

SENATE*Monday, May 15, 2017*

The Senate met at 1.30 p.m.

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

Madam President: Hon. Senators, I have granted leave of absence to Sen. Daniel Solomon who is out of the country.

SENATOR'S APPOINTMENT

Madam President: Hon. Senators, I have received the following correspondence from His Excellency the President, Anthony Thomas Aquinas Carmona O.R.T.T., S.C.:

“THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

APPOINTMENT OF A TEMPORARY SENATOR

By His Excellency ANTHONY THOMAS AQUINAS CARMONA, O.R.T.T., S.C., President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces.

/s/ Anthony Thomas Aquinas Carmona O.R.T.T. S.C.
President.

TO: MS. CHRISTLYN MOORE

WHEREAS Senator DANIEL SOLOMON is incapable of performing his duties as a Senator by reason of his absence from Trinidad and Tobago:

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NOW, THEREFORE, I, ANTHONY THOMAS AQUINAS CARMONA, President as aforesaid, in exercise of the power vested in me by section 44(1)(a) and section 44(4)(b) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, acting in accordance with the advice of the Leader of the Opposition, do hereby appoint you, CHRISTLYN MOORE, to be temporarily a member of the Senate, with effect from 15th May, 2017 and continuing during the absence from Trinidad and Tobago of the said Senator Daniel Solomon.

Given under my Hand and the Seal of the
President of the Republic of Trinidad
and Tobago at the Office of the
President, St. Ann's, this 15^h day of
May, 2017."

OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

Senator Christlyn Moore took and subscribed the Oath of Allegiance as required by law.

CONDOLENCES

(MR. RENNIE DUMAS)

Madam President: Hon. Senators, as you are aware, former Senator and Minister, Mr. Rennie Dumas passed away on Sunday, May 14, 2017. I now invite you to offer tributes.

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan):

Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, it is with the deepest regret and sadness that I rise to pay tribute to a former colleague, friend and in PNM terms, "A true soldier in the Red Army", Mr. Rennie Dumas, aka "Stretch". His death means something very personal to me, because both of us became ill

around the same time in December of last year.

I recalled vividly, immediately after my surgery, a couple days after, when the Prime Minister visited me at the hospital, he indicated to me that, “Boy, you know, Stretch suffered a stroke”, and since then I have been getting almost weekly updates of his health from Aunty Joan, whom I call the mother of the PNM.

Madam President, Trinidad and Tobago, and in particular, the people of Tobago, have lost a true patriot, a hard-working and dedicated public servant and a Tobagonian to his heart. Mr. Dumas and I served in the Manning Cabinet when he was Minister of Public Utilities and, later, Minister of Local Government. After the 2007 election, he was appointed Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development. And the parliamentary document outlines, in some details, his career but I will just go through his Ministerial responsibilities: Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development from November 2007 to May 2010; Minister of Local Government from November 2003 to November 2007; Minister of Public Utilities and the Environment, October 2002 to November 2003; Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister, December 2001 to October 2002. He was an Opposition Senator from January 2001 to October 2001. Then he became the Member of Parliament for Tobago East in 2007 to 2010.

Madam President, as a Minister, an MP and a Senator, he was clear and articulate and had an organized and an analytical mind and I must say, he performed creditably in all the various portfolios that he held, and in particular, when I joined this Government in 2015 and I was given the portfolio of Minister of Rural Development and Local Government where we championed the local government reform process, Mr. Dumas was very instrumental in assisting me in that exercise.

But, Madam President, my closest association with him was through the party. He served as Education Officer and Research Officer of the Tobago Council of the PNM. He was the Tobago's representative on the General Council of the People's National Movement. He was one of the more influential voices in the PNM changing its constitution which resulted in the formation of the Tobago Council of the PNM, the single act that has caused us to rebound in the politics of Tobago so that today we are an extremely strong force on our sister island.

He was elected Member of Parliament for Tobago East in 2007. He played a critical role in all THA elections. And I must say today that, probably bar Orville London, he is one of the most influential persons responsible for the current strength of the PNM in the island of Tobago.

In the last couple of years he played a leading role in the drafting on the policy of Tobago's autonomy and full internal self-government. He even went ahead and became the Campaign Manager for Mrs. Ayanna Webster-Roy who successfully contested election in Tobago East and won. Whenever called to serve, in whatever capacity, big or small, in front or from behind, he was always willing, a true servant of the people.

On behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, the Members of this side of the Senate and on behalf of the PNM family, I extend my deepest condolences to his family and friends, especially his wife and children, to the people of Tobago and in particular the people of Tobago East. May his soul rest in eternal peace.

Sen. Christlyn Moore: It is with great regret that I offer my condolences to the family of the deceased, Mr. Dumas. This regret is really heartfelt because he was a family friend. In fact, his friendship crystalized through his relationship with my father. They were inseparable for a number of years. They were cronies, they

Condolences (Mr. Rennie Dumas) (cont'd)
Sen. The Hon. F. Khan (cont'd)
Sen. Moore (cont'd)

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were best friends, they were partners, they were confidants and I would bump into them in the oddest of places. They were inseparable for a time before my father had his own stroke and Mr. Dumas, “Stretch”, became a real helper.

The people of Plymouth, Tobago offer their condolences because their relationship with Rennie Dumas was much more personal. He was a son of that community, a member of the Men of Exile, “Rat oil”, “Stretch”. He was one of ours. He could be found at village watering holes and at community activities in Plymouth and across the island.

My last encounter with Rennie was at a political meeting that my party held in Plymouth and he attended. He would attend all my political meetings held in that constituency out of respect for the relationship that he had with my father and out of our long-standing relationship. He would always stay to offer words of encouragement and advice and to give me a hug and to share some moment of levity.

Rennie Dumas in the last months of his life really experienced a reality that was different. He suffered great hardship. Great personal hardship befell him and he appeared to be alone. Personal hardship, Madam, is not a stranger to any of us and it is in these times where we are stretched that indeed we seek the comfort of Almighty God and the comfort of our friends and our family. When Rennie Dumas found himself at the feet of hardship, his friends and family, his true friends and his real family were there to support him, to anoint him, to pray for him and to administer to him.

On behalf of the people of Plymouth, on behalf of the people of Tobago, on behalf of the Tobago Forwards and on behalf of my own family, I offer sincerest condolences for the great loss to the community of Plymouth and the people of

Condolences (Mr. Rennie Dumas) (cont'd)
Sen. The Hon. F. Khan (cont'd)
Sen. Moore (cont'd)

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Tobago on the passing of Rennie Dumas. May his soul rest in peace and may he be received into the company of angels. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. David Small: Thank you very much, Madam President. The Independent Bench learnt with deep sadness of the passing of the former Member of Parliament, Senator and Minister, Rennie Dumas. He served the people of Trinidad and Tobago with distinction in these various capacities for just over a decade.

With the passing of “Stretch”, as he was affectionately known, I want to share that when he was Minister of Labour—the Ministry to which I was attached, the Ministry of Energy, we shared the same building, a building just down the street there, and because we shared the same building and we would also meet each other at events throughout the Ministry and he was one that was always known as one of the most affable Ministers that we had at that time.

So, while his passing evokes a sense of sadness and loss, it is also a celebration of his legacy of selflessness and self-sacrifice for the greater good. This is a great loss for us all as we are left without an individual dedicated to the advancement of Trinidad and Tobago; an individual who was actively engaged in the building and development and advancement of our country.

In honour of this remarkable political stalwart and the legacy he leaves behind, we urge all of us to be cognizant of his triumph through struggle and that he was one of the more understated persons of his generation, but he dedicated his life to the bringing about of meaningful change.

On behalf of the Members of the Independent Bench and all of our families, I would like to offer our sincerest condolences to the family of the late Rennie Dumas. In this time of great sadness, I pray for God’s comfort upon them. May

Condolences (Mr. Rennie Dumas) (cont'd)
Sen. The Hon. F. Khan (cont'd)
Sen. Small (cont'd)

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his immortal memory and the fact that he is in the great beyond be a source of comfort to them, even though they mourn his untimely passing.

Thank you, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President: Hon. Senators, I wish to join with the previous speakers here today in expressing sympathy and condolences to the family of Rennie Dumas. I also wish to endorse what has been said about him. Rennie Dumas was more than a parliamentarian to me; he was a friend. And while that friendship began as a result of politics, and our starting our parliamentary life together as Opposition Senators in 2001, it continued beyond politics in 2010 when he ceased being a Member of Parliament. Everyone hears about the harshness of political life and the few friendships that endure. I am certainly happy that ours did.

Rennie Dumas had an innate wisdom and understanding of human nature, and how the world operates. That trait in and of itself made him an excellent politician and an extremely effective Minister. He was always prepared to speak in Parliament on any topic, sometimes at a moment's notice and what a speaker he was. Many of us will remember his booming voice and towering presence in both this Chamber and the other place. Many of us will also remember his love and passion for Tobago which were limitless.

It is with more than mere passing melancholy that one observes that we seem to be paying tribute to deceased former Members of Parliament quite often these days. We mourn every such loss as we do this one. I once again join in paying tribute to Rennie Dumas and in thanking him for his service to Trinidad and Tobago. May his soul rest in peace.

Hon. Senators, I will instruct the Clerk of the Senate to convey to his family the sentiments that we have expressed here today. Hon. Senators, I now ask that

Condolences (Mr. Rennie Dumas) (cont'd)
 Sen. The Hon. F. Khan (cont'd)
 Madam President (cont'd)

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we observe a minute of silence.

The Senate stood.

FINANCE (VARIATION OF APPROPRIATION) (FINANCIAL YEAR 2017) BILL, 2017

Bill to vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorised by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2017) Act, 2016, brought from the House of Representatives [*The Minister of Finance*]; read the first time.

Motion made: That the next stage of the Bill be taken later in the proceedings.
 [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

Question put and agreed to.

PAPERS LAID

1. Annual Report of the First Citizens Asset Management Limited for the year 2016. [*The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]
2. Annual Administrative Report of the National Maintenance Training and Security Company Limited (MTS) for the year ended December 31, 2015. [*The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan)*]

URGENT QUESTIONS

International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (Measures to Address Claims)

Sen. Wade Mark: Thank you, Madam President. To the hon. Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs: What immediate measures are being taken to address claims contained in the 2016 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report that Trinidad and Tobago is a money-laundering jurisdiction?

Madam President: Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs, you have two minutes.

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The Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Dennis Moses):

Madam President, the 2017 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report is an annual report by the United States Department of State to the US Congress which is prepared in accordance with the Foreign Assistance Act. The reference report released in March of this year outlines the efforts of countries with respect to initiatives against all aspects of the international drug trade in the calendar year 2016.

