



REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Debates of the House of Representatives

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**OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)**

THE HONOURABLE WADE MARK
SPEAKER

THE HONOURABLE NELA KHAN
DEPUTY SPEAKER

Friday 12th September, 2014

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Friday, September 12, 2014*

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 hon. Patrick Manning, Member of Parliament for San Fernando East, requesting leave of absence from today's sitting. The leave which the Member seeks is granted.

**REVISED STANDING ORDERS
(STANDING FINANCE COMMITTEE)**

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, as you are aware, the revised Standing Orders changed certain aspects of the procedure for the second reading of the Appropriation Bill. The revised procedure improves the Legislature's scrutiny of the annual budget and includes a change from private to public deliberations of the Standing Finance Committee, which shall now be chaired by the holder of the office of Speaker.

The Appropriation Bill together with the estimates are automatically referred to the new Standing Finance Committee and, upon the conclusion of this debate, on the second reading of the Bill, the House shall resolve itself into the Standing Finance Committee in accordance with Standing Order 81(8). By the end of today, it is expected that the Leader of the Opposition will provide the order in which the Heads of Expenditure are to be considered in the Standing Finance Committee.

A detailed Practice Note has been circulated to all Members and I invite all of you to become expertly familiar with the revised procedures for the Standing Finance Committee.

**APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2015)
BILL, 2014**

[Second Day]

Question proposed.

Dr. Keith Rowley (*Diego Martin West*): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This will be the 24th occasion that I would have had the opportunity of participating in a budget debate in this honourable House. For the fifth time as Opposition Leader, I am privileged to be called upon to respond to the budget statement of the Minister of Finance and the Economy. This I consider not just as a duty, but also an honour as I act on behalf of all the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Trinidad and Tobago is not a basket case. In fact, for decades our favourable circumstances have placed us among the more fortunate in the region, and I dare say the world. That having been said, the people of Trinidad and Tobago have every right to harbour expectations of a better life, as we proceed to develop our nation from year to year and from administration to administration.

Along the way, on this journey, there have been and always will be highs and lows, twists and turns, for that is life. But how we cope with the inevitable hurdles will largely depend on the quality and effectiveness of the leadership which is brought to bear on our circumstances, whatever they may be.

It is against this background that whatever else we say today or do today, September 12, 2014, we cannot properly address this assignment without reviewing and assessing this Government and the national challenges as they existed or were perceived in 2010—that is, four budgets ago—as against where we are today. In short, we compare what we set out to do as against what we have accomplished. It is here that the budgeting process is located—that is, what we have earned, what we have spent and how well we have obtained value for money in fixing the nation's problems, as we pay our way forward.

This is an opportune time to remind you, Mr. Speaker, that we on this side, in a unique demonstration of cooperation for the national good, voted for the 2010 budget, as presented by this Government. Armed with this send-off, the Government proceeded to fail, to fail spectacularly and to fail regularly. That is why, knowing that they have failed, last weekend, on the eve of the Government's fifth budget statement, the Prime Minister sought to preface this budget by

repeating their election mantra, that “the Treasury empty”. The Prime Minister said the PNM left the country with a fiscal deficit of 6 per cent of GDP. Nothing is further from the truth.

Here are the facts based in part on information from the Central Bank’s *Annual Economic Survey* and the Central Bank’s *Economic Bulletin, July 2010*, *Central Bank Statistical Digest* of December 2010, and I quote from these documents.

At the end of the fiscal period 2008/2009, there was an overall deficit balance of \$6.6 billion, which was about 5 per cent of GDP. At the end of May 2010, just when the People’s Partnership Government took office, the deficit had dwindled to \$77 million, \$77.9 million to be accurate, and not 6 per cent of GDP as stated by the Prime Minister. At the end of September 2010, which was the end of the fiscal year, the overall balance from the Government’s fiscal operations was a surplus of \$188 million and not 6 per cent of GDP in deficit.

Mr. Speaker, in the face of record high oil prices at over \$100 per barrel and sustained gas prices well above the budgeted levels, this Government has operated a significant budget deficit in every year of its existence.

With that embarrassing fact as its legacy, the Government is now looking for PNM company by attempting to mislead the population so as not to be held accountable for its own fiscal irresponsibility. We will have none of it. The truth must be told to our children, notwithstanding the best efforts of the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance and the Economy.

Contrary to what they are now trying to peddle to the population, except for 2009, the year of the global collapse which led to a recession, which affected us here, the previous PNM Government had been consistently running budget surpluses as follows:

2004, \$1.5 billion in surplus;

2005, \$5 billion;

2006, \$7.713 billion;

2007, \$2.298 billion surplus;

2008, \$12.13 billion in surplus;

2009, as I mentioned before, the year of the collapse and the recession, we went into deficit of \$6.86 billion.

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And that by May of the following year, we had reduced it and by September, we were into a minus, a very small surplus of \$188 million. These are the figures to be found in the Central Bank *Annual Economic Survey*.

Compare that, Mr. Speaker, with data from the Ministry of Finance and the Economy's own review of the economy generated by this Government for its own stewardship.

2011, deficit, \$2.8 billion;

2012, \$3.5 billion;

2013, \$5.18 billion;

2014, \$4.87 billion.

The Prime Minister's statement on this matter and the numerous instances of the Minister of Finance and the Economy not coming clean on this budget confirms that we cannot trust anything this Government tells us. [*Desk thumping*] What they do not attempt to hide by omission, they misrepresent by naked untruths.

In order to have us at their mercy on these matters, they have virtually shut down the CSO, so that for the first time in my memory, there is no independent Central Statistical Office data on which to base our references and reviews. We are confined to the Ministry of Finance and the Economy and the Central Bank for statistical information about the economics and the performance of the Government.

The CSO does not even have useable office space, with its staff demoralized, drifting in the street, with and without placards, and the Government is quite happy to have that and the Government does not care.

Mr. Speaker, 2006 to 2008 were the peak years of this country's earnings and development, just prior to the 2009 global collapse. That occurrence found our country engaged in a series of progressive development initiatives, all of which were roundly condemned by this UNC Government coalition.

Today, after years of condemnation and scorn, not only heaped upon individuals involved in the projects, but on the very ideas themselves, this shameless Government, after humiliating and firing people, shutting down here, there and everywhere, delaying, bad-mouthing everything, now in 2015, the budget, they have embraced and are now presenting as new concepts and programmes, the very things that they have stalled, delayed and condemned.

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They now thump their desks for the Diego Martin Highway, which they stopped in 2010 and restarted only after the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin North/East was thrown out of Parliament for agitating for the restart. Carenage Fish Market is now to be their major accomplishment after four years of spiteful neglect as a construction project.

After four years, they abandoned the partially constructed Bagatelle Community Centre, and the Diego Martin Sports Complex does not even warrant a mention. Today, we are told that the abandoned multimillion-dollar Tarouba Stadium cannot be used for cricket because the soil eh good and Calder Hart built it.

In this budget of shame, they say, we have no shame. All that has happened at the end of their tenure is that we as a people have had our development derailed and valuable time has been lost in the process. [*Desk thumping*] In our developmental history, 2010—2015, this period would long be known as the missing years.

10.15 a.m.

After promising to bring new ideas and solutions to our problems, and producing nothing but stumbling, bumbling disasters as alternatives, this Government which deliberately refused to build on the foundations, now turns to some well-known elements of Vision 2020 for salvation.

Miss Cox: Too late.

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, permit me to quote for you from the budget statement of 2005, and I want you to listen very carefully, and I quote:

“We are also targeting a number of specific areas for further commercial expansion including;

Yachting;

Fish and fish processing;

Merchant Marine;

Music and entertainment;

Film Industry;

Printing and Packaging; and

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Food and beverage.”

Those were the words of the then Minister of Finance, Patrick Manning, PNM Minister of Finance 2005.

Dr. Moonilal: You are quoting Manning.

Dr. K. Rowley: Yes, “ah” quoting Manning. Nine years later—listen carefully, Mr. Speaker, and see if you see any similarity. Nine years later, and I quote:

“The Government proposes to provide incentives to develop the following new sectors which we are targeting:

Firstly...food and beverage industry.

...the creative, arts and entertainment sector...in particular...film, fashion and the music...”industry.

“thirdly, the maritime sector...

finally, the yachting industry....

The Government proposes to strengthen this industry by introducing at the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT) advanced training for yacht building and maintenance;”

Those were the words of Larry Howai, Minister of Finance and the Economy, the programme for 2015. [*Crosstalk*] After \$10 million, that is what we get. They had it for free before, you know.

And, of course, Mr. Speaker, as he talks about fashion and UTT, it particularly annoys me and others because, you see, Prof. Andrew Ramroop of Savile Row, London, the only professor of tailoring in the world from Tunapuna, he was drummed out of this country and slandered by this Government because of his association with the attempt to develop a fashion industry through UTT in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Miss Cox: Yes, correct. Shame!

Dr. K. Rowley: He sought to bring his image and his experience to bear for us in the fashion programme, four years later, we are now talking about fashion for diversification. They have no shame. [*Desk thumping*]

Miss Cox: None, none whatsoever!

Dr. K. Rowley: They have obstructed our development; they have stopped our programmes. Now, they are saying they will start it back. Thank God for

spared mercy. After \$300 billion and no new ideas of their own, they shamelessly resort to plagiarizing that which they despised and attempted to destroy. In this town without pity, this is a Government and a budget without shame. [*Desk thumping*]

We on this side, Mr. Speaker, consider the document presented here last Monday to be nothing more than an expensive spending list. It was a testimony to gross negligence in the management of the country's affairs that has been the hallmark of this administration. Mr. Speaker, the proposed budget is an election gimmick, constructed and presented in the hope that the Government could, as much as possible, on the expectation that this would wipe out the unpleasant memories that we have been living through for the last four years. The Government places its future on the misguided belief that the people of Trinidad and Tobago are not intelligent and they are not a responsible people.

If PNM budgets of 35 and 40 billion dollars were condemned as squandermania, then what can we say about consistent 60-odd billion-dollar budgets? At least, during the PNM administration, with that kind of expenditure of 35 and 40 billion, we could have seen what was being done.

Dr. Douglas: Where.

Dr. K. Rowley: Even if we did not agree.

Miss Cox: Right where we are here. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. K. Rowley: I want to repeat that, since I was obstructed by the white-hat man. [*Laughter*] He has lost his hat, so he can see me now. At least, during the PNM period of expenditure, we could have seen what was being done even when we did not agree with the priorities. Today, not even the Governor of the Central Bank could tell you where the money is going from the Central Bank.

We expected the Government to come with an election budget, and they did not disappoint. We expected them to go into overdrive expenditure, and they surely did that. Furthermore, we expected them to be short on revenue ideas and, again, they lived up to all our low expectations of them.

Mr. Speaker, what was presented on Monday can best be described as the most irresponsible, reckless and dangerous approach to fiscal management this country has ever seen. What is even more frightening, is that they are all proud of it. We need to set the record straight. We have had enough of their outright dishonesty about PNM governance of this country.

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Let me begin on this note on which they are working on trying to rewrite the country's history. In the six years when energy prices were above the budgeted price, from 2003 to 2008, the PNM's track record is far superior to anything they can dream of. [*Desk thumping*] Our management of the country's fiscal affairs was reasonable and responsible, and let me read into *Hansard* for the record of all time, what the record is:

- 2003, budgeted oil price, \$22: revenue, \$16.76 billion; expenditure, \$15.8 billion with a budget surplus of \$958 million, an economic growth of 14.4 per cent.
- 2004, oil price at \$25: earnings, \$20.6 billion; expenditure, \$19.1 billion for a \$1.5 billion surplus; economic growth, 7.9 per cent.
- 2005, oil price at \$32 a barrel: revenue \$29.65 billion; expenditure, \$24.64 billion for a \$5 billion surplus.
- 2006, oil price at \$45: revenue \$38.9 billion; expenditure \$32 billion, surplus \$7.7 billion; economic growth, 13.4 per cent.
- 2007, oil price average budgeted \$72 a barrel: earnings, \$40.06 billion; expenditure \$37.77 billion; budget surplus, \$2.3 billion; economic growth, 4.8 per cent.
- 2008, oil price at over \$104 a barrel: \$56.85 billion in revenue; expenditure, \$44.72 billion; budget surplus, \$12.1 billion; economic growth, 2.4 per cent.

That is the PNM record [*Desk thumping*] and they could jump high, they could jump low, they cannot change that.

So, accumulated budget surpluses for the six-year period, Mr. Speaker, was \$29.3 billion. This represented the very important additions to national savings. This is what fiscal responsibility is all about. In fact, Mr. Speaker, this huge national saving was instrumental in allowing them to be as profligate as they have been since they came into office and, of course, come 2009, we had a year of recession, and we funded a year's deficit there.

Mr. Speaker, oil prices dropped from the average of \$100 a barrel to \$60 a barrel in 2009. This resulted in an almost catastrophic fall in Government revenue, from \$56 billion to \$39 billion in 2009. That was a fall of \$17 billion in one year, and they had a lot to say; they had a lot to say then. So, it was hardly

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surprising that we had a deficit that year. As a result, in fiscal 2009, we funded that deficit from our savings.

So, a budget statement is one year's spending plan. It is the year's spending plan, so no government inherits a deficit in the true sense of the word. Deliberately deciding to run a fiscal deficit is purely up to the Government of the day. It has nothing to do with what happened under any previous Government. It is their policy decision to do it or not do it.

What successive governments inherit is the national debt. The Government seems to be confused about the difference between these two things, hence they are trying to play us for fools, once again, while embarrassing themselves, parroting economic gibberish. As I said before, what they actually inherited was a fair amount of national savings built up by the PNM over a six-year period of budget surpluses. [*Desk thumping*] This included \$9 billion in foreign exchange reserves at the Central Bank, and this motley crew has the audacity to still be talking about empty Treasury when they came into office. How dishonest can they be?

Further, in order to maintain stability, it is a fact that we did use some of the savings in 2009 in that year of recession. However, things were beginning to turn around in 2010. These are facts! These are facts! So to boast about bringing down the budget deficit from 5 per cent to 2.3 per cent can only mean one thing; the Minister is confused and does not know what he is talking about, but that is no surprise to any of us because we have to ask ourselves, who is advising him?

Now, let us examine their record of the past four years and see what they have offered in five budgets; 2011 to 2015.

- 2011, oil price, \$75—and these are the budgeted prices—\$75: revenue, \$41.3 billion; expenditure, \$49.02 billion; economic growth, negative 2.6 per cent.
- 2012, oil price, \$75: revenue, \$47 billion; expenditure \$54.6 billion; deficit, \$7.6 billion; economic growth, 1.2 per cent, they say.
- 2013, oil price, \$75: revenue, \$50.7 billion; expenditure, \$58.4 billion; economic growth, 1.6 per cent.
- 2014, oil price \$80 a barrel: revenue, \$55 billion; expenditure, \$61 billion.

Their budgeting for 2015, oil price at \$80 with revenues of \$60.4 billion, to spend \$64.7 billion. You see the pattern, Mr. Speaker. Have you seen the pattern?

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They who badmouth the PNM! I just told you under the PNM what the expenditure was in every year, spending less than we were earning and saving large amounts. They had a lot to say about that and promised something different, well we get it now—earning and consistently spending more than they earn and building up the national debt. In the last year, it grew by about \$7 billion alone.

And, of course, Mr. Speaker, if they had managed to do what they set out to do, they would have run up the national debt by \$33 billion in their five-year period. That is what they are telling us. That is the good economic management that they could boast about whole week. Listen to them for the rest of the week, you will hear them. The only reason why it is a little less than \$33 billion is because of their incompetence, they have not been able to do exactly what they said they would do with the development programme for each year, but the target was \$33 billion in debt in a time of record oil and gas price. So they plan to spend \$290 billion and generate little or no economic growth, and add not one cent to the national savings.

10.30 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, if this is not the height of irresponsibility and mismanagement of our country's finances, then you tell me what is. I am sure some misguided Member from the other side would get up and say, "But we added money to the Heritage Fund". Well, the IMF reported about that. In last year's Article IV Consultation report, which you may recall, Mr. Speaker, they hid until after the budget debate, the IMF addressed this issue and concluded that there is need for a medium-term policy which would allow the Heritage Fund to be funded only when there is a fiscal surplus. The event of funding the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund while running fiscal deficits is in effect borrowing to save.

Let me repeat that for all of them who "have stick in their ears". The event of funding the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund while running fiscal deficits is in effect borrowing to save. That is what they are doing. That is what they have been doing. That is what they are holding out to us. That is the IMF's concern. Let me ask you, Mr. Speaker, would you go to the bank and take out a loan of any amount to put it in your savings account and call it your savings? Mr. Speaker, would you do that? That is what the Government is doing.

Despite the fact that oil prices have been higher than they estimated in 2014 and the revenues from petroleum are higher, and Government's take is higher, they have not deposited a single cent in the Heritage Fund for 2014. In fact, because of elevated oil prices, the revenue from oil should be at least 25 per cent

above the original estimates. On the face of it, this appears to be a flagrant breach by the Government of the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund Act, which clearly states that if the revenues collected from petroleum exceed the estimate by 10 per cent, the surplus must be deposited in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund. The Minister of Finance and the Economy must tell us what he has put in the fund, how much he has put, and when he put it there.

However, in another sleight of hand and an act of deception, the Government has avoided depositing money into the fund by simply not collecting the taxes from oil companies, in particular Petrotrin. And so whereas Petrotrin is liable to pay taxes on its income from oil on a quarterly basis, like everybody else, the Minister of Finance and the Economy has allowed Petrotrin to break our income tax laws and not pay its taxes in 2014, thereby suppressing the actual collection of revenues from petroleum and breaching the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund Act. He has in fact cheated the fund and the future generations of money that should be deposited, and thus, facilitated the mismanagement, misuse of funds and disregard for procedure that is now rampant at Petrotrin under this Government. They are neither fooling the IMF, nor are they fooling us.

So, Mr. Speaker, they run deficits and they borrow money to put in the fund to comply with the law and proceed to beat their chests and boast, and add about adding so much and so much to the fund. The original estimate of revenue for 2014 was \$53.6 billion, however, the actual revenue to be collected in 2014 has been revised to \$58.4 billion, an increase of \$4.8 billion, and we have been looking all around for this additional \$4 billion. Where it came from? On the face of it, without drilling deeper into the figures, this increase of \$4.8 billion sounds good and gives the impression that the economy is indeed performing well. However, a closer examination will reveal the sleight of hand that the Minister of Finance and the Economy has engaged in, since most of the additional revenue of 2014 has come from non-tax income—that is, from what is called “property income”. In particular, the profits from non-financial enterprises in 2014 has exceeded the budget estimates by \$4.5 billion.

Again, this sounds good if you are not familiar with the terminology, but the reality is that additional revenue was not really earned in 2014 at all. Instead, what the Minister of Finance and the Economy has done is to appropriate \$6 billion from cash reserve of state enterprises, such as the NGC. These are reserves that have been built up over the years and instead of earmarking and using these cash reserves for intended purposes, such as development of our energy infrastructure and diversification and expansion of the economy through prudent investment, the

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Minister of Finance and the Economy has forced these companies to pay huge dividends in 2014 to cover its recurrent expenditure and to pretend that the economy is growing.

This, in effect, is a fraud on the population because the Government did not exceed its revenue projections in 2014; instead, it just pulled cash reserves or savings out of the state enterprises, money that had been built up over many, many years, in a deceitful attempt to cover its wanton, wasteful and profligate expenditure patterns. An examination of the figures also reveals that the Government intends to perpetrate this same sleight of hand again in 2015 by pulling another \$5 billion out of the cash reserves or savings of state enterprises, and pretending that this revenue is earned in the fiscal year under consideration. This approach, of course, is unsustainable because by the time they lose the next election they would have sucked the state enterprises dry.

What this means, Mr. Speaker, is that if this is allowed to happen, these companies would be looking to the Minister of Finance and the Economy for money for their own necessary investments as they would not be instruments of economic expansion as anticipated when they built up their own reserves. Their plan is that by the time the full effects of this folly is well known, they would have been long gone.

Mr. Speaker, their fiscal irresponsibility does not end there, they have now opted for a second tax amnesty in three years. Frequent tax amnesties are often associated with countries that are in economic turmoil. It is not a reflection of prudent management. Nevertheless, it is clearly another feeble attempt to raise quick money for the Government. This may be all part of their plan, along with the expected \$1.5 billion from Phoenix Park IPO, so that they can go around boasting and bringing down the budget deficits, as they say. Again, they are fooling no one who understands what they are doing.

All they are doing is degrading the revenue collection effort of the country. Instead of admitting that the revenue authority proposed by the PNM was the correct way to go, they rather engage in unsustainable gimmickry. We here today, Mr. Speaker, are committing that under the next PNM government, the establishment of a functioning revenue authority is a high priority in our country's institutional—[*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance and the Economy mentioned IPO and FCB, and this Government's penchant for covering up wrongdoing knows no bounds. We had an IPO at FCB and the public responded with expected enthusiasm. Unfortunately, the process has been mired in major

insider trading scandals involving elements of the management and the appointed board of the FCB.

During this scandal, this Minister of Finance and the Economy appointed an acting chairman of the board, who now has serious questions to answer to the authorities. I want to ask the Minister of Finance and the Economy here today what exactly does he mean by the following, and I quote:

Despite the concerns expressed by the national community with respect to the inordinate purchase”—amount—“by one staff member of First Citizens,... which is now”—the—“subject”—of—“an investigation...

One staff member? Is the Minister confirming that all the issues surrounding the acting chairman, his family and others connected to the IPO scandal are now completely buried? Did this Minister not give the public the assurance that the entire insider trading scandal was being investigated? Why then is the Minister now continuing to try to hoodwink the public that it was only one person, Mr. Rahaman, who has questions to answer with respect to the FCB insider trading scandal?

This Minister came to this job, in the eyes of many, bringing an image of trust and integrity. Mr. Speaker, if this is anything to go by, we might as well turn our gaze somewhere else. The Government needed to adjust its expansionary fiscal policy stance to one of consolidation. It needed to take the population on board, informing us of our heavy reliance on the external energy sector which faces exposure to declining energy prices over the medium term in the face of shale gas, and other clouds which could rain on our parade with disastrous consequences for the quality of life that we have come to know. Non-energy exports are on the decline in the face of shrinking purchasing power of our regional markets, which are in fact our largest trading partners.

They choose, instead, ad hoc policy measures instead of comprehensive policy prescriptions obtained by a reference to any plan of sustainability. What we are witnessing, Mr. Speaker, is a baseline scenario which shows growing overall imbalance and a deteriorating fiscal position with increasing risk of unsustainable debt accumulation. For as long as we are heavily dependent on the energy sector, the economy would be put at risk, if for any reason revenues from that sector decline. The results of the Ryder Scott Report show a continued decline in reserves.

The recent incentive programmes instituted to encourage exploration and production, while necessary, further erodes revenues from the sector, and the

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effects of this are immediate. The benefits from any successful drilling will only be experienced in five to eight years' time after discovery. There is no stated plan to mitigate the negative effects which exacerbate the risks to the economy. This Government promised to outline a diversification plan for the economy to support economic transformation required for sustainable growth. Several Ministers paraded it but there is no discernible plan. Whilst legislative reforms for the financial sector are moving apace, the ability to ensure compliance is sorely lacking, with the level of inefficiency prevailing in a collapsing and demoralized public sector.

Mr. Speaker, as the Government reports growth and health in the economy, the numbers show a reduction in the VAT take and, for the umpteenth time, they take us for a fool, trying to explain that by saying, the reason the VAT take is recorded as being lower is because they have paid back VAT to people. Mr. Speaker, VAT is a tax take to the Government, and if the Government's reported take is a certain number, it cannot be explained as being as a result of having paid back VAT to people. It is the net VAT earned by the State that should be reported to us, and if we should swallow the VAT story, how does the Government explain in this budget that the take for the health surcharge is lower? At the same time, they are telling us the economy has grown, record unemployment. So more people are employed, but the Government's take for the health charge is lower. Maybe they will come and tell us now is because they pay health bills.

Mr. Speaker, the inability of the CSO to provide quality and timely data severely hampers the monitoring and surveillance of the economy but, more importantly, it does not instil confidence in the Government's ability to effectively create and manage policy formulation. The IMF Article IV report, which the Minister has been carefully silent about, also points to the Government's expansionary fiscal policy which puts a certain amount of pressure on the Central Bank, and that is another story by itself. The Central Bank needs a whole day by itself to be discussed.

Whilst private sector credit has begun to grow after years of stagnation, the trend is for use in consumer durables, such as motor cars and mortgages. As I mentioned mortgages, Mr. Speaker, we notice the Government has lifted the level of approved mortgages to—I think it is \$800,000, and that sounds good to some people, but the sting in the tail is that that is the price where HDC houses are now pitched. Low-cost houses are now pitched somewhere in that ballpark. How many

of those who desire houses from the HDC now are going to qualify for that level of mortgage? So that is another story for another day.

10.45 a.m.

The level of transfers and subsidies has become unsustainable with very little attempt to control its growth. Just look at WASA and the famous Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources and see the scandalous award of contracts for huge sums, with very little to show for it. Same Ministry, same people, in an earlier time, the slogan was “Water for all by the year 2000”. New slogan, “Water 24/7 for all by Christmas”. Last year, the big item in the budget was the Government’s attempt to control the gas subsidy by raising the price of premium gasoline. We were told that this “vaps” would push drivers to the cheaper fuel by reducing the subsidy. One year later, not a word from the Minister of Finance and the Economy as to the outcome of this policy. All we have heard about is that Petrotrin is in the invidious position now of having to borrow to maintain its operating expenditure. The Government has indicated its intention to eliminate existing subsidy arrears by the end of fiscal year, but has not indicated whether this would be done by direct borrowing, suppressing planned expenditure or running larger deficits than programmed.

The other option here would be to request larger dividends from profitable state enterprises as I mentioned earlier on, where they intend to raid NLCB, NCB and scrape wherever Government has money in the public sector. That is how the policy would work. But, Mr. Speaker, that might be for short-term viewing, it is not a sustainable solution.

Non-energy revenue has continued to underperform, particularly non-tax revenue. And of course, Mr. Speaker, with all this talk 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, they still have arrears building up in VAT, and the Government says, “Well okay, we will eliminate it”. And of course, Mr. Speaker, the failure by the Government to implement some form of property tax, even after indicating it would do so in the last budget, continues to be a cause of concern to anybody in this country who is responsible. It is clear, Mr. Speaker, that the Government puts its political health above the national interest on this matter. [*Desk thumping*] Because while the Government resolutely refuses to collect revenues that are agreed upon, hundreds of millions of dollars are going down the drain in that area of taxation possibilities. That is the cost of this Government to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

The commitment to a balanced budget by 2016 is still being touted, but there appears to be no plan to acquire that state. To put in context, Mr. Speaker, the

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present budget outturn is expected to see growth of 1.5 to 2 per cent of GDP, therefore, there would have to be at least a 5 per cent increase in revenue to accommodate the growing trend in expenditure or a cut in expenditure by a similar amount if the Government is going to eliminate the deficit as they have promised. What they intend to do, they have not said, except that they have given us the target. The underperformance of the capital programme, well that continues, Mr. Speaker, and we wait to see what the outturn would be in 2014/2015.

Mr. Speaker, I want to spend a few moments on energy because it is too important to gloss over. During the last three responses to the budget presentation, I made the point that the energy sector, by far the most important in our country, contributing 42 per cent of GDP, was facing a looming crisis, a crisis that could be worsening. So far, our precarious position has been masked by consistent high oil and gas price, probably temporary, we do not know. At the time the Government pleaded that they had it under control. The Prime Minister, chairman of Petrotrin and others came on television with a bottle of light crude—sweet light crude—that was just discovered in the Jubilee field, and we were about to have an oil boom, which the Prime Minister promised will not be wasted. Mr. Speaker, to date we have heard nothing of the Jubilee oil field and its boom that was supposed to have started producing in October of that year. [*Crosstalk*] What we do know, even though “God is a Trini”, as she said there, is that the oil production has flattened out and remained pretty consistent at 80,000 barrels per day, which is 20,000 barrels per day less than it was in 2010. Mr. Speaker, of course, and we had many statements from the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs that in five years’ time oil and gas would be flowing.

Mr. Speaker, what all of this means is that contrary to what we have been led to believe, the gas supply would remain a major issue at Atlantic LNG and at Point Lisas for some time to come. In typical UNC style, they will tell you that this state of affairs is because the PNM did not do this and the PNM did not do that, but they take no responsibility for concluding crucial discussions about cushion gas or other arrangements to protect the load demand of the existing users at Point Lisas. Many of our downstream plants are regularly operating in fits and starts, well below capacity to the detriment of profits and the equipment. What is worse, Mr. Speaker, is that many of our major gas supply contracts are coming up for renewal on or around 2018, with the major issue of gas pricing not being addressed by this Government. Apparently, the Government is waiting until we get to the edge of the precipice before we deal with this issue when we have

virtually no negotiating room with the “upstreamers” who are required to keep our industries in Point Lisas in business. This environment of gas shortage coupled with pending gas pricing issues, being ignored, make very negative conversations in investor boardrooms abroad. We have read recently that the Ryder Scott Report has indicated that the gas reserves of the country have dropped by another 17 per cent. This is the climate in which we must review our competitiveness and our response to challenges associated with hydrocarbons as the mainstay of our economy.

The Government knows about the role of revenue generators in the energy industry, and that is why they repeatedly announce, over and over, numerous intentions to grow the investment in downstream operations, but like everything else, Mr. Speaker, they talked a lot, praised themselves lavishly, but delivered absolutely nothing. [*Desk thumping*] We heard, over and over, about the coming AUM2 plant, billion-dollar investment and how many thousand jobs—none. Five billion dollars of Sabic investment, biggest investment ever in the country. They beat the desks in this Chamber so much that some were damaged—none. Year after year, CariSal plant coming—none. Mr. Speaker, no plant, no expansion, no nothing. That is this Government’s record in the expansion of our industrial base. In an environment of gas supply issues and gas pricing challenges, they were announcing projects one after the other. Not one has materialized. [*Desk thumping*]

So in the period of shame, in this budget, not one has been mentioned, except of course, Mr. Speaker, we are left with the hopeful Mitsubishi plant, and even that has two questions: Where is the gas and at what price would the gas be put to market?

Mr. Speaker, the country needs to compare this situation with the development that took place in the late ’70s through the ’80s to 2000 when Trinidad and Tobago, under the PNM, was able to establish itself as a leading international player in the gas-intensive industries. The Trinidad and Tobago model, as it is called, was greatly admired particularly by gas-rich developing countries which witnessed the growth of an international gas industry in a very small country with less than 1 per cent of the world’s reserves. During the period I just mentioned, the late ’70s to 2000, the country moved from a production of 150 million cubic feet of gas per day in 1978, to our current level of 4 billion cubic feet per day. That was our growth. That was our record.

Also during this period, Mr. Speaker, with the establishment of one iron and steel complex, nine fertilizer plants and seven methanol plants, the country has

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exported 18.6 million tonnes of ammonia, 2.4 million tonnes of urea, and 23 million tonnes of methanol over the last four years alone. Since 1999, approximately 147 million tonnes of LNG have been exported, and over a 100,000 tonnes of melamine from the AUM1 plant which was commissioned in 2010; a remarkable story by any standards from a little country—the oil and gas.

One major ingredient, Mr. Speaker, which made all of this possible was certainty and confidence in a good investment climate. That situation is changing, and the Government is oblivious to this disastrous consequence if things do not get better soon. Trinidad and Tobago's economy is now driven by natural gas which accounts for 44 per cent of our GDP. The Government is not interested. The Government is not competent.

Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding our successes that I just mentioned, the country is now witnessing a set of circumstances that have begun to erode Trinidad and Tobago's position as a leader in the gas-intensive industries. The concern which I share with you, Mr. Speaker, is that the erosion seems to be happening faster than we anticipated. As we review the past four years, we are confronted with the following indisputable facts. Gas production has dropped. The production of methanol, fertilizers and steel has also dropped. Since the commissioning in 2011 of AUM1, which construction had begun in 2008/2009, the country has not been able to attract any new project to use gas; not one. The AUM2 project which has been approved and gas contracts finalized has not been realized, and with potential investors involved in protracted arbitration with the Government, very likely it will not be realized in the future.

The Essar Steel project has been cancelled. Disputes with the German bank and the German consortium with respect to MHTL, where the Government has been accused of oppressing the minority, a case that they have lost, and as of yesterday I understand that, Mr. Speaker, the matter has been concluded, and the Government has now been finally told what price they are to sell the MHTL/Clico shares for, and I ask the Minister of Finance and the Economy to tell the country what was the Government's valuation on those shares as at budget day, and what does the Government expect to get by this outcome of the arbitration that was completed yesterday. Mr. Speaker, this sale of these shares, the Government to be salivating over receiving that money to continue to spend, but there are important concerns in the face of this windfall, that the cancellation of high-profile contracts such as the OPVs, aluminium smelter or Alutrint, has tarnished this country's image as an investment location.

Mr. Speaker, committed investors to the creation of the aluminium industry, including the downstream production of high-valued products have been prevented from making these investments as the Government took a political decision, prior to any court action, to close down the aluminium project. Today, in fact only this week, arbitration has been going on in the United States where the Government is facing hundreds of millions of dollars in claim with respect to that action which we are not clear as to what the Government has done there with the closure of that project. And of course, the Government has rejected a 400-million concessionary loan towards this industry.

Mr. Speaker, all of that carried with it, the loss of attracting to Trinidad and Tobago the largest private sector investor in Brazil, that was on its way to investing in Trinidad and Tobago. That closure did all of that in one. That was the result of that closure, the aluminium project.

11.00 a.m.

And, of course, Mr. Speaker, we have the abandonment of the Union Estate and T&TEC paying 60-odd million dollars a month for power it hardly needs for a power station that exists with no taker from its original design. That is what we are facing now, that is what we are paying for now because of this Government's approach to running the country's affairs.

Mr. Speaker, to compound all these difficulties, the country is now faced with the rapid expansion of shale gas production in the US, which used to be our major market, but is now poised to be our major competitor, and where we used to sell 90 per cent of our LNG, we are now selling just 11 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, we are aware that Atlantic LNG is seeking to develop new markets, but the competition from the USA will increase as that country proceeds to become possibly an exporter, and we are also facing competition from Nigeria, Qatar, Angola and other possible suppliers in the not-too-distant future. As for petrochemicals, ammonia, urea, methanol, plants similar to ours, which for 30 years were not being built in the US, are now being built there, and many of those plants being built there are being built by investors who have investment in Trinidad and Tobago.

That puts some of our plants here in jeopardy if we do not have proper arrangements in place to maintain what we have and to supply gas to them so they do not operate as they did this year and last year, and, of course, with the prospects of next year to come which hold out the possibility of further shortages and underperformance. When you combine Government irresponsibility with challenges in the industry and

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changes in our market in the energy sector, the people of Trinidad and Tobago had better take notice that the environment is changing and has changed, and the Government is an absent bystander in the matter.

Mr. Speaker, there are some hard facts we have to look at, and those facts are to be looked at in the context of the budget and our revenue. And, of course, I know you may want to call me a prophet of doom and gloom, but these are the hard facts. I am not making these up. Over the past four years, the drop in production in petrochemicals at Point Lisas exceeded four million tonnes. Point Lisas has produced four million tonnes less in the last four years than it has been producing before. This loss in production translates to US \$1.5 billion in loss of revenue to the country. And, of course, in more specific terms, NGC through its loss of sales of gas would have experienced a loss in revenue of US \$600 million. And most importantly, corporation tax due to the Government that was lost as a result of this decline in our performance is US \$300 million. These things do not make the news in Trinidad and Tobago, because the Government would not tell you that. The Government will try to tell you everything is fine, they should be praised, they have done a wonderful job.

Mr. Speaker, under these circumstances and add to that the recent Ryder Scott report that showed a drop in our gas reserves, it would be difficult to attract—not impossible but difficult—further investments in gas utilization in Trinidad and Tobago. And, in fact, some of our existing plants may even be in jeopardy. Is there a crisis? The PNM thinks there is. The Government says no. We have been addressing these solutions with a view to lessening the crisis and have developed a policy with appropriate strategies that will lead to an improvement in this situation, which is currently taking place. You see in the meantime, the Government takes its sweet time to do anything. But, you see, you can have “vaps” with national games, you can have “vaps” with baby milk, but making great talking points with that, if you have “vaps” with energy, “dey go kill we”. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, the PNM’s energy policy and strategy would involve:

1. Re-establishing the credibility and image of our country internationally, with special effort focused on such relationships in the United States, the UK, Venezuela, Brazil, Germany, China, Saudi Arabia, India and the Caribbean territories.
2. Engagement with both current and potential producers of our hydrocarbon resources.

3. Treating with the problems that now face the companies involved in the petrochemicals sector, not the least of which is the thorny question of gas pricing upstreamers and downstreamers.
4. Identifying the key roles to be assigned to the energy sectors, our enterprises there including: Petrotrin and NGC, in meeting these challenges and grasping these opportunities. This includes an immediate and comprehensive tripartite and I mean here, Government, Petrotrin and labour—Government state companies, be it Petrotrin or NGC and labour; that tripartite audit of Petrotrin from a safety and economic standpoint. That is an urgent requirement. It will also include a review of the role and possible restructuring of the NGC/NEC in anticipation of partnership investment opportunities abroad. We need to be looking not only in our own reserve base, but looking elsewhere, taking what we have learnt and what we have and the partnering with those who would partner with us, of good reputation, to take advantage of opportunities abroad, and from that standpoint we need to look at the restructuring of the NGC and the NEC to position the appropriate vehicle in Trinidad and Tobago to step into that arena.
5. We also will ensure that the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs is once again staffed with experienced and qualified personnel.
6. We will revisit the use of Union Estate and the marine facilities at La Brea.
7. We will review the development plan of 2007, which was prepared for the south-west peninsula and do a similar plan for the south-east peninsula.
8. We will support UWI and UTT with the education and continued training of personnel specific to the energy sector.
9. We will continue to review legislation which governs the petroleum sector with the objective of encouraging the expansion of that sector and place emphasis on local content and the role of the value chain in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, it is a good point to note that we in the PNM take credit for the recent announcement that the Juniper platform will now be built at LABIDCO. We established LABIDCO and we revived it after political opponents had spitefully shut it down for five years. [*Desk thumping*] Today the Juniper project is what is going to bring relief to what I just described a while ago, and that platform is

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going to be built at LABIDCO. We have faith in our country even when others do not.

I turn now to transportation. In this country, it is well known that there is a huge and growing traffic problem. In fact, in some areas the situation has reached gridlock. It is true of side roads, arteries and the main courses. In the last budget I outlined in detail the PNM's approach to treating with this issue. The question still remains, which date and which year can the population expect the problem to be solved? What plan is being worked upon in Trinidad and Tobago today to treat with the chronic traffic problems in the country? The answer is, none. The problem is getting worse with each arrival of the monthly shipment of motor vehicles. The Government's solution is to purchase 100 flying buses. These would escape the traffic. Today, I want to reiterate the PNM's position.

In 2015, we would immediately invite the IDB to provide a technical review on this issue and report to us on the technical feasibility and economics of a mass transit system. Once the outcome of this review is positive, the PNM would build the rapid rail system. [*Desk thumping*] We would engage the IDB for long-term funding and tie some aspects of the repayment of this concessionary loan to the gradual and sustained reduction in the gas subsidy expenditure. We view this eventual establishment of this piece of infrastructure as a major driver which over a five- to seven-year period can change the face of the economic and social justice landscape of Trinidad and Tobago, and become a welcome legacy to bequeath to the next generation. The contribution of local content like concrete, steel, technical expertise, labour and finance, are just some of the positive associations with this construction of this infrastructure.

The millions of man-hours lost in traffic and the loss of sleep by the super early risers and the opening up of real estate away from the expensive currently crowded communities are but a few of the overall benefits this investment will bring. The PNM will do it, Mr. Speaker. We have boldly done with the purchase of bp, Shell and Texaco to create Petrotrin. As we have done when we established LNG, as we have done when we floated the currency, as we have done when we built the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, as we have done when we created FCB, as we have done when we created the Unit Trust, when others thought differently at the time, we in the PNM continue to have boundless faith in our country's destiny and in our people's ability to solve our own problems and grow from strength to strength. We will do it. We will build a mass transit system, if the study shows it is what we have to do. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, when the PNM introduced the GATE programme, it was underpinned by a policy which said that the country would invest in the maximum development of the human capital of the nation in such a way that no genuine desire for young people's self-advancement and willingness to participate in the nation's economy should be frustrated because of the individual's or the family's inability to pay the cost of associated tuition. The PNM reaffirms that today, GATE remains a flagship legacy and a featured forward-looking policy. However, after years of operation, we are now certain that there is some waste, inefficiencies, sharp practice and misdirection associated with the programme. So as we commit to the continuation as a major part of the top of the education expenditure, the PNM will immediately conduct a value audit to significantly tighten the operations to ensure sustainability. The moneys spent must deliver the stated objectives, keeping the door wide open for educational opportunities, particularly for the needy, whilst protecting the taxpayer from unnecessary burdens imposed by opportunistic extractions, duplications and inequity.

Mr. Speaker, commensurate with what we have initiated at the top, we will look at the primary school system, shift our focus to expending more of our efforts on the primary school system. It is our view that many of the well-known major shortcomings which reveal themselves in the secondary school system have their origins in the primary school system. It therefore follows that if we are to get maximum returns on the continuous large capital outlays which are expended in the secondary and post secondary school system, then the time has come for major targeted intervention at the primary foundation level of the overall structure. Experience has been teaching us that the existence of school houses and staff on the payroll do not themselves guarantee teaching, learning or the moulding of citizens who are respectable. We also know that in many communities the social stresses of the homes and the streets flow into the primary school classrooms, oftentimes branding young innocents as failures even before they get their first chance. This is where the State now needs to direct attention, and additional human and financial resources to prepare new curriculum to encourage teachers and principals, and to engage and insert the local communities into the preparation and nurturing of their children.

To this end, Mr. Speaker, the PNM will formalize and fund operational links between the social services arm of the State with the local government arm and the education Ministry in community council arrangements. What we anticipate would arise out of this approach, is effective community involvement with specific responsibilities for child rearing, accompanied by adequate resources and

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set targets determined after consultation with the educators and the local beneficiaries whom they are committed to serve.

Mr. Speaker, we will introduce the wider management concepts of school districts and accelerate the placement of school boards to rapidly involve local community personnel who have the time and the expertise to get involved in this plan in which the Government would lead the way in directing the people. This will create an era of hope rather than despair and helplessness, which now pervades our society.

11.15 a.m.

It is our view, Mr. Speaker, that we need to break the cycle of supply and frustration which feeds the criminal component with what some call “the lost generation”, who may increasingly see their portion as an embrace by the gang leader, a fast dollar, a beautiful casket and an early grave. We as a people, Mr. Speaker, can and must do better. We must intervene now with a sense of purpose, a sense of urgency in this operation life boat aimed at the primary schools for onward transmission to the rest of the education system.

Mr. Speaker, I turn to sport, a matter near and dear to the heart of the Minister of Finance and the Economy. So much has been said, Mr. Speaker, all bad, that the Minister has unsurprisingly been silent on his role in this subject.

In 2007/2008, at a cost of approximately \$10 million a year, the PNM initiated and maintained the programme of support for our promising elite athletes in preparation for 2008 Olympics and beyond. The results of this programme were that we saw an upsurge in our national participation at the Olympics and other international events. Instead of building on this and the sister Pathway programme, this Government chose to shut down, to starve and to fight with sporting personalities and fight with sporting bodies. The Government also shifted its focus in its search for the elusive crime plan and decided to use sport as a crime fighting tool.

Nothing was inherently wrong with the idea, but whatever was put in place, this UNC initiative soon became a crime in itself—organized crime. The real scandal was that the Minister of Finance and the Economy, through the sports company and the Ministry of Sport secretly allowed funding for LifeSport to the tune of approximately \$400 million worth of borrowed money, which had the effect of funding organized crime which is currently engaging large contingents of the police service. Then he comes to the Parliament to report on budgeting and spending and says not one word about this major budgetary disaster for which he

as paymaster is personally responsible. What is particularly painful about this is that while all of this was going on, the real sporting fraternity had been severely hampered by the insensitivity and neglect with respect to their aspirations, allocations and disbursement.

I want to give the sporting bodies, our athletes, patrons and fans, the assurance that from 2015, after the next general election, sanity and decency will return. [*Desk thumping*] And it will return to address our sporting potential and their appropriate well-thought-out initiatives to be funded for maximum development of our young people at all levels with particular emphasis on junior development and international standard competitions. Programmes by “vaps”, such as the hastily announced national games for elections will not be advanced, but instead better planning and execution to ensure success will be the yardstick by which all will be measured.

Mr. Speaker, there are three Arms of the State, the Judiciary, the Executive and the Legislature. Members of Parliament are elected to the Legislature, to represent their constituents, to make laws and to oversee the Executive. If MPs find themselves in the Executive, they then are separate with a different function and they are answerable to the Parliament. When you provide money to be spent directly on the say-so of MPs, then the lines become blurred and accountability is the first casualty. An additional layer of supervision is now required on these funds, and of course, if poorly supervised, they immediately open the door to practice, corrupt and otherwise, which are all unacceptable. This is not only my analysis, Mr. Speaker, but the findings of reviews in India and other places where they have experimented with constituency-type development funds under the control of MPs. Do we need this in Trinidad and Tobago, given our local government structure which now exists and which is not being funded?

Mr. Speaker, the PNM policy on local government reform to come into force within the first year of the new administration, begins with the absorption of the Ministry of Local Government into the Ministry of Finance and the Economy. That is, the abolition of the Ministry of Local Government as the first part of a wider reform process, beginning with a reduction of the size of the Cabinet. The staff at the Ministry of Local Government will be assigned to a division of the Ministry of Finance and the Economy, which would provide and supervise the allocation of financial and training resources to the 14 corporations, boroughs and cities in Trinidad. Some of the technical staff and professionals currently in local government could be used to beef-up the management capacity of local government units as these bodies assume a greater role in the governance

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structure of the country. The Ministry of Finance and the Economy will also be required to operate a general accounting office to actively monitor implementation and audit compliance through local authorities for funds provided. The executive bodies of local government will receive greater autonomy coupled with increased responsibilities which they must now discharge in a new paradigm shift of governance in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, the goal in Trinidad and Tobago must be for us to become a community of responsible citizens who are self-reliant, contributing to a caring society. We have always known that the Government has no concept of this or any concept of good governance, no sense of our past as a society nor any capacity whatsoever to articulate or to anticipate where it wants to take our country. The PNM is the only party in the living memory of our country that has offered a coherent sense of where it wishes to take our population and this has been articulated in Vision 2020 which they have dumped. It is something we will return to in the not-too-distant future. However, we confidently expect that a revised and reinvigorated Vision 2030 will put us back along the path of prosperity and progress to begin in 2015. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the PNM is not about yesterday's news, the PNM is about today's reality and tomorrow's dreams. You ask, Mr. Speaker, where do we wish to take our society? In the first instance, we can say the PNM is not committed to a "gimme, gimme" society, and it is not any gimmick by gimmick to gimmick to win any election, and the free-for-all that was manifested in this budget represents the best demonstration of this Government's inherent ability to look only at the next election. The PNM is about the maintenance of a responsible, self-reliant and caring society where every person can realize his or her destiny.

There is a talking point, Mr. Speaker, about baby fund, \$500 to help expectant mothers in need. At first blush, Mr. Speaker, this "vaps" seems to be a generous gesture, but as we examined it more closely, we discovered the deeply retrograde and irresponsible social engineering that the programme generates. The Prime Minister says, and I quote her:

"We are looking at October 1 once the budget process goes through. We will have to create the criteria. It is not for every single family, it is for those most in need. Within the Ministry of the People we will create the criteria."

That was September 07, in the *Sunday Express*.

This is the level of irresponsibility we hear from the other side. Within four sentences you have two "vaps" with different variations, repeating themselves, we

will create a fund; we will establish a criteria. We will create a fund; we will establish the criteria. Such a statement suggests that in the making, the People's Partnership did not think through the implications of its ideas—policy on the hoof. It is merely something they expect to do without having any sense of how such a proposal can affect the people it purports to serve. Such considerations are not important to them, it is just, giveaway, spend, thief and the devil take the hindmost—national policy. We in the PNM suggest that the devil is always in the details. It is the small aspects in these projects and schemes often overlooked which cause enormous problems in the future.

Mr. Speaker, what at first appears to be the epitome of caring and benevolence turns out to be false generosity, a way of acting and thinking that makes the poor poorer and the dispossessed the object of helplessness and dehumanization. Such false generosity simply leaves these unfortunate people in a perpetual state of grovelling, crying out as *Oliver Twist* did, “please ma’am can I have some more”.

Mr. Speaker, I will be the first to agree that in moving our society from Colonialism to Independence, we did not sufficiently empower our communities and build on the social and cultural capital that had accumulated over the centuries. But we did have our friendly societies, and Dr. Williams did encourage village councils, and we had our Better Village Programme. We can return to what has worked, Mr. Speaker. These village and community entities should be closer to the people and they would act as eyes and ears of the village. They would initiate cultural, social and sporting activities, monitor school boards, be involved in community policing and conduct any activity that was meant to enhance and improve the villages. They would also be responsible for managing their own affairs subject to the protocols and oversight that accompany such activities. The PNM does not believe that persons whom they elect to serve them should always be insulting them with all kinds of gimmicks and giving them a false sense of hope.

Mr. Speaker, I turn to agriculture. This is what the Minister of Finance and the Economy had to say, and I crave your indulgence to quote him at length, and I quote—talking about the Caroni GREEN, and he said, I quote:

“the recently created Caroni GREEN is limited.”—No, no.—“the recently”—sorry, I will start over. He said they created:

“the recently-created Caroni GREEN Limited.”

The company is called Caroni GREEN.

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“The company has already brought into agricultural production 360 acres of land utilising in the main the 2-acre sized agricultural plots leased from the former employees of Caroni. With more than 290 metric tonnes of produce harvested within the last 6 months, Caroni GREEN has been contributing substantially to domestic consumption of quality fresh”—produce.

Mr. Speaker, of all the people in this Parliament, the Minister of Finance and the Economy best knows of the scandalous position that Caroni GREEN has found itself in, to the point that today that company—I think that was two days ago, that company issued letters of termination to 17 of its 18 employees. It has no land under cultivation, contract or otherwise. It has no agricultural production to speak about. But, Mr. Speaker, very simply, contrary to what has been said by the Minister of Finance and the Economy, Caroni GREEN went into the red very quickly and remains there today, and the Minister of Finance and the Economy knows that. In fact, Mr. Speaker, the troubles of Caroni GREEN started with the decision to create a limited liability company and place it under the control of a former senior executive of what remained of Caroni (1975) Limited.

In October 2013, that senior executive had been at the centre of a \$12 million claim filed against his employer, Caroni (1975) Limited, of which his employer had no knowledge. Were it not for the suspicion of a high court judge, Mr. Speaker, that senior executive may have been the beneficiary of a default judgment against taxpayers for \$12 million. Mr. Speaker, instead of the board of directors of Caroni (1975) Limited dismissing this character, as it intended to do, in October 2013, and reporting the High Court claim as fraud on the company, it took the unprecedented decision to transfer him to Caroni GREEN.

In a letter dated October 28, 2013, from the chairman of Caroni (1975) Limited, the acting CEO of Caroni (1975) Limited—the chairman advises the acting CEO of his transfer to Caroni GREEN as manager with his \$40,000 job and all the perks that went with it. And I say, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance and the Economy knows what transpired there. He knows about the High Court claim. He knows about the grounds for dismissal. He knows about the incredible decision to transfer this gentlemen from Caroni to Caroni GREEN.

11.30 a.m.

So, Mr. Speaker, what happens is not surprising. In February 2014, Ernst & Young was asked by Caroni Limited to conduct an audit into the operations of Caroni GREEN since Caroni GREEN has been using Caroni Limited’s resources. In

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May of 2014, a draft audit report pointed out to financial problems at Caroni GREEN, conflicts of interest in procurement, a total lack of leadership and direction in the company and mounting losses.

Now, this is no surprise. Caroni GREEN was operating with 18 employees. Not one was qualified or had experience in agriculture. The company was supposed to provide high-level technical services to private farmers. That did not happen. And, of course, in February 2013, Cabinet approved a one-off grant of \$4 million [*sic*] to the company. The company has since used up \$11 million from that, and in toto, \$30 million, and has now been effectively closed down. Yet the Minister of Finance and the Economy comes here and reads, as the Government's major achievement, Caroni GREEN, telling us that this disaster is playing a major role in some new initiative in agricultural production in Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance and the Economy must apologize to this Parliament. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, before the UNC came into office—[*Crosstalk*] Mr. Speaker, I turn to Tobago and the blatant attempts by the Minister of Finance and the Economy to hoodwink Tobagonians and the population at large. Once again, the Minister of Finance and the Economy is—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, please.

