinidad and Tobago Unit Trust

Corporation in line with the guidelines relating to collective investment schemes. In this regard, I will now turn to clause 22 of the Bill, which identifies the key operational amendments to be made to the UTC Act, together with the rationale for the changes.

The first is in order to align to industry best practice, the definition of “securities” under the UTC Act is being amended to be consistent with the definition of securities applicable to all market actors in the competitive environment that exists currently.

Secondly, investing parameters—at present, under section 13(3) of the UTC Act, the UTC Board is not authorized to invest more than 10 per cent of the funds of any one unit scheme in the purchase of securities in any one company or other corporation. In addition, the investments of all unit schemes shall not include more than 10 per cent of the securities issued by a company or corporation. It should be noted that the CIS guidelines would restrict the control by the UTC, or any unit scheme, of equity or voting securities of an issuer, including securities not already saleable on a securities exchange.

In general, borrowings, including short-term and government and government-guaranteed bonds do not have a 10 per cent restriction under the guidelines. It is therefore proposed to amend the 10 per cent restriction, so as to allow for greater latitude in investing in government and government-guaranteed debt securities. Such a change will increasingly remove areas of potential conflict between the UTC Act and the Securities Act, as well as improve the competitive performance of the funds, particularly the Growth and Income Fund.

The next change we are making to the UTC Act, Mr. Speaker, is the removal of the upper limit on unit prices. Currently, the UTC Act imposes an upper limit of \$100 on schemes issued under the Act. We are removing that particular value limit, so as to give the UTC greater flexibility in terms of implementation of or introducing new unit schemes.

With respect to the power to open, close and amend unit schemes, in order to achieve adequate flexibility to satisfy market and competitive requirements, the UTC needs to have the explicit authority to close, re-open, amend, suspend or cease to sell units in or otherwise wind up a unit scheme. It is proposed to insert into the UTC Act a provision to expand the powers of the UTC to explicitly do these things—that is, open, close or otherwise amend the Act.

With respect to disposal of units, section 14(4) of the UTC Act now provides that: It is proposed to “where a unitholder desires to dispose of units by sale, he shall

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sell such units only to the Trust and the Trust shall purchase the units in accordance with regulations which provide for the determination of the value of the units". It is proposed to include at the end of this subsection the words: "except where the Board establishes a closed-end fund which is listed on an organized and regulated financial market".

The power to borrow—the existing Act restricts the corporation's power to borrow for the sole purpose of meeting short-term unit redemption needs, and restricts such borrowing to a term not exceeding 90 days. It is proposed to extend that term to 180 days.

We are also amending the definition of "income allocated for distribution" in the existing Unit Trust Act. The existing Act requires at section 25 that in the case of the First Unit Scheme, not less than 90 per cent of the income allocated for distribution shall be distributed to unitholders. Based on current practice, income to be distributed has included realized and unrealized capital gains. However, the provision relating to the minimum amount to be distributed has had the unintended effect of forcing the cash distribution of capital from the First Unit Scheme, often to the long-term detriment of the fund's growth potential and performance. The effect is that the unit scheme over the years has had to liquidate additional securities to facilitate cash distribution, contrary to the growth objective of the fund.

In this regard, it should be noted that undistributed capital gains retained in the unit scheme would bring value to unitholders as part of the total returns to such unitholders. It is felt that by excluding capital gains from the income allocated for distribution, that this will facilitate improved achievement of the growth objective of the fund. This exclusion will also promote the international best practice of encouraging emphasis on the total return to the fund, as unitholders would still receive the value of their realized and unrealized capital gains in the form of enhanced net asset value.

9.30 p.m.

It is therefore proposed that the reference to income allocated for distribution in section 25 should comprise of dividends and interest earnings. Mr. Speaker, it is proposed, again, that this change come into effect this month.

I turn now to government savings bonds. Mr. Speaker, clause 8(a) and (e) and clause 25 deal with the intention to provide for a government savings bond to allow small investors including pensioners to purchase bonds in small denominations including \$1,000 per bond. Purchases of bonds issued by the

Government will be tax deductible up to \$5,000 per annum for a period of five years.

The Act also allows the Minister to make regulations for, among other things, rate of interest. In this regard, the national tax-free savings bonds regulations provides for interest rates on bonds with maturity of five years, a rate of 6 per cent; seven years, 7 per cent; and 10 years, 8 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, an analysis of existing interest rates in the markets suggests that these are out of line with current market interest rates, and we propose therefore, also, to amend these rates downward as indicated in the Bill.

In light of the preceding proposal, we have also made changes which provide for a tax credit of an amount equal to 25 per cent of the face value of the bonds where the maturity period is five, seven or 10 years. The tax credit referred to above applies only to such portion of the bonds purchased in a year of income by any person which does not exceed \$5,000 in value.

The tax credit also goes to the original purchaser of the bond for the year in which it is purchased. Where the amount of the tax credit, as computed, is not fully utilized, we propose that the unutilized portions be carried forward to the next year, and if necessary, to a subsequent year.

Mr. Speaker: You have two more minutes to wind up eh.

Sen. The Hon. L. Howai: Okay, Mr. Speaker. I want to say, Mr. Speaker we have—very briefly—[*Laughter*] we have made some changes to the Petty Civil Courts Act which we have—the monetary limits. The monetary limits had been established in 1996, and we are proceeding—they are out of line with what is required now, and we are proposing, therefore, to increase the limits as far as that is concerned.

We have also made some changes to the Proceeds of Crime Act to address the seizure and detention of cash, as well as the forfeiture of cash. The amendments to these sections are found in clauses 38 and 39 of the Bill.

We have also made some changes to allow both the Arthur Lok Jack School of Business, as well as the St. Augustine Campus to be exempt from the payment of Value Added Tax on goods imported by them, as well as the commercial supplies of goods and services for their use. So, we have also put that into the Bill in clause 24. And we have also put in clause 26 some validations which are aimed at validating the actions of Ministries purporting to make pensions and disability assistance payments after October 01, 2014.

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So, Mr. Speaker, the measures which we have outlined were all contained in the budget which we read last year. We have made no changes other than those which we have identified. As we go forward, we recognize the challenging nature of the economy, and the challenging nature of the position that we face, but we recognize that these are important for achieving the objectives which the Prime Minister had outlined as being those of highest priority relating to the elderly, relating to measures to spur the economy, and of course relating also to measures that affect crime. So with these few words, Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Mr. Speaker: I beg your pardon. At this time I now invite Members of the Opposition or any other Member who would like to make a response. The hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East. My apologies.

Mr. Colm Imbert (*Diego Martin North/East*): I was wondering, Mr. Speaker, I was wondering if you were going to do that to me twice in one day. “Yuh go tell me I cyar talk.” [*Laughter and crosstalk*] I tell “yuh”.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister has once again demonstrated that he is blissfully ignorant of the world economic situation, the oil and gas sector, the impact of the fall in oil prices on petroleum revenues in Trinidad and Tobago. I am just— [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Speaker, what bothers me—who is advising Members opposite? It cannot be the Minister of Finance and the Economy because he is clueless. It cannot be the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs because he is in cloud “cuckooland”; and I will prove it, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Finance and the Economy came and told us—he repeated—I will prove it—the statement— [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Speaker, would you ask the— [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Please. Please allow the hon. Member. Silence, please.

Mr. C. Imbert: The Minister of Finance and the Economy— [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Please. Continue, hon. Member.

Mr. C. Imbert: Thank you. The Minister of Finance and the Economy repeated the statement that our energy sector is strong, and he said the words used by the Central Bank Governor—the word was “dismal”—was unpopular. I shall now prove that the Minister is completely clueless. I shall read the entire section from the statement of the Governor of the Central Bank to the Chaguanas Chamber on December 01, 2014. It goes as follows—the whole thing:

“The unexpected slowdown in the economy was caused by a dismal performance in the energy sector, with declines most pronounced in natural gas and LNG production. Energy companies had indicated in October 2013, the planned supply shutdowns and stoppages that had been taking place would be no more and energy production would have normalised in 2014.”

So, he says.

“However, supply disruptions mainly from the two largest energy companies continued throughout 2014 and stifled the recovery process. In January and May 2014, bpTT took down the company’s largest production platform, Savonette, to facilitate drilling activities. BGTT had a planned shutdown of its Dolphin platform for five days in June 2014 to facilitate the installation of equipment. BG also took the opportunity to undertake a parallel maintenance exercise. These are just a few instances of shutdowns by the country’s two largest natural gas producers. Routine maintenance by Atlantic LNG...and Petrotrin’s oil refinery worsened the situation in our energy sector. Energy output, therefore, contracted by an estimated 1½ per cent in the first nine months of 2014...This is the harsh reality to which we are tied in an energy-based economy.”

So at least the Governor of the Central Bank knows what is going on. The energy sector contracted by 1½ per cent in 2014. The Minister tells us that our energy sector is strong. The Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs in particular has tried to pretend that our problem is maintenance work in the energy sector. In fact, we have heard for the last three budgets that projections of output in the energy sector did not meet expectations because of maintenance work.

They come at the beginning of the year, they come with a budget, a set of sound and fury, they project all sorts of revenues from oil, and then they come at the end of the year and say unexpected maintenance work caused a fallout in revenue and a reduction in output and a shortfall in revenue from the petroleum sector.

Now, listen to what the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs has consistently claimed. This is a *Guardian* article dated October 12, 2014, just a couple months ago. And here is the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs for the umpteenth time trying to blame the energy companies for the problem.

Hon. Member: Not the PNM?

Mr. C. Imbert: No. He is trying to blame the energy companies, and the Minister in this article indicates that—and I will quote:

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“...Energy Minister Kevin Ramnarine consistently told the country prior to 2014, but which bpTT itself is now denying is the root cause of the problem. The company argued that the 2008 global economic crisis, unfavourable fiscal environment”—in Trinidad and Tobago—“and the expectation by the National Gas Company and the National Energy Company that an oversupply of gas was likely due to the cancellation of downstream projects created uncertainty which affected investment decisions.”

Now let me translate that for the uninitiated and the uninformed on the other side. The Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs has consistently claimed that the problem of declining production in Trinidad and Tobago is because of maintenance work by these oil companies. Every year they are doing maintenance work. Year after year after year, we keep hearing: “bp shutdown, BG shutdown; we did not expect this; we did not expect that”—and therefore that is why the energy sector has contracted. Bp says—no way. Yes, we had maintenance to do, but the problem is uncertainty because of the indecision of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago with respect to downstream projects.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it must have taken bpTT a long time before they decided to issue a press release to contradict. It is highly unusual that an international oil company which has serious investment in Trinidad and Tobago, and depends on the Government for favours or for cooperation—let us put it that way—depends on the Government for cooperation, it is highly unusual that such a large energy company would take the step of issuing a press release to say that the Minister is talking foolishness. It is the indecision of the Government that has caused a problem with the gas supply in Trinidad and Tobago. But let us move on, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Finance and the Economy also demonstrated his unfamiliarity with the energy sector by trying to score Brownie points against a point I had made that the United States had become the second largest producer of oil in the world. So trying to play tit for tat, he says no, they are the third largest—completely missing the point that three large players in the world are Saudi Arabia, Russia and United States. And from time to time each one of them takes the place of the other, Mr. Speaker. To show you how uninformed the Minister is, I will read into the record an article from *Bloomberg*, a very reputable international magazine and information agency, financial information agency, dated July 04, 2014. The article is headlined as follows—this is this year, you know. The United States is now seen as the largest oil producer in the world after overtaking Saudi Arabia. I will read into the record.

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“The US will remain the world’s biggest oil producer this year after overtaking Saudi Arabia and Russia as extraction of energy from shale rock spurs the nation’s economic recovery...

U.S. production of crude oil, along with liquids separated from natural gas, surpassed all other countries”—in the world—“this year with daily output exceeding 11 million barrels...”

So, I have a Minister of Finance and the Economy who does not read, who does not understand anything, who just parrots what he is told, who just repeats whatever somebody—I am sure the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs came and told him that nonsense, that “oh, US is number three not number two, as Imbert say”. No, Mr. Speaker, that is not the point.

9.45 p.m.

No, Mr. Speaker. That is not the point. There are three large producers of oil in the world: Saudi Arabia, Russia, United States. At some times Saudi Arabia is the largest, at some times Russia is the second largest, at some times, as you see, United States is the largest. And, in fact, the United States became the world’s largest natural gas producer in 2010 according to the international energy agency.

So, I would ask hon. Members opposite, if you do not understand just do not talk. “Doh talk.” And we now have to explain the significance of all of this, because I keep hearing the Minister saying—“what he say?” We expect prices to stabilize at \$60 or something like that. Where are you getting this information from? Where are you getting this information from? Mr. Speaker, I will put into the record that a statement made by the Minister, made by the hon. Mr. Larry Howai, just a few months ago, November 21, 2014—“Budget re-worked at US \$70—Howai”, and this is the Minister.

“T&T’s 2014/2015 budget has been reworked with revenue calculated assuming a US \$70 oil price...”

That is just less than two months ago, you know, November 21.

“Minister of Finance and the Economy Larry Howai told CNC3 business reporter Judy Kanhai...T&T’s oil price is based on West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude.”

Well, I think I better repeat that for the benefit of the Member for Oropouche East, who is also blissfully ignorant of the world benchmark to use on which to peg oil prices, when, again, you were trying to score Brownie points when you

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said “Brent dropped to \$9 in 1989.” We do not use Brent as our benchmark—*[Interruption]*—1998, whenever it was. We do not use Brent—West Texas Intermediate.

Dr. Gopeesingh: What it dropped to?

Mr. C. Imbert: It did not go to \$9. It did not.

Dr. Moonilal: How much?

Mr. C. Imbert: Mr. Speaker, let me move on. Trinidad and Tobago’s oil price—*[Interruption]*—Mr. Speaker, could you stop—

Mr. Speaker: Somebody is disturbing you?

Mr. C. Imbert: The Member for Oropouche East again.

Mr. Speaker: Oh, I did not know that. Please!

Mr. C. Imbert: He cannot help it.

Mr. Speaker: Member for Oropouche East, please!

Mr. C. Imbert: Thank you. Trinidad and Tobago’s oil price is based on West Texas Intermediate. Let me repeat that, not based on Brent. So, the Minister of Finance and the Economy goes on to say:

“We have reworked our figures using a reduction in oil prices at an average of US \$70 for the remainder of the year, and assuming that gas prices come down to US \$2.75. With these numbers, we do not expect a reduction in revenues of more than two per cent.”

And he goes on to talk, paint a very rosy picture—this is just six weeks ago, you know—of what is happening. He goes on to say:

“For the month of October WTI averaged just over US \$84 per barrel and therefore was ahead of budget.”—talk about cloud “cuckooland”—“Gas prices have also been averaging some 22 per cent more than budgeted”.

This is six weeks ago he is saying that, you know. This Minister of Finance and the Economy.

“This resulted in October energy revenues being better than budget”—and he goes on to make this bold prediction.

“The Minister predicted that”—that is six weeks ago—“the price”—of oil—“would probably average out at somewhere between US \$73 and US \$80 a barrel”—for this fiscal year.

That is what he said in November of last year. Six weeks ago, pronouncing to the

nation that the price of oil will average out at US \$73 to \$84 per barrel.

Mr. Speaker, it is necessary to explain because the Government obviously does not know and they do not care to find out, and they do not want the population to know. It is necessary for people in Trinidad and Tobago to understand what is going on, and to understand the variables, and to understand that it is possible that this severe drop in oil price could come to an end in about six months, and oil prices could slowly recover. And it is also quite likely that it will not, and rather than the Minister just coming and making wild statements based on nothing, people in this country need to understand what is going on, and I will say it again. What we are seeing here is a fight between three oil giants, between Russia, between the United States of America and between Saudi Arabia. And what has caused the problem is that the United States for many, many years was not an exporter of oil. The United States—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal: Since when he became an authority on energy?

Mr. C. Imbert: Recently. [*Laughter*] The United States was not an exporter of oil.

Dr. Moonilal: I want to find out when.

Mr. C. Imbert: It was not an exporter of oil. But recently, Mr. Speaker, oil producers in the United States—not just in Alaska, but in other places began to export oil—it was modest—to other parts of the world.

Now, in all the years prior to that the United States was an importer of oil. They need about 14 million barrels of oil per day and they produce about eight, nine, around there, we have seen they have gone up to 11 now if you include condensate and they imported about five/six billion barrels of oil.

[MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

So, Saudi Arabia, Venezuela and so on, these countries they were exporting their product to the United States and everything was okay. So, you had oil prices going up and down and you had oil shocks based on war and other things like that. But all of a sudden the United States, because of the shale oil explosion and the increase in production, because we need to understand how US oil production has increased in the last couple years. In fact, in just a few years, Madam Deputy Speaker, US oil production has doubled, just in the last three to four years. So, whereas US oil production had dropped to four million barrels a day, it is now nine million barrels a day, and the cause of that is the shale oil revolution.

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The reason why US producers had gotten into shale oil is because of high oil prices. So, it is really, I would not call it a chicken and egg, but it is a cause and effect. So, as the price of oil went up to \$70, \$80 and so on, it became profitable for US oil producers to start using fracking technology, which is splitting and drilling of rock in order to extract trapped oil trapped in shale, and this is how the United States was able to double its production from four billion barrels of oil per day up to eight billion and nine billion barrels a day, and if you include condensate, 11 billion barrels of oil per day.

And this has obviously, Madam Deputy Speaker—[*Interruption*]—what? I do not know what is going on here. Madam Deputy Speaker—

Dr. Rowley: Ask the Member for Chaguanas East to go back to sleep, please.

Mr. C. Imbert: What has happened in the world, Mr. Speaker—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Madam.

Mr. C. Imbert: Well, I can call you Madam Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I will minus you two minutes.

Mr. C. Imbert: “Madam Deputy Speaker. Doh try that.” So, what has happened is that the United States has become a threat whereas Saudi Arabia was the dominant producer, Russia right on its heels, now all of a sudden the United States has become a threat to the members of OPEC, because the United States is not an OPEC member. It is not a member of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries. They had their little cabal going on—you can call it a cabal, that is what it is—they produced about 40 per cent of world oil production and they had a nice thing going.

They are controlling the price of oil, because the United States did not have the volume necessary to be a big player, but all of a sudden the United States oil production is now rivalling Saudi Arabia and Russia, and in fact, if you include condensate, it is more than the two of them.

So, clearly now Saudi Arabia, seeing that threat, has decided it is going to try to deal with this shale oil industry in the United States, but there is a problem. And, you see, we need to be very deep and in-depth about these situations. There is a problem. You see, Madam Deputy Speaker, for wells that are already in production in the United States, for shale oil wells that are already in production, they can continue to produce oil for \$10 and \$20 a barrel. This is for wells already producing. The problem with shale oil is that whenever a well is brought into

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production, production drops off by 70 per cent within the first year, and within a couple years the production goes down to zero. So, when you are using shale oil for production you have to be constantly drilling.

What it means, Madam Deputy Speaker, you have all these shale oil companies in the United States that have invested billions of dollars in technology, billions of dollars in their industry, they have some financial challenges, but they can produce out of existing wells at prices as low as \$20 a barrel. So, what we are going to see, over the next six to 12 months, is a battle between Saudi Arabia, which needs oil at \$100 to support its social programmes. The cost of production of oil in Saudi Arabia is just about \$7 a barrel, but its budgetary expenditure on social programmes, because virtually everything in Saudi Arabia is free to the citizens of Saudi Arabia, so in order to support their budget they need an oil price of \$100.

So, you have a battle between Saudi Arabia that needs oil at \$100, but is willing to use its reserves to shut down the US shale industry, and you have the shale producers who can produce shale oil at \$20 a barrel for the next 18 months to two years. So, it is who blinks first. You know you have this thing about two cars driving at each other, they call it chicken, and who will blink first and drive off the road—so, we could be in for a very long haul here. Saudi Arabia wants to crush the US shale oil industry. The US wants to become a dominant player in oil production in the world, and they are improving the technology all the time.

When the shale oil phenomena came in, the cost of shale oil production could have been \$80/\$90 a barrel. They now have it down, and I have a table here which shows that in the United States, going from one part of the country to the other, because it all depends on geography, it all depends on geology and so on, you can have a cost of production varying from \$40 a barrel in one part of the United States and as high as \$70 a barrel in another part of the United States for shale oil. But the fact of the matter is, they have brought that down from \$80 three/four years ago, now down to an average of, say \$55, and they are continuously improving the technology for the recovery of shale oil.

So, what we are witnessing here, and that is why it is necessary for us in Trinidad and Tobago, especially the Government, not to be flippant about this thing. Six weeks ago the Minister of Finance and the Economy tells us that he expects oil to average out at between \$73 and \$83 a barrel. Just six weeks ago. Six weeks later he comes back and tells us it is \$45. Just pulling numbers out of a hat, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Member: He must be a magician.

Mr. C. Imbert: I do not know. He has to be a magician, where is he getting these numbers from? And who is doing the in-depth analysis of what is happening in that interplay between Saudi Arabia and the United States?

And on the other hand, you have the Russian economy facing bankruptcy, the Russian ruble has dropped by about 50 per cent, interest rates in Russia have gone to 17 per cent—17 per cent, that is the interest rate in Russia. They cannot take that pressure, you know, and the President of Russia is no easy person. Vladimir Putin is not easy. He just invaded Ukraine the other day.

So, you have all of this instability in the world oil supply market. Venezuela is going bankrupt. Venezuela is seeking assistance from other members of OPEC, Russia tethering on the brink, Saudi Arabia is trying to crush the United States, the United States is saying, try your best, but we are going to outlast you, and therefore, what we in Trinidad and Tobago need to do, is not to just, as I said, glibly and superficially and flippantly pelt out numbers, \$73, \$83, \$45, \$65, \$62—we need to do in-depth analysis and we need to have the best information.

You have the Minister telling us about who it is that said—I cannot remember who is—who is it he say, say that oil will be \$60? I cannot remember who it is.

Dr. Rowley: He said Standard & Poor's.

Mr. C. Imbert: But you have big arguments between the big banks in the United States; between Scotia Bank, between Bank of America and Standard & Poor's, over what the outlook is for oil prices and the international energy agency as well. They have different figures, Madam Deputy Speaker.

So, we in Trinidad and Tobago, we have got to stop guessing. And what bothered me about the Prime Minister speech, because we are talking about expenditure and we are talking about revenue in this Bill. The Prime Minister estimated a shortfall of \$7.4 billion, but I am certain that is simply based on reductions in petroleum profit tax, in SPT, in royalties, and in petroleum taxes overall; in earnings from LNG and so on, Madam Deputy Speaker.

10.00 p.m.

But I have not heard the Minister say a word about the domino effect on the rest of the economy. We are a petroleum driven economy. Most of the companies in this country depend on Government. It is the Government of Trinidad and

Tobago that drives this economy, that drives our GDP. So if you have a \$7.5 billion shortfall in petroleum revenue, that is going to have an adverse, negative effect on economic activity, on investor confidence and on commercial activity in Trinidad and Tobago, leading to lower collections in corporation tax, in value-added tax and you are going to have people cancelling—if you talk to any of the commercial banks in Trinidad and Tobago today they are very jittery, because people are putting their projects on hold, they are cancelling investments and so on, Madam Deputy Speaker.

So the shortfall cannot be just \$7 billion. That is the shortfall in the oil sector alone. But what about the non-oil sector? Because I hear the Minister talk about, oh, the energy sector did not perform well but the non-oil sector doing good. Where is the non-oil sector getting its money from? It is getting it from the Government. So, as the energy sector contracts, the non-oil sector has to contract as well when you have this kind of drastic reduction in revenues. And I have not heard a word from the Minister of Finance and the Economy to give us any reassurance that they have any clue as to what they are doing. They do not have a clue, not a clue.