The report comprises two volumes. Volume I deals with drug and chemical control, while volume II deals with money laundering and financial crimes. Information available indicates that Trinidad and Tobago is currently non-compliant with the Global Forum standard for the exchange of information on request for tax purposes. Trinidad and Tobago has committed to the new Global Forum standard for the exchange of information for tax purposes and to commence the exchange of information according to the new standard by 2017.

In an effort to improve Trinidad and Tobago's current Global Forum rating, a number of actions were undertaken. In January of this year, Global Forum's approval was obtained to defer Trinidad and Tobago's commitment to commence exchanging information automatically in accordance with the new standard from 2017 to 2018. On April 7th of this year, Trinidad and Tobago applied to the Global Forum—Fast-Track Procedure and also requested to become party to the multilateral convention on mutual assistance in tax matters and intends to become party to the Multilateral Competent Authority Agreement—[*Interruption*]

Madam President: Minister, your time is up.

Sen. The Hon. D. Moses: Thank you very much.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, could the hon. Minister indicate whether this action by the United States will impact in any negative way on any assistance to

this country in its fight against money laundering?

Sen. The Hon. D. Moses: Thank you very much. We have no such indication or information—thank you very much.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, could the hon. Minister indicate, how soon action will be taken to address this matter as it relates to the image of Trinidad and Tobago within Caricom and within the international community?

Sen. The Hon. D. Moses: Madam President, we continue persevering in maintaining the deep and strong ties that bind the United States of America and our country and, as feasible, we would seek to meet our obligations in this regard.

Invasion of Locusts (Measures to Address)

Sen. Wade Mark: To the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries: In light of the invasion of locusts in several communities in south Trinidad, can the Minister state what urgent measures are being employed to address this problem?

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat): Madam President, I thank Sen. Mark for his timely intervention. Madam President, the current problems we experienced with the locusts in Moruga comes after a few infestations we have had in the past, the worst being in 2004 and more recently in October 2014, in Cedros; June/July 2014, in Chatham; and in 2016, September, Point Fortin. There are two ways in which we approach any locust invasion. It is a seasonal thing and one is proactive and one is reactive. Locusts have a particular nesting season which is in the last quarter of the year, September to December. So when we responded in September in Point Fortin, it was to deal with the locusts appearing for the purposes of nesting.

Thereafter, it is mainly reactive to deal with the offspring from the nesting period and we have had a particularly intense problem in Moruga. We have

responded by putting in place more resources in terms of labour, chemicals equipment. In the last month, the Ministry has provided an additional seven mist blowers and we have introduced two cannon sprayers to deal with the low-flying locusts and we have seen the results in most areas. We have divided the Moruga area into 24 areas. We have indicated which of those areas have high and which have low infestation and I believe that the Ministry is working to deal with the issue. We recognized that in a few areas, five areas, the infestation remains high and we focused on that in the last two weeks and we would continue to deal with the matter. Thank you.

Sen. Mark: Could the hon. Minister indicate, Madam President, how is this invasion, or infestation as he referred to it, affecting social and agricultural life in the communities that you have identified—the five communities or areas?

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: Madam President, the locust is a pest. It is destructive to the farmers. We have seen the signs of the damage on some of the farms and of course it is something that will affect social life and community life in the areas which are affected. In fact, in dealing with the locusts, we also have to be careful that we do not over spray, we do not spray in a manner that would interfere with other forms of activity, including beekeeping. So it is a fact, it would interfere with agricultural production and the lives of the community.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, could the hon. Minister indicate whether the Government is considering providing any compensation to farmers, in particular, who would have suffered enormous losses as a result of this infestation?

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: Madam President, it is not the policy of this Government or previous Governments to compensate on the basis of something like the locusts or similar pests, but as far as possible the Ministry would ensure that the farmers who are affected are provided as much support as we could

provide.

CDAP Programme
(Measures to Remove Drugs)

Sen. Wade Mark: To the hon. Minister of Health: In light of the Minister's admission that questionable drugs have been used in the CDAP Programme over the last few years, what measures are being taken by the Ministry to remove and replace these drugs from the shelves of pharmacies?

Madam President: Minister of Health.

The Minister of Health (Hon Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, first let me say that the CDAP Programme is an excellent programme that needs to be lauded and supported. At no time did the Minister of Health, myself, make any statement that CDAP drugs are not good. That was a headline in a newspaper which was a total misrepresentation of what I said in the Lower House. At no time did I make a blanket statement—and my *Hansard* will bear it out—that CDAP drugs are not good. What I said was that we are looking at two categories of drugs to treat hypertension and diabetes where the efficacy of these drugs, the anecdotal evidence over the years suggests that they may not be working as well as they should.

What I also said was that we may have some factual basis to support that. The drugs are not unsafe. They are safe. What we are looking at is their efficacy. Let me further state that since I have started to talk in the public domain about drug procurement as a whole, patients and doctors are coming to me in droves and saying for the first time there is a Minister willing to stand up for what is right for the citizens of this country as far as drug procurement is concerned. For too long, drug procurement has not revolved around the patient but has revolved around other interests, and it is this administration, starting with this year's procurement

cycle, that for the first time in many a year we are going to put the patient, and the voiceless patient, at the centre of our procurement cycle. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President: Hon. Senators, before I allow Sen. Mark to ask his supplementary questions, the time has expired for Urgent Questions, so with your leave, we will just allow Sen. Mark his two questions.

Sen. Mark: Thank you, Madam President. Through you, Madam President, could the hon. Minister provide the Senate as to when he speaks to the efficacy of these two drugs, could he indicate to us what steps or measures are being taken to either replace or remove those drugs, given the fact that the strength of those drugs do not carry what you would really be satisfied with as the hon. Minister of Health?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Madam President, what I can tell you, in speaking to about 10 physicians to date, what they have been doing over the years is simply increasing the dosage so that they get the bioequivalent dose of the drug. What we want to do with this procurement cycle is to make sure that every drug on our formulary—every generic—is bioequivalent to their brand names. And let me go on record again as saying, I have nothing against generic drugs. There are good generic drugs and there are not so good, same way there are good branded drugs and not so good. But we must ensure that in our public system that the drug procurement process is robust enough so that we could guarantee our patients a safe, reliable, predictable supply of drugs throughout the year.

One of the other things we are doing, Madam President, for the first time one of the biggest problems in drug procurement is coming down to the last quarter of any financial year where NIPDEC may have no guarantee of funding to place orders and NIPDEC has to wait until the start of the other financial year. We are now fixing that. So NIPDEC could start to place orders in the last quarter of

the financial year. So it is a whole revolution in the way we procure drugs. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Mark: In this revolution in procuring drugs, hon. Minister, would you share with us whether the source of the importation of those drugs that you have mentioned would be reviewed by your Ministry to ensure the efficacy is addressed?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Madam President, not only the source of those two drugs to treat hypertension and diabetes but we are reviewing every single drug on the formulary because we have noticed in recent years drugs have come into the formulary—to the national formulary—that have no right to be there.

I was amazed recently in looking at an ad on American cable TV and I saw a law firm put out an ad asking Americans to call them to sue a particular drug maker, and I said, “But that drug sounds familiar. It is on our national formulary.” And we are going to be taking away those branded drugs, too, that have no right to be on a national formulary. So we are reviewing the entire process to guarantee our patients and our physicians who are backing me in this process. Because physicians are actually saying: “Minister, for the first time we have a Minister of Health saying what we have been silently saying for years.” But their voices have been stymied.

So I give this honourable House and the country, by extension, that our drug procurement process is going to be radically altered to benefit the patients of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): Madam President, the Government is proud to say that we will be

answering all questions listed save and except Question No. 73, which we ask for a two-week deferral.

Co-operative Credit Union League

(Response of)

51. Sen. Wade Mark asked the hon. Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development:

Can the Minister indicate why only fourteen (14) days were given to the President of the Co-operative Credit Union League to deliver a response to the Draft National Policy on Co-operatives?

The Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development (Sen. The Hon. Jennifer Baptiste-Primus): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Madam President. The growth and development of the cooperative movement in Trinidad and Tobago is really one of the priority areas of work in the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development. This is coupled with the reform of labour and related legislation which is aimed at creating a more conducive, enabling environment for the promotion of decent work for all and the creation of sustainable enterprise and cooperatives.

To this end, Madam President, the first consultative process in which I engaged in when I became the Minister responsible for this portfolio was a consultation with the cooperative movement. These consultations were aimed at obtaining inputs into a national policy on cooperatives that would inform legislative amendments to govern the cooperative movement in Trinidad and Tobago. There were consultations held on January 13th and 14th in Trinidad and January 29th in Tobago. A wide cross-section of representatives from the cooperative movement, including the Co-operative Credit Union League of Trinidad and Tobago, participated in these consultations. The views and

perspectives shared at the consultations informed the preparation of a first draft of the national policy on cooperatives, which was disseminated to stakeholders on June 29, 2016, with an initial deadline of July 29, 2016 for the submission of comments to the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development.

It should be noted that the Co-operative Credit Union League of Trinidad and Tobago, on behalf of the credit union movement, requested an extension of time to August 30, 2016, to submit its comments on the first draft of the policy, and this request was granted. The deadline was subsequently extended to September 30, 2016, for submission of comments by all stakeholders. The submission of the Co-operative Credit Union League was received on September 16, 2016.

Madam President, taking in account the many comments and views received on the first draft on the national policy on cooperatives, the Ministry undertook a careful and extensive review of all the positions expressed and sought and developed a second draft of the policy which was disseminated again to stakeholders on the 31st of January, 2017. The deadline given to all stakeholders, including the Co-operative Credit Union League for the submission of comments on the second draft was February 15, 2017. I would have placed the league on notice to expect the second draft of the policy when I addressed them at a thanksgiving service and launch of their calendar of events on January 21, 2017. I also indicated at that event the time frame for the submission of comments on the second draft.

Madam President, unfortunately, my statements at that event and intentions were grossly misrepresented in one of our daily newspapers, the *Newsday*, which stated that I had given the President of the Co-operative Credit Union League 14 days to comment on a revised and contentious version of the Credit Union and

Cooperative Bills of 2014. As a consequence, therefore, I penned a correspondence to the editor and editor-in-chief of the newspaper conveying my concerns over the inaccurate report.