Mr. Imbert: What is the point of order?

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: I am looking at, Mr. Speaker—this has been happening throughout, but the allegations being made for—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Allow the Member to point out the Standing Orders.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC:—Standing Order 48(6) and 48(8), please, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: You are referring to 48—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: (6) and (8), Sir.

Mr. Speaker:—(6) and (8).

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: The Member is saying the Minister of Finance and the Economy is hoodwinking the population.

Mr. Speaker: All right. Hon. Member, I understand the point that is being advanced, but may I suggest that in your reference to the Minister of Finance and the Economy—and I know that you are experienced enough—that I am sure that

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you are not imputing improper motives to the hon.—[*Crosstalk*] No, I am speaking. I am sure that you are not imputing improper motives, nor are you raising the conduct of the hon. Member. So maybe in putting across your point as you usually do, do it in a way that, at least, it would not infringe 48(6) and 48(8). Continue, hon. Member.

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, first, I want to ask you, will I be getting injury time on that? [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Nine minutes past 12.

Dr. K. Rowley: And, secondly, Mr. Speaker, is the word “hoodwink” unparliamentary?

Mr. Speaker: I would not say it is unparliamentary, but what I am saying is that it could be—

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I would like a clear ruling from you.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: On what?

Dr. K. Rowley: Is the word “hoodwink” unparliamentary?

Mr. Speaker: I am saying that if you are making a reference to a Member and accusing a Member of hoodwinking the population, and the Member takes objection, I am bound to refer to the matter that has been referred to me. The Member is saying—that is, the hon. Member for Siparia and Prime Minister—that by your implication, by the reference of “hoodwinking”, you are implicating and imputing, and you are, at the same time, bringing the conduct of the Member into play. I am just simply asking you, in proceeding, I know that you did not mean it that way and, therefore, I ask you not to get very close to violating 48(6) and (8), respectively. Continue, please.

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, what the Minister of Finance and the Economy reported to us was the allocation for the Tobago House of Assembly, with the impression that it had got a generous allocation. The point I am making is that under the Dispute Resolution Commission, the Tobago House of Assembly is supposed to get between 4.0 per cent and 6.9 per cent of the budget—to the Tobago House of Assembly. That has nothing to do with whatever else is spent in other ministries by other Ministers for the benefit of Tobago.

This Minister, and others, have been consistently giving the impression, for praise, that Tobago has got this generous allocation by adding what they have allocated for the THA to what they have spent in other ministries, and that

aggregated sum is presented as the allocation to the THA. That is hoodwinking in any dictionary. [*Desk thumping*]

Miss Mc Donald: Yes!

Dr. K. Rowley: And while that has been done, Mr. Speaker, if we look very closely at what the THA has requested and what they got, you will see the nature of the problem. Because you could easily have gone away last Monday and get the impression, as some person might have got in Tobago if they did not see the details, that Tobago was treated very fairly and evenly by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. Nothing is further from the truth.

What has happened, Mr. Speaker, for enterprise development—talking about diversification, Tobago is the place we can grow. There is room to grow in Tobago: tourism; industry. We have brought gas to Tobago. We have asked, under enterprise development, through the THA—in a \$64 billion budget they have asked for \$40 million for enterprise development for the existing Cove Estate, where we have invested all kinds of moneys already: power station; gas. They got \$1 million—one! One, Mr. Speaker.

They asked for \$65 million for their business programme there at Cove called E-IDCOT, they got \$2 million. They asked for \$492 million for housing, where they have 7,000 applicants to serve in Tobago, they got \$28 million. And I could continue.

But you know what is galling about this, Mr. Speaker? While I am being interrupted by the head of the Government, as she did a moment ago—the Member for Siparia—and while the Minister stays silent—and is trying to tell me I should not say this because the Government has no money to allocate for Tobago, listen to the allocation in the Attorney General's office, and I keep saying, the largest growth area in the Government. And for the benefit of the national population, whose money this is, let me take some time and point out how our money is being spent and what it is being spent on. Tobago cannot get \$2 million or \$10 million or \$20 million for industrial development, for national growth, for service of the people of Tobago, but we have money for this.

In 2010, when this Government landed on this country, the allocation for fees for attorneys in the Attorney General's office, was \$36 million. In 2011, the allocation was \$39 million, and that was a big increase over the normal \$20 million because that was the period of the Uff Enquiry and we had to make a one-off payment to the Uff Enquiry. So allocation for fees in the AG's office went to \$39 million. In 2011, \$108 million; 2012, \$94 million; 2013, \$103 million;

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2014, \$111 million, and in this budget, where Tobago cannot get \$5 million, \$130 million for fees for lawyers, for a total, since 2010 when this Government came in, of \$600 million, for fees!

Hon. Member: Madness!

Dr. K. Rowley: And if the taxpayers of this country want to pay \$600 million to lawyers at home and abroad, that is “all yuh” business. Do not use my taxes for that!

Miss Mc Donald: That is right! [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. K. Rowley: In the current budget where Tobago is so treated, where I am interrupted in this way, \$58 million more for the AG for forensics investigations while the Integrity Commission gets \$27 million, and their investigation is limited to \$3 million in fees. We have made multimillionaires of favoured lawyers in this country and every time I mention it, the AG sues me.

Miss Mc Donald: The A-team.

Dr. K. Rowley: He sued me yesterday.

Dr. Moonilal: “And yuh lorise again.”

Dr. K. Rowley: I “lorise”? The people of Trinidad and Tobago are the losers. They are the ones paying \$600 million to lawyers under this Government! That is a budgetary item! That is a growth area. This is a cancer in the Government.

And may I say, that is only in the Attorney General’s office, “yuh know”. This has “nutten” to do with instructions to state enterprises to hire more lawyers, “yuh know”. Some of those same lawyers are hired in state enterprises under specific instructions to do specific cases. So this \$600 million, .6 of \$1 billion, is only a piece of the wedge. If the true story is known, it may be over \$1 billion in legal fees. Mr. Speaker, they come to do that!

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Repulsive.

Dr. K. Rowley: And when I talk about greed and I talk about rape of the public assets, they tell me I “lorise” already. I have nothing to lose. Mr. Speaker, I say no more about Tobago, except that its potential falls below the priority of fees in the AG’s office. That is where it is.

Mr. Speaker, we are all faced with the major national issues of burgeoning crime and general lawlessness in our society. No one is safe, and many persons in Trinidad and Tobago are made to live in fear of criminal conduct. Listen to the failed Government, Mr. Speaker: “Crime has gone down”. That is the latest

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mantra. “Crime gorn dong.” What they mean, crime reporting has gone down, since most people no longer expect an effective police response, so they do not bother to report the violations.

This will not change until there is evidence of improved crime detection and successful prosecutions. Ask citizens: “Do you feel safer now?” The answer is always a resounding, “no”, and that is after \$29 billion—some similar figure. From small infractions to murder, the lawbreakers and criminals seem to have the advantage.

We must respond to this state of affairs with a clear recognition of the need for a more efficient and responsive police service, supported by a well-oiled, modern intelligence-gathering capacity. We may not need more severe legal sanctions, since in the past 10 years we have modernized our laws and we are arguably as well placed—*[Interruption]* Mr. Speaker, I am being disturbed by the Prime Minister and others, could you just—

Mr. Imbert: And she still talking.

Mr. Speaker: Allow the Member to speak in silence.

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, leadership in these matters comes from the Government. It is the Government that is largely responsible for the platform of law, order and security. Up until 2010, there was a clearly articulated and widely accepted philosophy driving the measures implemented to address this national challenge. The Government obviously did not share this philosophy, and having promised on the hustings that crime would be a thing of the past in 20 days, they set about dismantling our security apparatus.

11.45 a.m.

Prime ministerial mismanagement had the effect of massive demoralization within the local intelligence community and reeked of very severe loss of confidence by our regional and international counterparts in the world of intelligence gathering and management. The spiteful dismantling of the Special Anti-Crime Unit without immediate replacement of this, our best effort, has left us at the mercy of the criminals. The foolish cancellation of the OPV programme on the simplistic argument that we fight crime on land and not on the sea, rendered our borders defenceless and as porous as the number of illegal firearms of every calibre and capacity now enter and hurt us in our country.

After four years of time wasting and wasteful spending, we now hear the Government talking about buying patrol vessels in the next 18 months. They

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promised some from Colombia, they are still being loaded. They promised one from China, that is still on its way. And now we are hearing, again, somewhere else in 18 months. Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Security is now telling us about a special operations group whose mandate is to deal with hostage arrangements, terrorist activities, organized crime and gangland activities.

Hon. Howai: Sorry. Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 44(8), I would like to clarify a point, perhaps after.

Mr. Speaker: All right, after his contribution. Continue.

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, this special group that the Minister talks about now and the assignments put to them are the same assignments that SAUTT had and were carrying out. So, in other words, they intend to recreate what they had destroyed under the Special Anti-Crime Unit except four years later, and this would be done after we have expended on national security, \$22 billion in the last four years with no improvement, because no community in this country is saying to us, "We feel safer where we are". [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Just a second, please. Listen, could I ask Members to allow the hon. Leader of the Opposition to speak in complete silence, please? Continue, hon. Member, please.

Dr. K. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, the detection rate for serious crimes is now lower than the 24 per cent it was in 2007. It now stands at 12 per cent to 13 per cent with the Government boasting that serious crimes have gone down and the detection rate is falling. One would have thought that the lower crime rate, we would have had a better detection rate, but that is not what we are seeing. We commend our law enforcement officers who continue to work fearlessly and tirelessly to protect us. We would be happy to learn that they are seeing a reduction in reported crimes, however, we urge caution against complacency and urge action towards regaining the public confidence in order to avoid under-reporting, and to ensure that they win back the support of the public.

Statistics on murder show that they are mostly firearm related and, Mr. Speaker, as I speak to you today, more murders have been committed this year than last year, as the general sentiment is, coming from the Government, crime is going down. The Government now proposes to spend \$62.4 million on armoured vehicles. They attempted to pass a misguided soldier Bill. Plenty gun talk from the Minister of National Security as he encouraged our soldiers to convert Laventille into a military war zone for two weeks following the unfortunate killing of Lance Corporal Thomas. But after two weeks of heavy and robust

presence of soldiers in Laventille, up to today, the important matter of arrest of the killer or killers of Corporal Thomas has not been dealt with. We still do not know who killed him. So the detection of crime does not seem to be the priority; apparently the show of force is, and this is a serious policy in policing that the Government and the country has to discuss.

Mr. Speaker, during August of 2013, in the public interest, we, the PNM parliamentary Opposition, voluntarily approached the Government with a ten-point proposal. We gave the Government the assurance of our parliamentary support for these measures. We assured them that we would keep an open mind and provide support for any measure that they may initiate in the public interest. But, Mr. Speaker, it was not to be. Intransigence and inaction prevailed.

We proposed to the Government the immediate repeal of the convoluted law to appoint a Commissioner of Police and its replacement with an easier method to recruit a national of Trinidad and Tobago by an empowered police service; that has been ignored. We also proposed an immediate manpower audit of the police service in August of 2013; we do not know where that is. We proposed an urgent review of the system of promotion as a morale boosting intervention for the police service. We proposed a special intelligence gathering platform. We proposed the strengthening of the municipal police unit by 1,400 personnel under existing law and including the Tobago House of Assembly's portion; no action on that.

We proposed the strengthening of the Police Complaints Authority to have that agency carry out improved investigation and to give it prosecutorial powers arising out of the findings of its improved investigation; no action on that. We proposed a standing committee of the Parliament on crime and security; the Government ignored that.

We proposed to the Government that action be taken for strong witness tampering legislation and further improvements in the legislation with respect to home invasion and we also encouraged the Government to implement a sustained programme of urban renewal to treat with the particularly disadvantaged areas in the cities of the country, particularly Port of Spain; that has been ignored. Of course, more importantly, proposal number 10 was swift movement to the full jurisdiction of the Caribbean Court of Justice as our final Court of Appeal, so that we can get justice on time and justice for all; that too has been ignored.

There is PNM support for all these measures and this is part of the work programme of the PNM Government which the people will elect to solve these problems. Let them call the election, the people will deal with these issues. [*Desk thumping*]

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Mr. Speaker, in the area of foreign affairs, before the UNC-led administration assumed office, this country was well on its way to being established as the diplomatic capital of the region. It was well on its way towards operationalization of the Trinidad and Tobago International Financial Centre to provide financial services to the region. Arrangements were being ramped up to facilitate these two initiatives. What did this Government do? Very much like the very poor judgment and short-sightedness displayed towards the integration of national security efforts, the Government just lay everything to waste. Just the same way they ignored the Government Campus, they just left it all alone. The Government has been devoid of any developmental vision and did not understand the PNM's thrust into the international arena—international relations, international finance and trade.

Mr. Speaker, the International Financial Centre, deemed ill-conceived by the former Minister of Finance and shelved by the UNC since 2010, is seemingly being embraced now that the new Minister of Finance and the Economy has twice referenced it as coming and coming soon. Today, the PNM is heartened to have laid that solid rich foundation upon which the International Financial Centre can now flourish if the Minister of Finance and the Economy is to be believed. Mr. Speaker, the next PNM Government will ensure that the appropriate environment is provided to facilitate the strengthening and further growth of a robust and sustainable international financial arena so that Trinidad and Tobago can retain its position as the premiere International Financial Centre of the region.

Our foreign policy and foreign relations must be such that our profile and image within the international community is enhanced. In this way, we can seek out and expand markets; we can promote trade in manufactured goods; we can promote services and knowledge while attracting more foreign direct investment. With increased foreign direct investment, the country's economy will be further stimulated, generating greater employment opportunities and assisting our diversification programme.

Mr. Speaker, upon assumption of office, the next PNM Government will immediately pursue arrangements for the restoration of a brilliant image of our Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ensuring that an adequate number of diplomatic and professionally trained foreign-service staff are placed to interact with the diplomatic and international business community at home and abroad. Our foreign Ministry must return to its former place of respect and have its staff become proud exemplars of the international and diplomatic community once more. In summary, the diplomatic advantages, as well as the international business community, can be assured that the next PNM administration will be

conducting the business of State with the highest level of integrity, honesty and decency, and expects in return mutual respect in our relationship as we partner in building a better mother Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, as the world goes, we, the people of Trinidad and Tobago, must count ourselves among the fortunate. We are blessed with substantial resources in an enviable geographical location with good climate, good weather and many pleasant neighbours. We have, over the years, at great sacrifice, invested heavily in ourselves and in our children's future. All that is required of us now is to behave properly, make maximum of our potential, and live in peace and harmony proud of our complex heritage.

What has been happening instead, Mr. Speaker, more so in recent times, whilst we would agree that we all want the best for our country, we have been noticeably underperforming. Much of our failures come from an arrogance and a sense of entitlement to one thing or another, with minimal effort. The PNM is not entirely innocent of this shortcoming, because we, too, have made our mistakes, but we have sought to rectify them consistently over 59 years of sterling service to God and country, in Government or Opposition.

What this Government represents, a dangerous representation, is the outcome of no plan, no admission of myriad wrongdoing and no commitment to develop the country for all the people. [*Desk thumping*] What they have held out to us is greed, incompetence and "smartmanism". These are the options that they have chosen and this budget is their tattered flag. Mr. Speaker, we reject it! They must go and they must go now. I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Now, before I ask the Minister of Finance and the Economy to briefly respond to some misrepresentation he claims the hon. Leader of the Opposition made, let me make it abundantly clear to all Members that Standing Order 44(8) is only to be used by Members who have already spoken, and who do not have a right of reply. But, having given that undertaking, I would allow you— [*Crosstalk and interruption*] No, wait, allow me, allow me, I am making a ruling. [*Continuous crosstalk*]

12.00 noon

Members, Members, I am on my legs. Please! I am making the point, so it could be, as the former Prime Minister used to say, "pellucidly clear", that this particular provision is not to be abused by anyone. It is only to be used by those who have already spoken and who do not have a second chance to speak, to seek clarification or for a misrepresentation made by anyone. So, in those

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circumstances, I make my position very clear. I would allow you to speak for two minutes only. [*Interruption*] Yeah, yeah, I would allow him to speak. Go ahead.

Hon. Howai: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Please, allow him to speak.

Hon. Howai:—thank you to the honourable House. I understand that I will have another chance and opportunity to speak, but I thought there was a statement made about hoodwinking perhaps, the population, and the people of Tobago and I just wanted just to put on the record what I had said on Monday, in respect of the allocations to Tobago. Basically, what I said is that for fiscal 2015, the budgetary allocation for the Tobago House of Assembly is \$2.609 billion, of which \$2.02 billion will be for recurrent expenditure, \$384 million for capital expenditure and \$23 million for the Unemployment Relief Programme.

Furthermore, and this is what I said, so that in addition to that, under the various other Heads of expenditure, Tobago will receive an additional amount, and that is where I did go on to say in total, therefore, Tobago will receive \$3.7 billion, or 5.7 per cent of the national budget. So, there was no hoodwinking of the population whatsoever. I stated clearly what I had to say. [*Desk thumping*] So, I just wanted—I thank you, hon. Speaker, for the opportunity just to clarify that, to make sure that I could communicate properly. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: All right, may I again, seeing that we are into the new Standing Orders, I need to just advise Members who are going to speak now, formally. Under Standing Order 45, it provides for 45 minutes of original speaking time, with a possible extension of 10 minutes, if requested. Therefore, Members have a maximum, all Members including the Minister of Finance and the Economy, in his reply, have 55 minutes only, 45 plus an extension of 10.

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Dr. Roodal Moonilal): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise to participate in this very critical debate at this time, on the Appropriation Bill, the budget, 2014/2015. May I begin, Mr. Speaker, by congratulating the Minister of Finance and the Economy, Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai, [*Desk thumping*] on his presentation.

Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by indicating that the Member for Diego Martin West lived up to all expectations today, because it was on a television newscast last evening, CNC3, I believe, where a vast majority of viewers indicated in a poll that they did not expect the Leader of the Opposition to have a strong reply to the

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budget statement of Minister Howai, [*Desk thumping*] and he has lived up to expectations.

You see, Mr. Speaker, I wanted to know, during that two hours of contribution by the Member for Diego Martin West, which budget he was speaking on. What budget presentation did he hear that led to this two-hour, at times, painful and laborious presentation that was so tame and ill-prepared? But, Mr. Speaker, which budget presentation did he hear? Because, you see, Mr. Speaker, I have in my hand just a few newspaper clips coming out hours after the budget presentation. The next day, Tuesday September 09:

“Slice of pie for all”

Trinidad Guardian, front page. [*Desk thumping*] *The Guardian* continues:

“Sweeteners from Howai”

[*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, I am just reading quickly.

“Hike in traffic fines good—Arrive Alive”

Tuesday, September 09:

“Thumbs up from South business”

[*Desk thumping*] Let us go.

“Tunapuna chamber grateful for tax, VAT ease”

[*Desk thumping*] Let us go again.

“Chaguanas Chamber pleased”

[*Desk thumping*] We go again.

“Maxi-taxi owners on \$35m tax rebate: Wives already counting cash”

[*Desk thumping*] Let us go again.

“Security heads happy with \$1m for families of officers killed on duty”

[*Desk thumping*]

“Filmmakers happy with tax breaks”

[*Desk thumping*]

“Howai targets elderly and the needy”

[*Desk thumping*]

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“Roll-out key to babycare grant”

[*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, that is just the *Guardian*. [*Laughter*]

Let us go to the *Express*:

“Budget targets grassroots voters”

[*Desk thumping*] *Express*, Tuesday 09.

“Our babies will benefit”

[*Desk thumping*]

“Cops welcome \$1m compensation”

[*Desk thumping*] Sub-headline:

“...Soldiers happy too”

[*Desk thumping*] We go again.

“TTMA ‘optimistic’”

[*Desk thumping*]

“Amcham”—American Chamber—“Budget shows fiscal prudence”

[*Desk thumping*] Next one:

“Supermarkets Association: Citizens have more buying power now”

[*Desk thumping*]

“Hotelier: A step forward for Tobago tourism”

[*Desk thumping*]

“Chamber”—of Commerce—“: Positive things in budget”

[*Desk thumping*] We go again. Mr. Speaker, we could continue this all morning, eh.

“Mayaro Highway to benefit many”

[*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, today the *Express*, I believe of today the 12th:

“In defence of the ‘baby grant’”

[*Desk thumping*] The *Trinidad Express*.

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Mr. Speaker, let us get to the *Newsday*:

“TTMA describes Budget measures as ‘optimism’”

You would like this one, Mr. Speaker:

“Tim Kee pleased with budget allocation”

[*Desk thumping*] Who Tim Kee is this? Who Tim Kee is that?

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: The Mayor of Port of Spain.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: The Mayor of Port of Spain, Mr. Speaker, the PNM-appointed Mayor.

“Praise for...compensation fund”—in the millions of dollars. “Chairman of the Protective Service Compensation...Keith Scotland...—says.

Mr. Speaker, what budget is he speaking about? The only people who are not pleased with the budget is the PNM. [*Desk thumping*] The Member says it is a budget of shame. What is the shame? Is the shame the increase in the minimum wage?

Between 2001 to 2010, the gentleman from Diego Martin West, for most of that time before he was fired, sat in the Cabinet. They increased the minimum wage by 20 cents per year in that period, 20 cents. [*Desk thumping*] In four years we have increased the minimum wage by \$6.00, this Government. [*Desk thumping*] In four years we have increased the minimum wage by 66 per cent. We have increased old age pension by 40 per cent, increased the Disability Grant by another 40 per cent. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, the Funeral Grant has been increased by 100 per cent. What is this budget of shame? Is the shame the baby care grant? Is that the shame, Mr. Speaker, where their own constituents in need will support that and will benefit from that care? What is the shame?

Mr. Speaker, none of these statements I read here came from Renzi Complex. Now I did not even read the statements by the constituency of Oropouche East, eh, but I did not want to. These are the independent agencies and institutions in our country that are heaping praise on the Minister.

I want to remind the Minister that last year, September 12, 2013, there was a headline:

“Licks for Larry”

Imagine that, last year. This year everybody gets a slice of the pie.

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Mr. Speaker, the Member for Diego Martin West came to this House today with absolutely no plan, no plan, no programme, no policy. In 2010, I want to remind the Member when he came to the House in the budget debate, the Member said, regarding the PNM, from a PNM perspective:

“...we did make...mistakes for which we paid the ultimate...price....”—those were avoidable mistakes. We have had shortcomings and policy recommendations which have failed.

Today, the Member embraced and wants to take paternity for the policies that he thought failed in 2010. He wants to claim the policies of the Member for San Fernando East.

Imagine, 38 minutes into his contribution, breaking news, a future PNM Government will do a study for a mass transit. They spent \$485 million on a study for the rapid rail. We are still paying for that.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: The “racket rail”.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: We are still paying for that. That is part of the debt, which I will come to in a while, \$485 million of taxpayers' money for a study for the rapid rail or the “racket rail”, which they use as a “peerhaa” in the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure now, that study, and today, shame, no plan, comes to tell us today if we are elected we will do a study on a mass transit. They need a next \$400 million of taxpayers' money.

But you see, Mr. Speaker, it did not stop there. The Member told us today, 62 minutes into his contribution, that if elected, they will reintroduce a property tax. They will come back with the Revenue Authority. That is the Member for San Fernando East talking, the same one that they chased out from Balisier House. They chased him out from Balisier House. Four and a half years later, they want to take claim to his policies to say re-elect us again, property tax, “racket rail”, smelter, coming back with that. But where is the new plan? Where is the vision? Where is the programme? Where is the programme? Absolutely none! Absolutely none! And harping on revenue, as if to suggest, if they are elected, it will be taxation and taxation and taxation in this national community. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, that is shameless. That is shameless, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to respond to a couple matters raised by the hon. Member, and they raised it this morning. But it has been in the public domain. The Member is portraying the issue of the resources to the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, as if to suggest this Government is breaking the law. Mr.

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Speaker, there is nothing further from the truth. Under the People's Partnership administration moneys going into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund from 2010 to 2014, we have increased that fund by 87 per cent [*Desk thumping*] in four years. When we came in, the Fund was at US \$3 billion. Today that Fund is TT \$5.6 billion—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: That is US.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: That is US. The Fund is over TT \$30 billion today. [*Desk thumping*] There is over TT \$30 billion in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, an increase of 87 per cent and—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: That is \$16 billion.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: That is \$16 billion, the numeric Member for Caroni East corrects me. But, Mr. Speaker, the Member is portraying, as if we are breaking the law. He knows that in 2009, when he was—I do not know if he was fired before or after—when the PNM was in Government, they did not put a cent in the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund [*Desk thumping*] in 2009, not a cent, but did not jump up and say they are breaking the law then. No, no, no, they did not break the law then, but talking about breaking the law, when the Member knows that at the end of this year, there will be another review and at the end of that review, we will place into the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund what is legally entitled to the Fund, according to the law. Mr. Speaker, the prudent management and investment of that Fund by this administration has led to 87 per cent increase in the fund. [*Desk thumping*]

You see, Mr. Speaker, that is not the first attempt at hoodwinking, I am sorry, Mr. Speaker, not hoodwinking. They come again, the Member this morning, spent a lot of time, as the Member for Diego Martin North/East will do later in this debate, talking about the national debt and blaming this Government for running up the debt, we are spending and running up to debt.

12.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I want to tell the Member for Diego Martin West, I want to tell him something, and I want to be correct and I want to be honest in this matter. In 2009, Mr. Speaker, we are very clear, the public sector debt was \$45.5 billion, 2009. In 2014, the public sector debt was \$78 billion, an increase of \$32.6 billion, but what he did not want to tell you is that 66 per cent of that debt is related to the Clico and HCU matters which we inherited from them. You remember when the former Minister of Finance presided over the collapse of the institution?

Miss Mc Donald: “Dat again?”

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Do you want me to remind you? Do you want me to remind you about “de curlers and de Cutex and de duster runnin down” on old year’s day? But you remember, but 66 per cent of that public debt we inherited from them. [*Desk thumping*] In deficit financing, they will not tell you, but I will tell you, outstanding bills, we had to settle by April 2010. When they left Government, when they were kicked out, they left us with bills, VAT refunds of \$2 billion, a fuel subsidy of \$2 billion. Contractors were looking for them, and came to us for \$2.6 billion. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, before we found where the Ministry was, we went to the Diplomatic Centre, we did not even know which was that Diplomatic Centre, you remember? Contractors collared us up there, they were looking for the Member for Diego Martin North/East and the Member for Diego Martin West, and they said we owed them \$2.6 billion. This is the bill they left at the dinner table. When the bill came, they ran off, [*Laughter*] and this constitutes the deficit financing of \$6.5 billion. So you are talking about this debt the Partnership incurred, but you do not tell us that 66 per cent is the mess we are cleaning up from the People’s National Movement. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, they talk about revenue as if this country does not earn revenue, they know that in 2014, \$54 billion was earned in revenue. The major revenue sources, of course, the energy sector, the oil companies and so on, providing and other state enterprises providing the bulk of our revenue, \$54 billion. They talk as if “de parlour buss”, as if we are not earning revenue.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Chicken Little.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, they remind me, the Leader of the Opposition, of the mythical character Chicken Little when something fell on his head, “he bawl, de sky is falling, de sky falling”, but I want to say the sky might be falling on his head, but it is not falling on Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

You know, the Member announcing the next PNM Government, “not one man next door clapping, not one opposite clapping”. [*Laughter*] They want to know if Lester Henry put that in his speech too. [*Laughter*] “He bawling de next PNM Government, but they not even pongin’ de table”, because they do not believe that in their hearts and in this minds.

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The Member talking about revenue and how much money the PNM left the country in 2010 and so on, but would not tell you that gas prices in 2008 was \$8.90 per MMBtu; 2006, \$6.98; 2007, \$7.00. Mr. Speaker, today it is \$3.98, that is almost 100 per cent increase in gas price that they had, 2007, 2008, 2009, yet how much we have done which I will come to in a moment. The oil prices in 2008, I think it was \$148 a barrel of oil that they had. Today, what is the price? About \$98.

Hon. Member: “Dey collapse de economy with dat.”

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Yeah, they “buss de economy” with an oil price of \$148 “ah barrel”.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: And gas at \$14.00.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: And gas at \$14.00 per MMBtu.

Hon. Member: “Dey want to come back!”

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: And they want to come back, they want to come back for the rapid-rail study, they want to come back for the property tax, they want to come back for the smelter, they want to come back, Mr. Speaker, for what else, [*Crosstalk*] and they have no plan.

Mr. Speaker, I waited to hear what was the plan of this Government, of the— [*Interruption*] they could not even—they have nothing to say at where?

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Piggott’s Corner.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Piggott’s Corner, they have nothing to say at Piggott’s Corner. You see, the Member likes to look at what we said in the budget last year, but what he said in his budget statement last year? 2013, it was a black Friday the 13th when he spoke and said:

Mr. Speaker, in due course we will be unveiling our policy strategy and actions to be taken.

What policy and strategy they have unveiled in one year? What PNM convention approved any policy document? He promised us last year mass transit rail system, a PNM national security blanket. And what is their major contribution to fighting crime, a thousand officers in the municipal regions. We have appointed almost a thousand, not a hundred, a thousand police officers. [*Desk thumping*] He promised a hundred police officers. Could you imagine? Vote from the PNM, they will appoint a hundred police officers. We did a thousand and “more coming”.

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So between last year and this year, not one new idea, not one plan, not one programme comes from the Leader of the Opposition as to how to develop this country differently [*Interruption*] from what the PNM—from what the Partnership is doing, but last year he told us about Vision 2030. I notice this year there was a deafening silence on Vision 2030, but what happened to that Vision 2030? Where is it? [*Crosstalk*] What came out of that? What are the policies of Vision 2030? Are they the policies of the Member for San Fernando East who they rejected, Mr. Speaker? In one year, no plan, but want to condemn a budget that all these institutions and agencies as I read before have commended to the country.

You see, Mr. Speaker, I was hoping and waiting that the Member would speak to the housing sector where he spent a few years there, and he dealt with—he would have spoken about that. And you know, accusing this Government of being irresponsible, reckless, dangerous, dishonest, then went to task with the Attorney General's budget. He has a preoccupation with the Attorney General and fees, legal fees, because you see, in 2012 July, the Attorney General sued him and two years later he could not put in a defence, and that matter has gone for a judgment in default, in which somebody will have to pay. But you see, I could understand the fear when they read about fees for the Attorney General, because these legal fees are taking up matters of forensic audit, the GTL matter, boasting about the PNM's energy legacy. When you go down the highway to Pointe-a-Pierre, there is a shell there on your right, \$400 million standing there that they spent, \$400 million, Mr. Speaker. The GTL fiasco is a matter that today this Government is involved in arbitration and dealing with that.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: No, we won that.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: We won that? Oh, we have won that.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: The arbitration is the Sural matter.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: The Sural matter, another poisoned legacy item from the PNM that we are dealing with, to which legal fees must be paid, Mr. Speaker, but accuse us of being irresponsible, reckless.

Mr. Speaker, and you know, our good friend spent two hours trying to tell the nation what we are in his view, trying to put his impression on what we are, but we should really look at what he is, Mr. Speaker. In this matter, and I will touch very briefly, because I have so much to say. In the matter—Members of the Opposition over the last year, on the issue of governance which he raised today, came to this House and in one of the most colossal, scandalous portrayals ever in

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independent Trinidad and Tobago, accused the Prime Minister, the Attorney General and other Government Ministers of conspiring to murder citizens.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: A citizen.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: A citizen, conspiring. Mr. Speaker, they did that.

Hon. Member: Deliberately.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Deliberately, willfully.

Mr. Speaker, the courthouse in the United States, a District Court—
[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: The Supreme Court, California.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: The Superior Court of the State of California, County of Santa Clara, with documents has said that there is no truth in those allegations, those email addresses do not exist, and no such records could be found that emails were sent purporting to threaten and to conspire to murder.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Emailgate is now “Rowleygate”.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: So emailgate has become “Rowleygate”. [*Laughter*] This is the Superior Court of the District in California. It is not California, Couva, eh. It is California, the United States, [*Laughter*] they have said that those emails do not exist, there is no such record.

Now, one of the more reasonable deputy leaders in the PNM, Mr. Orville London, very quiet type of fella, he made a statement on Thursday, May 23, 2013, and I want to quote from the *Newsday* of that date:

“London stressed”—I imagine it is the hon. Orville London—“that Dr Rowley ‘would pay the price’ if his information is wrong...”

He said at the end of this:

““This is a game-decider and at the end...”—when the truth is told—“there would only be one man or one woman left standing.””

I want to tell the Member for Diego Martin West, one woman is left standing. [*Desk thumping*] And today, if he had shame, he would have tendered his resignation as Leader of the Opposition in the aftermath of this. [*Desk thumping*]

You see, Mr. Speaker, in the aftermath of those allegations, local experts in IT said they were false and fabricated. We said, no problem, these are local people, maybe they know person a, b, and they may not be biased or unbiased. But when

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the United States District Court in the State of California pronounced that you fabricated and sought to undermine high public offices, it speaks to your credibility, it speaks to who is reckless, who is honest, but those are themes raised by the Member this morning, recklessness, who is dangerous.

And, Mr. Speaker, I want to say this matter does not only involve the Prime Minister and Attorney General, they are persons in high office. This is a matter of the ordinary, poor, innocent, defenceless citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. If one could fabricate allegations like this against a Prime Minister, what would you do against poor, defenceless citizens of the country? [*Desk thumping*] What will you do against innocent citizens who cannot go to the District Court in California to clear their names?

So there is a fear that a future PNM regime will bring a reign of terror to innocent citizens of Trinidad and Tobago which they had done before. [*Desk thumping*] The recklessness did not begin with the “Rowleygate” scandal. The Leader of the Opposition in 2011 accused the Attorney General of going to New York and making racist statements there. Mr. Speaker, he had to apologize one year later, he had to apologize that he got it wrong, accusing the Attorney General, who never went to New York, of making racist statements, and come and say well, “when he finish with dat, he say well, now, yuh conspiring to kill”, as if that was not bad enough.

Mr. Speaker, they made statements about business people in this country, hard-working business people, the Integrity Commission had to clear those persons. They made statements that the PM abused power in the FIU veto. The Integrity Commission again had to clear that, clear the Prime Minister in this matter, January 16, 2012, the Commission advises that having considered this matter, it determined that there is no breach of the Integrity in Public Life Act, the article was:

“Kamla cleared”

Newsday, Friday, January 20, 2012, Mr. Speaker.

They said Resmi Ramnarine works with the Government, they had to correct that as well, Mr. Speaker.

12.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, at every point they have been making statements that the Integrity Commission and other institutions had to clear the air on, but none is as bad as those emails—“Rowleygate” matter. None is as bad. You see, this speaks to credibility and it speaks to what we can expect because we are in an election

year. This is the alternative government in front of us. As tragic as it appears, this is the alternative government we have. If there is a nightmare, those opposite will get to the Cabinet room. What do we expect? Those opposite will get to the Cabinet room. That is the tragedy we face.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: That is a nightmare.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: That is the nightmare. And when they occupy there, what do you expect? You expect, based upon the evidence that you have before you, based upon their own credibility—

I have cleared up the matter of the debt and so on. The Member spoke about shale gas and the revolution in shale gas and so on. The Member is not informed and those around him may not do the proper research. It was Bob Dudley, I remember well. In October last, he came to the Hyatt, that is the Chief Executive Officer of bp. In a speech at the Hyatt, he praised this Government's handling of the energy sector and indicated that Trinidad and Tobago was well on its way to navigating through those difficult waters involving the competition of shale gas from the United States and elsewhere. That is the CEO of bp, eh. That is not a fella in Balisier House, Mr. Speaker. That is the CEO.

Talking about energy, they spoke about energy and you know what, it is shameless to hear the PNM talk about energy projects. In the 10 years, 2001 to 2010, they talked about Alutrint, aluminium smelter, Alcoa smelter, the steel downstream industries, the Union Estate fertilizers, ammonia downstream, nitrogen plant, West Lake Ethylene Complex—all mentioned by them. All of these projects they placed in their budgets 2002 to 2010. All of those projects collapsed under the PNM. They got nowhere with those projects. The Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs may contribute later in this debate and will deal with some of those matters.

I have not even mentioned that the usual annual reports from Ernst & Young and PricewaterhouseCoopers dealt with some of the matters in the budget. I cannot quote at length here, but at page 16, PricewaterhouseCoopers, reflecting on the minimum wage—the minimum wage incidentally, which was introduced in 1998 by the UNC administration. Just remember that. They said: “The increase in the allowance for first time owners is welcomed.”, dealing with housing and they welcome the minimum wage.

“This measure will increase the spending power of the low income earners and will be applauded by the Trade Union movement...”—I do not know if they applaud, but they should.

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Mr. Speaker, you know what is phenomenal about this? We increased the minimum wage in this country and the business community applaud it. Where in the world has that ever happened? The business community say we welcome this; it is more spending power, and the elements in labour, they remain silent. So PricewaterhouseCoopers.

In Ernst & Young report, there are also glowing tributes, in particular, to the good work the Minister is doing in the financial services industry. They said:

“...the FSI”—industry—“in T&T is strong, having withstood the impact of the global financial crisis and with the Government able to step in to deal with CLICO and the Hindu Credit Union.”

Problems, Mr. Speaker, this is Ernst & Young. If I had more time, I would have read in detail from these reports. But you see, I wanted to remind my friend opposite that we are implementing promises that we made to the electorate, not only on constitutional reform, fundamental, but where we promised to build highways.

The PNM promised to build the highway to Point Fortin. About 40 years now, they promised to do that. They did nothing. They promised to build this highway to Point Fortin, it is this Government, the Member for Siparia, Prime Minister, who opened the first leg, Debe to Golconda, [*Desk thumping*] and we are well on the way to completing that highway to Point Fortin under the distinguished leadership of the Member for Tabaquite, Minister of Works and Infrastructure. [*Desk thumping*] We are going to finish that.

Mr. Speaker, do you know—the Minister of Health reminded me—that in November 2007, the People’s National Movement Government went and turned sod to build the oncology centre? Former Minister John Rahael, they went to build the oncology centre in 2007. It is being built now by this Government. [*Desk thumping*] But they were promised that since 2003. Every year, in their budget 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, they were promising this oncology centre. Pass by Mount Hope today, you will see the Partnership Government building the oncology centre. It is off the ground. [*Desk thumping*]

The Sangre Grande Enhanced Health Centre, they promised that, too, in 2003. Today, this Sangre Grande Health Centre is being constructed. [*Desk thumping*] It will be completed in December 2014, in a few days.

The one I like to talk about is the Mayaro Fire Station. Eric Williams, in 1964, went up to Mayaro, with Minister of Housing and Health, Isabel Ursula Teshea,

and they promised, in 1964, that they would build a fire station in Mayaro. Go to Mayaro today. The fire station is being built by the People's Partnership, [*Desk thumping*] long after Eric Williams and Isabel Teshea gone. We are building that. [*Interruption*] I do not want to get into that.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Scarborough Hospital.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: The Scarborough Hospital began at \$150 million. How much did it end at? Seven hundred and fifty million dollars. It took eight years to build it and this Government had to complete it. [*Desk thumping*]

The Children's Hospital; go down Couva, you will see the Children's Hospital. I am not sure—the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre reminds me that at the Scarborough Hospital one of the causes, I think, for delay was that there was a shortage of material. The material apparently was walking away from the hospital site. The gravel and sand was walking from the site and the Member for Diego Martin North/East knows about that more than he is willing to tell. He knows more than he is willing to tell about that because I remember him declaring several years ago that he saw Ministry of Health vehicles on a site that was not the Ministry of Health, in Tobago. So, he has more to say about that and maybe in his moments, if he gets an attack of the conscience, he may do that. In his memoirs, he may wish to tell us where that material went in Tobago.

You see, that is a ghost that follows the Member for Diego Martin West. It is that ghost that was preoccupied with Macbeth that Shakespeare alerted us to; that when you do wrong, the ghost follows you. That scandal in Tobago is really a ghost that followed the Member for Diego Martin West. He thought he got away because there was a matter with procedure and process, not of substantive fact; it was procedure and process. But more will be said on that matter as we go along.

You see, the Member for Diego Martin West served this country in the Ministry of Housing and in that sector, which we are close to now, it will speak volumes of the management and competence of the Member for Diego Martin West if we outline what happened in that sector. In that sector, the housing sector, it has been riddled with inefficiency, with incompetence, with corruption from 2001 to 2010. When we got in there, we could not believe what had happened under the watch of the Member for Diego Martin West and others in that period.

Mr. Speaker, I will give you three examples and three examples alone. There is a tower called Edinburgh Towers in Chaguanas. You see it from the highway. That was being constructed at a cost. It began at \$50 million. We can find on

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record no tender for that project. We can find no letter of award for that project. From \$50 million, it went to \$115 million. At that project, \$115 million of taxpayers' money expended, during the reign of the Member for Diego Martin West as Minister of Housing. That tower of shame is standing in Chaguanas. Would you believe, you have to walk sideways in the corridor of that building? In the bedroom, they have columns in the middle of the bedroom; and not Colm Imbert. [*Laughter*] They have serious design problems. Incorrect placement of bathroom windows which were placed opening into the corridors; improper space planning; lack of garbage facilities; improper placement of stairwells, as anchorage positions may be compromised during a hazard. OSHA has failed that building.

The bill we are looking at to correct that mess is \$200 million. That is the debt we speak about and this was undertaken while the Member for Diego Martin West was Minister of Housing. It did not stop there. At the housing estate in Wellington, Debe, it began at a contract price of \$46 million in 2005, the Member for Diego Martin West went to Debe. One day I saw him at Picton Junction. He was lost. He was looking to find Debe and he ended up by the doubles vendor asking for directions to find the Wellington site.

The total value of works paid to that project—2005 it started eh—he was Minister of Housing in 2005. In fact, I was with him when I was ill-advised and I turned the sod with him for that project in Wellington as Member of Parliament. I had not a clue what he was doing. I went there as MP and turned the sod for the Wellington, Debe, site.

Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you something. They brought in contractors to do what is called experimental housing units and they were experimenting with housing units without structural approval from the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure and without statutory approvals from the relevant authorities.

That project has led to serious infrastructure cost and remedial works to the tune of \$30 million. That began under the reign of the Member for Diego Martin West. On that site, we have shown, with photographs—you know on that site, the ground was moving under the house. Houses were moving by a couple inches every month. They were not mobile houses, Member for St. Augustine. They were moving because they did not do infrastructure work there. They went on cane land and just build house—\$112 million gone with \$30 million in remedial work.

Las Alturas Housing Development, conceptualized and initiated under my friend, the Member for Diego Martin West. Mr. Speaker, I am telling you this—*[Interruption]* Well, you can deny what you want.

Dr. Rowley: I am ignoring you.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, a housing estate that they entered into a relationship for the Chinese to build. Today, they accuse us of bringing Chinese in this country to build when we are building hospitals. They had the Chinese building houses, as if local contractors could not build houses; as if we could not build houses.

They went into Las Alturas Housing Development Scheme there at a contract sum that began at \$65 million and ended at \$90 million. Under a geologist as Minister of Housing, they did not do the geotechnical scientific work at that site, when a geologist was the Minister of Housing.

China Jiangsu, buildings H and I, approximately \$13 million. There were two geologists—one Prime Minister and one Minister of Housing—and they failed to do the geotechnical work at that site; built houses on a gravel sand pit. They built houses on a sand pit.

Today our forensic structural engineers have told us that two building towers valued at \$26 million must be demolished. That is taxpayers' money. That is a shame; \$26 million, two building towers at Las Alturas must be demolished.

12.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, and I know that it would be hard to believe that; it would be hard. Mr. Speaker, it would be hard for you to believe that. This is why, I took the liberty, because it is hard to believe that.

Miss Mc Donald: You get permission to bring that here?

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: You forget about my permission “nah”! Mr. Speaker, this is what the housing estate at La Alturas look like. *[Picture in hand]*

Hon. Member: That is shame. *[Crosstalk]*

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: This is the shame that we have had to put up with, Mr. Speaker. This is it. *[Crosstalk]* This is the Member for Diego Martin West, Minister of Housing. This is what we have to do now. This is taxpayers' money. Look taxpayers' money at work courtesy the PNM! This is it! This is what we have to put up with.

Dr. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I rise under Standing Order 48(6). I had absolutely nothing to do with that. The Member has ascribed that to me and my tenure as a Minister of Housing, I had absolutely nothing to do with that and I ask for your protection, Mr. Speaker. [*Crosstalk*]

Miss Mc Donald: It was not this Minister.

Dr. Rowley: I am the Member for Diego Martin West. Look it there! Diego Martin West; that is me. I have nothing to do with that.

Mr. Speaker: Do you want me to rule or you want to rule? [*Laughter*]

Dr. Rowley: I apologize, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I think you mean Standing Order 48(6), not 46.

Miss Mc Donald: No, 48(6) he said.

Mr. Speaker: 48(6)?

Miss Mc Donald: Yes, that is what he said.

Mr. Speaker: The Member is saying that you are imputing improper motives, and he is not associated with that project. I have to take the Member word. So I ask you to withdraw and let us move on, please.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, I know how to handle this easily. One Dr. Keith Rowley was Minister of Housing from November 10, 2003 to November 07, 2007. Construction of this site started in 2008 where the planning work would have been done two years before. [*Desk thumping*] You do not start a housing construction site like this—[*Crosstalk*] So, what do you think you are building, box drain? [*Laughter*] What do you think, when you are building a house, is a box drain? It took a minimum of two years to plan and execute a project like this, Mr. Speaker, and the Member was Minister until the end of 2007.

Dr. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I rise gain under Stading Order 48(6)—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: But he is saying now he was not the Minister when this was initiated and—[*Interruption*]

Miss Cox: Sit down! Sit down!

Dr. Rowley: Mr. Speaker, I rise for your protection under Standing Order 48(6). That project was added after I left the Ministry of Housing, that tower, and I ask my colleague to stop ascribing it to me. I have enough of “meh” own to carry. If you have nothing to do, do that. That particular tower was added to Las

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Alturas, after I left the Ministry of Housing by others. There is much more he can say, but why is he ascribing it to me. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Well, I think you did, in fact, raise that matter about Standing Order 48(6) and the hon. Member has withdrawn. [*Crosstalk*] You have withdrawn. All right. Well, let me just put the question for an extension, please. The temperatures seem to be rising here.

Hon. Members, the question is that the speaking time of the hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Development be extended by 10 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, let me move swiftly on. I hear the Member, because he had demitted office. I think he was fired in November 2007. [*Crosstalk*] “But now ah can’t talk then!” It was not the only case of incompetence, inefficiency and corruption in the HDC. Let me move on to another case.

When they were in office, the now chairman of their party, a former Minister of Government and sitting Member of Parliament, in that period 2005/2006—sitting Member of Parliament, chairman of their party, former Minister of Government, the chairman of their Party today—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Who is that?

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Franklin Khan, and he is no member of any House, I can call his name. “What dey does call him? Smiley or Chin Lee or something like that.” Mr. Speaker, that person came in to the HDC system in a family business named Vidara. They came in with a family business named Vidara—the now chairman of their party who was a Cabinet Member of Parliament in the period—when they got contracts in the HDC valued at \$53 million between September ’06 to December ’07. Who was the Minister of Housing at the time? Who was the Minister of Housing between September ’06 and December ’07? Who was the Minister of Housing at the time when a sitting Member of Parliament received \$54 million in contracts from the HDC? They did not talk about corruption then; they did not talk about transparency. No shame then!

Mr. Speaker, Vidara was able to secure contracts in the HDC when they had no track record of building houses. They had no track record. One of the directors was a school teacher in San Fernando, went to Teacher’s Training College. They are not Members of Parliament.

Miss Mc Donald: Mr. Speaker, I rise on Standing Order 48(1), please, relevance to what we are dealing with.

Mr. Speaker: Overruled. Continue, please. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, and I challenge the Member for Diego Martin West to tell us if he was the Minister of Housing when a sitting PNM member and their family benefited to \$53 million in contracts from a state enterprise under his watch. [*Desk thumping*] And if it is that you did as Minister of Housing, what are you likely to do as Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago? [*Desk thumping*] That is why you want to come back. That is why they want to come back. They are seeing money. They want to plunder. Mr. Speaker, I withdraw that. I know they would jump up one time. I withdraw that; I withdraw that. Save that.

You see, while the Member for Diego Martin West was the Minister of Housing, I have an email, and this is a real email. You can check this one in the State of California and so on. Mr. Speaker, an email from one Emma Forde. Who is this Emma Forde? Former Minister of Housing, Emily Dick-Forde, I believe. Emma Forde says on Thursday, January 07, 2010, writing the PS at the Ministry of Housing, she said:

My attendance at Post-Cabinet briefing seems sure now that Dr. Rowley called me a liar.

My attendance at Post-Cabinet briefing seems sure now that Dr. Rowley has called me a liar regarding tender rules at the HDC.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Who is this?

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: This is Emma Forde, former Minister of Housing, Emily Dick-Forde, telling her PS that she was just called a liar by Dr. Rowley, who said that he laid the tender rules of the HDC in 2007 in Parliament.

But Mr. Garcia told me that he brought draft rules which were not approved at Cabinet.

Today, there are no rules of the tender as pursuant to the Housing Development Corporation Act. Those tender rules should be laid in Parliament.

They were fighting among themselves, Emily Dick-Forde said he called her a liar in an explosion of anger, and we remember that explosion of anger. The Member for San Fernando East alerted us to that. He called her a liar, and she was

researching whether he had taken tender documents to Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, they never took the Housing Development Corporation tender rules to Parliament pursuant to the Act. It is in 2013 that that person who occupies the position of Minister of Housing and Urban Development now, took the tender rules to Parliament. [*Desk thumping*] We took the tender rules to Parliament in 2013, not the Member for Diego Martin West. I have other emails here that others may read concerning the goodly gentleman, but this is the alternative Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker, they have embarked on a campaign of lies, of deception, of untruths, of falsehoods. I want to warn the national community that in the next year it will get worse; from murder it may go to treason. They will come with all kinds of allegations and scandals and bacchanal in order to undermine the credibility of this Government. They will come with all types of lies, in order to undermine the work of this Government because they are desperate for power. They are desperate for power, and they are sensing that power is slipping from their grasp.

They are running around with jello in their hands. They are running around with jello in their hands, and they are desperate for power, and in their desperation for power they will fabricate; they will invent; they will make up as they did with that “Rowleygate” matter; as they did with the Attorney General; and as they are doing with several ministries. They will come because of their desperate lust for power, because I explained to you when they were in power what they were doing. I explained to you what they were doing; the inefficiency. The people of this country will have to decide in due course. They are desperate, aided and abetted by the Member for Chaguanas West. I needed 25 minutes again to address some matters pertaining to the Member for Chaguanas West, but they will come again to accuse Ministers of all kinds of things.

My friend from Chaguanas West, every week there is some Minister building a house and they are taking out picture of a businessman’s house—taking out innocent citizen’s house. By now I may be have 10 houses and five rum shops. That is the propaganda. They will come to tell you: “You are building this. Now, they are building mall, they are building everything.” The lies they will portray in the next year—and they portray lies, they portray untruths because they have no plan; they have no policy; they have no programme.

Mr. Speaker, if this entire Government get up today and move out and those persons come into the Cabinet room, they would destroy this country once and for

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all. [*Desk thumping*] They will destroy this country. Mr. Speaker, and my colleagues will speak about the infrastructure development; about water. There are people in this country today cannot believe that they got water. People have roads and drains.

In my own constituency, I could tell you, in closing, there are areas in my constituency where people have told me that they never got pipe-borne water. The road was never fixed since the British left. They never fixed the railway road since the British left. Today we are fixing roads. [*Desk thumping*]

If you travel in this country, Mr. Speaker, I give you in closing, one drive. You drive from Mount Hope, you see the Oncology Centre; you go down the highway to the Divali Nagar, you see the tertiary education headquarters; you go to Couva, you see the velodrome there, aquatic centre, [*Crosstalk*] the next side, the Children's Hospital; San Fernando, the Teaching Hospital; Debe, the University of the West Indies.

Let us go to Diego Martin, to Toco: Diego Martin, a highway that they promised that they could not build, a highway in Diego Martin; Duncan Street, for you, the police post to protect your constituents; [*Crosstalk*] the police post to protect your—housing, Clifton Hill, Mr. Speaker. [*Crosstalk*] In Tunapuna, an administrative centre.