And what are we doing as a country? We are faced with this problem, oil is now \$48. It could be \$45 tomorrow, it could be \$50, we do not know, but we do know that between now and June when OPEC has its next meeting we are going to be in a lot of trouble. We have no idea what the oil price will be, but we know that it is going to be depressed. It could be \$40, \$45, it could be even less. We do not know, but we know for six months until June is pressure. What are we doing as a country? Because I hear the Minister talk about the oil companies are still committed to investment. What oil company in their right mind will invest in oil exploration and production in a country like Trinidad and Tobago where many of our wells, the break-even price is \$60? And the Minister could tell me if I am right or I am wrong. The break-even price for many of the oil fields in Trinidad and Tobago is \$60, but right now oil is \$48.

So what businessman, especially a large oil company, is going to make an investment decision on a product that costs \$60 to produce but all you are getting is \$48? Yes the oil companies, I have said it are committed to their 2015 programme of investment. But what is going to happen in 2016, and I see the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs here.

Dr. Rowley: Has returned to the chair.

Mr. C. Imbert: Yes, he has come back, and I want to know what is the Government's plan, because I am certain if you look at the cycles, if you look at

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the oil shocks of the 1980s, the oil shocks of 1990s, the oil shock of 2008, you look at what happened in terms of investment, you do not have an immediate reaction, but within six to 12 months investment dries up because these oil companies they are risk averse, and they do not take rash decisions. So they start to slow down, they cancel investment and they wait, they watch and wait, because they will need a certain oil price to make their operations profitable.

So what we are going to find if this oil price is depressed? You are going to find towards the end of 2015 and into 2016 you are going to have a pullback from the energy companies because there is no point in investing in oil production in Trinidad when the break-even price is \$60 and you are only getting \$50 for your product. Why would anybody do that? And you look at the pattern all over the world in the oil shocks of the 80s, of the 90s and in 2008, the global recession. And it is unfair to the country for the Minister of Finance and the Economy to come in here with his superficial self and just glibly spout platitudes at us. We want to know what is the Government's plan. And I am hoping that the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs is going to give us some kind of plan, because in the face of declining prices we have only one choice, and that is to boost production, because we cannot boost the price because, as I said, we are a dot on the map when it comes to oil production. Our oil production is what? [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: No, no, less than that.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East has expired. Member can you indicate whether you would be requiring additional time?

Mr. C. Imbert: I am afraid so, yes.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, the question is that the speaking time of the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East be extended by 15 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member, you may continue.

Mr. C. Imbert: Yes, thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] I think I need to educate Members opposite. The world oil production is 70 million barrels a day of which OPEC produces about 40 per cent. So OPEC produces about 30 and the rest of the world is the balance. We produce 80,000 barrels of oil a day. Not so, Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs? Eight-one, 82, 85, it does not matter.

Dr. Moonilal: He will correct you after.

Mr. C. Imbert: “He cyah correct me”. So, Madam Deputy Speaker, our oil production—[*Crosstalk*] “he cyah correct me”—our oil production, let us use the best figure, the most hopeful figure from the Government, 85,000 barrels a day, I will give you that. [*Crosstalk*] No, it is averaging for 2014, our oil production which includes condensate, it is not real oil production, it is oil and condensate was 81,500 barrels a day. But I am told that within the last month or two we may have had production of 85,000 barrels a day. It does not matter. Look at 85,000 barrels a day and compare it to 70 million barrels a day in the world. That is why I say Trinidad is a dot. So it does not matter what we do. We have no possible effect on the price of oil. We do not have reserves of a trillion dollars like Saudi Arabia. So all we can do in Trinidad and Tobago is boost production.

And Madam Deputy Speaker, when the UNC came in, oil production was 100,000 barrels a day. Since then oil production dropped to an average of 81,000 barrels per day in 2014, a 20 per cent decline. What has this Government done over the last four and a half years, to boost production? What? What innovative incentive to boost—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Rowley: Jubilee field.

Mr. C. Imbert: Jubilee field or whatever, 500 barrels of oil a day. Where is the innovation? Where is the intellect? Four and a half years, what have they done? As I said, I saw a reference to something called stranded oil. It is said that we have about three and a half billion barrels of stranded oil. That is heavy oil. This is oil that requires secondary recovery techniques. This is oil that will not come up on its own pressure. They say we have about three billion barrels of that. What has this Minister done, what has this Government done to improve or to access that three billion barrels of stranded oil, the heavy oil on land and so on? What have they done?

And we are now facing this crisis apart from having to cut expenditure, there are no two ways about that, because they have increased our budget from 40, 45 billion or whatever it was, they have increased our budget by \$20 billion over the last four and a half years. They have increased expenditure by \$20 billion with their profligate spending. So we are stuck with that. So we are stuck with a budget of \$60 billion. What are we going to do to deal with the shortfall between revenue and expenditure? I have heard no coherent plan coming from them. The Minister of Finance and the Economy again did not tell us the details of that \$4 billion cut in expenditure. We keep hearing they are not cutting carnival, they are not cutting pension, they are not cutting propaganda and advertising, they are not cutting this, they are not cutting that. Then on one side of their mouth they say, projects that

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do not have financing will be stopped, but the Point Fortin highway up to two days ago had no financing, and you know it is disingenuous of the Minister of Finance and the Economy to come and tell us that NIDCO has raised a loan of \$1.5 billion, today Friday, when on Wednesday we had a huge argument with him over the financing of the Point Fortin Highway and he tells us that a loan is not required, two days ago.

So in 48 hours it moves from we do not need to borrow money for the Point Fortin highway, to, we have entered into arrangements for a one—and I can tell you this is with Royal Bank. This country is an open secret you know. NIDCO has negotiated a \$1.5 billion loan with Royal Bank, it did so in December, it required the usual letter of comfort from the Minister of Finance and the Economy in order to get the loan approved. So you are going to tell me that a state enterprise negotiates one of the largest loans funding infrastructure project in the history of this country, \$1.5 billion in December 2014, and the Minister is telling us in January that he does not know anything about that, and it is not true, and it “eh” happening, and we do not need to borrow money. And then he comes 48 hours later and admits that they have raised a \$1.5 billion loan for the highway project Madam Deputy Speaker. Yet in the face of all of that they are cutting \$4 billion out of the budget but they would not tell us where. Are you going to stop constructing the community centre in Bagatelle in my constituency? Are you going to cease construction on the fish market in the constituency of—

Hon. Member: It stopped already.

Mr. C. Imbert: It stopped already.

Mr. Deyalsingh: They stopped the St. Joseph police station.

Mr. C. Imbert: They stopped the St. Joseph police station, I understand. So since they are stopping all the projects in all the PNM constituencies, I understand where the cuts are coming from now, Madam Deputy Speaker, I understand.

I put on the record, Madam Deputy Speaker, it is disingenuous, it is reprehensible of this Government and the Minister of Finance and the Economy to come to this Parliament seeking to raise taxes through this Finance Bill telling us that there is a \$4 billion cut in expenditure and not telling us where these cuts will take place, which areas will be affected? Which constituencies in Trinidad and Tobago will be affected? Which section of the population will be affected? Which projects will be affected? Just a glib statement, we are going to cut \$4 billion out of the budget, Madam Deputy Speaker. I can assure you, we on this side are not

going to stand for that, the population is not going to stand for that and one of the good things that may come out of this is it may accelerate the general election and we will then be rid of them. I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Kevin Ramnarine) Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. First of all let me congratulate the Minister of Finance and the Economy—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: For what?

Sen. the Hon. K. Ramnarine: Madam Deputy Speaker, I crave your protection from, please—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Members, the Member for Diego Martin North/East and others who were rumbling just now, the hon. Member sat quietly and listened to the debate. I want to ask you to allow the Member to speak in silence. You may continue, Member.

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. So we congratulate the Minister of Finance and the Economy, the hon. Larry Howai, a very distinguished Minister of Finance and the Economy. We commend the Prime Minister for the address that she gave to the nation last night where she explained to the country the situation that the economy was in, and I want to thank all my colleagues for the hard work they have put in to navigate this country over the last four and a half years. I came tonight to deal specifically with some of the matters that have been raised throughout the course of the day, and I am aware that we are now into two debates during this day.

Of course, energy has been very much in the news in the last couple of weeks because of the falling prices of oil and the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin North/East is the latest energy expert in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] And I would like somebody to define for me, what is an energy expert?

Hon. Member: Not you.

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: There is no such thing, Member for St. Joseph; but you are a pharmacist and you are an energy expert. So you prescribed and you dispense, right? No we will deal with you in the electoral battlefield, do not worry. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Rowley: The electoral battlefield has been joined.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Have your seat, Member. Member, have your seat. I rule, have your seat.

Dr. Rowley: He has come to declare the electoral battlefield.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member, I ask you to have your seat.

Dr. Rowley: I have simply joined the electoral battlefield.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Have your seat. What has suddenly gone wrong with this House?

Dr. Rowley: Ask him.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Members, please, I am asking you to allow the Member to speak. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, you may continue.

Dr. Rowley: He has declared battle.

10.15 p.m.

Dr. Griffith: Exactly what Manning described—

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. If the Members opposite do not want to hear the facts—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Imbert: “We doh want tuh hear you.”

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Okay. All right. Nobody wants to hear you.

Mr. Imbert: Everybody wants to hear me.

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Everybody wants to hear you.

Hon. Member: Talk to the Chair.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member for Point Fortin!

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Madam Deputy-Speaker—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Address the Chair, Member.

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine:—I am being distracted. Madam Deputy Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin North/East quoted from a newspaper article, or a press release issued by bp, and I want to say that I had—*[Interruption]* No, this is the press release from bp here. This is the actual press release. It is dated September 19, 2014, and you see, you are dealing with a specific issue of natural gas supply in the country, so let us deal with that issue. *[Interruption]* This is the actual press release, Madam Deputy Speaker, dated

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September 19, 2014, and let me read the actual press release, not what was reported in the *Guardian*.

Mr. Imbert: The *Guardian* lie.

Dr. Rowley: The *Guardian* lie.

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Madam Deputy-Speaker—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Members.

Mr. Sharma: Proceed. Proceed.

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: I do not know if they are familiar with lying. I am reading the press release, and I consider it necessary in the national interest that I come to the Parliament tonight to treat with the issues that have been raised, and I have come here to treat with the issues in a factual and logical way and I want to be permitted to deal with the issues in a factual and logical way. [*Crosstalk*] Ten per cent—[*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Griffith: They do not want to hear the facts.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Members, I am asking you one more time—

Hon. Member: Put them out! Put them out!

Madam Deputy-Speaker:—to please allow the Member to speak in silence. Diego Martin North/East—

Mr. Imbert: Me? I did not say anything.

Madam Deputy Speaker:—when you were speaking just now, the Member sat quietly and listened to you. I am asking Members of this House to allow the hon. Member to speak in silence. You may continue, Member. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Imbert: I did not even talk.

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. Madam Deputy Speaker, in the previous debate, when the Member for St. Joseph spoke, he said Point Lisas—and I listened to all the contributions all day. He said Point Lisas was operating at 50 per cent capacity. Wrong!

Mr. Imbert: Who said that?

Hon. Member: You.

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: No, the Member for St. Joseph said 50 per cent. The Member for Diego Martin North/East said 90 per cent. You could get the *Hansard* and check it. So you all do not agree on—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Imbert: Which one correct?

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: You are correct.

Mr. Imbert: All right, thanks.

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: I would definitely go with your figure any day, over the Member for St. Joseph, if I have to choose between the lesser of the two.

Dr. Gopeesingh: “Doh choose none ah dem, because he wrong too.”

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Yeah, but if I have to choose.

Mr. Imbert: You never said that.

Mr. Deyalsingh: No.

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Yes. The *Hansard* will reflect he said 50 per cent. But let us read what bp said in their press release.

Hon. Member: He is a pharmacist.

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Yeah.

Dr. Gopeesingh: “He feel he is the Minister of Energy, yuh know.”

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Yes.

Dr. Rambachan: “Be careful how he mixing that medicine, yuh know.”

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: And the energy sector is very frightened, Madam Deputy Speaker, at the possibility of the Member for Diego Martin North/East as the Minister of Energy. Let me read the press release now. This is September 19, 2014:

“The lower production that has resulted in the gas curtailments recently experienced by...Point Lisas and Atlantic...is primarily a result of a pause in new investment in recent years by upstream producers, including BPTT due to the culmination of many factors which created an unfavorable investment climate.”

So we put the full stop right there. This is a slide that was presented to me by bp. [*Raises document*] This slide was reproduced by the *Sunday Express* in an article by Asha Javeed. So this slide is now in the public domain. This graph shows Bp’s capital investment in Trinidad and Tobago from the year 2007 to the year 2014. That collapse in the middle of the graph there occurred in the years

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2008 and the years 2010, and began to pick back up in 2011, 2012, 2013 and is shooting off again.

So when bp speaks about a pause in investment, bp did not want to offend the PNM.

Hon. Member: You were in government.

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: These are the facts. And if it is the Member for Diego Martin West wants a copy of this—[*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Rowley: He is the one misleading the House. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: “All yuh doh want to hear de truth.”

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: They have never said unfavourable. In fact, the press release—you see, he did not read the entire press release because he did not have it. He had a *Guardian* article. The press release goes on to say—and I will give you a copy of the press release. The press release goes on to say—it says bp on top here.

“Measures have however been taken to improve the attractiveness of investment in the sector [*Desk thumping*] - such as improved fiscal terms and more frequent bid rounds - and there is clear evidence that investment is returning. It will however take time to re-build”—what you destroyed—“upstream capacity.”

Mr. Imbert: Old talk.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Read it over again.

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: So this is a graph from bp.

Mr. Imbert: “All yuh reading in bits and pieces.”

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: It was reproduced by Asha Javeed in the *Express*. I will give you a copy of it.

Mr. Imbert: “Who you trying to fool?”

Hon. K. Ramnarine: But this is bp’s graph.

Dr. Moonilal: North/East. Throw him out.

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: And you see, this is what happens when—[*Interruption*] you see, they have plenty brawn but not much brain.

Hon. Members: Yeah. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Plenty brawn. They come with all sorts of nancy story about Mr. Panday was convinced by Ken Julien to save the LNG project. I went and I found the book called *Beyond Oil and Gas* by Gregory McGuire, who is now an advisor to the PNM, and Mr. Trevor Boopsingh, and I found the reference in the book where they said the Train 1 contract was signed in 1996 and the Train 2 and Train 3 contracts were signed in the year 2000.

So credit must be given to the Panday administration for birthing the LNG industry in Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Deputy Speaker, I agree with a sentiment expressed by my colleague for San Fernando West, that we have had consistency of policy for the last 40 years, and I spoke to former PNM Minister of Finance, Wendell Mottley, who agreed that, by and large in the energy sector for the last 40 years, we have had consistency of policy.

So the PNM would have initiated discussions with Cabot in 1992; the PNM would have left office in 1995 and the UNC continued that project, and the first LNG cargo to set sail from these shores, set sail in April 1999. We have now been into the LNG industry for 15 years.

I would also say—because the PNM likes to take credit for lots of things—Phoenix Park Gas Processers Limited was established in 1989 during the administration of the NAR government, and that 1989—I remember 1989 very well. I was in lower 6 in a very noble high school. Phoenix Park Gas Processers Limited started operations in June 1991 under the NAR. So we must give credit to the NAR administration for Phoenix Park, and we will go forward—and after the Leader of the Opposition spoke about Phoenix Park’s IPO, I spoke to a number of professionals in the financial sector today and all of them were of the view that that IPO will be oversubscribed. [*Desk thumping*]

Well, we hope nobody on this side buys any shares because we know you probably would have bought shares in FCB. But do not buy any shares, therefore, in Phoenix Park.

Dr. Rowley: I do not need your advice.

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: And the Leader of the Opposition may have well sabotaged the Phoenix Park IPO today in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago.

Dr. Griffith: He try.

Hon. Member: Irresponsible! [*Crosstalk*]

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Dr. Rowley: Madam Deputy Speaker, I crave your protection from this wanton allegation.

Hon. Member: He said “may”.

Hon. Member: Sit down!

Hon. K. Ramnarine: I said “may”.

Madam Deputy-Speaker: Member, I want to ask you to stick with the Bill before us and you may continue, with caution.

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Madam Deputy-Speaker, they could give but they cannot take. [*Desk thumping*] This is the most important slide presented to me in three and a half years as Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs. It explains why we are where we are today in Point Lisas, why we have curtailments of natural gas. It is because bp’s cushion gas vanished. That is the green wedge on top this graph here, because bp had lost confidence in Trinidad and Tobago under the People’s National Movement. [*Desk thumping*] That is what the graph is saying. The graph is saying that. The graph goes on to say—this is 2009/2010:

“Reduced drilling activity due to risk of fiscal changes.”

It goes on to say:

“Exploration incentives, threat of increased SPT.”

They had threatened to put SPT on natural gas, and the Member for Diego Martin North/East who is studying the fiscal system for the first time in his life and doing a Master’s somewhere in some part of Scotland—probably in the highlands of Scotland or something—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal: “He high!”

Hon. Member: “In de bush.”

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine:—would know that there is no SPT or supplemental petroleum tax on natural gas. There is no SPT on gas. There is SPT on oil, and the PNM threatened to put SPT on gas, and that is when bp said, “We done. We done. We done here, because we have bigger fish to fry in Angola; we have bigger fish to fry in other parts of the Gulf of Mexico and so on.”

But these are facts, and the fact is that when they hear the facts they get vex. These are facts, and the Member for Diego Martin West visited bp’s offices in London and I am sure they gave him a very positive outlook for their company in Trinidad. The year 2015 is going to be the largest year for bp investing in Trinidad and Tobago, ever. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: Under who?

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Under this Government. And they will tell you it is because of the 15 changes to the fiscal regime that we have implemented in the last four years. [*Desk thumping*] Investment has been attracted back into this country. The Prime Minister, last night, gave a conservative estimate of what foreign direct investment would be in 2015 when she said it was going to be around US \$2 billion.

So I want to deal with this issue of the bp press release and of bp's investments in this country. A few years ago, Andy Hopwood, who is Norman Christie's boss, was at the Hyatt.

[*Mr. Imbert leaves Chamber*]

Hon. Member: "He cyar take it."

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: "Yes, he cyar take it, he gorn. He cyar take it, he gorn. He gorn and get de whole press release."

Hon. Member: "Yuh gorn like Bp under de PNM."

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: So their confidence in Trinidad and Tobago has been re-established. They are a very conservative company and when they said "recent years", it was because they did not want to embarrass the Opposition. That is why they said, "in recent years", and they did not say, "In 2008 and 2009 and 2010, we lost confidence in this country and our investment collapsed". And that is borne out by this graph, and I will make this graph available to every Member of Parliament. This is a graph that was reproduced by Asha Javeed.

So I have dealt with that. The other thing I want to deal with now is the errors, because the Member for Diego Martin North/East, who has just vacated the Chamber, has said that we cannot correct him. When he spoke he said the world oil production and the world oil supply is 70 million barrels of oil. You all heard that, right?

Hon. Member: Yeah.

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: That was just now. This is PIRA, P-I-R-A—PIRA, one of the world's leading energy—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Indarsingh: Not Pirha?

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Not Pirha. This is PIRA. Global oil demand is not 70 million barrels of oil, as the Member for Diego Martin North/East wrongly told the Parliament—mised the Parliament, and discounted his credentials as a

new-born energy expert.

Hon. Member: “Dat fella doing one short course in energy.” [*Laughter*]

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: World oil demand, 92.7 million barrels of oil. He was off by 32.7 million barrels of oil. He lost the whole of OPEC. So world oil demand is 92.7 million and world oil supply is 93.7 or one million barrels of supply ahead of demand, and that is why we are in the price scenario that we are in today.

He spoke a lot about oil production, and I will speak about oil production and I will give you some figures because, you see, we deal with facts, we deal with logic. We live in the age of enlightenment.

In the year 2005, Madam Deputy Speaker, oil production in this country was 144,425 barrels of oil per day. That is the highest it has been in almost the last 15 to 20 years, and there is a reason for that. That is the year that production came on line from—Minister Cadiz knows the field—the Angostura field.

The Angostura field was interestingly—and I am not scoring points here—discovered under the tenure of a very good Minister of Energy, Minister Finbar Gangar, who was an excellent Minister of Energy. The year 2006, it fell to 143,450 barrels. The year 2007 it fell to 121,295. The year 2008 it fell to 114,279 barrels. The year 2009 it fell again, 106,756 barrels. The year 2010 it fell again, 98,179 barrels; 2011 it fell again, 91,919; 2012 it fell again, 81,735 barrels, 2013 it fell again, marginally—it fell by 0.76 per cent—81,114. A marginal decline, 2014—the year just ended—oil production—so, 2013, 81,114 barrels; 2014, 81,192 barrels.

10.30 p.m.

So, for the first time, Madam Deputy Speaker, since 2005, we have had a small increase in oil production. It is a small increase and it therefore says the decline is beginning to be arrested and reversed, and for the first—[*Interruption*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Please, allow the Member to speak and you will respond. Allow the Member to speak.

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine:—eight days of this year, oil production is averaging 84,000 plus barrels of oil and we are beginning to see signs of stabilization and recovery.

I want to talk about the PNM and oil production. I have gone to the Ministry’s library and I have look at speeches from PNM Energy Ministers from the last decade, from Prof. Julien, from Mr. Manning, and I have not seen a single speech.

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Can Members recall a single speech from a PNM Energy Minister on oil production? Their focus was gas and nothing is wrong with that, but they focused on gas heavily at the expense of oil. As a result, we have had social and economic decline in certain parts of south Trinidad: La Brea, Palo Seco, Fyzabad in particular. We have had decline in those areas. We have now changed the fiscal regime and we are attracting investment on land in south Trinidad.

We have had the first dedicated land bid round in 15 years at the Ministry to Energy and Energy Affairs. It was very successful. [*Desk thumping*] We were able to attract bids on all three blocks and blocks were awarded to Touchstone of Canada, Range Resources of Australia, and our very own local company Lease Operators Limited. Those three blocks will result in 12 exploration wells and we are going to have a renaissance of oil production on land in Trinidad and Tobago. We consider that at the Ministry—I say we, because I operate with a team at the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs and my team is mainly public servants. We operate as a team and we consider that to be our best achievement, our biggest achievement of 2014. Very significant.

So in that period when they were in office no major incentives were given for oil production—there were some minor incentives—and there was not a strategic focus on oil production. The Member for Diego Martin North/East who has gone to go to google something, going to look for the bp press release, probably calling somebody in bp, he knows that there is tremendous potential to increase oil production in Trinidad and Tobago on land and in Trinmar.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker—[*Interruption*] The short course—I want to deal also with this issue of a \$9 oil price, because when I heard the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin North/East I went immediately onto the website of the U.S. Energy Intelligence Agency—and the date is December 10, 1998—Brent price went to \$9.10 on that day. So the price did go, and Brent is one of the world's—on December 10, 1998. The West Texas price on that day was \$10.82. Now, the Trinidad basket—Hold on! Hold on!—of crudes is not an exact replication of West Texas and Brent. It is somewhere in-between West Texas and Brent. So because of Trinidad's heavy crudes that Petrotrin produces, those crudes are of lower value than Brent and West Texas, you could assume that the price did go to \$9 in the year 1998. [*Interruption*] No, it did because of the quality of crude. So the Member was wrong and the PNM has to be very careful that they get chain up, because it seems that people just tell all “yuh” all kind of “ting” about the energy sector, all “yuh” believe it and run into Parliament. I am quoting the United States Energy Intelligence Agency as my source.

Madam Deputy Speaker, they made a lot of noise about my statement that the energy sector is strong. So I should have said the energy sector is weak and they would have applauded it. That statement is predicated on a number of things. We, during the course of this week, have polled all the energy companies in Trinidad and Tobago. I directly with the major companies and my staff directly with the minor companies, and we have gotten them to send in, in writing, what their investment profile would look like for 2015 and we are working on the 2016 number.