Permit me to clarify that we have not yet reached the stage of legislation at this time, as was indicated in the *Newsday* article, but we are rather focusing on ensuring that the national policy on cooperatives, which will guide legislative amendments, is finalized and approved by Cabinet. So that the 14-day time frame that was given to stakeholders was meant for the second round of consultation. Madam President, my approach, as the Minister responsible for this portfolio, has been to afford every opportunity for genuine consultation with all stakeholders.

Madam President: Minister, your time is up. Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: Thank you, Madam President. Could the hon. Minister indicate to this House whether the stakeholders have all responded to the second draft of the national policy on cooperatives?

Sen. The Hon. J. Baptiste-Primus: Thank you, Madam President. Indeed, I am quite happy, Sen. Mark, to share with you, the rest of the Senate and the rest of the country, that all the comments and views submitted have been collated into the Draft Policy and it is now before Cabinet for its consideration, and I hope we will have a decision soon. In that context, Madam President, I wish to expressly thank all the stakeholders who participated in that consultative process, and I also would like to thank the Commissioner of Cooperatives and his staff, and the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development and our hard-working team at the Ministry for working assiduously in crafting this document.

Sen. Mark: Madam President. Could the hon. Minister indicate, once Cabinet has approved the policy on the cooperatives, that that policy would be laid in the

Parliament?

Sen. The Hon. J. Baptiste-Primus: Madam President, I cannot prejudge what the Cabinet is likely to do or does not do. But in terms of the question asked, such a policy will find its way before the Parliament, but I cannot say yes it will, or no it will not because it is a national policy.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, I do not know if the Minister is in a position to answer this question, but there has been some contention for some time as it relates to where to place the cooperative movement in this country, and I know the final position was that it should come under the control and supervision of the Central Bank. Can the hon. Minister share with us whether that is the route that is being taken by the Government in relation to ensuring the financial integrity and stability of this vital cooperative body?

Sen. The Hon. J. Baptiste-Primus: Thank you, Madam President, and indeed I understand the anxiety of Sen. Mark, but I just want to point out to this House that the contentiousness which existed with regard to this particular issue did not occur under this administration. The contention lay under the last administration, and I worked assiduously for months, Madam President, to bring all the stakeholders together to make sure all hands were on deck. And I am quite sure, following the Cabinet's decision, I will report here what the Cabinet has decided. So I will report in due course.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, am I to infer from what the hon. Minister has said that all cooperatives, credit unions inclusive, will fall under Central Bank's supervision and management when the new policy is enunciated?

Madam President: Sen. Mark, I will not allow that question. Next question.

Murders Committed

(Details of)

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52. Sen. Wade Mark asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

How many of the fifty-four (54) murders committed within the first thirty (30) days of 2017 have been solved as at January 31, 2017?

Madam President: Minister of National Security. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Maj. Gen. Edmund Dillon): Thank you, Madam President. Hon. Members, official data received from the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service indicate that for the 30 days of 2017, 52 murders were recorded and not 54 as stated in the question posed by Sen. Mark. Of this number, seven, or 13.5 per cent, were solved as at January 31, 2017.

Sen. Mark: Could the hon. Minister indicate to us what actions are being taken by his Ministry and the Government to provide more resources to the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service to address this low detection rate in the murder rate as you have identified?

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: Madam President, the Government continues to work together with the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service to increase the number of crime scene investigators to expose them to a number of training institutions, both locally and abroad. Additionally, the Commissioner of Police has, in fact, taken particular interest in the detection. You will also recognize that part of the strategic pillar is, in fact, detection, and so we are working together with the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service to improve the detection rate as quickly and as fast as possible, Madam President.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, today is the 15th of May. I would like to ask the hon. Minister whether the detection rate identified a short while ago, whether there has been any improvement since the period of January. Or the information you provided a short while ago, would that be inclusive of today's date that that percentage of detection was, in fact, realized, given the 52 murders? Madam

President, you understand the point I am making?

Madam President: Yes, but I have to tell you that it does not arise from the answer that was given by the Minister.

Sen. Mark: No, no. I am just asking the hon. Minister, Madam President, whether the detection rate from then to now has increased.

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: Madam President, the detection rate as it stands to date is about 18 per cent right now—18 per cent, as of to date.

Madam President: Sen. Mark, next question?

Sen. Mark: Just a supplemental, Madam President.

Madam President: This would be your last, eh.

Sen. Mark: Yes. I thought I am entitled to four. I think I asked two.

Madam President: No, this is your fourth.

Sen. Mark: Fourth, okay, sorry. Madam President, I just wanted to ask the hon. Minister whether the 18 per cent identified, is it for crime generally, or is it in murders alone?

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: Just murders I am responding to.

Sen. Mark: All right. Thank you very much.

Madam President: Sen. Mark, you may have one more supplementary.

Sen. Mark: I will reserve that for the next rounds. Thank you.

National Gas Company

(Details of Natural Gas Supply)

61. Sen. Wade Mark asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries: Did the National Gas Company cut the supply of natural gas to any or all of the MHTL plants during the period May 01, 2016 to June 30, 2016 with or without MHTL's consent?

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan):

Thank you, Madam President. The National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited, the NGC, has advised that it did not cut the supply of natural gas to any, or all of Methanol Holdings Trinidad Limited (MHTL) plants during the period May 01, 2016 to June 30, 2016, with or without MHTL's consent. MHTL's three monthly interim contracts had expired and there was no commercial and/or legal basis for a gas supply. All three substantive MHTL contracts had previously expired way back in 2013 and 2015 respectively. In the circumstances, the affected MHTL plants were brought down by MHTL with NGC support in an orderly manner.

Sen. Mark: If I may ask the Minister, this same MHTL did pursue legal action against the NGC for breach of contract. Against that decision and action of MHTL, would the Minister not agree that there would have been some kind of activity that would have caused that legal action on the part of this particular company?

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: Not really, Madam President. That matter is being currently negotiated outside of the legal process and we hope to have a commercial settlement to that matter. However, since the plants were brought down in an orderly manner, the NGC has established an interim agreement which would end in June and which they hope to extend until the end of the year whereby MHTL will receive 164 million cubic feet of gas per day and they will decide what plants they want to use it on. So as we speak, some two or three of those four plants that were brought down are back on stream.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, through you, could the hon. Minister indicate what capacity in terms of operation these plants are at? Are they operating at 100 per cent capacity; 70 per cent? Could you advise us?

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: I am not sure of the exact capacity but I could take the

liberty to say M5000 is operating at full capacity. The other plant, Methanol 4, I think is almost at full capacity. The other three plants are under capacity. But as you know, there is something called gas curtailment which I will deal with extensively during my contribution later today.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, could the hon. Minister indicate whether with the Juniper Gas Field coming on stream shortly to supply close to 1.5 trillion cubic feet—I think about 530 cubic feet per day—could the hon. Minister indicate whether that is on stream, and when that does happen, these plants of MHTL will all be able to get their supply of gas to operate at 100 per cent capacity?

Madam President: Sen. Mark, that question does not arise.

Sen. Mark: Oh, it does not arise. Okay.

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: Later tonight you will hear the answer.

Madam President: Sen. Richards?

Accessibility of Public Buildings (OSH Requirements)

72. Sen. Paul Richards asked the hon. Minister of Planning and Development: Can the Minister indicate what is in place to ensure that public buildings meet the OSH requirements and are accessible to the differently-abled?

Madam President: Minister of Planning and Development. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very much, Madam President. The Town and Country Planning Division makes a direct effort to ensure that all new developments for commercial and office use in Trinidad and Tobago provide access for the differently-abled in accordance with fundamental principles set out by the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards, national standards “TTS/ANSI/ICC A117.1: 2014 Accessible and Usable Buildings and Facilities”. The division incorporates these considerations

into its development control operations by incorporating relevant requirements into permissions for development of land.

Madam President, there are two types of planning applications, namely, an outline and a full or final application. An outline application allows for a decision on the general principles on how a site or a building can be developed. A full or final planning permission allows for a decision on the detailed proposal of how a site or building can be developed. The full grant of planning permission does not in itself enable development to commence. There are other legal consents and procedural requirements to be considered prior to the issuance of a completion certificate by the relevant authority.

In this context, Madam President, attention is drawn to the applicant of the need to comply with all other statutory provisions, such as those contained in the Building Regulations and Public Health Act, Fire Regulations and the OSH Act. These are stated in the notice of the Grant of Planning Permission to develop land as conditional notes. Conditions in the Grant of Outline Planning Permission that speak directly to access for the disabled, include the following:

1. All new development must have access for persons with disabilities and those who are mobility impaired, incorporated into the design of buildings as an integral part of the proposal, e.g. washroom in public buildings should be designed for wheelchair access, electronic access doors, ramps and the like.
2. Parking bays for persons with disabilities must be located as close as possible to the entrance of buildings or premises and must be clearly visible with signs posted and marked with the relevant international symbol.

Madam President, the Ministry of Public Administration document titled: “Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago Office Outfitting Policy”, outlines the requirements and standards related to these planning designs and fit-

out of offices for the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. It also relates to privately-owned buildings leased for the office accommodation by the State.

The Property and Real Estate Services Division of the Ministry of Public Administration is responsible for the administration and property management services for all structures being used for public purposes and as a requirement, they confirm that all aspects of any building proposed for government use is in compliance. The assessment that they use is based on the informed reports of multiple agencies, including the OSH Authority as it relates to any building's degree of compliance with the OSH requirements.

As a requirement, all agencies, both public or privately-owned, must adhere to the regulations laid out in the OSH Act, No. 1 of 2004 as amended in 2006. Regulations, standards, best practices and codes of practice are also applicable. This policy ensures compliance with the relevant clauses of the OSH Act and perusal of the Act reveals that there is no direct provision on access for the differently-abled.

Madam President: Minister, your time is up.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you, Madam President.

Madam President: Sen. Richards.

Sen. Richards: Thank you, Madam President. Through you, thank you Minister, for that comprehensive answer. Through you once again, the Minister referenced new buildings and requirements for same. Can the Minister indicate whether the Ministry has done an assessment of buildings that may be older that may have been retrofitted to accommodate for the differently-abled, or there is a schedule for retrofitting of these?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very kindly, Madam President. Madam

President, the Ministry of Planning and Development has done an assessment, in particular of buildings for older persons which will entail an assessment of whether they have been retrofitted to suit persons who are differently-abled and the assessment continues. We have done specifically those homes for the elderly and we are in the process of doing other buildings which may not have been captured. And we are in the process of doing that, Madam President.

Sen. Richards: Can the Minister indicate if there a timeline, given the length of time the OSH Act has been implemented, for the retrofitting of those buildings and the completion of the assessment?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, with regard to the homes for the elderly, all homes have been examined. With regard to other buildings, we are still in the process of doing that and it is anticipated that by 2018 we should have covered all buildings.