Mr. Speaker: Please, please. [*Crosstalk*] Member for Port of Spain, South, please. Members, I know lunch time is approaching, so we are a little peckish. [*Laughter*] So let us cool the temperature, cool it down. You have a few seconds again to wrap up.

Hon. Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Speaker, for the Member for Port of Spain South, let me whisper to you, the Arima Hospital, the Valencia By-Pass, the Point Fortin Hospital [*Desk thumping*] I would whisper that to you. So, performance is there. They talk, we deliver. Mr. Speaker, we will deliver right through to the general election, and the People's Partnership and the Member for Siparia will be returned as the next Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

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

Mr. Speaker: Could I have your undivided attention? You all will talk over lunch. Dr. Rowley, talk over lunch. [*Laughter*] Hon. Members, I think that we need to take our lunch break at this time. This sitting is suspended until 2.15 p.m.

1.00 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

2.15 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for La Brea.

Mr. Fitzgerald Jeffrey (La Brea): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Vox populi, vox dei, deliverance time is nigh. [*Desk thumping*] All the goodies in the budget will not save you. You cannot buy people because you have money. The AG learned that lesson with Dr. Merle Hodge. Your party learned that lesson last year with the THA elections. [*Desk thumping*] Your party learned that lesson in the by-election in St. Joseph. “Stick break in yuh ears”, because you still believe that you could buy the electorate this time around—“it too late. It too late.” After four and a quarter years of corruption, cronyism and nepotism, spite and vindictiveness, the population cannot take it.

In your four and a quarter years in office and over \$270 billion at your disposal, how much did corruption go up by? Makandal Daaga says it all. Martin Daly has made his pronouncements. I just want to seek some clarification from the Member for Oropouche East. I am not casting any aspersions, I just want an answer, whether or not he has a brother who was a huge contractor with HDC and, if so, how much contracts did he get for 2014? I just want to ask him because I just want to get some questions answered. I will give you a chance.

Dr. Moonilal: I really do not want him to continue this.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: No, no, I am just asking a question.

Dr. Moonilal: I have no relatives who are contractors with the Housing Development Corporation.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Mr. Speaker, this is the fifth budget—[*Interruption*] You want to ask a question? Go ahead.

Dr. Moonilal: Do you have any colleague on your side as a Member of Parliament whose family business is also a contractor with the HDC that you are aware of?

Mr. F. Jeffrey: I cannot answer that, I do not know.

Mr. Speaker, this is the fifth budget from this UNC-led coalition and I have heard, time and time again, references to all our citizens, all the people, welfare of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and to the casual observer nothing seems wrong with that, but after seeing, “serve the people, serve the people, serve the

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people”, and how it has played out by this Government over the years, I have to take everything with a pinch of salt. One only has to remember the experience of the very ebullient, young Avinash Singh, reference that was made about him when they realized he was the candidate for the People’s National Movement. Mr. Speaker, we have to look at this thing very closely.

As we go through the budget presentation, there is a statement that, “We are witnessing improving living standards among all citizens”, and I ask the question, who is this “all citizens” that they are talking about? Mr. Speaker, you could not be speaking about now, if you are talking about all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. You have to be thinking futuristically when the People’s National Movement returns to office. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, when we look at the performance of this Government we know for a fact that the majority of the state resources is spent in UNC-controlled constituencies; you have better roads, better recreational facilities, more Government offices, more jobs, more corruption, and what we have on the other hand? In PNM-controlled constituencies, we have nothing. So, obviously, one section of the population will be faring well and another section will not be faring well.

Mr. Speaker, I want to look at my La Brea constituency. When this Government came into office they closed down the Alutrint smelter, putting thousands of persons who were involved, or who were working on the construction site, they sent them home and nothing replaced the Alutrint smelter. So for four and a quarter years you had no replacement and, therefore, as a consequence, you would find unemployment was ridiculously high in the La Brea constituency, and, I dare say, in some parts of the constituency, unemployment is as high as 50 and 60 per cent. Debe will have full employment, Couva will have full employment, Chaguanas will have full employment, but La Brea and Point Fortin, and even, I dare say, Port of Spain South and so on, would have a different story. Mr. Speaker, and this was deliberately created by this Government.

Mr. Speaker, I am glad for the walkover at the Divali Nagar site because I know how dangerous it is, but I ask with the same breath, why a walkover could not be put for the people of Sea Lots where so many lives had been lost over time by vehicular accidents? When we are talking about the whole question of quality of life for people, it cannot be on one side alone. Why is it that up to this day a walkover cannot be put in place for the people in Sea Lots?

I go a step further. In another statement in this budget debate we heard about:

“My other colleagues have also played critical roles in charting our national agenda for improving the welfare of the people of Trinidad and Tobago...”

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Mr. Speaker, those colleagues and them, they have performed their roles superbly. Let us take, for example, the Siparia Erin Road which runs from Siparia down to Erin, between Quarry Junction and Erin, the road is in a deplorable state, worse than from Quarry Junction to Siparia. That road from Quarry Junction to Siparia, on the right hand side it belongs to the Member for Siparia, on the eastern side it belongs to the Member for Fyzabad, south of Quarry Junction the road is shared between the Members of Parliament for La Brea and Fyzabad—Mr. Speaker, like a hot knife going through butter, at Quarry Junction, where the Members for Siparia and Fyzabad meet, that is where the paving stopped. If we are talking about this whole question about fixing the place and so on, and the whole question of welfare of the community, one needs to take that into consideration.

Let us look at another example. I have noticed in my own constituency, and I guess in other constituencies as well, that wherever there are pockets of UNC supporters, they tend to fix those areas; wherever there are PNM strongholds, nothing happens. Mr. Speaker, that is the reality whether we like it or not. I have asked for a maintenance team for the roads in La Brea because we know the effects of the Pitch Lake—I have spoken about this thing more times than I could dare to remember and nothing has happened. Recently, the road was in a deplorable—I mean, real, real bad, and as a concerned Member of Parliament I called to ask for some work to be done so that we would not have to resort to the blocking of the road, the burning of tyres, and the Member for Tabaquite, my good friend, told me that he had no money. Mr. Speaker, what had to happen is that when they blocked the road and burned tyres, something started to happen.

If in the 21st Century this is what has to happen for something to happen then I could understand why it is you want to buy those 52 Spartan armoured vehicles. I understand why you want to do that. [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Speaker, you know something, if the roads were bad in Westmoorings, I am certain they would not have waited for people to burn tyres and block roads, they would have come long time and fix it. [*Interruption*]

Dr. Rambachan: But Westmoorings people voting for you all, what do you hate them for? Westmoorings people voting for “yuh”. What you have against Westmoorings? [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. F. Jeffrey: I want you to say that for Tabaquite too. Say that for Tabaquite too. Mr. Speaker, I will not be distracted. I want to go to a third statement in the budget, and listen to this, the Minister of Finance and the Economy said that they have:

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“...policies in place which are extending a caring hand to those who experience difficulties, and we are creating opportunities for all our citizens...”

—and I ask: what are those policies, Mr. Speaker? Where are the caring hands? And who has those caring hands, Mr. Speaker? In our National Anthem, “Here every creed and race find an equal place”, and when we are dispensing with state resources, we have to make sure that whenever we are dispensing of state resources that we try to unite rather than divide the population.

Mr. Speaker, we saw the unequal treatment meted out to the oil spill victims, and I can speak with authority here. In La Brea we had the oil spill—major oil spill. We had a little sprinkling in Diggity Trace in Penal and we had some in Marabella. In the twinkling of an eye, they came down to Diggity Trace, evacuation took place and compensation. In La Brea, nothing of the sort.

2.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, let me just read a little thing here for you. *Guardian* newspaper, Saturday 04 January, 2014, and I want the population to hear this.

“At a press conference on Tuesday, acting Prime Minister Errol Mc Leod announced that temporary housing would be provided for La Brea residents...”

That was January 04, 2014. [*Crosstalk*] Ten months later not one resident got a house. Ten months later and you are talking about equal treatment and so on. Mr. Speaker, we cannot treat people like that. The Minister of Housing and Urban Development:

“I expect in a few days they should be in a position to indicate to us their most serious cases and then we would see what is available in our housing stock to offer those...”—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Browne: Who said that?

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Ask the Member for Oropouche East.

“We are looking at La Brea itself where we have a couple of houses available. Apart from that we have not ruled out private guest houses for persons who are in emergency need.”

Mr. Speaker, nothing. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. But you know, Mr. Speaker, just for the record, you see, the Member for Oropouche East mentioned that I did

not communicate with him about the housing situation for oil spill victims. I just want to go to *Guardian* newspaper Kevon Felmine article, Monday, December 30, 2013.

“In response Housing Minister Dr. Roodal Moonilal said he has taken note of Jeffrey’s request for housing accommodation.”

But I did not tell you anything. But I did not tell you anything. [*Crosstalk*] It was not you who say “wha”? [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Indarsingh: Who wrote that column? [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. F. Jeffrey: “Ah boy. It not easy. It not easy.” That is why we have to question, when you “talking about all the citizens and the people” and so on. We have to take that with a pinch of salt. Mr. Speaker, in this oil spill situation what we got in La Brea was plenty “mamaguy”, plenty empty promises and vacuous statements made by those who should know better.

Mr. Speaker, I was there from December 18, and I remember when the oil spill showed up itself in La Brea, some Petrotrin officials they wanted to help. As a matter of fact, they started to organize, but then came a helicopter [*Laughter*] with Santa in red [*Crosstalk*] which landed not very far, and out came our Prime Minister, smiling; no problem with that. Hugging the little ones. No problem with that. Taking pictures. No problem with that. But, Mr. Speaker, hear the sting in the tail. “I thought it was much worse”, when she was looking at the oil spill. And that statement was repeated twice.

Hon. Member: Can you repeat it?

Mr. F. Jeffrey: “I thought it was much worse.” And I looked at the Petrotrin officials and I saw their chins dropped because it was a subtle message, “Listen, all yuh doh bother wit dem people. All right. Doh bother with them. Yuh aint have to do much.” All right. Because you thought it was worse. So it “aint” so bad, you know.

But hear what happened. Mr. Speaker, the chairman of Petrotrin, Mr. Gillette, he told me that he is asthmatic, and he “cyar” stay here much longer, “he gone”. Alpheus Lee, an 80-year-old blind pensioner who is bedridden, 10 months he stayed in that same place, but Mr. Gillette left. He could afford to go, but the poor pensioner had to stay there. [*Crosstalk*] Where is the caring hand that we are talking about? Where is the caring hand, Mr. Speaker? [*Crosstalk*] But the caring hand of the Government did not stop there. We had the case with Petrotrin and the dumping of COREXIT 9500. Now, I heard the Minister came here and told the

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House that it was used in Pointe-a-Pierre only on, I think, December 17 and 26, but we have information from both Mr. Dial who is the HSC Manager of Petrotrin, who knows better, who indicated that they used the COREXIT 9500 on the first two days of the oil spill—of the clean-up which is 18 and the 19.

Secondly, the President of Petrotrin also said that they used the COREXIT 9500, but they used it according to the National Oil Spill Contingency Plan. So how come those two “fellas” who know the oil industry inside out, who work there, Dial and Hassanali, they could say they used it—[*Interruption*]

Ms. Ramdial: “Deyal”, not Dial.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: “Deyal” Dial. It would not matter. [*Crosstalk*]

Ms. Ramdial: No. No. Have some respect.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: What mattered, something happened; it wrong.

Ms. Ramdial: It is his correct name.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: It is wrong. Because you know, Mr. Speaker, according to the international conventions and guidelines by the National Oil Spill Contingency Plan, you ought not to use—Mr. Speaker, I want your protection, please. I am getting disturbance.

Mr. Speaker: Yes. You have my full protection. Allow the Member to speak in silence. Continue, hon. Member.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Right. So they dumped the chemical, the COREXIT 9500. And I want to read something, Mr. Speaker:

“Oil is deadly and COREXIT is deadlier and when the two products are combined, it is a lethal cocktail as the mixture becomes up to 52 times more toxic than oil alone.”

And that was taken from Mr. Dave Hodges, all right, in his article “We Are Being poisoned”.

Mr. Kim Anderson who is head of a research team at Oregon State University, hear what he has to say about this COREXIT 9500.

“...regarding the toxicity of COREXIT 9500 and its use in the Exxon Valdez oil spill. The Exxon Valdez oil spill and subsequent clean-up activities provides the...case...of the United States involving significant exposure to the types of toxins discussed in the article...Findings, related to the longevity of the Exxon Valdez clean-up”—on—“workers, are very disturbing as their collective

lifespan statistics revealed that the average life expectancy is a mere 51 years of age and nearly all of the Exxon Valdez clean-up workers are dead.”

Hon. Member: What!?

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Are dead. And, Mr. Speaker, I know I did not ask your permission, but let them go to Wednesday, December 25, in the *Guardian* and look at the pictures of those workers who were involved in the clean-up; no protective gears. As a matter of fact, they did not even know, right, that that chemical that they were using was so dangerous. What happened? It started to itch, diarrhoea, vomiting, chest pains, stomach pains, headache and fever. And, Mr. Speaker, you know what happened? When we checked those manifestations, it is the identical thing that happened in 1989 in the Alaska case, and in 2010 in Mexico. But the sad thing is, that 10 years after the oil spill in Alaska, cancer became prevalent. Lungs, stomach cancer—prominent. And so too with serious lung disorders. Mr. Speaker, that tells a sad story. How caring is this Government? How caring, that in a serious situation like that, the State refuses to come in and help these people. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, you see we have to understand that talking one thing and doing something else is something else. When we look at the La Brea situation, the COREXIT 9500 that they mixed with the oil, what they did, they were supposed to evacuate the toxic sand with the oil and so on and carry it away. You know what they did? They took the sand and they sprayed it over the toxic sand.

Hon. Member: What!

Mr. F. Jeffrey: So what happened, Mr. Speaker, when the tide came up the water mixes with the COREXIT 9500, and then it goes back out into the sea.

Hon. Member: You serious?

Mr. F. Jeffrey: And you could see if you go down to Point Sable beach, when the tide is high you would see some nice little black nodules in the water; that is the dangerous COREXIT 9500 that is mixed with the oil. And this is a caring Government. [*Crosstalk*] This is a caring Government. But time longer than twine. That is why we in La Brea look in joyful hope for when this Prime Minister will call the next general election. We cannot wait! We cannot wait. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker, we come now to the unemployment figure of 3.6 per cent. So they said from 2013, 3.6 per cent and most of 2014, 3.6 per cent. So that is all right. But I wonder if in calculating that 3.6 per cent if they regarded URP, CEPEP, OJT, MILAT, MYPART and MuST as part of people who are employed?

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2.45 p.m.

Because, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Siparia, when she was in Opposition in 2006, 2007, 2008, made a startling statement, where she said:

“Employed persons earn wages, those who receive Government transfers are in receipt of welfare payments...and since welfare payments are not wages, those who receive them cannot be counted as being employed.”

Dr. Browne: Who said that?

Mr. F. Jeffrey: That is the Member for Siparia. She said that in 2006. So, I ask the question now, Mr. Speaker, in arriving at that 3.6 per cent, I hope to God that those figures did not figure at all, because we know that to arrive at that 3.6 per cent you had to include those things. But more than that, the darling project of the LifeSport Programme, those people inside there, how do you classify them, as employees or people who are receiving just the grant? Because many of those, they had no work, they collect money just like that. And I want to know when they arrived at that 3.6 per cent, whether or not that was taken into consideration?

Mr. Speaker, dealing with this unemployment situation I want to come back to my Point Sable beach in La Brea. Rumour has it that this caring Government, trying to help with the unemployment situation wants to put down a port in Point Sable, and I want to say from the outset, over my dead body; that will not happen. [*Crosstalk and desk thumping*] Mr. Speaker, you see Point Sable beach is a shallow beach. If you are going to make that a port, the amount of dredging that you would have to do would mean that all the other beaches in La Brea, even though now, are very toxic, we would lose all. The mangrove swamp that fish used to spawn, the crab and the oysters and so on, we would lose all of that. And then the mangrove which acts as a buffer against the waves and so on, our coastline would be further eroded. But more than that, when you go down to that Point d’Or area where people have been living for 50 and 60 years, and you go and you put down a port that they say they would do ship repairs, and you have to do sandblasting and so on, what happens to the comfort of those people in the Point d’Or area? I say it now and I would say it again and again, no port development must take place in Point Sable. [*Interruption*] If you want to put down a port, go down to Brighton where there is a natural deep water harbour and adequate space to put down a port. Why you want to go down to Point Sable to put down a port? We say, no, no, no. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I heard in the budget, the Minister proclaimed that this Government is committed to the promotion of employment practice which is fair and equitable to all workers. “But that doh play out. That doh play out”, because we had the unfortunate experience where a former fiery trade union leader who used to defend workers’ rights, now Minister, could threaten to take legal action against a former colleague and now PSA leader, who is standing up for the rights of his workers for safe environment. People like George Weekes, Tubal Uriah “Buzz” Butler, Adrian Cola Rienzi, Donald Granado, Nathaniel Crichlow; they must all be turning in their graves. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker, we know for a fact that the Patrick Manning administration built spanking new premises for the public servants to work, but because of vindictiveness and spite, this Government refused to outfit the buildings so that the public servants can work in comfort. You know what, Mr. Speaker? They are in the International Waterfront Centre, you know. A lot of the Ministers and them, they occupy buildings here, so they could take the nice conditions, but leave those workers and them in those hot, dusty areas to go to work in. And you want to jam a trade union—no friend of mine—for taking that kind of action. I am saying, that cannot be right.

Mr. Speaker, I want to go to another serious area, Petrotrin refinery. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Deyalsingh: Oh gosh, yes. Great. You have enough time for that?

Mr. F. Jeffrey: I have enough time, man. Let me just take a “lil” read from this thing because you know, it is startling.

Mr. Deyalsingh: You could spend a whole day on Petrotrin.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Yes. Because we are told that despite the problems with the maintenance, how the Government still was able to, am—oh yes, look it here:

“We have had in the period 2012 to 2014, three years of positive economic growth, notwithstanding extensive and prolonged maintenance activity in the energy sector”.

And I say, but, “wait nah”, which energy sector they are talking about? Which one? Those tanks, they have 42 of them high risk and 75 medium risk. What kind of maintenance is going on there for that? Mr. Speaker, the Sealines, you know we had the big oil spill in La Brea with Sealine No. 10. Maintenance was to have been done there since 2011. Nothing happened. And we know for a fact that there

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is poor maintenance practice taking place in that refinery. [*Interruption*] And I want to ask a question, whether or not there is insurance coverage that is up to date at that Pointe-a-Pierre refinery? I also want to know, could the State give us the assurance that within the next two years or so, no serious accidents would occur in the refinery because of poor management maintenance practices?

I remember hearing the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development, when asked about whether he could give any assurance that there will be no more oil spills, and he said he could not give it. If it was one time he was talking the truth, it was that time. Because Petrotrin is in a colossal mess, it is just waiting for something to happen, and I am saying here now, “leh we stop playing roolly-polly” with the oil industry in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, that oil industry is the lifeblood for this country. Oil and natural gas, and Petrotrin being a major employer in the oil industry has to get its act together.

Hon. Member: Change the board.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: And as you quite rightly said, that whole board is supposed to go. You know why, Mr. Speaker? Shell Global Solutions did a comprehensive study of the infrastructural integrity at Petrotrin, and they put some recommendations inside there, at great cost, for Petrotrin to uphold.

Mr. Speaker, I know for a fact “Mr. Capuchin” or whatever his name is, sent copies of the report to every single management official in Petrotrin. So that when the oil spill occurred in La Brea and they took six small-fry and sent them home, I say that was real injustice. The people who were supposed to go home are not those six people, but the whole management and the whole board. [*Desk thumping*] But we “fraid” to do that. You see, they would not do that, because some of those managers are related to high-ranking political officials. Nepotism at its best. [*Interruption*] And that is why they cannot fire nobody up there.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Rumour-mongering.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Rumour-mongering? Mr. Speaker, if we had some more time we would talk about that. Let me go a “lil” step further. In the budget statement we are told about—the nice, a nice “lil” line inside there—the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development chairing some committee and so on. It looked nice, but all could not be well in the city of Denmark.

Dr. Gopeesingh: In the State of Denmark.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Mr. Speaker, when trade union—State of Denmark, sorry. All right, okay, my pardon. Good. [*Interruption*]—leaders of OWTU, PSA, CWU, BIGWU, are at loggerheads with the Minister of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development, you know that the end is nigh.

I went to the Industrial Court because I always like to use the latest figures, but this is what I get, [*Interruption*] October 2011 to September 2012—you see things going nice under this Government, eh. The number of man-days lost in 2010 was 3,488 for 428 workers. You think that bad? You might say, all right, in 2010 PNM was there and then UNC take over, so, maybe when PNM was there that is why it was so high. In 2011, no PNM was around, 897 workers and the number of man-days that were lost were 100,614.

Hon. Member: What?

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Things going nice, man. And that is not my figures, that is from the Industrial Court. [*Interruption*] Retrenchment 2010, 638—

Mr. Speaker: Would you be interested in extending your time?

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Okay.

Mr. F. Jeffrey:—2010, number of reported retrenchments, 638; 2011, 1,124. And, Mr. Speaker, I guess the reason why I did not get 2012 and 2013, it was worse. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, let me talk a bit, because time going. Let me talk a bit about the agriculture. My political leader went to town on the Caroni GREEN so I would not go there. But, Mr. Speaker, you know something? When the PNM was in office, we knew what the food import—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the hon. Member for La Brea be extended by 10 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

3.00 p.m.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, thank you comrades. When the PNM was in office we always knew what the food import bill was, \$4 billion. “You ain’t find it strange that things getting better, right, but we cyar get the figure for the food import bill.” That is a red flag, and a lot of the figures quoted in agriculture are not correct.

Hon. Member: It is false.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: You see, Mr. Speaker, if I could go back to the whole question with the Caroni GREEN—

Hon. Member: Red. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. F. Jeffrey: The 360 acres under cultivation—do not for one minute believe that the Minister of Agriculture who came up with the 360 acres, you know, or the Caroni board you know. It is Ernest and Young—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Ernst.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: All right, okay, [*Laughter*]—who did their audit, and they came up with the 360, because, Mr. Speaker, the Member—[*Crosstalk*]—the Minister of Food Production had said that by December 2013, 1,800 acres would have been under cultivation. But you know what happened, in August he made a statement that 5,800 acres was under cultivation. And you know what happened, it is when Ernst & Young did their audit, they came up with that figure.

But, Mr. Speaker, we know that Caroni GREEN is a cash cow. Millions of dollars are being lost. That board from Caroni GREEN used to inflate figures, like for overheads and so on, and charge the farmers. Mr. Speaker, they had a contract for somebody to do PR. They paid \$360,000 on PR to make Caroni GREEN look good, but that company, that Caroni GREEN Limited is a virtual disaster, because none of those employees have the expertise to be engaged in the agriculture. But, they are talking about this whole thing with praedial larceny, how they raised the fine by 50 per cent, but that will not solve the problem.

The first thing is that you have to catch the thieves and the number of security involved in the praedial larceny squad is minuscule. So you could raise it 100 per cent, you would not catch anybody. So the first thing you have to do is increase the staff, and what you should do is give some tax break to the farmers who installed surveillance cameras. That is the way to go, Mr. Speaker. This cosmetic thing about you will increase it by 50 per cent, “who you will catch”? Who will you catch? Mr. Speaker, what goes around comes around.

When the PNM was in office we had the large farms, the mega farms concept which they make hay, and so on. It is good to see that they came around, and they got involved with the mega farms. I do not want the Minister to leave this House at all because the situation in La Brea—you know we are part of the south-western peninsula for industrialization, and I just want to put back on the record,

September 14, 2010, and I want you to hear the words of our next Prime Minister.

“It is not surprising that as the government takes this decision to derail the smelter, as with other vaps, it has absolutely no credible alternative to present to the people of La Brea, Pt. Fortin and the rest of the south west peninsula...”

Mr. Peters: Kamla never said that.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: I said the next Prime Minister.

Mr. Peters: That is what I say.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley. Because, Mr. Speaker, you see, if I can go very quickly, let me go through the events. In 2010, when this Government came into office, we heard from the Member for Tunapuna, the Alutrint project shall cease and an alternative strategy will be put into place for the south-western peninsula. That was in 2010. We heard what our political leader said, that nothing was going to happen. This was followed by another important statement. The south-western peninsula already has a power generation plant and port facilities. Building on these advantages we will construct a new industrial estate which will create jobs in the area.

Now, Mr. Speaker, that Union Industrial Estate is 320 hectares. TGU only occupies 15.94 hectares. So you have about 304 hectares vacant, you have a port, you have a power plant. You would not study to full the Union Industrial Estate, you are going to build a new industrial estate. Who are you going to build it for? TGU only employs 60 persons in an area with high unemployment. You are not serious. You are not serious. Incidentally, that industrial estate that they are talking about was in Debe. That new industrial estate was in Debe, and that is why up to this point in time no industrial plant has been put on the Union Industrial Estate. And to put the final nail in the coffin, in the budget of 2013, hear this, Mr. Speaker:

“Transmission Infrastructure to move power from the recently constructed Trinidad Generation Unlimited 720 megawatt power generation plant into the national grid to ensure optimal utilisation;”

Now, imagine they put down a power plant on the industrial estate to feed those plants on the estate and now you are taking that power and putting it outside. What they mean, Mr. Speaker, is to close down the industrial estate, and we are hearing about Mitsubishi, the \$5.4 billion project that is supposed to create 3,000 jobs. We had that story already.

Mr. Speaker: You have one more minute.

Mr. F. Jeffrey: All right. Mr. Speaker, the Reliance Bitumen Upgrader is one of the plants that was supposed to employ between 15,000 and 20,000 persons in La Brea, gone. PV wafers was supposed to employ 1,750 during—sorry, 3,000 in construction and 1,750 permanent jobs, nothing happened. Polypropylene to plastic was supposed to employ 5,000 during construction and 500 permanent, nothing, Mr. Speaker. And therefore, in a nutshell, what I am saying is, this Government is not serious. They are discriminatory, they have been vindictive and wicked, and we are saying enough is enough, “call an election now”. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Kevin Ramnarine): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is always a great privilege to be invited to come to the House of Representatives to make a contribution during the budget debate. First of all, I want to congratulate the Minister of Finance and the Economy on his third budget [*Desk thumping*] and on the, I think it is now the fourth budget of this Government since we have been in office, [*Crosstalk*]—thank you very much—and he has five more to deliver. [*Desk thumping*] And I want to say that it is a great privilege to be coming in what is termed in cricket, “one down” after the brilliant opening pair of the Minister of Finance and the Economy and the Minister of Housing and Urban Development.

So coming “one down” is a great responsibility. [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Speaker, I would appreciate—I sat in silence while Members opposite were presenting. Mr. Speaker, a lot has been said today—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: I am going to give the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs the full protection of the Standing Orders, so I ask Members to observe. Let me just refer to the specific section just in case Members might have not read it. It deals with rule 53, and I want you to pay attention to 55 at the same time, “Order in the House”. So please allow the Member to speak in silence. Continue, hon. Member.

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Thank you very much. So again, Mr. Speaker, I did not expect to be here today, and I only started to prepare for this contribution a couple hours ago while the Leader of the Opposition was making his contribution. And that being said, I am quite capable and competent of delivering a contribution on energy or on that matter for many different topics in this House as I have done for the last four years. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, I am again being distracted, but I would not ask for your protection this time. Well, let us start off with the energy sector. The energy sector, Mr. Speaker, everybody in this House would agree it is very important to the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. I heard the Leader of the Opposition say that natural gas accounts for 44 per cent of GDP. That was wrong. The energy sector in its entirety accounts for roughly that amount of GDP. So that is just not the natural gas. He also went to great lengths in his contribution to paint a picture as though we do not know what we are doing, and that we have done absolutely nothing.

So, I have been doing nothing, according to the Leader of the Opposition, in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs for the last three years and three months. But I do not depend on the Opposition for any validation of my performance. My performance has been validated internationally, Mr. Speaker, as a Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs. [*Desk thumping*] My performance has been validated internationally as the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs.

Hon. Member: By whom?

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Yeah, and you will read more about that very soon. So coming to the contribution, Trinidad and Tobago, energy sector accounts for 17 per cent of bp's global volumes. The Minister and the Leader of Opposition visited bp's offices when he was routing through London a few months ago and I see nothing wrong with that, because he was able to get some of the good news from bp with regard to their investments in Trinidad and Tobago. And he spoke a lot about Ryder Scott as though the Ryder Scott Report is something that we only started to have in this country in 2010, and as though reserves started to fall in the year 2010.

Natural gas reserves have been falling every year since 2002, and I would like the Opposition to explain, when they reply to me, why is it there was no Ryder Scott audit in the year 2005? Because when you look at the graph of natural gas reserves in this country there was no Ryder Scott audit in the year 2005. And the reason for that is, in the year 2006, because you do the audit for the previous year, so in the year 2006 there was no full-time Minister of Energy in Trinidad and Tobago and that continued until the year 2007, because the then Minister of Energy was also the Minister of Public Administration, and he ran the Ministry of Energy from the Ministry of Public Administration. So they were not able to renew Ryder Scott's contract in 2006 and there was no audit in the year 2005.

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Having said that, there has been a decline, constantly, for the last 12 years because we are simply not replacing our reserves as fast as we are using them. We use approximately 1.4 to 1.5 trillion cubic feet of natural gas per day and to replace that requires a tremendous amount of drilling and exploration and so on.

But I want to come to 2012, and for 2011 and 2012 there were very small downward movements in the Ryder Scott reserves for this country. In 2012, a very significant well—probably the most significant well to have been drilled in this country for the last decade—was drilled. That is called the Savonette 4 well and it encountered one trillion cubic feet of natural gas, and that well is today on production, and I heard the Leader of the Opposition say that it takes years for production to come on. That might be so in some circumstances, but when a discovery is made close to existing infrastructure, production could come on almost immediately.

But the Savonette 4 well is something that I think this country should know that there was a conscious and deliberate attempt by certain individuals in this country to sabotage that well, and that is based on information I have corroborated between two companies—between bp, on whose behalf the well was being drilled, and by one of the contractors on the rig that day, and that is Lennox Petroleum. That well, if it were sabotaged, this country would have lost billions in terms of value. But the attempted sabotage was being executed, or carried out, by persons that the Opposition are now aligned with.

Hon. Member: Who is that?

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: And these are facts.

Hon. Member: Who are they?

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: No, I do not want to call names. I will leave that to your imagination. [*Interruption*] I am just saying that they are persons that you are aligned with. You are aligned with many people.

So the Ryder Scott audit also had a piece of good news. One of the pieces of good news in that audit was that there is a 26 per cent increase in exploration resources—one of the four categories of reserves—and that is because the audit now considers blocks that were licensed in the year 2011. The audit does not yet consider the deep-water acreage for which there has been a massive amount of licensing in the last two years. And when those blocks come into that audit, we will see a further increase in our natural gas exploration resources.

But the Leader of the Opposition dealt, quite extensively, with natural gas curtailments at the Point Lisas Industrial Estate, and there is something philosophical about the PNM and energy which I want to talk about because it speaks to the history of the PNM. Whenever the PNM speaks about energy, the first two words to exit their mouths is Point Lisas, as though Point Lisas is the be-all and the end-all of the energy sector and there is no energy sector outside Point Lisas. Because, you see, Point Lisas is what you see in Couva and in California, not California where the emails were discussed and so on.

And what they do not take into consideration is that there is a massive upstream industry in this country that is located primarily off our east coast and to our south-east coast and to some extent, off our north coast, and it is that industry that provides the natural gas that feeds those plants at Point Lisas. Those plants at Point Lisas will be sucking air if it was not for the natural gas supply coming from offshore.

The Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, and the Government, do not produce natural gas. Ninety-nine per cent of the natural gas produced in this country is produced by four companies: bp, being the largest player; BG; BHP Billiton; and EOG Resources. So I do not produce natural gas. But I want to say why it is we are in the position that we are in today with the curtailments, and I do not want to betray the confidentiality of any company in making this contribution. But between the years 2008 and 2010, there was a collapse in investment by one of this country's major upstream energy companies, and there was a loss—a collapse in confidence on behalf of that company. And the Leader of the Opposition spoke about the need, that currently there is a lack of confidence and we are losing reputation and so on.

That company—and I actually have the information from that company here with me today, but I do not want to reveal the name of the company—told me on more than one occasion that they were spooked—that is the exact word they used—that they were spooked by the former Government.

Hon. Member: Call the name of the company.

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: No, I “doh” want to call the—I am not dragging the good name of energy companies into the politics—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Please, please. Members, this is the second time I am rising to appeal to Members to allow the Minister to speak in silence. If I have to rise a third time, I am going to invoke the Standing Orders and I will ask Members to remove themselves for about three hours. But do not continue to disregard the ruling of the Chair. It is disrespectful. So if I have to rise a third time, I am going

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to invoke the Standing Orders and I am going to ask those Members who persistently disregard the authority of the Chair, to remove themselves from the Chamber.

Continue, hon. Member, please. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: So, Mr. Speaker, it is also important to know that the NGC, apart from a little piece of the Angostura field that they now own, does not produce natural gas. Right?

So, in 2008, there was an environment of uncertainty and unease that was created because somebody at the Ministry of Energy called in that company and told them that SPT, or Supplemental Petroleum Tax, was going to be applied to natural gas. That is what happened. I have the PowerPoint presentation that was delivered to that company at the Crowne Plaza four or five years ago—five or six years ago—and as a consequence, the signal went back to the United Kingdom that Trinidad and Tobago was about to become very punitive with its fiscal regime. At that time—well, there are many companies in the United Kingdom so it does not—but do not victimize them, please. At that time, that company was investing heavily in other projects around the world, so guess where the capital investment flew to? It left this country.

So, Mr. Speaker, when you get a heart attack, it is not because of what you ate last night or the day before, it is as a consequence of compounded action over a period of 10 years, and the companies have been telling us that they were basically telling the former Government that the fiscal regime had to change, and it had to change to encourage a greater competitive outlook for Trinidad and Tobago. And what we have done in the last four years—and if you read, I think it is the Energy Chamber's comments in the Ernst & Young report on this budget, there have been no fiscal incentives for the energy sector in this budget, and there is a good reason for that. They were provided in the last four budgets.

Every budget, since 2010, we have had incentives here for the energy sector, and the response to that has been record levels of foreign direct investment in the energy sector. [*Desk thumping*] These are facts. We have had, I think it is US \$1.8 billion in 2011. That is energy FDI, not total FDI; about \$2.2 billion in 2012 and \$1.4 billion in 2013; and the outlook is very, very positive for energy sector investment.

But coming back to the gas curtailment issue and the philosophy that says that Point Lisas is the be-all and the end-all of the energy sector, I am very disappointed because it seems that certain people in the Point Lisas Industrial

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Estate have taken this issue of the gas curtailment to the political level, and this flies in the face of a level of camaraderie and collaboration that was taking place between the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs, Point Lisas Energy Association, Atlantic LNG and the upstream players, where we recognized that we were in a challenging environment with gas supply and we have been sitting, on a regular basis, around a table and discussing how best to mitigate this.

Mr. Bob Dudley was here last year October. Members of the Opposition visited a bp function that was held at the Hyatt and they would have heard what he had to say. It was reported in the *Guardian* of October 03, 2013, a little less than a year ago. It was reported that Mr. Dudley said Trinidad and Tobago had survived what he called the “shale gale”. Trinidad and Tobago had survived the shale gale. So we have held this thing together in the last three years. In addition, Mr. Dudley was very high in praise of the efforts of not me, but the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs, to coordinate the largest turnaround in the history of the energy sector last year September/October. This is when the Cassia B Hub went down.

So we are in the situation we are in today for many reasons, and I will go back to another reason. In the period 2009 to 2010, the NGC went out and they signed three gas supply contracts: one with BG, one with EOG and one with BHP Billiton, and those three contractors were to supply gas for two projects in the main, one of them being the Alutrint project and the other one being the Essar steel project. And I would love to know what happened to the Essar steel project because they talked about SABIC and they talked about CariSal and so on, but they do not tell us what happened to some of the projects under their Government during their tenure.

So every Minister of Finance—and there were two Ministers of Finance from the year 2002 to 2010—would come to this budget debate and read out a list of projects, and some of the projects included Alutrint Aluminium Smelter, a downstream project. What happened to that? The Alcoa Smelter project—what happened to Alcoa? The Essar Smelter—that was under your time in office. *[Interruption]*

Hon. Member: Did they shut it down?

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: I am calling out more projects. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I want to bring—under Standing Order 53(2), I want to draw to the attention of this honourable House that I have brought to the attention of this House continuous disturbances. I recognize the Member for Point

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Fortin continuously disturbing the proceedings. I pointed out a short while ago, the Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Diego Martin West, is also persistently disturbing these proceedings. I warned the Members before. This is my final warning. The next time I rise I will ask both the Members for Diego Martin West and Point Fortin to retire from this Chamber, for three hours. Continue, hon. Member.

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So I will go through the list again: the Alutrint project—and, yes, that was a project that was referred to in the very first budget speech given by the Minister of Finance in the year 2010; the Alcoa project—that was a project proposed by the former administration in many budgets; the Essar Steel project—again, a project proposed by them that fell away; First UAN, a project by Ansa McAl—I do not know what happened to that. That was supposed to go to La Brea, but you are not complaining about that. The Union Estate Fertilizers Limited—whatever that is; La Brea Nitrogen, another project; TEIL Ammonia downstream—a project which my colleague, Minister Hadeed, is very familiar with; West Lake Ethylene Complex—again, another project that I picked up in the budget speeches of Karen Nunez-Tesheira and Patrick Manning, Member for San Fernando East; Lurgi Basil, Gas to Polypropylene—all these were projects coming out of their budget speeches; ISGN Malik and Hydride and the famous CariSal project which straddles administrations.

A lot has been said, too, about the Union Industrial Estate, and our colleague next to us here is very passionate about the Union Industrial Estate. He has said that—I think it was the Leader of the Opposition who said that we have abandoned the Union Industrial Estate. Well, Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. We have not abandoned the Union Industrial Estate. This Government inherited a TGU project that was incomplete and behind schedule and floundering.

Today, I want to give credit to the board of TGU, led by Mr. David D'Andrade and the CEO of TGU, Mr. Steven Badrie, for their leadership in right-siding that project, [*Desk thumping*] and for successfully closing a dispute that they had with the company, Man Ferrostaal which was the EPC contractor for that project, and for successfully buying out the minority shareholder, AES. That project was supposed to have been funded 60 per cent by AES and 40 per cent by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. It ended up being something like 91 per cent Government of Trinidad and Tobago and as a result, AES's position was

diluted from 60 per cent to almost 9 per cent. That project is completed and it is 100 per cent owned by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

Our colleague talked about debottlenecking TGU, and I want to say that this Government is completing, as we speak—if you go on the M2 Ring Road, this Government, under the leadership of my colleague, Minister Baksh, is completing the Gandhi Village substation which will debottleneck TGU and allow that 720 megawatts available in La Brea to be used in the national grid. But that does not mean that we are neglecting the industrial estate at Union Estate.

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The Mitsubishi/Neal & Massy or Massy methanol to dimethyl ether project is in a very advanced state of finalization and we expect—and that is a private sector driven project because the Member for St. Joseph keeps talking about a blade of grass not being cut. That is an issue, it is a private sector-driven project, and it is for them to decide when they reach final investment decision. That project, Mr. Speaker, we could have put that project in a place called Point Lisas North which is a vast expanse of land north of the—what they call—I call it the Farmland Misschem Plant. It is now called Point Lisas Nitrogen Limited. We decided as a Government to put that project in La Brea on the same site that the smelter would have been located because we recognized that there was a need to stimulate that part of the country. It is one of the growth poles.

I want to put on record today, as the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, my support for the highway to Point Fortin, and that highway is going to open up the entire south-west peninsula and, in particular, the energy sector to economic development. [*Desk thumping*] Imagine we have a US \$5 billion plant in Point Fortin, one of the world's leading LNG facilities, without adequate infrastructure to get there. Atlantic will tell you they are very happy with the highway and it is going to open up further development in La Brea.

But coming back to Union Industrial Estate, because the Leader of the Opposition took credit for the Juniper project, and I want to say that it was, again, this Government, that insisted to bp that that platform be fabricated in La Brea, because they could have easily fabricated that platform in the Gulf of Mexico, or in Mexico itself which is becoming a destination for platform fabrication. But we insisted that Technip, which is the company doing the platform, fabricate that platform in La Brea, and we insisted that there be a significant local content component in that project in La Brea. And that project will start in the fourth quarter of this year. That is the fabrication of the Juniper platform starting this year.

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We also heard that we have left Union Industrial Estate for—you know, we have forgotten it and so on. NEC, now called National Energy, is about to expend significant moneys for the upgrade of port facilities at Brighton, that is berth 2 and berth 3, and that upgrade is going to, again, prepare the ports at Brighton for post-Panamax-type traffic and so on. So we have not forgotten La Brea, we have not neglected the Union Industrial Estate.

As we talk about Juniper, Juniper is a US \$2.1 billion investment and the Opposition takes—that is one thing they take credit for because they probably looked at the newspaper clippings and saw that is a good thing. That investment would not have been possible had it not been for the tax incentives that have been provided by this Government in the last four years. [*Desk thumping*] That investment would not have been possible.

Mr. Speaker, in listening to—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Jeffrey: Minister, will you give way to one small question?

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: No, I do not have much time, I am sorry, but we could talk afterwards offline. A lot of talk about the National Gas Company and I heard in the crosstalk that we are destroying the NGC and so on, but the NGC recorded its highest ever profits in the year 2013. [*Desk thumping*] Six point five billion dollars in profits, and I want to give credit to the board of the NGC today [*Desk thumping*] and the management of the NGC, and none of them are related to me or, you know, I have no relatives there in the management of NGC or in Petrotrin.

But the Leader of the Opposition must tell the country whether it is their plan because I have heard this coming time and time again from the Opposition—“why yuh shaking yuh head for, I ent finish talk yet”. The Leader of the Opposition must tell the country because I heard it in the Senate that part of the Opposition’s energy plan is to merge all the energy companies—all the state-owned energy companies in Trinidad and Tobago, meaning Petrotrin, NP, NGC, et cetera. That plan was well in train in 2010 before they left office, and that is why they put Malcolm Jones as Chairman of the NGC and Chairman of Petrotrin, because the plan was to take NGC’s cash surplus and to use it to prop up Petrotrin. That was the plan. And therefore, if that is the plan that they plan to roll out in 2015, they must tell their friends in the Oilfield Workers’ Trade Union, what does that mean for employment in Petrotrin in particular. What does that mean? [*Desk thumping*] Because they must tell the Oilfield Workers’ Trade Union that; tell Roget that.

Now, coming to the issue of Petrotrin, and I heard the Member for St. Joseph said he could talk for a whole day on Petrotrin. Well, guess what? I could talk for a week on Petrotrin. Right? I could talk for a week because for the last three years and three months, I have been compiling a lot of information on what transpired in that company from the year 2002 to 2010.

I want to tell you, and I will start off by saying, the debt in Petrotrin—and this is a fact and the Opposition knows that because this is a question they posed to Petrotrin in one of the Joint Select Committees. The debt in Petrotrin in 2002 was TT \$3.3 billion. When they left office, that debt had moved to TT \$12.5 billion, and that is a fourfold, or a 400 per cent increase in the total liability or the total debt of Petrotrin, and, of course, to quote the Member for San Fernando East when he was in a different incarnation, I would ask where the money gone because I do not see the evidence of that.

I will tell you where the money went. The money went into the World GTL Project for which \$2.8 billion was spent and to date, that has been best described as scrap metal. The money went into—and the Member for Oropouche East alluded to the headquarters that we see on the highway; that is somewhere in the region of hundreds of millions. It sits ironically opposite the Tarouba Stadium, and that is another project that was—when I asked for the designs on that, it was a palace that was being built. It was opulence to the max that was being built there—chandeliers and curtains. I saw the whole thing.

But what happened is that there was the GTL project and there was the GOP project. GOP stands for Gasoline Optimization Programme. That project started off at US \$350 million in 2005. The project is now completed at US \$1.5 billion. That is a fourfold—almost more than a fourfold increase in the cost with regard to that project. To support all that expenditure in the refinery, they went out and they caused Petrotrin to enter into two bonds for something in the region of US \$1.5 billion, and those bonds are very onerous to Petrotrin. So that is part of what was happening at the time.

Our colleague from Pointe-a-Pierre was, for a period of that time, still in charge of the union there, and he would tell you, as many people will tell you, that Trinmar was being deliberately run into the ground. And if you look at the production of Trinmar, there was a sharp collapse around the year 2005/2006, and no money was going to Trinmar. Trinmar was being starved. Money was flowing into the refinery and flowing through the refinery like a dose of salts, and that is why today, we are playing catch up today, in the refinery in terms of maintenance, because all the money was heading into the GOP project and into the GTL—and

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these are facts. All the money was headed in that direction for those two projects while Trinmar, which is the cash cow of Petrotrin, was being run into the ground. But the Government decided to refocus the company on the upstream and the South West Soldado project will be completed in 2015 bringing on an incremental 3,000 to 5,000 barrels of oil from South West Soldado.

I will talk a bit about Alutrint and I am aware that there is an ongoing arbitration with Alutrint with regard to a company called Sural, but I do not think the country knows exactly how much was spent on Alutrint; US \$84.24 million was spent—yes, it is US dollars here—on Alutrint. That is how much was spent on the Alutrint project. Now, again, where the money gone? Because I did not see much blades of grass being cut, I did not see a brick, right. And I got a breakdown of that money, and I am seeing here, for example—they like to talk about legal fees, eh. One of my colleagues will multiply by 6.4 for me because I have the numbers here in US. Legal fees for Alutrint, US \$2.21 million. Now, multiplying that by 6.4, you are going to get about TT \$13 million for one company. And we were talking earlier about the entire AG’s office. This is TT \$13 million in legal fees for Alutrint.

Something called “foreign travel”, 2.11, almost the same amount of money in foreign travel. Now, I am pretty sure that might be the foreign travel budget for a couple of Ministries but this is one company. Something called “office expenditure”—I have to find out what that is—US \$10.49 million. That is office expenditure. I do not know if that is steno pad and stapler and manila folder and so on, or if it is photocopy ink. I have to find out what that is. So, significant expenditure, the former CEO’s salary, TT \$100,000 per month—much more than I earn, much more than any of us on this side here earn—and an Audi A6 and an X-Trail. I do not know why he needed two—[*Crosstalk*] Because you all talked about Alutrint so let us talk about Alutrint because the PNM’s plan—and you all have not made it a secret—is to bring back the smelter, is to bring back the rapid rail, is to bring back the revenue authority, is to bring back the property tax. And we have said that those ideas sound very familiar, they sound like something from the period 2007 to 2010. It sounds like “ah back-in-times party”. Back to the future, yes.

So, Alutrint—and that is just one part of it. There was a very nice arrangement between Alutrint and the gas contract and so on, and they were supposed to get natural gas at very good prices, I understand. That is part of the problem that we have inherited today because the NGC went out and contracted gas from three companies to supply gas to Alutrint and Essar. Those projects never materialized.

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In the interim, bp said, “Well, you have excess gas”—because colleagues around—my colleagues on this side will recall that in the year 2010 when we came in—I was not yet Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs—we had what we called oversupply of natural gas in Trinidad and Tobago, and that was because of the over-contracting for Alutrint and Essar.

As a consequence of that oversupply, bp said, “Well, you know what, we are going to go into maintenance mode because you all have an oversupply of natural gas” and so on, and at that time, bp had the Macondo incident in April 2010, one month before the Government changed. So all these things from five or six years ago are having an impact today. So I come back to saying, what is happening today is not a function of the year 2013 or the year 2012 or the year 2011. It is a function of decisions that have been taken or not taken over a very long period of time when our colleagues opposite were in Government.

Coming now to one more thing I want to talk about and that is liquefied natural gas. We have had curtailments and it has impacted Point Lisas, it has impacted Atlantic. And with regard to energy revenue, I can tell you that energy revenue from LNG is actually more today than it ever has been, and I will not give the exact figures, but LNG revenue, I can assure this Parliament, is more than it was—it is, today, more than it has ever been in the face of curtailments. And why is that? That is because the commercial structure for many of the LNG contracts have changed or have caused to be changed. And I have personally overseen some of these issues because the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs has had to get involved from time to time, and as a consequence of all that change in the commercial structure, we have allowed for greater flexibility in the marketing of LNG. As a consequence—and I keep hearing people harping on the US market. Well, guess what? The world is not only one country. Right? There is a massive market for LNG to the south of Trinidad and Tobago. South America; 49 per cent of our liquefied natural gas goes to South America. I put this on TV but the Opposition did not hear it.

3.45 p.m.

Only 10 per cent now goes to the United States. So we have diversified, significantly, the LNG market and we are no longer totally a slave of what they call the Henry Hub price. So the LNG business is strong and robust in Trinidad and Tobago. Our country continues to be the most reliable supplier of liquefied natural gas in the world, while other countries like Egypt, Angola and Nigeria and so on have been having a lot of issues.

I wanted to deal a bit with what our colleague, the Member for La Brea, said about the oil spill, about there being no compensation. I have been advised, while I was listening to him, that TT \$22.5 million have been paid in compensation as a consequence of the oil spill at La Brea.

Dr. Gopeesingh: That is not a rumour.

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: That is not a rumour. That is not a rumour. Twenty-two point five million Trinidad and Tobago dollars have been paid to persons affected by the spill in La Brea. I want to say that with regard to that oil spill, it is unfortunate what happened and we all know the story—I would not consume much of my time going on and on about it. That has been cleaned and we are treating, at the level of Government, with the whole issue of ageing infrastructure, because that is going to a central issue moving forward. The Cabinet has approved that the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs enter into a high level consultancy—that is with the Central Tenders Board; the deadline date was actually yesterday. We are going to be doing a national facilities audit of the entire energy sector that would deal with this issue of ageing infrastructure. These things take time, they do not happen overnight and they cost a lot of money.

Mr. Speaker, there has been—of course, I did not expect the Opposition to say anything good about me or the Government or anything good, period. We have had three times more investment in the energy sector from 2011 to 2013 as we did between 2008 and 2010. That is a fact. We have signed 12 production-sharing contracts in the last three years and there are 28 production-sharing contracts that are currently active, so we have almost doubled the amount of production-sharing contracts that have been managed by the Ministry of Energy. [*Desk thumping*] We will sign two more deep water production-sharing contracts in the coming months and we will sign three licences for onshore exploration.

Interest in Trinidad and Tobago's upstream sector is very high. One international magazine said, is Trinidad and Tobago the next North Sea and so on. Our rig activity is very high. We have eight rigs working in this country right now; bp is about to bring in a third rig to work for them to drill the Juniper development next year. I want to say, too, that the Ministry, in working with the Central Tenders Board—the Central Tenders Board has selected a consultancy. We are still in negotiation with that consultancy as to the final terms of their contract, but they have selected a high-level consultant of great international repute to execute this country's natural gas master plan. That is something which the Opposition did not have for eight years; because the natural gas master plan

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probably existed in the mind of Ken Julien. There was a natural gas master plan that was delivered to the desk of the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs in January 2002—it now sits in the library in the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs—that was ignored for that eight-year period. We will not do that. That natural gas master plan would be in my hand by March 2015.

Mr. Speaker, we have re-engineered the NGC. The NGC used to be a company that bought and sold natural gas in Trinidad and Tobago. We have vertically integrated the NGC. We have acquired 39 per cent of Phoenix Park from ConocoPhillips. We have gone into the upstream by acquiring Total's assets. We have been involved in vertically integrating the company and the company today is much stronger and much healthier than it has ever been. [*Desk thumping*]

We have re-engineered the fiscal regime that governs the energy sector and for this, according to a report from the Fraser Institute, today we have moved 11 spots on a ranking that the Fraser Institute has for ease of doing business in energy sectors around the world. We have moved up 11 spots because of the work that—So, we have not been doing nothing in the last three years and three months. We have been working very hard. The Leader of the Opposition says that they will bring in new people—I did not actually hear him say that, my staff told me that—to repopulate the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs with the best people.

I want to say that the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs already has the best, the brightest and the most patriotic—[*Desk thumping*] the most patriotic public servants in Trinidad and Tobago. They have been with me for the last three years and three months. We have completed the Galeota Port. We have completed the Galeota Port and I want to talk a bit about that. [*Desk thumping*]

The Galeota Port is now complete. We opened the port a few day ago. When I became Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs in June 2011, that project—which the PNM Opposition may seem to take some credit for—was stuck. It was going nowhere because there was a dispute between landowners in the area. One of the landowners, bp, had a lease in the area and there was a dispute between bp and National Energy Corporation. I intervened and I got that dispute settled in three weeks of becoming Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs—[*Desk thumping*] in three weeks of becoming Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs.