2015 is going to be a significant year, one of the highest levels of investment. The major player is bp and the major expenditure is going after the Juniper project. The Juniper project has started in La Brea. The fabrication of the platform started in November 2014. The Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs in addition, Madam Deputy Speaker, signed 17 production sharing contracts and/or exploration and production licences in the last three years. That is a record. [*Desk thumping*] We checked. We checked the history of the Ministry going back as far as Barry Barnes. That is as far as our records. We have to go to some archives somewhere in El Socorro that we have to go further than that. That is a record for signing production sharing contracts and licences, and I asked the Ministry to value what that was worth.

These 17 production sharing contracts and licences are valued at US \$0.8 billion minimum. That is based on what we call the minimum work obligation that they must do regardless of oil price. They have entered into a contract with the Government to execute a work programme and a maximum of US \$1.7 billion. That is what. So when you see the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs signing contracts on television and so on, those are serious documents that companies commit to do certain things that are worth investment in this country.

We are also—I am faulted for not multiplying by 6.4 because my industry operates in US dollars. Those 17 production-sharing contracts mean a minimum of 32 exploration wells and a maximum of 51 exploration wells over the remainder of this decade and, as I said, bp has approved Juniper project which is valued at US \$2.1 billion. So when I say the energy sector is strong, it is predicated on a number of things. One of those things is this Government's global outlook, and I want to place on record the Prime Minister's role in promoting this country internationally. [*Desk thumping*] She has been the chief ambassador for Trinidad and Tobago and has lifted the image and reputation of this country. Wherever she has gone she has conducted the affairs of Trinidad and Tobago with distinction and we place on record [*Desk thumping*] the role that she has played. I will give

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you one more fact and this is profound and I hope Members listen to what I am about to say.

As we speak, BHP Billiton and its partners are completing the largest seismic survey ever conducted by an international oil company in the history of the oil industry in Trinidad and Tobago. That is the seismic survey over our deep water. There is one seismic survey bigger than that survey. It was done by PEMEX, the Mexican oil company, but PEMEX is an international oil company so we say, okay, it is the largest ever done by international oil company. And, Madam Deputy Speaker, when we look at what the level of foreign direct investment in the energy sector was in the year 2010, it was US \$501 million. That was 2010. In 2011 it went to \$1.8 billion. Why did it leap to \$1.8 billion? In 2012 it went to \$2.2 billion, that is energy-related FDI; and in 2013 it was \$1.4 billion and we continue to attract investment particularly into our upstream in significant ways.

We have taken great steps at the Ministry. We are aware of the challenges at Point Lisas and Atlantic, and the Ministry now acts as a coordinator of supply and demand. We, of course, do this in collaboration with the industry, and what we have been able to do is mitigate the impact of those curtailments by what we call sheltering, where we shelter the shutdowns upstream with the shutdowns downstream.

So, I know it is late and we have a lot of information here before us and I want to talk a bit about how our colleagues opposite responded to the global economic meltdown of 2008 because they have made heavy weather of the statements that we have made. So we should have said nothing and according to one person call election or accelerate election. Well, elections will be called I am sure when—that is in the remit of the Prime Minister, but I want to say something. I am reading from the *Guardian* of Tuesday, September 23, 2008. This is the day after Karen Nunez-Tesheira delivered her budget which was delivered on September 22—because I see people saying that we should have known back in September when Minister Howai read the budget. We should have known that the IMF warned that prices would have gone down.

So Karen Nunez-Tesheira reads the budget on September 22, 2008, but on the 15th—this is a couple days before, that is seven days before Lehman Brothers filed for bankruptcy in the United States. I went and checked the date that Lehman Brothers filed for bankruptcy because that was the signal that the global economy was in trouble because it signalled, of course, the start of the subprime mortgage crisis in the US and, of course, if the US economy began to slow down,

the global economy begins to slow down. So they had information seven days in advance of the delivery of the budget and they went ahead and pegged the 2008 budget at \$70 per barrel and, of course, the price of oil collapsed thereafter.

Let us look at what some of them said because they are criticizing us to what we have been saying. Member of Parliament for Diego Martin North/East, Mr. Imbert, *Guardian*, October 13, 2008. Imber: “Call to review budget not justified.” So this is the Member for Diego Martin North/East saying that “there is no reasonable justification for the Government to review the 2008—2009 budget because of falling...prices.” They are calling on us to review, but he is saying there is—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs has expired. Minister would you indicate if you require additional time?

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, the question is that the speaking time of the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs be extended by 15 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Minister, you may continue.

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. So this is when the Member for Diego Martin North/East was at that point in time a health expert, a construction expert, an economic expert, now an energy expert and who knows where he will go to next. He goes on to say:—this is the Member for Diego Martin North/East in 2008 when they were in Government.

“...the Government had adopted a ‘wait and see attitude’—and that—“the situation”—is going—“to be temporary.”

But he is telling us, of course—he is prescribing for us, but he is saying the situation should be temporary.

Another former PNM Minister of Finance, Minister in the Ministry of Finance, Mariano Browne, now social/political/economic commentator, on all things in the universe, in the *Guardian* today, chiding us and so on and saying we do not know what we are doing and we should have known better and so on. This is what he said on the same day, October 13, 2008, reported by Juhel Browne in the *Express*.

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“...Browne said ‘a budget is a statement of objectives and goals which are always subject to change should the circumstances warrant a change.’”

But he is in the papers today criticizing this Government. He goes on to say:

We—...“will...monitor the situation...”—closely.

And he goes on to say:

“Browne said”—this is what shocked me—“the Government did not miscalculate the oil price for the Budget as the existing turmoil in the international markets did not exist when it was being drafted earlier this year.”

But I just showed you that the budget was read on September 22, 2008 and Lehman Brothers filed for bankruptcy seven days before. Now Lehman Brothers’ problems would not have started on that day. The whole world knew Lehman Brothers was in trouble, and Bear Stearns, which I understand the former Government entered into some arrangements with, Bear Stearns was also in trouble.

Of course, we go on to many quotations here from different—we have Mr. Manning. Mr. Manning said he was confident that Trinidad and Tobago would be able to fight a recession. So he was predicting a recession. And, the classic—the classic, Madam Deputy Speaker, Andre Bago, *Newsday*, April 29, 2009—now this is about five or six months after.

“PRIME MINISTER Patrick Manning yesterday sought to assure the nation that the current economic downturn is ‘a mere blip’...”

You remember that?

It is a mere blip—“on the road to developed nation status, as he made a bold prediction that ‘by this time next year’ the economy will be back to seeing ‘significant progress’.”

Well, the country, one year later, was seeing significant progress because we voted out Mr. Manning and the PNM. Right? [*Desk thumping*] So be careful for what you wish, Madam Deputy Speaker, you may just get it.

10.45 p.m.

I quote from these statements to show the approach taken by our Prime Minister. In the early to mid-1980s, we heard about “Fete Over — Back to Work” from George Michael Chambers, then Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. In the mid-1980s to the late 1980s, we heard “the Treasury is empty”. As a child, I remember looking at the news—and Members may ask, as a child what are you looking at serious economic news about. I remember seeing Mr. Robinson on TV: “the Treasury is empty”. Then, we had Mr. Manning saying that this is a “blip”.

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But, last night we had a Prime Minister who came on to the television and sought to reassure the nation that there is a problem and we will find a strategy [*Desk thumping*] and a policy to navigate the country out of that problem.

Mr. Imbert: “So wah is dat?”

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Well, we have not heard your plans. [*Crosstalk*] The Member of Parliament for Diego Martin North/East went to the Port of Spain Rotary Club. I understand he invited himself. He went to the Port of Spain Rotary Club and he said the solution, his plan, if he becomes Minister of Energy, God forbid, because I could tell you the energy sector—and I am serious, I have not made this up—many of them have come to me and said, “yuh really think Dr. Rowley is going to make that fella—”. [*Crosstalk*] And the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin North/East has appointed himself as the next Minister of Energy and pre-empted the Leader of the Opposition. And that is assuming the very small probability that they will win is realized, and that is not going to happen.

Because, you see, Madam Deputy Speaker, he went to the Port of Spain Rotary Club and he said to the Port of Spain Rotary Club that the way forward is to cut the taxes and to introduce fiscal reform. So when I saw that, I said, “But is that not what we have been doing in the Parliament for the last four years?”

Mr. Imbert: It is not working.

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: That is what we have been doing in Parliament and that is working.

Mr. Imbert: No, it is not.

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: It is working because we are attracting investment into the energy sector—and you could steups how much you want but that is the case. And that is why every time you look out at Chaguaramas from the back of the Hyatt, you see rigs, every single time. Anybody go to the back of the Hyatt, at some point in time, there are rigs in the back there because those rigs use Chaguaramas as a parking lot when they are not in operation around the island. So, investment has returned to the energy sector of Trinidad and Tobago.

We as a country, we have been here before. We have been here in the mid-80s; we have been here in the late 1990s; we have been here in 2008 when Members opposite said that there was “a blip” and the Member for Diego Martin North/East said that the sky would not fall. I have that one, I remember that one. He said he is Chicken Little. Right? He said the sky would not fall, do not worry,

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all is well, the sky would not fall.

So, we are saying today that we assure the country that the economy is strong. We are led by the Prime Minister. We have the Minister of Finance and the Economy managing the economy. Our foreign reserves are at record levels. The Heritage and Stabilisation Fund is at US \$5-plus billion; unemployment is at a record low and all the macroeconomic fundamentals say that we have the fiscal space to navigate the situation and oil prices have fallen in the past and guess what? They have always recovered. Colleagues opposite, on the Opposition Bench, are not familiar with running a country in tight economic times, they are familiar with booms—booms of the 1970s and booms of the last decade and so on.

But managing an economy in a difficult and tight fiscal situation requires discipline, requires intellect and requires skill, and that is exactly what this Government has brought to the table to the people of Trinidad and Tobago in 2010 to 2015, and we will continue to bring that to the people of Trinidad and Tobago from 2015 and onward. Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker.
[*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Keith Rowley (*Diego Martin West*): Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is times like these that we miss the lengthier periods of response that we had been accustomed to. But recently, we have limited ourselves to 45 minutes and, as a result of that, a lot of what one could say in response in a debate now has to be foregone. I will have a discussion with my colleagues and somewhere along the way, I think we will have to make some kind of adjustments to the Standing Orders so that while every Member is entitled to 45 minutes, if the House is so generous, that we may—there is another approach that we can use to get the best out of debates and that is that Members can cede their time to other Members who have something to say, and those who do not have much to say can cede their time and have a debate go effectively. It is not meant to insult any Member but it is meant to maximize the time and focus the debate. That is something that we can look at in the future.

But tonight, I just want to make a few comments and focus on a few specifics because this debate has gone on for the whole day, and it is a very valuable debate, and I am sure that the public is learning a lot, notwithstanding the extra theatrics of some of our colleagues.

Let me just start on the last point made by the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs because the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs is a very important

officer of State and the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs is a very important institution in the country and when he speaks, he ought to be taken seriously, but we do that at our peril. Could you imagine on his way out, in that last contribution, he said Members on the other side have no experience in running a country in tight situations?—they have only had experience in running in booms. When a Member makes a statement like that, is he “ah clown, ah comedian” or is he being jocular or is he serious?

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to put to you and the rest of my colleagues that nothing is further from the truth. Because it was a PNM Government in 1991 that came into office and met this country of Trinidad and Tobago under an IMF Structural Adjustment Programme. How did we proceed? That was my first experience in a Cabinet, first day in a Cabinet, going in to meet a situation of IMF Structural Adjustment Programme where a significant portion of our earnings had to go to pay back the lender of last resort. You could not think of a development programme because the debt of that structural programme was what a new Cabinet had to face. And what did we do? We did not turn around and blame the NAR. Nobody in this country ever saw a PNM Government or a PNM spokesperson every time they speak, constipated or otherwise, blaming the previous Government. Do you know what we did?

As a new Government, we said we will take the position of taking the pain of paying off the IMF to get out of the strictures of that Structural Adjustment Programme so as to free us to be able to embark upon a development programme. That is what we did. The first year of a new term, ignoring the opportunity to blame the previous Government, but saying to the country, “Let us tighten our belts for a little while longer, get out of the programme, rather than take the easy route of paying off the structural programme over a longer period of time, carrying the IMF as our masters, but getting them out so that we can be free to do what the country needs to do without the IMF strictures”.

That is how you manage a country in a difficult situation. That is what we did. And to hear a Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs come here and talk all of what he talked about tonight and end by saying we have no experience, especially after a Prime Minister who listed her experience as being in a \$9 oil barrel.

And you know what? My colleague from Oropouche East spent a long time today chastising me for being misinformed—and quoting from where? I do not know because he did not tell me the source—about our oil price, as we put it in our budget here, was \$9 under his colleague. What are the facts? The facts are that there was never a West Texas \$9 oil during the period of time that he mentioned.

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So, after he chastised me and talked about my unsuitability for all kinds of job, from dog catcher to Prime Minister, it turns out that he was wrong. He shouted at me all morning that I was wrong and I could not get advisers. There was never a West Texas \$9 oil since the 1970s, and all I was saying is I was not aware that his colleague was in Cabinet then.

Now having that, the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs comes here and spends another whole half an hour tonight to try to prove that his wrong colleague was right. And you know what they ended up saying? Well, you know, there was not any \$9 oil, you have to assume it out of a basket. That is not what this debate is about.

But more importantly, a very—how should I put it? I do not want to be uncharitable to the young man. He said—as we are talking about our circumstance—that I, today, undermined the IPO of Phoenix Park. Not the Minister of Finance and the Economy, you know, who delayed it and who, as Minister of Finance and the Economy, sits on top of it with serious question marks over the FCB.

Mr. Imbert: And TCL.

Dr. K. Rowley: So the FCB scandal of the IPO under them did not undermine it, you know. We have had state enterprise shares go on the stock exchange here: TCL, we have had PLIPDECO, we have had MFM. We have never had allegations of or instigations of insider trading and other kinds of criminal conduct in the IPOs. This Government had one: FCB. It is a roaring scandal going on right now. But the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs comes here and says that because I said that in the current environment of lower gas prices, depression in energy industries, that that is the worst time to try and sell an energy asset, he comes here and accuses me of undermining the IPO. Is he for real? Is he for real? I may have sabotaged the IPO at Phoenix Park?

When, in fact, if there is any concern over that IPO is the concern that we have, that the Minister of Finance and the Economy has questions to answer and ought not to be allowed to conduct any more IPO in Trinidad and Tobago, [*Desk thumping*] right, of state assets unless those questions are answered. And, on that basis, I just want to put them on notice that we have more questions for the Minister of Finance and the Economy, and if he is not prepared to answer those questions, we will come back to this Parliament and move a Motion of Censure in the Minister of Finance and the Economy because we want no Minister of Finance, in this country, who would not answer those particular questions relevant to this particular matter while he holds on to the Treasury, when there are serious

allegations over his head and allegations about the conduct of an IPO under his watch. So the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs could put that in his pipe and smoke it.

Then, of course, Madam Deputy Speaker, I heard a strange interpretation here tonight. This Government, up to this day, on its way out of office, is not prepared to accept its responsibility, acknowledge its own shortcomings. All the Government is concerned about is self-praise and self-preservation. Today, it was embarrassing to listen to some of my colleagues brown-nosing to the Leader of the Government, whole day, nine, 10, 15, 20 times about the Prime Minister and how good she is—brown-nosing of the worst kind. I am told it is a requirement of the Cabinet Members.

Hon. Member: They have to do that.

Dr. K. Rowley: And they intend—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal: Madam Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 48(4), “brown-nosing”. [*Crosstalk*] That is for by the rum shop and thing, that is not for here.

Hon. Member: It seems to be a requirement. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Moonilal: That is for Piccadilly Junction.

Dr. Gopeesingh: That is offensive.

Hon. Member: “How it offensive?”

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, the Member who moved the Motion just now—Member for Oropouche East—has called on a Motion and he believes that you are using offensive and insulting language, I want to ask you to be careful, be cautious and be guided.

11.00 p.m.

Dr. K. Rowley: Could you identify, just to make sure I do not offend my colleague again, could you identify the offence, please, the language?

Madam Deputy Speaker: The Member thinks that you are using insulting language, and maybe more offensive than anything else. So I am asking you to be guided, be cautious as you continue in your debate. You know what you said. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. K. Rowley: Madam—[*Interruption*]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Members, please. Allow the Member to speak in silence, please.

Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Deputy Speaker, if it is your ruling, that the phrase is offensive, I have no difficulty in withdrawing, but the sentiment I am expressing is, the fact that we spend so much time kissing up, and I am sure that would not be unparliamentary. So much time was spent kissing up to the leadership of the Government, that one wonders, what exactly is the value of Members in the Cabinet. But I was going on to say that, they have a penchant for self-praise, everything is about praise and revision.

Madam Deputy Speaker, recently I have had the opportunity to talk to a lot of people, who have serious investments in Trinidad and Tobago over a long time, in my effort to understand better what is going on with our circumstance and our industries and so on. One of the persons I had a chat with in London recently was the head of bp. The head of bp Trinidad and Tobago who came to London for the meeting, and we had a very long and very productive discussion on bp in Trinidad and Tobago. Nowhere in that discussion which was all positive, nowhere in there was any inclination that bp ever had any problem with its investment approach to Trinidad and Tobago.

Tonight I am hearing from the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs that bp was scared of supplemental petroleum tax on gas, and as a result, withdrew its enthusiasm for investment in Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Deputy Speaker, I mean, that came out of nowhere. I do not know where the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs got that from. In fact, the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs having said that, I would really want to hear from bp, whether there is any basis for a statement like that.

But you know, everything is blame the PNM right down to the point where into 4½ years of governance, this situation has developed surprisingly because I am not going to believe anybody who tells me that they knew that the oil price was going to collapse in this way, because the way these industries go, there is a certain amount of cyclical nature, and if certain geopolitical interventions take place, then things are triggered.

Of course, there are those who will tell you that they saw the collapse of Wall Street in 2009, but they saw it after it happened. So when people tell you now about, oh Standard & Poor's says what the price is going to be, going forward,—they were there four months ago. They did not see the collapse, though. They did not mention that. So why are you relying on their prediction as though it is gospel.

You have to be careful that as you plan your course, you take into account that things might happen and you put yourself in a situation to deal with eventualities. That is why I want to go to the *Hansard* of another place recently, just to make

my point, where a Member of the Opposition in the other place, had reason to point out, not because we do not like Trinidad and Tobago, not because we do not like to be in a position of wealth where we can do things that we really want to do, but saying to the other place, referring to the collapse of 2009 and the loss of revenue, the significant drop in revenue. Because you see, Madam Deputy Speaker, the point I made this morning that generated all the discussion from my friend from Oropouche East, was \$9 in the context of collapse. When \$10 goes to nine, that is not a collapse, but when \$87 goes to 39 or \$42 goes to nine; that is a collapse. A \$10 movement to nine when oil price was \$10 or thereabouts as the main price, and goes to nine, that was not a collapse, and it only happened for two or three days.

Under the George Chambers arrangement, it was \$42 and it went down to \$9, that was the collapse I was talking about. We were at a \$107. It has now gone to \$48, that is a collapse, and in anticipation of that kind of eventuality, Sen. Dr. Henry said in the budget debate, could you imagine if something like that were to happen, that loss of revenue in 2009 in the few months ahead, when this Government plans to spend \$67 billion or \$68 billion or some number in that vicinity?

So what I am saying is that hitting and hoping is not a policy, and the whole point about this massive spending that this Government has embarked on, is going down a dangerous road. So the best way I could describe this budget actually is, listen carefully, those were his words, how to manage an economy—how to mismanage an economy 101. That was the Member in the other place talking about the Government's massive budget, the size of the budget which does not take into account the possibility of an eventuality of a loss of revenue in the months ahead. He was not predicting it, but he was saying it is a likelihood, a possibility, cater for it. And as fate would have it, he might have been the only person then in that House, who was saying that, because the Government was saying full speed ahead, and look what has happened. The prediction has come to pass. In the months ahead a significant collapse resulting in a loss of revenue, and not just difference in oil price, you know.

Today you were told because you have gone below certain threshold, you cannot trigger an SPT, a petroleum tax, Supplemental Petroleum Tax is not triggered. So there is none to be had once the price stays below \$50, that is where we went. That is why this debate should really be not about trying to revise some history for bp down the road, and the Minister praising himself on a bp press conference, and his interpretation, and accusing a discerning Opposition of

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undermining a policy of the Government. That is not what it is about. What it is about is going to the numbers that you came to the House with.

Let me tell you what those numbers were, and I said it today that we should look at the increases that we projected in the 2015 budget. Look at those increases and see whether now that we know that our revenues will be constricted, whether we, in fact, could eliminate some of those increases, roll them back, shelve them, slow them down, that is where we should be looking. And guess what we got in response from the Government? A whole diatribe of accusations from the Member for Tabagaita, backed up by the Member for Oropouche East, accusing me personally of trying to influence the election campaign; as trying to fire public servants, trying to cut medicine in the hospital, trying to do all manner of evil to people, when all we are saying, now that we are accepting forcefully or otherwise that our revenue stream would be constricted, the Government is saying “leggo de steering wheel, cut de brakes, full speed on de X”. That is what they are saying.

Madam Deputy Speaker, look at what we have done in the budget. In the Ministry of—I am talking about the increases, eh, 2015 over 2014, increases predicated on a revenue stream generated from \$80 oil, which no longer exists. We had put in that budget \$410 million for a new expenditure called Constituency Development Fund. We lived without that in 2014. We predicted it for 2015 based on higher revenues. The higher revenues are no longer available. What is unreasonable in saying that we could look at that again? Even before we came here we had conflicting stories from the Government. The Minister of Finance and the Economy saying, it is not going to happen.

Hon. Members: Bhoë Tewarie.

Dr. K. Rowley: The Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development, sorry. The Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development saying, it is not going to happen. [*Crosstalk*] The Prime Minister saying it is going to happen. So I ask the Minister of Finance and the Economy tonight, what is the story? Having lost a significant portion of our revenue, and the Opposition saying, let us cut that out of the expenditure pattern, what is the Minister of Finance and the Economy saying specifically to that? Because they keep saying that we are not telling them what to do, right? We are saying, that is one area that should not see the light of day under the present circumstances. For all the other reasons plus this one, that the money is not there, right? [*Desk thumping*] But, of course, we are told that we are not going to cut essentials. Is this an essential, this new expansion? And, of course, the Government said we are going to place \$19 million to bring the self-

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employed on to the NIB. That did not happen before, it is something we were planning to do. Is that still an essential?

The ADB, which I do not have time tonight to go into the scandalous behaviour that is going on inside there, but time will come for that. We put aside \$75 million to the ADB. Is that an essential priority that has to happen when the revenues have constricted?

And, of course, there is a Ministry called the Ministry of the People and Social Development, where we had proposed, what we had proposed since 2010, which is an increase for senior citizens, they are having it now. So I would not be the one to say, let us cut that. Nobody is saying that. So when my colleague got up and say, “yuh saying cut”, are you going to cut pensions? No, we are not saying that. We are saying you promised it since 2010, thank God you are going to pay it now. That is all we are saying.

Another disability grant increase, \$83 million, I think it is worthwhile if we can afford that even under the circumstances. Nobody is saying cut that, because those persons who will get that—as long as the right people get it, and the waste and the corruption do not affect it—we cannot argue with that.