Sen. Richards: Thank you Madam President. Finally—and I do not know if this falls within the Minister's remit. Has the Ministry also done an assessment of the state facilities in addition to access where technological aids have been provided for those persons who are differently-abled: sight impaired, hearing impaired, et cetera, for example, libraries?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: No, we have not, Madam President.

2.30 p.m.

Sen. Roach: Thank you. Through you, Madam President, can the Minister please answer, what if anything is being done to make the present Parliament compliant with disability access?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Madam President, the Parliament is in the process of examining what is available now. I know they have put some ramps in place, but a lot more needs to be done. And, Madam President, having brought this to my

attention, I will ensure that the Parliament moves assiduously to have it done.

Sen. Roach: Thank you, Madam Minister.

Sen. Ameen: Thank you, Madam President. I want to ask the Minister if there are any efforts from the Ministry of Planning and Development to work with agencies or bodies representative of the differently abled to standardize the designs, the measurements and so on, that you described earlier so that just as there are OSH specifications that OSHA supervises, if such a similar thing would be done for the differently abled fittings?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, as I indicated, when the Ministry of Planning and Development gives the approval, those specifications are stated in the approval to ensure that there is compliance with the approval that is given.

Sen. Khan: Madam President, I would like to inform this House, and yourself, that the Government is in a position to answer question No.73.

Madam President: Hon. Senators, I will therefore reverse the previous order that I had made. Sen. Richards.

Sen. Paul Richards: Thank you very much, Madam President, and thank you very much Minister of Planning for the answers to those questions. Question No. 73 to the Minister of Social Development and Family Services.

Management at Senior Citizens Homes

(Monitoring and Regulating of)

73. Sen. Paul Richards asked the hon. Minister of Social Development and Family Services:

Given reports of substandard care and management at several senior citizens homes, can the Minister indicate how the Government intends to improve the monitoring and regulating of these homes?

The Minister of Social Development and Family Services (Hon. Cherrie-Ann Crichtlow-Cockburn): Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, senior citizens homes are currently governed by the Private Hospitals Act, and this is within the remit of the Ministry of Health. On September 07, 2007, however, the Homes for Older Persons Act was assented to, and the Homes for Older Persons Regulations were subsequently passed in 2009 by Parliament. The Homes for Older Persons Act will provide for the licensing, regulation and control of homes for older persons in Trinidad and Tobago, and, upon proclamation, the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services will be responsible for the functions enshrined therein.

The Division of Aging in the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, in view of its mandate, the proposed Homes for Older Persons Act and recognizing some of the limitations of the Private Hospitals Act as it relates to homes for older persons, has been performing some of the limitations of the Private Hospitals Act as it relates to Homes for Older Persons, has been performing some of the functions stated in the Homes for Older Persons Act. In this regard, the Division of Aging has assessed 100 of the 187 senior citizens homes in Trinidad and Tobago in accordance with the standards of care and management standards outlined in the homes for older persons' regulation. This approach was implemented to, one, compensate for the shortfalls in the implementation of the Private Hospitals Act and, two, to prepare senior citizens' home owners for what would be required for compliance with the homes for older persons' legislation when it is proclaimed and enforced.

In terms of the two areas referred to by the hon. Senator, the assessment of the 100 homes revealed the following:

In terms of standards of care: 24 homes met the legislative requirements and

standards as outlined in the not yet proclaimed Homes for Older Persons Act; 42 homes had the required items, but did not meet the legislative standards; 30 homes did not have the required items and did not meet the standards.

In terms of administration and management: eight homes met the legislative requirements and standards; 33 homes had the required items but did not meet legislative standards; and 59 homes did not have the required items and did not meet the standards.

The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services does regular follow-up visits, both announced and unannounced, and we conduct those visits in collaboration with the Division Inspectors, sometimes with the assistance of Public Health Inspectors and the district health visitors of the Ministry of Health, and those visits are made to the homes that did not meet the legislative requirements and/or standards to facilitate compliance with the proposed Act.

In terms of action which is being taken to improve the monitoring and regulations of homes, the Ministry held a meeting in March with officials of Ministry of Health to address the inclusion of an inspector from the Division of Aging on the multidisciplinary team which usually inspects homes and private hospitals for the purpose of licensure, and this is to enable greater collaboration. In addition, the Ministry is working towards enabling the proclamation of Homes for Older Persons Act.

Thank you, Madam President.

Sen. Richards: Thank you, Madam President. Can the Minister indicate in lieu of the data given as to homes not meeting the care standard and/or administrative and management standards, what mandates have these homes been given since they learnt some of these homes are classified as vulnerable groups?

Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn: Thank you, Madam President. The Ministry of

Social Development and Family Services has been basically using moral suasion to convince the operators of these homes to comply with the provision of the Homes for Older Persons Act because it has not been proclaimed thus far, and we do follow-up visits and we seek to ensure that the homes operate at least to a minimum standard. In that manner, that is the best way we can at this time, to protect the vulnerable in those homes.

Sen. Richards: Can the Minister indicate if the data or assessment has indicated any instances of neglect, putting residents of some of these homes at risk as has been reported in some arms of the media?

Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn: Madam President, as at September 30, 2016, we had 157 reports of cases of abuse. Of those cases, 51 pertained to older persons' homes, a percentage of 25 per cent of the total cases received. As far as possible, reports have been responded to in real time, relative to the level of the crisis, however few reports are received monthly to assess those homes. What we have found also, Madam President, is that most of these reports are in terms of older persons being abused in their homes, not at the senior citizens homes, but we respond to all reports and we take the necessary action. Where necessary, if persons have to be removed, we remove them.

FINANCE (VARIATION OF APPROPRIATION)

(FINANCIAL YEAR 2017) BILL, 2017

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam President. I beg to move:

That a Bill to vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorised by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2017) Act, 2016, be now read a second time.

Madam President, unlike the other place, what we are debating here is the Finance (Variation of Appropriation) which is a Bill, which has five clauses and a

Schedule. The five clauses are: the title, the interpretation, the reference to the Schedule where we have the changes in the Heads of Expenditure, that would be clauses 3 and 4; and clause 5 also refers to the Schedule. Therefore, Madam President, let me just deal with the variations which are the subject of this Bill.

It my understanding that details of proposed changes were circulated to all Senators, this document. [*Hon. Imbert displays document*] With respect to these details, there were increases to 21 Heads of Expenditure and decreases to two Heads of Expenditure, resulting in a variation of \$1,188,684,544 under Recurrent Expenditure and \$209,441,000 under the Public Sector Investment Programme from the Consolidated Fund. The funding for this variation will be met from sums already appropriated to certain Heads of Expenditure within the appropriation Act, 2017, which was passed by the Parliament in October of 2016. So there is no supplementation of the budget. The total budgetary numbers remain the same, and this is simply a movement of sums of money from one head to the other.

There are five Heads of Expenditure that require supplementary resources in excess of \$100 million. These are: the Ministry of National Security, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Public Utilities, and the Ministry of Housing. The funds are required to facilitate payment for outstanding liabilities and to allow those Ministries to continue the effective discharge of their functions. The other variations are lesser in number, so I will just focus on these five heads for the time being.

The Ministry of National Security requires an additional sum of \$149.5 million, and from this sum \$22.6 million is to meet a funding shortfall to facilitate the payment of salaries and allowances for contract officers including contract officers in critical areas such as legal, project execution, ICT, CCTV, international

affairs officers, et cetera. The sum of \$126.9 million is also required under the Development Programme of the Ministry of National Security to settle outstanding payments to Huawei International and Huawei technologies for the supply and installation of telecommunications equipment and software, training and technical support for the National Operations Centre; and to Harris Corporation for the supply, delivery and maintenance and training provided in connection with a digital safety communication system for the police service.

With respect to Education, additional funding of \$180.5 million is required for the purchase of 13,600 laptops and 1,600 replacement batteries, a total of \$60.7 million. Servol is also being given additional funding to provide critical training and education, counselling and support at junior life centres, early childhood care and education centres, adolescent development and skills training and adolescent development programme, all run by Servol. Servol is being given an additional \$15 million for fiscal 2017. The National Schools Dietary Services Limited, our School Feeding Programme, is being given an additional allocation of \$50 million to allow it to continue to supply meals to primary and secondary schools students. YTEPP is being given an additional \$30 million to allow it to continue its skill training courses at its 26 centres. The Accreditation Council is being given \$5 million to pay arrears of salary and allowances stemming from previous industrial agreements. And finally for Education, a sum of \$19.8 million is being given to that Ministry to allow them to settle interest and principal loan obligations on an RBC loan for the design and construction of early childhood centres and primary and secondary schools.

With respect to Health, an additional \$196.5 million is being given to that Ministry to facilitate outstanding payments at three RHAs—North West, North

Central and South West—I am told that the others have not yet requested additional funds—for the supply of critical goods and services including medical supplies and equipment, plant maintenance services, food at institutions, security, medical gases, and for patient referral at private medical institutions.

With respect to Public Utilities, the sum of \$275 million is required to assist TTPost with additional allocation of \$42.5 million to meet the shortfall on its operating expenses for the balance of the year. Solid Waste Management Company, \$4.7 million to repay them, essentially, for the payment of the second tranche of arrears of wages and cost of living allowance to daily-rated employees backpay; and WASA, \$227 million to meet a payment of arrears of \$137 million to DESALCOTT and outstanding liabilities for security, electricity, facilities: lease and rental, et cetera, of \$90 million.

With respect to Housing, the money to be provided is primarily for loan arrangements in the sum of \$283.8 million to allow the Ministry of Housing to meet principal and interest payments on an ANSA Bank \$1.5 billion loan taken out by the previous administration—and I am told spent by them too—and to facilitate a debt obligation of \$13 million on a loan finalised in October 2016 with ANSA Merchant Bank being serviced by the UDeCOTT. And finally, to provide additional funds of \$80 million to undertake physical infrastructure work at several locations in order to provide security of tenure to eligible squatters who have satisfied the necessary requirements under the State Lands (Regularisation of Tenure) Act. These works for regularisation of squatters are estimated at \$75 million, and a further \$5 million is being provided to the Ministry of Housing to provide subsidies for low income families to finance home improvements.