Mr. Speaker, I may need a few more minutes to wrap up. But, that project was going nowhere; it was stuck, the contractors were mobilized, nothing was happening and money was just being wasted. Minister Howai, when he was

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Chairman of National Energy Corporation, a subsidiary of the NGC, went with me to Galeota in 2012 with Minister Peters and we turned the sod to start construction work on the Galeota Port. That project is completed and it is going to change the complexion of south-east Trinidad.

I want to commend our colleague, the Member of Parliament for Mayaro, for his support on that project. [*Desk thumping*] Because he was with us from start to finish and we ensured that the people of Guayaguayare had employment from that project. That is why you hardly ever heard any sort of noise around that project for the last two years. Because we were able to engage the communities and employ them in that project. We will do the same wherever there are major energy sector investments in Trinidad and Tobago. That project is going to reduce the amount of time that companies take to get to their platforms and rigs. Those companies are now located up in Chaguaramas and so on, and in La Brea, and this project is going to make it a lot easier to do business in the south-eastern part of Trinidad and stimulate economic activity. Cities are born out of ports, in the main, and we see our vision for Galeota. Galeota would become to Trinidad and Tobago what Aberdeen is to the North Sea. [*Desk thumping*] That is the vision.

So, Mr. Speaker, in wrapping up, I want to say that the energy sector continues to be strong. The Leader of the Opposition talked about the shale gas revolution. We have no control over the shale revolution in the United States. I cannot tell the United States how to manage their energy policy, but Trinidad and Tobago, over the last three years—He talked about the confidence that foreign countries have in this country. I want to say in the last year and a half we have had visits to this country by the Vice-President of the United States, by the President of China and, most recently, the Prime Minister of Japan, Shinzō Abe. When Mr. Abe came to this country, he did not come alone. Mr. Abe walked with two very important men with him. He walked with Chairman of Mitsubishi Corporation, one of the most powerful businessmen in the world and he walked with the Chairman of Mitsubishi Gas Chemicals. That, to me, sent a signal as to Japan's interest in Trinidad and Tobago.

So, we have been attracting the interest of the three largest economies in the world. The United States is the world's largest economy, China is the world's second largest economy and Japan is the third largest economy in the world. That has a lot to do with the foreign policy outlook that we have in this Government where our Prime Minister—I want to give credit to the Prime Minister; that the Prime Minister has been going and promoting Trinidad and Tobago in a most positive manner internationally. [*Desk thumping*] So much so that we have the

leaders of the world's three largest economies coming to this country—
[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: What about Dookeran?

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Yes, I would not be distracted by your remark. So, confidence is very high in Trinidad and Tobago. Wherever we go internationally, we are received positively and the—[*Interruption*] Yes, I am glad you are received positively, you are not positively received here. [*Laughter and desk thumping*]

So, Mr. Speaker, there is a lot more to be done. I do not know how much more time I have, but I want to talk a bit about—Mr. Speaker, do I have some injury or extra time?

Mr. Speaker: Let me indicate that the question is going to be put that the speaking time of the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs be extended by 10 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

Sen. The Hon. K. Ramnarine: Thank you very much to the House for voting 10 minutes more time for me. I must say I am coming at one down after the brilliant opening partnership of Minister Howai and Minister Moonilal. I had to score 100 runs today, Mr. Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] And I am very happy to announce that I am now on 101, not out. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, coming to the deep water, it has been one of the signal successes of this administration. The former Government, under the PNM, had tried to get investment in the deep water, it did not happen. We now have one of the most significant exploration programmes in the history of the oil and gas industry taking place off our east coast in our deep water. The president of BHP Billiton, Mr. Tim Cutt, President of Petroleum & Potash of BHP Billiton, has been very bullish and very positive about what they believe is one of the world's last unexplored deltaic regions, which is the Orinoco delta. They believe that in that deep water there is going to be the find of a giant oil field. A giant oil field, by definition, means an oil field with greater than 500 million barrels of recoverable oil.

So, that drilling will actually start in the year 2016 and we will be in office in the year 2016—[*Desk thumping*—]—when that drilling programme starts. Bp is going to be drilling what they call the Andrilling prospect in the year 2016 and we will be in office in the year 2016 to oversee; because, you see, continuity is very

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important. Continuity of policy is very, very important in the energy sector. Political cycles and energy sector cycles do not always overlap, but continuity is very important. We will ensure that there is continuity in the level of confidence that these companies have in Trinidad.

I want to say that all the multinationals in this country did not have in 2010 a growth story. By a growth story, it is what they tell the analysts in York and in London with regard to how the company is expected to grow in Trinidad and Tobago. They all have growth stories now to tell around Trinidad and Tobago. Bp's investment in Trinidad and Tobago is now going to be averaging US \$1 billion a year from now into the year 2017 when they bring on production from the Juniper field. All the multinational companies now have confidence because confidence is rooted in competence. Confidence is rooted in competence. [*Desk thumping*] The posture of this Government and of the Prime Minister and the posture of the Minister of Finance and the Economy and the posture of the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs and, indeed, all my Cabinet colleagues, have always been very pro investment. We have always sought to attract, not only investment for investment sake—because you had some very strange characters turning up as investors under the previous Government—but the world's best companies are being attracted to Trinidad and Tobago to invest and we will continue with that level of delivery into our next term when we are re-elected in the year 2015.

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

Miss Donna Cox (*Laventille East/Morvant*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am, indeed, delighted to contribute to the debate today on the Appropriation (Financial Year 2015) Bill.

Mr. Speaker, this is the Government's fifth and this Minister's third and may I say, his final budget presentation to this Parliament and to the nation. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, I must admit that when this Minister assumed office as the new Minister of Finance, I had high hopes, given his background and training, that at last the nation had, in this administration, someone cut of different political fabric from that of his colleagues and who, from his past record would put country first above all else and would not become contaminated by those around him. Mr. Speaker, I am sorry to say that after the presentation of this budget, I cannot now recognize the Minister.

Mr. Speaker, his legacy would be one that would identify him as the Finance Minister who would have inspired a national budget construct that would have imposed on the backs of the population of this country a state of indebtedness that will continue to be a burden on this and future generations. More importantly, he would have laid no groundwork to facilitate the settlement or repayment of the national debt.

4.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I have always maintained that a national budget should be cast within a strategic and socio-economic framework and philosophy, which is structured and tailored to short-term, medium-term and long-term sustainability. This, one would have thought, would have been outlined early in the life of this administration, but after four years and five national budgets, the nation is still awaiting the long-term framework policy of this Government.

Against this background, therefore, and in the absence of such policy prescriptions for the nation, you cannot be surprised by this hodgepodge which was delivered as a national budget. Mr. Speaker, the best description of this budget I could find is that it is a “swiftophrenic” budget. I say this because many of the statements we heard bear no relation to reality. The best illustration of this is the very title coined for the budget statement and that title is, I quote: “Empowering Our people through Sustained Economic Growth and Prosperity”. So, Mr. Speaker, how are we empowering our people when the Government, through its policies, is in fact encouraging and propagating the dependency syndrome, that is, citizens becoming increasingly dependent on the State and State resources?

Clearly, Mr. Speaker, after the PNM, while in office, was criticized over the years by the very people when in opposition, they accused us of harbouring and developing the dependency syndrome amongst segments of the population. Now that they are in office, we witness before our very eyes the promotion and growth, through this very budget, of the most widespread package of facilities geared to grossly expand the features of a welfare state. The obvious question is, Mr. Speaker: is this package sustainable? And in answering this question, let us pay some attention to the financial components of the 2014/2015 national budget. The Minister of Finance and the Economy proposes to spend a whopping \$64.7 billion for fiscal year 2014/2015, the largest budget in the nation’s history, and this represents an increase of 11.7 per cent on budgeted expenditure for the 2013/2014 fiscal period.

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But since the Minister of Finance and the Economy, throughout his budget presentation, compared the current year with 2010, let me remind him, since he did not mention this one, that the expenditure level for the current period is 38.7 per cent above that of 2010. In fact, the five budgets presented by this administration, each year's expenditure budget was larger than the previous year. Hence, each year, in and of itself established a spending record. The five budgets presented over the period by this Government have totalled \$273.7 billion, just under \$300 billion. This sum of just under \$300 billion in just five budgets would have covered the expenditures of all the national budgets that would have been presented to this nation from the year 2001 to the time this Government assumed office. What the previous Government took 10 years to spend, this Government, in five budgets, has not only outspent the budgets of the entire decade of 2001 to 2010, but will also have a balance to partially fund part of that 11th budget.

Mr. Speaker, this is nothing short of reckless pillaging of the national Treasury in a way we have never seen in our 52 years of Independence. But it would be fair to say that there is nothing inherently wrong with undertaking high levels of expenditure from time to time. But, however, the obvious question is: how are these expenses to be paid for?

In its fifth year, this Government has very little to show, in respect of the formulation of some strategy geared towards economic transformation and diversification away from the energy sector.

Mr. Speaker, let us examine the impact of this wanton spending on the finances of Trinidad and Tobago. The Minister in his statement glossed over the issue of the Central Government and the public debt of Trinidad and Tobago by stating somewhat, in passing, and I want to draw to the attention of the Minister of Finance and the Economy that—no, I need to quote from the statement. I quote, Mr. Speaker:

“...for fiscal 2015, the Government envisages a fiscal deficit of 2.3 per cent of gross domestic product, down from the 3.6 per cent of gross domestic product in financial year 2014 budget, and in keeping with our commitment to reduce the deficit by 1 per cent per year.”

But I want to draw to the attention of the Minister of Finance and the Economy that this Government, since it came into power in 2010, has possibly established a record for having posted a budget deficit for every budget it presented, and I would not go into the details because the Leader of the Opposition gave those details on the budget deficit of this present Government.

But this amounts to an accumulated deficit position of \$20.4 billion or 31.5 per cent of the current budget. So, successive budget deficits must be funded from somewhere. Quite naturally, the financing of these deficits is done through domestic and/or foreign sources, which in turn can be very burdensome.

Just for the record and for the information of hon. Members of this House and to the nation, let me inform them that the PNM, in its eight years immediately preceding this regime, posted budget surpluses for each of these years, with the exception of the final year in office. And these were all done during rather difficult, international economic times. Mr. Speaker, this is what you call prudent management of the nation's economy and this is what you call responsible and efficient execution of the mandate entrusted to you by the people of this country.

Mr. Speaker, again, just for the edification of the Members opposite and the national community, the cumulative surplus position generated during the seven-year period was in excess of \$9 billion. And although this was partially eroded in fiscal 2009 to 2010, in the context of a challenging world economic environment, the PNM, at the end of its term, left the country with a healthy surplus position, all of which has now been frittered away by this wild-spending regime.

Mr. Speaker, I want to move on to sports, but before I move to sports, you hear talk about—the Member for Oropouche East spoke about all the glowing headlines. Of course, it is clear that this is an election budget. It is a budget for votes. But yet, if you want the votes, you cannot wait until the final year before an election to start to do things for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. So I want to speak about sports in the constituency of Laventille East/Morvant, because a perusal of the PSIP document will reveal that no provision was made for the refurbishment of any recreation ground in the Laventille East/Morvant area.

It is important to note that since 2010 to now, the Ministry of Sport has done no work in the constituency, but yet I see they have concentrated on the UNC areas. For example, the cycle track will be built in Couva; the National Aquatic Centre is Couva; the National Tennis Centre in Tacarigua; three multipurpose indoor facilities are to be built in Charlieville, Couva and Fyzabad. Also a perusal of the PSIP document, I want to quote from the document:

“One of the main objectives of developing sporting recreational facilities is to promote the adoption of healthy lifestyles and provide spaces for sporting events.”

And, clearly, well, this is not applicable to many PNM constituencies.

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Mr. Speaker, I also saw in the document that the Sevilla Golf Club house and the golf course, the pool and extended deck in Caroni will also be upgraded.

Under community grounds, \$63.4 million was invested in 2014 for the development of local community grounds. So when I saw that, I got excited. I said: well, of course, maybe Laventille East/Morvant is in that. The following eight grounds were completed: Union Recreation Ground, Pointe-a-Pierre. I want you to note clearly where all these grounds are located: Union Recreation Ground, Pointe-a-Pierre; Beaucarro Recreation Ground, Couva; El Dorado Gardens Recreation Ground, El Dorado; Phoenix Park Recreation Ground, Couva; Korea Recreation Ground, Couva; Avidesh Samaroo Park, Chaguanas; Inverness Recreation Ground, Naparima; Williamsville Recreation Ground; Kumar Recreation Ground, Naparima.

So, Mr. Speaker, there were an additional 11 recreation grounds which are to be constructed and I think they are down for major upgrades. Okay? And these grounds are: Spring Village Recreation Ground, St. Augustine; Moosai Honeymoon Recreation Ground, Tunapuna; Caroni Village Conquerors Recreation Ground, Caroni; Frau Street, Orchard Gardens, Recreation Ground, Chaguanas; Leo Thompson Recreation Ground, Gasparillo; John Peter Road Recreation Ground, Chaguanas; 4 3/4m Penal Rock Road Recreation Ground, Penal; Esmeralda Recreation Ground, Chaguanas; Worrell Road Recreation Ground, Moruga; Morne Diablo Recreation Ground, Morne Diablo; Clarke Road Recreation Ground, Siparia.

Not one of the 63 point-whatever million dollars, none, no recreation ground in any of the PNM constituencies. Mr. Speaker, many of them are completed. The new ones are completed, well lit and maintained, and when you pass there is not much activity taking place there. Where is the integration of the development of sports, the national sporting organization and the use made of these facilities?

Mr. Speaker, every one of the completed grounds and the additional grounds that are to be upgraded, every one of them is in a UNC constituency. You all should be ashamed of yourselves. Mr. Speaker, this is what they want to call good governance. This is what they want to talk about, a budget for everybody, and so on, and look at what is happening. In the final year, you want to give persons stuff for votes. But look at what is happening, and this has been happening from 2010 to now.

Mr. Speaker, one sure way of dealing with deviant behaviour is through sports and yet this Government wants us to believe that they are serious about crime. I mean, which recreation ground in the East Port of Spain/Morvant/Laventille area? What have they done? Nothing. And it is not to say that they have not been receiving letters and being beseeched by Members on this side for the grounds to be upgraded. It is not to say that this has not been happening. This is a deliberate plan. That is what they have been doing, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, by now, the Government should recognize that sport, of course, can act as a deterrent to criminal activity and antisocial behaviour. Emphasis, of course, therefore, should be placed in areas where youths are at risk and the criteria for development work should not be in UNC areas. I mean, how serious are they about sport development and talent identification? How serious are they about crime?

Mr. Speaker, the people of Trinidad and Tobago are asking for more transparency in the operation of the Elite Athlete Programme. Who are the athletes on this programme, and how much do they receive? I understand some persons on the programme are still awaiting funding and others are waiting on a balance. I would like the Minister of Sport to give an update on the status of the programme because, recently I saw someone in the newspaper talking about the fact that he has been waiting for a balance and he was thrown out of his apartment. I think it is the *Newsday* of Saturday, August 09.

4.15 p.m.

Permit me to quote from the *Newsday*:

“TWO-TIME Trinidad and Tobago 110 metre hurdles Olympian Mikel Thomas, has been kicked out of his Florida apartment and forced to abruptly end his 2014 competitive season due to the unavailability of Elite Athlete Assistance Programme...funds from the Ministry of Sport.”

And that is just the first paragraph of this letter. So, Mr. Speaker, I feel that our athletes should not be going through that. Where is the money? Where is the money for the elite athletes? And I think that the Minister of Finance and the Economy too can tell us about this, because I would like to know what is happening here. I understand that there are persons who should not be given funding because they have not met the criteria, and they are receiving funds—

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Minister of Sport, so you would need to look at that, and this is contrary to the objectives and policies of this programme. Who is responsible for this?

Because actually, the national sporting organizations and the Olympic Committee are supposed to be involved in the process of choosing these elite athletes, and they have been left out of this, and this is not in keeping with the Cabinet Note that dealt with the Elite Athlete Programme. And as I speak about elite athletes, it brings me to the successes of Jehue Gordon and Lalonde Gordon and other athletes. I wish to remind this House, that the success of all these athletes is as a direct result of programmes like this Elite Athlete Programme, which was put in place by a PNM administration, under a PNM Minister of Sport.

As I speak about Jehue Gordon, I am reminded that I recently saw a letter to the editor, and this letter was written by one Dr. Ian Hypolite. I saw this letter September 10, *Express*, and the heading is:

“What happened to that Chaconia”

So, Mr. Speaker, I understand that Dr. Ian Hypolite who is Jehue Gordon’s coach and he is also the coach of the national track and field team, you know, was offered a Chaconia medal in public, and then privately it was rescinded without any explanation. You know, I feel that—I just want to read a part of this letter. It says:

“In August 2013 upon my return to Trinidad and Tobago from the ... World Track and Field Championship, I received notice that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago had recommended that I receive a cash award and the Chaconia Medal Silver as a result of the coaching work I had performed with Jehue Gordon.”

All right, he went into details about his work with Jehue and so on. He said:

In August 2014 “I received a letter signed by the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Sport, in an envelope labelled ‘Private and Confidential’, dated July 30...advising that the award to me of the Chaconia Medal Silver by a decision of Cabinet...”

And then they explain the subparagraph:

“...a (iii) of minute # 2453 of August 29, 2013’ had been rescinded. No reason was given for the rescission.”

Now, you know, at the end of the day, he said:

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“In the interim I did receive the cash award and I received communication from the Office of the President on more than one occasion with respect to an appropriate time for a ceremony to receive the Chaconia award.”

You know, I think that the kind of work that this gentleman has done in the sphere of sport for Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Speaker, I think, that you know, this embarrassment, the Government has embarrassed him and we would like to know who took away this award? Why did this take place? How could this happen? And no explanation to him, I mean, it is an embarrassment for him to write a letter to the editor, it means he feels very hurt about this situation, and I feel that he should be given a public apology and a proper explanation, okay. [*Desk thumping*]

This brings me to the fact about clear guidelines in the Ministry of Sport. Mr. Speaker, there is an urgent need for clear guidelines and a rewards policy with regard to achievement in sport. You know, our athletes are doing better and better because of a sustained sporting programme and policy that this administration inherited. It is, therefore, realistic to assume that more and more successes will take place, especially with the Rio 2016 around the corner. And I agree that athletes should be rewarded for their successes, but it must be done within the framework of a policy guideline. And you know, just now, somebody else will win a gold medal and so what is going to happen, are we going to give away the Queen’s Park Savannah next? [*Laughter*] You know, in the absence of a policy, a clear policy framework when it comes to rewards for sports, because we expect to do well. We expect to continue doing well, then anything could happen. So I am just asking that this be done please, Mr. Speaker.

Under the Recurrent Estimates, \$2.5 million was allocated for the Anti-doping Association, and I would like to know when this board is expected to be set up, because to date nothing has been done in terms of moving forward.

Mr. Speaker, I move to Malabar FC. [*Interruption*] Why is Malabar FC in receipt of \$60,000 a month from the Ministry of Sport? [*Interruption*]

Dr. Rowley: Malabar Football Club, right?

Miss D. Cox: Yes, Malabar Football Club, and I am looking for the document because I see here—I have two documents from Malabar FC. Now, I see, I want to quote from a letter because I want to make a point, you know. And this letter, this is a second letter from Malabar FC asking for an increase to \$80,000, and there is a note on the letter signed by—I will read it, Mr. Anthony Creed, sport, recommended as per policy, Anil, 03.07.14.

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Now, what I would like to know is: what policy are they talking about? What policy exists in the Ministry of Sport, that a Ministry sponsors a football team? I would like the Government to tell me: what policy exists that a team is sponsored? Because money is supposed to go to the national sporting organizations, [*Desk thumping*] okay. If a community is having something, it is a difference, but to sponsor a team every month, Mr. Speaker, every month to the tune of \$60,000 which we are sure of, and I am not sure, I know it was approved, so they could be getting \$80,000 and, Mr. Speaker, I feel that this is something that we need to look at. We need an explanation for this because other sporting persons then—where was this policy advertised? If there is a policy then we have—I have sporting groups in my constituency. I have teams in constituency. All of us have teams. Why were they not being sponsored per month? We are not talking about a one-off to assist in a situation, you know. Per month Malabar FC was getting this money, taxpayers' hard-earned money approved by the Minister, and actually, I mean it seems like it is a norm, they asked for more.

Hon. Member: What constituency?

Dr. Rowley: Where is the PS in that?

Miss D. Cox: This is D'Abadie/O'Meara, Malabar, this is what is happening.

Dr. Rowley: Where is the PS in that?

Miss D. Cox: Where is the PS in this, you know? [*Crosstalk*] What is happening here? [*Crosstalk*] So, Mr. Speaker, I think that this is something that is very serious here, and must be corrected, must be. Because as I said before, money is supposed to go to the national sporting organizations, and we have been reading the newspapers and hearing sporting organizations crying out, crying for money, and I will give an example here concerning the Trinidad and Tobago Cricket Board. Permit me to quote from a newspaper article dated September 09, this week actually where—*Trinidad Express*:

“Trinidad and Tobago Cricket Board...President, Azim Bassarath, was in a fiery mood as he addressed the male and female awardees at the TTCB's 58th Annual Award Function at the Chaguanas Borough Corporation Hall on Saturday.

And in this, he is saying:

“...for four long years little or nothing came to the TTCB and its clubs while companies such as”—and he gave the name of some companies—“and the

like enjoyed state funding of over \$400 million of taxpayers' money.”

And here he was referring to LifeSport. And, Mr. Speaker, he also spoke about the fact that Malabar, he drew reference to:

“...Malabar...Club, a non-participant in the domestic professional football league, but which received government assistance of”—a certain amount—“for the past four years.”

This is ridiculous, Mr. Speaker, clearly this is ridiculous. When we have, as I was saying, national sporting bodies crying out for assistance and then one club, all right, they are not even in the professional football league. Because I understand in the professional leagues some clubs get assistance, that is an agreement with the Ministry of Sport. So then, of course, it is fair because it is across the board where the professional football league is concerned. Malabar is not a member of the professional football league. What criteria—all we know is that they were in the Minister's constituency that they would be getting that amount of money. I mean, we have to do something with that.

There is something else that I observed, Mr. Speaker, looking through the Social Sector Investment Programme, 2015. I want to quote from this, and page 62:

“In fiscal 2014, Cabinet agreed to the implementation of the National Football Development Plan...”

Well, we heard about a national football development plan, and my thoughts when I heard it was that the TTFA would have been the persons who would have been involved in carrying out this football tournament. But I saw here:

“In fiscal 2014, Cabinet agreed to the Football Development Plan and to the establishment of a Football Development Unit within the Ministry of Sport, to facilitate the implementation of the Football Development Plan. The Ministry has also commenced a recruitment process for the establishment of the Unit.”

I continued to read, and I am seeing where:

“A Football Development Unit will implement the Plan...provide leadership and support for all football stakeholders.”

And the other objectives here, it is clearly the role of the Trinidad and Tobago Football Association. So I do not understand what is happening here, this is a parallel unit being formed from the Ministry of Sport and I would like to know why. Why would the Ministry of Sport be getting involved in the running of football? Something has to be wrong here.

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I would like to move on. Mention was made about the Brian Lara Stadium. Mr. Speaker, in today's *Express* again, there is another—some other information from the Trinidad and Tobago Cricket Board where they stated that the team, the national team played on the grounds, but yet we understand that the Minister of Finance and the Economy mentioned that he was informed that the grounds at the Brian Lara Stadium is not suitable. We would really like too, to see that report. I understand that, you know, the President of the Trinidad and Tobago Cricket Board asked to see that report. I think the public would like to see that report, just let us know. It is only fair that we know if you are saying that the ground is unfit for play, we would like to know how come. And I quote from today's newspapers, today's *Express*:

“...Trinidad and Tobago Cricket Board President Azim Bassarath says that a report on the Brian Lara Stadium in Tarouba should be made public.”

Okay? He also said that:

“...the Trinidad and Tobago senior team played two practice matches there in the build-up to the 2009 regional season and players reported that the pitch was one of the better surfaces they have played on, with good bounce and pace.”

And if you know about cricket, you will know that that is what you want, good bounce and pace. And if they are saying that they played there and it is one of the better cricket grounds, then clearly we need that report to be made public.

Mr. Speaker, I move on to speak about LifeSport. Well, I would not be saying very much about LifeSport, but I want to say, because I think the Member for Chaguanas—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we did come back here at around 2.15 p.m. We are bound by the Standing Orders to suspend at 4.30 p.m., but I seek the leave of the House to allow the hon. Member to complete both original speaking time, as well as the 10 minutes extension which will take us to 4.54 p.m., and we shall then suspend for tea. Do I have the support the House?

Assent indicated.

Mr. Speaker: Continue, hon. Member. [*Desk thumping*]

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4.30 p.m.

Miss D. Cox: Thank you very much, colleagues. So, Mr. Speaker, I would not say much, but I would want to say that if the Government had paid heed to the Auditor General's Report, which I spoke about in detail in last year's budget, we would not have been in this situation where LifeSport is concerned today.

Mr. Speaker, LifeSport, indeed, is a scandal and I am in possession of some documents in relation to LifeSport, which is also known as "DeathSport." It is, indeed, scandalous.

I see I have an invoice here for the cleaning of Morvant Recreation Ground. When it comes to the cleaning of Morvant Recreation Ground, it is from Reno Energy Company Limited. Reno Energy Company Limited is from Chaguanas and this invoice is dated January 31, 2014. Okay. Leaving Chaguanas to clean here, right, and the figure is \$78,200.

Hon. Member: Per year.

Miss D. Cox: Not per year; month, a month. That is clear. It is a month. I have a letter from the regional corporation. I wrote to the Chairman of the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation, asking him about Morvant Recreation Ground because, as far as I am concerned, Morvant Recreation Ground is cleaned regularly and the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation is responsible.

So here I am, surprised when I have this invoice from Reno Energy Company Limited stating that they removed all weeds and nut grass, \$8,400; supply and place, but not limited to weed killers and fertilizers, \$20,000; supply and place, but not limited to grass seedlings and grass plants, \$18,400; supply and apply lime to all infected areas—I do not know what infected areas—of the field as required, \$1,200; clean and maintain surface free from all unwanted dirt, silt, oil, grass and grease, \$10,000; maintain all lines to basketball court—that is the funny part—Morvant Recreation Ground has no basketball court; maintain all lines to basketball court, \$7,600; no basketball court there; for a total of \$78,200 per month.

I would just like to read the response from the Chairman of the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation:

Hon. Donna Cox

Member of Parliament

September 10, 2014

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I refer to your letter dated 5th September, 2014 and I am pleased to respond as follows.

The Morvant Recreation Ground, located at Park Street, Morvant and comprising of five acres with facilities consisting of water, electricity, practice nets, pavilion—no basketball court eh—were vested in the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation by virtue of Vesting Order 2000.

Consequently, the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation is the owner of the said property. See copy attached.

And they have attached the information here.

The property referred to above is maintained at least twice monthly by the workers of the corporation, that is brush cutting, rolling, cutting of the verges of the savannah, etc. The last work done was on Tuesday, 9th September, 2014.

This is Tuesday gone. Mr. Speaker, could you believe this? Could you believe this? The sum of \$78,000 a month and yet here, the San Juan/Laventille Corporation is saying that they maintain here twice a month and this is happening all over, across the country. And there are other invoices for almost every recreation ground in Trinidad and Tobago. I have invoices for almost every recreation ground and most of them, when you check, the corporation has been maintaining those grounds.

Now I am seeing here—this is fraud and clearly I am seeing here that they are maintaining the lines for a basketball court that does not exist; that does not exist. And this is just one area that I just wanted to point out.

There is another area here that I see concerning the—the other thing I saw, too, is that all the invoices—I must tell you all the invoices are the same, even the layout, the font is the same font. So, apparently, all invoices printed so, every field, you did the same thing on all the fields and you got the same amount of money. Okay? It is a template and apparently people are just signing.

Now, recently—[*Interruption*]

Mrs. Mc Intosh: Whether they have basketball court or not.

Miss D. Cox:—whether they have basketball court or not, basketball on it. All right. I see here there is also one here from Dustbin Divers and this is for January and this states that this is refurbishment work at—I want you to listen carefully—

refurbishment works, upgrade and servicing of electrical work at the Morvant, Mount D'Or, Peytonville and Malabar community centres.

Now, I do not know about Mount D'Or; I do not know about Peytonville; I do not know about Malabar, but I know that the Morvant community centre now start to build. [*Laughter*] I do not know what work—It “ent” build yet. Okay. They are now laying the groundwork for the Morvant community centre.

Hon. Member: “Dey cleaning it.”

Miss D. Cox: Not cleaning. They did upgrade and servicing, refurbishing, upgrading, \$75,790. Okay and I have no Morvant community centre. [*Interruption*] But yet, yes, every month, this person, Dustbin Divers, was getting \$75,790 and I have no Morvant community centre. As a matter of fact, we have been waiting 22 years and it has just started to be built. So we have none. So it “cyar” be no mistake. They could not have made a mistake to say well, it is a community centre. It is fraud. It is not a mistake. That is the situation. No community centre.

I have an invoice for Morvant Export Centre. Well, as far as I know, I do not know of any LifeSport that was taking place in the Morvant Export Centre in Morvant. I checked around and nobody knew that there was any LifeSport there.

Also, I have an invoice for providing 65 lunches and breakfasts every month. This person is getting \$86,450 per month, Glen Amadie—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: For what?

Miss D. Cox: For providing lunches and breakfasts to the Angostura LifeSport Centre. I called Angostura to find out well, do you have a LifeSport Centre there? The answer is no.

I have an invoice for work being done at the Angostura LifeSport Centre. They said that no work was ever done at the LifeSport Centre. No work was ever done at the Angostura LifeSport Centre. No work at all. None. None whatsoever.

So, Mr. Speaker, what we observed, too, is that, like some of the work done in Morvant, too, there is an invoice from a company from Point Fortin. So it means there is nobody in Morvant/Laventille or environs that could have provided meals or could have done any maintenance. So there is an invoice from Egypt Village from Business Solutions, Egypt Village, Point Fortin, for cleaning and maintenance of the Laventille Community Complex and they are saying that none of this work was ever done because Laventille Community Complex, there is no

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LifeSport there. I think they were there for just a few months and there is none there. There was none after just a few months.

When I called around to find out—it is my constituency so I know. I talked to the people in the area. I understand that there was some area that there were some LifeSport persons. What did they do? They came in the morning, had breakfast and collected their lunch and left. So nothing was going on. So they were being paid every month. They collected the lunch. They did not even stay and eat the lunch, eh. They collected the lunch and gone with it. What they did when they were there? All they were doing was gambling; liming and gambling.

So, tell me, a programme that is supposed to actually assist with crime—a social programme—this is what was happening, became a programme that was encouraging crime. That is the reality.

I also saw some invoices from persons I know, criminal elements, using their sisters, their mothers and certain persons' names, to receive money out of LifeSport. I know that recently the Prime Minister—I was reading the newspaper, I saw the Prime Minister was castigating the Leader of the Opposition, and stating that what he was saying is incorrect and LifeSport was not involved in criminal activities or encouraging criminal activity. I can tell you because I also checked with the police and some of the persons' names whose invoices I have in my possession, their mother, their sister—they did not put their names, but hard-core criminal elements, they put their families' names on these invoices to receive the money. So who do you think the money going to? Them.

So, the scope of work on each of the invoices for the LifeSport Centres identical, of course; no VAT on most of the invoices and, of course, a lot of them were interrelated where family members were concerned. I see that Glenroy Associates and Quantum Possibilities Limited, each received \$250,000 and that was supposed to be for providing facilitators for LifeSport. I would like to know what facilitators because nothing was going on. So they received \$250,000 a month for two years. All right.

Mr. Speaker, there is a person here Jude Legere, employed by LifeSport as a Project Stores and Inventory Officer, who was receiving \$11,000 a month. He was involved with—not him, but family members were involved in companies named Reno Energy and Accent Enterprises Limited Service and they have been contracted by LifeSport for mainly cleaning and maintenance. Also, one was listed as a caterer. Jolene Legere, Crystal Legere, Alicia Legere, Marcia Legere, Joan Legere; all of them, just two different companies and the names just inter—

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and when you check, one of the companies has his address, Jude Legere's address, when you check the Register of Companies and he is the Inventory Officer.

Then you have police officers, you have soldiers involved. You know there is a person here who is involved, too. He has under one company, Finbar Pierre, policeman. There are also soldiers who were involved in two companies, Roamfort Enterprises and MBAS Landscaping.

Many of the companies, of course, as I tell you, same format, same information, same font, same total. So it means every day, nobody "ent" absent. Every day, 65 persons getting meals and 30 persons and when you check, I am talking about my constituency, people will tell you sometimes they will just see 10 persons or less, but yet 65 and so on.

Mr. Speaker: Are you interested in an extension?

Miss D. Cox: Yes, I am interested. So, we have, as I said, many companies have same directors. They just move them around like Hard Hat, Dustbin Divers and Raising the Bar. Same directors, the Haddads. Reno Energy Limited, Accent Enterprises Service, 21st Century Contracting, three of them, same persons, just move around the names. So it is clear.

We see here that LifeSport was funding criminals and to what end? Why was this happening? What were the checks and balances put in place? We have a Permanent Secretary in a Ministry and senior officials. We have accounting officers and so on, accounting executives in Ministries, and yet this was allowed to happen. So nobody noticed that these invoices were so similar, same invoices. And I am telling you a whole set of invoices. When you have about 20—30 invoices looking the same, all identical, nobody looked at them and realized that something had to be wrong.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the question is that the speaking time of the hon. Member for Laventille East/Morvant be extended by 10 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

4.45 p.m.

Miss D. Cox: Thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker. This LifeSport scandal raises serious questions about the Government's oversight of public expenditure [*Desk thumping*] and the Government's implementation of programmes aimed at stemming the rising tide of criminality in this country. Mr. Speaker, imagine since

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August 2012, this feeding frenzy has been going on. To quote from a former colleague of mine, “People feeding off the fat of the land.” This was supposed to be a crime-fighting initiative, it became a crime-encouraging initiative, and the Government should apologize to the taxpayers of this nation [*Desk thumping*] because they approved the uncontrolled disbursement of taxpayers’ hard-earned money to enrich friends, family and sad to say, criminals. I want to move on.

I will move to the defence force. With regard to the functioning of the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force, it is clear that there must be a rationalization of the security apparatus in this country. I mean, we need to know where the defence force fits in with regard to security in Trinidad and Tobago because the defence force, of course, is more or less now playing a major role in the national security sector more than ever, and there must be role clarity. Their role must be made clear to the people of Trinidad and Tobago and to members of the defence force. And it is clear, as I said, they are being pushed into many roles without proper resources and equipment, of course.

Examples of some of their new roles they are expected to play are—we recently debated a Cybercrime Bill, so national cybercrime defence border surveillance and security, national critical infrastructure protection. They are not unionized, so there is no one to agitate on their behalf. They do not receive overtime as police officers, so there is now a need for a specialized approach to compensation for members of the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force because they are now assisting the national security sector.

And I would like to say too, we should seek to give the military—there is an Act, the Defence Force Act. I know that the Government wanted to make soldiers police at one point in time, but I am saying that since under the PNM administration work was being done on the Defence Act—Justice Cross was one of those persons who made input into the amendments—and I think that the Government should revisit this Act.

There is a need for increased provision of medical benefits for serving officers and retirees, and they need an organized system to take care of veterans and this is, of course, in keeping with international standards. It is not taking place here, at this time.

There is a need for land-based coastal surveillance equipment because our borders are open, and special attention should be placed in the north coast and the south-west coast. We must be able to deploy soldiers on the coastline and there is need for the proper equipment to do so.

So, Mr. Speaker, a perusal of the PSIP shows that the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard will be allocated \$103.1 million for the provision of quality service for safety and security within our maritime borders on a continuous basis. The Prime Minister told the world that the fight is not at sea, and what is required is boots on the ground, but she however recanted and stated that long range vehicles are needed after her recent visit to China.

But, you know, I must remind this House that the cancellation of the OPVs was a reckless decision taken by the People's Partnership Government. [*Desk thumping*] After four years, they are still scrambling to purchase similar vehicles while our borders remain exposed to criminal activities. The Government refuses to acknowledge their mistake in cancelling the contracts with regard to the purchase of these OPVs.

Mr. Speaker, a naval team was dispatched to search for OPVs and were given specific instructions as follows:

1. the vessel must not be called an OPV;
2. the length of the vessel must be far less than 90 metres;
3. the vessel must cost less than the OPVs; and
4. the vessel must be delivered before the next general election.

Mr. Speaker, this is how not to acquire a military asset. [*Crosstalk*] Yes, those were the specs. I return to the LRV, also known as OPV that the Government wants to acquire.

The Prime Minister, on a recent visit to China, stated that a special naval team, under the Ministry of National Security, had visited many countries in anticipation of purchasing LRVs and that this team recognized the Chinese LRV. They said that the Chinese LRV was one of the more desirable operational vessels.

Mr. Speaker, I would like the Government to tell this House, what was the rating of the LRVs including the Chinese that this team assessed? Who placed first and who placed last? Mr. Speaker, the Chinese LRVs placed last. So you understand why now they cannot make a dent in crime, only fooling people about crime going down.

Mr. Speaker, I was going to talk about the contract of the OPVs, but I know that it was mentioned already but, you know, the Minister of National Security, not this Minister, Brig. John Sandy, recommended the purchase of the OPVs by

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Cabinet quietly. He recommended the acceptance of two, Cabinet disagreed, of course, because it was under the PNM. He then came in the Parliament and called them “lemons”. It is the same way, the present Minister of National Security spoke as though SAUTT was the worst thing ever. You know, he is now quietly putting SAUTT back together under another name, “NSOC” or “NOC” and so on. It is the same thing happening. They have been recruiting some of the same US/UK SAUTT personnel quietly to come back here, and although they “bad talk” them and said that they were highly paid and so on, they are being recruited, as we speak, to come back here.

Mr. Speaker, are you aware that Brazil purchased the OPVs that were built for Trinidad and Tobago? They are so pleased with it that five more are currently being built for Brazil. The British Navy commissioned a couple more of the same type of OPVs also. So the OPVs would have impacted on the level of serious organized crime, not only in Trinidad and Tobago, but in the hemisphere.

There have been some grumblings in the defence force. What has happened is that recently a list was given to the defence force to promote certain officers, and this list was given to them by the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, and this occurred in late 2012. I understand that the members of the defence force, from that list, were indeed promoted by the Chief of Defence Staff, and if that really did take place, Mr. Speaker—because many members of the defence force are very upset about it—it is wrong, because many persons who were not due for promotion were promoted because they were on that list, and if that did take place, it is very, very, wrong.

I also want to say too that recently—why is it that the Members of the Government have military personnel providing security for them? Why has that been happening? Why have members of the army been providing security? Mr. Speaker, because I know of two Ministers here, two Members of Parliament: the Member for Oropouche East and the Member for Fyzabad had members of the army providing security for them. Presently, they are providing security for the Attorney General. This is wrong. Mr. Speaker, they like flashing blue lights; they like flashing green lights, just now is fire next.

Dr. Moonilal: Please, just for the record. I did not hear, because I was giving an envelope to someone. I have no army personnel protecting me.

Miss D. Cox: In the past, not anymore.

Dr. Moonilal: Okay, thank you.

Miss D. Cox: In the past. At present, the Attorney General has members of the defence force.

So, Mr. Speaker, in closing, I just want to say that if that has been happening, it is wrong. If they do not trust the police, then do you expect members of the public to trust the police?

I just want to say with regard to this budget, it is indeed a welfare budget. It is a budget where persons—the budget debate is now taking place—it is because they want votes, but the people of Trinidad and Tobago are not foolish and they will remember all that has taken place in the past where this Government is concerned, and I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

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

4.55 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.30 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Minister of State in the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources (Hon. Ramona Ramdial): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Firstly, let me extend congratulations to the Minister of Finance and the Economy, Minister Larry Howai, for a people's budget or a people-centric budget 2014/2015. And before I get into the meat of my contribution with respect to the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, I would just like to identify, highlight and comment on a few statements the Leader of the Opposition and the Member for Diego Martin West made when he spoke this morning and which he identified.

The Leader of the Opposition mentioned \$300 billion and no new ideas. But I want to assume that the Leader of the Opposition forgot or is suffering from something called forgetfulness, because the Friday before the Monday the budget was read, the hon. Leader of the Opposition was on a morning show on TV and, of course, he admitted to the host of that morning show that: "Yes, of course, the PP Government has done some good work with the amount of money that they have spent. They have done some good work."

So my question this afternoon is, you are contradicting yourself. The hon. Leader of the Opposition is contradicting himself when today he got up and said \$300 billion and no new ideas, and then the Friday before that he was praising the

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People's Partnership Government for doing good work over the past four and a half years and, of course, reiterating that this work was done with the amount of money spent.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say that the people of Trinidad and Tobago, they are not foolish. As a Member of Parliament, they are a well-educated bunch of citizens that we have here today and, therefore, I want to thank the Leader of the Opposition for endorsing the budget, of course, in a premeditated sort of way and thanking the People's Partnership Government for delivering on its promises over the past four and a half years.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, I will also like to say that in 2009—and the hon. Leader also mentioned today, as a Member of Parliament, there were certain projects that he was not getting, and certain resources he was not getting in his constituency. I want to reiterate, and one can look up on the *Hansard* and see in 2009, in his budget speech—I have always been referring to his 2009 budget speech because it was very much in a different time, when he was in a different place in a different situation. In 2009, in his budget speech, he also raised the issue of the Diego Martin Playing Field not being done under his own then PNM Government.

He also begged his own government, at that point in time, for the Diego Martin Highway. I want him to realize and to identify and help to remind him that it is this People's Partnership Government that delivered the Diego Martin Highway in 2012/2013. [*Desk thumping*] And he went on into a long diatribe in his 2009 budget contribution attacking one of his own colleagues, the then Minister of Works, and advising him as to how to go about to get the Diego Martin Extension Highway going.

Mr. Indarsingh: Who was that Minister of Works?

Hon. R. Ramdial: I think it was the hon. Member for Diego Martin North/East, yes, if I am not mistaken.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to identify with emphasis that the Ministry of Health turned the sod not very long ago under the leadership of the Minister of Health, Dr. Fuad Khan, for the Carenage Health Centre Facility and this is also something he complained of in his 2009 budget contribution against his own Government.

In addition to that, he also reiterated in 2009, the water woes of the upper Diego Martin area, and I want to let the hon. Member for Diego Martin West

know today that to date, under WASA, we have spent at least \$22 million in just upgrade works and pipe-laying projects in the Diego Martin area.

5.35 p.m.

In addition to that, for 2014/2015, we continue to explore new sources of water and we are looking at the Four Roads well field and the River Estate well field, together with the Tucker Valley well field. So these are areas that we are exploring for new sources of water, and we are also in the process of laying projects so that the people there can get a reliable pipe-borne supply of water. So, therefore, with respect to the hon. Leader of the Opposition, I just want to remind him, and as I said before, when it is that your Members, and the other Members of the Opposition are making comments about this inequitable distribution of resources, I think that the People's Partnership, and I know that the People's Partnership Government, they have led by example, they have been equitably distributing the resources. And, rightfully so, some Members of Parliament may not have benefited in one sector but in other sectors of Government, and in other areas where they made requests, they would have gotten some resources at some point in time during the course of our history as a Government in Trinidad and Tobago.

So, Mr. Speaker, I just want to correct the record there, because the hon. Leader of the Opposition has a habit of coming up and standing up and complaining about resources not being in his constituency, when there is evidence and facts to show that we have done lots of work in a lot of the Opposition-held constituencies. Mr. Speaker, in addition to that, I want to, of course, just talk a little bit about the premise of this 2014/2015 budget and the backdrop against which we produced this budget under the Ministry of Finance and the Economy. The economic environment is a very important one and, therefore, the global environment is also very important for a small island developing state. The global economic growth is projected, according to IMF, 3.4 per cent in 2014 and 4.0 per cent in 2015. That is the backdrop against what we are working.

Trinidad and Tobago economic growth, according to Moody's Investors Service, forecasted 2.9 per cent for 2014 and 3.2 per cent for 2015. Now, in 2010, economic growth was already stopped and we were in a declining or a contracting position, but after that we have seen that, of course, we have grown economically. There has been economic growth in our country after that year, 2010. Mr. Speaker, the unemployment rate for the period of January to September, 2013, has been on average, 3.6; a drastic decrease on what it was under the PNM-held government. Inflation, 5.1 per cent for 2013, and by June of 2014, the inflation

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rate had reached its lowest levels in 10 years at 2.8 per cent. I think that is a milestone for our Government or for any Government to continuously try to bring down the inflation rate, and we have been very successful over the years at doing so.

Mr. Speaker, our fiscal deficit, we are on target for a balanced budget by 2016 as reported by the Minister of Finance and the Economy and, of course, we have a budgeted deficit for 2014 at \$6.3 billion and a surplus of \$1.9 billion, which was realized by June of 2014. Revenue and expenditure: 2010—2015 revenue totalled \$258.598 billion, 2010—2015 expenditure totalled \$270.110 billion. Transfers and subsidies amounted to 53 per cent of expenditure, and this includes the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, GATE, fuel subsidy and social spending.

Mr. Speaker, the public sector debt, 43 per cent of GDP, debt ratio within international benchmarks and, of course, we have been ever increasing on our savings as a country. So this is the backdrop against which this budget has been, of course, developed, and, therefore, it is all positive growth in every area as I have mentioned before. So with that in mind, we also have to be mindful that the Opposition politics would stop at nothing, especially in an election year to get to win the votes of the people. As much as they are accusing us of having a campaign budget and having an election budget, it is the same way that the Opposition forces themselves are agitating propagation and propaganda is askew and, of course, they are there drumming up support for their side of the fence. But, Mr. Speaker, I must continue by saying that under the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, we have been working very hard. If not 24 hours round the clock, we have been working very, very hard, both the staff, the technocrats at the Ministry, and under all of the units under the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, we have been working very hard to fulfil the mandate of the Government and the manifesto of the People's Partnership Government from 2012 till now.

So, Mr. Speaker, therefore my report here this afternoon would be that of the achievements of the Ministry and, of course, the plans for the new fiscal year. WASA, as you know, is one of our biggest units under the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, and in 2010 when we analysed WASA coming into Government, we, of course, were delivering—well, WASA was delivering a continuous 24/7 pipe-borne supply of water to 18 per cent of the population, while 30 per cent of the population had access to a centralized waste water collection system. Upon assuming office, WASA was given a mandate to improve the delivery of water and waste water service to the population of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, in 2010, WASA estimated a deficit in supply compared to demand to be approximately 38 mgd, together with the shortcomings in the production, transmission and distribution systems, we resulted in extensive scheduling of the pipe-borne water supply. With respect to the waste water, approximately 30 per cent of the population had access to a centralized collection and treatment system. In 2010, 18 per cent of the population was receiving a continuous 24/7 pipe-borne supply, as I mentioned before, and over the last four years I am very pleased to announce that this percentage has increased to 63 per cent of the population [*Desk thumping*] receiving a 24/7 supply of water—63 per cent. From 18 per cent to 63 per cent—18 to 63. So we have seen a great increase in the water supply and the distribution of water throughout our country.

Mr. Speaker, we were also given the mandate to achieve water security for every sector and, therefore, it is our mandate to ensure that adequate water is available. A plan was developed to increase the total volume of water available for distribution and, in 2013/2014, the following have been undertaken: completion of the construction of the desalination plant at Point Fortin on build/own/operate basis, which is now in operation with production of 4.6 mgd; drilling of eight wells commenced at locations across the country including Louis d'Or, Scott Farm, St. Clair, Point Fortin, Queen's Park Savannah, Maraval and Santa Cruz, with expected increases in production capacity of 1.5 mgd. Mr. Speaker, today, the Louis d'Or and Scott Farm wells have been completed with the production of .55 mgd. Thirdly, the expansion of the Point Lisas desalination plant is currently in progress to have an additional 10 mgd above current levels of 30 mgd made available.

So we are trying, of course, to upgrade the operations at WASA, whereas in a season of drought, in an area where there is extreme water stress, that we would now have the additional water within our water sector to distribute to these homes so that our citizens can enjoy that benefit of a pipe-borne supply of water. In addition to that, the pipeline systems: in 2010, WASA embarked upon an extensive pipeline system operation. In addition to that, there was a high leakage transmission pipeline where a major section of the Navet South Trunk Main was replaced. The old Hollis Trunk Main has been replaced between Valencia and Port of Spain, and this has resulted in an improved level of service being experienced by customers along the East-West Corridor. Work of a similar nature is also taking place in Tobago, currently.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, under the National Social Development Programme (NSDP), residents now have access to a pipe-borne supply of water for

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the first time. For the fiscal year 2014, new pipeline projects were completed, benefiting approximately 1,300 persons who were receiving pipe-borne water supply for the first time in New Grant, St. Charles Village, Princes Town, Barrackpore, Debe, Palmiste, San Pedro, Gran Couva, Claxton Bay, Gasparillo, Las Lomas, St. Helena, Arima, Sangre Grande and Valencia. We have also gone on in the areas of Mayaro to include a new storage tank which was constructed. Rehabilitation to the San Fernando Booster Pump Station was completed to improve the reliability of supply to the City of San Fernando and south-west Trinidad. Collectively, all programmes involving pipeline installation comprised 351 projects with 287.2 kilometres of pipe being installed, benefiting over 600,000 persons in Trinidad and Tobago. The result of this was a segment of the population receiving a 24/7 service, increasing to 63 per cent.

So, Mr. Speaker, what I am really trying to report here to the House is that all of these projects, and in certain areas, you would have noticed that in the rural areas, especially, where the previous Government ignored, in terms of having a pipe-borne supply of water in these rural areas, and even in some of their own areas that we undertook as a new Government, the mandate, of course, was to have water for all and, of course, to sustain that water. So we are right on track. We are moving full speed ahead, and I really must thank the staff and the complement at WASA, all of the managers and the operators, the technical persons, and just the general employees who have been really committed to helping us and to helping the Government. I think that they have realized to a certain extent that it is not just helping a Government but, really and truly, helping the population and the citizens of the country so that every citizen can enjoy a basic amenity as simple as that, of water availability to every home in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, I must reiterate, in 2010, when we campaigned to take Government in 2010, we identified and we realized, and even in our talks with people one on one on the ground, that basic amenities was something that was lacking in every area and in every corner of Trinidad and Tobago. Basic amenities being water, lights and infrastructure; road infrastructure, health infrastructure, because what we saw was a previous government that focused its resources and its finances on grandiose plans and grandiose projects, and even the hon. Leader of the Opposition himself, in his 2009 contribution in Parliament, made reference to those grandiose plans and those grandiose projects that his own Government

had undertaken and, of course, had gotten themselves into a hole with respect to cost overruns and all of the corruption that took place under a very famous person.

So, Mr. Speaker, in 2010 we realized that Government and governance had to shift in a different direction. We had to be people-centred, we had to be, of course, people-centric in terms of delivering for the population of Trinidad and Tobago. And, of course, we know that when you develop your human resource and you provide basic amenities, and you, of course, create the enabling environment and encourage an enabling environment for your people, that is really what true development is all about, and that is how we can reach first standard or First World developmental status. Right now we are a small island developing State, but I want to predict that with the pace that we are going and through this Government, if we continue with that mandate to deliver to all and, of course, to provide the enabling environment and help create the enabling environment that we will be able to reach the First World status. It would not be a “pie in the sky”, like Vision 2020 and Vision 2030, and whatever else we may have heard here this morning.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, I also want to focus on the waste water programme that is being undertaken through WASA and through the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), as they are known, we have been very, very fortunate to get funding to expand the collection and treatment facilities of our waste water in Trinidad and Tobago. So we have the integration of eight waste water systems in Maloney, the integration of two waste water systems in Cunupia, the expansion of collection systems and treatment facilities at Malabar and San Fernando, the rehabilitation of the Scarborough Wastewater Treatment Plant, and the connection of 215 properties to the collection system under the Caribbean Regional Fund for Wastewater Management, or better known as CREW.

5.50 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, collectively, funding has been secured from IDB to the extent of US \$278 million. US \$246 million of this represents the first component of the multi-phase loan of US \$546 million to undertake the works at Malabar and San Fernando. The planning is well advanced and the physical works is scheduled to commence by September 2014.