There was an offering of \$120 million for newborn babies. We asked then, over and above, the soundness of the policy—we asked for the mathematics. How many newborn babies will qualify for that facility? And what is the threshold to qualify? We did not get an answer then. We do not have an answer now. What we do know is that we are planning to spend \$120 million. Until we know who will qualify, the yardstick to qualify, and how many babies will be covered, it might very well be that that \$120 million is overstated. Maybe the Minister of Finance and the Economy could tell us now, because since October we were asking for that information. We do not have it. It is now January. The first quarter has finished. Who got milk for babies from that? I do not know. What is the yardstick and, therefore, how many babies are going to qualify? We do not know, but we have a problem of restrictive revenues and is full speed ahead. “Do not change nothing.”

There are a series of small contracting provisions in Ministries, ill defined, not sure what it was, called Other Contracting; \$96 million. It is so essential you cannot even identify what it is. It is just for other contracts. So we are in a tight squeeze, billions of dollars lost in revenue, and we cannot be telling ourselves—we cannot find it within ourselves to say, since we do not know what the contracts are we could at least say, let us not have that increase, and I am talking about

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increase, eh. The increased provision, \$96 million increase, but we cannot identify what the increase is for, but we cannot cut it. We cannot touch it. We want to call that responsible budgeting.

Contract employment, specific to do what in the Ministries? Because again, these are increases, \$106 million in increased contract employment, specifically for what, essential to what? No answer. I am not saying do not have contract employment, the amount is there. I am talking about the increased provision for 2015. The money is not there in 2015. For three quarters going ahead in 2015, we are talking about oil revenues predicated on \$45 a barrel. So your provision of \$106 million for increased contract employment which you cannot put your finger on to say what it is. Why can we not say we are going to cut that, all or some of it? If I say we should look at it that way, Members of the Cabinet start accusing me.

11.15 p.m.

Recently, Madam Deputy Speaker, before the collapse—I spoke in November; the collapse had just started in October and it looked very real because of the nature of what was driving it. At a party convention, I spoke about the need in the coming environment for the Government to make a particular effort to focus on elimination of waste in public expenditure. What is wrong with that?

Some gentleman with a strange looking mouth like a rear end of a bird gets up and accuses me on behalf of the Government, wants to know if I am going to fire teachers and fire nurses. Now, I was not aware that nurses and teachers were hired as waste. So here is a call from the Opposition to the Government where everybody knows—some people believe that up to 40 per cent of government expenditure in this country can be classified as waste, loss through incompetence or corruption, and you call on the Government and say, “Listen, let us make a concerted effort now to identify and eliminate, as far as you are able to, waste from the system”, and the Government spokesperson jumps out and says, “Tell us if you are going to fire nurses and tell us if you are going to fire teachers”. That is folly; that is not management.

And if I go down the list again, they can post provisions made for, in the budget, increased allocation for vacant posts. Again—I am making it quite clear—I am not saying do not fill vacant posts—an increased provision of 2015 over 2014 of \$197 million. Will we die in this country if we say, given our current circumstance of constricted revenue and collapse of oil price, we will freeze vacant posts and, therefore, freeze the increase? So you can still use the level up

to the 2014 level, but what we projected, \$197 million more for increase, let us respond by saying, in the current circumstances, that is one area they can contract the expenditure.

Then, of course, other minor equipment. We had a \$900 million provision for minor equipment before the budget. We added an increase of \$200 million to it. I am saying, could we not say that the increase of \$200 million would not be effected and we live within the \$900 million provision?

You hear no such thing from the Government side. They want the Opposition to tell them what to do and the Opposition is not telling them what to do. *[Interruption]* You understand? Nine hundred million dollars provision. You expected more money because oil was at \$80 a barrel and gas at \$3.80 or what it was. So, therefore, we could add \$200 million more for minor equipment. The revenues are not being realized, but we cannot touch the \$200 million increase that you make provision for because we are not touching “nutten”. We are not cutting “nutten”. We are talking about esoterics and if you mention any contraction, you are going to do this and you have Ministers accusing people of nonsense, about wanting to put workers under pressure and all kinds of foolishness. That is their response.

Then, Madam Speaker, overtime, monthly paid officers, an increased provision of \$70 million. If you do not have the money, what is wrong in confining yourself close to what you have? What is wrong with that? Increase of \$70 million for increased overtime. Why can departments not be told to restrict their overtime in such a way that there is no increase over the last budgetary amount? What is wrong with that?

Dr. Gopeesingh: Will you give way, Member for Diego Martin West?

Dr. K. Rowley: Yes.

Dr. Gopeesingh: I believe, if you listened to and you read what the Prime Minister said, that part of our strategy on this finance issue is a 15 per cent cut or reduction in expenditure in non-critical items across all Ministries.

Mr. Imbert: What does that mean?

Dr. Gopeesingh: That would have been in that area that you are speaking about—contracted goods and services and so on.

Dr. K. Rowley: And if that is so, why then this morning when I said that we should begin—at least begin to look in the areas of the provisions for increases,

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why have you all accused me all day of trying to do all these nefarious things that I have been accused of? Why? [*Crosstalk*]

We made a provision—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Diego Martin West has expired. Member, would you require additional time?

Dr. K. Rowley: Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, the question is that the speaking time of the hon. Member for Diego Martin West be extended by 15 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

Madam Deputy Speaker: You may continue, hon. Member.

Dr. K. Rowley: [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. We have a \$104 million provision from the previous year, 2014—\$104 million provided for conferences, seminars and hosting similar things. We made a provision of \$5 million increase on that. Well, the money is not there. Can we live without the increase? The answer is yes. What is difficult in saying that? What is the difficulty?

Official entertainment, various Ministries, \$24 million. We made a provision of \$5 million on top of that. It will increase. Why can we not forego the increase? What is the difficulty in that?

Capital projects, of which there are about 20 existing capital projects where we allocated approximately \$524 million more in increases for those particular projects. If you do not have the money, you have room within that \$524 million—not to eliminate the \$524 million, certainly—but at least to find out, and the Government should indicate, what exactly is the scope of reduction that we could make on that \$524 million. Not a word, just a general statement that we will look and see where.

I want to tell you, Madam Deputy Speaker, I was a public servant first. I was a manager in state enterprises and I was a Minister. You tell the public system, look and see, and they will see nothing. Nothing! It has to be firmer guidelines than that; specific guidelines in that.

Telephone: a provision for increased telephones, \$78 million, I think it was. Let me just get the exact figure. If you go through the system, you will find that the increased provision for telephones, \$78 million. What you would want is

tighter controls of the telephones in the public system—tighter controls because if before it was lax, now that the finance is tight, what you expect are instructions to tighten the use of telephones in the system because I can tell you, there is significant abuse of the public telephone system and now that we are having difficulty and we are making provision for \$78 million, we can reverse that. But, of course, they will accuse me of saying do not have telephones in the public system. That is what they will say.

And new capital projects of which there are 73 listed in the documents there, \$347 million. Now, it might sound small, but what has to happen is that the Government has to show leadership. What the country was looking for last night was leadership on this issue and that leadership was sadly lacking. [*Desk thumping*] It was full speed ahead; business as usual. That is what it was.

Madam Deputy Speaker, if we go back to 2008 when there was a similar situation of a sudden collapse in the revenue side of our accounts, I want to quote for you from the *Newsday*, a Sean Douglas article reflecting the circumstances of the day. And he said:

“Prime Minister Patrick Manning last night said because of the global economic slowdown, this year’s \$50 billion Budget is to be cut by \$6 billion.”

A definitive statement.

“In terms of revenues projected in our present Budget, we expect to fall short by \$6 billion for this financial year,” Manning said in a televised address to the nation.”

...—and it—“meant that government ministers have been told to identify areas in their budget for cuts which he would announce next week.

His remarks came on the day oil prices fell to a three-year low of...\$49...

Saying no country could escape the effects of a global recession, Manning said TT has already suffered revenue-losses due to falling prices...”

So there was a straight admission that no country under our circumstance could escape the effects of global recession and we had already suffered losses.

In this case what we are getting from the Government is all is well and the person who led the all-is-well, good-feeling statement is the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs. All is well and keep talking about what we are doing in the deep water. Good as that might be, as if that is a response to today’s problem, he knows that what is going on in the deep water is good, but it has no real bearing

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on the current problem in front of us. It is quite likely and, hopefully, in fact, we expect that long before the first well is spud in the deep water and produces hydrocarbon, that we would have gone past this problem one way or the other.

So what is this flag you are waving about every time we ask what is happening to the situation we are facing, they tell us about deep water and how many agreements we signed? These are different ballparks. There are different considerations, different problems and different solutions. And, of course, he is showing the BP graph about the decline in the period 2008, 2009, 2010. There are very few investors who go out and make bold investments when the market has collapsed and is generating a negative vibe.

Right now, in the world today, in countries like Italy, in countries like Ireland and other places that were booming and were supposed to be—especially Ireland—examples of how to run a country, the problem is that the general global climate and the regional climate and the local climate is such that people will wait to see what is on the horizon. They want to see sunlight on the horizon before they get that buoyant feeling to invest with rapidity.

So, of course, five years from today, you could show a curve that, in 2014, the curve turned downwards, but you spend a lot of time blaming the PNM. And, of course, a PNM Prime Minister was specific on where the cuts were going to be and that is the difference. And I quote:

“He added that goods and services and minor equipment have also been targetted and also listed the developmental projects due to be reduced as,”—follows—“new projects other than those of an urgent or critical nature, those projects for which there were no firm contractual obligations, ongoing projects for which the pace of implementation could be reduced without legal penalties and ongoing projects for which some components could be deferred.””

Those are the ones we will deal with. It is a clear statement. [*Interruption*]

Well, Madam, I am not getting into any argument with my colleagues in here. They are satisfied with their own statement. I would be surprised if they were not. But it is my view and the view of the wider population that the Government has not been sufficiently clear as to how we are going to respond and exactly where the response is going to come. If they think that those who think so are wrong, then that is their right to think so. We still have freedom of thought in this country and I trust that they will continue to allow us to express our impressions, to

express our opinions that we do not think it is good because they say it is good.

The whole question, Madam Deputy Speaker, of how the population at the household level, at the community level will view its expectations of the Government and of its own ability to respond to this crisis is what is missing from our response on this occasion, especially when you try to misrepresent the actual circumstance.

11.30 p.m.

The Prime Minister last night talked about this re-establishment of confidence. That might be so with them. They may have access to unlimited foreign exchange for their business, one kind or the other. I can tell you, one of the greatest areas of disquiet under the current circumstance has to do with people who do their business requiring foreign exchange either for their children abroad, for importation of parts, for importation of goods. General foreign exchange trading is a problem in this country now because the confidence that has been damaged has allowed people not to expect to get foreign exchange in the bank, and it has generated hoarding at the personal and household level. This is happening now, and that is not a reflection of any superior confidence. It is a lack of confidence that is there. [*Desk thumping*]

It is not the first time we on this side have been talking about a lack of confidence in the environment of Trinidad and Tobago influenced by the Government. It started in 2010/2011 by their utterances about empty Treasury. One Minister of Finance spent his entire career trying to tell the country that the Treasury is empty and that the country is broke, and we are on the precipice of disaster. Now, we are hearing from the Government a completely different story, because they are going into an election now where they have to paint the prettiest picture, but we are experiencing some significant confidence issues.

Where are the investments that took place in this country for the private sector in the last four years? Where? The banks are awash with cash in Trinidad and Tobago. Where are the private sector investments in all this confidence? Only the Government knows it.

Dr. Moonilal: “Current”!

Dr. K. Rowley: “Current”—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal: He built a shopping mall.

Dr. K. Rowley: In Holland. Yeah, he built a shopping mall in Holland. You understand. How does a minister building a mall in Holland benefit all of us? How? [*Crosstalk*]

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So, Madam Deputy Speaker, I want this country to understand that this issue is not one about PNM and UNC, Government and Opposition, this issue is about Trinidad and Tobago; the people of Trinidad and Tobago whose feet are in quicksand [*Desk thumping*] and what is required—I am going to repeat it—at this particular juncture to respond to this particular problem is honest, transparent leadership; responsible leadership. [*Desk thumping*] What we are getting is the perpetual blame game of blaming the last government and praising oneself. No wonder the country is confused; no wonder the country is confused.

If there is anything that should tell the population that the Government itself does not believe itself is that ridiculous expensive advertising campaign the Government is carrying on with telling you that the Government is working for you. If the Government was really working for you, you would know. The Government does not have to take taxpayers' money to tell taxpayers that the Government is working for taxpayers. It is the only government in the world that is doing that, costing tens of millions of dollars—a few government advisors, a few well-positioned smart men and carpetbaggers are making millions telling you foolishness. Unnecessary! If you did work for the population they would know, they would see it, they would feel it—and portraying us as a country of idiots. Enough of that, and tell the population exactly what we are facing; tell them exactly what we need to do to respond; tell them that you are responsible as a Government to do what has to be done—take the population on board—and we are all in this together. This country demands and must have nothing less than responsible and honest leadership. I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Transport (Hon. Stephen Cadiz): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Well, it is what—it is 13 and a half hours we have been sitting down here now. It has been a very long evening and, therefore, I would not be as long as the Member for Diego Martin North/East nor the Member for Diego Martin West whereby all they did was just repeat what they have been saying for however long. They figure if they say it enough times that somebody somewhere might actually believe what they are saying.

You know, we have gone through this exercise. For practically the whole day we have been on this issue of the economy and the falling of oil prices and what have you. What I find remarkable is that those on the other side, all they have done is to preach doom and gloom for this country. That is all they have done. Regardless of the information, the data, the parameters, regardless of what is there in the public domain, they are hoping—they are really and truly hoping—that

something happens because, of course, they know it is an election year, and one of the things that the electorate is going to see is how to manage an economy. That is what the electorate is going to see this year.

What they are hoping is somehow, for whatever reason, that what they are saying is going to happen, which is the sky is falling and doom and gloom. It is wrong for any responsible party, any responsible politician, to be scaring the public like this, and yet still the Member for Diego Martin West—look how fast he is packing. That is the individual. It does not matter how much reimagining or what have you that goes on with the Member for Diego Martin West—he packs up, he gets vexed, looking all ruffled headed going down the road. All right.

When we look, for instance, at the Member for Diego Martin West's contribution, another thing that obviously irks the other side is when they see a sign, "Your Government working for you", that irks them. It hurts them, and do you know why it hurts them? Because the sign goes up, the work is done and the sign comes back down. Under their stewardship, the sign goes up, the sign just falls apart. "Deh does have to come and put back ah next sign." They have come and repaint the sign, and the job is still not completed. That is what irks the other side. Regardless of what this Government puts its hands to—whatever job, whatever project that we start—it works.

And you see that south highway, Madam Deputy Speaker, if it is one thing that is sticking in the craw of the other side, the balisier brigade, is that southern highway, because they know the potential. They know what it is going to do to this economy. You cannot build an economy with people stuck in the bush. You need a road network; you need a proper road system, and they understood that. They knew that, but where did they build the roads? Every single road is in their own corridor. They never thought about opening the south. Here it is they are talking about the oil sector and the energy sector and the gas sector. Whether it is natural gas or whether it is oil, none of those areas has proper access to it and has never had access, and why is that.

The Member of Parliament for Mayaro, ask him how long it takes to get to Mayaro. That is the south-east coast where all the revenue of this country is practically generated—a great part of it is generated—and yet still when you are opening up these territories they have a problem with that, and why? Because what they do not understand, what they do not like and what they cannot handle is success. That is the one thing they cannot handle. When they see this Government coming in, in four and a half years—what this Government has been able to do in four and a half years they would never ever imagine.

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I just heard the Member for Diego Martin West saying that he worked in public service; he worked in the state sector and as a Cabinet Minister, and in his opinion if you go and tell the public service: “Start to cut, cut cost, make yourself more efficient” he said they would never do it, and he has spent his entire life in the public sector, and that is the man that is coming here to offer himself as the Prime Minister of this country knowing fully well he cannot fix nothing. If he cannot fix a simple Ministry by identifying cost in a Ministry, and saying these are unnecessary costs, we are not going to buy this now, we are going to hold back on our budgets, if he is not in a position to do that: how is he going to be the Prime Minister? How is he going to be running this economy?

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Prime Minister in her address to the nation last night—and I am going to read it. This is under the heading:

“ADJUSTING OUR PRIORITIES

In moving forward there will be areas where we must moderate or redirect our spending in order to manage the present situation by keeping people and country first.”

She goes on further:

“Reviews of our PSIP and recurrent expenditure are on-going”—the review is ongoing—“with the aim of identifying savings of approximately \$4.5 billion.”

I continue:

“And you can be assured that these adjustments are aimed at preserving employment levels and job security.”—which is crucial, absolutely crucial.

Continue:

“Amongst those areas identified for re-directional spending...”

Now, I do not know if the Member for Diego Martin North/West does not understand what re-directional spending means. [*Crosstalk*] The Member for Diego Martin West. Well, I am getting confused between the Member for Diego Martin West and the Member for Diego Martin North/East because both of them adopt the same position.

“1. Infrastructural projects for which funding has not yet been confirmed;”

And, of course, they went to town. I was surprised that the Member for Point Fortin said we should stop the highway. Of all people to say that. If the Member for La Brea had spoken, the Member for La Brea would have followed the Member for Point Fortin and say, “Stop the highway.” Right, Member for La Brea? Look, we have support from the Member for La Brea. Member for La Brea,

you are a good man. Okay—talking about stopping the highway. The highway is 42 per cent, I believe, or 45 per cent completed and that is going to create all kinds of new economies down—well, not only in south, but in Trinidad and Tobago as a whole—creating a whole new economy—and you are talking about stopping that.

“Infrastructure projects for which funding has not yet been confirmed;”—re-directional spending.

“2. Lower expenditure on non-critical goods & services, and allocations in selected Ministries by 15 per cent...”

The Member for Diego Martin West now wants to come here and say: What exactly is non-critical goods? What is that? What is non-critical goods and services? He wants the Prime Minister in an address to the nation to say, “Stop buying coffee; stop buying Crix, no more juice.” What nonsense is that? That is the job of each individual Ministry, each state organization, to look very, very carefully at what they have been doing, what they have been spending on and, of course, like anybody in business—

I am a businessman, even though the Member for Diego Martin West was never involved in business, so I am not too sure how he is going to do this thing, but in business when things are good and things are going okay, you tend to loosen up sometimes on your spending, and to be able to add and to create and to do certain things—you would paint the building this year because you have extra money; you would buy a new vehicle this year because you have extra money. You are able to do certain things—retool and all these sorts of things—but when things are tight and you do not have the money, you have to cut your cloth, and therefore you say, we would not paint the building this year or we would not buy a vehicle this year. It could last for another year, and let us see when the recovery is going to come before you start doing it.

So, when the Prime Minister speaks about lowering expenditure on non-critical goods and services that is for each individual organization, whether it is a Ministry, whether it is a state-owned company or it is a state agency, it is for them to look for the board of directors, for the management of that agency to come back to the line Minister and say, “We have been able to find X amount of dollars and, in fact, we beat the 15 per cent. We have been able to cut our expenses by maybe 20 per cent or 25 per cent.” And that is what management is all about.

He said that if you tell the public servants cut, “dey go laugh at yuh and dey go spend more.” [*Crosstalk*] This is how it works. There is a whole structure in

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the public service. I find for a person who spent his entire life in the public service, if he does not know how to manage a budget in the area that he was operating, well God help us. Maybe that is why public housing is in the mess that public housing is in. Maybe that is why National Quarries is in the mess that we found it in, because I believe he was the head man up in National Quarries.

So, it is not for the Prime Minister to come and identify each heading as to where you are going to cut. The Prime Minister knows she has responsible Ministers in her Cabinet. The line Ministers know they have a responsible board of directors; the line Ministers know they have responsible heads of departments and agencies, and that is how you work the business.

11.45 p.m.

You cannot come in the Parliament and say how much “Crix” you are going to cut. What nonsense is that? You cannot work like that. This country running on—how much?—\$60-something billion and you are talking about how much “Crix” you are going to cut. [*Member steups*] Look.

Then, of course, the Prime Minister goes on about the inverse relationship between the price of gas and the subsidy at a lower price of gas which will result in savings of the petroleum subsidy, estimated at \$1.4 billion. So, it is not to say that the Prime Minister stands up there and makes an extremely powerful statement, very, very powerful statement to the country, that this Government is aware of our situation. We know what has happened; we know what to expect; we know maybe how far it would go; we have now pegged our budget to \$45, okay—all of that down. We have moved gas down to, I think, \$2.25.

So, how can you say that the Prime Minister comes here and it is all fluff and says nothing about how we are going to deal with this economy? I think that entire section over there did like Diego Martin North/East and did not hear the Prime Minister. I do not think they heard. But either that or they only wanted to hear what it is that they wanted to hear, and all they want to hear was doom and gloom. This country has been through this thing before. We have been in the ups and downs, okay. It is an oil economy. You hear people saying, “Why they did not diversify the economy”, and what have you. That is not an easy thing to do on an island this size, with an economy this size. How are you going to diversify the economy so easy? At least from what the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy is saying, that in the non-energy sector that we have seen an increase in the growth in the non-energy sector. But there are all kinds of other ways, Madam Deputy Speaker, that you can deal with this. I just want to go through a couple of

things but, again, the Member for Diego Martin West, you know, talking about the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs coming here and saying, “All is well”. It is not a case of whether all is well you know, it is not doom and gloom; that is what it is not. But, again, as a responsible Government we understand what it is that we have to do. We understand the job.

Let me tell you something, Madam Deputy Speaker, when we came into office in 2010, the mess—and I know they are going to say, “Why are you going back with the PNM”, but the fact of the matter is what they managed and what they oversaw over the period, all the years they have been there, because it is not just from 2002 to 2010 you know, it is from 1956 we are talking about, okay. That is what we are talking about—and when you see systems that were created in the 1960s that they allowed just to remain like that and those archaic styles of management that are totally inefficient.

So when you come in here in 2010, it is not just about taking over from where PNM left off you know. That is not what it is you know. It is about the fix; it is about the cleaning; it is about removing all the mess and corruption and mismanagement from in the system. That is what you are talking about. So, you spent the majority of your day trying to fix a broken system and that is what this Government met, and, yet still, when we talk about “Your Government working for you”, they cannot stand to see the sign, because all over this country they have seen development. Every single part of this country, they try to throw that horrible card that they always play about south of the Caroni, and I say, “Nonsense”. Absolute nonsense. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Hypolite: How many buses we have in Tobago?

Hon. S. Cadiz: If you only want me to talk about the bus company and what PNM did to the bus company, I will have to ask for about five extensions, okay. I would have to ask for about five extensions of what they did to—well, the first thing that they did—*[Interruption]*

Hon. Member: *[Inaudible]*—PNM.

Hon. S. Cadiz: No. No. You want to talk about that? The first thing—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Hypolite: How many buses do you have in Tobago?

Hon. S. Cadiz: So, Madam Deputy Speaker, when they talk about all this doom and gloom they are hoping that is exactly what the position is going to be, but it is all right.

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This country has never seen better management in a Government. It is a supreme level of management, okay, what we have been able to do, what we have been able to cut, the way the services that are being provided to the people of this country. I want to talk, for instance, when I look at my constituency of Chaguanas East—I know Port of Spain South do not like me to talk about my constituency but I have to, because what I met and after four and a half years, what I see is a totally different and completely revamped constituency, and it is not to say that I got any more than Port of Spain South or I got any more than Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West. It is about managing your business; that is what it is about. It is about managing your business. When they see the roads, when they see—I “doh” believe that there is a single person in Chaguanas East does not have a proper potable water supply, okay.