To give effect to these increases and the other increases which are in the

Schedule, savings were identified from two Heads of Expenditure. The two heads being under the Ministry of Finance, savings of \$1,363,125,544, including \$86 million from the Food Price Support Programme. We were advised by the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services that they do not require all of the money that was originally appropriated for that programme, and therefore, the savings are available. From the Infrastructure Development Fund, \$1,257,619,525 is being made available; and from Caricom Development Fund, we have limited our contribution to the second funding cycle of the fund to a maximum of US \$10 million, or rounding that off to TT \$70 million for this fiscal year. With respect to the IDF funds, the fund is a rolling fund which has deposits in it just like the GATE fund, and the transfer of \$1.2 billion from that fund will not significantly affect the ability of the Government to do its capital projects because the fund already had a surplus in it quite close to that amount.

With respect to other matters, the declining oil prices have had an impact on petroleum product prices which have had an effect on fuel subsidy, and this has translated into a lower resource utilization under the fuel subsidy which has resulted in savings of \$35 million under the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries. So we are transferring funds out of the Ministry of Finance and out of Energy and Energy Industries in areas where we are able to do that without significantly affecting the Government's programmes, and the supply of goods and services, and our capital development programme. That is a summary of the major items of variation that would be contained in the Bill and would have been further expanded upon by the document that was given circulated to hon. Senators.

Madam President, I also now want to deal with a few other areas that are outside—to some extent—of the Bill, but—[*Interruption*] If you want me to sit

down, I will. I will be very happy. I mean, finished dealing with the Bill. Through you, Madam President, I see that the Opposition would like me to stop, but I do not think that anybody else wants me to stop. So that I will just report on a few matters.

Oil prices have fluctuated since October 2016 when the budget was read—September 30th actually—trading in a \$10 band between \$45 for West Texas Intermediate, which is the type of oil that is closest to the basket of crudes that are produced in Trinidad and Tobago, and \$55. So that we have seen the price of oil fluctuate between \$45 and \$55. Just before I got up to speak, I had a check on the price of oil and it was \$49. I heard you sotto voce, Sen. Small. So it has been fluctuating today between \$47.75 and \$49.66—it is about \$49. When I read this speech in the other place it was \$47. So it has gone up by a dollar, dollar and a half within the last week.

However, the economy has faced three years of consecutive, or three consecutive years of economic decline caused by a 23 per cent fall in petroleum output between 2013 and 2016, and I made the point in the other place and in order to ensure that we have no misunderstandings: In 2016, oil national production from all producers—not just Petrotrin, but from all oil producers in Trinidad and Tobago—dropped to 66,000 barrels a day. Now, for those of us who are familiar with oil production in Trinidad and Tobago, we will know that that is the lowest level for 50 years. That level was last seen back in the '50s and the '60s: 66,000 barrels per day and production went way up beyond that, doubled in the 1980s. But fortunately for a number of reasons including a concentrated focus by this Government on getting oil production back up for a number of reasons, to reduce the cost to Petrotrin of purchasing crude and also to generate revenue, we now

have oil production back up to approximately 76,000 barrels per day, and that is total oil production.

So oil production has increased by approximately 10,000 barrels per day since last year. However, it is still way below what it was in 2014. Oil production was over 100,000 barrels per day in 2010 and dropped about 80,000 barrels per day around 2014. So we are still below where it should be, and with that drop in production and a drop in price, because in 2014 the oil price was over \$100. I think it hit about \$108, \$109, \$110 in that year and then collapsed to below \$30 in early 2016, around February 2016, if my memory tells me correctly, it dropped to about \$27 or \$28. So there was a 75 per cent falloff in the price of oil while production was coming down. So that is, essentially, what is often referred to as a double whammy. So we got hit with a fall in price and a fall in production at the same time.

What this has done to Trinidad and Tobago, is that when you look at the revenues from petroleum as defined by the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund—and that is a good definition because you are looking at revenues from natural gas, you are looking at revenues from oil, petroleum is defined in a particular way—we have seen a falloff in revenue from petroleum—I have indicated this previously but it needs repeating—of over \$17 billion per year. So we have had a drop in national revenue, national income, of over \$17 billion per year, but it is more profound when you look at foreign exchange. What has happened, all our petroleum revenues are earned in foreign exchange and what has happened to our foreign exchange inflows is that we have lost US \$2.5 billion per year in foreign exchange inflow, and that brings me to the point of—I would not call it digression—I need to make because in the other place I made a comment that the Ministry of Finance

had asked the Central Bank when it is injecting funds into the system to ask the commercial banks to give priority to manufacturing and that led to a hue and cry and lot of noise. I am reading here from the *Express*, I think this was Friday 12th of May—so this was last week—and it is a statement made by the Dr. Farrell to the effect that we should not be telling commercial banks to prioritize forex to manufacturing, and that we are introducing exchange controls, and that the bank should resist this proposition, and it is if as we are going back to the old ECO system, and that it is going to lead to—I think the actual words I am seeing here—a royal mess, and I noticed some commentators who—I will say this very bluntly—cannot think for themselves, just like to piggyback on statements made by particular individuals because ipso facto when the person say them it is so.

You know, because so and so says something it is so, and then commentators just piggyback on that without thinking for themselves. I want to put into the record—because I am really getting tired of this—I have in my possession a copy of an aide-memoire dated Mach 02, 2009—'09, okay?—from the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago. In those days the Central Bank, from time to time, would send out a document, which is a public document, to all commercial banks, and this is an aide-memoire from the Central Bank, March 02, 2009 and it is entitled “Operations of Foreign Exchange Market”, and it had this to say—it talks about a number of things in the role of the Central Bank, intervention in the domestic foreign exchange market, exchange rate for intervention, exchange rate for intervention funds and guidelines on the sale of intervention funds—and listen to this sentence from March 02, 2009:

Intervention funds are to be used to settle trade related requests for foreign exchange from the public.

So at least for the last eight years—and I am told it goes way back before that—the Central Bank has been telling the commercial banks what to do with the foreign exchange that it injects into the system. Well, listen to this one. November 15, 2010, under the former administration here is a letter coming from the Central Bank, sent to all commercial banks, November 15, 2010. [*Interruption*] It does not matter. It is under the former administration. Foreign Exchange Market.

Over the last two months or so we have been seeing an increase in the level of cues reported by the commercial banks. The manufacturing sector has since indicated that it is experiencing acute difficulties in obtaining foreign exchange.

November 15, 2010, almost seven years ago.

Therefore, I am requesting you give priority to request for foreign exchange for imports for the manufacturing sector.

So when in my speech in the other place, I said I have asked the Central Bank to ask the commercial banks to give priority to trade and manufacturing, I was simply doing something that had been done in this country for more than 10 years, in writing, Madam President. And following the policy decision, the Central Bank has corresponded with the commercial banks as it has been doing for every two weeks for at least 10 years—so how many interventions are those? Over 200 times the Central Bank would have corresponded with the commercials bank and asked them when they are distributing the foreign exchange injected into the system by the Central Bank— Let me explain what that means.

3.00 p.m.

That is the country's foreign exchange. That is the Government's foreign exchange that it earns from the oil sector. The Central Bank, from time to time, will put foreign exchange into the system to top up the quantity of foreign

exchange available, but that foreign exchange belongs to the Central Bank. It is, in fact, the Government's foreign exchange that is converted by the Central Bank into TT dollars which it then gives to the Government, puts it into its current account and we run the country. We run the country with that income stream.

So that the Central Bank, for many, many years and at least 10, whenever it puts its own foreign exchange into the system, not the one belonging to the private sector, but the Government's foreign exchange will write the banks and say, please give priority to trade, please give priority to manufacturing. This has been going on for years. As I said, it may have happened, maybe, 200, 100 times. And therefore, for anyone to say that this is something new, that this is something strange, that this is going to wreck the economy, that this will lead to "ah royal mess". It does not make any sense. It does not make any sense.

Hon. Senator: "Farrell doh know wha he talking about then."

Hon. C. Imbert: It does not make any sense and I thought I should say that because I find that the commentary is just escalating as if this is something that has dropped from the sky and has never happened before. And I want to put on the record and I have put on the record what the Central Bank has been telling the commercial banks with respect to the distribution of foreign exchange. So I want to put that matter to rest.

Now, let me move on to another matter that has created a problem for us. In the other place, I made the point that with the assistance of all Members of Parliament, we are very hopeful that we can enact the gambling and gaming legislation this year, 2017, and put in place a gambling and gaming commission to regulate gambling because there is tremendous leakage of revenue in that area, and there are issues with money laundering, insufficient regulation. And I said in the

other place, I expect to get “ah pushback”, it did not take long. The casino owners and operators came out and said, “What is he talking about? This is all nonsense. There is no problem. There are no issues with leakage of revenue, there is nothing illegal going on in our sector.” Well, I have in my possession, sent to me today, a country report from the United States of America on Trinidad and Tobago, and a number of other countries in terms of money laundering and terrorist financing and things like that and on page 175 of this document, it says:

“Trinidad and Tobago’s AML”—anti-money laundering—“regime is unable to quantify the extent to which fraud and...corruption contribute to money laundering.”

It goes on to say:

“Money laundering occurs outside of the traditional financial system. While public casinos and online gaming are illegal in Trinidad and Tobago, gamblers take advantage of ‘private members’ clubs’, which operate as casinos and are able to move large amounts of cash due to Trinidad and Tobago’s lack of adequate AML...”—anti-money laundering—“supervision of this sector.”

And this is not me saying this, Madam President. This is the “United States Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, Volume II, Money Laundering and Financial Crimes March 2017”.

So that the point we keep making in this place is that because of the lack of regulation of the gambling and gaming sector, Trinidad and Tobago is continuing to be viewed unfavourably by the international agencies with respect to regulation of the casino industry and dealing with the potential for money laundering that could occur in that sector. And anybody who believes that these things do not

happen is just dreaming because if you look at what occurs in Las Vegas, Atlantic City and any other centre for gambling and gaming, they have very, very strict regulations and very tight controls and all of these activities are managed by commissions, by governmental commissions, because they know all the intendant ills that come with gambling: gambling addiction, tax evasion, money laundering and the kind of people that gravitate towards the gambling sector. I mean, I do not have to read and spell for Members here but all developed countries have put in systems because of the problems that can occur with this sector.

And I remember reading a report that Trinidad and Tobago must be the only country in the world with such a vast unregulated gambling and casino sector and I am certain that we are. We are probably the only country in the world that has a thriving gambling and gaming sector that is largely unregulated. We are under the guise of another piece of legislation, the private members' clubs. And the way private members' clubs are supposed to operate is that everybody joins the club—it is supposed to be not for profit—so that you pay your money and whenever you collect all the winnings, you are supposed to redistribute the winnings to all of the players. That is how the private members' clubs are supposed to operate.