One of the other major initiatives of the waste water is the rehabilitation and extension of the sewerage system in south-west Tobago with treatment to be

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effected at waste stabilization ponds at Bon Accord and Samaan Grove. Design work has been completed, and physical works are to commence in 2014.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, steps have been initiated to address some of the chronic problems being experienced in collection and treatment systems. Installation of new sewers along the Vistabella River in San Fernando was completed with work ongoing for the rehabilitation of a number of waste water treatment plants at Maracas, St. Joseph, Santa Cruz, Arima, Edinburgh 500 and San Fernando to improve the effluent quality and reduce the impact on the environment.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to that, we continue to be a corporate sponsor especially to the young people in Trinidad and Tobago. And in order to preserve the environment we have, of course, gone about introducing a competition called “Adopt A River” initiative which was launched previously. The programme is an ongoing collaboration with NGOs, private and public sectors with the common goal of preservation of watersheds and sustainability of water sources. To date, Mr. Speaker, there are 12 registered potential adopters and seven watersheds have been adopted at Guanapo, Arima, Courland, Caura, Tumpuna, Matelot and Caparo. And to be more accessible to its customers, the authority opened two new customer service centres at Trincity and Sangre Grande facilitating payments of rates and provision of information on enquiries on water supply.

Provisions were also made to accommodate customers on Saturdays at four of the major rate payers centres at Port of Spain, St. Joseph, Chaguanas, and San Fernando. So now WASA operates on a Saturday where you can go and pay your bills at these four locations and four offices.

We have also introduced, Mr. Speaker, the online bill payment service that was launched in May 2014, and to date 478 customers have accessed the facility. And we are urging other customers to go online and pay your bills. So, we want to get in tune with the IT, with the progress of IT and, of course encourage our customers to do such.

The authority also, Mr. Speaker, has engaged in several media interactions to raise awareness of its programme of works, water supply and conservation issues over the period. As you would know, this year over the dry season we experienced a drought—well, I do not want to say a drought, but a drier than necessary dry season.

Mr. Sharma: A dry spell.

Hon. R. Ramdial: Yes. A dry spell. Thank you. A dry spell. So what we were doing as a responsible unit dealing with water, of course, and a Ministry, was that we were trying to raise awareness of the population. We also had a lot of outreach programmes. We targeted schools, and on the media, on the airwaves you would have heard ads being played to customers especially to conserve water, and how to go about doing that. Mr. Speaker, WASA of course has been very aggressive in its programme of works with both its operations, its customer care and other areas.

Mr. Speaker, in 2014/2015, WASA will continue its drive to deliver on providing water security to the population. The most significant project in this regard is the dualling of the Caroni South Trunk Main between the Caroni Water Treatment Plant and Couva. The project entails the installation of a parallel trunk main along the route replacing the old Hollis Trunk Main. It will achieve reducing the level of leakage compared to what was experienced previously while also providing a degree of redundancy of supply to customers in central and south Trinidad. Construction works to commence at the Savonetta booster pump station to pump water to south Trinidad from additional supplies to be made available with the completion of the Beetham Water reuse project.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to that, we have and recently in the media we would have seen of course WASA engaging and of course highlighting the IDB multi-phase waste water rehabilitation programme. TT \$1.2 billion in contracts was awarded under the IDB multi-phase programme, and of course on Wednesday 10 September, 2014—which was two days ago—WASA announced that it had issued letters of award for contracts amounting to TT \$1.2 billion during a media conference in Port of Spain. The contract which falls under the Inter-American Development Bank is funding a multi-phase waste water rehabilitation programme which will see major waste water development works being undertaken in the San Fernando and Malabar catchments; and I mentioned this before. Of course, the details to it, it is very detailed, so I would not go into all of that, but only to say that, again, it is the first phase of the funding of IDB that we have gotten that we are starting the improvement works on our waste water capacity in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, that is just under one unit of the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, and so much work is going on. That is why I always have to come back and refer to my colleagues on the Opposition side when they keep reiterating “inequitable distribution of resources”. There was no other government

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other than the PNM Government in their tenure that lived for inequitable distribution of resources. [*Desk thumping*] I mean, it is obvious. It is very, very obvious, in this day and age now, one can see and through every Member of Parliament, and even the Opposition Members of Parliament who continue to get resources. Some who I deal with personally on a one to one basis, would call and we would sit down together and we would even tour together and go and see what is going on and how best they can be helped.

But when they were in government it would have been something out of a storybook to see a PNM Government Minister out on the ground in an area that was not even theirs at some point in time. I mean, from the area of central where I am, we wrote numerous letters, we invited to meetings, and I do not think there has been any Government that has been so accessible, so accessible like our Government. And in this day and age of social networking, we have our facebook pages, we respond on our facebook pages, we are on Twitter, we give out our emails. Minister Rambachan had a billboard with his phone number which said, "Text where you see a pothole, text this number and let me know what is going on".

So, we have been so accessible because we came out of an era where there was no feedback from those who took care of us; from those who took care of us, from the government who was responsible for us, and they were there in that nine-year period. It was hard to find them, to see them, to hear them in areas, in certain areas. And that is why we so emphasized rural neglect when we came into power; rural neglect. And I do not mean just the rural areas only, there were the suburban areas, and even you know, San Fernando was neglected to a certain extent, and the growing city of Chaguanas was also an urban area where you have expansion of settlement, and these areas were ignored. I remember sitting down in front of my TV and watching the then UNC Opposition fighting, begging, asking for resources. And now when I sit here in Parliament and I see the PNM Opposition asking, begging for resources, they get it. Minister Rambachan has been so accessible and amenable. The Member of Parliament for Tabaquite, the Member of Parliament for Caroni East and Minister of Education. They will reiterate. They will let you know.

I know that as Minister in the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources that a lot of your Opposition areas have gotten extension under WASA for the pipe-borne supply of water.

Miss Mc Donald: Port of Spain South?

Hon. R. Ramdial: We will get to that. We will get to that. But what I am trying to say, the argument here is that they are claiming that they have not gotten any resources since 2010 to date. And I say, that is wrong, and that they are misleading the Parliament and by extension misleading the population of Trinidad and Tobago.

So, Mr. Speaker, I will continue. [*Crosstalk*] So in addition to that, we also have the EMA under the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, and over the years we would have heard that the EMA needs some more teeth, and, you know, we need them to have a bigger unit of enforcement and monitoring capabilities. And I am very proud to announce that my own Government and our Government has approved the expansion of the EMA police, and that note was approved and therefore we would see soon a collaboration between the Ministry of National Security and the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources and the EMA expanding that policing unit of EMA by at least a hundred or so police officers. [*Desk thumping*] And these police officers would be focused especially on the activity of illegal quarrying and illegal hunting, and they will be put in different posts. I know that the EMA is also expanding its offices. There is one in central that is soon going to come, and one in south that was there, but is also going to be expanded, and we are going to have our police dispatched to these areas.

But what we have also noticed, as a Government and as a Ministry, is that over the years we have seen an increase in complaints with respect to noise pollution. Over the weekends especially we have some bars that trouble residents and different areas, and based on that data that we are getting from the different police stations and from calls coming into the EMA, that is another reason why we have expanded that policing unit. So our officers will be able to go out, and we are going to equip them of course with the paraphernalia that they would need so that they can measure the decibel levels at the bars, et cetera.

So these programmes are all in the works, and they are being delivered under the People's Partnership Government. [*Desk thumping*] And it is very, very obvious who is doing the work, who is talking and who is delivering, who has been mouthing in Parliament, and mouthing before even nine years in government, and who has been delivering on their promises also, on some of their promises as a government. Because we accept that they have had some good plans, one or two in-between, but at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, I have a quote here that says:

“Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality.”

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Yeah. They had a Vision 2020, and their plan and their vision was no good, but there were little things that, of course, the population asked for. [*Crosstalk*] There were little things that the population asked for. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Please, Members.

Hon. R. Ramdial: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There were little things that the population was asking for. They were asking for a vision that would lead them to developed status, to a first world country. And therefore, as I want to say again, leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality, and this is what the People's Partnership has been doing. The vision of the country is now, of course, being led by the People's Partnership Government seeing this vision into a reality that has made the population generally happier across the board.

Miss Mc Donald: Happier?

Hon. R. Ramdial: I will continue, Mr. Speaker. In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that the EMA has also been initiating the PSIP projects under its mandate. I will just highlight some of them; the establishment of an ambient air quality management programme—and that was under 2013/2014. The inventory of the air and water pollutant sources in Trinidad and Tobago; the revision of the national environmental policy as required under the EMA Act; the national sensitization of wildlife on the issues of environmentally sensitive areas. The EMA hosted nine consultations with the fisherfolk throughout Trinidad and Tobago in April of 2014. The information from those consultations was compiled and a report was developed, and based on that information the 2014/2015 proposal, of course, was developed and input was given in this budget.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, the EMA has been on a drive to better inform on the CEC process by understanding the potential impacts of the seismic surveys and mitigating impacts through the development and implementation of the guidelines. Also, the strategic assessment for the quarry sector of Trinidad and Tobago has been ongoing under the EMA; the developing ambient water quality standards of Trinidad and Tobago, phase one, also under the EMA and the acquisition of the ISO 14001 certification, environmental audit of the EMA and development of the environmental management system. So, EMA has been very, very busy and in 2014/2015 they will continue with their projects, and also to implement some of these studies and consultations that they have been having over the past couple of months.

6.05 p.m.

In addition to that, the EMA, of course, embarked upon a project, and we would see collaboration from other Ministries. Now we all know about the Beverage Container Bill which was laid in late 2012/2013 and, of course, in the next House there were some changes made and it went back out for consultation. However, under the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, I want to reiterate and assure the public that the Beverage Container Bill will be laid in Parliament again for the passing so that we can really and truly implement the measures in that Bill to protect against pollution in our environment and to alleviate that big problem of flooding that we have yearly.

Mr. Speaker, the Beverage Container Clean-Up Project was launched in 2014 and, of course, we partnered with the Green Fund. It was funded through the Green Fund. And to achieve the deliverables of the project, of course we collaborated with the EMA as a coordinator, CEPEP was responsible for the nationwide clean-up activities, SWMCOL was responsible for the beverage/container collection processing and data, and the IMA is responsible for training and data processing. All stakeholders signed contracts on February 04, 2014 and the deployment of 12 CEPEP contractors and eight more contractors on March 24, 2014 within the northern region and some central regions in Trinidad were deployed.

The collection site is at NAMDEVCO in Port of Spain, Forres Park and Guanapo. I was fortunate about two days ago to visit one of these collection centres, which is the NAMDEVCO site right here next to the abattoir in Port of Spain, and we were very, very pleased to see how much beverage containers and plastic bottles were collected over that period, and that is just one centre. I think there is over half a million bottles, they were telling me, that were collected, and they are in the process of continuous collection.

Now, what is happening here, is that under SWMCOL, they have decided to go into the recycling of—well, of course, reducing first and recycling of the plastic containers. So, what is taking place right now is that the plastic bottles are being reduced, they are being compacted—well, the aluminium, the cans are being compacted for export out, but the plastic bottles, however, are staying here and a machine is soon to come in that is going to see the plastic containers broken down into something called “PET” and, of course, that will assist in the market. We are collaborating with SWMCOL to find a market when we break down these plastic bottles. So, that is in the process. So, for the first time in this country we are going to have the actual recycling of plastic containers in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, the last step towards that recycling initiative is still being worked out but, as I said, a market is being sourced. So, we are doing nearly everything in terms of the recycling and the last step of it, of course, with marketing, is being outsourced. But, I want to say and as I reiterated earlier, the Beverage Container Bill on this framework now that we have, this new framework of the national clean-up and on the framework of getting the recycling plant down for one aspect of our waste, that we are going to come back to Parliament with the Bill so that we can have proper legislation. I know that my line Minister, the Minister of the Environment and Water Resources, Minister Singh, mentioned a recycling authority, and we have been advised that is the best way to go right now by developing a recycling authority so that all of these issues would be dealt with under the authority.

So, Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that by this action alone we are really showing our commitment to preserving our environment, to dealing with the flooding issues in Trinidad and Tobago. And talking about flooding, just very recently we would have seen the City of Port of Spain yet again flooding and terribly so this year. I just want to talk a bit about that flooding issue in the City of Port of Spain. First and foremost, the propaganda put out there by a few was that the Ministry and this Government is doing nothing to alleviate flooding, and I want to dispel that notion once and for all.

This Government, if it is anything at all, is working, working very hard, and again through IDB, to get the funding to start the rehabilitation of the drainage system in Port of Spain. Over the years we would have recognized that the drainage system in Port of Spain, they do not have the capacity anymore for the volume of water coming down. In addition to that, we have suffered from pollution problems over the years. We have seen the causes of flooding in certain areas, especially in the city area being that of garbage blocking the watercourses, blocking the channels. There were some pictures that ran on media that showed areas where construction took place and the contractors failed to remove the boxing boards and all the other materials, and they cast over it and made the channel smaller than usual.

In other pictures you would have seen tonnes of garbage blocking, and because it is the City of Port of Spain, and I want to make no bones about this, the Port of Spain Corporation is responsible for the maintenance of its city area. That is just what part of the local government Act is about. The Port of Spain Corporation is responsible for the maintenance of its city area. When we went in there and we looked at what caused the flooding—and it is a collaborative

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approach, because you have partial responsibility, the corporation, with its drainage especially. When we looked at the causes of flooding, in three of the channels that took the water out to the sea they were blocked by garbage. When we went around the city area we saw in certain areas that the garbage was not even collected for days, and this was contributing to the waterways being clogged. And, therefore, when I heard the deputy mayor of Port of Spain speaking—Mr. Keiron Valentine, who is my friend also, by the way. I have known him for quite a number of years—I was very appalled to hear that he was putting the blame on the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, when we know for a fact that the maintenance of the city falls under the Port of Spain Corporation, and they are allocated a budget. They are allocated a huge budget under which they operate to maintain the city area.

However, Mr. Speaker, we shouldered that burden of blame and we went in with our contractors and we took a couple of nights, blocked off the road and all that kind of thing, and we got the job done. But I want to dispel, of course, the wrong information coming out there that we were responsible for the flooding in the city area. It was not the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources or the Government. By extension, it is the lack of strong leadership in the corporation that has allowed for poor maintenance operations, and that is what is going on.

So, Mr. Speaker, I want to dispel that notion of the Ministry being responsible for flooding. You know what, Mr. Speaker, we have gone on and liaised and collaborated with the IDB for funding. The City of Port of Spain is going to get full rehabilitation with respect to its drainage networks. We are in the first phase of getting through with that process, and the first phase is going to be implemented very soon, I think by fiscal 2015 or a little after that year, the latter part of 2015 we are going to see that project rolling out. So, I want to, of course, assure the residents and all of the commuters and all of the persons who traverse back and forth through the City of Port of Spain on a daily basis that very soon, within the next couple of years we would see Port of Spain and its flooding problem alleviated, if not solved to a certain extent.

Mr. Speaker, moving on to that, Port of Spain is not the only area that floods. We have areas in south, central, the East-West Corridor, Diego Martin Central, we have the problem in the entire area of Diego Martin with that of the landslips with the hills coming down, with the landslides and all of that. So, we realized that the natural progression of the environment, we have degeneration and degradation of the environment, and therefore what we need to—

Mr. Speaker: Would you like an extension?

Hon. R. Ramdial: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Okay, continue.

Hon. R. Ramdial: Therefore what we need to do, we have identified at the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources that it is a holistic approach that we need to adopt and we have been approaching that holistic plan in dealing with the alleviation of flooding. We have sought funding through IDB, we also have our domestic revenue that has also been given so that we can deal with that problem, and we are collaborating with every Ministry, every entity and, of course, the citizens at the end of the day.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to say that in our country we need to adapt a culture change when it comes to the environment. It is very, very important as citizens of the environment that we not pelt bottles out of the car and clog the drains and we not pelt the food wrappers.

Dr. Browne: Pelt, you say?

Hon. R. Ramdial: Yes, pelt the food wrappers, drop it in waterways and all of that, that contributes to—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the question is that the speaking time of the hon. Minister of State in the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, be extended by 10 minutes. [*Interruption*] Member for Diego Martin Central, you are disturbing the proceedings.

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. R. Ramdial: Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and to all my colleagues. Because my time is so limited, there are the other units that I would not be able to touch on, but there are certain pieces of information that I need to get out there that have been dominating the airways for the past couple of days and we need to clarify that.

I just want to touch a bit on the Baby Care Grant of \$500 per month for 12 months. [*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, being a new mother myself I understand the need of young mothers out there. [*Desk thumping*] I understand the need out there, of course, for assistance.

Hon. Member: You do not qualify.

Hon. R. Ramdial: I do not qualify, however, but I am very, very glad that the Prime Minister saw this and the Cabinet and the Government saw this in their wisdom to assist the low income mothers, especially, in our country.

Mr. Speaker, all of the adverse comments we are getting, especially from the Opposition forces, I know that the media stations have been running their polls on the ground and you would see daily when they ask a question right after it was mentioned in the budget, and they asked the normal man on the street and, of course, they asked the females, the mothers, and they were extremely glad and heartened by the fact that they were getting assistance for their young ones. They even asked for an increase. They already started asking for an increase in the fund to assist them. I want to be serious about this to a certain extent, because I myself have witnessed the increase in milk prices and diaper prices. It is very costly, and when you go to the supermarket people are in awe as to the price of the milk and the diapers and other stuff that is needed to take care of the young ones. Therefore, that is why I say that this budget is a people-centred, people-driven budget. [*Desk thumping*] We are taking care of our young ones, the youth of this country is most important for the proper development, and at the same time we are taking care of our mothers, especially the single mothers, the low-income mothers, and this is the way we have to go in the new way of the world and governance.

Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this Baby Care Grant is to assist mothers living in difficult circumstances. It is intended to ensure proper nutrition and health needs in the first year of life, and it is to improve chances of underprivileged children having a good chance at a better future. [*Desk thumping*] There is a qualification process for this \$500 grant and it would be measured by the \$3,000 minimum income currently used by the Ministry of the People and Social Development for similar programmes. So, there is a qualification process. It is not going to be \$500 just being given out like that for milk. [*Interruption*]

Programme context: Mr. Speaker, one in a series focused on ensuring that children have a much better chance of a good future. Other programmes focused on children include, universal preschool education by 2015, the Children's Life Fund, the Couva Children's Hospital, the expanded access to sound primary and secondary education, and the increased availability and quality of tertiary and vocational training. There are other initiatives. These are programmes through which the grant can be administered, a National Parenting Programme is currently in force and a better pre- and antenatal care delivered through the health service. [*Interruption*] The National Parenting Programme through the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development, and the Minister would expound on that

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later on, provides a good avenue for vulnerable mothers to apply for the grant. Better pre- and antenatal care providers, provides a good monitoring mechanism for child nutrition.

Mr. Speaker, the National Family Planning Association has already expressed the willingness to work with the Government to ensure that the grant is delivered where it is most needed. And, of course, there are going to be regulations attached to the grant, so you have policy guidelines, regulations and measures to prevent the abuse of the grant which will be announced when the programme is formally launched in a few weeks.

6.20 p.m.

So, Mr. Speaker, this is to dispel the naysayers and the critics out there. In a nutshell, it summarises the Baby Care Grant of \$500, of course, for 12 months, and therefore, this information coming at hand would dispel some of the criticism to this initiative under the People's Partnership Government.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to that, I would just quickly like to touch on the Constituency of Couva North. The Constituency of Couva North, of course, is in very good hands under the People's Partnership Government, [*Desk thumping*] and we continue to develop the constituency. We have identified different challenges over the past four years, but I really want to say that for the first time in a very long while all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago are getting their fair share of resources in different communities, since a very, very, long time we are now seeing this happening. We have upgrades of community centres, recreational grounds, the construction of box drains to alleviate flooding. We have had refurbishment of existing community centres, and I know that the Minister said that in the new fiscal year we are going to build a few new ones and he, of course, would roll out that plan. But, Mr. Speaker, I want to say, though, that we have a very proactive society.

In today's world, society has become very proactive, people speak out, they come to your office and give you ideas. They tell you sometimes what to do and they are very much well-informed and they do have the background in which to give advice and to give ideas, and therefore, I want to say thanks to the People's Partnership Government for ensuring that the constituencies throughout Trinidad and Tobago have been adequately provided for.

However, I want to again go back to one of my quotes that I spoke about earlier, and it is that of leadership. And I just want to read something before I end, if you permit me, Mr. Speaker, and I want go back to the *Hansard* of 2009, when the Leader of the Opposition, the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West

said, and this is what he said in 2009:

“Most people in this country if you ask them what they want from the Government, or what they want from the Minister of Finance, it is something in the local area, something in their backyard, something in their neighbourhood and I can tell you that much of what the Government has done has brought no political credit to us even though it should, because we spent money on some grandiose things and it should bring us some credit, but in fact, it is bringing us anger. There are many angry people in this country today”—and he was speaking in 2009—“because they believe that their small priorities have been displaced by other priorities...”

We cannot go back now and undo what we have done, but we certainly can do things differently so as to make sure that the small priorities are at the spear of the arrow as we go forward. The things that influence people’s quality in life, the small aggravations which, in many cases, cost small money, a high lift pump, a retaining wall, a drain, the paving of a road, those things.”

And, Mr. Speaker, this is what the Leader of the Opposition today—well, at that point in time, in 2009 said of his then PNM-led Government where he incriminated them and attacked them for doing the wrong things, and, of course, channelling the resources in the wrong areas and not dealing with what was most important to the people of this country.

Mr. Speaker, I want to, in the backdrop of quoting that, the Leader of the Opposition, I want to say again, a famous man once said that:

“Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality.”

And under the esteemed leadership of the Prime Minister of this country, Kamla Persad-Bissessar, we have seen a vision of the people transform into reality over the past four and a half years. And I make no bones about that.

Napoleon Bonaparte said, “A leader is a dealer in hope”, and this is what the People’s Partnership has given this country, hope. We have listened to our population and, of course, the Prime Minister always mentions that she listens before she leads, and she has given hope to this country using her team and the Cabinet and the Government moving forward and therefore, Mr. Speaker, I want to predict a second term in government where we would really fulfil and complete the circle in providing for our people. [*Desk thumping*] Thank you.

Miss Alicia Hospedales (*Arouca/Maloney*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am happy for the opportunity to contribute to this debate on the Appropriation Bill,

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2014. Mr. Speaker, I join my colleagues on this side of the Bench, my well researched colleagues, the Member for Diego Martin West, our Opposition Leader, as well as the Member for La Brea and the Member for Laventille East/Morvant. I would like to say I am happy to join the debate after them, because they have exposed over and over and over again the falsehood and the deception of the Government.

I just want to make reference to the Member for Couva North. The Member for Couva North indicated that the PNM Government was focused on grandiose plans and projects and not creating an enabling environment for its people. And this I would say is false. I am not sure if the Member is aware of free primary and secondary education. The PNM Government is the one that initiated these things, [*Desk thumping*] free university education, about the GATE, Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses Programme, the University of Trinidad and Tobago, even the establishment of the ECCE centres, because our plan which they are rolling out, our plan would have been to establish free ECCE education.

Mr. Speaker, I am not sure if she is aware of the MILAT—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: I would like to hear the Member for Arouca/Maloney in silence. So I have risen in her support, so continue hon. Member, please. I want to hear you.

Miss A. Hospedales: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I am so happy for you [*Laughter*] in that—I am so happy that you came to my defence.

Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, the Member for Couva North, I am not sure if she is aware of the MILAT and the MYPART programmes, these apprenticeship programmes; the Targeted Conditional Cash Transfer Programme—and I will come back to that a little later—the Chronic Disease Assistance Programme better known as CDAP, the comprehensive poverty reduction programme that we had in place which they literally would have dismantled. I am coming to talk about poverty and poverty reduction a little later on, Mr. Speaker. All of these, including this building that the Parliament is housed in, the building next door that the other Ministries are housed in, the Hyatt, the Government campus, so many. [*Desk thumping*]

They talked about the National Academy of Performing Arts, the Southern Academy of the Performing Arts, all of these are manifestations of Vision 2020, if you did not know, Member for Couva North. They are manifestations of Vision 2020. We not only as a PNM Government sought to develop sound infrastructure,

we ensure that we develop people; we focus on developing people, building and nurturing and caring for society, as well as, you know, not just our focus as a party, our focus when we are in Government, it is not about winning elections, it is about developing and investing in generations. And so I wanted to make sure that the Member knows that leadership is really indeed the capacity to translate vision into reality. We translated Vision 2020 into reality. You are sitting in one of the buildings. [*Desk thumping*] We translated Vision 2020 into reality.

Mr. Speaker, if she did not know, she is fully well aware of it now. You know, I sat here and I listened to the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs and, you know, I honestly thought that the Minister came to this House to tell us about, you know, the strategies, the plans, the things that they intend to do in order to ensure that there is a turnaround in the energy sector. And while he was talking, I had the fortunate pleasure to go through their documents on the Review of the Economy, and to my amazement, I thought the Minister was going to come and tell us that okay, Mr. Speaker, Members of the House, members of the population, these are the things that we are going to do to ensure that the marginal growth of 0.6 per cent that was projected in the exploration of production, that marginal growth will be no more. We will experience exponential growth.

Mr. Speaker, I thought that he was going to tell us that the petroleum sector in 2014 is going to expand. But you know what the Review of the Economy said? It said that the petroleum sector in 2014 is constrained by an anticipated contraction of 2.9 per cent in refining. It not only said that, but it also went on, their report, Mr. Speaker, I want to make it clear, it is the Government's report that stated that contraction is due to the challenges and the supply of natural gas to downstream refiners. In a newspaper article I read, where the Minister was saying that the downstream sector has been losing millions of dollars, and I did not say that, Mr. Speaker, due to the shortfall of natural gas. That is what the Minister had said. The downstream sector has been losing millions of dollars due to the shortage in natural gas.

Mr. Speaker, I thought he was going to come here and tell us about the plans that they have to ensure that there is no more shortage, that natural gas is in full supply, that they are able to supply the refineries, et cetera. I thought the Minister was going to come here and tell us that, you know, but he did not. So I really sat amazed and wondering really, what he came here for.

The Review of the Economy as well, told us that petroleum drilling—that there were 47 wells that were drilled during the first eight months of 2013—2014, a 26.6 per cent decline, compared to a 64 wells that were drilled last year for the

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same period. Mr. Speaker, I again really wish that the Minister had come and told us what strategies they are putting in place to ensure that they rank, they beef-up the drilling of wells and that the number far exceeds the 64 wells that would have been drilled last year.

Mr. Speaker we are also told in the Review of the Economy document that there is a decline in crude oil and condensate production. Mr. Speaker, 752 barrels less compared to what would have been produced last year around the same time, 752 barrels less. And then he also talked about the issue of La Brea and what was taking place there and stuff like that. The Minister did not give any comfort to the people of La Brea, I would like to say. He did not give any comfort as well to the citizens of this country, particularly with respect to what is taking place in the energy sector.

In reference to La Brea, my heart really goes out to those people. I remembered one night looking at Point Blank that programme by Marcia Henville and she went in and she was interviewing the residents of La Brea. People had sores on their skin, their hair in patches, you know, Mr. Speaker, because of the chemicals that they would have been exposed to. Those people were begging to be relocated, begging to be moved out of there to get treatment. Some of them not only experienced hair lost, they experienced breakouts in their skins and they have respiratory and other problems, and you know, the Minister did not give any comfort at all to the people of La Brea.

Hon. Member: Nothing! He did not say a word.

Miss A. Hospedales: He said nothing to them. All he talked about is compensation, but who were compensated? How many of those people were compensated?

Hon. Member: None, none.

Miss A. Hospedales: Those people do not need compensation, they need to be treated, they need to be removed from there to be relocated elsewhere. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, you know what he said to them, the comfort or what he wanted to—I do not know, it really does not apply to the people. He said that treating on the level of government, that they at the level of government were treating on the issues of aging infrastructure. I mean the infrastructure in the petroleum industry is important, but the people, Mr. Speaker.

6.35 p.m.

The Member for Couva North talked about the people and the Government is caring and the Government establishing an enabling environment. Mr. Speaker, this is a demonstration of a lack of care. [*Desk thumping*] The people in La Brea—my colleague is here, the Member for La Brea. The people in La Brea need the Government to intervene in a way that demonstrates care, and we know that the Government cannot do that. They do not know what care is all about. They “doh” even know how to define care.

I hope that after today they will take the time out. If even you all “doh” want to go in person, ask Marcia Henville for the video. I am sure she would be willing to share it with you, and you would see the kind of devastation that has been caused to those individuals in La Brea. And, you know, the Member for Couva North talked about, “Oh, how the MPs on this side never went into their area”. Have you visited La Brea, Member for Couva North?

Miss Ramdial: Of course, many times. Many times. Many times.

Miss A. Hospedales: So, Mr. Speaker, I really, really, really hope—my heart goes out to the people of La Brea and I really hope that the Members of the Government will visit La Brea.

The Member for Oropouche East said in his contribution to the debate, that the only people who are not happy with the budget is the PNM. This is so far from the truth because I read the same newspaper that he read and I would have read a report in the *Guardian* by the Chamber of Industry and Commerce, and they said that the budget did not substantially provide any new avenues for truly taking the country to sustained economic growth and prosperity: This was in the *Guardian*. The Member for Oropouche East quoted articles in the *Guardian* and the *Express*. This was in the *Guardian*.

Fixin’ T&T, their fears, they said, basically, they are estimating yet again 50 to 60 per cent of the \$64 billion will be lost to corruption and inefficiency. That is what Fixin’ T&T said. They are calling for legislation to plug the holes and stop the theft, they said.

Mr. Speaker, I read other articles indicating that the budget is cosmetic, an election budget. “Same old, same old”, one person indicated. One individual said: It is way too high. It reflects the mismanagement and poor management of funds. The Princes Town Business Chamber, Mr. Shrikissoon, indicated that the Government’s decision to raise the minimum wage to \$15 will result in a higher

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cost of production and prices for the consumer.

Additionally, Mr. Keith Sankar, President—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Indarsingh: What is your position on the budget?

Miss A. Hospedales: I will tell you what my position is just now. Mr. Keith Sankar of the Siparia Chamber of Commerce said:

“If you do not have increased revenue you are going to have a deficit budget and that would mean major hardships on the population”—in the future.

Mr. Speaker, a poll conducted by the *Express* on the budget revealed that 64 per cent of the persons voted that they did not believe that the budget will bring relief to the underprivileged and disenfranchised. So when the Member for Oropouche comes here and he talks about the budget, “is only the PNM who don’t like the budget and the PNM saying negative things about it”; Mr. Speaker, it is not only the PNM. There are right-thinking citizens out there who are very, very concerned.

He talked about the greatest tragedy that they would have to face, and I would say to them that the greatest tragedy that this country has been faced with is that Government. [*Desk thumping*] They have mismanaged the Treasury continually. Mr. Speaker, there has been evidence of squandermania in this country. Just imagine millions of dollars being lost through the LifeSport Programme. As the Member for Laventille East/Morvant indicated, corruption, ghosts, in the LifeSport Programme, and she gave so many examples.

When calls are being made to audit the National Lotteries Control Board, there is cause for concern. And, you know, the Member for Couva North said that they are setting the right example. Are you all really setting the right example for the people of this country?

Mr. Jeffrey: They cannot be serious.

Miss A. Hospedales: You all really cannot be serious. Mr. Speaker, in an article on the National Lotteries Control Board, there were allegations of contracts being given out to a company that was not registered with the Companies Registry. Apart from that, a member of staff of the National Lotteries Control Board being awarded \$5 million contract to market—for different services. These are the kinds of things that were happening, and they are setting the right example? Ah! They are setting the wrong example.

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Mr. Speaker, just imagine, even the Minister of Education—he just left his seat—requested an audit to be done on the Educational Facilities Company because he expressed concerns about the award of contracts for construction and refurbishment work on several schools. Even the Minister of Education is calling for an audit. You know, audits have been called for at the National Quarries. The Member just spoke about the National Quarries. A past chairman was fired as a result, and the Minister of Finance and the Economy indicated that the audit would have been sent to the DPP. That is to tell you how serious that is. And, you know, we keep hearing about an audit being done here and an audit being done there, and an audit being done in all these different state agencies and in some ministries, but you know what we do not hear about? The results. We do not get access to the results, to the findings of the audits, and that is cause for concern. Or, is it really that they are doing the audits, or saying that they are doing the audits? We need to get to the bottom of the truth.

Then you hear at the National Quarries, the issue of questionable hiring practices; questionable preference given to different firms; questionable aggregate supplied for the construction of the Point Fortin Highway. When you hear an audit request for Caribbean Airlines as well, that is cause for concern. They are not setting the right example for the people of this country. The entire Caribbean Airlines board was fired in May of last year because of bad corporate governance, abuse of the position to promote private business interests, and just imagine the issuing of complimentary tickets by the Vice-President of CAL for a concert in Toronto. So many other things were happening.

Audit, after audit, after audit, after audit, and they are asking for audits, other concerned citizens are asking for audits. And you know what the Auditor General had to say about them? The Auditor General, in the Auditor General's report for the financial year 2011, for the financial year 2012 and the financial year 2013, had this to say: that there was non-compliance with financial instructions, with financial regulations and with financial directives on the part of the Government Ministries. The Government's non-compliance with financial instructions, non-compliance with financial regulations, non-compliance with financial directives.

There were significant differences noted—and, you know, Members of Government are moving away from their seats because they are embarrassed. [*Desk thumping*] Significant differences were noted in the information presented in the appropriation accounts to that which was reported to the Auditor General.

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Mr. Speaker, this is not my report, you know, this is the Auditor General's report. [*Desk thumping*] They have found that in several Ministries, the Appropriation Account was signed by someone who was not the appointed accounting officer, and in that instance it is the Permanent Secretary. So the Appropriation Account was not signed by the Permanent Secretary. The inaccuracy of financial statements due to a discrepancy of the Appropriation Accounts and other records was evident. There were differences between unpaid cheques totalling millions of dollars from the total sum on the list of unpaid cheques. So there were a lot of discrepancies, errors, omissions. Inconsistent presentation of the Appropriation Accounts were noted to be prevalent. And Mr. Speaker, again, these are not my reports; these are the reports of the Auditor General.

So what we have seen happening over the last four years was the Government presiding over weak systems of internal control. They failed to comply with the regulations, as well as the financial directives necessary to ensure the maintenance of transparency and accountability in Government. They have failed to give proper account for the way in which they spend hard-earned taxpayers' money.

Again, the Member for Couva North said that they have led by example. In what way? We have seen again, squandermania. They have used our Treasury as though it is their own personal ATM machine. They have done so, and Members on this side can give you example upon example, upon example, of projects in our community, needed infrastructure in our constituencies, that they refuse to construct because they said to us that they have no money.

Mr. Speaker, I could tell you, in 2010, the Bon Air community centre was scheduled to be constructed; the Trincity community centre. The contracts were already awarded. You know what happened? As soon as we lost the election, they cancelled them. Up to today, those facilities have not been constructed and as far as we are aware, it will not be constructed as long as they remain in Government, but that is just for a short space of time.

Mr. Jeffrey: Yeah, man. [*Desk thumping*]

Miss A. Hospedales: Mr. Speaker, ECCE centres for the Bon Air, Arouca and Trincity areas—the ECCE centre, particularly for the Bon Air area, was scheduled to be done. It actually—just imagine last year the Minister of Education, in bringing the budget for the Ministry, noted that there was an allocation for the construction of that ECCE facility, and up to today no sod has been turned.

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The health centre for the Trincity community, I wrote to the Minister of Health indicating that Trincity is an ageing community. There are a lot of senior citizens. They actually have to leave Trincity to go to Macoya or go to Arouca to be treated, and there was land allocated in Trincity. But guess what? Because, you know, the developer does not care, themselves, about the residents of Trincity, they sold the piece of land.

But, Mr. Speaker, I do not know, the Member for Couva North was talking about the Government caring and creating this enabling environment. They have not really demonstrated that. I read the 2013 Auditor General's report that said to me that through the LifeSport Programme, the Maloney or Clayton Ince Recreational Ground was upgraded; work was done on it. I am asking where, when, how, who did it? Because no work to date has been done on that recreational ground in terms of upgrade. Who was the contract awarded to? And why was this individual paid money to do nothing at all?

To date, I am inviting the new Minister of Sport to visit the Clayton Ince Recreational Ground and you would see for yourself, Minister, nothing has been done on that recreational ground.

6.50 p.m.

[MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, for yet another year, we are having a deficit budget of approximately \$4 billion. The Government has not to date accounted for the billions of dollars lost in the Auditor General's Reports—the billions of dollars lost through LifeSport, the billions of dollars lost through the Educational Facilities Company, the billions of dollars—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Rambachan: The billions?

Miss A. Hospedales: Yeah, billions, billions. Because when you add up all together, it really amounts to billions of dollars. They have not given a proper account for the amount of money lost. [*Crosstalk*] Apart from a deficit budget, we have experienced so many losses through all these corrupt things that have been happening in the state enterprises, in the Government Ministries. [*Continuous crosstalk*] Madam Deputy Speaker, I seek your protection.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Members, Members please allow the Member to speak in silence, please. You may continue, Member.

Miss A. Hospedales: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. We have experienced so much losses through all these corrupt things that have been happening across these state agencies that are run by Government and their

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agents, et cetera. They have not given account for the money that has been lost. How do they intend to collect the money that they have lost? We have heard of instances where chairpersons of boards squandered money and then was just told to go away, nothing coming out of it. That person was not called to account to—you know, the money was not returned, nothing at all, just go away; or, in some instances, not only just go away but be promoted to another position in another Ministry or two. So you see the kind of example the Member for Couva North said that the Government has been setting for the people of this country.

I have a question I would like to ask. The economists or the advisors to the Government, have they researched the debt-to-GDP ratio that the country can sustain before the economy collapses? What is the threshold level? I do not even know, the Government, if they have done that kind of research because the way they are spending and spending and spending, and every year is a deficit—for the last four years, deficit, deficit, deficit. I am asking the question on behalf of every right-thinking citizen in this country: have you all thought about the debt-to-GDP ratio that the country can sustain before the economy collapses? And it is a serious, serious question.

I am not sure if they have done their research well. Trinidad and Tobago enjoys the commerce-based economic model and we have done so for many years, but what they are now doing is taking us into the debt-based economic model. What this can do to our country can be very detrimental, not just to us at this present time, but to future generations. Madam Deputy Speaker, a debt-based economic model is one that exists in the US and we have seen the impact that that has had on the US economy. The only way that they were able to survive the economic downturn and to survive through their deficit budgeting is because the US currency is a commodity currency, and as a result of it being sold, they are able to sustain to some measure, a standard in terms of their economy.

But how much of our money is actually bought? How much of our money is actually sold? I think that the Government needs to begin to think carefully about what they are doing. Every year a budget, every year a deficit budget. That means every year, they have to take out loans to sustain, to support the budget that they have—the deficit. If they continue along this path that they have been taking the country, we would be swiftly moving into a debt-based economy, and the thing is we would not be able to survive in an environment like that because we do not have commodity currency, we are actually a commercial-based economy.

So, what may happen to us is what would have happened to the Nigerians in the 1980s. In the 1980s, the Nigerians were very confident that their economy was

doing well. They were a rich oil-based economy and, as a result of that, the Nigerian Government, being so confident in the economy, they went on a spending spree, and what happened as a result of that, the economy collapsed. Prior to that, they could have—one naira was able to purchase US \$1.50 and currently ₦163 actually purchases US \$1.00.

If the Government, this current Government, the UNC alliance Government, continues to go along that path, who knows what can happen to the Trinidad and Tobago economy. God forbid that we will end up in a position that the Nigerians ended up in, but the possibility exists because they have done no proper assessment or analysis of our economy to determine how far they can go in terms of deficit budgeting. I really do not think that the Government has been responsible in terms of how they have been spending the money, how they have been managing the money. It is not my concerns I expressed just now, I expressed concerns about the Auditor General highlighting the lack of compliance where the Government is concerned, in terms of managing, giving account, being transparent, where the money is concerned.

I want to raise a little about the Government's—you know, I read the *Social Sector Investment Programme* document and what it said is that the Government has a comprehensive Poverty Reduction Programme, and part of that programme is the Targeted Conditional Cash Transfer Programme, better known as the food card programme. In looking through the *Social Sector Investment Programme*, I realized that in 2012, \$2,500,000 was allocated for the food card programme; in 2013, \$2,809,500 was allocated; 2014, \$2,330,000 was allocated, and in 2015, they said \$2 million was going to be allocated.

But strangely enough, in the same *Social Sector Investment Programme 2015* document, there is also an additional allocation of \$264 million. I had to stop and ask myself, well, why are there two different allocations—budgetary allocations for 2015 under the food card programme? And you know, I was reminded of some concerns raised by Dr. Rowley when he said that he got wind of a Cabinet Note that indicated that they are going to ramp up the food card programme. I am asking: is the \$264 million noted on page 107 of the *Social Sector Investment Programme 2015* the actual budget for the Targeted Conditional Cash Transfer Programme for this year that is actually going to be used to ramp up that programme? I think the Government needs to come straight and let us know exactly what they intend to do with that programme.

I talked just now about audits—the audit for the LifeSport, the audit for national lotteries, for Caribbean Airlines, for the Educational Facilities Company

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and so many others, and I am also calling for an audit of the Targeted Conditional Cash Transfer Programme. [*Desk thumping*] We have heard instances of cards and I could give an example.

A resident in my community, she indicated that she was in Arima and just happened to be standing by when there was a direct impact or direct effect, or whatever you call it, programme by the Ministry of the People and Social Development, and the then Minister of the People and Social Development was passing through Arima, happened to lay hold on her—well, cast his eyes upon her and walked up to her and said, “Hi, how are you going? How are things with you?” So she responded and told him, well, how are things with her and et cetera, and he just took a food card out and gave it to her. [*Crosstalk*] Yes, and that is just one example.

A few months ago, sometime last year, I was getting ready for Parliament, my neighbour, who is a retired police officer, called out to my father quickly indicating that a vehicle just pulled up in front of him, he showed him literally, he got an envelope. He literally showed him the food card that was provided in the envelope to him. A retired police officer who basically would be getting a pension of over \$7,000 or something. Just never applied—that was during local government elections campaign—for the food card but suddenly a food card shows up in an envelope at his home. So he, being a responsible citizen, took the food card back.

These are things that are actually happening on a daily basis. We heard of the instance of the food cards being distributed in Tobago during the THA elections. It is alleged that over \$2 million worth of food cards were distributed. We need an urgent audit of this food card programme. [*Desk thumping*] We need an urgent, urgent audit of the programme.

This Targeted Conditional Cash Transfer Programme, or the food card programme, is really meant to promote the nutritional and food security for members of the population who are poor, who are vulnerable, who are indigent. But what we have seen coming out of this programme are persons who are financially abled. If you go and do a survey in all the groceries that provide the opportunity for people to come and cash, you know, for the groceries—the food stuff that they purchase with their food card—the grocers will tell you that some of those people do not qualify because they are capable of looking after themselves financially. There are lots of people like that. One set of abuse in this programme.

Then you have the issue of the very poor who really need to be on the programme having to wait months or even a year, or even years, in some instances, unable to access the programme because people who do not need to be on the programme are on the programme, and in a sense, blocking them from coming in, from entering. There are persons who would have lost their cards and as a result of that—up to today, I have heard instances of persons losing their cards over a year ago, and up to today, even though they reported it to the police, they filled out all the relevant forms, they went back to the food card office and they submitted the report, et cetera, up to today, those very poor individuals are unable to get the card back.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we have other issues with reference to square pegs, as I would say, being placed in round holes where you have the unqualified staff; where you have staff who do not even understand what social work is all about, who do not understand what it is to empower and to work with and to help these people to get to a level of empowerment and self-sufficiency.

7.05 p.m.

There are people who are just working in this particular programme who do not belong there; they are not qualified based on the level of qualifications that has been outlined. Some of them are just doing whatever they wish; distributing cards however they wish; telling people they do not qualify because they have a washing machine.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, I just want to enquire, do you anticipate that you would require additional time?

Miss A. Hospedales: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: You may continue.

Miss A. Hospedales: Madam Deputy Speaker, I would really like to ask the Government to ensure that there is a comprehensive audit of the food card programme. As the *Express* poll indicated, 64 per cent of the persons who cast their votes in the poll—with reference to whether the budget would trickle down to the poor and disenfranchised, et cetera—did not believe so. I think that is a cause for concern.

The other thing is that this programme is really supposed to touch poor and disenfranchised individuals, but you could imagine civil society organizations in Trinidad and Tobago indicating that poverty is persistent and hunger still remains. Despite the status of the country, more than one-fifth of the people live below the

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poverty line. This is what civil society is saying. They also noted that more than— Well, what they are saying is that more than 20 per cent of the people live below the poverty line in Trinidad and Tobago, while 8 to 11 per cent are reported to be undernourished.

We would like to have accurate statistics on poverty in this country, but you know what happens? The Central Statistical Office (CSO) does not function; we have no up-to-date statistics. Just imagine in the *Social Sector Investment Programme*, on page 70, the only statistics that the Government has to offer us, to date, is statistics available for the year 2005? Two thousand and five, the only poverty statistics they have available? That is highly, highly, highly, highly ridiculous.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I will also like to touch, briefly, on the Unemployment Relief Programme (URP) because they said that the Unemployment Relief Programme is a part of the Government's poverty reduction strategy. For the year 2015, they have allocated \$542 million. Millions of dollars are being spent in the URP and, to date, I am still asking where is URP in my constituency? I do not see them. What are they doing? What projects are they doing? I am still asking. Since 2010, I came here; 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, to date, in 2014, I am still asking the same question: Where is URP in the Arouca/Maloney constituency? I am sure everybody else on this bench is asking the same question: Where is URP?

Madam Deputy Speaker, you know, the Member for—I saw a newspaper article by the Member for St. Augustine saying that there would be no more ghosts in the URP. Even the Member for Tabaquite, when he was the Minister of Local Government, no more ghosts in the URP, but where are they? Where are they, Member for Tabaquite? Where are they? Even the Member for Couva South said he knows for a fact that there was corruption in URP.

Hon. Member: What falsehood you are coming up with?

Miss A. Hospedales: No, I am reading out of an article. You are actually being quoted here that there was a level of corruption in URP that has to be brought down and I will make no apologies for saying it. I am pleased to take on whoever I have to in relation to getting the corruption down in URP, et cetera.

Madam Deputy Speaker, they have only talked. I am still asking where is URP? How much money I just quoted? Five hundred and—

Hon. Member: Forty-two million dollars.

Miss A. Hospedales: —forty-two million dollars, for what? The Minister of Finance and the Economy said that by the end of September they will have 1,000 completed projects. I want to ask—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, the question is that the speaking time of the hon. Member for Arouca/Maloney be extended by 10 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

Miss A. Hospedales: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to ask the Minister: Where are those projects? Provide a list for us by constituencies, the number of projects being done in each constituency, the actual location, the name of the contractor and the type of work being done.

Dr. Rambachan: Ask a question. File a question.

Miss A. Hospedales: I would like you, the Member for Tabaquite—you hear he is saying file a question. This is a budget debate, when you get up we are asking that you present the information, Member for Tabaquite.

Madam Deputy Speaker, there is need for accountability in the URP programme and we are saying let there be a financial audit, a forensic audit, Madam Deputy Speaker. We need a forensic audit of the URP.

There are a few more things I want to talk about. [*Interruption*] No, I want to talk about Transform Life Ministries. That is an organization in my constituency, Transform Life Ministries. I am asking the Minister of Finance and the Economy, and the Prime Minister, to tell us whether or not the subvention for Transform Life Ministries was stopped in 2013 and 2014 and the reason why the subvention was stopped. I am aware that the subvention for Transform Life Ministries was stopped in 2010 when there were several financial anomalies and discrepancies in that particular organization.

I wrote a letter, a comprehensive letter—I wish I had enough time, but I have two other things I want to touch on. I wrote a comprehensive letter in 2011 telling the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of the People and Social Development of the concerns I had because I saw in an article that the Government had a strategy to remove street dwellers. I said that was doomed to fail if they sent those people to Transform Life Ministries.

Madam Deputy Speaker, they had no programme in place; they had no staffing; they had nothing in place to accommodate persons who were coming off

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the streets going into a structured programme. I said to them that the facility would fail, it would fail, it would fail.

As far as I am aware, the Ministry—I would like to find out how much money was paid, to date, to the manager of Transform Life Ministries; whether or not there was a contract or MOU established between the Ministry and Transform Life Ministries to house, rehabilitate and integrate street dwellers. As far as I am aware, approximately \$3,569,668.38 has been paid, to date, to Transform Life Ministries.

Madam Deputy Speaker, those clients come to my office. *[Interruption]* That ministry is located in Arouca/Maloney constituency and those clients come to my office. Approximately two weeks ago, a client came, scabies. You know what he said? There was a breakout of scabies at the facility.

Hon. Member: How do you know that?

Miss A. Hospedales: It is alleged, right. I am saying, after the clients, they are physically abused and verbally abused. This is the demonstration of care by this Government to these persons, these homeless individuals who need to be in a nurturing and caring environment. Not only that, in 2009 there was a facility—*[Interruption]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Members, please, please. I am asking you, let us have one speaker at a time. I would want to listen to the Member in silence.

Member, you may continue.

Miss A. Hospedales: In 2009, a facility was constructed during the tenure of the People's National Movement when both the Member for Diego Martin Central and myself were in the Ministry of Social Development. A New Horizon was the name of the facility, housing 200 persons; 200 street dwellers or homeless persons. Staff would have been hired, a beautiful facility where they could have been aired—no airing takes place at Transform Life Ministries. It is like a miniature remand where they are imprisoned; especially if they behave badly they are put in isolation and whipped on top of that.

Madam Deputy Speaker, there has to be a thorough investigation into the Transform Life Ministries and those persons that they have there. Those persons are sent there—*[Interruption]* They have complained that they were actually snatched off the streets. They were grabbed from the streets, they were not told where they were going and they—*[Interruption]*

Hon. Member: Kidnapped.

Miss A. Hospedales: Yes, that is it, they were kidnapped. If we were to do something like that, they would be going to international human rights associations for us, but that is the kind of thing that is happening under this Government. The homeless people are snatched from the streets and they are not told where they are going. *[Interruption]* Yes, they are whipped; verbally abused; and they run away on top of that. Some of them ran from the programme because you know why? They were tired of that kind of—*[Interruption]* Yes, they were tired of that treatment.

Madam Deputy Speaker, so the facility in Piparo, next to the Piparo Rehabilitation Centre was built. Nobody is there right now, as far as I am aware. No one is there and I want to ask the Government why? Why is that facility not being used to house the homeless persons? Why? I would like the Prime Minister to tell us why, because she is now the Minister of the People and Social Development. *[Desk thumping]* Why is that facility not being used? I would like to call for the immediate removal of those human beings from Transform Life Ministries. I would like—*[Interruption]* Yes, it deserves to be.

Just before I wrap up, I just want to highlight another issue with reference to Student Support Services. I came out of the Student Support Services and the Guidance Officers at the Student Support Services have not been paid their outstanding payment of travelling allowance and communication allowance for some years well. I am asking—I wish the Minister of Education was in his seat. I am asking him, I am pleading with him. I understand the importance of a travelling allowance. I worked in Student Support Services before and it requires you to travel from place to place. Some of them do not have a vehicle and they have to hire a taxi or rent a car and their travelling allowance is very important.

The other thing, apart from that is their communication allowance. I could tell you, I was a School Social Worker; you always have to be on the phone calling parents, calling teachers, arranging to have sessions, calling facilitators. You always have to be on your phone making arrangements for this and counselling, advising and that kind of thing. So, I really hope that this particular issue is settled, the travelling allowance as well as the communication allowance for guidance officers. They literally have been left stranded and are, more or less, appealing for a settlement of their travelling as well as communication allowance.

I saw in the Revised Estimates the Student Support Services was given \$5,500,000 and I hope that part of the \$5,500,000 would actually be utilized for the payment of these outstanding allowances.

Apart from that, I just want to highlight the concerns expressed by the senior citizens in my constituency with reference to the inequity in terms of the senior citizens pension being more than the NIS pension as well as some of my constituents expressed the fact that they were public servants and are still receiving \$1,500 or less in pension with no increase. So they have told me to highlight the inequity. I am asking Government to take a look at those persons whose pensions are not brought on par with the senior citizens pension to make sure that it is brought up to a particular level where it is equitable as that given to the senior citizens.

7.20 p.m.