When I see what we did with flooding and the extent of the work that we did there by pushing as a parliamentary representative, working and pushing and pushing, you know. The people understand you know. The people in Trinidad and Tobago understand when they see the performance of this Government, okay. It is their job to try and do their level best to change the perception of the people in this country, but that is not going to fool them because everyday somebody gets out of their house and they go into the road and they are going to work, and what have you, and they see the difference. The difference is what it is going to make. [*Crosstalk*]

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, not one of them spoke on the Bill today, eh. All they talk about is doom and gloom, and what have you, but I want to show how we think, how this Government thinks. We have under the Ministry of Transport, the Licensing Office, right. We have the Licensing Office under the Ministry. How long has it taken—where is the Member for Diego Martin North/East? The Member for Diego Martin North/East has disappeared once again. The Member for Diego Martin North/East is a disappearing act in the Parliament. [*Interruption*] Yes. But I want to know how long did it take the other side to understand that there were problems in the Licensing Office, and not to start to fix you know, but to completely overhaul what is known as the Licensing Office.

The building on Wrightson Road was built in 1951—1951 that building was built—and we come into office and what do we find? A building that was built in 1951 where zero maintenance was done on the building. Nothing new. They did not even have a computer in Wrightson Road. Everybody with big pen writing 20-digit number, transferring into a next book, into a next book, into a next book, into a next book. That is the system that we met. How do you try to manage, for

instance, 730,000 vehicle registrations? How do you expect to manage that with a big pen? Eh? You cannot. Hence the reason the service in the Licensing Office has reached to a level that is totally unacceptable, but that did not happen last week, that did not happen on May 24, 2010, that happened decades ago, but for whatever reason, they on the other side do not ever think that, “Hold on a second, the level of service we are providing to our citizens is totally unacceptable and we need to fix it”, but they go on and on with the same old archaic system.

Madam Deputy Speaker, you know in Licensing Office on Wrightson Road they produced their own books because they cannot go nowhere else in the world to buy these big books? “Dem big, big ledger.” The ledger about big so [*Member gestures*]. “You see dem going and dey going so, [*Member gestures*] whap and dey opening de ledger”, and then have to go through and look for a vehicle registration number, and if you cannot remember when the vehicle was bought, well, “God help yuh”, because they have to go and look through about 19 of these big, big books, okay. Not a computer. That is what we found, okay.

So when you want to talk about what you are going to do about the issue of the economy, it is about making every single Ministry, every single agency, every single division, making them efficient, and when you make them efficient then all of a sudden your cost of operation comes down. So when the Prime Minister talks about 15 per cent, by creating an efficient Licensing Office you would probably find that we could actually drop our operating cost by plenty more than 15 per cent, and guess what? Upping the revenue, because you are sure about the revenue now. You are sure about what people are going to be paying because you remove the person with the big pen who could mark down anything in a book, because it then goes into a computerized system.

The Member for St. Augustine with the electronic birth certificates: imagine you had to go by the old lady—what is it? The Registrar of Births and Deaths—and go and sit down and wait again. The poor lady had to come out with the big pen and mark down and start to write down all kind of things, and if you cannot remember—well, you bound to remember when you were born, all right. But to get a birth certificate before we came into office was how long? It took a year to get a birth certificate in Trinidad and Tobago, one year, and they did not see—Diego Martin West, who said he spent his entire life in the public service, did not know that it was taking a year to get a birth certificate and did not see it where it was his responsibility to go to the then Cabinet and say, “This is ridiculous, we need to deal with this”. [*Interruption*] Madam Deputy Speaker?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Members, please, please, allow the Member to

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speak in silence.

Hon. S. Cadiz: “The Member for Laventille West is trying to make his last speech because he know he ent going back up, all right, so he trying to make ah last speech here.” [*Interruption*]

Mr. Hypolite: “Chaguanas East dont want you.”

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member for Laventille West, please.

Hon. S. Cadiz: Madam Deputy Speaker, when we are talking about an economy that is going to be slowing, or what have you, you really and truly have to put the levels of efficiency into every single area, okay.

You cannot go to Wrightson Road and pay any fee—\$500. I got stuck the other day. I went to renew my licence, and stupid me—yeah, I have to say “stupid me” because “dey doh have a parlour, dey do not have a parlour, dey doh have a parlour, dey doh have a minimart in Trinidad and Tobago that doh take a debit card”—not one, okay? Down to lotto vendors selling with a machine on the side of the road. “So I go down Wrightson Road to renew my licence, \$500, when I dip in meh wallet, I doh have \$500.” I had to go and borrow from somebody I saw there to go and pay the thing, because why? Not a debit machine, piles and piles of cash operating, okay. How could that be? How could that be in this day and age? Eh?

Dr. Khan: No accountability.

Hon. S. Cadiz: No, but then of course it breeds all kinds of other issues with all this cash.

Why is it that the Member for Diego Martin West, as a lifetime member of the public service, why did he not see it fit to introduce an electronic payment system in the Licensing Office?—or the Member for Diego Martin North/East. The Member for Diego Martin North/East was the Minister of Works and Transport that came under that, and Licensing Office came under that. So when you all want to talk about, “What you are doing?” and “What you are cutting?”, it is not a case of what you are cutting, you know, it is what are you making more efficient that you could use maybe the same dollar and stretch that dollar to get \$1.50 out of it, or \$1.75 out of it.

12.00 midnight

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin West said 40 per cent of public expenditure is wastage—not me, you know; he said that. [*Interruption*] Thirty-eight years or something like that; I cannot remember—43 years in

government, and 40 per cent of government expenditure is wastage. And he did not see it fit to go to his Cabinet and say, “People, this is ridiculous”. [Interruption] “Is true; well dat does happen in dat Cabinet, you know.” You only raise your head, “whap, blame”; but that is the point.

So when you want to talk—we do not have to—it is not a case of severing anybody and losing jobs. Make it more efficient, so when I have to go down to Licensing Office, I do not have to take a day off from work; I do not have to take two days off from work. I could go down there and in 15, 20 minutes I do my transaction, and I am gone, and I am still employed for the day, because there are people—unlike some other people—that if they take a day off from work, they dock their pay for a day.

So here it is you have to go down to Licensing Office, you lose a day pay, you go down there and they tell you, “Well we cyar find de big book with your name down inside of it. You know dem carnival characters that walk around with this big book? That is what they does have down in Licensing Office, just like that.”

Hon. Member: The ledger.

Hon. S. Cadiz: The ledger. So when you create efficiencies in a place like the Licensing Office, where you can go down there and in 15 minutes, 20 minutes, you get your transaction done, off to work you go, and you do not lose a day’s pay. The Licensing Office still gets its same fee, but it is getting its fee in minutes rather than weeks and months. People call me all the time. They tell me, “Ah went down there, ah pay meh money, dey tell me come back in three months.” Three months for what, a form? Member for Diego Martin Central, I do not believe you could accept that.

Dr. Browne: Would you?

Hon. S. Cadiz: No, no—but I do not believe you could accept that.

Dr. Browne: Well, do not call my name.

Hon. S. Cadiz: I do not believe you would accept that. Three months to get the most—[Interruption] Excuse me, Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, we had to change that; plus we had to change the bus company; plus we had to change the airport; plus we had to change the port; plus we had to change Maritime Services Division; plus we had to change agriculture; plus we had to change the Ministry of Finance and the Economy; plus we had to change the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health. All of that had to change.

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So do not ever feel that because we are there for four and a half years, why we did not do that on day one, because on day one you had a barrage, a “grap” of mismanagement for donkey years, that we had to start fixing. So do not ever make the mistake [Crosstalk]

When I first came into this Parliament, I asked, “You know what you all have to do first? The first thing you all have to do is apologize to this country—apologize to this country for the mismanagement of this country”, and up to now, not one single apology, so I am not taking them on. “Why it take four and a half years to do it?” They know very well “it doh work so”. You have to come and get legislation passed; you have to change the public service; you have to do all kinds of things.

We are taking another big change through the Ministry of Trade, it is the TTBizLink. What we are doing is that when you import a vehicle, when you see the vehicle transporter, the ferry coming in here—I think twice or three times a month it comes in to drop vehicles—as soon as that vehicle lands on Trinidad and Tobago soil, you take what we call the DNA of the vehicle, that goes into the TTBizLink system, and that lives with the vehicle till the vehicle is de-registered. Something as simple as that.

But you go down on the port now to see where the Customs Officers have to operate—set up by them—is an old container, “bruck up”, with a piece of canvas. I mean, if you see the condition of this place. Duct tape and all “kinda thing”. If you see the condition of this place.

So here it is we are rebuilding all of that, so as soon as those vehicles arrive, we take the DNA, and once we take that DNA there at the port, that is into the database and, therefore, you do not have to go and “write down” with your Bic pen now in your ledgers down in Wrightson Road. “All of dat stop.” [Interruption]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the Member for Chaguanas East has expired. Hon. Member, would you indicate if you need additional time.

Hon. S. Cadiz: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, the question is that the speaking time of the hon. Member for Chaguanas east be extended by 15 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member for Chaguanas East, you may continue.

Hon. S. Cadiz: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

But there are other areas that, of course, the Government could look at, for instance, PTSC. PTSC has lands all over this country, and I hate to say it—Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, “yuh go get vex with meh, but ah doh care, because you would not be here just now anyhow”—the fact of the matter is that when the trains were shut down, I believe in 1969, what did they do? What did the PNM do? “The PNM just lef’ it so. Dey just lef’ the railway lands just abandoned all over de place.” [*Crosstalk*] You have to ask Mr. Bain about “de iron”. They just left it like that.

PTSC owns—for instance in South Quay—some of the prime property in the city—prime, prime property—and instead of the then administration looking at that and saying, “How are we going to monetize this property?” Because all we have is a set of old, derelict buses and old chassis and all “kinda ting” sitting on this prime property. That makes no sense. So when you are talking about managing the economy and changing the way in which we do business, that whether or not, depending on the fluctuations in the price of oil, et cetera, you have this whole other business you could be doing, and that is about monetizing the properties of PTSC. It is not rocket science.

So there are a number of areas that we can look at, but I am just using the Licensing Office as a reference point for what, really and truly, mismanagement by people who do not have a clue about what efficiency, what good systems are, what good business practices are, and that is that whole section from down on the end down there, from San Fernando East come right across the country down to Port of Spain South.

Hon. Member: Glenn Ramadharsingh!

Hon. S. Cadiz: That is why this population, for all the little issues—all the little issues that this administration has had; we have had issues—as I tell people, I am not perfect so do not expect me to make a perfect decision. We have to make decisions, and sometimes the decisions might not have been the best, and we correct them, as we have seen time and time again.

But if this population only makes the mistake to even think about that section over on that side there, exactly what I spoke about here, they are going to rip out every computer, “dey go rip out every ATM down in Licensing Office, bring back de big book, go and buy a whole stack of Bic pen and say, ‘Come, back to business now. Leh we go back with what we were doing before’.” And that is what they are going to do to this economy.

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Madam Deputy Speaker, all I can say is that the work this Government has put in over the last four and a half years has been phenomenal. Whether you like “de sign or yuh doh like de sign”, it is a fact: Your Government working for you. Okay I say, “If yuh doh like it, doh look at it.” But stop talking about it, because every time you talk about it I say, “Ay, ay, like yuh see de sign”. “Dey know de new bridge gone up; dey know de road pave; dey know Dr. Gopeesingh put a new school in Diego Martin North/East district call Paramin, that for 15 years he could not do—21 years, sorry—he could not put a primary school in Paramin.” So when we put up the nice, little sign outside the Paramin school, “Your Government working for you”, that is a fact.

“So if it hutting allyuh, not a problem; doh watch de sign. Send your children to the new school, drive over de new bridge, drive on de pave road.” [*Crosstalk*] Oh yes, you could do all that. “Just now yuh go be driving on the new CNG buses for PTSC”.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to tell this country something: 35 CNG buses is going to equate to in excess of \$400,000 saving on diesel fuel per month at the full retail price. In other words, it is not a cash flow issue for PTSC, but the State, the Treasury, is now paying that subsidy. When you work it out, it is \$400,000. That is what? That is \$5 million a year saving by just running on CNG rather than diesel, and that is how this Government is thinking.

So when you are talking about cuts, it is not only about cuts. It is about working more efficiently. It is about finding new ways of doing the same things, and cleaner and it is a much better system.

If we put 300 buses of CNG working for PTSC, we are going to be saving over \$50 million to the State. That is what good governance is about. Not because you have diesel, “yuh bunning diesel”. That is not how you manage a system. You look at ways and means of changing up the processes, finding more efficient ways of doing it, finding more cost effective ways of doing it. But, again, for the Member for Diego Martin West, I want to say, and this is my final word—the Member for Diego Martin West has admitted that under his tenure, under his stewardship, 40 per cent of the taxpayers’ money is wastage and he accepts that, “because he say dat and he jump and he gone”. That is accepted.

I just want to thank, Madam Prime Minister—and I know “dey go say why ah saying—come again”—but I want to thank my Prime Minister for running a country and providing the governance and leadership to this country where the major changes that have happened in this country are as a result of her

stewardship and her leadership. You cannot take that away from her. She never hurt the people. A person who takes pleasure in speaking with people and being around the citizens of this country—unlike some of the potential leaders on the other side, who have a problem with people.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it is very late now. It is 10 minutes past 12 and therefore I want to thank you.

Mrs. Patricia Mc Intosh (*Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West*): Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to make a contribution to the Finance Bill, 2015. I have to say good morning, yes, because it is now 11 minutes past midnight. As the Member for Chaguanas East said, no one really spoke on the Finance Bill as yet.

I had planned to begin my contribution with some statements and some discussion on the state of the economy, but you know what, so much was said about it already. There has been so much discussion on it, and because of the late hour—and we have been here since ten o'clock this morning—I shall forego this part. I feel I had some very important discussions and points to make, but I shall forego that.

I should like to turn my attention directly and focus directly on some amendments in the Bill. I would like to look at the Pensions Act. In clause 9 of the Bill, which seeks to amend the Pensions Act:

“9. The Pensions Act is amended—

- (a) in section 18(1), by inserting after the words ‘three thousand’, the words ‘, five hundred’; and
- (b) in section 19(1), by inserting after the words ‘three thousand’, the words ‘, five hundred’.

I should also like to look at the Teachers’ Pension Act. That is why I stayed, that is why I said I am going to speak, because as a retired educator, a retired teacher, it would have been remiss of me had I neglected to make a contribution on the amendments in this Act.

Clause 15 of the Bill seeks to amend section 12(1) of the Teachers’ Pensions Act:

“...by inserting after the words ‘three thousand’, the words ‘five hundred’.”

I would look at these concomitantly, all these pensions Acts—the Assisted Secondary School Teachers’ Pensions Act, Chap. 39:03, in which clause 16 of the Bill seeks to amend section 11(1) of the Assisted Secondary School Teachers’ Pension Act:

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“...by inserting after the words ‘three thousand’, the words ‘five hundred’.”

Madam Deputy Speaker, as a retired educator and public officer, I have a vested interest in these amendments. As I said, I would have reneged on my duty as a retired educator, had I not made a contribution on these amendments.

12.15 a.m.

Having read these amendments, I would have expected to see retired teachers and public officers treated with much more appreciation and respect than that which has been meted out to them in the amendments in this Bill. As it is, the amendments contained therein are nothing more than an effort to align the pensions of retired teachers and public officers who are in receipt of a pension of less than \$3,000; some of them receive \$2,500. This is an effort to align them to the \$3,500 that is being granted to those who are in receipt of the Senior Citizens’ Grant or Public Assistance Grant of \$3,500.

Madam Deputy Speaker, you know, the Members opposite love to twist things. I want to say from the onset, that I am very happy, very pleased for those who are receiving the Senior Citizens’ Grant or Public Assistance Grant of \$3,500. But I feel strongly, it is indeed an affront to retired teachers and public officers who would have spent some 33 1/3 years or more, some of them 40 years in the service, having given the best days of their lives and the salt of their blood in service to their country, that this Bill is seeking to bring them on par with persons, many of whom might not have worked one single day in their lives.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this is indeed a mark of disrespect, not only towards retired teachers, but towards all retired public officers whose pensions are already so woefully inadequate that they could hardly lead a decent and respectable existence.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the maximum pension of teachers and indeed public officers who retired 15 to 20 years ago would be somewhere in the vicinity of \$2,500 to \$3,000, no more. I will explain why. Remember, the pensions of teachers and public officers are 50 per cent of the retiree’s last substantive salary which, 15 to 20 years ago, would have been \$5,000 or \$6,000. So that their pension now—and I see my colleague the Member for Moruga/Tableland—*[Crosstalk]* he is shaking—because he knows. He knows what we got. So, if you take 50 per cent of \$5,000 or \$6,000, some of these teachers or those teachers are living on a bare minimum of money. And we have these retired teachers and public servants in their 70s and 80s and they are languishing in retirement and living like paupers, almost like paupers, after having given the best years of their

lives in service to their country.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I can speak passionately for teachers because they are the ones who embraced the lofty vocation of educating our nation's children whether the children be gifted or talented, whether they be intellectually, academically or physically challenged, whether they be well-mannered or ill-mannered or ill-behaved, but teachers play a very critical role, Madam Deputy Speaker, in educating our nation's children, and in education in general, the bedrock of national development.

Madam Deputy Speaker, so having thus laboured in the vineyards for so long, they should at least be able to look forward to a retirement with a pension that would sustain a decent, reasonable, respectable and comfortable life. But this is not so. They are getting \$2,500 to \$3,000 per month. For this reason we find that many a retired teacher has to resort—whether she wants to or not, whether she is in good health or not—but she or he has to resort to giving lessons to augment this very meagre pension or seek some form of contract employment with the Ministry.

You know, the hon. Minister, through you, Madam Deputy Speaker, he must really take time or suggest when they are interviewing some of these retirees, see whether they are fit, because I have seen some of them dragging, dragging coming to the school. I know they would prefer to stay home and do some sort of little part-time work somewhere, if they have to. But they really do not want to be there because they have worked hard there for many years. They could hardly make it, but they need the money, and it is sad.

Many retired public officers, especially the males, have to ply their cars for hire to mind their families. Now what this Government is doing is adding insult to injury by offering teachers and public officers a handout to bring their pensions in line with those who are in receipt of the Senior Citizens' Grant and the disability grants, Madam Deputy Speaker. As I have said, these recipients might not have worked a single day—most of them, many of them—in their lives. Where is the justice in all of this? This is what I ask. Where is the justice for teachers and public servants in all of this?

I heard the Prime Minister say last night on national TV that her Government will take care of all the vulnerable groups—this is the group of retired teachers and public officers, a very vulnerable group. I am not advocating for an increase in moneys to them. I am not for the Government to grant an increase in moneys to them. I am not advocating that because I understand the state of our economy. I

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understand that we cannot afford to give those increases. But what this Government should be doing instead, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to recommend that this Government should be reviewing the public sector pension legislation reform in a very holistic and comprehensive manner.

Public officers, teachers and public servants should be given the option of contributing to a pension that the Government would match accordingly. This would constitute a good incentive for public servants to safeguard their futures, and live comfortably after retirement, instead of solely depending on the State. So, I am not just advocating that the State should dole out money to them, but they should review the public sector pension legislation reform, and implement such strategies.

Additionally, the contributions of public officers could be deposited in the consolidated form, and such deposits could be invested to generate revenue for the State. It is a win-win situation for all, I am suggesting here.

Furthermore, in order to ensure that the value of pensions is not eroded, pensions must be indexed to the cost of living [*Desk thumping*] that will serve to protect the pensions of teachers and all public officers from the erosive effects of inflation. That is what obtains in developed nations like Canada; that is what they do. They index the pensions to the cost of living.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we must not forget or we must remember, we must recall that people these days are generally living much longer than long ago. People are living up to 80, 85, 90 and in their 90s. So without this provision of indexing the pensions to the cost of living, the pensions, the retired teachers will have to live 20 or 25 years on a fixed income until death, while cost of living is rising, is increasing constantly.

It is my understanding, Madam Deputy Speaker, that three years ago an interministerial committee was appointed to look into this matter of public sector pension reform and report to Cabinet. To date, no report, I understand, has been forthcoming, and I do not see that any funds have been allocated to this exercise. This Government must acknowledge the plight of retired teachers and public officers, many of whom, as I have said, are living like paupers. They must treat the public sector pension reform with dispatch and in a holistic and very comprehensive manner. To do otherwise, Madam Deputy Speaker, would be immoral and unconscionable.

In addition, I should like to make a fervent plea on behalf of all retired teachers and public officers, that upon retirement their pensions be paid with dispatch. Very often public servants have to wait for months, sometimes a year

and more, sometimes two years to receive their pensions; and we know that. The Member for Pointe-a-Pierre is nodding his head.

Madam Deputy Speaker, what do we expect these poor people to do, having laboured so long in the vineyards for the nation? What do we expect them to do during the year and two years that they are waiting for their pension? They have to go and beg, you know, hand to hand—beg.

Furthermore, whenever there is an increase in teachers' salary as a result of wage negotiations between the unions and the CPO, some retired teachers do qualify, if you are retired very soon after, you do qualify for an increase in pension by virtue of being in the employ of the service during the time frame under consideration in the specific negotiation. Often these retirees have to wait years for that adjustment to their pension, and for the corresponding gratuity.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I know why I am speaking about this. I can empathize with this because I qualified for an increase in pension since the last wage negotiation was conducted in 2012. Despite having visited the finance and accounts division at the Ministry of Education, despite having spoken to the relevant personnel, more than one person, they all came around me, they assured me that everything—I said, is there anything to sign? Do I have to write a letter? Is there a form I must fill out? No. They just got all the information, got my file, they took out all the paper, and they are going to send everything down. They promised me they will send all the relevant documents to the Treasury for the requisite adjustment to be made to my pension.

To date, nothing has been done. I have someone in the Treasury waiting to help me—looking and waiting. Every time I ring, nothing has been sent from finance and accounts. I went down there and I begged them. You know what I told them? I said, probably I might die and never get it. “Oh no, do not say that. We will send it.” Nothing has come from finance and accounting to the Treasury for my pension to be adjusted, and for me to receive my rightful—it is my right! [*Crosstalk*] I worked hard in education. It is my right. I wonder—I am not only speaking about myself, Madam Deputy Speaker—how many pensioners are in this position? [*Crosstalk*] What I do know, Madam Deputy Speaker, to cause retired teachers and public officers to suffer in this manner, it is not only heartless, it is immoral as I said and unconscionable.

I would like the Minister of Education to look into these things, please Sir. Thank you. I need my money.

Dr. Gopeesingh: I promise you I will look into it.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Madam Deputy Speaker, I would just like to talk about—I would not be long—on another amendment which is the Praedial Larceny Prevention Act, Chap. 10:03. The Praedial Larceny Prevention Act is amended by increasing the fines by as much as the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy said, 50 per cent for such offences. This is good. This is good. But my question is, who is going to enforce these laws? We are passing them here, who is going to enforce them? Just like the litter laws where people dump their garbage all over the place, anywhere they feel.

I met a lady in my constituency in Belmont who drove her SUV right in front of a sign that warned against “dumping of garbage is prohibited.” She opened the back of her SUV and took about five bags of garbage and dumped them there. I accosted her and I took her number plate, and I said that I was going to the police. She begged and begged, and I made her take back all the garbage in her car and drove it off. [*Laughter*] But who is going to enforce these—[*Crosstalk*] I am going to enforce these laws then. Who is going to enforce these laws? Just like the litter law, and noise pollution.

In St. Ann’s, Madam Deputy Speaker, I have my constituents weeping and crying for the noise that is emanating from bars, they are blasting music from bars from morning to night, poor people, elderly people and children cannot have a night’s rest. So, who is enforcing the laws? We do not enforce laws in Trinidad and Tobago. Who is being apprehended and charged?

Madam Deputy Speaker, when I first moved to Cascade 15 years ago, we had several incidents of praedial larceny. Individuals would roam the area day and night, stealing fruit and vegetables and other produce from the homes in the area. Of course the residents, we would complain to the police. Nothing ever happened. They never caught anybody. They would take all the mangoes, the avocados, coconuts, whatever they found. Sometimes you would see them, they would approach you on the road to sell back to you your own fruit. Yeah? Yes. That is it.