But I mean, I do not think that a private members' club has operated in Trinidad and Tobago in that way for at least the last 25 years. I have never been to one. I am not a frequenter of casinos. I do not even know what the inside of a casino looks like. But, the fact of the matter is, this charade where they are operating under the private members' club regime, where nobody is supposed to be making money—as I said, all of the profits are supposed to be redistributed to the members. This charade is occurring right under our faces, right in front of our eyes. I mean, if you have a bar, I understand—and this is not coming from me,

you know, this is coming from Members of the Opposition—Opposition MPs, not Senators, elected Members of Parliament in the Opposition in this place, from the another place—have said if you go down south, you go into a bar, every street corner you meet a bar with a slot machine in it. I do not know because I do not go into these bars and I do not play slot machines but I have to go on what I am told.

And my understanding is that the enforcement of our laws with respect these matters is extremely lax. I understand that persons would register one machine, one, and it would just move around. So a person might be controlling 1,000 machines but they are only paying for one or two machines or three machines as the case may be. I understand they are even bringing them in like how they used to bring in foreign used cars. Bringing them in pieces and assembling them. I read that in the papers today. I read in the *Guardian* that there is an association that deals with this—not the casino, another association—and they said that they import these machines in parts and they assemble them and then they lease them to these bars and other establishments throughout Trinidad with some agreed arrangements. And I am told that the enforcement with respect to the regulation of these machines is very lax.

And what they do in other countries? These things have to be all online. They have to be connected, like lotto machines, so that you cannot have revenue coming in and revenue coming out without it being recorded somewhere. The weakness of our system is nobody records anything. So nobody is recording how much money is being put into these slot machines, nobody is recording how much money coming out of these slot machines and similarly with blackjack and roulette and all these other games. As I said, we are the only the country—it was the Western Hemisphere actually. The only country in the Western Hemisphere that

has a thriving casino sector with no regulation whatsoever.

So, we just have to keep pushing and I am very glad to hear what UNC elected Members are saying in the other place that they are all—they have given me some of the information and they seem to be very gung-ho in terms of addressing this matter and I would not say much more about it because it is before a Joint Select Committee. I have not spoken at all about our deliberations as you would realize. I have not mentioned anything that we have discussed. But I am hoping that out of the deliberations of the JSC, after we listen to everyone and we interview all interested parties, we will be able to get conclusion and bring this thing to finality and be able to enact this legislation and install the commission and have proper enforcement of the casino industry in Trinidad and Tobago.

I would not want to speak too much on property tax because I have received a pre-action letter. I think from somebody in this House, [*Laughter*] I am not sure. I think I saw a name in there somewhere of somebody in this House, I am not 100 per cent [*Laughter*] but there were a lot of lawyers. [*Laughter*] All UNC, every single one.

Hon. Senator: “Nah, nah, nah.”

Hon. C. Imbert: Anand Ramlogan is not UNC? Gerald Ramdeen is not UNC? “Come on, gimme ah break.” So I got a pre-action letter about property tax and therefore, I do not wish to say anything more than to speak in general terms about that tax, to point out that the rates of tax in Trinidad and Tobago are amongst the lowest in the world, and that no less a person than my predecessor in the Ministry of Finance, Mr. Howai, indicated in 2014 in his 2014 budget speech that property tax is a fair and equitable tax. So, Madam President—how much more time do I have?

Madam President: You have until 3.22.

Hon. C. Imbert: Okay, about 10 minutes. All right. I would just want to give some highlights of the fiscal outturn for 2017. As I indicated, oil prices have been travelling in a band between \$45 and \$50 but for the first six months of the year, I can inform hon. Members that oil prices averaged \$50.45. Gas prices, again, have been moving but mainly in an upward trajectory so that the Henry Hub price of natural gas, spot market price has averaged \$3.30 per MMBtu. Now, our budget figures were \$48 for oil so it is averaged \$50.45 and \$2.25 for gas, so it is averaged \$3.30.

We have had an increase in gas production. We had a strengthening of natural gas price as I have indicated, but we are still losing over US \$2 billion in foreign exchange which makes it quite difficult for us to deal with the demand for foreign exchange. We have seen an increase in tax collection from petroleum companies, supplementary petroleum tax, because we crossed \$50, became due for the first time for several years in the first quarter of this year. We have had an increase in tax collections from corporations, primarily due to the millionaire tax. We had some tax collections from individual millionaires as well—Sen. Ramdeen. *[Laughter]* And we had a reduction in collections from value added tax, possibly because of a decline in discretionary spending but also reduced spending by oil and gas companies. Our expenditure has been 14 per cent lower than projected. So we have been keeping a tight rein on expenditure so we are below our budget projections in terms of expenditure.

We had a drawdown from the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund of approximately US \$250 million but I am pleased to say that after the first drawdown last year of US \$375 million, the level in the fund went to \$5.4 billion

and in the last 12 months before we—actually in the 10-month period between the first drawdown and the second drawdown, we recovered \$275 million in income from the fund. So the fund went from 5.4 back up to almost 5.7. And in the two months since we have done the last drawdown, we have recovered another US \$100 million in—well, we have earned another US \$100 million. So basically speaking, the fund went from 5.75 down to 5.4 and we withdrew 375 to make that happen and, since then from the 5.4 to the time we did the second drawdown, we recovered \$275 million so it went back up to \$5.675 billion. We took out another 250, so it went back down to 5.4, the same level as it was last year when we did the first drawdown and it has now recovered to \$5.54 billion.

So the fund managers—the point to be made is the fund managers are doing very, very well. [*Desk thumping*] The fund has earned US \$375 million in the last 12 months, which you will appreciate, Madam President, is almost TT \$2.5 billion. So the fund has recovered extremely well. It is doing extremely well and I want to compliment the fund managers in terms of the earnings from their investments. I wish that some of our local institutions like the National Insurance Board could do a little better because the fund is generating about 6 per cent per annum in income and NIB is 2 per cent. So these are things that we, as a country, we need to look at in terms of how we use our savings and so on.

With respect to the downgrades that we received from Moody's and Standard & Poor's, the S&P downgrade was expected but quite positive in terms of the outlook for Trinidad and Tobago being changed from negative to stable, and let me explain what happens when you have a change in outlook. When you are on a negative watch, which is what Trinidad and Tobago has been on for the last several years because of the collapse of oil prices in 2014 and the corresponding reduction

in revenue from petroleum, the rating agencies put Trinidad and Tobago on a negative outlook—which stands to reason because we had a tremendous drop off in national revenue—and we got downgrades starting as far back as 2014, 2015. And because Trinidad and Tobago was on negative outlook, the rating agencies would do annual reviews of our credit rating and they did their annual review this year and they have downgraded us, both of them, Moody's and Standard & Poor's but they have changed the outlook to stable because they no longer believe that our economy is in a negative spiral. The two rating agencies now believe that our economy has stabilised and we now have a stable outlook.

In the case of Standard & Poor's, they gave us a triple B rating, which is still well into the investment grade rating, and Moody's put us into a Ba1 rating which is just below the lowest level in the investment grade rating. What this does, it affects our ability to borrow in terms of the interest rate that we will be charged by lenders when we go to borrow. And your credit rating is simply an assessment of what your interest rate should be and what your credibility is in terms of repayment of lending.

But one of the interesting things from Moody's is that when they did the rating, they made the point that Trinidad and Tobago has not—[*Interruption*]

Madam President: Minister, you have five more minutes.

Hon. C. Imbert: Sure, I am nearly finished. Trinidad and Tobago has never defaulted on a loan, ever. [*Desk thumping*] So that when we saw this, that Standard & Poor's was giving us an investment grade rating and Moody's was putting us below the investment grade but Moody's was telling us that the country has never defaulted on a loan, and there were some other issues that we found of serious concern with respect to the Moody's rating, because we made the point to

them that it is difficult to understand how a country with the following characteristics could be deemed to be a credit risk and the characteristics were: official reserves of US \$9.1 billion or 10 months of import cover; a Heritage Fund of US \$5.5 billion equivalent to 25 per cent of GDP and deposits in sinking funds—which we make all the time for the expressed purpose of repaying debt—currently totalling TT \$6.5 million in sinking fund set aside to pay debt. So you have a HSF of \$5.5 billion, 25 per cent of GDP, reserves of over US \$9 billion and deposits in sinking funds of \$6.5 billion, so we made the point that how is it possible for a country with all of these assets to be deemed a credit risk.

And the point is, when you look at these indicators, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, Trinidad and Tobago as a country, has the ability to repay its current central Government external debt several times over. So we have enough money in sinking funds, enough money in the HSF, enough funding in our reserves, to repay our debt several times over so it does not really make any sense and this is why we have decided, there are three rating agencies that are considered the big three. Standard & Poor's is the largest followed by Moody's, the second largest and the third largest is Fitch and we have decided that for balance, if one rating agency is giving us investment grade and the other is giving us non-investment grade, there is a disconnect here somewhere, so we have decided to approach the third rating agency to get a rating from them so we will have a balanced perspective so we will have a better understanding, whatever the rating is. Whether it is a good rating or a bad rating, it is necessary for us as a country to understand what is going on so we can take appropriate action. But we do not agree with the rating given to us by Moody's. As far as we are concerned, it is wholly unwarranted and this is why we are going to Fitch to see if Fitch will say

the same thing or if Fitch will agree with Standard & Poor's.

And with these few words, Madam President, I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Sen. Wade Mark: Thank you very much, Madam President. I rise to make my contribution on the Bill that is before us which is an Act to vary the appropriation of sum the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2017), Act 2016, and also to address among the issues raised by the Minister of Finance on the public finances of our country.

Madam President, you know it has been said that once you step into the water, you would have stepped and every step into the water represents the past, and if we are to liberate ourselves from the troubled water that we are stepping in and we have stepped, we need to literally leapfrog, take a giant leap in order to arrive at a new place. But what we have witnessed over the last 20 months is almost the same old, same old. We are almost in the same place. So the Minister has brought a Bill, as he indicated, varying from one head to another but as he also indicated, not increasing the appropriation through any supplementation, what we have a variation. And, of course, he has taken the time to explain to us, briefly as he has done, the fiscal outturn for the country over the last six months.

Madam President, what I would attempt to do in my brief period available to me is to examine the finances, public finances; look at what I want to consider to be the precipitous decline in our capital programme or capital expenditure, and to show with this capital expenditure decline, we are also experiencing job losses and poor economic growth or negative economic growth. Concomitant with that is the control or management of our foreign exchange and the precipitous decline in our foreign exchange between September of 2015 and the current time. We also need

to link this to deterioration in our dollar, depreciation in the country's dollar and, of course, when we look at the overall impact on the society and which segment of the society is carrying the burdens that have been placed as a result of these adjustments.