And with my one minute or one second, I just want to highlight the fact that TTPost—I think the Minister of Public Utilities needs to do a proper investigation into TTPost with reference to the delivery of mail—what is happening is that the delivery of mail is delayed sometimes by a week, two weeks, a month, and as a result people are unable to pay their bills on time. It is a regular occurrence in the Arouca/Maloney constituency and I hope that he will intervene in this matter.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in closing, I would like to indicate that the Member for Oropouche East has indeed revealed their campaign strategy, which he said: to run a campaign of falsehood and to do anything that they possibly can, because they recognize that power is slipping from their hands.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I just want him to know that the people of Trinidad and Tobago are not foolish and if they think that they can fool the people, fool the people, fool the people, they are wiser than that. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of the Arts and Multiculturalism (Hon. Dr. Lincoln Douglas): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I rise to support the Motion moved by the Minister of Finance and the Economy and to address this budget that we understand provides a real platform to build on the Government's successful efforts to reverse decline and achieve a full economic recovery.

Now, when this budget was read by the finance Minister, I said to myself that this is a great budget, and I did not really say more after that. I came here, expecting that, in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, during the debate, some of my optimism and some of my excitement about the budget will be defused and brought down a little bit by great arguments and points. What I have found is a series of whining about little detailed issues in their particular constituency and no real rigid debate.

The last speaker went on and on and on about issues that—some of which she has no idea about, some of which the Member herself was responsible for when she was in the Ministry of the People and Social Development and did nothing. “And all de talk dey talk about homeless people and we responsible, did not even go through the serious process.”

They talk about building a facility, if you have to require this, it requires engagement of people on the streets, it requires legislation so you could forcefully remove people or get them to volunteer, incentives to get them to voluntarily go in. That is why there are no people, because this was a facility where people had to voluntarily go, and street people hardly ever voluntarily go. So you needed legislation. They were not prepared to work on the legislation. You needed all kinds of things, in order to deal with street people. And they were responsible, both the Member for Arouca/Maloney and the Member for Diego Martin Central. They did not deal with all of these things but when they had the Summit here, they hurriedly made a little box and put it up there and put people in it and then coming here with this whining, whining, whining.

Notwithstanding the Member for La Brea, well, every time he comes here he is crying about something, you know, and not addressing. So, I thought that I would have been—you know, my enthusiasm, my optimism about the budget would have been whittled down by their great arguments. Even the Opposition Leader had nothing significant to say. I cannot even remember what he said, besides talking—*[Interruption]*

Miss Hospedales: “Yuh was sleeping!”

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: I was listening clearly. I could tell you some of the things, some of his mantra, that he said that had nothing really to do—“all he talked about, they have no shame, this is ah election gimmick, blah, blah, blah.” Anybody could stand up and say those things, but let us have some good, logical, creative argument. Madam Deputy Speaker, “somebody text me and say: you going to deal wit dem eh.” And my response was: deal with what? Nothing specifically was said.

So I will move on, Madam Deputy Speaker, to talk about the Ministry of the Arts and Multiculturalism and our accountability to the budget and our accountability to what we have done in 2013/2014 and going forward.

One of our consultants and researchers, Dr. Vanus James, wrote that Trinidad and Tobago has been investing considerable resources in the development of Carnival. I use Carnival right at the top here because that is our most popular

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symbolic cultural artefact that represents the design and the development and the creativity of our people. He says considerable resources have been invested in Carnival and other industries that rely mainly on copyright. Not much data available for Carnival itself but many of the components of Carnival are also the main activities in the copyright sector, so some basic impressions can be formed by considering that sector.

The World Intellectual Property Organization, which we had here just recently, a couple of weeks ago, says in 2000 copyright contributed approximately \$1,998 million to the economy, more than three times as much as agriculture, which is \$626 million, 2.8 times as much as hotels and guest houses and nearly 23 per cent of manufacturing. In real terms, the copyright sector contributed \$3,630 million in 2007 and \$4,102 million in 2011.

I am saying that to say, Madam Deputy Speaker, in 2011, within the core copyright sector, there were four dominant sectors ordered, in terms of size, radio and television, press and literature, inclusive of academic publishing, software and database. Other significant sectors are motion picture, video, sound, the organizational and advocacy services provided by professional organizations.

I am saying all of this because we do not think that all of this is in the creative and in the cultural sector and provide a significant contribution to the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. And even with all of this information to support investment in the creative sector, I still think, in a lot of ways, we have not appreciated what the cultural sector and the artistic sector is to the economy and to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I would not even go and probably I would later on, to during the reign of the PNM and their whole concept of art and culture and the total disregard and disrespect for art and culture and probably I will get to that later on.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, last budget I advised that our traditions have not helped us to grasp the values as we should have, of the arts and the role of culture in forming our citizens.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we cannot enjoy and we do not boast about the misfortunes of other countries, but the world is in a lot of turmoil and distress. Millions of people, since we last met, have been made refugees, hundreds of thousands have been killed in conflicts and every one of these wars of religion or tribal conflict, they have one thing in common and that is ethnic conflict exacerbated, manipulated and made deadly by people who believe that they can mobilize around tribal affiliations.

Our Government continues to promote love, compassion, tolerance, respect for difference and care. The Ministry of the Arts and Multiculturalism is at the epicentre of our efforts. As a matter of fact, the very formation of a Ministry that deals specifically with arts and culture and our interrelated—as a matter of fact we have two—demonstrate our commitment to the functioning of this society in a meaningful and a harmonious way. Look at this Government: Christians, Hindus, Muslims, well mixed and balanced, demonstrate that.

Madam Deputy Speaker, please, bear with me. Sadness and despair and unimaginable suffering is the lot of many people. If you take Ukraine right now, fighting between ethnic Russians and Ukrainians, Boko Haram in Nigeria and in Sudan north and south, especially there are ethnic conflicts with the Dinka and the Nuer ethnic people who have killed scores and thousands of people.

The NATO led by the United States of America right now is preparing to deal with ISIS in an ethnic war in Iraq and in Syria. Elsewhere, there is the root of this problem. Madam Deputy Speaker, I am emphasizing these things because there are people right now on the radio who continue to mobilize and continue to talk about race and about ethnicity ad infinitum, as if they do not understand the serious consequences of their actions, their behaviours and their thoughts.

They continue to use symbolic language of ethnic and racial mobilization as if there are no consequences to these things. And we have seen how quickly and how easily a society can unravel when people go on radio stations. This is what happened in Rwanda. You had one radio station continuing to describe people in languages and talk about them as cockroaches and squashing on them and so when the moment came it was a tinderbox, it just exploded.

And here in Trinidad and Tobago we have people who continue to use this language, as if they have no implications or no consequences. I want to distance myself from that kind of talk. I want to reject that kind of language that pervades our stations and I want to ask those people to cease and desist also, because once these things start, it is like a genie out of a box, you cannot put it back in the bottle. But we have continued to demonstrate that the harmony, the variety, the diversity, and we have continued to work hard at making that a reality.

My colleague, the Minister of Nationality Diversity and Social Integration, continues to work on patriotism and continues to work on bringing our people together, yet we have other people who feel that mobilization is, around those kinds of ideas, something to feel good about and they confront me on the street and they talk about “aye, you ah black man, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera”.

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So, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will list our achievements at the Ministry of the Arts and Multiculturalism for the last four years, as we outline initiatives to exploit our culture and our arts to cement national unity. I would not talk too much about that. I would leave that for my colleague Minister, to build the efforts of our citizens who must be applauded for ignoring the mischief-makers here, who are willing to fan the flames of ethnic intolerance. But, in opposition to that, we continue to work hard at making this a better place.

Madam Deputy Speaker, our Ministry promotes love, as I said, and all great art that is universal and enduring, lasting and ennobling, they originate in a place of love and passion to serve humanity. Such is poetry of our world religions; our world religions that are resident here in Trinidad and Tobago, that are rooted in India and Africa or the Mediterranean peoples. We are the world where all these streams have come together, again, making our unique Trinidad and Tobago culture.

Every ethnic group known has survived because it evolved a culture to meet the challenges of existence. Such elements of our culture are its rituals, celebrating the rights of passage from birth to death, even after death, language, music, festivals, the values about how children are taught or educated, how they are inducted into adult roles. This is the stuff of culture. These are the things that are critical for a lasting civilization. This is the work of writers and poets and artists and musicians and sculptors and painters. They tell us a story about where we have come from and how to survive the coming tragedies, because come tragedies there will be.

We have been fairly lucky and have escaped earthquakes and hurricanes and famines, mudslides and avalanches and all these things that have been all around us. We have escaped these things but all the scientists tell us is, it is not a matter of if, it is a matter of when. And what will determine whether we survive this? Would it be oil, or gas, or something? No, it will be the strength of your culture.

7.35 p.m.

Madam Deputy Speaker, that is why in probably about 157 BC, the Roman poet or historian wrote that it was conquered Greece that took Rome captive. Madam Deputy Speaker, Rome went and conquered Greece, but because the Greek culture was so powerful, their language and their art and their architecture, the Romans started speaking Greek. [*Laughter*] They started building houses like—so they were able to survive on the sheer force of their art and their culture, and so their civilization survived.

And that is why I am trying to emphasize today the importance of not only the Ministry of the Arts and Multiculturalism, but the role that our artists, artisans and the people who make our cultural artefacts, the significance of that to society. We have long faced a whole administration that has not respected this, and in a sense, has left us quite bereft of any real values that are supposed to be continuing in our society.

So our Ministry accepts its central and strategic role and the responsibility in this juncture of our history, this responsibility to refocus our children, to refocus our young people, to teach them how to overcome the social pathologies and the problems that plague developing societies. So we are desperately in need of strong cultural values.

As a matter of fact, I am happy for the Baby Care Grant, because my colleagues know that I have advocated for not even when the child is born, but before the child is born. The Minister of Education was reminding us that by the time a child is born, 30 per cent of the brain development is already in place, you know.

Dr. Gopeesingh: By one and a half, 50 per cent.

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: Yes, by one and a half, 50 per cent of brain development is in place. So it is very critical that right at the beginning and even whilst, during, that people address these things. So I am happy that we can be part, this Ministry and this Government, can be part of this.

This Ministry will continue to collaborate with all our community organizations. We will continue to collaborate with groups in the community, because we cannot do everything. So we will nurture these values of citizenship through art and culture, such as love of neighbours, respect for different religions, respect for the Constitution, respect for law and the institutions that promote order, respect for women, children, elderly, the handicapped and the aged. We are going to institute artistic projects that are able to do all, and teach our young people all of these things.

The position of the Ministry of the Arts and Multiculturalism is simply this: I have a very firm belief, Madam Deputy Speaker, that our arts and our culture give us the best means by which we can engage the most number of people from the most diverse backgrounds in the shortest space of time, for the least investment and the best return for our investment. I know that many of you have heard me say this more than once, and I continue to repeat it, because I really do believe

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this. Arts and culture—earlier this year and even last year I had the opportunity to participate in the United Nations conference on culture and development, and it is clear, Madam Deputy Speaker, that any kind of development that ignores the value and the power of culture, will continue to fail.

Oftentimes, the Opposition has spoken about Dr. Eric Williams, but this is one of the things that evaded him, you know. He did not read Paulo Freire and Antonio Gramsci and some of the intellectuals of his time, who were dealing and struggling with the issue of how culture should be changed to address—even Frantz Fanon, talking about how you address your movement away from colonialism. So he was not able to capture—so if you read Dr. Eric Williams', you know, own biography, you know, you would see that as he comes to the end of his life, he is ruined or burdened by the fact that the people have not really taken to his ideas. And the reason they have not taken, was because he misunderstood in spite of whatever brilliance he had as a historian or an economist, he did not understand the power of culture and the force of the colonial brainwashing, and never was able to deal with it.

So that was why he could have walked around Laventille and gave away his salary, not knowing that he was reinstituting colonialism and the dependency syndrome, even though the Member for Laventille East/Morvant talked about dependency. He did not realise that it was right from the beginning, that it was the founder himself of the PNM who was instituting dependency when he walked through Laventille and was giving away his pay cheque. It made him a good man, but a bad leader, it happened, Madam Deputy Speaker. So he was unable to really take our people out of the clutches of colonialism and post colonialism, because he himself was deeply entrenched in it, and probably was too arrogant to understand what was going on in his own mind. So he should have read a little bit more of Marx, Fanon, Gramsci and Paulo Freire and all of these people who were talking these kinds of things.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, we have engaged in a number of projects in the last four years, that manifest a vision and complete commitment to this truth, that only polices firmly grounded in our culture, will enable us to overcome our many challenges. Culture must be at the heart of development.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I said earlier no developed country today was a developed country 200 years ago, and the ones that have become developed, they have learned how to take modern technology—countries like Taiwan, China, Singapore and Malaysia, they have learned how to take modern technology and

work with their own culture, and create a brand that is unique to them, so that they could create a kind of development that is particular to them, and that is what we need to do. I continue to speak in this Ministry of the Arts and Multiculturalism, to emphasize the value of culture.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I said that our mission and vision, that culture is the foundation of all we can do to promote sustainable development, and the welfare of our people, the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Before I discuss my plans for next year, and the Ministry's plan, I want to offer you an outline of how we are going to be going about this, how we need to evaluate our work, our list of accomplishments, and then I will outline the plan that we are going to embark upon. This is the direction of the Ministry of the Arts and Multiculturalism, the creative and cultural sector.

We believe that our role as the Government agency responsible for cultural development, the empowerment of our cultural practitioners and facilitating an environment where diverse cultural expressions of Trinidad and Tobago can flourish in a spirit of understanding, tolerance and harmony. We are not going to focus on one group, neither are we going to use the arts as an appendage. You know, you are having a summit or something, and you say, bring in the artistes, as if they are like jugglers or something like that, that is not the idea.

First of all, Madam Deputy Speaker, I am going to talk about the development of a Ministry that can satisfy the current and future needs of the sector, that is committed to people. I am going to talk about empowering artistes through training and support of positive artistic projects; how we are going to lead the overall advancement of the cultural sector and the industry; how we are going to facilitate projects and initiatives that enhance a society, and support the peaceful development of a multicultural society.

I wonder if they had—if the Opposition had the opportunity to read the section in the manifesto that deals with embracing the arts. Just in case, page 46, 47 all around there, but in case you do not get around to reading it, I will give you a little insight on this, so that you could understand what I am talking about. In our manifesto we promised this.

“EMBRACING THE ARTS”

It says:

“Man Cannot Live by Bread Alone

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A nation cannot seek its development exclusively in political and economic matters.”

This is in—when we—2010, eh:

“We believe that it is in the arts that the spirit of our people emerges and that the possibilities inherent in artistic endeavour need to be nurtured. A cultural environment that frees up our people for creative expression will strengthen national identity, without in any way, stifling individual expression and diversity. We will develop this vital sector on the following pillars:”

I want the Opposition to listen to this because, and when I start to outline what we have done, to see if it corresponds with exactly what we promised is being delivered, so listen, we are going to:

- Respect the work of our creative people
- Use the arts to strengthen our national identity and to foster the spirit of unity in diversity
- Generate sustainable livelihood for persons directly involved in the arts
- Allow for the sharing of our creative products and talents with the rest of the world

To achieve this we will:

1. Create a clear policy for the arts
2. Create decentralised spaces for the expression and performance of the arts
3. Facilitate the establishment of festival villages”

Listen carefully, because I am going to detail what we have done and see if it corresponds with this. We will:

- “4. Provide fiscal incentives for the promotion of the arts
5. Strengthen the enforcement of the copyright laws”

Well, I already let that cat out of the bag, because I started talking about the World Intellectual Property Organization and what they were doing here, showing that we were involved in the development of copyright, because that is where the

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real bread is, that is where the real money is, in copyright and intellectual property:

- “6. Establish an independent body for the endowment of the arts to give financial and other support to individual artists, artistic organizations, productions and festivals
7. Make cultural promotion an essential function of Overseas Missions
8. Support the development of a network of community museums, equipped with efficient...artefacts, documents, buildings, and cultural skills, both traditional and new
9. Enhance training of arts administrators, curators, art historians, archivists, and tutors, creative and technical practitioners. The schools’ curricula will be revised to recognise and include exposure to the plastic and performing arts, the history, development and practices of our local traditions
10. Facilitate research and development of the arts”

And I let that one out too because I did mention about Dr. Vanos James, but I will talk some more about it:

- “11. Encourage the financial sector to introduce a window for the development of the arts
12. Enhance and facilitate the environment through which there is reciprocity between local and foreign art forms
13. Work with the sector to develop Business opportunities and partnerships and to channel investments”

I mentioned about 14 things there and I am going to demonstrate that the Ministry of the Arts and Multiculturalism or this Government, has done what it says in its manifesto. So while everybody else is talking, chattering and going on with coming to the Parliament and carrying on with old talk, they will see that while others talk, this Government continues to deliver. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Ministry started off by developing our draft national policy framework for multiculturalism, and the draft national cultural policy these are before the Cabinet for consideration right now. The policy framework for multiculturalism, that is also there. A draft policy was developed

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for upgrading the art and cultural allowance of the Corporation Tax Act, and the development of quotas for 50 per cent airplay on local media that provide incentives similar to the art and culture allowance. I was pleased to hear in the address by the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy that, and I quote:

“...to spur development in the non-energy sector, I propose with effect from January 01, 2015, to increase the rebate from 15.0 per cent to 20.0 per cent in the production expenditure rebate programme on use of local labour, in particular in the film, fashion and music subsectors and also to increase the cap from US \$3 million to US \$8 million in the production expenditure rebate programme.”

I look forward—that is to encourage businesses to participate and to support the development of arts, artefacts and cultural work. I look forward to more information on the details of this. It must be noted, that our Ministry is resourced, with special—this is in the fields of arts and cultural management, in addition to the fact that the staff of the Ministry interacts directly with actual practitioners of the sector, in 2013/2014, the Ministry will pursue the adoption of the 50 per cent local content legislation, and is seeking appointment to have it brought for debate. Local content has been used in successful models for consolidating and growing domestic and internationally competitive film and key industries in Canada, most of Western Europe, Australia and in some countries in Latin America, empowerment of our cultural practitioners.

7.50 p.m.

We have been working on developing a ministry that is friendly to the cultural practitioners and the artistes. Sometimes when Ministry people or technocrats sit in their offices and they have their academic knowledge going, they do not understand fully what is going on, but in this Ministry, we recognize that art is a speciality area with peculiar needs and practices, hence, in the next financial year, the Ministry will increase its efforts in the creation of a national arts council.

We already have received; it has been brought to Cabinet, has been passed, and so we are in the process of developing all the processes for a national arts council to address all the artistic forms in Trinidad and Tobago. It will be the core body of experts with the relevant competencies and experience to guide the advancement of the cultural and the creative sector. That council will manage funding; it will roll out a progressive agenda for the art.

Even right now, there is a DeVos Institute of Arts Management training for artistes and for organizations that deal with the arts. The Ministry continues—and it is called the DeVos Institute of Training. It is facilitating a three-day workshop focusing on artistic planning, institution marketing, effective fundraising, fiscal analysis for board members, financial management, arts administration.

Madam Deputy Speaker, do you understand what is going on here? We are laying a foundation for the strength and the development of the artistic community; for the strength and the development. You have to lay a foundation. It is not something willy-nilly where you have \$400 million that you are just giving out to friends and family and you call that culture and somebody comes and you give them. No, you have to lay a foundation with proper institutions to deliver and to grow the artistic sector.

Mr. Sharma: Say a word on Ramleela.

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: I will get to that and you will hear what we are doing with that. This month, we have a one-year training programme for arts management, and this is for all arts management, whether it is Indian arts, African arts, Mediterranean arts, whatever you want to call it. All these organizations are there and being trained and the DeVos Institute is affiliated with the Lincoln Center so we have real professional thing going on.

This year, we had the Trinidad and Tobago Interactive Music Expo that brought in—it provides musicians and artistes with the opportunity to present and to network with creative industry professionals. They came from around the world to Trinidad and Tobago to expose artistes to the possibility of signing deals for entry into the global market. It provided musicians and artistes with solid advice for the advancement in the creative industry; created a platform between local and foreign and creative markets and it developed audiences for new music and creative products.

This initiative was launched in February 2014 and allowed artistes to showcase their talents. Right now, we have over 20 contracts being negotiated with international entertainment and industry organizations.

We continue to develop the National Registry of Artistes and Cultural Workers. This Registry of Artistes and Cultural Workers is an ongoing initiative that facilitates access by intended beneficiaries to the gains provided by six distinct amendments.

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I would not mention them, but the programme also facilitates the development of the cultural industry, research and heritage, and so our artistes they now can register with an organization that gives them a registration that helps them move easily throughout the Caricom region, throughout Europe and in other places. They will now be recognized artistes. They have access to a Caribbean-wide and European-wide list where they can be chosen from or they can be seen or they can submit their portfolios and their packages so that people can hire them from abroad and see exactly what they are doing.

We continue to work at the development of festival villages. You guys remember I said that when I was reading from the list of things: create decentralized spaces, establishment of festival villages. This is a project that aims to create festival spaces in various areas in the country. The role of the festival space is to allow for entrepreneurial opportunities around the arts and culture, provide places for performance, for education and training.

And as the Member for Fyzabad was asking, the first one we are working on is the National Ramleela Festival Village, the construction of a Ramleela facility at the former Brechin Castle, Couva. [*Desk thumping*] It has been approved, 2013/2014 fiscal year. We have acquired the land; process has been in place; the consultation has happened with all the stakeholders; we have designs and we are moving forward on that.

We have the Mausica Festival Village. This is 10 per cent completed; work started at the proposed site on the Old Road in Arima. The land acquisition—let me tell you about this one, Madam Deputy Speaker. This is being built on a site where the PNM started a folk centre 28 years ago. There are six pillars standing there like giant burnt trees in the wind, and nothing.

This is in Mausica Village in the very community where I grew up. I heard a man say that this is going to happen and it was a time when the Mausica Folk Theatre was on the pinnacle of—they had won Best Village three and four times and they said, “We are going to build this folk centre”. I understand that over three different contractors have been given hundreds of thousands of dollars and the posts just remain there.

Right now, we have designs. We were able to—it was stopped for a simple issue, you know. They tried to take the land by force. The owner filed an injunction; it could not go forward. We solved that along with the Minister for Land and Marine Affairs in one go, “voosh!”, one day, brought the owner, brought everybody together and that was solved and we are proceeding.

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Notwithstanding the criticism of the Opposition, we are moving ahead with the Laventille Festival Village. We are working in collaboration with the Laventille Rhythm Section and that is 30 per cent completed. As a matter of fact, it is more advanced than all the others. We are building a facility for the Laventille Rhythm Section. We are working with them and their contractors to build that up so that they could do pan, folk theatre, et cetera.

Miss Mc Donald: Anything for Picton Pan Theatre?

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: I said Laventille; you gone Picton.

Miss Mc Donald: No that is in Picton.

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: Yeah, well I am working with Laventille. Probably, I will get to you soon. You have Sangre Grande, Princes Town and other places.

We are also working on a pan yard regularization project and this project aims to formalize the ownership, primarily of state lands and subsequently private lands currently occupied by steel bands. It will mark the single largest transferral of wealth to the creative and the cultural sector. All steel bands and most of the steel bands, I should say in Trinidad and Tobago, we will work with. This will give them an opportunity to bargain with conventional and financial institutions, enable the streamlining and uniformity of steel band management.

We will work with these pan sides and, in another Ministry, UDeCOTT is working to assist with the building of steel pan tents and theatre and these will become homes of music; not only steel bands, but will become music schools in the community.

We continue to do work that is foundational; that is strong; that will support the development of the arts and the culture industry for a long time. Immediately, we have three major organizations within the Ministry of the Arts and Multiculturalism: the National Steel Symphony Orchestra that continues to demonstrate high quality in terms of music and steel pan; the National Philharmonic Orchestra. The National Philharmonic Orchestra was created to promote quality symphonic music and all of these things were there on the books long time, you know, but like they continue to boast, they have ideas, but no capacity to deliver. Either it is the will or the ability or something. So when you do it, they say, "is we idea".

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, do you require additional time?

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: Yes, ma'am.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Continue.

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: Thank you. So we are looking at music development, musicianship, audience development; all of these things are taking place. The National Theatre Arts Company: This is our recent—it was established to foster development of the arts and heritage of Trinidad and Tobago in a cultural environment that frees our nationals to engage in diverse cultural activities and provide suitable platform for creative expression and that goes on.

Creative sector research. One of the main things that I said when I became the Minister of Arts and Multiculturalism is that we have to do more research as it relates to the arts and culture of Trinidad and Tobago. And so, this year, we have done our cultural mapping exercise and this established a baseline of information required to monitor and to grow the industry; to provide data to assist in planning for the development of the industry. These studies will be used to support policymaking initiatives, inclusive of future versions of the policies and culture, multiculturalism, grants and subventions.

The Carnival Development Industry Programme: for the first time we had a major study that outlines clearly the direction for carnival. Madam Deputy Speaker, I have been to various countries—I recently came back from Zimbabwe and South Africa—and demand for Trinidad and Tobago culture requires that we lay out a clear plan how we are going to use our culture to develop an industry.

And this is outlined, Dr. Vanus James conducted an analysis of the carnival subsector. The project targeted six core carnival industry groupings: fetes, events, music, steel band, mas, associated business association, public administration, service provider and the NCC, as well as 53 regional carnival committees. All of these things were studied. The analysis aimed to develop a strategy for the development of the cultural industries of Trinidad and Tobago as a major contributor to the social development, to GDP, employment and trade.

And so we continue to work with the NCC, the National Carnival Commission, and I want to point out, Madam Deputy Speaker, that our work with the NCC, managing and restructuring the board, bringing in new creative people, management-type people and working hard at restructuring, procurement processes, et cetera, for the first time, we were able to bring in carnival within budget and still deliver a meaningful carnival to the people.

We are clear that the carnival celebrations continue to generate significant economic activity and contribute to the GDP and employment to facilitate social cohesion. We “does” jump up here in Trinidad and Tobago and have a great time,

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but when we travel and we take carnival abroad, for example, like in Nigeria, the theme of that is, “Celebrating our Diversity”, because they understand clearly there, and in other places, that the function of this festival is to bring people together and have a great time of celebration.

If you live in a country like Nigeria with 180 million people and 100 and something different tribes and 52 different languages, you will understand the significance of bringing people together from the north, from the south, from the east and the west, so that they can understand that they belong to part of a country and that is what carnival does.

We have found that it is a great consultation tool to take to other countries to say, “This is how you bring people together”. We are the happiest people alive. [*Desk thumping*] And it is not by chance. We have mastered the art of happiness. And we are now in the process of bottling it and selling it. We are in the process of packaging happiness, so that we can sell it abroad and teach people how to be happy. That is what we have developed over the years and we are now understanding all the parts of this product and how to market it. Those are the kinds of things that we are working on.

8.05 p.m.

We have commissioned a business diagnostic review of procurement policies, procedures with the NCC; we have had PWC, PricewaterhouseCoopers consultant; we have developed a four-year strategic plan from 2013 to 2017, facilitated by a consultant, Dr. Aubrey Adams, and so, we are clear. We are going to develop a world carnival music conservatory.

This year coming, we will have our international conference on pan and panorama, and we are making a significant drive to brand Trinidad and Tobago arts and culture. They are begging and asking for the arts, artefacts and the culture of Trinidad and Tobago. This was so striking to me, Madam Deputy Speaker, when I went to a pan festival in Japan. Here I am sitting in the audience and people are running up and down jumping.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Hon Members, the question is that the speaking time of the hon. Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West and Minister of Arts and Multiculturalism be extended by 10 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

Madam Deputy Speaker: You may continue Member.

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you colleagues. I was making the point of the demand for Trinidad and Tobago arts and culture. I was saying that I was in Japan, and I am seeing all these Japanese people running up and down waving Trinidad flags. Some of them have never even been to Trinidad, but they are imitating the happiness of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and they are demanding—like when I was in China and I spoke to the Minister, Dr. Cai Wu in China, the Minister of Culture, and he said: “Oh, I know this music”. After we played the pan for him and he was so ecstatic and elated, he said: “Aha Aha we know this music, this is happy music. This is happy music.” We are bottling this right now, as we continue to reach out to the rest of the world. Our outreach to the rest of the world, that is what we are doing, Madam Deputy Speaker, but before we do that, we continue to reach out to our own people here in Trinidad and Tobago.

We have had cultural and technical camps throughout Trinidad and Tobago. People have learnt every imaginable thing as it relates to the culture of Trinidad and Tobago. If you could teach it, we allow you to do it. Everything in every sector from every art form—whether you want to weave hair or whether you want to paint on stones or whether you want to be a belly dancer—whatever, Madam Deputy Speaker, we have facilitated these camps throughout Trinidad and Tobago and not “just for so,” as we used to say growing up, not “just for so,” because we understand that all of these things have significant value.

We have 53 regional carnivals and we have an ongoing training in traditional mas. You should have seen the people in Zimbabwe when we brought out the traditional mas: the Indians and the Moko Jumbies and the Jab Jab and the Sailor mas. I mean, there were almost like a million people lining the streets. Of course, they gave us a big trophy and a thing for first prize. We did not even know we were competing, but they gave us a prize, nonetheless, but they were spellbound by these cultural things, and we are not taking them for granted anymore.

We understand that they have significant value to the country economically, socially and psychologically. We are leaving our mark in time that a great people have traversed these spaces and have done wonderful things, and so they would give our children and our society a great lift. We will be able to be like the Greeks, to conquer any nation that tries to come at us; they in turn will become Trinidadians. They would claim to be Japanese or Chinese or South Africans, they would claim that, but they really will be taken by the Trinidad and Tobago culture. That is what we are about, Madam Deputy Speaker. So we are reaching out to our own people.

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First of all, as I said, we have these camps. We have introduced them to an array of art forms and life skills. We have reached out to underprivileged communities; we fostered a spirit of entrepreneurship; we have had 15 technical camps; we have had 41 of the other kinds of camps, our cultural camps; we had 2,100 children introduced to the cultural art forms and this is only in the cultural camps. I am not even talking about the traditional mas camps from the NCC. We have had 400 persons given the opportunity to improve their technical skills in eight different areas; we have 50 camp venues throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

More than this, we have developed a programme called Mentoring by the Masters. Madam Deputy Speaker, you will understand that in the arts and culture world to be mentored is one of the most significant things—that you have been trained under this particular master—whether you are a violinist, a pianist, a dancer or a gymnast or whatever to have a master. We have created a programme called Mentoring by the Masters, the art of success and we have mentors like Earl Lovelace; Joseph Valley, Marina Salandy in the area of festivals and workshops. This is the second time and the second year around that we have been doing it, and this allows young and upcoming artistes—we connect them with a master and they spend a six months or something there, and they become not only good at their art, but they become an artiste which is a way of being. This is talking about the cultural transmission and the way of moving the culture of being to a new generation.

We had music schools in the communities; we have had artists in residence; we have worked in correctional facilities like St. Mary's, St. Michael's, YTC, St. James Police Youth Club. We have worked in panyards like Potential Symphony, Casablanca, Joylanders and Cordettes. We have done East Indian Music at the Mary Jo Sabha Mandir. The Music School continues. We have had pan camps, et cetera.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the work goes on, and why? Why? Because the art, Trinidad and Tobago culture, has a significant amount of value to the world. It has value to us, of course, to make us a great people in this time and space that we are in, but it has value to the world, and too long we have been playing with it like a man who found a rock by the river and put it just as a doorstep to block his door from flying in with the wind. Somebody came by and offered him a hundred dollars for it and he said: "Sure, take it." Not knowing that it was a big piece of diamond that he had there in the rock, and that is what we have in Trinidad and Tobago, we have been just playing around with it.

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Years have passed and the PNM has done nothing. I should read to you their understanding of culture in their Vision 2020. [*Crosstalk*] It is just like a puff in the wind, nothing significant, no clarity about what the value of culture is to our people. That culture is the foundation upon which we walk; the way we view ourselves in the world that it should help us describe ourselves. It should give us meaning. It should help us understand and explain the most vexing questions of the human condition about who we are; what is this project we are involved in; where we are going; where do we come from and what are we doing on this plate. This is the question Eric Williams did not answer for the people that plagued him and all why he could not address the people and change in the way that he, himself, wanted the understanding of the social and cultural values of people. This is what culture should do for us. How much more time do I have here, Madam Deputy Speaker?

Madam Deputy Speaker: You have until 8.16 p.m.

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: So we have continued to do things. This month, October, we are celebrating “Calypso Through the Years”, the calypso month. I am sure you will hear the Member for Mayaro demonstrating to us his dexterity at extempo. We have done the “An Evolution of a World Icon” with Mr. Mandela. We have celebrated and done exhibitions on all the functions: Divali, Christmas, Carnival, Hosay, Indian Arrival Day, Spiritual Baptist Liberation Day, Eid ul Fitr, Emancipation and Independence.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we are working on a multicultural society. We are working on a harmonious society. We are working on a happy society [*Desk thumping*] where we all can live together. We try to demonstrate that even in our very existence here in this Parliament, and the variety that is in this Government. [*Desk thumping*] We continue to do that.

And so, we are supporting a harmonious multicultural society. On page 46 of the manifesto under the segment “Embracing the Arts” it says:

“A nation cannot seek its development exclusively in political and economic matter. We believe that it is in the arts that the spirit of our people emerges...”

So we had cultural exchanges with Japan, China, South Africa, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, India and Cuba. Right now, we are supporting Exodus in Japan. They are doing a 20-city tour, and so it goes on, and all of these things is to help us more and more.

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Most of all, our Prime Minister, has recently announced that we are going to be building a cultural institute: one in China and one in Nigeria and we are doing this to further—I hope you remember, Madam Deputy Speaker—members would remember the outline that I gave from the manifesto, because all of these are our delivery. I am going to be winding down. So let me go to my closing statement, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: You have two additional minutes, Member.

Hon. Dr. L. Douglas: Okay, thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I support the Minister of Finance and the Economy in this budget. I think it is a great budget. I do not think the Opposition has anything to say. I continue to believe that the arts and multiculturalism is a significant benefit for the economic development of our people through culture, and the bringing of our people together in a harmonious relationship will continue to be a significant part of our culture.

Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of State in the Ministry of Finance and the Economy (Hon. Rudranath Indarsingh): Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. I rise to make my contribution to the fifth People's Partnership budget presentation, which was made by the Minister of Finance and the Economy, Sen. The Hon. Larry Howai. When the people of Trinidad and Tobago voted for change in May 2010, and they provided us with that overwhelming mandate to govern the affairs of Trinidad and Tobago, they did so because of the leadership of our Prime Minister or, at that point in time, our political leader of the Partnership who provided a sense of hope and direction in relation to what was advocated in the manifesto of 2010. Her leadership over the last five years has demonstrated what we would call a true sense of transformational leadership which has brought about a sense of development throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it is important that I take the opportunity here to reflect and remind those on the other side and the national community that we did not arrive in 2014 by vaps. We had a plan that was executed over the last four and a half years, and today we are seeing a full recovery of the economy of Trinidad and Tobago after a negative economic growth, and taking into consideration when we came into political office, Trinidad and Tobago went into a recession.

8.20 p.m.

This is something that we must not forget, and it is important to see that the linkages from our first budget presentation to our second, third, fourth and fifth, which has been presented under the theme: Empowering our People through Sustained Economic Growth and Prosperity. Madam Deputy Speaker, when our distinguished Prime Minister and leader, and our candidates campaigned in 2010, we focused on the issue, or the broad and overarching policy of people-centred development. We conceptualized, as a political party which went into government, the most progressive political manifesto that has ever been produced [*Desk thumping*] in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, one that focused primarily on what we can say to be, a process of people-centred development and one that was complemented with a sense of focus as it relates to poverty eradication and social justice. That is why today there is no criticism for this fiscal package in relation to 2014—2015.

It is a package that has benefited all the sectors of Trinidad and Tobago, and we are reaping the rewards of careful planning and execution and implementation which was clearly outlined in this manifesto of 2010, because we went to the people and said that every child going on to secondary school from SEA will be provided with a laptop to begin their secondary school education programme. Today, through the distinguished leadership of the Minister of Education, this Government has followed through when some on the other side—and some of our critics in the society—have said that this is an initiative that we would not be able to sustain, we have delivered over 75,000 laptops [*Desk thumping*] to successful SEA students in Trinidad and Tobago. This programme has been so successful that the Government of Saint Lucia has entered into an agreement with Trinidad and Tobago to ensure that it is delivered to the students of Saint Lucia. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Deputy Speaker, we said to the national community that we will begin the issue of securing and expanding the GATE programme to achieve 60 per cent participation at the tertiary level education in Trinidad and Tobago. We enunciated that in May of 2010, and, today, I could say without contradicting myself that this indeed has been delivered beyond 60 per cent, and, today, the youth population is participating fully in the education sector of Trinidad and Tobago through the initiatives of not only the Ministry of Education, but also the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training, to beyond 65 per cent. That is something that is noteworthy in terms of planning for the continued development

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of the economy of Trinidad and Tobago, in relation to finding the appropriate skill set in terms of what is needed for the productive base and the continued economic development of this country.

We must be reminded that we said to the national community that we will begin an aggressive programme to fix all leaks in WASA's pipelines, and this has been ably demonstrated in the overall vision of the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources. Today, that charge is being led by the said Minister, Sen. Ganga Singh, and the Minister in the Ministry, the Member of Parliament for Couva North, and, in fact, it is indicated, and we have already enunciated to the national community, that we should achieve water for all by—if my colleague could remind me—

Miss Ramdial: 2015.

Hon. R. Indarsingh:—we would achieve water for all by 2015, and, certainly, we would all know the state of affairs of WASA and water leaks and pipe-borne water supply in relation to what existed before May of 2010. I think that the national community only benefited with a 24 per cent supply of potable water throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

It is amazing to know that after enjoying an energy boom and a windfall between the years of 2002 to 2009, this was all that they could have delivered in terms of water resources, something that is critical for all the citizens of this country. This is what they could have achieved in terms of development for the people in Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Deputy Speaker, we committed ourselves as a political party and a Government to ensure that we will review the process of the minimum wage in Trinidad and Tobago, and that is something that we have followed through. [*Desk thumping*] We have followed through with ensuring that the minimum wage has moved from \$9 to \$15 per hour. I want to take a few moments of your time, Madam Deputy Speaker, and to remind the national community of the lack of commitment from the PNM as it relates to the issue of the minimum wage.

In fact, if I can recollect correctly, every year that they made a budget presentation in the House of Representatives, between 2002 and 2009, they made commitments in saying that they will increase the minimum wage, and on a number of political platforms, and so on. In fact, quoting from an article dated August 22, 2007:

It was indicated that Prime Minister Patrick Manning announced a \$1 increase in the minimum wage from \$9 to \$10 in Monday's budget, and the

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Government had implemented an increase from \$8 to \$9 in April of 2005.

It is important to see the hypocrisy of the PNM, and to see how they toyed with the labour movement and the workers of this country.

Today, the Member for La Brea in his contribution spoke about the minimum wage, and he spoke about this Government using high-handed tactics and so on against the President of the Public Services Association, and so on, but I will say more and I will warn the national community, especially the labour movement, about the history of the PNM in relation to how they have treated the workers, organized and unorganized—or what I would call, workers in the informal sector—based on their track record. But it is important to note, Madam Deputy Speaker, after having announced an increase in the minimum wage from \$9 to \$10 per hour, it was never implemented.

It was never implemented and, today, the Member for Diego Martin West talked, or alluded to this budget being “shameless” and so on, and even calling upon the Minister of Finance and the Economy to apologize to the national community. He was a part of the PNM that failed to give [*Desk thumping*], what we would call, the legislative support to the Minimum Wages Order. Hence, this was one of the biggest, what I would call fraud, that was ever perpetuated on the workers of Trinidad and Tobago and the labour movement by saying that they will implement to move the minimum wage from \$9 to \$10 per hour, and they never displayed the political will to implement the Minimum Wages Order. Today, our Government has been able to, in less than four years, display that political will to move the minimum wage [*Desk thumping*] from \$9 to \$15 per hour.

That, Madam Deputy Speaker, is the difference: between the People’s Partnership Government and the People’s National Movement. That is the fundamental difference; they talk, we deliver. [*Desk thumping*] [*Interruption*]

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: “Come with something new, nuh, man.”

Hon. R. Indarsingh: Point Fortin, the only thing I will say about you—I will hold my fire. I will hold my fire, Madam Deputy Speaker, and not be distracted. They do not want the national community to hear of the cohesive way that this Government has gone about its business, from being a political party that presented a manifesto, and over the last four and a half years, every year has ensured that there has been a transformation of this society. They do not want the national community to be reminded.

I want to tell you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that we said that we would replace the senior citizens' grant with the old-age pension and increase it to \$3,000. We said that in May of 2010. Today, the old-age pension has been increased to \$3,500, [*Desk thumping*] but what is more important too, we must recollect that the PNM attempted to remove the old-age pension from the statute books of Trinidad and Tobago, and they attempted to replace it and they named it the senior citizens' grant. Today, this Government has ensured that successive Governments cannot take away the old-age pension of the elderly and the vulnerable in our society. [*Desk thumping*] That is the fundamental change that has been brought about by this Government.

We said to the national community, through the very inspired and distinguished leadership of our then political leader, the Member for Siparia, that we will establish a Children's Life Fund for life-saving surgery for children. This fund will be administered by an independent board in a fair, equitable, transparent and accountable manner. Again, to remind those on the other side and the national community, this was the very first Cabinet Note which was drafted by our political leader and Prime Minister, and implemented by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. Today, approximately one hundred children have benefited from what we would call life-saving surgery as a result of the establishment of this fund. And the national community, Madam Deputy Speaker, must never forget what was the policy of the PNM as it relates to surgeries for children who were in need of emergency life-saving operations.

8.35 p.m.

I could recall the then Minister of Health, Jerry Narace, saying that the allotment for surgery would be \$60,000, and those who were in need, those parents who were traumatized as a result of the position that was taken by the PNM, that inflexible, that cold-hearted position, they said very bluntly, find "the rest through curry cue, barbecue, raffle and so on, and pholouri, and the sale of saheena" and so on. [*Crosstalk*] Today, that is a thing of the past under this Government, Madam Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] And in fact, I could say that three children, three children from the constituency of Couva South have been able to have access to this fund, and three families have been comforted by the vision of the hon. Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar and the People's Partnership Government.

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Madam Deputy Speaker, it is important for us to remind the national community that we said that we will initiate a process to make every police station a centre for crime containment and reduction, crime fighting, community policing, statistical information gathering and communication linked to a National Operations Centre. Today, serious crimes are indeed down in Trinidad and Tobago by 36 per cent, and that statistical data did not come from anybody on this side, that is something that has been put out in the public domain by the acting Commissioner of Police, Stephen Williams. But again, I want to show the PNM in their budget presentations—I have it here, Madam Deputy Speaker—nine budget presentations where they said that in the budget presentation of 2003, “Vision 2020: People...Our Priority”, then delivered by the hon. Patrick Manning, Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, he said that the PNM:

“...will construct five (5) new police stations in Manzanilla, Mayaro, Mathura, Cumuto and Brasso;”

It is stated on page 41 of this budget presentation, Vision 2020. It has moved to Vision 2030, and I do not know if it is vision 2040, based on what was told to us by the Member for Diego Martin West and the Leader of the Opposition.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: 2030.

Hon. R. Indarsingh: Well I “doh” know. You all are always shifting the goalpost, Member for Point Fortin. I do not know these days if you are in sync with what is being pronounced by your political leader. I really do not know if you are in sync with what your political leader is saying. I really cannot say.

But, Madam Deputy Speaker, it is important to see again a statement of intent, a broad pronouncement of new police stations by the PNM in 2003, eh. And we must never forget, Madam Deputy Speaker, the prices of oil and natural gas. They enjoyed a boom where oil price peaked at US \$147 per barrel of oil, and natural gas was being sold at US \$7 per MMBtu. And again, the national community must ask themselves the question, why the police stations were not built in Brasso and Manzanilla, and Mayaro, and Mathura and Cumuto. Today, through the drive of the Member for Oropouche East in terms of the charge that he has been leading at the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development and UDeCOTT, police stations are being built at La Horquetta, at Moruga, at Piarco. The Member for La Brea who is always crying for amenities because the PNM ignored him for nine years, [*Crosstalk*] they ignored him for nine years, today the police station is being built at La Brea.

And they did not have the understanding to know that next to a state-of-the-art international airport, a police station of good keeping should be built. [*Crosstalk*] Today, Madam Deputy Speaker, I could say that we have built a spanking, new brand police station next to the Piarco International Airport. [*Desk thumping*] And that is part of the continued delivery on the part of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. They do not understand—that is why the Member for Arouca/Maloney said nothing in her contribution. [*Laughter*] She said nothing, Madam Deputy Speaker, she did not even understand what was presented by Minister Howai in this particular package. And that has been her track record since I have been in this House. That has been her track record. Every time I sit and seem to be inspired, but I am deflated at the end of her contribution. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Sharma: More perspired than inspired.

Hon. R. Indarsingh: So, the Member for Arouca/Maloney will have no effect on me. [*Laughter*]

Miss Hospedales: Are you a balloon?

Dr. Gopeesingh: Alicia, you have to do something about that.

Hon. Member: He is so easily deflated.

Hon. R. Indarsingh: Madam Deputy Speaker, returning to the issues of national development and the vision we had for Trinidad and Tobago, it is important that I remind them again, that we said to the national community that we will begin the process of reviewing the laws and institutions which address white-collar crime with a view to strengthening the laws of Trinidad and Tobago. And, Madam Deputy Speaker, it is important again that I remind you of this Government that was the PNM in terms of their commitments and their statement of intent because in the budget presentation of 2004, I have moved from 2003 to 2004, they said again that—and if you would just spare me a moment—and I want to quote from their budget presentation of 2004:

“One of the major areas we have earmarked for reform is the financial sector.

You will recall that just over four months ago this Administration laid in this House a Report on the Review of the Financial System in Trinidad and Tobago, in the form of a Green Paper. Based on comments received a Draft White Paper with an implementation schedule is expected to be brought to the Parliament by the end of this year.

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The importance of a strong and well-regulated financial sector must not be underestimated. We plan to introduce a number of legislative amendments to establish enhanced prudential and supervisory systems to ensure that our financial system is adequate to meet the challenges of globalization and financial liberalization. Amendments will be brought to Parliament with respect to:

the Insurance Act;

the Financial Institutions Act;

the Securities...Act; and

the Co-operative Societies Act;”

Madam Deputy Speaker, again in 2004, they said that they will regulate the financial system through the introduction of modern laws by the end of the year. They sat here from 2004 to 2009 to 2010 and they did nothing about bringing laws that will bring about a modern financial system in Trinidad and Tobago.

Today, I could tell you that we have dealt with the Securities Act. We have signalled, in fact, we have already established through a joint select committee, the work has been done on the Insurance Act, and that would be laid shortly in this session of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. And also, a new Act in relation to bringing credit unions under the jurisdiction of the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago will be laid in this very said Parliament. It is important that I make this point here today, Madam Deputy Speaker, because when they want to talk about governance, they want to talk about transparency and so on, they have no moral authority, based on their track record as it relates to legislation. And I say so too, taking into consideration that they presided over the collapse of Clico, CL Financial and the Hindu Credit Union Co-operative Society. [*Desk thumping*]

Again, just to elaborate, we did not just talk. When we became the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, we had to deal with this particular issue. And I could remember in his contribution today, the Leader of the Opposition and the Member for Diego Martin West saying to this Parliament and saying to the national community, that he boasted about the budget surpluses that were realized under the People's National Movement Government, and he attempted to tell the national community that the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance and the Economy were being less than truthful about the economic data as it relates to what we have achieved as a Government over the last five years. But what he should have told the national community, or apologized to the national

community, is to say, in spite of the surpluses that he boasted about, they could not find the solution to Clico and HCU. They could not find the solution to paying the contractors, who when we came into political power we had to deal with liabilities for contractors of over \$2 billion. They will not tell—they boast about realizing these surpluses, but they will not say, why did they fail to settle over 75-plus negotiations. Why did they undermine the collective bargaining process, Madam Deputy Speaker? These are the things they must tell the national community and the labour movement of Trinidad and Tobago.

8.50 p.m.

And this is something again that the labour movement of Trinidad and Tobago must be very vigilant in terms of—I see that all of them on the other side there are trying to portray themselves as friends of the labour movement, as the new-found messiah who will lead the labour movement. But, I just want to finish this point on Clico, and I will probably take some time to go into the history of the PNM and the labour movement in Trinidad and Tobago. Because, Madam Deputy Speaker, what they would not want to be told, or for the national community to be reminded of, is that we have been able to successfully as a Government establish the Clico Investment Fund, managed by Clico Trust Corporation, and approximately 830 investors, more than 13,600 persons have become unit holders in this Clico Investment Fund. And also, they will not tell you that during this period of uncertainty this Government has ensured that the investment of over 225,000 traditional policy holders have been protected as a result of what we did. [*Desk thumping*]

In that, we were able to lend a very stabilizing hand to the credit union movement, whom hundreds of credit unions in this country had investments in Clico and CL Financial. [*Interruption*] We too played a supporting hand to the trade unions who had investments in Clico and who had investments in CL Financial, and again, these are policies that were geared to what we would call people-centred development. Because if this Government did not stabilize CL Financial and Clico, it would have led to the collapse of the financial system in Trinidad and Tobago.

In keeping with the theme of delivery, I want to say to the national community that the settlement of debt to more than 147,700 depositors of the Hindu Credit Union, we have begun that process. Approximately 18,000 shareholders or depositors who would have invested less than \$75,000 would have received \$136 million in cash. One thousand three hundred and thirty members holding in excess

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of \$75,000 have also received in cash \$99 million and 1,400 members will receive bonds to the value of \$340 million. The bond issuance programme is due to commence early in the next fiscal year. That is delivery in keeping with the commitment that we made in 2010.

We said to the national community also that we would begin and we would establish an economic development board which would consult with stakeholders and play an advisory role in policy formation. This is something that we have delivered to the national community. We said that we will establish a civil society board to strengthen the voice and influence of NGOs and civil society organizations in Trinidad and Tobago, and today the distinguished Minister of National Diversity and Social Integration, and the Member of Parliament for Arima, has ensured that the civil society board is well on its way in terms of, again, delivering on a commitment which we made in May of 2010. [*Desk thumping*]

We said to the national community that we would begin a timetable for constitutional reform beginning with consultation. So, when those on the other side and those in the national community want to instil a sense of hysteria and panic, and saying that we are operating in a very clandestine and a very secretive manner and so on, we signalled to the national community prior to May of 2010 that we will pursue an agenda as it relates to constitutional reform in Trinidad and Tobago through a consultative process. It was not done in a back door or a back room, it was done in the full glare of the national community throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago, led by the distinguished Minister of Legal Affairs and Member of Parliament for St. Augustine, the hon. Prakash Ramadhar.

I could go on and on, but it is important to say to you here, Madam Deputy Speaker, that we committed ourselves to saying that we would begin the rehabilitation and paving of existing access roads and construction of new ones, and today we are seeing that being rolled out and rolled out very clearly throughout the length and breadth of this country. So, whether it is the highway to Point Fortin or the Couva/Preysal interchange or the Diego Martin highway or the Valencia Bypass road, it is important to see and to know—Members for Point Fortin, St. Ann's East, Arouca/Maloney and others—it is important for you all to be reminded that the difference between us and you all, the PP Government, is that if this was done by your Government it would have been cost overruns to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars, and it would have been behind time and behind schedule.

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Today, all or 95 per cent of the projects that are being implemented by the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure are being done within the stipulated time frame and within budget, a hallmark of this Government in ensuring that we manage the financial affairs of this country in a very responsible manner.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I said and I indicated that today Trinidad and Tobago is experiencing positive economic growth. It is experiencing growth that will see Trinidad and Tobago on a firm economic footing in terms of economic recovery which will ensure that there is a higher level of development in all areas of this country.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

And, Madam Deputy Speaker, as you make your exit and the Speaker has resumed the Chair of this session, as we continue this debate, it is important for us to understand that we had to consolidate in May of 2010. Why? Why we had? Why was it three years of decline and so on? Why did Trinidad and Tobago go into a recession? We must always remember the national community, the voting public of Trinidad and Tobago must never forget the wild spending of the PNM between 2003 and 2010. We must never forget the mismanagement, the corruption, the wastage which existed at Petrotrin, at UTT, at the Estate Management Business Development Company.

Every time I go down the Sir Solomon Hochoy Highway and I pass the Brian Lara Stadium, I am pained because what they did to the name of Brian Lara. Brian Lara being the world record holder, who placed Trinidad and Tobago on the global stage because of his exploits, his achievements and his feats in the cricketing arena. I am pained at the fact that the world cannot come and play cricket in the Brian Lara Stadium because of a lack of planning as it relates to this particular stadium.