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But you see, it progressed from there. Then they began stealing articles of clothing that were hung out on the lines. If you had clothing on the lines, and whatever else they could find in the yard of the homes, whether it is a bicycle, car parts, car wheels, car tyres, equipment, et cetera, they would steal anything. And, so, the praedial larceny progressed into petty burglary and now we have minor housebreaking, and it is mushrooming. The residents have complained time and time again to the police, but to the best of my knowledge only one person in the

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St. Ann's area was ever apprehended and then subsequently released because of a lack of evidence.

The situation has now progressed, Madam Deputy Speaker, to the point where the persons who were committing praedial larceny have now graduated to become burglars and are breaking and entering homes currently and are holding up people at knifepoint and at gunpoint. That is what is happening at Cascade and St. Ann's, a wonderful residential area, that is what we are suffering from.

And that is why I stayed back. You know, I find it very difficult to make a sensible contribution at this hour of the morning after being here from ten o'clock in the day, but I stayed back because there are certain things I have to deal with. You understand Member for Arima? [*Mr. Rodger Samuel nods head*]

Thank you. I thank you. And despite all the complaints to the police, these crimes continue unabated. We have had several such incidents in the recent past. Just last week there was an incident in Knights Bridge in Cascade, and the criminals seem to be targeting that area. Christmas Day a family in Knights Bridge, they sat having their Christmas meal, men came in and held them up, pointing guns and knives and robbed them of all that they had. What are we waiting for? No one has been killed yet. Are we waiting for that, for someone to be murdered?

So, we do have a lot of praedial larceny crimes in Cascade and St. Ann's, and a lot of burglaries. But the laws are not being enforced—this is the point—and the detection rate is very low. So, while we are here doing good work, amending laws to increase fines and so, I am not as hopeful as I would like to be. It begins with, as the Minister of National Security likes to call it, the broken window or the broken pane, or something so, syndrome, and it mushrooms into something more serious, and that is what has happened, from praedial larceny now we have breaking and entering at knifepoint and at gunpoint.

Madam Deputy Speaker, you might have asked yourself, well, what are you doing as the MP? But since my assumption of duty as Member of Parliament for the area, I have had seven community meetings, three town meetings and four community meetings, with the police, both from Belmont station and from head office, including the top brass, the Commissioner of Police, the Minister of National Security has attended my meetings, and we have another one planned for this week coming.

The residents of Cascade would like to see the following strategies implemented to address—[*Interruption*—I am talking for my constituents which is what I was elected to do, Sir, Member for Mayaro. I would like to see the

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following strategies implemented to address this problem of crime that is posing a serious threat to the lives of the people in the community. They would like to see a mobile police post set up in Upper Cascade where the crimes are rampant. They would like the Government to install security cameras that can identify height and size of people because their faces would be covered, and if the film is in colour it can reflect the colour and pattern of clothing and footwear. They would like cameras to be installed on the Lady Young where trails leave the hills and descend into Cascade—people come over the Lady Young.

The residents would also like cameras to be installed that could record the number plates of vehicles entering and exiting St. Ann's on the St. Ann's Main Road in front of Queen's Hall. They would also like the army to do a sweep of the hills, because it is felt that a hill sweep could uncover temporary camps, ganja fields and maybe a few stashes of stolen goods, and lead to some perpetrators.

Madam Deputy Speaker, praedial larceny is indeed a crime which mushrooms into more serious crimes against residents. But crime on a whole is a growing concern in our beloved country. We ended 2014 with 403 murders, four murders less than the previous year 2013. In 2013 we had 407 murders, in 2014 we had 403 murders. And I do not understand why the Government is maintaining that serious crime is decreasing. I want them to show me, how is it serious crime decreasing, because we had four murders less?

In 2009 under a PNM administration and under the then Minister of National Security, Martin Joseph, God rest his soul, there was a significant decrease in murder, from 550 in 2008 to 509 in 2009, a decrease of 41 murders. Did any of the Members opposite at that time, did they ever say—41 murders decrease—that crime was decreasing? You see, that is why I do not like politics. That is why I do not like politics, nothing is sincere. Did they ever admit and say and acknowledge that crime was decreasing? They maligned the poor deceased gentleman, the former Minister of National Security. And, this is not a decrease of four murders, this is a decrease of 41 murders.

If, for a decrease of four murders they are saying that crime is decreasing, so, what should they have said for a decrease of 41 murders? Every year thereafter they have decreased. They clamoured instead for the exit of the PNM—with the current Minister, he is not here. That is why I do not like politics. [*Laughter*] The current Minister of Transport, the Member for Chaguanas East, he was at the helm with his Keith Noel 136 Committee. Where is he now that we have 403 murders? Where is his 403 committee? He was there with the 136 Committee, I

cannot hear a peep from him on the crime situation. We never heard a peep from him, since they came in, on the crime situation.

And to make matters worse, we had two kidnappings—do you all know that?—in 2014, and the year before, 2013, there were no kidnappings, an increase of two kidnappings and they say that serious crime is going down. They cannot fool me! [*Desk thumping and laughter*] Under the PNM administration—that is why I stayed back. I stayed back because I had to deal with these. Under the PNM administration there was a very significant drop in kidnappings, from 155 in 2007 to 11 in 2008 and six in 2009. No one in this UNC Government applauded that very significant drop in kidnappings under the People’s National Movement. No one. They maligned Martin Joseph, the poor deceased gentleman, and the PNM, and they continued to clamour for the PNM to demit office, citing crime as one of the reasons.

What do you think we should call for you all to do now? That is why I do not like politics. This is not good. It is not a good thing. [*Laughter*] And what are they saying now, that this year with the kidnappings having increased by two, since we had absolutely no kidnappings last year? They are still maintaining that serious crime is decreasing. I say again, who do they think they are fooling? They are simply playing a numbers game, and they are certainly not fooling the intelligent citizenry of this country who are now clamouring for their hasty exit from the corridors of power so that our beloved country could be delivered from such poor governance.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Ministry of National Security has now introduced the Community Comfort Patrol. They are not armed or anything, they drive around and they look. Well, you know, we are grateful for anything, so I do not want to bad talk any initiative. You know, I am not like them. I am not like them. It is a good thing. We are grateful. But this is only a plaster to a sore, and the hon. Minister of National Security is a very cooperative man, very enthusiastic, very energetic, very busy and very dedicated. But, unless we first deal with the underlying causes of crime—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West has expired. Member, do you require additional time?

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, the question is that the speaking time of the hon. Member for Port of Spain North/St Ann’s West be extended by 15 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, you may continue.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. But unless we first deal with the underlying causes of crime, you know, issues such as whittling down the drug trade, white-collar crime, the protracted dispensation of justice in both the lower and upper courts; and some serious flaws, not everything bad—some serious flaws in the education system, the hon. Minister of National Security will be spinning top in mud and our lives will continue to be threatened.

I want to talk about a flaw I noticed in the education system. Madam Deputy Speaker, approximately 18,000 children—I stand to be corrected, the Minister is there, I think I have my figures right—who sit SEA examination every year, but only approximately 12,000 of them write the CXC. What I want to know, how does the hon. Minister of Education account for that fallout, that difference of 6,000 children who passed through the secondary school system like a dose of salts every year without any particular form of certification? How do we account for them? What are they doing? They are out there. Are they involved in a life of crime?

You know, the Minister and the Government like to boast about the high standards of education they have achieved, and they boast about things like the scholarships, but what they have done, they have lowered the bar for the attainment of a national scholarship and so they have increased the number of scholarships awarded—which is good—and they have brought all the technical institutes under the GATE Programme, thereby increasing on paper the number of students accessing GATE, so they have reached to this glorious 65 per cent tertiary education. And, you know what these are? They are no more than academic and cosmetic arrangements, and they look good.

You know, this Government has deliberately shied away from acknowledging the fact that students attending these technical institutes have always been beneficiaries of free education in these technical institutes under a PNM administration, and having once graduated from technical institute—because I know some of them—they have qualified for matriculation at university level. Had the PNM counted all of them and included them in the GATE Programme, we would have reached the 65 per cent ourselves, but we did not do that. I am not saying it is a bad move, but you must not make it look as though you have done so much to account for this magnificent increase over the last two years. You

have surpassed First World status, and we are not a First World country, not with the crime and all the allegations of corruption, and all the things that are going on in this country. It is very disingenuous of you all to engage such strategies to make things look better than they are.

But, what I am concerned about, Madam Deputy Speaker, I am concerned about the 6,000 children unaccounted for almost every year, who passed out of secondary school without writing the CXC examination. That is what I am concerned about. And, this UNC Government must account for all the young people who fall through the cracks. What about those who never pursue technical and tertiary education, who, therefore, are not privileged to belong to that 65 per cent group that the Government is bragging about? Where are they now? Are they pursuing a trade? Have they become young entrepreneurs? Where are these students? Can the Government account for them? What are they doing? Have they fallen through the cracks of the educational system into a world of crack cocaine and crime? Has that happened to them? Does this Government really care about these unfortunate lost souls?

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to respectfully recommend to the hon. Minister that he encourages schools to monitor and track their past pupils. I used to do that. I used to do that in schools. Every year we would get a database of all the pupils and we would fill in where all of them have gone. We knew where all of them had gone.

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And in that way you will determine where the students are and what they are pursuing. And when we saw students were falling out, this one did not go to UWI, did not go to UTT, did not go to SAM, did not go to SBCS, did not go to Caribbean Union College, did not go to wherever, and what are you doing? We will call them sometimes; most of the times we will call them, “What are you doing? Are you employed?” “Yes, Miss, I have a little job here. What you plan to do? We will find out what they are doing with their lives, and if we can help any of them who is in a bad way, we would help them.

So what the Ministry could do, is from schools collate this information and try to keep a hand on what the young people are doing, because those are the ones, the ones who do not succeed, the ones who fall through the cracks, those are the ones that turn to crack. Those are the ones that we have to be afraid of. When I say, afraid for their future, afraid for their lives—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Browne: Concerned about.

Mrs. P. Mc Intosh: Concerned about, thank you, Sir, concerned about, thank you colleague. Concerned about. So, it is a very simple thing for a school to track every year and monitor their students, and give that information to the Ministry of Education because something has to be done. We have to try all strategies to fight this crime.

I would just like to look at the finance committee meeting on Wednesday, and I would just like to look at a statement of transfer for 2013, page 18, where under Head 26, Sub Item 16, Contract Employment, I see, Madam Deputy Speaker, that there was a saving of \$494,600 which was used for a very good thing, a project on literacy. And the reason for saving the Ministry said, the Ministry continued and I quote:

To experience challenges in recruiting qualified staff and as a result several contract positions were not filled in fiscal 2013.

So you had \$494,600 saving.

Madam Deputy Speaker, let me tell you, the Ministry of Education will continue year after year to allocate moneys for contract positions and will year after year be unsuccessful in recruiting the requisite qualified staff in specialist areas, such as Early Childhood Care and Education and special education. And why is this? Because all of these specialists positions are contract positions that offer neither security of tenure nor pension benefits. They talk to me, they come to me, and the potential candidates who wish to work in these specialist areas are desirous of permanent positions in which they would be entitled to benefits such as a pension. That challenge which was recorded in 2013 persists to date.

In my contribution to the budget for fiscal 2015, I had pointed out this issue to the hon. Minister of Education, particularly in respect of those primary school teachers who had pursued degrees from UTT in Early Childhood Care and Education and special education and who were required to resign their permanent positions. How can you ask somebody to resign their permanent positions; surrender their pension and all their benefits in order to take up a contract position with the Ministry of Education, should they wish to work in these specialist areas which are critical areas of service to our nation's children?

But who is going to do that? Who is going to give up their permanent employment and prospects of a pension in exchange for a contract position that does not offer security of tenure? They last for a period of—you sign up for a period of three years. You cannot even go to a bank for a loan with that. You

cannot get a mortgage. They come to me and tell me, they cry, why would they not regularize them and make permanent positions? I should like to respectfully recommend to the hon. Minister that permanent positions of special education teacher for each school be created as recommended by the Misky Whik Report.

Two, permanent positions of Early Childhood Care and Education be also created so as to allow for security of tenure for these qualified specialists, and this would also help to ensure the stability and foundation of our education system. Then and only then will the hon. Minister find that the challenges that his Ministry has been facing in respect of recruiting qualified specialist personnel will be overcome in the best interest of the children of Trinidad and Tobago, in particular, and the country in general.

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

Madam Deputy Speaker: Member for Chaguanas East.

The Minister of Education (Hon. Dr. Tim Gopeesingh): Madam Deputy Speaker, it is Caroni East.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Caroni. I am so sorry.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Madam Deputy Speaker, it is now 14 hours and 49 minutes or 50 minutes since this Parliament has been in session, and wanting to respond to the speakers this afternoon, and particularly, the last speaker from Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West on a number of matters in the education will take me an entire session, but let me just touch on a few of the issues.

The last point about the recruitment of teachers for Early Childhood Care and Education, to make them permanent positions will have to necessitate a review of the Education Act, because the Education Act does not incorporate secondary schools—it incorporates secondary schools and primary schools but not ECCE and this is something that we are looking at to bring within the Education Act for the change of regulations to incorporate ECCE. So we will, most likely, have the ECCE teachers permanent. But you know, as well as I know, that the Minister of Education has all the responsibility for education but absolutely no authority—no authority. I cannot appoint a teacher, I cannot transfer a teacher, I cannot promote a teacher, nor can I discipline a teacher. So I have 16,000 teachers which I have to be responsible for but I have no authority over them as Minister of Education.

So that has to be corrected in our next term of office when the people of Trinidad and Tobago realize that we need a second term to continue the good work that we have been doing under the stewardship of the hon. Prime Minister. [*Desk thumping*] So that—we have done a lot.

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There is another point you touched on as far as scholarships. No bar has been lowered as far as scholarships are concerned. The children are becoming brighter, the students are becoming better. As I said, what separated the first 3,000 places for the SEA was about six or seven marks in this examination gone. Ninety-four per cent of the students writing the CAPE pass Grades I to V. So we have more and more students doing better and better, and seven out of the 10 Caribbean scholarships given by CXC were won by Trinidadians and Tobagonians last year. Three out of 10 of the scholarships by CSEC were obtained by Trinidadians and Tobagonians.

This year, in 2014, it has been the best academic performance ever in the history of Trinidad and Tobago's education system. It has surpassed everywhere, and whereas previously only about 55 per cent of the students passing the SEA, getting more than 50 per cent, this year we had 75 per cent of our students, three out of four students getting more than 50 per cent. Two out of three students got more than 60 per cent and whereas previously 14 per cent of the students were getting less than 30 per cent—so 14 per cent of 17,500 is about 2,500. So previously where 2,500 of the 17,500 students writing SEA getting less than 30 per cent, this year we had less than 6 per cent of those students getting less than 30 per cent. Still too much, but we have moved by leaps and bounds as far as that is concerned.

Then you spoke about the CSEC examinations. This year as well, more and more students passed five subjects or more in the SEA and got more subject passes in CSEC, including CVQ Level 1. A lot of students are now mainstreaming, not necessarily in the academic but they are going to CVQ Level 1. So approximately 17,500 students in the past came to CSEC, came into secondary schools, and approximately 12,000 students wrote five subjects and more. The other students are not dropouts but they did not write five subjects. Some wrote four subjects and three subjects. That is because of the weakness emanating from the primary education into the secondary education which we have now corrected over the last four and a half years. So more and more students are doing more than five subjects now, more and more students are getting more than five subjects passes and more and more students are getting more than five subject passes including Maths and English.

In fact, we do not have enough spaces for students wanting to go into the CAPE classes because so many more students are doing better and better. And so, we are making the move now not only from primary to secondary, but we are

making the move from early childhood to primary. And it is my pride and honour to say in this House that Trinidad and Tobago has reached now universal early childhood education. Every child in this country, age three and four, [*Desk thumping*] age three and four has a guaranteed place in an Early Childhood Education Centre in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Every child?

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Every child has a guaranteed place, meaning, we have 210 Early Childhood Education Centres; about 70 are run by Servol and the rest are run by the Government and government assisted. We take care of 10,000 children there. They are in school. There are another 53 schools we built recently and each school takes 70 students, that is another 3,500; that is 13,500 students.

In the private sector, 200 of these Early Childhood Care and Education have partnered with us and they take care of another 10,000 students, and we are paying for 7,000 of those already. We paid for 7,000 last term and this term we are paying, we are looking to see whether they have increased. There are another 300 private Early Childhood Education Centres which have not partnered with us yet, but they are providing education for three-year and four-year children from parents who are still deciding to continue to pay for their children. But the State, we have told and we have advertised nationally that we are prepared to pay— Cabinet passed a Note to pay for all 36,000 children if their parents cannot afford and they want us to pay, 36,000 children, the Minister of Finance and the Economy and Cabinet approved \$110 million in this year's budget to pay for these students ages three and four to be in the Early Childhood Education Centres. Only 7,000 have taken it up already. We are providing it for 10,000 places already and another 3,000. That is, 17, 13 and 7, 20,000 and the others are taken care of by the private sector.

So we are improving early childhood education. We have now universal early childhood education, we have universal primary education, universal secondary education, we have universal tertiary education, up to the undergraduate level with a bachelor's degree and we are paying for 50 per cent from the Masters and PhD level. And those who get first class honours at the undergraduate level, are afforded a full scholarship for the Masters and the PhD.

So at this time, Trinidad and Tobago is a leader in education in the world. I am sure you being an educator for 33 years, I am sure you are proud of the work that you have done, your colleagues have done, that we continue to do. The hon. Prime Minister was Minister of Education, she had the baton of relay in

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education. Then the PNM administration came in and two of your colleagues had the baton. We have taken on the baton and we are carrying Trinidad and Tobago to world heights now as leaders in education. Whether it is ICT; whether it is universal early childhood education; whether it is special needs; whether it is improved academic performance; whether it is improvement in literacy and numeracy; whether it is the training and the retraining of teachers, thousands of teachers, in pedagogical skills, ADR, mediation, language arts, mathematics, science, all these things Trinidad and Tobago stands in front and as a leader in education, not in Latin America and the Caribbean alone but on the world stage. We have been recognized for our work in education.

Now, you spoke about the GATE issue. Previously, the PNM administration said that they were—they questioned what we are doing about the GATE. During the 2010 election run-up, you said that we were going to close down GATE. The UNC coming in, the People's Partnership coming in, they will close GATE. We said, no. We are going to expand GATE and we are going to expand GATE to the technical/vocational education sector. So I am disappointed to hear you say that—you were questioning whether we are giving GATE assistance to students in technical education.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: No, no no.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: This is where we need the students to be if they cannot mainstream in the main academic performance. So are you begrudging the students who are—

Mrs. Mc Intosh: I never said that.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Are you begrudging the students who are within the GATE Programme? You said that we were going to close it down. We told you that we are not closing it down; we are going to expand it. We have expanded it. More and more students are coming into the technical vocational area. Minister Fazal Karim has done a tremendous job in technical vocational education in Trinidad and Tobago with skills training, and this is why we have moved Trinidad in the tertiary education sector from a 42 per cent participation to 65 per cent participation in the tertiary education sector—unparalleled, never before in the history of Trinidad and Tobago and we have reached First World status as far as that is concerned. And the world is going with tech/voc education and we are in sync with that.

Madam Deputy Speaker, there are other issues which the Member raised as far as education is concerned about the pensions. This is a matter—the Minister of

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Finance and the Economy has already set up a team of individuals to look at the whole question of pension reform. And that pension reform, many developed communities around the world are 20 years behind time in terms of a national pension reform for countries. Our Minister of Finance and the Economy has done a tremendous job to take us where we are in the economic situation and has done admirable work to maintain Trinidad and Tobago as a stable economy and a growing economy. He is ensuring that the whole question of reform and pension reform is brought to the forefront as quickly as possible.

Let me just remind this House, that previously, under the PNM administration you all raised pension in a five-year period by \$90 during a five-year period. Ninety dollars you all increased pension by in a five-year period. I have the institutional memory of it. It is the UNC administration and this People's Partnership administration that have moved pension to \$2,000 for a pensioner, to \$3,000 and now to \$3,500. And so the pensioners, whatever they are getting now, \$3,500, it is because our successive administrations have had the hearts of the senior citizens in mind and have raised their pension. National Insurance as well has moved from \$2,000 to \$3,000 as well. And it is the Minister of Finance and the Economy who has, our administration, has moved pensions for senior citizens, who have retired on two occasions. No PNM administration for 43 years did absolutely anything for public servants who are retired or senior citizens. [*Crosstalk*]

Well whether you did, it is on two occasions we moved the amount of money that they are receiving, we took it to \$3,000, now it is \$3,500 for approximately 40,000 public servants who are retired at this stage. So we are taking care of 90,000 plus senior citizens. We are taking care of another 50,000 with degrees of disability. We are taking care of another 40,000 who are retired public servants and in that way a net of over 200,000 people we are caring for.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

So when the Prime Minister said in her speech last night, this is a Government that is putting people first and the country first, and what she has in fact ensured during our four and a half years term is that the people—she has always made sure that she looks after the people first. Whether it is increase in pension, and most of these things on this Bill here tonight are in consonance with looking after the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and for the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. And so when the Prime Minister said, put people first, put the country first, she said that last night; she maintains that all of the time and we will continue to do that.

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So do you want us to stop the senior citizens grant? Do you want us to stop the pensions that we are increasing from \$3,000 to \$3,500? Do you want us to stop the increase for the retired public servants from \$3,000 to \$3,500? That is what the Prime Minister is speaking about. To put the people first and to ensure that what is required for the people we continue to give to them. So this is not a time for sudden changes in the direction of economic development for Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Speaker. This is not a time for this and this is not a time for creating panic in the population.

Here it is we had the Member for Diego Martin North/East coming to give serious misinformation on the energy sector and went as an authority on that for a long while, misleading and misleading the House until the hon. Senator, the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, had to come and correct some misdirect, misinformation for the Member for Diego Martin North/East. Suddenly he has become an authority on energy and he is trying to showcase himself with the Leader of the Opposition that he knows a lot about energy and so on, but he knows a lot about energy now by doing some little programme. He knew a lot about work when he was there in the Ministry of Works. And that was when the wall fell down and the stadium in Grenada blew away and so on—so all those things.

So when the Member for Diego Martin North/East speaks about anything in the energy sector he ought not to be believed because he brings misinformation to the Parliament which was corrected by the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs here today. The Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs had to come from where he was, to come and correct the misinformation that the Member for Diego Martin North/East was misleading the House and misleading the House deliberately. Then there are consequences of that, of course.

Miss Mc Donald: No, Mr. Speaker, 48(6). Certainly my colleague was not misleading this House deliberately.

Hon. Member: Deliberately.

Miss Mc Donald: No, not deliberately. No, no, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: No, I am saying that I sustain the point that the Member for Port of Spain South raised. Okay?

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: I will move on, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Diego Martin West obviously had somebody do some research for him in his office as Leader of the Opposition and he brought his documents researching the

areas of increase in expenditure this year from a previous year. And obviously he had his document. He showed where we have increased areas of—in the budget there is an increase in expenditure for different areas: telephones, electricity, seminars, conferences and so on. And he wanted to know whether we were stopping the \$10 million per year for each one of the 41 constituencies coming up to \$410 million. Then he began to look at different areas of whether we are stopping it and the Prime Minister must tell the country whether we are stopping it or what we are doing about it. But the Prime Minister was emphatic last night. The Prime Minister said to the country, here we are, this is the price of oil, this is the price of gas.