Madam President, the Minister has provided us with some information as it relates to the savings that resulted in the Infrastructure Development Programme being reduced by \$1.3 billion or thereabout. But what was also important to note is that the Public Sector Investment Programme for 2016/2017, for the first six months, was supposed to be \$2.7 billion. But what actually occurred was a disbursement of \$1 billion. So the capital expenditure programme of our country was reduced from \$2.7 billion to \$1 billion, meaning that \$1.7 billion would not have been disbursed for the capital projects in Trinidad and Tobago. That simply means that a number of capital projects that we were supposed to have come on-stream in the first six months of 2016/2017 were not realized. And as you know, that is critical for economic growth, for generating employment and jobs in our country.

And, Madam President, the Central Bank *Economic Bulletin* of 2017 revealed that our capital programme has been reducing since the PNM came into office. On page 30 of this *Economic Bulletin* dated March 2017, we saw where the 2014/2015, the capital programme was \$7.6 billion. Then when the PNM "red and ready brigade" arrived, it was reduced to \$4.7 billion and even though it was reduced to \$4.7 billion, the Central Bank was able to show that capital expenditure decreased by 76.1 per cent in the third quarter of 2016.

3.30 p.m.

So what we have, Madam President, is that in 2015/2016, the capital

programme went to 4.7. It increased and it went to 5.1 in 2016/2017. But, even though it has gone to 5.1 for the entire fiscal year, what we are being told by the Minister of Finance is that for the first half of fiscal 2016/2017, what has happened, Madam President, is that the Government was unable to implement its capital programme and was only able to utilize \$1 billion out of \$2.7 billion.

Now, Madam President, that has, as I said, implications for job creation, for economic growth, for capital development, infrastructural works in our country. So, what we have Madam President, is a situation, as the Minister admitted—we have had three consecutive years of negative economic growth in this country. And this fiscal year, even though the Minister, he did not say it today, but he said it elsewhere that he anticipates some small increase in real GDP growth come 2016/2017 fiscal year. But the reality is, Madam President, we are trying to determine where this economic growth is going to come from.

The International Monetary Fund, in its *World Economic Outlook* for 2017, published in April of this year, revealed that this economy contracted by 5.11 per cent in 2016. That is the extent of the economic contraction of this economy as at the end of fiscal 2016. The Minister is however saying that the Central Statistical Office, which is the only body that is responsible for issuing growth figures—*[Interruption]*—I read that somewhere.

Hon. Imbert: What is the source?

Sen. W. Mark: Your source?

Hon. Imbert: What is the source?

Sen. W. Mark: Your source is your document that you issued; your statement that was given to the House of Representatives, and is on the *Hansard* record. That is the source. *[Desk thumping]* That is the source.

Hon. Imbert: What is the page?

Sen. W. Mark: No you “cyah” tell me what page to go to. He is out of line. Yes, let me talk to you.

Madam President: Address the Chair please.

Sen. W. Mark: Yes, let me talk to you. Yes, Madam President. I am being disturbed. Madam President, I am trying to be very calm, but he is— So, Madam President, what is happening is that the International Monetary Fund has said minus 5.11. The Minister is saying that the economy contracted by minus 2.3. Who to believe? Who to believe, Madam President? What we do know, Madam President, is that the economy of Trinidad and Tobago has contracted for a third consecutive year. And from all indications, given the policy direction and trend of this Government and this Minister of Finance, the hon. Minister of Finance, we can anticipate, Madam President, a further contraction in economic output for 2017. There is no light at the end of the tunnel, under the PNM and this Minister of Finance. [*Desk thumping*] And in spite, Madam President, of whatever they may try to say—

And I want tell you, Madam President, the Minister of Finance has been providing this country with what I call questionable data. I want to be very charitable in my language. Madam President, when we look at the debt-to-GDP ratio as we decline in economic growth and the Government engages in huge borrowings internationally, domestically, Madam President, what are we seeing? We are seeing where Trinidad and Tobago has now crossed the 60 per cent threshold that the OECD countries have said that we should not go beyond. We are now 61 per cent debt to GDP. Thanks to the PNM and the Minister of Finance. That has been gifted to us by him and the PNM. And, Madam President, the borrowings are not

yet over.

So this Government, Madam President, has taken us from a position where the debt to GDP was less than 50 per cent or thereabout when we left office, and within 20 months, Madam President, it has gone to 61 per cent debt to GDP. And I want to debunk this argument that the Minister is attempting to peddle on the population, that we were responsible, the People's Partnership, the United National Congress, Madam President, was responsible for this huge debt that they inherited when we demitted office in 2015, on just about 50 per cent debt to GDP.

Madam President, what the Minister has failed to explain to this population is that when the mess took place in January 2009, involving Clico, under the stewardship of a governor, who is now advisor I understand, the Minister could disclaim that, but I understand he is an advisor to the current Minister of Finance, but it took place under the watch of that former Governor of the Central Bank, who failed to put in place certain prudential regulations to ensure that we do not have a Clico debacle. Madam President, that did not take place, so much so that Clico “buss”. Clico went belly up and they came begging for rescue, and the PNM rescued the Clico group in 2009.

Madam President, do you know what it cost this country? It cost this country over \$20 billion.

Sen. Ramdeen: Twenty-eight.

Sen. W. Mark: Well, the Minister is now saying that. You cannot trust his figures, but he is saying is 28. I am saying, Madam President, it cost us \$20 billion. But do you know what is significant about it? The \$20 billion, Madam President, some were raised by the former PNM, led by the late Patrick Manning and we had to raise another amount in order to make sure policyholders and other

creditors were not deprived and, therefore, the systemic risk to the whole financial order would not have been severe and/or grieved. So it is as a result, Madam President, of this intervention by the PP Government back then that caused the debt to GDP to rise from the point that it was, Madam President, to the point where we are now. It is largely responsible. So, I take umbrage for the Minister of Finance—

Madam President, if I may, I want to refer you to a document. It is the *Economic Bulletin* of the Central Bank, July of 2013. And I want to refer you to an article written by researchers within the Central Bank, entitled “The Impact of the Global Financial Crisis on the Fiscal Accounts and Public Sector Debt in Trinidad and Tobago”. It was prepared by Kester Thompson, Richard Cassie and Joseph Cotton. And I want you to listen very carefully, Madam President, as I read to you and to this honourable Senate what these gentlemen said in 2013, in this article about the bailout of Clico and the rising debt to GDP. Madam President, I quote on page 100 of this report:

“Total public sector debt (net of OMOs) increased from 24.4 per cent of GDP in FY2008 to 44.5 per cent in FY2012.”

I read again:

“Of this amount, \$19.7 billion (13.5 per cent of GDP) was due to borrowing to fund the CLICO bail out.” I go on, Madam President.

“The remaining 7.6 per cent of GDP can be attributed to borrowings related to deficit financing...”

Madam President:

“As a result, the Government did not have to borrow”—that is the PP—“to finance the deficits incurred over the period 2009-2012. In fact, if financing

related to the CLICO bailout is excluded, the central government debt actually declined by about \$575 million (0.4 per cent of GDP) during the period. Instead, the Government's cash balances at the Central Bank fell from \$17.7 billion to \$3.6 billion..."

Madam President, the point I am making here is that the bulk of the debt that was accumulated between 2010 to 2013, under the People's Partnership, came as a result of the bailout, which amounted to \$19.7 billion at the time. [*Desk thumping*]

What these authors are showing is that if you minus that, we would have been in a surplus situation. So it is very disingenuous, Madam President, for anyone to give the impression to the country that we saddled this country with a 50.1 per cent debt to GDP at the end of 2015 when, Madam President, out of that 50 per cent, 13.5 per cent came as a result of this debt of \$19.7 billion, and that was as a result of the Government's failure, the PNM's failure, Madam President, to properly regulate the insurance companies and the financial sector, Madam President. So, I thought it necessary to deal with this point.

Another area, Madam President, we need to deal with; our foreign exchange reserves, in September of 2015, stood at \$10.4 billion or \$10.5 billion, Madam President. I would give you the exact figures, Madam President, so I do not misquote. It is 10 billion, 459.2 million dollars. That is where we were in September of 2015. Today, the Government of this country has failed to generate, Madam President, any foreign exchange. Do you know where we are today, Madam President, in terms of foreign exchange? And it is depleting at a rapid rate. Today, as we speak, Madam President, as at the end of April 2017, our foreign exchange is \$9,053,000,000. It is just under. It is coming under \$9 billion; \$9,053,000,000, Madam President, as at the end of April. That is the state of play.

And, Madam President, may I advise you that if we did not go through with the Minister of Finance, on this so-called road show in the United States, and raise US \$1 billion, our foreign exchange reserves at this time would have been \$8 billion, because that \$1 billion, Madam President, that was raised, went into our foreign exchange reserves. So we are borrowing to buffer and to build up, Madam President, our foreign exchange. That is the state of play.

So this Government, Madam President, that speaks about prudence in managing this economy and dealing with the interest of the people, has been a total, complete and absolute failure when it comes to the management of the people's business in this country. Madam President, we can see it throughout the numbers wherever we turned, Madam President. Madam President, may I also invite you to look at the state of play, Madam President, as at the end of 2016, to tell you, Madam President, where we are with this particular regime.

This is Central Bank's *Economic Bulletin*, January of 2017. It is called the Statistical Appendix, Madam President. Madam President, when we go to table 1, we look at the third quarter of 2016. We look at GDP for the first quarter, minus 5.3; for the second quarter, minus 8.2; for the third quarter, minus 10.8. Madam President, if you go to the energy sector, minus 9.1, first quarter; minus 12.4, second quarter; minus 18.3, third quarter. That is the state of play under this administration in the energy sector. The non-energy sector is more different. First quarter, minus 3.0; second quarter, minus 5.8, Madam President, third quarter, minus 6.7. This is the state of play involving this administration. This economy has gone nowhere fast, Madam President. And the Minister of Finance and this Government, apparently do not have a clue how to rescue this economy, how to diversify this economy. Whether horizontally or vertically, they

do not have a clue. And what is happening, Madam President, it is the ordinary people who are paying the price for this Government's incompetence. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, now you have the Minister of Finance telling—now he has said, and okay Madam President, he has attacked his Chairman on the Board of Economic Development. The one in Friday's *Express*, the 12th of May, page 10, Trinidad Express.