And, Mr. Speaker, we must never forget that this Government has been responsible in the way that we have managed the financial affairs of Trinidad and Tobago over the last five years. We have never had to be warned by the sitting Governor of the Central Bank of placing the economy down a slippery road. We have never been warned about overheating the economy of Trinidad and Tobago. We can only take heart in terms of the data which is being provided by the IMF and the World Bank, and the international rating agencies such as Standard & Poor's and Moody's and so on, in relation to where Trinidad and Tobago is from a financial point of view and an economic point of view.

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Mr. Speaker, it is important too that what we have achieved must be seen in the context of the transformation of the economy of Trinidad and Tobago because, in addition to the policies that we have pursued and in addition to the programmes that were stated in the manifesto of 2010, we have diversified the economy of Trinidad and Tobago to an extent where the financial services sector of Trinidad and Tobago is now playing a key role or providing an important pillar as it relates to contributing to the GDP of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, the financial services sector is contributing approximately 15 per cent of the GDP of this country. We have been able through the development of this sector to create 1,000 jobs within the last 24 months within the economy of Trinidad and Tobago, and we have been able to see further diversification in the economy of Trinidad and Tobago in relation to the performance of the manufacturing sector which is contributing approximately 9 per cent of the GDP, based on the support, based on the initiatives that are being rolled out by the Ministry of Trade, Investment and Communications and what we are doing in relation to the ease of doing business in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, only yesterday the Prime Minister, the Minister of Trade, Investment and Communications and also the Minister of Transport—

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, your time is up, would you like to get an extension?

Hon. R. Indarsingh: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the question is that the speaking time of the hon. Member for Couva South and the Minister of State in the Ministry of Finance and the Economy be extended by 10 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. R. Indarsingh: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, only yesterday, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Trade, Industry, Investment and Communications and the Minister of Transport, and the Comptroller of Customs presided over the unveiling of the scanner at the Port of Port of Spain that was gifted to us by the Government of China, something that will contribute to further growth and development of the economy of Trinidad and Tobago in terms of the outflow of containers from the Port of Port of Spain, something that is of a major concern to the respective Chambers of Commerce and the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers' Association, and so on.

9.05 p.m.

And this will further facilitate the flow of goods out of the port because we are close to the Divali period, the Christmas period and so on, and I am sure that this initiative on the part of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago will certainly be welcome by the business community of this country. It is important, Mr. Speaker, for us to also note that we have experienced growth in the agricultural sector in Trinidad and Tobago.

Today, when the Leader of the Opposition and the Member for Diego Martin West made his pronouncement, made his contribution, I thought as the individual seeking to lead Trinidad and Tobago, we would have heard something about the PNM's vision for the agricultural sector in Trinidad and Tobago. Here is a man aspiring to lead this nation, and we must never forget that he was a former Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. And his contribution was virtually one paragraph on the Caroni GREEN, but he did not say anything because they had no vision for agriculture in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] The only thing I could remember of worth from the PNM is that there was a Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources by the name of Jarrette Narine, and his claim to fame was that he distributed flood grants to farmers in this country, the legacy of the PNM. This is something we must never forget. Flood cheques, farmers got cheques to the value of—and he boasted about it, eh, \$27 and \$32, and it took months for the processing of these application for farmers.

Today, under this Government and the Ministry of Food Production, that is a thing of the past. Well, the Leader of the Opposition said nothing because he did nothing for agriculture when he was the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources. But we must remember that the PNM—based on their policies, food inflation in this country skyrocketed between 30 to 35 per cent, and just to read from the *Newsday* I want to just read into the record. It says:

“Poor people are soon not even going to be able to afford to buy flour which has risen...by 88.3 percent in the last 12 months!

Citizens have also been forced to pay more for fresh fruits. The price of pawpaw jumped by 64.1 per cent since August 2007, ripe bananas now cost 46.3 per cent more and oranges were 41.2 per cent more expensive.

Dairy products which have been rising substantially in cost over the past five years increased...by 20 percent year on year to July 2008.”

So food inflation was between 30 to 35 per cent. Core inflation was between 14 to 16 per cent under the PNM. Today, inflation is under 5 per cent and for the

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first time in 21 years, in the history of this country, that there had been back to back growth in terms of annual growth in the agricultural sector [*Desk thumping*] of Trinidad and Tobago and that is something noteworthy in terms of how this Government has tackled the whole issue of the development of the agricultural sector in Trinidad and Tobago. And, the Member for La Brea pleaded for a manpower increase as it relates to the praedial larceny squad. But, what he will not tell you, again, they did not implement the praedial larceny squad. They spoke about it in their budget presentations. Again, I want to remind the Member for La Brea, the Minister also revisited the issue of praedial larceny, that is just like a predecessor had done in 2006 and 2007, and now without even an explanation as to why the PNM Government failed to keep its previous commitments to establish a regime to deal with the praedial larceny. The new Minister of Finance fell into the habit as well, promising an expansionary approach to the problem. But it is important to note that they had a vote, they had an allocation for the praedial larceny squad but they failed to display, again, the political will as it relates to implementation. It was left to the People's Partnership Government to deliver this praedial larceny squad. [*Desk thumping*]

So, again, the difference between the PNM and the People's Partnership Government, statement of intent from the PNM, delivery from the People's Partnership Government as it relates to the praedial larceny squad and actually a clear vision for the agricultural sector with growth, with development and based on the support that this Government has been giving to the Agricultural Development Bank, that was a secret operation under the PNM.

Mr. Speaker, very few people knew about the Agricultural Development Bank and what it had to offer to the national community. Over the last four and a half years this Government has injected over \$107 million in loans to small and medium size farmers. And in this financial year we will allocate a further \$175 million.

So, the growth that I have spoken about, the transformation that I have spoken about that has occurred at the national level is occurring in the 41 constituencies of Trinidad and Tobago. The people of Couva South have benefited tremendously, whether it is in the sphere of education, infrastructural development, health, agricultural development and so on. There is a sense of hope, there is a sense of feeling that this country will continue to rise and soar to higher heights. There will be continued development in all fronts. There is a sense that there are better days ahead based on the leadership of Kamla Persad-Bissessar and the People's Partnership Government that will certainly have the support of

all the citizens based on the outlined and the continued process of development as we move beyond 2015, building on the five budget presentations that we have produced of all the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Glenn Ramadharsingh (*Caroni Central*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute to this debate on the Appropriation Bill, 2014. I would like to follow on the heels of a very lively contribution from the Member for Couva South and begin by congratulating the Minister of Finance and the Economy [*Desk thumping*] for a job well done. We also have to be very grateful for the vision of our Prime Minister who has led us to the fifth budget of the People's Partnership administration. Under her visionary leadership we have seen transformation of Trinidad and Tobago from the length and breadth, from the south to the north, to the east and to the west.

I am very, very, pleased with this budget as is the population of Trinidad and Tobago. When one looks at the snapshots of the newspaper articles, one can see that the people are saying there is something for everyone in the budget of 2014.

Mr. Sharma: Very good observation.

Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: We are seeing where the vulnerable in society has been further protected. The elderly has been given more resources and income to satisfy their daily activities and we have seen the spending in the area of education and provision for health care. The 2014 budget provides a platform to build on all the Governments' successful efforts to reverse the decline and to achieve full economic recovery. The budget has signalled progress of economic diversification, particularly, with the manufacturing sector contributing 9 per cent of the GDP and the financial services now contributing some 15 per cent of the GDP. This is very significant for a country that is an oil and gas based economy.

In many countries of the world it is called the curse of oil and gas, because there is development only of one sector, that is where the inflows and the capital come in, that is from oil and gas, to the detriment of all sectors. And I remember under the PNM Government the figures were always startling, and indeed agriculture, I remember, would always be below 0.5 per cent of the GDP. We are seeing here in a budget, the development of the financial services contributing some 15 per cent. So that tells a story of growth of all sectors of the economy and spells for a very healthy financial growth of the country. We are seeing efforts to look, not only at the minimum wage of the country which has been increased successively by this administration because the People's Partnership is an amalgam of forces that came together to save this country in 2010.

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Indeed we remember very well, that we were seeing the skyline of Port of Spain rising in 2008 and 2009, and when people would have to make that journey from different parts of the country to Port of Spain, they would continue to see very huge buildings that looked very formidable, and when they go back to their communities and they turn on their taps they had no water. For them to get back to their homes they had to go through broken roads and non-existent drains, and they would think, but how is it that the capital city is mushrooming with these buildings and we in the rural communities do not have the facilities that we would like to have. And that is what caused the people's revolution and the rise of our political leader and Prime Minister, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, who brought that amalgam of forces together and the voice of labour was a very significant part of that and that is why this Government can boast of successive increases in the minimum wage to protect the small man in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Further to that, the Minister of Finance and the Economy has indeed signalled that he will continue to look at the programmes of URP and CEPEP and the living conditions of these workers and also to bridge the equity divide in terms of income in the URP Programme. So it is clear that we are on the path to achieving prosperity for all through disciplined coordination of expenditure.

Equitable distribution of resources for infrastructure: the budget speaks to successful fiscal policy, to very prudent management of the economy. The reduction of the subsidy spending has clearly been signalled by the Government. The budget signals empowerment of the people and also an enhanced democracy and better community infrastructure, and in terms of water, which is a basic necessity of life, this Government is running waterlines throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago.

9.20 p.m.

In my own constituency, there are places that for 30 and 40 years have not had a drop of water supplied to their homes, and that is now happening and we are working towards, in 2015, 100 per cent of the population who are WASA customers, receiving water 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

So I am very, very proud of the measures contained in this budget. I also want to commend the Leader of Government Business for his wide-ranging contribution, showing some of the strong points of the budget and how it has impacted on the population. And, indeed, the contribution of the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs, who was very knowledgeable in the area in which he

practises, and demonstrated to the country what was the track record of the PNM: colossal wastage of money in a gas-to-liquid plant; billions of taxpayers' dollars pumped into nothingness, and massive structures are looking at us, virtually, as a sign of wastage, bad policy decisions, bad management decisions and decisions that have cost Petrotrin, the energy sector and, certainly, the country, a lot.

I have the greatest regard for the Minister who has been able to restore growth after three years of decline in the period 2012—2014. The economic growth has taken place in the context of job-creation and stable inflation rates. One would also recall in 2007, 2008, 2009, that inflation was rising, and while persons were receiving small increases, it could not have matched the inflation rates that were out of control. People could not have afforded to buy food, and under this Government we have seen a period of growth with stable inflation rates.

The public sector debt remain at a sustainable level at 43 per cent of the gross domestic product. The balance of payments remains robust with the generation of consistent surpluses under current account. As a result, gross official reserves stand at US \$10 billion. In 2013 they stood at that, and approximately 12 months of import; by July 2014, the gross official reserve has reached US \$10.2 billion. All of this has been done against the challenges that the Government had faced after the failure of Clico—Colonial Life Insurance Company—and the Hindu Credit Union, and the Government has also taken steps to address the losses that have been experienced by the population in this regard, in the Clico matter and, certainly, lately on the Hindu Credit Union.

Therefore, this budget now addresses the minimum wage, from \$12.50 to \$15 an hour. It is a welcome change and will see workers being protected, being able to tend to their families. Our elderly in the society who have contributed to national development and who have given their entire lives to the service of the nation can now expect an increase in their pension which, I am sure, they will need in the face of many of them having health challenges, where they come to offices requiring help to buy pharmaceuticals and drugs for their various conditions.

So, certainly, this is a people's budget. This is a budget of which we can all be proud, and it is a budget that will keep Trinidad and Tobago on a growth path and a sustainable growth path. [*Desk thumping*] We must never forget that not only has this Government been investing in physical infrastructure throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago, but in terms of correcting the ills of the past; the fact that a child, when they pass the SEA exam and they go to the secondary school, they do not have to go peeping into another child's laptop, or

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for the first time try to see what features a laptop has, but they have their own laptop given to them by the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, through the vision of our Prime Minister. And indeed, 75,000 laptops were given out in this regard, and every child has equal access, has a window to the world, where they could go home and teach the parents, other siblings, aunts and uncles, how to use this laptop to access information and to gain an insight into what is happening around the globe.

Our hon. Prime Minister was a former Minister of Education, and I am sure that has given her the inspiration and resolve to ensure that education, as Nelson Mandela put it, becomes a tool to change the world and, certainly, a tool to change the country, which is Trinidad and Tobago.

When I look at the work of the Ministry of Education, I am very, very proud of the work that is taking place there. Certainly, when we look at the coverage between June 2010 to September 09, 2014, we see primary schools being built throughout Trinidad and Tobago: Arima West Government Primary School in Arima; St. Mary's Government Primary School in Barrackpore; the Brasso Roman Catholic Primary School in Brasso; the Penal Rock Road Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha in Penal; Balmain Presbyterian in Couva; Riversdale in Guaracara-Tabaquite Road. Then we see Palo Seco Government Primary School in La Brea; then we see St. Barbara's Spiritual Shouter Baptist Primary School in Maloney, in the constituency of Arouca/Maloney.

Miss Hospedales: That is in St. Augustine. You need to know your boundaries.

Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: All right. Well, it is in Maloney. Not in your constituency, but in Maloney, serving people, I am sure, who come from your constituency as well.

Miss Hospedales: Yes.

Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: Rose Hill Roman Catholic Primary School in Port of Spain; then we have Lower Cumuto Government Primary School in Cumuto/Manzanilla; Egypt Village Government Primary School in Point Fortin. So when we look at the distribution of these primary schools, it is throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago, and it is this equity of access, this equality of opportunity, that creates real growth of human capital in the country, for all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. This is how we get persons with talent. When you expose all to the same opportunities, you get the best out of the mix.

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And certainly we also have—the Ministry of Education believes in the concept of “no small matter”, and “no small matter” means that the young children, the younger they are, the greater the potential for you to get them to develop their minds because it is between the ages of three to five that we now know that so much development takes place. Previously, two or three decades ago, one would wait patiently until the child is five years old and get them into the school and begin their learning. Now we know that colour, logic, thinking, all of these faculties are being developed at the tender age of three.

Therefore, the Early Childhood Education Centres are the new frontier that the Ministry is confronting. Therefore, at this level they will engage the minds of the young ones, those who come from challenged circumstances who may not have facilities at home, whose parents are working and do not have the time. Under the hon. Minister Tim Gopeesingh, 53 of these centres have been completed. [*Desk thumping*] And when we look at the distribution again, Maloney, you are topping the list here: Flamingo Boulevard, Maloney; Caura—[*Interruption*]

Miss Hospedales: That was built in 2010.

Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: This is for the last four years.

Miss Hospedales: That was built in 2010, Flamingo—

Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: Caura Royal Road, Caura; St. Augustine—[*Interruption*]

Miss Hospedales: We opened that in 2010.

Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:—St. John’s Road; Maraval—[*Interruption*]

Miss Hospedales: That is a lie, eh.

Dr. G. Ramadharsingh:—in Morne Coco Road; Oropune Gardens in Oropune; Roystonia, Valencia, Clarke Road, Rochard Road, Bon Air, Malabar, La Horquetta, Carlsen Field, which is in my own constituency and which I am very proud of, and I know that the Minister is also looking to build a library in that part of central Trinidad. And might I just say that that will be a welcome development as well because previously we would think about libraries as a place where you would go and collect a book off the table and begin to read. Now, libraries are places where you have CDs, you have audio books, you have games, you have rooms where you can go and click on icons and learn more, and go on a particular journey discovering more about a particular topic, using the technology, and the archives of Trinidad and Tobago are available to you.

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So no longer you have to have big buildings, but you have a building where the technology enables you—the digital recording that has captured a lot of our history is available to people throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago.

The drama, the arts, these things are captured in the library. So that a child who comes from a squatter settlement in a part of Carlsen Field, who lives on the eastern side of the highway where you do not have all the development as in the western side, they can go to a library near to them and get that education outside of the school doors. That is only available sometimes in first-world countries. This type of exposure is now coming to the people of Trinidad and Tobago through the new way that NALIS is doing business, and the fact that the Minister is having these libraries built throughout Trinidad and Tobago. The former Minister, I know Minister “Gypsy”, had started to spearhead work in that regard.

St. Mary’s in Moruga with the ECCE centres, Phoenix Park, Milton, Rancho Quemado, St. Ann’s, Mount Hope, Maloney, Current Hill, San Fernando, Salazar Trace in Point Fortin—these are not only People’s Partnership constituencies, these are constituencies that belong to Opposition communities and I am very proud of the non-discriminatory manner in which a Ministry of Education is proceeding to do business throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: No child must be left behind.

Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: No child must be left behind. And, indeed, that is what the Prime Minister had done with regard to the Children’s Life Fund, one of the first things that the Partnership Government did because of the Prime Minister’s insistence that no child should die because their father is unemployed, or that their mother works in a roti shop or she works in one of the fast food outlets, and they are eking out an existence and this child has some condition that requires life-saving surgery.

9.35 p.m.

I remember the days very vividly—in fact, in my own constituency, I recall that there was a case where someone in the house needed surgery, and I see where they keep selling these tickets and having this curry que and this barbeque and then they raised \$10,000, and they tried to raise \$20,000, and then they bust in the next one, and they start back again with \$10,000 and they keep going knowing that they will not reach the figure of \$300,000. But how could they tell the child that they are not trying their best to preserve their life and ensure that that child

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has an opportunity to go to school, to become an adult, to experience life as everybody else?

Therefore, the Children's Life Fund has now helped so many of our children, and if it was not there, those children would have died. What existed before was a stoic response: we will give you up to \$60,000 and not a cent more. You are on your own with that child; fend for yourself. That was the response of the then Minister of Health under the People's National Movement. Many children died waiting for that surgery, never having an opportunity to even set foot to begin to travel to go for that surgery. Today, we have the Children's Life Fund where up to \$1 million is paid for the surgery of those children, and close to 100 children have been saved. And while there are issues because it is new legislation and there are sometimes grey cases, I must compliment the Minister of Health who steps in [*Desk thumping*] and ensures that he gets the board to look, to take a second look at some of these issues.

Certainly, the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs gave us an insight into how the energy sector had been handled by the PNM, and it was a very dismal picture indeed. He told us that they were making money from Trinmar and that they were suppressing that income, not developing the work that Trinmar was doing, while giving away the money that Petrotrin was spending with the gas-to-liquid plant in the value of billions of dollars.

When we look at the work that is taking place on the highways of Trinidad and Tobago and in our communities, throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago, people are getting the sense that there is performance—things are happening, things are moving, things are taking place throughout Trinidad and Tobago. And people on the ground are saying that this is one of the best performing governments that they have ever seen in Trinidad and Tobago.

You see it by the signs. You see the large, colourful orange signs throughout Trinidad and Tobago. If you are going up to Toco, you will see about 20 signs. You will see the name of the contractor. Do you know why that is possible? Before, you just had a sign "Works, Caution, Works taking place". Now, you have a billboard telling you which Ministry is doing the work. Before you never knew if it was URP, if it was local government, if it was the Ministry of Works. You are seeing which Ministry, which agency, whether it is NIDCO, whether it is PURE, which contractor, so people could call the contractor or call the Ministry and give their input. You are seeing consultations with the community; you are seeing the completion date. There is total transparency in the development of infrastructure throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago.

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We are seeing the development of a 47-kilometre four-lane from San Fernando to Point Fortin; a 6.2-kilometre Rivulet Road which is being rehabilitated which is an artery to the energy axis of the country. On the East-West Corridor, the Churchill Roosevelt Highway to St Joseph River has been widened; the Beetham Highway access route in and out of Port of Spain is being widened; the Diego Martin Highway, which is not partnership territory, is now fully operational and the all-important 34-metre span walkover canopy with staircase near Cuthbert Road will bring major safety benefits. The Valencia bypass is now under construction so people in the east of the country can feel more comfortable.

The Government has in sight three new highways: the Princes Town/Mayaro highway, the San Fernando/Princes Town highway and the Wallerfield/Manzanilla highway. When you hear about these highways, these are things that will take place and will get done, not like previously, in the PNM, where they talked about the highways that we are building for decades before and nothing had come to fruition.

Perhaps, what is even more of a crowning glory on the human capital development of Trinidad and Tobago, beyond the work taking place in the Ministry of Education, is our tertiary level education sector. We have seen the Government not only preserve GATE, but we have seen them expand it. You will recall that there was a time when people would be lining up at the embassy to get a visa to go to America and writing letters to their family in England to get the opportunity to visit England so that they could look to study abroad, that they could look to get an education in New York or in California. Today, you can have a farmer, you can have a maxi-taxi driver, you can have a clerical worker, their child will be able to go to primary school, they will get the school feeding programme; they will get the textbooks loaned to them. Then, if they do well, they pass the SEA, they can win some sponsorship, then they can go to secondary school, they will get the laptop, then they will get assistance there as well throughout. And when they are ready to go to the university, you have the GATE Programme that will give them a chance to get a free education. Something that many of us in this Chamber never had the opportunity to get is now available for our young people to become doctors and lawyers and engineers. Here again, is equality of opportunity, equality of access; that is the backbone of the policy position of this Government. We now have 67,000 persons who are participants. So this programme has not only been preserved but expanded.

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I want to say up until last year, I was a participant in this programme when I benefited from getting my law degree from the University of London. [*Desk thumping*] I benefited from the GATE Programme as well and free education. All you have to pay is the tuition fees to the school here—sorry, in London, but the tuition fees for the institution is paid by the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. So, we see it every day. In fact—[*Crosstalk*] postgraduate, 50 per cent, Masters and PhD, persons—I mean, you will see the movement of persons who have ancestry and citizenship in Trinidad and Tobago from the First World countries coming back to Trinidad and Tobago to study and get an education at UTT and at the University of the West Indies.

There is so much expansion in that regard. The Minister in that Ministry is not creating programmes in isolation so that you can get a degree for the sake of getting a degree. What value will that add to society? I distinctly recall that when I had travelled to the United Kingdom, it would be very, very interesting to see how these universities function. What these universities in England and in other parts of Europe do is that they partner with private sector businesses that are in the business of making a profit. And they create courses at the tertiary level that will bring about better design, optimization of, the engine of a vehicle, for example, if they are dealing with a motor vehicle company, and they would assist that company in marketing and create courses in marketing, and do real things that will benefit the society, and we are seeing that movement in tertiary education, working with the Metal Industries Company, the drilling academy. This is an oil-and gas-based economy and we have not had a drilling academy under an administration that prided itself to be czars in the area of oil and gas. So we are finally seeing a business education and training in, for example, Carapichaima for a digital academy in film, television, animation; an aviation campus in Camden Field in Couva. So one must be very proud of the training opportunities that are available at the level of tertiary education in Trinidad and Tobago.

I was also indeed happy to see not only the quantitative measures that are being introduced in the tertiary level education system, but the qualitative ones. Very often I see in the newspapers, the guests, the lecturers, that they are bringing down to edify the population on concepts, on ideas, on emerging technologies, on medical innovations and also on pioneers in the field of art, culture and also human courage, and I refer to Malala who was able to visit the shores on the invitation of the UTT. Such events are qualitative inputs into the development of our country.

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Having been in this Parliament and listening to contributions in this Parliament for quite some time, I am particularly proud when we are invited in south Trinidad to the newly constructed teaching hospital in San Fernando. [*Desk thumping*] As indicated by the Minister of Housing and Urban Development, this is the first hospital that has been delivered to the people of Trinidad and Tobago since colonial times. And it has been built in a very innovative way and the money that was used to transform this administrative complex has saved us so much if we had to build an entire hospital from the very beginning, and this hospital is now in operation.

The other facility that we must be proud of is the children's hospital and multi-training facility in Couva that will take care of the medical needs of our children in an 80-bed facility, but that will have 300 medical and nursing students trained from the University of the West Indies in the School of Medicine, Nursing and Pharmacology. Now, that sounds very good on paper but the beauty of that for me is that this is being built in my constituency in Gran Couva. And therefore, this will impact on the local economy of Caroni Central and cause the development of our people, in terms of training to become nurses aides, to getting jobs, business opportunities, in that area because a facility like this will be a very welcome one for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, especially where you have an industry in terms of methanol, in terms of National Gas Company, Petrotrin, nearby and you do not have a burns centre. And through this hospital, the Ministry of Health will ensure that we have a burns unit so that we can have capacity for 150 beds for a facility in the event that there is unfortunate circumstance that there is some incident in that Point Lisas area.

9.50 p.m.

We continue to hear about the National Oncology Centre. For years every single budget, for about nine years, "We will build the National Oncology Centre". It was almost like a rhyme appended to the items in health. Under this Partnership Government, the oncology centre is rising before our eyes at the Mount Hope Medical Complex. [*Desk thumping*]

There is so much help in the health sector for those who are suffering from diabetes. More than 140,000 persons in Trinidad and Tobago are suffering from this disease and thousands more do not know that they are, in fact, suffering from this disease.

There are two measures that I will talk about. Certainly, I find one particular measure is one that the Prime Minister must be applauded, in great regard, for. I

have it in my hand here, the protective services officers killed in the line of duty; that will allow a family who has an officer serving, to protect, not only their home, but the community—a man who has chosen a profession where he actually puts his own life on the line. We all know that there are different types of officers. In the police service we have very distinguished persons serving as police officers in large regard and when they go out there, they do not know what they meet.

Today the Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs said that what happens in energy is not affected by what happened last month. He put it in this way, that when someone gets a heart attack, it is not because of what they ate last night or yesterday, it is because of a sum total of what they have been doing for the last two decades or so. So, too, it is with the crime. The Partnership Government and the Minister of National Security are engaging the forces. They have the troops out there. He is working the system—to deal with crime. We are seeing increased visibility of police cars throughout Trinidad. In fact, those who use the Solomon Hochoy Highway to head down to San Fernando, you never saw a vehicle until the last year or so; you are seeing blue and white and hearing sirens. You are seeing the vehicles there.

There are many times that women would be coming from Moruga and coming from Point Fortin, coming up to work and staying late at work to finish jobs and do projects. They may get a flat and they would have to be almost playing Russian roulette with their lives when they have to put out their hands to ask for help because they do not know who will stop. Now, we have surveillance bays on the highways; we have police vehicles on the highways, where people can feel a sense of comfort.

More than that, the crime situation is a very serious one in Trinidad and Tobago. We sometimes see, when there are raids, the types of machine guns, the type of armoury that the criminals have—very sophisticated weapons; the systems they are dealing with. Therefore, when a police officer confronts a very serious situation, and he engages himself in that line of duty, it is very possible—like the bandits—he may die. But, here is a man, doing good for society; here is a man leaving his family, sipping that hot cup of coffee and not knowing if he will return in the afternoon to have dinner. Therefore, with this fund we are giving those families, the police officers, a sense of comfort that we are behind you, we will stand with you in case there is an unlikely event, but if there is an unfortunate event, we are there with you to support your family.

There are many cases where we have seen police officers die and their families—all the people who promised assistance and all those who made all the

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wonderful remarks at the funeral, days and weeks after, they are not there to assist the family. Therefore, this is a particularly heart-warming measure for those officers. I see that the comments have been that they feel very pleased that they were thought about, and action has been taken, in this budget, to protect them.

Mr. Speaker, the other grant that I am particularly happy about is the Baby Care Grant.

Dr. Gopeesingh: You are happy about all.

Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: I am happy about all, but, in particular, I point to this one as one that you sometimes see persons who are rearing their children and they sometimes have many kids in school and they are holding on to jobs that do not pay very high incomes and unexpectedly or expectedly, they have another child and there is severe difficulty in providing for that child.

We have seen cases where once a mother was caught in a supermarket stealing a tin of Klim and the mother was arrested. The mother cried and said that she felt she needed to do that because she had no hope, the baby was crying and she came for this tin of milk because she did not want the baby to cry and to be in need. Therefore, in those really, really heart-wrenching circumstances there is some hope for them in terms of this. Of course, the policy guidelines are being formulated and the structures are being put in place, but, certainly, this will be a measure to assist those who are in very desperate and wanting circumstances.

With regard to those people-centred measures, I also welcome the fact that not only the Government pensioners will receive additional income and that persons over 60 will receive a benefit in terms of their tax allowances, but that the 35,000 retired public officers who receive—

Mr. Speaker: Your original time is up. Would you like an extension?

Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the question is that the speaking time of the hon. Member for Caroni Central be extended by 10 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank my colleagues in the House.

The public officers who received \$1,950 a month in 2010 will also receive this \$3,500. Now, when the pension was increased to \$3,000 we also ensured that they got the \$3,000 and I am happy that we are consistently, not only giving more

money to the pensioners but ensuring that no one gets less than the \$3,000 or the \$3,500. That is very significant because under the previous administration when they made changes to the pension, there were groups and bands that got less money. They pleaded with them for the equity in terms of receiving the same amount and it fell on deaf ears. This Government has shown itself to always be a responsive government to the cries of the people and in that regard I am very happy.

Mr. Speaker, the Disability Grant was increased from \$1,300 to \$1,500 in 2010. It had been increased to \$1,500 last year and it is now \$1,800. When one looks at the plight of the differently-abled and one sees the steps many of them are making to lead a normal life, one would realize that that extra income will go a very long way. You see, a differently-abled person does not only have a challenge in terms of physical disability or some problem with movement or with using a particular part of their body, but usually that disability that they have requires therapy, requires medication, requires visits to doctors/consultants and some of these things are very expensive. Therefore, any help to the differently abled is highly appreciated and will affect some 24,100 persons.

I am also happy that the centre for the differently abled will, in fact, be opened before the end of this year. The Public Assistance Grant also is increased by \$300. Again, looking after the very vulnerable in society. Truly, measures that affect the poor, the vulnerable, the weak, the challenged; and, measures that will certainly go a long way in bringing equity, not only in infrastructure; equity not only in education; equity not only in health, but equity of the individual, the rights of the individual to lead a normal life regardless of how they were born; whether they were born with deficiencies or challenges. Therefore, we have to be proud of any government and this Government that has taken that action.

So, I know that my constituents of Caroni Central will be very happy when these measures are implemented. So, we really want to applaud the technical persons in the Ministry of Finance and the Economy who helped make these things a reality and who have worked long hard hours so to do.

In my constituency I really want to thank the Minister of Works and Infrastructure who leads from in front, who takes the charge to the projects; who takes control and who intervenes and resolves disputes and handles situations. I have had the distinct opportunity to call him on many occasions and inform him about poor quality work; shadowy practices that were observed by villagers. Sometimes when they are rushing work or trying to complete projects very quickly and villagers notice that the consistency in the work is not what it should

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be and they report it to us. Previously, we would have to call a Minister and the Minister will say, “All right, well I will tell them next week when I go to office”. This Minister is on the ball, on the go. He gets the job done immediately.

So, I want to congratulate him on the work that he is doing. I also want to thank the Minister of Local Government, Sen. Marlene Coudray, who tries her best to intervene and assist communities in any way that she can and only lately, has been trying to assist us to get some roads paved that have never been paved for some 30, 40 years. I thank her graciously for that.

We have been able to get several projects completed. As you enter Freeport you will see a dramatic transformation. You will see Freeport turning from a town into a metropolis because of the work of this Government. Because, previously, if you had to enter into Freeport in the afternoon time from half past four, you would be backed up onto the highway, the highway would start to get traffic. We now travel freely into Freeport on both sides from Caroni Central to Couva South—[*Desk thumping*]*—through the Mission Road. Innovative work because we removed that pavement that was just in the road and put it under the pillars of the highway and created extra space for the vehicles to move. Those ideas came, not from the technocrats, they came from the people; listening to the people who walk; they walk and say, “Why are we walking on the road, can’t you just put this pavement at the side?” Listening to the people. The Prime Minister has said that we listen and lead, and so we take advice from the people who utilize the facilities.*

I will just call a few. Rodney Road, road, bridge, paving, Tewarie Circular North—I want to thank the Minister of Land and Marine Resources. This Minister is a new Minister and in a short space of time he has come out, gone to the stumps and batting like Sunil Gavaskar and settling land left, right and centre; coming up with policies and programmes that are giving people hope for Trinidad and Tobago. Land is a very complex matter. It is very integrated and is affected by laws that are archaic; by policies that are no longer there; by agencies that are non-existent and it takes a very determined policymaker to piece it all together and to create some sense out of all this complexity to help poor people to get some title.

I can tell you that in an area called Arena in Freeport, he has been able to do that for me and settle 52 farmers who now have a piece of paper, at least, to say they are on the journey to getting title for this land. That means the world to these

people because this is what they have done all their lives. For some 50, 60 years, they have farmed this land, they have their children now in it and they do not know if they could pass this on or if tomorrow morning they will see some building being built and they have to move. So, this is a protection of a generational activity and some form of comfort to them that they have some entitlement that, as a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, this Government gives them some protection for their livelihood.

Mr. Speaker: One more minute.

Dr. G. Ramadharsingh: Mr. Speaker, there is so much work that has taken place but all you need to do is to drive through Caroni Central and you will see the metamorphosis in terms of physical infrastructure that leads to a comfort in the mind of the citizenry there that this Government has performed. This Government has delivered. This budget is a success story. This is the first budget that people are smiling about; that they are talking about; that they are glowing about and they are very hopeful that when all the measures are put in place, Trinidad and Tobago will be on the road to becoming a First World country under our Prime Minister, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar. [*Desk thumping*]

I thank you.

10.05 p.m.

The Minister of Tobago Development (Hon. Dr. Delmon Baker): Good evening, Mr. Speaker, it is—[*Interruption*]

Miss Mc Donald: And Madam Chief Whip.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker:—and Madam Chief Whip. It is that hour in the evening when one is expected to be in the deepest phase of sleep, its rapid eye movement, REM sleep, at around 10 o'clock for at least four hours, so that by the next day you are refreshed. But as MPs having recently received an increase in our salaries and backpays I think we deserve, on this occasion, to give to the population of Trinidad and Tobago a little bit more, and I am sure, Mr. Speaker, as we converse—[*Interruption*]

Miss Mc Donald: I have nothing to get.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker:—that Madam Chief Whip would agree with me to extend my time a little. If she behaves, we will finish this part of the evening very quickly, and I am hoping that I can get agreement through you.

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Mr. Speaker, when one looks at the provisions of the Appropriation Bill for fiscal 2015, one can only term this budget as the people's budget. Quite frankly, the focus on a few of the groups in our society that have suffered the most over a long time: our senior citizens, expectant mothers in financially difficult circumstances, the working poor, and the physically challenged, I think, with this new Appropriation Bill, that these groups would be particularly pleased with the Minister of Finance and the Economy, the Hon. Larry Howai.

Mr. Speaker, today we can boast that unemployment in Trinidad and Tobago is down to 3.7 per cent. We can boast that food and core inflation is down to single digits in Trinidad and Tobago, after four years of the People's Partnership administration, that we can forecast economic growth to the tune of 2.6 to about 3 per cent for Trinidad and Tobago over fiscal 2015. Those are achievements for which this Government can boast, because of a Government that continues in the mantra of serving the people, serving the people, for all five years—[*Interruption*]

Miss Mc Donald: “Yuh know how long I ain hear dat: serve de people.”

Hon. Dr. D. Baker:—of our administration.

Miss Mc Donald: “Wey uh resurrect dat from?”

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: You promised to behave. In that vein, Mr. Speaker, let me take a few minutes to congratulate the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar. [*Desk thumping*] You know, I could twist a phrase. Mr. Speaker, in the Prime Minister, I see a person of compassion, humility, strength of character, a resolve to do right, regardless of the consequences, a person in whom no nobler vocation can come but that in the service of a people. [*Desk thumping*] And that is in stark contrast to the Leader of the Opposition whose own Prime Minister used some interesting words to describe him. But I promised to go quickly, and to do that is to keep within the agreement between myself and the Chief Whip. We will try. I cannot promise anything, but we will try this evening.

I must answer some interesting statements that were made in the public space. This is post the campaign of 2013, for which the PNM would have won all 12 seats in the Tobago House of Assembly. And this is through a threat coming from the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West, that on becoming—“he ain even get de job yet”—the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, one of the first acts he intends to do is to close down the Ministry for Tobago Development. Not even attempting to understand the construct, that is the Ministry with responsibility for Tobago's development, not even consulting with the people of Tobago as to

whether or not this new and revived entity meets some niche requirement that is not being adequately fulfilled by the current administration in Tobago, and not even attempting to understand the very THA Act, which we attempted to amend in 2013, a pronouncement is made in the public space without reason, without consideration, without consultation, and without the very inspiration that is required of a leader of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, the Tobago House of Assembly Act, section 26(1) says that:

“The Assembly shall not have responsibility for matters within the Sixth Schedule.”

Subsection (3) continues:

“The Government or any relevant body, as the case may be, shall promote the delivery in Tobago of services to the public in relation to the matters set out in the Seventh Schedule.”

So there are two Schedules within the Tobago House of Assembly Act, for which the Assembly itself would not have any responsibility. That, Mr. Speaker, is the settled law.

So whether or not you change on becoming Prime Minister, the construct of the Ministry for Tobago Development, the very departments within that Ministry, cannot be ablated, cannot be removed, unless you amend, or change or alter the Tobago House of Assembly Act. So, there is no place in reason, in rational thinking, for treating with a matter so rashly that you do not understand the very construct and law for which you wish to amend.

And what are the matters in the Sixth Schedule?

“The President; National Security; Foreign Affairs; Civil Aviation;”

and the matter for which the Ministry has responsibility administratively:

“Meteorology;

Legal Affairs including the registration of legal documents;”

The Seventh Schedule: the “Treasury, Comptroller of Accounts, the Registrar General and the Bureau of Standards.” It would be ludicrous to ablate these functions. It would be ludicrous to even conceptually discuss the idea of removing one of the most important Ministries in the construct of this the People’s Partnership Government. And I am sure my colleagues would be displeased if

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they were to lose the company of a Minister from the beautiful island of Tobago.
[*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, that brings me to the specific question as to what are the responsibilities of the Ministry. By the President's Schedule, the Ministry, therefore, is responsible for the central administrative services, which includes the matters relating to the sub-Treasury in Tobago and the Comptroller of Accounts. Additionally, we manage the Prices, Weights and Measures Inspectorate and are responsible for the administrative management of the Office of the Registrar General in Tobago and the Met Services Department on the island of Tobago. This is what we consider the astute management related to ensuring that the people of Tobago do not suffer because of the geographic separation, that is the construct that we see as the island of Trinidad and the island of Tobago forming the country, the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry for Tobago Development is also responsible for the appointment of the members of the board to the Tobago Regional Health Authority, a matter for which the very Chief Secretary fought with his then Prime Minister, the hon. Patrick Manning, over for several years. You would be pleased, Madam Chief Whip, that when that question came to me as Minister, we settled that matter without any friction between the THA and the central government, because we are operating in the mode of a collaborative approach between the two administrations, to facilitate and accelerate the development of the island of Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry proposes, through its medium term policy framework for fiscal 2014/2015, to spend some time on a few areas regarding its coordination of matters in relation to Tobago, and they are to facilitate the development of Tobago's human capital, in order to maximize resource utilization and improve the quality of life on the island. Mr. Speaker, we are there also to strengthen the participation of all groups within the community in this the general ethos of Tobago's development, to support initiatives that stimulate Tobago's economic environment and increase the overall GDP contribution of the island of Tobago to the general GDP of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, I will deal with a few specific issues further in my contribution, related to Tobago's economic development.

10.20 p.m.

With that—because this is a budget debate—it is very easy for me to move to some of the major achievements of this, the Ministry of Tobago Development. I

am trying my best to keep within the agreement, but there are some things that would take a little time.

Mr. Speaker, perhaps for the first time without any challenges, I had the distinct pleasure of posting a photograph on my electronic page, my Facebook page, with both myself and the Chief Secretary holding a shovel, symbolically representing both administrations in the development of a major infrastructure project on the island of Tobago. On February 20, both of us turned the sod to start the construction of the \$79 million meteorological services building in Tobago, one of the most modern facilities in all of Trinidad and Tobago and far certain one of the most modern facilities on the island of Tobago itself. The Tobago station is as essential to Trinidad, Mr. Speaker, as it is to Tobago because in the event of any adverse occurrence affecting service delivery in Trinidad, the Tobago station can provide redundancy, not just for the islands of Trinidad and Tobago, but all of the Caribbean islands in the pathway for which the Met station provides service in the Caribbean.

Additionally, with the finalization of the construction which is expected to take 15 months, we create the additional space required for the expansion of the ANR Robinson International Airport in Tobago, a matter which has been the subject of much discussion by hoteliers on the island. Tobago's development is as important to the development of Trinidad, to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, I was taken aback when this relatively good relationship soured a bit about two weeks ago in the public space, when the then Secretary of Agriculture, again, in the vein of the past, went into the media space and complained that the Ministry was overstepping its bounds in treating with issues relating to fisheries, and fishermen on the island. Something that again is repeated in the public space in Trinidad, to suggest that there is some war going on between Trinidad or the central government in Trinidad, and the people of Tobago through their construct of a Tobago House of Assembly. Nothing can be further from the truth, Mr. Speaker.

In my quiet persistence, we have found every opportunity to collaborate with the Tobago House of Assembly on all matters which are deemed in the interest of the people of Tobago. Because while the Tobago House of Assembly Act gives the Assembly the responsibility for policymaking matters or policymaking, on those matters in relation to the Fifth Schedule, it does not give the THA the legislative responsibility for those very matters, because that responsibility lies with this honourable House, the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

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And, therefore, to settle those issues when matters which would affect Tobago come up for discussion in the context of a wider Trinidad and Tobago, there needs to be the requisite mechanism within the very Cabinet construct, to be able to convey the position of Tobago in the place where the decision on legislative policy needs to be made. So that any attempt to remove the position of the Cabinet—the Cabinet-ranked position of the Ministry of Tobago Development, will be shorting the people of Trinidad and Tobago, an opportunity to hear a Tobago perspective on matters that may affect the very island, Mr. Speaker.

And when the issue of oil and gas exploration came up in some of the deep-water blocks off the coast of the island, fishermen in Tobago came to two offices. They first went to the Chief Secretary's office and they marched, about 300 of them to his door, to the gate I was told, that they were not even let in the compound. These are Tobago fishermen, protesting in Tobago, something that was unheard of before this year, 2014. That same band came to the Ministry of Tobago Development because there was a matter in which the THA had given permission for the oil company whose name I shall not call, to explore waters which these very fishermen considered their fishing grounds. In addition to that, they raised concerns as to the effect that the seismic surveys would have on pelagic fish, fish that would swim in the waters where they fish, get to their spawning grounds in Tobago and become the food for many other fish, which make their way to the island's diet and the island's plate.

And therefore, we had to find a mechanism by which we brought the discussion, the fishermen's issues to the place where energy policy was being discussed. In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, the Tobago House of Assembly only had administrative control of about six nautical miles off the coast of the island by law. And, therefore, fishermen operating beyond six nautical miles were actually operating in the space under the control of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. There had to be some merger between the two administrative centres, to treat with this very important matter not just for 300 fishermen, but for the island's 50,000 to 60,000 inhabitants.

I was pleased as the Minister with that responsibility to work through that interface, and to develop along with the All Tobago Fisherfolk Association, the small watercraft monitoring system. This system in brief, Member for Port of Spain South, which in time, allows for the ring-fencing or geo-fencing for fishing vessels off the coast of Tobago in their vessels, because in their vessels we gave them the possibility of implanting a chip that will tell the satellite wherever that vessel is off the coast of Tobago. And we proffered to the fishermen a satellite

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telephone or we will proffer to them, that will allow the Met services to pass on weather data to the fishermen, and they will transmit sea conditions back to a central location in Tobago.

That small watercraft monitoring system also allows the advanced and quick development of a new marine product in Tobago. Because now that you know where the vessels are, you can then provide fishermen in Tobago with insurance for their vessels, in the event of theft of their engines or in the event that the vessel gets into difficult circumstances off the island's coast, and that allows for quick locating of fishermen in trouble. That project is costing us close to \$3 million in fiscal 2014, and the Government has seen it fit to add an additional \$2 million to the PSIP for the Ministry with responsibility for Tobago development to treat with that issue in 2015. Mr. Speaker, fishermen in Tobago are happy that we have the Ministry with responsibility for Tobago development. [*Desk thumping*]

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, and you know I have to pause a bit. In 2010, there came the possibility for great hope for the people of Tobago. It was the first time in perhaps the island's history, that so many Tobagonians occupy a seat in this honourable House or in both honourable Houses. For a while there were two elected Members of Parliament, my lovely sister from Tobago East, the hon. Vernella Alleyne-Toppin [*Desk thumping*] and myself from Tobago West. We also have the Leader of the Opposition, now, granted he is now labelled the Member of Parliament for Diego Martin West, he still has some navel string somewhere on the island of Tobago, perhaps in Mason Hall, along with some hospital material I am told. [*Laughter*]

Miss Mc Donald: Take that back!

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: I will take that back. I will take that back. [*Laughter*] I will behave at this hour, Mr. Speaker. And in the Senate, we have Sen. Embau Moheni, who is the junior minister in the Ministry of National Security. We also have the Independent Senator, Dr. Victor Wheeler, in addition to—I think we have—[*Interruption*] Sen. Lambert, Sen. Cudjoe, Opposition Sen. Shamfa Cudjoe, and at one point we had Madam Christlyn Moore, who was the Minister of Justice subsequently, and we had Sen. Terance Baynes. So that the stars had aligned themselves in 2010 with so many Tobagonian voices in both Houses of Parliament. It was as if it was Tobago's time for Tobago's voice to be heard. What a remarkable opportunity, what potential, and I will get to some of that. Some of that I felt we missed a bit when we came to the election of 2013.

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Mr. Speaker, what troubles me the most, is that as the Minister with responsibility for Tobago development, I kept getting requests for people to find jobs, young people. Whilst unemployment this year in Trinidad and Tobago is down to 3.7 per cent, unemployment in Tobago is 5.1 per cent. In fact, the statistical figures as reported by the Secretary of Finance in the recent budget debate in the Tobago House of Assembly, indicate that unemployment in Tobago's youth may be as high as 15 per cent, Mr. Speaker.

So I made an attempt to see how bad this problem was. I put on my electronic pages, anybody who was interested come. We had set the date in the Ministry. I had brought all the technical folks downstairs in an open space, and we allowed as many people to come into a job fair at the Ministry. We saw on that single day over 200 young Tobagonians looking for employment, but that was the challenge.

Mr. Speaker, when we looked at the certificates, not many of them, in fact, 90 per cent of them at the CXC level, did not have five CXC passes to be able to take up the BOA position, which was the Business Operations Assistant I, the level of a Clerk I in a Ministry in Tobago. This is after giving the Tobago House of Assembly billions of dollars, 4.03 per cent, almost every year, for the last four years.

10.35 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I wish the Minister of Education, Dr. Gopeesingh was here to hear me out on this. This has been the report produced by the Ministry over the last three years, as to the performance of Tobago students at SEA, CXC, CAPE and GCE A levels, and the report says:

The number of students in Tobago who scored over 90 marks from 2007 to 2012 was as follows:

11 students in 2007;

3 students in 2008; and

11 students in 2009.

Further, from 2010 to 2012, by the same national comparison, the percentage of students who scored above 60 per cent in the Tobago district, again performed the worst; and, in 2008 and 2009, Tobago was the second worst performing district out of eight districts in the country of Trinidad and Tobago.

I call the attention of the hon. Members of this House to our performance at CSEC. This is in 2011. A comparison of all students who passed five subjects—inclusive of maths, English—showed the Tobago district as having the second worst percentage, at 27.9 per cent, and this is after, of course, the north-eastern district in Trinidad.

Finally, further attention is called to what is happening at the level of the CAPE proficiency examinations, Units 1 and 2. The Tobago district performed poorly in CAPE, Unit 1, in 2012, with the lowest pass rate nationally from Grades 1—3, of 50.4 per cent. Tobago had the third lowest pass rate in the nation, from Grades 1—5 in 91 per cent percentile.

So, we have not been keeping pace with the developments in education in Trinidad and Tobago and this puts Tobago in a serious crisis. If we do not allow our charges to be able to keep pace with their counterparts in Trinidad, then all you would have is an island with a very large URP and CEPEP labour force, dwindling intellectual and human capital potential and falling even further behind Trinidad in the island's human capital index and the country's general developmental thrust.

That has been happening, Mr. Speaker, and my sister from Tobago East reminds me that that slippage started when the PNM administration came at the helm of the Tobago House of Assembly, since 2001, when the honourable Orville London, an educator, a principal, became himself the Secretary for Education in Tobago. Since then, the Tobago youth population has never recovered and Trinidad must learn the lesson of bad PNM administration in charge of youth and education in the country of Trinidad and Tobago. Never again must we allow a PNM administration to manage youth affairs in this country. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, as Minister with responsibility for Tobago Development, I could not allow this slip to persist. It would be against my very nerve. It would be against the mandate for which I was elected and it would mean that we would have to import labour to treat with the developing hydrocarbon sector and ICT sector on the island of Tobago. And, therefore, we devised the project HOPE. I like the budget, you know. It gives the people of Trinidad and Tobago hope and HOPE in Tobago stands for Help Our People Elevate.

The HOPE Programme seeks, through the Ministry's departments, to set up a series of apprenticeships in general services: customer services, administrative services, meteorological services; and these apprentices will be sent to the

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established learning institutions: COSTAATT and MIC, the Tobago Technology Centre for CVQ training on the island of Tobago.

At the Ministry, we have engaged in a current cadre of trainees, 75 young people, who are currently learning skills of masonry, carpentry and joinery, as they fit themselves for the Ministry's General Services Department. In fact, next week Friday, we take a technical team to Barbados to meet with the Caribbean Institute of Meteorology to treat with tinkering with our meteorological programme to make sure our trainees can matriculate into the programme in Barbados far more easily.

The Ministry of Tobago Development will not sit back, like the THA, as there is a crisis in youth and in education on the island. If I recall correctly, Mr. Speaker, you would have visited one of these very centres, these buildings we are considering for the HOPE Centre, in Bethel, Tobago, when you came to look at an office for the MP at that time in 2010.

We propose, as we spent close to \$10 million on the project last year, the Government, through this budget, has increased the allocation from \$8 million in fiscal 2014 to \$10 million directly through the programme elements within the Ministry, and an additional \$26 million for the Human Capital Development Facilitation Company in Tobago.

We propose to build four HOPE Centres throughout the island of Tobago, one of which is already outfitted and occupied in the village of Hampden in Tobago. More HOPE Centres in fiscal 2015 will come to the people of Tobago. And I am teasing. We are proposing to build the Met service station at a cost of \$79 million, in 15 months, on the island of Tobago, a feat that has been unheard of in the last 12 to 13 years.

You know why? This is the history of project construction in Tobago, and I start with one of the ones in the middle, the cultural complex. Construction started in May 2004; still not yet completed. The cultural complex, started in 2004, with an estimated budget of \$196 million; still not yet completed and the project is now costing the people of Tobago \$552 million—yes, the people of Trinidad and Tobago—a cost overrun of \$300 million to date and more than eight years under construction.

The library: the library met two generations, started again in 2004 at an estimated cost of \$19 million is now projected to cost over \$100 million, in 2004, from \$19 million; and that building is still not yet complete and available to the people of Tobago.

In fact, we had a joke, Member for Tobago East, the library at one point was called the Leaning Tower of Pisa in Scarborough. The cultural complex itself was not even approved by the fire service because the roof was too heavy. The initial design for the roof was too heavy for the very building that it was supposed to give shelter to.

Mr. Speaker, to add insult to injury, the Chief Secretary's very residence, started in November 2013 with a projected or estimated cost of \$1.2 million, comes in at \$5 million and just finished. He had to run in quickly before we raise more questions as to the fancy house he was having in the villas. Where? In Plantation Villas.

Mr. Speaker, and if you add the hospital to that, you will see cost overruns in the projects in Tobago of greater than \$700 million and it is mega projects alone. If they had spent that money on improving the education system and in sending teachers for higher level certification, that money would have translated into our charges getting higher grades at SEA, CXC and GCE A levels.

So when the Leader of the Opposition makes an argument as to why the Assembly does not get more than \$50 million for one or two of its projects, that is not an argument you can make in this place. What you need to see is to look at how long those projects have been on the books of the Assembly and how much money has been wasted. [*Interruption*]

I will get to that. I will get to the fearmongering. It is the same issue that was attempted today with the Chicken Little phenomenon to frighten the people of Trinidad and Tobago into this thing that the sky is falling. Maybe something did hit him on his head. But with unemployment down to 3 per cent; growth projected to be between 2.6 per cent to 3 per cent, Mr. Speaker, the sky is not falling in Trinidad and Tobago. If anything, it is the people of Trinidad and Tobago who are rising. [*Desk thumping*]

Let me tell you, in addition to the HOPE Project, on Friday coming, we will launch our Women Helping Women Programme at the Ministry of Tobago Development. Already we have 200 women signed up for entrepreneurial and business development training on the island. We will give them contact with literacy, numeracy, ICTs, business management training, so that at the end of two years, those women can get involved in cooperatives and manage their own businesses and not be dependent on any state agency for an income. That is what we are doing in the Ministry of Tobago Development, focusing on the empowerment of the people, women and youth on the island of Tobago.