It is predicted that the price of gas and oil will fall and this is what we are pegging the price of gas to be at \$2.25 for MMBtu, and for oil at \$45 per barrel. As a result, with the decline in the prices, we estimate that would be about \$7.5 billion in decline in revenues over the period of time in this fiscal year. So how are we managing that \$7.5 billion? Are we going to say we are reducing electricity, we reducing telephone? As my colleague, Member for Chaguanas East, indicated, each Ministry and each Minister and each Permanent Secretary has the ability for themselves to look and have a deep introspection in their budgetary allocation and see where they can focus on a reduction in expenditure.

The Prime Minister said, we are asking all Ministries to reduce their expenditure by 15 per cent on non-critical areas on goods and services. So 15 per cent reduction comes up to about \$4.5 billion. [*Crosstalk*] I do not have time to answer that question.

Mr. Speaker: No, no, no, the Member is on his legs and do not be asking the Member questions whilst he is speaking. You had your chance to speak. Please.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: You spoke—\$4.5 billion there. Then the Prime Minister indicated that from the sale of some shares in an energy sector we might generate \$1.5 billion. That price is subject to little variation because you cannot tell the price, because the Securities and Exchange Commission, as mentioned by the Minister of Finance and the Economy, you have to seek their permission first. Then she also mentioned that because of the drop of the price of oil below \$50 our—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Sharma: Subsidies.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: —our subsidies will be reduced. And our subsidies will be reduced by another \$1.4 billion. So 4.5, 1.4, that is 5.9, and another 1.5, that is 7.4. So here it is the price pegged at \$45 per barrel of oil, \$2.25 for MMBtu,

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a decrease in budgetary revenue by \$7.4 billion. This is how we are going to match the deficit with these three things. It is quite clear for anyone to see. The Prime Minister does not have to go into detail in every one of the 30 Ministries of Trinidad and Tobago in a national speech. The Prime Minister spoke for 13 minutes and gave the salient facts that are important for consideration for the national community.

And so she spoke about the FCB offering, she spoke about revenues generated by the public offering programme and this is the first ever listing that we will ever have for citizens of Trinidad and Tobago to have a share of the energy sector by any national. This is the first time ever in the history of Trinidad and Tobago we are looking forward to that. Also in 2014, there was a budget deficit that we had predicated of \$6.3 billion. The budget deficit turned up to be \$2.6 billion, \$3.7 billion less or 55 per cent less in the expenditure for 2014.

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 44(8), I would like to get two minutes to be heard to correct parts of my speech that were misrepresented by the Member; 44(8).

Mr. Speaker: You made your point, you do not have to engage any longer. I hear you. At the end of the speech you will have a minute and a half to two. Continue, hon. Member.

May I just say before you continue? Members, may I just advise that a lot of Members have been making reference to the Prime Minister's statement. The Bill that is before this House has nothing to do with the Prime Minister's statement. The Minister of Finance and the Economy made reference in passing. I have allowed a lot of liberty this evening. I am not allowing any further intervention on the Prime Minister's statement. We will stick to this Bill. I am going to invoke the Standing Orders. If Members are irrelevant I shall warn them three times, thereafter you resume your seat and I shall go to the next speaker.

So I am warning the Member for Caroni East, if Members want to bring a Motion on the Prime Minister's statement let them file a Motion. But we cannot take up precious parliamentary time dealing with a Bill that has several provisions. The only Member who has been relevant tonight and this morning is the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West.

Miss Mc Intosh: Thank you, thank you. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker: Everybody else all over the place. So I am giving ample notice, that it is now 1.15 a.m., there are seven more speakers to go—three on the Opposition Bench, three on the Government Bench, plus the Minister of Finance

and the Economy to wind up, and I am not allowing any Member to continue to waste precious parliamentary time. Hon. Member for Caroni East, Minister of Education, tighten up for me, please, tighten up. Continue, please.

1.15 a.m.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Mr. Speaker, I have to respond to the assertions and the statements made on the other side and I am doing so at the moment. I am responding to the statements made by the Member for Diego Martin West, the Member for Diego Martin North/East and the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, and I was referring to the point that the Member for Diego Martin West was asking: what is it that we are doing in terms of the expenditure from a national perspective in the budget? And I had to respond to it. This is the Parliament and once a speaker speaks on the other side on a particular issue, it is incumbent upon the other side to respond on it. And you will forgive me if I seek to respond to statements made on the other side. We have to correct, and sometimes if we have to agree, we have to agree.

So I was making the statement of the cost-cutting measures that we are taking on this side in reference to the questions asked by the Member for Diego Martin West about what are we doing about the \$411 million and the money for increased electricity and for telephone. We are definitely moving by cutting 15 per cent of the expenditure on non-critical goods and services in selected Ministries. We are also halting infrastructure projects for which funding has not been provided. We are also reviewing the PSIP and the recurrent expenditure for further savings. We are also ensuring that we continue to monitor and evaluate, from time to time, the relationship of the oil pricing and the gas pricing versus our revenue which we will be getting, and our expenditure.

We are also ensuring that we continue to diversify our economy so that we can pay the money that is available, that the Minister of Finance and the Economy has indicated in this Bill, that we have to pay for a number of areas in terms of the tax adjustments that are being made and the tax adjustments in a number of areas, Mr. Speaker, that the Minister of Finance and the Economy indicated on the Bill. So to get the money to pay for these different tax measures and the increase in the \$500 for the pensions and the tax incentives and so on, and the housing allowance grant, and so on, where he spoke about the agriculture housing allowance, tax incentives and gains and profits for residential housing, environmental protection with the CNG vehicles, road usage measures, all of which are in different clauses of the Bill, we, as a responsible Government, are taking measures to ensure that

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our funding and our revenues which we are doing now, will match the amount of money that we have to put out from paying more on these pensions at various levels.

So we are also ensuring that the social sector has some sustained social stability and we are ensuring that we maintain a quality of life for all citizens, with the senior citizens grants, senior citizens pensions. Support care for new mothers will be maintained and in a number of areas the quality of life of our people will continue to be improved as we move on.

So this Finance Bill which incorporates a lot of measures for assisting people—

Mr. Speaker: The speaking time of the hon. Member for Caroni East, Minister of Education, has expired. Would you like an extension, hon. Member?

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the question is that the speaking time of the hon. Member for Caroni east and Minister of Education be extended by 15 minutes.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you may continue.

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Mr. Speaker, so all the measures that the Minister of Finance and the Economy has mentioned in this Finance Bill, which come into effect from the beginning of this year, and some would have come into effect which we are seeking to have retroactive from October, all is in keeping with the development of the individual and the furtherance of the improved quality of life of our citizens. This is why we believe strongly that we have the capacity and the capability in this country, under the stewardship of our hon. Prime Minister, to carry this Government and ensuring that we continue to look after every citizen and for the continued development of our society. We are not going to be providing any one-stop measure and saying we stop here and we are doing this. It is a continuation of monitoring, evaluating as we move along so that decisions can be made from time to time, based on what is happening in the national economy.

We are well poised, Mr. Speaker, to implement all the programmes and policies spoken about by the Minister of Finance and the Economy in the Finance Bill, and we stand with a certain amount of strength and determination, under the strong leadership and guidance, to carry us forward and to carry this country

forward, not only throughout this year but in the future five years to come and even beyond.

Mr. Speaker, it is incumbent for me to say that this Government can manage this economy whatever is put onto us because in 2010, when the world was reeling under the recession from what was happening in the United States, our two Ministers of Finance and the Economy, under the leadership of our Prime Minister—first Minister Dookeran and next, Mr. Howai—were able to carry us through a difficult period where we had to spend more than \$20 billion to the CL/HCU fiasco—over \$2 billion in paying contractors—\$22 billion just in that little issue alone—and carry us to a stage where the world was reeling under the economic problems, and Trinidad and Tobago had to move very slowly and carefully to come out and to ensure that we maintained growth.

We did maintain a certain amount of growth, increase in the GDP and our savings increased so that we can now pay for these pensions and the senior citizens grants. We now have close to TT \$110 billion in foreign reserves and the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. The Heritage and Stabilisation Fund has increased by over US \$2 billion under our watch, now close to \$5 billion, with a US \$2 billion increase in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund.

Import cover has moved from about 10.4 months to 12.5 months of import cover. So because of all of these improvements in our financial situation, we now can do the things which the Minister of Finance and the Economy is seeking in this Bill to accomplish here tonight to pass this Bill. That is the confidence that we have in ourselves, and we have the confidence in what we, as a Government, can do.

Mr. Speaker, you know, if a paedophile is seen going into a savannah or a playing field with kids, an alarm has to be sent and the person has to be prevented from moving there. Similarly, it is our duty to sound the alarm that we cannot afford for any PNM administration to come in to run this country to bring about the effects of what we are trying to do in this Finance Bill. Because in the late 1970s there was an oil boom and in 1981 to '86 when the PNM came into power, the Treasury became empty. That is why the people voted them out, and they voted them out 33/3 because they emptied the Treasury after an oil boom.

In 1986 to 1991, the NAR government had absolutely little money to run the country and they had to cut COLA and salaries by 10 per cent, and because of that the people became annoyed with the NAR and they voted back the PNM in 1991—1995. Obviously, you all did not satisfy the population because they had no

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confidence in you all and they voted you all back out again, and it was a UNC administration that took over between 1995 and 2001, and 2001 to 2002 was an 18/18 tie.

So every time there is an oil boom, your administration goes to town and spends the money and empties the Treasury and leaves the succeeding government to have difficulty in managing the economy.

Hon. Member: “Borrow and doh pay.”

Hon. Dr. T. Gopeesingh: Yes, they borrow and “doh” pay. Therefore, just like a paedophile, moving into a savannah with kids, you have to sound the alarm of a PNM administration wanting to get back into government. And when we say that we are the best Government at this time to run the economy of Trinidad and Tobago, undoubtedly we are the best and the people recognize that and they have the confidence that we would be able to take this economy forward despite the fact that the price of oil and gas is now becoming less and less.

We have the ability to do that. We have the ability to run a government with the price of oil, whether \$9 or \$10 a barrel. The price of oil now is \$46 or \$48. We have the ability to put the savings into place to grow the economy to withstand the difficulties that are now emanating, and we still have the ability to pursue the increase in pensions and to pursue the increase in disability grants and everything, for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

So, Mr. Speaker, I will close by saying, we have decided to continue improvements in our health care alongside our improvements in pensions. We continue to intensify our efforts to make the nation safer. We continue our commitment to critical infrastructure projects, including schools and hospitals. We continue to ensure that we sustain jobs, prevent unemployment because unemployment now is about 3.6 per cent. We continue to ensure that we continue the strong economic diversification in the manufacturing sector and in the financial sector, and we continue to ensure that our revenues from the non-energy sector continue to grow, and we continue on our social programmes of health and education.

Education and health are two fundamental pillars of any civilized and major democratic society. Therefore, the Prime Minister and we, under the stewardship of the Prime Minister, are ensuring that the expenditure on these areas are not withdrawn and that we continue to provide for citizens on the pensions and the disabilities grants and a number of tax incentives that are incorporated in this Finance Bill here tonight.

So, at this stage, we are not creating any alarm for the nation. We are going ahead with caution in the way that the Minister of Finance and the Economy sees how to manage our economy. He comes with tremendous ability and competence, tremendous knowledge. We have a Government and a Cabinet of individuals who are extremely bright, who assist our Prime Minister in ensuring that we take the leadership from her, and we are governed by a distinguished Prime Minister who is extremely brilliant. I could scarcely see any parallel to her brilliance as a politician and as an academic as well.

1.30 a.m.

We on this side, Mr. Speaker—when Minister Moonilal and myself were on the opposite side of Parliament in the previous administration we looked from the Opposition and we looked at the Government, at that time Dr. Moonilal and myself, and I think Vasant and a few of us, five or six of us said, “You know, look at the side who are running this country at the moment and look at what they are doing to this country. You know, five or six of us here could manage and do better than all of them are doing on the other side.” And, Mr. Speaker, there is no question.

We are extremely competent if I might say so myself, for all of us, all my colleagues. We are led by a distinguished personality. We have taken the economy to new heights, we are maintaining a stable financial situation, we are putting people and the country first and we are making sure that we do the right things for the people all the time. This is the time for us to continue with calmness and with confidence, and we give the country the assurance that under the distinguished leadership of our hon. Prime Minister, we will continue to shape and carry this country forward in a very positive direction for the benefit of all.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Mr. Speaker, for the record I would like to say that I never said, never intended, never hinted, never intimated that I did not want the senior citizens or persons with disability not to get their grants. I never said that. My contribution around that was—I expressed my concern about the pensions of retired teachers and public servants and I expressed the need for public sector pension reform. That was what I was talking about. So I do not know why the hon. Member told me, “and you do not want them to get”—why do they say these things. The second thing—they must not do these things. [*Interruption*] No, but it is wrong. It is wrong.

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The second thing, I never said I did not want tech/voc students to be included in the GATE programme. I never said that. I said by incorporating the tech/voc students under the GATE programme, the numbers accessing tertiary education necessarily increased. Why must they say these things? It is wrong.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for La Brea.

Mr. Fitzgerald Jeffrey (*La Brea*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With this Bill, the Finance Bill, there are 21 Acts to be amended in some form or the other, and I think the question before us—we have to look in terms of one, the revenue earning capacity of some of those Acts and, two, the whole question of the expenditure that will be incurred because somehow or the other to have funding to meet those expenditure and so on. But all of that will come to naught if we do not take into consideration a very serious situation in this country at this point in time.

The Members for Diego Martin North/East, Diego Martin Central and Diego Martin West dealt with the economic situation, but there is a crime situation which some people have mentioned in spurts and I want us to look at this very carefully. Let me just make a little quotation here:

“The US Department of State has said that crime in Trinidad and Tobago has deteriorated to a ‘critical level’ in its latest T&T 2014 Crime and Safety Report released earlier this month...”

And that was released by diplomats and expats. But hear the chilling thing, Mr. Speaker, because we heard about 2013 was 407 and 2014 is 403 or whatever it is.

“It is said that many crimes go unreported, and added that there are instances in which crimes are reported but not documented. Most reported crimes occur within the metropolitan areas of Port of Spain and San Fernando...”

Now the cause “for a low conviction rate can range from shortage of investigative officers, pressure from politicians and corruption to a slow judicial system.”

Mr. Speaker, that should tell us it is a very serious situation that we have to deal with because we all know that the Downtown Owners and Merchants Association has also mentioned that until and unless the failure to make arrest is recognized as the central cause of this gruesome state of affairs, attempts to reduce crime such as the reintroduction of hanging as expressed by the Prime Minister will not be fruitful. What is the whole scenario in terms of this set of quotations I made mention of? You see, if we want to have our citizens enjoy their pension, if we want to see it that in terms of the Income Tax Act, the Value Added Tax, United Trust Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago Act, et cetera, we

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have to make sure that the environment is right.

We look at an article in the *Newsday*, March 16, 2014. We are told that:

“Unless we can stem the flow of guns out of Venezuela to the rest of the Caribbean, it will be very difficult to slow down the spate of murders.

The Report finds that, ‘in Trinidad there are two routes that weapons come through’. It states: ‘One is the guns from Venezuela; and the other is through appliances out of the...’—United States of America.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we all know the number of murders we have been having in 2015—it start already—and the problem is, guns are the root cause of this thing and we need to find ways in which we could handle the situation because we could have oil price up and so on. The way things are going in this country it is frightening. Life will indeed become very uncomfortable.

Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister had mentioned that there was no criminal element in LifeSport, but the Minister of National Security said he was targeting the criminal elements in LifeSport. I do not know what that means. I do not understand that. But, you see, there is a very nice article from Mark Bassant, CCN journalist, and he had a fella whose name he did not publish, but he called him Jim John, who claimed he cashed close to \$2 million in cheques from the LifeSport programme and he had never worked a day. [*Interruption*] I will come to it just now. You hurry?

Mr. Speaker, the then Minister of Sport in trying to clarify the situation said that the cheque on which Bassant based his article was not a LifeSport cheque. It was a cheque issued from the Ministry of Sport. What does that tell us? We are in serious trouble, and the 20 most homicidal countries in the world—and I want us to listen carefully because this is serious business. For 2011, Trinidad and Tobago was ranked 13th as the most homicidal country in the world. PNM not in power, eh. In 2012 we went down to 12th. In 2013 we came 10th. If that is something for us to rejoice, I do not know. Things are getting worse because no measures are being put in place to stem the spate of guns coming into this country, whether it be through the back door or coming through the port. Nothing! They do not want any OPVs, they do not want that and so on—Right?—but what is being put in place to deal with that situation? We are in a total mess in this country and this whole question about things going nice and how much things they do and so on, it really does not make sense because we are in a total, total chaos in this country.

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So on the one hand, we have the economic scenario in which we have falling oil and gas prices, we have high expenditure and so on, and therefore, we have a little problem, a little economic situation, and then when it comes down now that your own house you cannot live in peace, you cannot walk the streets and so on in peace, that is cause for us to be very worried. You see, Mr. Speaker, there is a study done on guns and crime in Trinidad and Tobago and we were warned as far back as 2000 that the vast increase in use of guns started in Jamaica in 1974 and Trinidad and Tobago in the year 2000. I do not know who was in power in 2000.

Mr. Speaker, we need to come to grips and recognize that we have a fundamental responsibility to stop playing politics with the lives of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. The expenditure that was being advocated—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Brendon Daniel.

Hon. Member: Who is that?

Mr. F. Jeffrey: What about Adolphus Daniell? [*Laughter and desk thumping*] Thirty-four million dollars for doing nothing. Thirty-four million dollars—\$36 million for doing nothing. That is what you should remember.

1.45 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, it is also extremely important that in the highway to Point Fortin, I want to go on record as saying that the people in La Brea and Point Fortin and Fyzabad, et cetera, we are in support of the Point Fortin Highway. That is not in issue at all. [*Desk thumping*] We are not in issue to that. [*Crosstalk*] However, what is of tremendous importance to us is that we would like to see a detailed breakdown of the expenditure of the highway to Point Fortin in terms of who are the beneficiaries, give us their address, the amount paid and the reason for the payment. That \$7.5 billion they are talking about for the highway, I could tell you, when the sun sets, it will be about—of the vicinity of around \$10 billion, because, Mr. Speaker, when we look at what is happening down in that Vance River/Point Fortin area, nothing going on. “Nothing ent going on at all” and we know that we have serious problems.

And while, Mr. Speaker, we are talking in terms of building the highway and we see the nice billboards on the highway that they said cost \$60,000. I do not know if it is \$60,000 for one, or \$60,000 for all or if it is just \$60,000 for the material. Right.

Dr. Browne: For the photograph.

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Mr. F. Jeffrey: For the photograph? All right, could be. And people smiling. But the people in my La Brea constituency—and I could talk about Point too—*[Crosstalk]* “we eh smiling at all”. Because the condition of our roads—I am talking about the road where the—in that La Brea Point Fortin road: Atlantic LNG, TGU, Petrotrin, TUFCO, Lake Asphalt; they all use that road and the road is in a total mess. “Yuh go Sobo, yuh go La Brea, yuh go Vessigny, yuh go Vance River”, plenty large potholes and so on.

You go on the other end and I think I have made mention of that already. I wrote the Minister of Works and Infrastructure and I asked for the paving of Siparia to Erin Road. *[Crosstalk]* I “ent” talking about La Brea constituency, Siparia to Erin. Do you know what happened? They paved from Siparia and they stopped at Quarry Junction. I find it is a miraculous coincidence that where the La Brea constituency starts, the material finish. *[Laughter]*

Miss Hospedales: Shame on them. Shame, shame!

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Mr. Speaker, so you understand why we cannot smile. So all that big smile with the Prime Minister on billboards all over the place, it getting people angry. And what could happen—and I am glad they take down the billboards because it was a distraction to people. One way or the other, it was a total distraction. *[Crosstalk]* “Wha is yuh problem?”

Hon. Member: Relevance of it.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: No, no, no, it is relevant. It is relevant.

Mr. Speaker, in 2009, the People’s National Movement introduced the Agriculture Rangers Squad to deal with praedial larceny. They had a pilot project covering 215 square miles: Cunupia, Chaguanas, Couva and Montserrat. From 2009 to the end of August 03, 2010, not a single report of praedial larceny was made. But you know what happened? Government changed and so on and they disbanded the Agriculture Rangers Squad. And you know what happened? Eight hundred and eighty-two farmers recorded losses of crops through praedial larceny; 202 livestock farmers also reported losses. So what happened? Well, let me go before that.

We all remember Granville Jessop from Madoo Hill in El Dorado, in October 2011. He had bought some insecticide and some syringes and went to the Tunapuna Police Station indicating that he was going to inject about 2,000 avocados that he had there because he could not take the jamming anymore.

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Mr. Speaker, all of that could have been avoided if we had the squad in place, but, you see, because it was the PNM who started it, that “it ent good”, and it took a lot of protest action for them to reintroduce the—they call it by a next name now, cannot remember the name now. It has a next name for it; a next squad to deal with the praedial larceny. But, Mr. Speaker, this Bill tells us that they are looking at the increases in the fines. That is not going to solve the problem. What you need is more officers—more range officers in the field, they need more equipment, if, in fact, we want to deal with praedial larceny.

Mr. Speaker, I remember that in the 2014 budget, we were told that in setting up the praedial larceny squad, they were going to be able to help reduce the food import Bill, which, as we all know is \$4 billion. I asked the question here tonight: what is the present value of the food import Bill? It is still \$4 billion.

Miss Hospedales: No, more than that.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Well, it could be more than that too, \$4 billion.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I want to state here now, Mr. Speaker, that giving pensioners the \$500 and so on is a drop in the ocean when one recognizes that this Government, in four years, they had over \$380 billion at their disposal. PNM never had, over a four-year period, over \$380 billion to play around with.

Dr. Browne: Never, ever.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Right, and it was not because of your doing. It was because of the oil and gas prices that made it possible for you. Now is the real test for your mettle, and we know that the population has already decided that enough and enough, [*Desk thumping*] and whenever you call the election, you will vacate this place. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. NiLeung Hypolite (*Laventille West*): Thank you kindly, Mr. Speaker. And a pleasant good morning to you, Mr. Speaker, and to all my colleagues. I will not be long since my colleagues would have dealt with a number of these issues, since my colleagues would have also dealt with the state of the economy, since we have been here for the past 16 hours or so.

But, Mr. Speaker, there are some issues that I would like to respond to, some concerns raised by the Member for Chaguanas East. One such issue would have been that of the highway—the highway from San Fernando to Point Fortin of which he would have stood up there and he would have spoken about the highway and the PNM and the PNM and the PNM. I just want to put on the record that it is the People’s National Movement that would have laid the foundation, not only for

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the highway from San Fernando to Point Fortin, but also we would have put in place—and I wish to refer you to the PNM’s manifesto that would have spoken about the highway from San Fernando to Mayaro, the causeway from Cocorite to Chaguaramas, the highway from Mayaro to Toco and the one from Curepe to Princes Town. [*Crosstalk*] Yeah, all right. Maybe you need to check again the PNM’s manifesto.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to that, he would have spoken about the Licensing Office and he would have linked that to the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act and all of those different things. He made mention of the mess that the Licensing Office is in. I wonder who is the Minister responsible for the Licensing Office. [*Desk thumping*] I am wondering if the Minister—[*Crosstalk*] both, because I want to believe that both are linked to the Member for Chaguanas East. Because after four and a half years, the Member would come here once again and all he can say is “the PNM, the PNM, the PNM”. But let me just remind him that he would have been in office for the past four and a half years, and if he really and truly had the people at heart, I am certain that he would have fixed that situation by now.

But, Mr. Speaker, again it was the People’s National Movement—seeing that he loves to speak about the People’s National Movement, let me just remind him that it is the People’s National Movement that would have laid the foundation, once again, to fix the issues at the Licensing Office. [*Desk thumping*] It was the People’s National Movement that would have looked at putting policies in place for the new number plates where persons would have been able to have their own personalized number plates. We looked at new offices. In fact, one of the offices should have been at Mount Hope. And more so, I distinctly remember that the then Minister Kennedy Suratsingh—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Members: Swaratsingh.