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Mr. Speaker, at the end of the programme, we are projecting to train over 400 Tobagonians in 2016. We will work with the Assembly and with other state agencies to ensure that our people do not lag behind when it comes to human capital development. And the north-east growth pole, Mr. Speaker, a project for which the THA had failed the hon. Member for Tunapuna when the idea of growth poles came to the fore in 2011 and 2012. In fact, I sat in a meeting with the then Secretary for Finance, Anselm London and the Chief Secretary, where he boasted about his qualifications and how bright he was.

Hon. Senator: Cousin London.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: Yes, the cousin of the Chief Secretary. He was so bright, Mr. Speaker, that almost every project he put his hands to, failed. [*Laughter*]

10.50 p.m.

The Esplanade Company, failing to meet its expectations; the Medical Transcription Centre, failing to treat with the issues for which the centre was established; the Venture Capital Programme in Tobago failed completely; the Cassava Development Project on the island failed.

Hon. Member: Even cassava?

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: Imagine you cannot even grow cassava in Tobago. The *Capital of Paradise*, a fishing vessel, one of the larger fishing vessels that was supposed to be managed by the fishermen in Castara—catch fish off the deep waters in Tobago and return that large fish catch to the island’s processing centres, which would have then been sent and exported to Trinidad and throughout the Caribbean—that boat, Mr. Speaker, never made its way to the hands of the people of Castara.

Hon. Member: That is a *Su*.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: Well, at least, the *Su*, you could see outside there. The boat does not catch fish, I am told, it catches seaweed. [*Laughter*] “You go get that when we sit and we chat.”

Mr. Speaker, almost every project of that former Secretary for Finance failed, and I am told that the current secretary is his protégé. So Tobago will expect another four years of failure under the current PNM administration in Tobago—cost overruns; failure in economic development.

If you understand what is going on in Tobago you could never turn or close your eyes but, “dey say doh close yuh eyes”—and pick up a PNM cat in a bag. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, so why did they win?

Hon. Member: We want to know that.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: I was home during the campaign in 2013, and I sat listening to some of the megaphones going through the village. Two messages passed: “If you vote for the TOP in Tobago there is some ship waiting outside”, and they called the ship, Calcutta ship, giving the people of Tobago a subliminal message that a race, perhaps, that is different from them will come to Tobago and buy up and take away all Tobagonians’ land. That was the fear, as if Tobagonians, in the first place, had control over their lands. The Chief Secretary was found in an article—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Your time has expired. Would you like an extension?

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the question is that the speaking time of the hon. Member for Tobago West and the Minister for Tobago Development be extended by 10 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

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

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, 70 per cent of Tobagonians do not have deed or title to their lands in the first place and, therefore, they are not empowered to be engaged in economic development activity related to getting access to the equity in the land and the houses that they own. Therefore, a Tobagonian who does not have a deed and a title cannot access a bank loan to treat with the educational needs of his child; a bank loan to treat with economic development of the very land on which he lives, a farm—farm equipment, a vehicle to ply his trade, simply because he does not have access to the deed and title which then allows him to go to the bank with considerable assets, because land in Tobago is very expensive.

In fact, the biggest owner of land in Tobago is the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Do you know that? But the law makes the Tobago House of Assembly the chief custodian of all state lands on the island and, therefore, the hon. Chief Secretary is the repository of over 40 per cent of the available lands in Tobago.

Further to that, with the island having the largest single cadre of daily-paid workers, it means that the majority of Tobagonians earn less than \$6,000 a month.

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Which young Tobagonian can go to the bank and afford a lot of land in Tobago west which now costs over \$600,000? I want to tell the Chief Secretary to begin to divide the land he has and give it to the Tobagonian youth so that they themselves can build the houses as proud Tobagonians used to do in times past. [*Desk thumping*] That is how my father built his house on sou sou lands. That is what we are seeing happening in Trinidad with so many houses and so many lands being given away. Where are the houses in Tobago? Where are the parcels of land to give young Tobagonians the economic status that is required for them to treat with the issues that they will face in the upcoming future when they have to take care of their families?

If that is the backward way that the PNM manages a small island like Tobago, why would we turn back and give them the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago?

Dr. Griffith: No way. Even Marlene would agree with that.

Miss Mc Donald: Leave my name “outta dat”!

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: How am I doing so far, Member for Port of Spain South? Is it time to wrap it up for you?

Miss Mc Donald: Yeah.

Hon. Dr. D. Baker: Let me tell you, I would give you one more thing as we close; one more, Mr. Speaker, in the last 10 minutes. We have a court judgment; a court judgment on the Milshirv project and this is before the hon. Justice Ronnie Boodoosingh. On the second question, the justice was to answer this matter. The THA: is the THA subject to the Central Tenders Board Act? And the question that the judge had to ponder upon is whether a BOLT arrangement comes under the purview of the Central Tenders Board, and much has been said in the public space of the Milshirv project in Tobago.

The judge ruled that:

“The Assembly in pursuance of its functions”—according to the THA Act section 52—“shall be subject to the Central Tenders Board Act until such time as there is, in effect, alternative provision...made by the Assembly.”

And, therefore, in paragraph 52, in answer to the second question, therefore, the judge was of the view that the THA cannot enter into a BOLT-type arrangement as outlined above, except in accordance with the provision of the Central Tenders Board Act.

Mr. Speaker, the THA is in breach of the Central Tenders Board Act in the construction of its agricultural complex in Tobago by a court order, and like what they have done in Charlotteville—defying the court when they broke down the Charlotteville complex and started breaking down the shop spaces of tradesmen outside of that complex—they have defied the court order in the Milshirv project and is continuing with their development programme to make sure that the PNM is funded for the next general election campaign, and that is what has been happening with those cost overruns. Their contractor friends make millions of dollars on those projects and that is what is funding the PNM through its election campaign for 2015. [*Desk thumping*]

Tobagonians will not allow a second Orvillian reign of terror to occur. I am 100 per cent certain that Tobago will return two People's Partnership representatives in the next 2015 election to the House of Representatives. [*Desk thumping*]

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

Mr. Collin Partap (*Cumuto/Manzanilla*): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank my colleague, the Member for Tobago West. I know it is always a pleasure to come after him, especially in this budget debate 2014. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to contribute on the Appropriation Bill, 2014 and I am proud to be a member of the People's Partnership Government which took the reins of power in May 2010 under the leadership of our Prime Minister, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar.

Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the Minister of Finance and the Economy, Sen. the Hon. Larry Howai, on behalf of the constituents of Cumuto/Manzanilla on his third budget presentation, and the most progressive people-orientated budget in this country's history.

Mr. Speaker, I want to reiterate some of the major economic indicators mentioned in the House by the Minister of Finance and the Economy. Mr. Speaker, the economy under the People's Partnership Government performed admirably in the face of the global economic crisis of 2008/2009, as a course for the stabilization and sustainable development for Trinidad and Tobago was charted.

Mr. Speaker, the economy is projected to expand at a rate of 3.4 per cent in 2014 and 4 per cent in 2015. The unemployment rate averages at 3.6 and the

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inflation rate has fallen to 2.8 per cent, the lowest in 10 years. Mr. Speaker, the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund now stands at US \$5.6 billion. Those were just some of the key, you know, economic indicators that show the robustness of this economy: growth, unemployment, inflation and your Heritage and Stabilisation Fund; four of the key factors anyone looking to see progress would look at.

Some of the key features, Mr. Speaker, of the budget that will affect the constituents of Cumuto/Manzanilla; and I would start with number one, the increase in the minimum wage to \$15 an hour. I am sure the former Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, His Excellency Harry Partap, the High Commissioner for South Africa, who piloted the first minimum wage legislation way back under the first UNC administration will be very, very happy. I wish him a happy birthday today. Today is his birthday, so we would like to wish him a very happy 73rd birthday. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. McLeod: Did you call him?

Mr. C. Partap: I did, I did. I did call him earlier on.

Mr. Sharma: Collect call.

Mr. C. Partap: Always a collect call to South Africa.

Mr. Speaker, number two, the Disability Grant, increased by \$300 to \$1,800 a month; public assistance, increased by \$300; personal allowances for individuals over 60 increased from \$60,000 to \$72,000 and, of course, Mr. Speaker, the increase of pension from \$3,000 to \$3,500. Mr. Speaker, public officers, the monthly pension for retired public officers has also increased to \$3,500, and when we entered office it was \$1,950.

11.05 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, bringing self-employed people into the national insurance system and, of course, the Baby Care Grant of \$500 a month for one year, and this is to assist the underprivileged mothers living in difficult circumstances. It is intended to ensure proper nutrition and health needs in the first year of life. This improves the chances of the underprivileged children to have a good chance at a better life.

Mr. Speaker, as you can see, this budget is a budget for all; the most vulnerable in society from the time they are born to the time that they are older. I would like to recap. You know, I was reading the papers and I saw one of the bylines was “Who won in the budget”, and I would now list it: low income

families, the minimum wage increase, Baby Care Grant, the increase for first-time homeowners, the allowances from \$18,000 to \$25,000 as of January 01, 2015, and, of course, the 2 per cent mortgage rate for properties up to \$850,000.

Middle-income earners also won in this budget, the increase in the tax deductible amount for BIR for approved annuities from \$30,000 to \$50,000; self-employed persons to become entitled to national insurance benefits, tax deductible savings bonds and, of course, the mortgage interest rate at 5 per cent for properties valued at \$850,000 to \$1.2 million. Senior citizens were the other group: the increase in the pensions and the increase in the overall personal allowance.

Mr. Speaker, these are just some of the social issues that were dealt with by the hon. Minister of Finance and the Economy in the budget, and we always talk about caring for people and this Government has been a Government that has cared for people, and this Finance Minister in this budget is a caring budget. In his third presentation he shows, and the Prime Minister shows, that this Government cares for the poor, cares for the underprivileged in society.

I am sure many of the MPs would tell you, and many of the Opposition will tell you, that a lot of people come into the offices, and you know they are poor, they cannot afford milk, they cannot afford food, and we have to take out from our pockets to help them. That happens on a daily basis at my office, and that is why this Baby Care Grant is so important. Senior citizens, a lot of their moneys are now spent on medicine. I had one senior citizen who came into my office; I would not call her name, but she said she has to take care of her two grandchildren and the pension is very small. What is that senior citizen to do? She is trying to do her best, and the \$500 increase will help her tremendously. That is the only income that they have, they do not have any other income. They cannot go out to work. So that is why I said it is a caring budget.

Mr. Speaker, I would now like to turn to my constituency, which I have the distinguished pleasure of representing for the last four years, both in Cumuto and in Parliament. Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to thank the constituents for their patience in waiting for development to arrive. The constituency of Cumuto/Manzanilla had suffered from rural neglect, and it was not only rural neglect, everything was neglected under the People's National Movement: roads, schools, agriculture, security, human development—neglect was the name of the game. From 2001 to 2010, it was the biggest show in town in Cumuto/Manzanilla.

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From 2001 to 2010, the direct investment into the constituency of Cumuto/Manzanilla was \$15 million over that nine-year period.

I spoke to the former Member this morning and he told me \$15 million is a stretch. They neglected everything. When Dr. Rambachan came to the temple in Cumuto, in Coryal, earlier on this year, he saw it. He saw the neglect—the road system totally falling apart. Every single road in Cumuto/Manzanilla needed rehabilitation, retaining walls, box drains, paving and landslides. These are the things that people wanted, that they never got, and let me tell you, the Government has spent close to \$3 million, could be more, in direct investment into Cumuto/Manzanilla over the last four years. This is in everything. That is the level of investment which this Government saw fit for that constituency. Rural neglect is slowly being chipped away.

Mr. Speaker, I neglected to mention one thing, the Constituency Fund of \$10 million, and this is a development fund for the MPs. Now, Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister mentioned it, there were grumbles and rumbles, but we as MPs know we do not have a budget, we never did. In the history of Trinidad and Tobago, MPs never had a budget for their constituencies. Councillors have a budget through the regional corporation; they could put projects in areas, we cannot, and whenever anything goes wrong they blame, not the councillor, they blame the MP and they blame the Government. [*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: “Rowley ent want it.”

Mr. C. Partap: No. Well, Mr. Speaker, through the Minister of Finance and the Economy, I would gladly ask him, anyone that does not want it on that side, we will take it. The Member for Oropouche West will take it.

The Constituency Fund came about with the recent passage of the Constitution (Amdt.) Bill, when constituents could recall their MPs. The recall provision triggered the Constituency Fund because the Prime Minister, in her infinite wisdom, saw it fit to give MPs finances which they could put towards projects. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. Prime Minister, and the Leader of this Government—she has taken a step that no other leader would have ever done, in giving the Constituency Fund of \$10 million to all 41 MPs. That is a move that no other leader in Trinidad and Tobago would have done.

Mr. Speaker, I now want to report on the development of the infrastructure of Cumuto/Manzanilla, and, firstly, I would like to thank the hon. Minister of Works and Infrastructure, Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan, for his work in the constituency.

To date, about 20 kilometres of box drains are done. If I go to read out the list—I told the hon. Prime Minister earlier in the tea room, no longer we have to do flyers when we go for election, we have to do booklets. Right now, if I take out the booklet, I could finish 45 minutes just reading out some of the work we have done.

In Sangre Grande south, there are 10 pages of work; Manzanilla, almost the same; Vega de Oropouche, Biche and Cumuto Tamana—*[Interruption]* Should be ashamed of what? Producing a booklet of development of a constituency? *[Interruption]* Well, when you were in office you should have made a booklet. Mr. Speaker, 10 kilometres of road paved so far, and these are main roads. Ten major landslips already rehabilitated.

Just recently, I went to Carmichael, 2.5 kilometres paving coming down, and the Minister, by this time next year, that whole road will be rehabilitated, and not only that, the North Oropouche Road, the Cunapo Southern Main Road, Fishing Pond, Ramnath Terrace, Gender Road, Marques Road, works started—I told the Minister works started on the box drains and then the paving will continue, afterwards—St. Isidore Road, and it is a partnership not only through the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure and PURE, through RDC, through URP; these are the agencies that never worked in the constituency of Cumuto/Manzanilla before that are now finding a new home there.

Mr. Speaker, this Minister of Works and Infrastructure did what no Minister of Works and Infrastructure had done before. *[Desk thumping]* I want to thank him again, and I will continue to thank him, because we had a former Minister of Works and Infrastructure—*[Interruption]*

Dr. Rambachan: “Yuh managuying meh or what?”

Mr. C. Partap: No, I am not “mamaguying yuh”. We had a former Minister of Works and Infrastructure, he paved one kilometre of road in the two years he was there, and I used to go to his office five o’clock, four o’clock in the morning and he would say, “Give me a list of five roads”, and when I gave it to him—done, done, done, done, done, and I came out happy. All my constituency executives came out happy, and I would take them around the savannah for “doubles”, because, you know, it was what was available at five o’clock in the morning. They would feel happy that they were part of a process of development, and then he jumped ship to another party and then came in my constituency saying that how the Government did not perform, when he was at the helm for two years and did not do anything.

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[MR. PARTAP]

Mr. Speaker, I would like to tell the people of Harkoo Trace that the landslip will start within the next few weeks—two landslips. But that is just the tip; soon the landslips in Plum Mitan, Bon Air Road and Gajadhar Road will also be rehabilitated. As I said before, in the next fiscal year URP will start work on Hilltop Drive, Gender Road, Panchoo Road, St. Isidore Road and Marques Road, and this goes without saying, Mr. Speaker, others talk, this Government has delivered. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Corruption

Mr. C. Partap: They will yell “corruption”, as the Member for Arouca/Maloney just did—corruption; giving people the basic necessities to which they are entitled in this country is corruption. The people of Cumuto/Manzanilla are entitled to good roads, but that is corruption for the PNM. That is corruption when you drive on a nice road in a rural area. That is corruption. Right? Corruption—everything must be city-centred, that is not corruption, but the poor people in the rural areas, that is corruption. You heard it, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Arouca/Maloney just said it.

I want to move on in the field of recreation, Mr. Speaker. Through T&TEC and the Minister of Public Utilities, hon. Nizam Baksh, we have gotten six out of 14 grounds lit, luminated, and when you see it at night—and I know my colleague from Toco/Sangre Grande, you know—Damarie Hill was lit just a few weeks ago, and when I pass there on my way home it is like Christmas. The field is teeming with young people.

You know, I did a walkabout in Riley Settlement, and I was walking on the road, we just did the lighting for North Oropouche Ground, and a rather robust-looking gentleman came up to the gate—of course he was clad in green—and he came up to me and said, “What have you done for this area? What is development? What development have you brought to our village?” So I told him, “Well, at night you could see the ground is lit, it is filled with people walking”. He said, “I do not call that development”. Well, you know, he was a rather robust guy, I do not think development for him was walking on a ground, but I did not tell him that, I thought of it in my mind and chuckled. But that is development and some people do not see it, and that road, North Oropouche Road, as the Minister said, will be totally rehabilitated within the next few months.

As I was continuing, Fishing Pond, Caratal, Cunaripo and Santa Ana, these are the next grounds that we will be tackling. So in all, when this Government demits office, 11 out of 14 recreation grounds would have been lit, under this Government. Well, when this term of office is finished. Under the PNM, for the nine years that they were at the helm, they lit one ground, and we had to go and redo the lighting recently because it was done very poorly.

11.20 p.m.

So again, in four years we have done 11 grounds—in four years. That is a record of development. Again, six and then four, plus the one we had to redo, 11. Again—[*Crosstalk*] well sometimes you have to—they talk, we deliver and the Government has delivered.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to look at pavilions constructed. The total so far in this constituency is seven. And I know when Minister Rambachan was the Minister of Local Government we had a very nice pavilion built in Sou Sou Lands, and there is on the drawing boards four more pavilions to construct within the next few months.

Mr. Speaker, I will like to turn to education. The constituency of Cumuto/Manzanilla, like the rest of the country, every home—almost every home—of a child from Form 1 to 5 has a laptop. Every child that goes to secondary school from Form 1 to 5 will have a laptop courtesy of the Prime Minister and the Minister of Education. No longer is a laptop a device of the elite. It is now a device available to the grassroots and the very low income earners of society. The common child has access to a laptop, and that is development.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Minister of Education. On September 19 he will be coming to Manzanilla to officially open the Manzanilla Government Primary School, a state-of-the-art primary school. And housed in the primary school will be the early childhood centre also—so, with two buildings in one. We, through the Ministry of Education, two primary schools were built; Lower Cumuto Primary School and Manzanilla Primary School.

Mr. Speaker, during the nine years of the PNM, zero was built. In the first incarnation of the UNC Government, three secondary schools were built, and one was reopened because it was closed for a long period of time. The Member for Mayaro would bear me out on this. The Biche High School was opened under this Government.

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Mr. Speaker, in the field of higher education, COSTAATT, the Sangre Grande campus, was formally opened during our term in office, and this made higher education accessible to everyone within the eastern division. The Member for Toco/Sangre Grande was there at the opening; and there are students from Matelot, all the way down from Guayaguayare, Rio Claro, Biche, Cushe, Oropouche, Fishing Pond, all now could have higher education at the Sangre Grande campus—[*Crosstalk*] almost 1,000 students. It started up with 400, it has reached a thousand.

The Trinidad and Tobago Development Atlas 2012 has shown that Sangre Grande and the environs has the lowest graduates for secondary and tertiary education in the country. At this facility, as the Member for Toco/Sangre Grande just said, has a thousand students housed now. And not only a thousand students, but 40 full-time jobs and 25 part-time jobs came about through the campus.

I would like to move on to the issue of national security. Sangre Grande and Cumuto/Manzanilla are two of the most depressed constituencies with the lowest crime rate. And I think that is an enigma in this country—depression, low income, and low crime.

Mr. Speaker, the Cumuto Police Station, a state-of-the-art facility in the fight against crime has been opened and it will be officially opened by the Prime Minister very soon, and next year the Manzanilla Police Station will be built. Mr. Speaker, you know, when the PNM was in office the Cumuto Police Station was housed in a house painted blue, and the Manzanilla Police Station, right now, is housed in containers painted blue. And that was their effort in the fight against crime.

On the issue of health, the Sangre Grande hospital will be one of four that construction will soon start on, and this will increase the state of health within the constituency of Cumuto/Manzanilla and Toco/Sangre Grande. Through the intervention of the Minister of Health, health facilities are now open later. The Cumuto Outreach Centre which is opened Monday to Friday from eight o'clock to four o'clock now goes on—sorry, eight o'clock to four o'clock in the afternoon—now goes on to 8.00 at night. It is opened on Saturdays from nine to five, Sundays from 9.00 to 2.00, and public holidays from 9.00 to 2.00. So too is the Coryal Outreach Centre, the Manzanilla Outreach Centre and the Sangre Grande Outreach Centre—opening health facilities for longer hours. No other government would have seen it fit to do that, to take the load off the hospitals.

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Mr. Speaker, let me now turn to the delivery of water. WASA, areas like Plum Mitan, Biche, Cunaripo, La Tosca and the Cunapo Southern Main Road in Coalmine never had water before. All now are receiving pipe-borne water. [*Desk thumping*] New lines have been run in Cumuto, Guaico/Tamana, bigger mains. Soon Los Amadeus and the surrounding areas, once the feeder—the booster pump—is put in, they will benefit from the water.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to mention, through the Ministry of Public Utilities, there is the LTE broadband services, Internet services, the first one in the country was opened in Sangre Chiquito, and the second—in my constituency—the LTE tower was put up in Plum Mitan, and throughout the constituency there are eight more sites to put in, and once those sites are fully operational, we will have a web of Internet connectivity throughout the whole constituency of Cumuto/Manzanilla. This a project that TSTT, under the leadership of the hon. Minister Nizam Baksh, this was their plan for rural development in constituencies like mine.

Mr. Speaker, you know, I could go on and on, and as I said we will publish a booklet on our accomplishments in the constituency of Cumuto/Manzanilla, but I would again like to commend the Minister of Finance and the Economy, commend this budget. The people of Cumuto/Manzanilla are very happy with the Government that they chose in 2010, and I am sure when they go to the polls in 2015, they will return this Government to office with another resounding majority. Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

The Minister of National Diversity and Social Integration (Hon. Rodger Samuel): Mr. Speaker, it is indeed a privilege for me to probably close the innings.

Hon. Member: Ah, praise God!

Hon. R. Samuel: I want to first thank Almighty God for this opportunity to contribute to this budget debate as, first of all, as Member of Parliament for Arima, as well as the Minister of National Diversity and Social Integration, and pray and hope that as we continue to work and develop this beautiful twin-island republic of ours that the nation would continue to be blessed, and that all of Trinidad and Tobago will prosper in everything that we do, even in this House, and would benefit tremendously from the deliberations here today and for the upcoming periods.

It would be remiss of me, Mr. Speaker, if I do not extend congratulations to the Minister of Finance and the Economy [*Desk thumping*] for steering this

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economic vessel, as I term it, to safety over the last period. For, Mr. Speaker, he having been giving the helm, if this was a ship, from his predecessor, to manoeuvre through the turbulence that was created in the inception of us taking office by the Clico and a Hindu Credit Union debacle, but I am satisfied that he has done, thus far, an excellent job in creating an atmosphere of relief, in creating an atmosphere of comfort for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

This budget indeed, Mr. Speaker, is an exciting one. For the budget demonstrates the theme in a practical way, the theme of empowering the people through sustained economic growth and prosperity. And I have all assurance that its implementation will ensure that as a nation we will continue on the steady path towards the revitalization of our economy. I also extend congratulations to the hon. Prime Minister for her philosophical underpinnings which indeed supported and continues to support the decisions made by the administration, and for her guidance during the budgetary process, and all the policy-making functionalities geared towards serving the people of this nation.

The vision of this Government, Mr. Speaker, is obvious as we peruse the allocations. The allocations that are set out in this budget, with the highest going towards education, training, and then to national security, and then to the health sector, where the people of this nation can justifiably appreciate our agenda as a Government, our agenda in serving the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

And while I am on that, Mr. Speaker, for some time now we have heard so much objections to the development, and the infrastructural development that is taking place throughout Trinidad and Tobago. But, Mr. Speaker, when I drive throughout the length and breadth of the twin island, I recognize that for the first time in our history there is so much development taking place. From every corner, everywhere, every road, you can pass in every town, and in every village and you would recognize that this Government has not been selective or biased in its approach to development, but that development has taken its course and its flow throughout the twin-island republic.

As a matter of fact, for those who have been complaining about the development throughout the nation, what it says to us when I drive around is that the fact that we as a Government have had to do so much, it says that there was so much that had not been done before. [*Desk thumping*] And we must never forget that. The more we see on the streets and in the villages and the communities being done with regard to infrastructure, roads and development, it says to us, and it sends a clear message, that those things were never done before. And if they were

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never done before, then the burden has rested upon our shoulders to ensure that the country develops the way it should be developed.

11.35 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, so often, every time talk comes about development, we cry about things happening in the south land and in central, and then people talk about, “What about the East-West Corridor?” But at the time when other Governments ruled this country, the East-West Corridor was not developed in the way it should have been developed, and yet millions and billions of dollars were spent, and yet when we look at it now, it is this Government that still has to come back and develop the very said East-West Corridor that was under the rule of other Governments and the PNM in the last years.

My own constituency, the constituency of Arima, I mean, when I look at the things, and like the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla, I want to thank the present Minister of Works and Infrastructure, I want to thank the Minister of Public Utilities and those service-oriented Ministries for a job well done, because when I look at the list of stuff that is done in my constituency, it says to me and I oftentimes ask the question, I wonder what on earth was going on all the time? The fact that we have had to pave so much roads and build so much things and do so much infrastructural work; the fact that we now have to look to build a hospital that should have been built 40 years ago; the fact that we have had to do work on a bridge that collapsed 28 years ago; the fact that we were still in a 19-something police station and we had to do a new police station that should have been built many, many years ago; the fact that the present health facility that needed to be expanded to accommodate the kind of workload that it is expected to facilitate, we now have to build Block E to accommodate further work that had not been done many years ago; it says that the burden of development rests upon this Government and we have come full, full to the task and we have fulfilled the things that we have promised. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, the wealth of a nation, just as its strengths, comes from the wealth and the strength of its citizens, and our nation is a dynamic and diverse society. We are a blend of the world, we are a blend of all the nations of the world in our diverseness and how dynamic we are as a society. But, as I listened to the presentation of the budget and then subsequently read the budget, I could not help but in the midst of it feel the heart and compassion of the Minister of Finance and the Economy as he presented his budget in the most gentle ways, as he is accustomed doing, his sense of care and concern for the most vulnerable in our

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society, a concern and passion that we know is shared deeply by the hon. Prime Minister, which continues to be exhibited in practical ways and in the ways of the establishment of the Children's Life Fund and in several other initiatives that pertain to the helping of our society, the helping of our citizens, the helping of those that are vulnerable in our society.

And I am certain, Mr. Speaker, as those people would have cried out for more, if it was possible the Minister of Finance and the Economy would have done even more, but because of the economic situation and constraints we are still thankful for what we are able to do and what we are able to offer to the citizens of this country.

But, Mr. Speaker, Hubert Humphrey once said, and I want to quote:

“...that the moral test of government is how...treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life,”—the aged—“and those who are in the shadows of life, the sick, the needy and the handicapped.”

And I want to quote that again. And the reason I am quoting that is because this budget falls right in place and really epitomizes the ideals of this philosophy:

“...that the moral test of government is how...treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life,”—the aged—“and those who are in the shadows of life, the sick, the needy and the handicapped.”

This statement or even versions of this statement, has been often used in various sectors by various individuals, it has been used by Winston Churchill in some of his presentations; by Pope John Paul II and by Truman, and perhaps most dubiously attributed to Mahatma Gandhi, as he would have elaborated on it when he said that:

“The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated.”

Those are deep words, and he just elaborated and extended on the philosophy.

Mr. Speaker, this budget attempts to look at the greatness of this nation, but also it attempts to deal with the moral test of this Government. How this Government feels about those that are in need, how this Government feels about the children, how this Government feels about the aged, the elderly and how this

Government feels about the sick and those that are needy and the handicapped. This budget expresses the real essence of what this Government is about.

The fact that we are expanding the social safety net by modifying the number of benefits in this budget says a lot for the philosophy of this Government, and the fact that—you know, I hear people talk about, this is not a caring Government and they do not care. Mr. Speaker, somebody got up on the television and said, “what could \$500 do?” And if you ask that person if they had \$500, they probably do not.

The idea about it is that sometimes we are not as grateful as we ought to be. The Disability Grant that will be increased, and it is looking at it in its holistic sense, it is \$3,600 a year. I can do with that likewise. *[Interruption]* That says to us, that it shifted from \$15,600 a year to \$21,600 a year. If people cannot do with that then something is wrong with us. As a matter of fact, what I look at, is the number of people this increase will impact, and I am looking at the impact because this Government’s intention is to impact the society and ensure that the society is assisted in the way that it ought to be assisted and not be neglected. And this would impact 24,100 persons.

We have got to put value for money, and the Minister of Education who is always the person, who is the mathematician and always is the one who is calculating for us, that says to us that the percentage of the society that is being impacted, even by this measure is fantastic and is great, not only that but the increase of the public assistance grant. Remember we are talking about those that are in the twilight of their life, we are talking about those that are at the beginning of their lives and those that are in the shadow of their lives, and this budget is dealing with all of that. The fact that the Public Assistance Grant is increased by \$3,600 across the board per year and that says a lot for us.

Dr. Gopeesingh: A quarter million people.

Hon. R. Samuel: That is right. Not only that, but if you add that 24,000 that is impacted by the Disability Grant and you add another 25,000 persons that are impacted by the increase of the public assistance, that is 50,000 persons just in two measures. *[Desk thumping]*

And then we are talking about things that have not been done since before 2010, and we are now talking about personal allowance for individuals aged 60 being increased and we are talking about the Servol situation being increased by 12 per cent; we are talking about a Baby Care Grant of \$6,000 per year for the

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first year; \$6,000 for the first year to people who probably did not have \$6,000 in the first year. And that says to us that this Government is concerned about its citizens.

Dr. Gopeesingh: From young to old.

Hon. R. Samuel: From young to old. For those who are in need, for those who are handicapped, for those who are having problems in their lives. But this is not it, Mr. Speaker, because through the education system we are in the process of doing the developmental aspect in the society to ensure that every citizen has the opportunity to educate or re-educate themselves and that nobody is slipped through the cracks. [*Desk thumping*]

So, this is not just a one-sided situation, and I am certain the plans and programmes for those mothers who will access the grant will be something that would be beneficial to them from a developmental standpoint likewise. It is important for us to see the facts of this and not allow ourselves to be mesmerized by old talk and not allow ourselves as citizens to be shifted by all kinds of winds of information that come from the other side in criticism to the facts of this budget. The fact says that the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago will benefit from the measures laid out in this 2015 budget.

Mr. Speaker, not only that, but through the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development, when you think about the shift in the FairShare Programme, the fact that there is an increase from \$1 million to \$1.5 million, and that is to boost the small business sector. So we are concerned about the development of the normal person, we are concerned about the development of the average citizen, and it is important for us to see that—the increase of pension—and the impact it has upon about 85,000 senior citizens. Add that to what I have already said about 24,000 people in Disability Grant and the other grants that are being increased that will impact 25,000 people, Mr. Speaker, just in these measures alone—

Dr. Gopeesingh: Quarter million.

Hon. R. Samuel:—we have a quarter million people. Mr. Speaker, that is unheard of. That is unheard of in the history of Trinidad and Tobago. That is unheard of and, as a matter of fact, when you think of where the senior citizens grant was in 2010 of \$1,950, this is fantastic. This is yeoman service. This is service to people. This is not something that can be topped off and shifted just so

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in the minds of people. We have got to focus that the monthly pension has been increased, and increased by \$6,000 a year.

It is important for us to see that, and it impacts another 35,000 persons who are retirees, Member for Caroni East, so we have gone past quarter million people. We understand the value for money, the impact upon the lives of people. When people benefit, the nation benefits. It is important for us to see that.

Mr. Speaker, to add insult to injury, if we can use that kind of terminology in this House, then we add the increase of the minimum wage. That is icing on the cake. In other words, it now broadens the scope of all that this Government wants to do for this society, and, Mr. Speaker, when you look at successive budgets from 2010 to '11 to '12, we realize that there has been a systematic flow from one budget to the next, an increase from one budget to the next, an adjustment.

We were plagued, I said, by the Clico and the Hindu Credit Union situation, but we have been able to weather the storm and now we have reached the point where we can embrace our society and embrace our citizenry and say to them, we care about you. It is important for us to say that. [*Desk thumping*]

So, the minimum wage represents a 66 per cent increase, and it is important for us to see that. But, Mr. Speaker, I like to use quotes, and the reason I like to use quotes is because I like the philosophical underpinning of quotes, and one writer asked the question:

“Wherein lies the strength of a nation?”—and the answer was written, it lies—“Not in its planes or tanks or missiles. Not in its economic prowess. Not in how low people bow to its diplomats and leaders...”

But the true strength of a nation lies with its people—their willingness to move the nation forward, their willingness to work together, their courage and determination, their cherishing of their past and their optimistic gaze to the future, their industriousness and valuing of honest, hard work. With such a people—it is said, Mr. Speaker—“no government or military can frustrate them. Without such a people”—it is said—“no government or military can lead the nation forward.”

It is important for us to understand. It is about empowering people and ensuring that the citizens of our nation rise up to take their rightful place and be the kind of citizens that they ought to be.

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Mr. Speaker, this idea of cherishing our past is something that we have not placed serious attention to and upon. In my own research since being given the responsibility to lead the Ministry of National Diversity and Social Integration, and having taken over the reins from the Minister and the Member for Tableland/Moruga, I have found out that if we do not protect our history and our heritage we would find ourselves as a nation running helter-skelter and never being the kind of society we ought to be.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Bereft of a soul.

11.50 p.m.

Hon. R. Samuel: That is right. Mr. Speaker, I have found out that we have lost so much, and I want to bring to your attention an awareness that our citizens should be aware of, the things that they should be aware of. I have found out, and I was confirming this with the Minister of Arts and Multiculturalism, that really there is a lot of stuff that we do not own anymore, our heritage.

Mr. Speaker, there is somebody in Alaska who owns the rights to all of the years of Panorama Finals. There is somebody else who had patented our pan. Somebody else owns—a foreigner owns all of the vintage calypsoes of Trinidad and Tobago. And we can go on and on, a lot of stuff we do not own anymore. Why, because for years we had never paid attention to the protection of who we are and what we have as a nation, and as a result of that, Mr. Speaker, we have lost a significant amount of artefacts that belong to this country.

When we began to look, as a Ministry, throughout the Commonwealth and in America and in Spain, we have found that the museums and archives, there is a rich amount of artefacts about us in Trinidad and Tobago that we do not know anything about. If you go to the States, to Smithsonian, there is an entire wing about us, things that have been taken out of Trinidad over the many years that belong to us, “buh we doh own it”, that is supposed to exhibit the richness of our heritage and our history. Just take a drive, Mr. Speaker, and you look to see what has happened over the many years with even the built heritage of Trinidad and Tobago, and you would realise how much attention was placed on it even though this had been under seven Ministries for years, but nothing was done. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: Look at the Heritage Library how they dealt with it.

Hon. R. Samuel: That is right. You look at it, just drive around, but we—I want you to understand, Mr. Speaker, and that is why I applaud the Prime Minister for the establishment of a Ministry as a Ministry that is responsible for

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the Ministry of National Diversity and Social Integration. [*Desk thumping*] I applaud her for that.

Dr. Gopeesingh: You are doing a great job.

Hon. R. Samuel: The Ministry that was created to regain ground for us to begin to now look at ourselves, because this twin-island Republic has a rich history, a rich heritage, but we have not protected it. People come into our waters and they dive and they take stuff out of here, no law.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Cultural heritage, underwater heritage.

Hon. R. Samuel: All aspects of our heritage, archaeological, underwater, built heritage, natural heritage, Mr. Speaker, has been disappearing gradually, and there has been no protection for it. It is important for us to speak about it. Why, Mr. Speaker, because it is important for us to be determined to cherish the past, because it is when you cherish your past then the optimism of the future is bright. It is important for us to see that. If a nation does not know their history they are doomed to repeat it. [*Interruption and laughter*]

Mr. De Coteau: That is why they want to vote back PNM. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Seemungal: They will never bring back PNM.

Mr. Indarsingh: Remind them about the history of the PNM.

Hon. R. Samuel: Mr. Speaker, this Government is not just about giveaways, it is about protection of who we are; it is about preserving our diverseness. Mr. Speaker, I went to speak at a conference in Germany—a diversity conference, and they were amazed when we presented our paper, as to what we were able to achieve to integrate our society, when we began to talk about how diverse our society is, racially and ethnically, and all of these areas of our diverse—they were amazed. I remember one Professor from India stood up and said he is so amazed, and he said to me, he said, if India had only been able to learn from Trinidad and Tobago, the region there would have stayed together because what took place in the region is because people of different religions could not stay together and people could not just amalgamate and come together and if they had understood what we understand today, things would have been different. And he said that, I did not say that.

But, Mr. Speaker, it is important for us to see this. It is important for us to understand that development has to be done from a holistic standpoint. But one of the things that we must learn to cherish is our rich history. What we must learn to

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cherish is how we defend and protect what we have and who we are, because it is all that we have that makes us all that we are. And it is that will take us to the future, and without that the future is dismal.

I am glad that this has happened because for decades agencies charged with the responsibility for preserving, for securing, for protecting, for managing our nation's heritage have neglected it. And it is now that we are beginning to see something happening. And as a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, where there is no functional administrative guide to champion the true focus of our nation, then we would find ourselves in total abandonment and then people would laugh at us.

Mr. Speaker, I went to a function that deals with preservation and restoration of heritage, and there was this woman from Britain who had worked as a preservationist on Buckingham Palace, and she was almost in tears when she began to describe what she is seeing in our country. Sadness, because we have such a rich history, but we are unable to preserve and protect it and then market it to the rest of the world.

Mr. Speaker, this is not going to happen anymore under this Government. This Government realizes that even though entities such as former Ministries of Community Development, and all these areas that were responsible for these things, there needed to be a hub for coordinating efforts geared at preserving our heritage that would be more cohesive and coherent, hence, the genesis of this Ministry. It is important for us to say that. It is important for us to understand that not only are we interested in helping people, but we are interested in building and strengthening the resolve of a nation.

Mr. Speaker, one writer said that:

“History leads the wise man and drags the fool”

Another writer said:

“If we could first know where we are, and whither we are tending, we could better judge what to do and how to do it.”

It has been, Mr. Speaker, and it has been said, in a study that was done by a Professor JFA Ajayi, he said in a study of looking at Nigeria and looking at the shortcomings of a country of that nature, he said, Mr. Speaker, that:

“History has been recognized all over the world as a source of enlightenment and development. As a collective memory of the past of a nation, history attempts to bring to the fore the salient and significant part of events that

occurred in the past, which could be utilized in building a prosperous national future. This is why every human society, no matter the level of advancement, has placed optimum priority to the bequeathing of a ‘useable past’ from generation to generation.”

He talks about:

“Modernity has also been influenced greatly by the enhanced production of history. This is assisting nations...in their tasks of nation building, promoting national consciousness, the flowering of moral leadership and ensuring overall national development.”

So, Mr. Speaker, to develop a nation we have got to develop not only the minds of the nation, but we have got to now feed the nation and the citizen with its history, the past, to strengthen the results of who we are so as we move forward, we move forward together. He said subsequent to that:

“The nation suffers which has no sense of history. Its values remain superficial...”

Mr. Speaker, when we think about this and we think about what has not been done before, we recognize how much we now have to do as a government. So, not only do we have to develop the infrastructure that has not been developed; not only do we have to decentralize our society with regard to the infrastructure that had never been done before, we now have to develop the process of educating our citizens with regard to the history of our nation so that we can be a far more patriotic society. And in being a far more patriotic society, we become far more dedicated to our own country so that we can be a better people and a better nation.

So the Ministry of National Diversity and Social Integration has the responsibility to do that, the development of a museum sector policy, museums are a rich archives of our past and there are several things that are happening in that sector, and our purpose is to develop that and we have been developing the policy for that purpose.

Mr. Speaker, since 2005, even the National Museum, there were regulations to establish a board to govern the National Museum, or the Royal Victoria Institute. Since 2005 not a board has been installed, you know, we are now doing that. We are now doing that. We have just sent the names to Cabinet to be approved for the board, that is what we are talking about. Since 2005, never done, never done. We have never developed what we call a heritage policy in this country. We are now doing that. And to look at our heritage as we work in harmony with the various

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sectors, with the Ministry of Arts and Multiculturalism as they look at cultural heritage and all the aspects of heritage that fall under their Ministry, we are now working to deal with the museums and to deal with the museums at the Sugar Heritage Village. We are now dealing with all of those things at the same time, the development of Fort San Andrés as a museum. We are now doing all of that; this Government is doing that.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Looking at the cultural and heritage sites.

Hon. R. Samuel: Cultural and heritage sites. Mr. Speaker, without that, our young people have nothing to stand on. We will become very educated but when we think about understanding who we are as a nation, that goes past us very easily. If you were to take a television, camera or some video camera and walk down town and go to Chaguanas and go to San Fernando and at random hit the streets and ask people simple things about our country—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Seemungal: They do not know.

Hon. R. Samuel: They do not know. It has to stop. And this Government's intention is to ensure that our citizenry is well developed and educated about itself. That is what we are doing—and appreciating our past, just like the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development has embarked upon the process of establishing what we call a labour heroes park to acknowledge those men and women who have struggled for this nation, that the nation does not even know, because we have not been a society that talks about those things. And that is important for our young people to understand, those men and women in the labour movement who have struggled and who have played an integral role to getting us where we are today. And it is important for us to say that. And as we cherish all of these things, we will understand the dynamics of change that will suddenly come up upon our nation, because we will change this society and we will be a better society because of the things that we are doing.

So it is not just giveaways, it is not just helping—giveaways as people say it—but it is about helping and strengthening and educating and changing the mindsets of our nation so that we can be the kind of people that we were created to be, and designed to be.

12.05 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, I have always said that one of the things that is our strength in this nation is our awesome belief in a Creator, and this is what has taken this nation to the heights it has been, from every facet. We are multi-ethnic, we are

multi religious. We are just all that we were supposed to be. As a matter of fact, I have always said that when those that sailed this way, according to what is written in the history of the West Indies—not the history of Trinidad and Tobago because we have got to look at the history of Trinidad and Tobago. We have embarked upon a programme with the three premier universities and the Minister of Education, and the Member for Caroni East will understand what we have embarked upon, a thematic writing of the history of Trinidad and Tobago, and subsequent to that, to work with the Ministry of Education in producing the curriculum so that the history of Trinidad and Tobago can be taught.

It is important for us to say that because when I went to school we were taught the history of the West Indies, the making of the West Indies, but we have not really been taught the history of Trinidad and Tobago. Yes, people would have read different writings about the history, but we need to teach that. In any other country where you go you can be taught the history of that country. To become a citizen of the United States you must understand aspects of its history. And it is important for ours to change.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things that we have not been high on is how we preserve our records. For many, many years, Ministries and Government institutions have been storing records in warehouses and in atmospheres that are not conducive for proper record keeping, and as a result, the preservation of the material is hindered because of the conditions under which it is stored.

We are quite concerned about that because records are history and records tell a story for generations, and it is important for us now, together with the National Archives, to work in ensuring that we preserve the thousands of records in various formats that we have recorded; the Government records as well as the other records of our nation. We are building the capacity of the National Archives and these include the Government records, immigration records, photographs, books, maps and everything else that is recorded in this country that had not been dealt with before.

Mr. Speaker, when I was at the office of the Prime Minister and the URP's management administrative arm was under the Office of the Prime Minister, I visited the head office at El Socorro, and when I walked in the morning to sit with the management there, I saw staff dressed up looking like forensic people, you know, those crime people in all their white garments from head to toe and in gloves and mask and respirators. So I thought that somebody died, and they said, no, they are going into the records centre of the URP. Why did they have to dress

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like that? Because the conditions under which those things are stored; and there are mites and all of the insects and stuff like that. They have been getting rashes and infections on their skins, so they now have to clothe themselves like these people who are coming there all in white and all clothed and stuff like that. And a lot of those records are no longer good.

That is important. The records of a society are important. We are now strengthening the capacity of the National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago, and many of these records are exceptional in the way they reveal our heritage and enable us, as a nation, to have a better understanding of Trinidad and Tobago, having a better understanding of our ancestors.

Mr. Speaker, I know you would ask me if I need more time. Yes, I will.

Miss Hospedales: No.

Hon. Member: Take your time.

Hon. R. Samuel: Yet, this institution called the National Archives has been allowed to rot for many, many years, allowed to be forgotten under the last administration. During the life of the National Archives of Trinidad and Tobago it had been callously tossed from ministry to ministry. This was due to the lack of understanding of its purpose, the lack of understanding of its importance, an understatement of its potential, a disregard for its stature as a repository of the history of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

But it is now under this Ministry, the Ministry of National Diversity and Social Integration, that the National Archives has been given a home. We acknowledge its national importance and our national responsibility. And how do we do this? We are in the process of changing the direction in the way in which records are managed across the public service.

To this end, we are collaborating with the Ministry of Public Administration to develop a record and information management programme to treat with all formats, with emphasis on the digital media which is aligned to e-Government initiatives. It is important for us to say that. We are modernizing the operations of the National Archives. We have invested in the wide format and microfilm scanners to digitalize the archival collections which will improve access to records, allowing persons to view the records online.

We are working with them. We are working and ensuring, since under this Ministry, the 2006 promised purpose-built building for the National Archives project will be realized—since 2006—because nobody took it on. Nobody took it

on because they never saw the importance, as they have never seen the importance of a lot of other stuff. We have improved accessibility to the facilities. We have ensured that it is user-friendly for even people with disabilities, and the public now can go to the National Archives and begin to search their history.

Mr. Speaker, following the Prime Minister's visit to India in 2012, the Ministry of National Diversity and Social Integration, via the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, initiated discussions under the programme of cultural exchanges with the Government of India for the exchange of records of the Indian indentureship system, 1845 to 1917. At present, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is drafting the memorandum of understanding to facilitate the exchange. So what is going to happen, through that process we will have access to records of even indentured labourers who came to Trinidad and Tobago, and people can go to the archives and begin to research their ancestry and their heritage. It is important for us to see that, and we want to do that across Trinidad and Tobago. We want to make sure that our history is not lost.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the question is that the speaking time of the hon. Minister of National Diversity and Social Integration be extended by 10 minutes.

Question put and agreed to.

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

Hon. R. Samuel: I tell you, Mr. Speaker, they are not interested in the preservation of the history of Trinidad and Tobago and the things of Trinidad and Tobago, and it does not matter what time it takes, we have got to do it, and all of us may be here.

Mr. Speaker, we have embarked upon the development of another rich aspect of our history, Nelson Island, that has been, for some time, left undone, and through this Ministry, a developmental work had begun to build and bring Nelson Island into that tourist kind of attraction that it should be. The work began under the former Minister and we continue to do the work even to today. With that, the members of the National Trust had visited Ellis Island earlier this year to partner with Ellis Island in the development because the history of the both islands are similar.

It is said that in Ellis Island alone, on a daily basis, you have some 1,000 to 2,000 people passing through that island on a regular basis, from a tourist

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standpoint, and if we could achieve that for Nelson Island, or even half of that, then we would now bring tourists to Trinidad and Tobago to understand the dynamics of our rich history.

Hon. Member: That is right.

Hon. R. Samuel: Mr. Speaker, I want to shift a little bit and talk about Arima and the work that has been done in Arima because that is the constituency that I represent and it is important for me to deal with the things that have been done. But in so dealing with the things that have been done in the last couple years, it really tells a story of the extent and the magnitude of the neglect of a constituency of that nature—a constituency of that nature that was governed by the Opposition—by the PNM—from its inception. It changed hands in 1986 under the NAR; it returned to them five years after, and then it remained there ever since until 2010.

Mr. Speaker, I am still startled; I am amazed; I am shocked because of the amount of work that we have had to do in four years, which would say that it is the amount of neglect that has taken place for the last 30/40 years.

Hon. Member: That is right.

Hon. R. Samuel: That is where the problem is. You know, every time you hear about development, they keep saying it is only one set of people being developed. But what happened when they were in power? What happened when they governed these constituencies all the time? And what kind of development that took place? I mean, roads, upon roads, upon roads, have been resurfaced and milled and paved by this Government, in Arima. I mean, drains upon—we have to be so focused on the infrastructure now because of the magnitude of the neglect, and we have to build these constituencies up to a point where we can begin to shift and do other social aspects of development because our energies are now drained in dealing with the infrastructural neglect, that to balance it off, it is a tough thing but we have to.

12.20 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, the neglect had been rampant, it had been rampant. Again, I thank the Minister of Works and Infrastructure who, every time you call on him he would always say, “I’ll check on that” and we get the stuff done. Take a drive on the Blanchisseuse Road now, wow. You will be amazed. You would be surprised by the magnitude of development that takes place. As a matter of fact, Tobagonians have a way of saying if you come to Tobago it is the capital of

paradise. Well, go to the Balanchisseuse Road, and it is the place called heaven. It is the closest thing to heaven you can find now, because of the extent and the magnitude of the development of 26 miles of road that had not been undertaken before to the magnitude we have had to do it, Member for Caroni East. Because, really, there was never the development of drainage and all these things on those roads for 20, 30, 40 years. Now, it is being done by whom? By this Government, a promise that we made in 2010 that we will embark upon the development of the Blanchisseuse Road. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, when you think about it, what can they say about us when it comes to our performance? What can they really say?

Hon. Member: Unparalleled.

Hon. R. Samuel: Unparalleled.

Mr. Speaker, I remember, around the Arima Health Facility, ambulances, for years, had to come up John Shaw Avenue. To enter the facility you had to go all around the Princes Royal Park; people died on the way around the Princes Royal Park to the hospital on the other side. We took office and I called the Minister of Works and Infrastructure, then, and I said, "I need a road from John Shaw Avenue into the hospital as an emergency road." Done; within a few weeks, road finished. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, now nobody has to die going around the Princes Royal Park. As a matter of fact, we named that road after one of our leading cricketers, I think it was Philbur Prince

Dr. Gopeesingh: Prince Bartholomew.

Hon. R. Samuel: Prince Bartholomew, sorry. We named it after Prince Bartholomew.

Dr. Gopeesingh: I took over from him.

Hon. R. Samuel: That is right. [*Laughter*] Prince Bartholomew, we named it after him, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, but the strange thing about it is that—[*Interruption and laughter*]

Mr. Speaker, you know what hurts the most? What hurts the most? Many of these things that we have been now made to do are common-sense things. Many of these things that we are now doing are common-sense things. It does not take being a rocket scientist to know that you cannot have people who are ill travelling so far around to get back to the point. The distance between one road and the entrance to the hospital is like from you to the end of this room, but they have to

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go around four, five miles to get there. It does not make sense. Those are common-sense things. A lot of the stuff that are being done now are common-sense things and we have to do them.

Mr Speaker, the Arima hospital, it is coming, the sign is up. The sod will be turned shortly—[*Desk thumping*—]and the work would begin. Something that Arimians cried out for for years. As a matter of fact, one politician said, “Arimians do not need a hospital, they need a morgue because they do not get sick, they does dead”; another one said, “If Trinidad was a donkey, Arima is something under the tail”; then another one came and said, “Arima was bush.” They have tried to degrade Arima so much it is a shame. You know something, Arima had a few ministers of health pass through, eh; from John Rahael to—you name them, they lived in Arima, but they could not push to have a proper hospital built in Arima. This Government will start the hospital in Arima. [*Desk thumping*] A new hospital in Arima, it will start this year. You understand?

Mr. Speaker, I could go on and on, but you know something? I am so elated that what we have been able to do in four years, they have not been able to do in 40 years. Yet, they have the audacity to come in this House and criticize this budget, a budget for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, God bless us in this country, through this Government. [*Desk thumping*]

God bless us.

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 Monday, September 15, 2014 at 10.00 a.m. to continue debate on an Act to provide for the Service of Trinidad and Tobago for the Financial Year ending on the 30th day of September, 2015.

I beg to move.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 12.23 a.m.