Mr. N. Hypolite: Yeah, Swaratsingh—going to Nova Scotia and linking with persons across there to look at the entire computerization of the Licensing Office. So if the Member was really and truly interested in transforming the Licensing Office, he would have picked up on the policies that we would have put in place and just continue with it. But no, he left everything, dumped everything, pushed everything aside and coming here to talk about the Licensing Office is in a mess, and he went to pay \$500 and he borrowed the \$500 from somebody, and he did not say whether or not he paid back the \$500—[*Interruption*] Who? Robocop? Well, he did not say whether or not that took place. But the People’s National Movement would have put the foundation in place for 99.9 per cent of the

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projects and the policies that this Government would have picked up and moved forward with.

2.00 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, unfortunately the Member would have called himself stupid. I do not know why. [*Laughter*] He would have made mention of himself being stupid in relation to the birth certificates and death certificates coming out from the Ministry of Legal Affairs. Again, I just want to remind him, that it was the People's National Movement, and it was Peter Taylor, then Minister of Legal Affairs who would have put the systems in place to start the whole computerization of birth certificates, and that of the other certificates that come out from that particular Ministry.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, I would not be long, but while we look at the state of the economy, and we look at the oil prices—we look at the price of gas, [*Interruption*] and we look at the drop in revenue. When I look at the Bill before us, and I look at page 25 that deals with property tax, again, I ask the question, what really and truly is taking place with that particular issue? It states, and that is 52A:

“Notwithstanding any written law to the contrary, the payment of any tax under this Act shall be waived for the period 1st January, 2010 to 31st December, 2015.”

Mr. Speaker, I distinctly remember that prior to 2010, the Members of the Government would have gone around the entire country talking about “Axe The Tax”, and then in 2010, they would have laid a Bill in this House, all right, to repeal the property tax and go back to the land and building tax. Then, in 2013, the Minister of Finance and the Economy would have spoken about the Industrial land tax, commercial properties tax, agriculture lands and residential properties tax. And they would have indicated that this new tax system, would have kicked in, in 2014 and by 2017, the whole tax system would have been reformed, and once again, the land and building tax system would have been fully operational.

Here it is, Mr. Speaker, we have a Bill before us telling us once again, that there will be no taxes collected from January 01, 2010 to December 31, 2015. Question, are we to expect come January 01, 2016, for the land and building tax to kick in once again? Or through you, Mr. Speaker, the Minister might be able to indicate whether or not we will have another Bill postponing the collection of taxes for yet another period of time?

The other thing I want to look at before I close, is that of local government. The thing about it is that the Leader of the Opposition would have made mention not now, but he would have made mention of it a number of times, that on taking office as the next Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago—*[Interruption]*

Hon. Member: Without you.

Mr. N. Hypolite:—one of the things that he will do and yes, with or without me, the People's National Movement will be the next Government of the Republic, *[Desk thumping]* and sad to say the Member for Oropouche East will not be here either, because the People's National Movement will be the Government. So it is either he is sitting on this side, or he will be sitting outside. But the thing about it is, the Leader of the Opposition said that as Prime Minister, one of the things *[Crosstalk]* he will do is to dismantle the Ministry of Local Government.

The Member for Oropouche East indicated earlier on in the debate, that what will take place when that happens, is that we will be sending home people. Let me just correct that. By dismantling the Ministry of Local Government, what actually will be taking place is that the persons who are at the various corporations will remain at the regional corporations. The staff at the Ministry of Local Government will be absorbed into the Ministry of Finance and the Economy. The 14 regional corporations will report similar to that of the THA, will report directly to the Ministry of Finance and the Economy. So the only person who will be out of a job really and truly, will be one person whoever would have been looking at, wanting to be the Minister of Local Government. That is it, that one person, all right? Mr. Speaker, just that one person, okay?

Mr. Speaker, it is the same way—*[Interruption]* yes, the Permanent Secretary can go to the Ministry of Finance and the Economy. There is nothing wrong in the Ministry of Finance and the Economy having three or four permanent secretaries. *[Interruption]* In fact, it takes place right now, where Ministries have two and three permanent secretaries all right?—two and three permanent secretaries. At one point in time, the Ministry of National Security had two permanent secretaries, or a permanent secretary and two deputies. So it can take place, but again, the Ministry of Local Government being dismantled will not cause any major disturbance when it comes to unemployment. What it means, is that you will have the 14 municipalities running similar to that, or operating similar to that of the THA, whereby they will all be reporting to the Ministry of Finance and the Economy.

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It will also give the various regional corporations the opportunity to forego that third person, that third headache which is to have a Minister or a permanent secretary or some other senior official within, in the Ministry of Local Government, giving them or not giving them the opportunity to really and truly get their work done.

I say that because some \$250 million was not utilized in 2013, and that was done simply because a number of persons [*Interruption*] who felt that at that point in time, they would have been paid their backpay. They never received it. In fact, the Minister would have indicated that the negotiation, all right, of the collective agreement was completed. Yet still a number of persons—and for instance, the Tunapuna Regional Corporation, over 1,000 persons were not paid their backpay.

Mr. Speaker, we believe that by removing the Minister of Local Government, and the bureaucracy that goes with it, and having the various regional corporations act similar to that of the THA, [*Continuous crosstalk*] we will be able to have the regional corporations act in a much more efficient and effective manner.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to transport, I asked the Member for Chaguanas East how many buses are there in Tobago, because it was brought to my attention that there are only six buses working in Tobago, with something like about 32 buses down. While that is so, we are seeing whereby, you know, some \$20 million would have been transferred from project No. 050, being the purchase of 100 new buses, transferred to the Public Transport Service Corporation.

Now, I distinctly remember again, just about three months ago, the Member for Chaguanas East boasted about some rapid bus system or the bus rapid system. We are faced with a situation in this country, a traffic situation; congestion, all right, of which the idea or the suggestion made by the Government was to have this bus rapid system, where I think some 300 buses they were going to bring into the country, to cause more congestion, so as to relieve the citizens from being in long hours of traffic.

Mr. Cadiz: I do not understand, go ahead.

Mr. N. Hypolite: You do not understand? Let me go again. The Member for Chaguanas East wanted to bring in, Mr. Speaker, some 300 buses that will cause more congestion because as he said, the 300 buses will release or will relieve the people of Trinidad and Tobago from having to stay long hours in traffic. Mr. Speaker, I will like the Member for Chaguanas East to share with us or probably the Minister of Finance and the Economy to share with us, the 100 buses, the \$20 million that would have been transferred from the purchasing of those 100 buses

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to that of PTSC. What is that money—that money being transferred, what is it to do? Is it to construct new terminals, pay extra salaries? I would like to know exactly what that \$20 million is to do? And more so, I will also like to know—
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Indarsingh: “Like yuh on de right Bill?”

Mr. N. Hypolite: Yeah—[*Interruption*]—with respect to local government, what is the status of the payment of the backpay to the workers at the various regional corporations.

Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

2.15 a.m.

Miss Alicia Hospedales (*Arouc/Maloney*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this very, I would say, early hour of the morning, I just have a few points that I would like to raise and I am not going to be very long.

Clause 12 of the current Bill that is before us, the Finance Bill, indicates that “section 11A(3) of the Public Assistance Act is amended by deleting the word “five” and substituting the word “eight”.

What the Minister of Finance and the Economy indicated to us is that, based on his budget statement in September, he is increasing the Disability Grant from \$1,500 to \$1,800 which is really a \$300 increase.

During his budget presentation in September, he told the general population that this increase would have taken place on October 01, 2014. What this would have done was create a level of expectation among the disabled community and, to my amazement—and I guess to their amazement—three months later—almost four months later—they have not gotten the increase.

This caused them to react. On January 05, they called the *Newsday* office and filed a complaint with the *Newsday* indicating that they have not gotten their increase and this resulted in the *Newsday* calling the Minister to find out. Her response to them was that, in a telephone interview, that they are trying to rationalize things. I really do not know exactly what she meant by “they are trying to rationalize things”. What she should have indicated to them is the exact reason why they would not have gotten the increase from October 01, so that it would have allayed some of their concerns and fears.

I am not sure if the Minister is aware that many of the members of the disabled community survive on the Disability Grant. It is their main source of income, so you can imagine the level of expectation, the level of anxiety, the level

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of concern expressed by that particular community based on the fact that they did not receive their increase. So many of them would have been looking forward to it to pay a bill or to purchase medication; to pay transportation or to purchase food.

I interacted with a facebook friend of mine who is disabled. He actually sent me a message indicating to me how he felt about it and I told him that I would make sure today—well yesterday—to speak about it—which is now today.

He said that the members of the disabled community feel left behind as a community because this Government talks about equality for all, equitable treatment, et cetera, but as a community they feel that they are not given equal treatment and that they are left behind; they are marginalized, and a lot of them are actually angry at the fact that they have not received their increase in the time frame in which they were told that they were going to increase it.

Even the head of the Disabled People's International Chapter for Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Fraser, also indicated that he was still investigating the concerns raised by the members of the disabled community because they had also reported to him that they did not receive the increase.

This is something that I think needs to be given a high level of priority with reference to the Minister of State and the Minister of Social Development ensuring that the members of the disabled community are given the increase as soon as possible.

The other thing I want to talk about briefly is the fact that the Member for Caroni East and even the Member for Chaguanas East both raised the point that selected Ministries would have been asked to cut back by 15 per cent. I am totally amazed at that particular statement because I still do not get the truth coming from Members of the Government. It is really, really, really a shame, particularly when I look at the Ministry of the People and Social Development.

In the draft estimates for 2014, what I saw in the Ministry of the People and Social Development, under Head 56, Sub-Head 02, Goods and Services, Item 001, Sub-Item 22, Short-Term Employment, I was totally amazed at this. Both Ministers are telling us that Ministries are asked to cut back by 15 per cent. But let me tell you what happened. Under short-term employment, in 2009, \$64,684 was allocated. In 2010, it went up to \$98,000. Under the revised estimates for 2010, it leaped again to \$150,000; in 2011, \$135,000. Mr. Speaker, you would never believe this, in 2012, it moved from \$135,000 in 2011 to \$13,839,976 in 2012.

In 2013, it was \$9 million, short-term employment. That was the allocation for short-term employment in the Ministry of the People and Social Development. In 2013, the revised estimates went up from \$9 million in 2013 to a little over \$25 million in the revised estimates. And, in 2014, it is \$23,300,000. Mr. Speaker, short-term employment leaped from \$64,684 to \$23,300,000.

So, you know, when the Member for Caroni East and the Member for Chaguanas East say that, yes, Ministries are cutting back by 15 per cent; it is so prudent and this, that and the other, it is not true. If the Ministries were cutting back, the short-term employment in the Ministry of the People and Social Development would have certainly been reduced. We really cannot believe them. They are not telling us the truth about the economy. They are not telling us the truth about the decrease in spending. They are not telling the population the truth.

The other thing that I would point out is that the People's Card, is this really necessary at this particular point in time? We are in a crisis, Minister of Finance and the Economy. The economy is in crisis. Is the People's Card necessary at this time? An allocation of a little over \$30 million was made in 2013. In the 2013 revised estimates, they brought it downward to \$1.5 million and then, in 2014, it leaped again, over \$37 million—approximately \$35 million increase.

I am asking, is this necessary? Do you all think that this should be shelved until the economy is more buoyant and stable? It is important that the Ministers try to be honest with us and really let us know what they are doing. They are not telling us the truth. They are not cutting back, that is one. They are only transferring from one Head to the next and they are also not telling us the truth. I would like to know.

Our political leader and the Member for Diego Martin West asked the question, who is advising the Government in all of this? Who is advising the Government? Because they do not seem to have any foresight, any thought. They do not know what they are doing. The economy is in a state of crisis and they do not know. They are not providing guidance, as the Member for Diego Martin Central had indicated.

The Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs came and he said that the Government has the discipline, the intellect and the skill to manage the economy at this particular point in time, but I am saying all of those things are lacking. All of those things are lacking. They have no discipline. The intellect is totally lacking and they certainly do not have the skill.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

The Minister of Finance and the Economy (Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai): [*Desk thumping*] Yes. With those few words. [*Laughter*] Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Interruption*] That is too long. I want to thank Members again. We had the same problem, I think, with this Bill as with the last one where, as the Speaker indicated, we sometimes strayed from some of the clauses of the Bill.

With respect to the issue that was raised, I want to thank the Members for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, Laventille West, for focusing on some of the issues in the budget.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Pray but thank me.

Sen. The Hon. L. Howai: And thank you for not speaking. I appreciate that very much. But with respect to pensions, the issue of indexation, of course, is going to be a costly issue for us and it is something that we have been talking around, but we recognize it is not something—because we have not really over the years established a pension fund for public servants, so the cost is not segregated out and, therefore, it could create a significant burden on the State in years to come and we still need to work it out.

When I got into the Ministry, I found out, to my surprise that they have been working on pension since 2004, so it is actually about a little over 10 years and they finished phase 1. So I have tried to put some things in place to speed the process up. I do not see us getting anything sorted out for at least another three years or so. It is going to take some time, so the whole issue of how we rationalize pensions and how we deal with it is still a little way off. So I would not want to suggest that I am anywhere close to any kind of solution there.

With respect to the Praedial Larceny Squad—praedial larceny on the whole—we do have the squad and I did ask for some information which, I suppose, because of the hour, I have not gotten the feedback on how effective they have been and, therefore, I understand the point which you are making which is quite valid that, okay, you put the increased fines, but unless somebody is actually implementing it, it does not make any sense. That is why I wanted to get the update on how effective they have been over the year or so that they have been in place. I recall vaguely that we were told that there was a certain degree of effectiveness, but I do not have the data with me right now.

With respect to the issue raised by the Member for Laventille West with respect to the land and building taxes, we did say we would try to put something in place during the course of the last year. We did start a process of doing some valuations to the industrial land tax and we went out to four state enterprises so

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that we could understand the issues involved in actually properly implementing it. We think we have a template that we may be able to have some discussions around before we move forward with it, but it is still also again a little way off. It will take us a little bit longer than we had originally envisaged when we first put it into the budget last year.

The question on the buses related to the other Bill, which was the Appropriation Bill. I do not remember the details of it. I remember the funds were transferred to make other payments and then I think it was supplemented after and it was used for the buses which were eventually acquired I think; but I need to get some more details on that to be able to answer that properly.

2.30 a.m.

There was a question on the 15 per cent cut, but I do not think that is something—you know, we are now looking to put it in place, so I do not think it is anything that we can deal with at the moment.

The Bill itself is a Bill that covers, as was indicated, about 21 different pieces of legislation, and it is quite extensive covering a number of areas including putting in place arrangements for things like housing, where we gave the incentives about two years ago, but have been trying to find ways to actually have it implemented and executed, and I think with this particular amendment we should be able to do so.

There are a couple of other areas that we have had some challenges with, but I think based on the Bill in front of us, for example, the saving bonds, I think the formula we have here should allow us to be able to move forward with the implementation now.

There are a few amendments which we have circulated with respect to this particular Bill. They are not very extensive, but they are intended to clean up some issues which we picked up subsequently. So I would not go into those, I would deal with them in the committee stage itself rather than holding us up at this particular hour.

So those were the main issues. I mean there were a lot of other talk around a number of other matters, but I do not think they were pertinent to this particular Bill, they were more pertinent to perhaps the statement that was made yesterday, so I think I would leave everything at that.

The issues around the economy, I think still for the record, I would want to say that while certainly we are in more challenging times, the basic underlying

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infrastructure remains sound and, again, our buffers remain strong, and I think certainly we do have the wherewithal to be able to manage the challenges that we face notwithstanding the real deficiencies that we are all aware of in our economy being as it is so heavily dependent on oil and gas, but I think that overall, given the buffers that we have and given the expectation we have about an eventual turnaround of the situation that we face, I think Trinidad and Tobago continues to be well placed to continue to be the leading economy in the English speaking Caribbean and in much of Latin America.

So, with those few words, Mr. Speaker, I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Bill committed to a committee of the whole House.

House in committee.

Mr. Chairman: Are you ready?

Mr. Howai: Yes.

Clause 1 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 2.

Question proposed: That clause 2 stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Howai: Mr. Chairman, I beg to move that clause 2 be amended as circulated:

- A. Delete sub-clause (1).
- B. Renumber sub-clause (2) as sub-clause (1).
- C. Insert the following new sub-clause (2);

“(2) Sections 17(j), 19, 20 and 25 are deemed to have come into force on 1st January, 2015.”

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 2, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Chair, I know it is 2.37 in the morning, just bear with me please because this is fairly new stuff that we are dealing with here with electric vehicles. The amendments under Part 1A, have we covered that as yet, please? I just have two simple questions to ask.

Mr. Chairman: No, that is clause 17. We have not reached there as yet.

Clauses 3 to 16 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 17.

Question proposed: That clause 17 stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Chairman: I think you want to raise the point.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Thank you, Chair. I know it is 2.30, just bear with me please because we are doing particulars of tax for electric vehicles. I just have two simple questions: one, what model or what formula is used to calculate the \$5 per kilowatt for electric vehicles? What was the rationale to come up with these figures just for the sake for the public to know, if it is possible to tell us? [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Howai: What they are saying it is the same formula that would have applied to the normal cc engines that they have placed here.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Okay. And just the second question, please on the same Part 1A on page 2. In looking at all the other categories of vehicles, I would see an escalating rate as the kilowatt or engine size goes up. Under section (4) Goods Vehicles, I noticed there is a flat rate. Does it mean that goods vehicles regardless of engine size by kilowatt just carries a flat rate as opposed to all other categories of vehicles?

Mr. Howai: Yes, that was the intention.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Oh that was the intention. And the same thing applies to tractors—agricultural tractors and industrial tractors regardless of engine size by kilowatt.

Mr. Howai: Yes. That is right.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Let us go. Minister of Finance and the Economy, we are dealing with clause 17 and there is an amendment.

Mr. Howai: Mr. Chairman, I beg to move that clause 17 be amended as circulated:

- A. In paragraph (j)(ii), in the proposed paragraph 8A, delete the words “1.79”, wherever they occur and substitute the words “179”.
- B. In paragraph (j)(ii), in the proposed paragraph 8B(2), delete the words “an internal combustion engine or” and substitute the words “a combination of an internal combustion engine and”.

- C. In paragraph (j)(iii), delete the proposed Part 1A and substitute the following new Part:

“PART 1A

PARTICULARS OF TAX FOR ELECTRIC VEHICLES

Class of Description of Vehicles	Vehicle tax \$
(1) Private cars or rented cars, station wagons or estate wagons:	
(a) Engine size not exceeding 159 kilowatts	5.00 per kilowatt
(b) Engine size exceeding 159 kilowatts but not exceeding 179 kilowatts	8.00 per kilowatt
(c) Engine size exceeding 179 kilowatts but not exceeding 199 kilowatts	15.00 per kilowatt
(d) Engine size exceeding 199 kilowatts but not exceeding 249 kilowatts	25.00 per kilowatt
(e) Engine size exceeding 249 kilowatts but not exceeding 299 kilowatts	30.00 per kilowatt
(f) Engine size exceeding 299 kilowatts but not exceeding 349 kilowatts	35.00 per kilowatt
(g) Engine size exceeding 349 kilowatts	50.00 per kilowatt
(2) Taxis:	
(a) Engine size not exceeding 159 kilowatts	1.50 per kilowatt
(b) Engine size exceeding 159 kilowatts but not exceeding 179 kilowatts	3.00 per kilowatt
(c) Engine size exceeding 179 kilowatts but not exceeding 199 kilowatts	6.00 per kilowatt
(d) Engine size exceeding 199 kilowatts but not exceeding 249 kilowatts	15.75 per kilowatt
(e) Engine size exceeding 249 kilowatts but not exceeding 299 kilowatts	18.75 per kilowatt

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| (f) Engine size exceeding 299 kilowatts
but not exceeding 349 kilowatts | 22.50 per kilowatt |
| (g) Engine size exceeding 349 kilowatts | 3.75 per kilowatt |
| (3) Maxi-Taxis: | |
| (a) Engine size not exceeding 249 kilowatts | 6.00 per kilowatt |
| (b) Engine size exceeding 249 kilowatts | 8.00 per kilowatt |
| (4) Goods Vehicles: | |
| | 2.50 per kilowatt |
| (5) Tractors: | |
| (a) Agricultural tractors | 1.00 per kilowatt |
| (b) Industrial tractors | 1.00 per kilowatt |
| (6) Private School Bus: | |
| (a) Engine size not exceeding 249 kilowatts | 6.00 per kilowatt |
| (b) Engine size exceeding 249 kilowatts | 8.00 per kilowatt |
| (7) Omni Bus: | |
| (a) Engine size not exceeding 249 kilowatts | 6.00 per kilowatt |
| (b) Engine size exceeding 249 kilowatts | 8.00 per kilowatt” |

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 17, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 18 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 19.

Question proposed: That clause 19 stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Howai: Mr. Chairman, I beg to move that clause 19 be amended as circulated:

- A. Delete paragraph (a).
- B. Renumber paragraphs accordingly.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 19, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

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Clause 20.

Question proposed: That clause 20 stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Howai: Mr. Chairman, I beg to move that clause 20 be amended as circulated:

- A. In paragraph (b), in the proposed paragraph 7C, delete the words “1.79” wherever they occur and substitute the words “179”.
- B. In paragraph (b), in the proposed paragraph 7D(2), delete the words “an internal combustion engine or” and substitute the words “a combination of an internal combustion engine and”.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 20, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 21 to 26 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Question put and agreed to: That the Bill, as amended, be reported to the House.

House resumed.

Bill reported, with amendment, read the third time and passed.

2.45 a.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Leader of the House.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Wednesday, January 21, 2015, at 1.30 p.m., and to serve ample and adequate notice that on that afternoon it is the intention of the Government to deal with Motions on our Order Paper, under Government Business Motion No. 1, the notification of the nomination of Dr. Gomes.

It is also our intention to debate Motions No. 4, 5, 6 and 7, and to seek cooperation with the Opposition that those Motions that deal with the Children’s Authority and the Children’s Community Residences and the Foster Care Regulations, that those Motions can be debated together. And on that same evening, Mr. Speaker, to debate a Bill entitled an Act to amend the Adoption of Children Act, 2000, in the name of the Minister of Gender, Youth and Child Development.

Adjournment

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Mr. Speaker, it is the intention of the Government to debate all of these matters on Wednesday 21st at 1.30 and, therefore, to serve adequate notice that the Government intends to deal with all these matters the week after next. Mr. Speaker, I beg to move.

Miss Mc Donald: Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: Yes.

Miss Mc Donald: Mr. Speaker, just a gentle reminder to the Leader of Government Business, and this is the request for the written questions. There were 10 questions and only one response we got in writing. So, again, I would like to know what is the status of the remainder of questions, please.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Leader of the House.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Yes, Mr. Speaker, we did circulate, I believe, a response to one of the questions. I think it was from the Minister of Planning and Sustainable Development—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Jeffrey: There is one for me too.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: There is one for you too?

Mr. Jeffrey: Yeah.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Okay. Mr. Speaker, on the next occasion we will look at the written answers and seek to circulate most, if not all of them, on the next occasion. Thank you.

Leave of Absence

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, before putting the question, I want to revert with your leave to announcements, to the item Announcements. I did get communication quite early in the evening, yesterday evening, but I did not want to disrupt or interrupt the flow of Members' contributions so I left it for this period.

I have received communication from the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, Member of Parliament for Siparia and Prime Minister, who has asked to be excused from today's sittings—yesterday's and today's sitting of the House. The leave which the Member seeks is granted.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 2.48 a.m.