“Farrell warns Imbert over Forex prioritising

It could lead to a ‘royal mess’”

This is what he is now saying, that Terrence Farrell is totally wrong because “he bring out aide memoir of 2009. He bring out aide memoir 2015” and he indicated that is what the Central Bank does.

You know, Madam President, when I listened to the Minister of Finance I thought I was hearing the former Governor of the Central Bank Clarence Rambaran talk.

Hon. Senators: Clarence Rambaran?

Sen. W. Mark: No, not Clarence Rambarran, Jwala Rambarran. Jwala.

Sen. Small: Freudian slip.

Sen. W. Mark: Jwala, Jwala. Maybe you are heading there after. Maybe you are heading there after. So, Madam President, when I listened to the Minister, because the Minister is now saying this is our money. But we always said that. So when the former Governor of the Central Bank indicated to the nation who was utilizing our foreign exchange, Madam President, it was our money. It was our money, Madam President. So the Minister objected to the behaviour of the then Governor of the Central Bank, and now you have Mr. Terrence Farrell on page—

[Interruption]

Hon. Imbert: Point of order, 47. The matter is sub judice.

Madam President: Sen. Mark, if the matter is in fact before the court, I would ask you to desist from speaking about it.

Sen. W. Mark: But let us go to the royal mess, which is not before the court. It is before this court, and this royal mess that the Minister has created as a result of his decision to request the Governor of the Central Bank, Madam President, to intervene and to distribute forex to what is called the manufacturing sector or class. Madam President, we would like to know how are these commercial banks to determine, Madam President, who to give and who not to give? Madam President, we learn, the Prime Minister told us, I think two years ago or just under two years ago, that there were billions of dollars stashed away, US dollars, at commercial banks. You have people, Madam President, hoarding foreign exchange. You have people—this is a serious matter. Where is the Minister going to get the forex to give to the manufacturing sector? Is he going into our foreign exchange to reduce it even further? Is the Minister going on another road show to raise another billion US dollars through borrowing? He cannot, because of the downgrading?

Madam President, where is money going to come from, or is the Minister going to raid the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund again, to give money to the manufacturing class? Sorry Madam President, sorry. Is he going to do it? So, Madam President, the question here is that the Minister is proposing a measure, at a time where forex is in short supply and where there is a lot of manipulation and possible corruption in the system today.

My information is that when businessmen, Madam President, go to certain banks in this country to request foreign exchange, genuine businessmen who are

involved in manufacturing, they are being told: “Listen, you can go X place or Y place, they have Forex at \$8 to one.” So it seems like the banks in this country, some of them, are in collusion with the underworld black market, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*] They seem to be in collusion. And it seems to me that whoever is doing business with them, they seem to be getting greater preferential treatment over those who they do not consider to be high-valued customers.

So Madam President, the question here I ask: How are we going to determine? How is the Minister going to determine who needs what and when and where? Who? Who is to determine that; the commercial banks? Well then, why do you not take that out of the commercial banks, Madam President, and put it into the hands of the Central Bank? Because the Central Bank used to conduct ECO0, ECO1 in the years gone by. Let the Central Bank handle that matter. Since it is our money, our foreign exchange, let Central Bank handle it, since the commercial banks seem unable and incapable of handling this matter properly and fairly.

Madam President, what about ordinary people who go to these banks and they want to get foreign exchange to import medical supply or to pay for their children's education? They are not been given any preferential treatment. So certain people are being given and others are being denied, Madam President. Where are we going with this, Madam President?

So it appears to us that the Government has been a total failure. Whether it comes, Madam President, to the issue of its ability to generate growth and create jobs in this country, it has failed. And you can see it in the data. Capital expenditure is declining in this country, not increasing, Madam Vice-President. In terms of the burdens that they have placed on the shoulders of the ordinary people, Madam President, that burden, in terms of the debt to GDP, is rising.

I would like the hon. Minister to tell this Parliament today when is he going to stop? When is he going to stop borrowing? At what percentage is the Minister going to say this is enough, Madam President? Well we are saying that we have had our fill. We are saying that the country is choking and we can no longer continue borrowing. The Government has to be creative. Like the frog, it must leap, Madam President. Make a giant leap and come up with imaginative and creative solutions, Madam President, in order to deal with the issue. So, but for the time being, Madam President, what the Government is doing is its favourite strategy. It is its only approach to things; increase prices, increase taxes, and borrowing. That is the only way, Madam President, it seems, that the Government is able to raise moneys in this country and, of course, the latest—[*Interruption*]

Madam President: Sen. Mark, you have five more minutes.

Sen. W. Mark: Thank you, Madam President. The latest assault is the property tax, and, of course, the people are fighting back. The people are fighting back this oppressive regime who is seeking to seize their properties in this country.

Then, Madam President, when that is not enough, they are now saying that they want to abolish, Madam President, the Inland Revenue Department, the Value Added Tax Division and the Customs and Excise Division, and bring into being a new revenue authority with an army of contract employees who will have loyalty to the PNM and not to the country. How can we support that? We could never support that.

Madam President, may I also advise the hon. Minister of Finance who is searching desperately for money, I want him to go to the Global Financial Integrity Report for 2013 and see where, in this country, Madam President, US \$33 billion trade fraud through mis-invoicing in this country for the period 2003—2013 and

they examined 2014 and they showed where US \$206 million the people were defrauded. Because of what? Mis-invoicing: under-invoicing and over-invoicing. So you could go on the website, look for what is called the Global Integrity Report for 2013 and 2014. And if you want to get some money, I ask you to go there, because there is where you can raise a lot of money. Do you know what is TT \$33billion being lost in this country between 2003—2013; and then they say in 2014 about US \$206 million were lost? Madam President, if the Government is serious about really getting at funds and trying to balance its revenue with its expenditure, you have avenues that it can traverse.

And then this other thing, Madam President, which is the final point I would like to raise, is the unemployment rate in this country. Madam President, it is almost laughable when we are told that unemployment is falling. How can unemployment be falling in this country when so many workers are being laid off? And Madam President, we have estimated close to 20,000 people laid off since the PNM came into office. [*Desk thumping*] So how can we be told, Madam President, that you know what, Madam President, the actual figure is falling? Madam President, I do not know to what extent the PNM Government is looking at underemployment but that is a real serious problem in our country today. So it is not only unemployment, Madam President, it is underemployment.

And in closing, Madam President, I want to ask this question. I read in the papers with alarm where the Public Service Commission of this country is delegating its authority to five Government Ministries to hire staff and to discipline staff: the Office of the Prime Minister, Public Administration, Local Government, Community Development and there is another Ministry, Energy. Madam President, that to my mind, is a most backward step, and unless we can see

evidence—Madam President, I do not even know if it has been gazetted but it is something that is totally unheard.

When I was Public Administration Minister under Basdeo Panday, I approached Mr. Ken Lalla to do the same thing and he told me this thing requires a lot of training for Permanent Secretaries, to ensure there is impartiality, fairness and neutrality in the public service. And I just want to serve a warning on this nation. It is a dangerous path that we are traversing and I call on the Public Service Commission to come clean and issue a statement to this country as to the modalities and where this thing was gazetted so we can properly understand what they are doing. I thank you very much, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*]

4.00 p.m.

Sen. Jennifer Raffoul: Thank you, Madam President, for the opportunity to speak. As always it is a pleasure and an honour to be here and to contribute to this debate. To put this in perspective, today's debate is on the Variation of Appropriation Bill, also called the midterm review. We are very lucky that we have the opportunity to contribute to it, because it is really an Executive function and we are the legislative arm. So I am really grateful that we have this opportunity.

As always, my intention is to serve and to be extremely succinct and to be technical and collaborative. My contribution today will be in five parts. First, I would like to give a bit of a kind of a macro overview of what are the international trends in economics. This is really quite relevant because a lot of times we continue the status quo without stopping to look at how everything is changing and this affects our taxes, the way we do business, and this division between public sector and private sector.

Second, I would like to comment briefly on the numbers. The Minister of Finance did a great job in going into a lot of depth, so I am going to just be very brief on my interpretation of that. The third part to my contribution will be looking at where I commend. I think a lot of things have been done right. Fourth, I would like to comment on the property tax; and fifth, I would like to give my technical recommendations on going forward, addressing the fiscal imbalance and the foreign exchange imbalance.

So first, looking at the macro overview of what is happening internationally. Historically, the rationale and the justification for a public sector expenditure mechanism was because private sector did not have large volumes of capital, or there were efficiencies and economies of scale from a public sector provision of services. Things have changed so much in the last 800 years since a constitution and this Westminsterial system was put into place. Oftentimes we do not kind of stop and look and say: What can we tweak? How can we make this better? Have we concentrated maybe too much power in the hands of the public sector? Because at that point in time it was rational and necessary, and now maybe things need to change and there needs to be greater partnership. What exactly is the justification and how does this affect taxes and how we do business on a day-to-day basis? How does this impact the education system, water, energy and electricity? Everything is really impacted on how we see a justification for public expenditure.

So the trends basically are that there is so much more capital in the hands of private sector citizens, and you can see the same thing in international institutions. Traditionally, there was the World Bank and the IMF and institutions that were Bretton Woods oriented. Now, there is Gates Foundation, et cetera. There is a lot

of international/global philanthropy that is led by millionaires and billionaires. So everything is changing and because of private capital being able to influence social impact initiatives. So this is something for us to, I think, just to keep in mind in terms of long-term trends and be aware of how taxes and international governance can be affected longer term.

Second, my interpretation of the numbers. We do have a deficit as well as a—my apologies, the word is escaping me. [*Interruption*] Okay, thanks. We have a deficit as well as a shortfall. The deficit is—we have had a deficit now for nine years. We have had a recession for three years. So we have been overspending for a lot longer than we have actually experienced a decline in revenues. So the decline in revenue has only been occurring over the last three years, but the deficit, i.e. our overspending, was occurring over the last nine years. This is really important to acknowledge that it is not because of Brexit, it is not because of international oil prices, it is because we have overspent and overspent.

Nine years ago we were projected to have a deficit—sorry, we were projected to have a decline in revenues and we ended up rebounding. We were very, very lucky but we still continue to overspend and overspend and overspend. So it is important for us to recognize that our current imbalance is because of our own overspending and not necessarily because of international factors. [*Desk thumping*]

The third thing I would like to comment on is my commendations. There were four things in particular that I really liked. I know sometimes we can feel sitting here that things go so slowly, but there is an expression that I learnt recently and I would like to share. It said that we often overestimate what we can accomplish in one day and we underestimate what we can accomplish in a year.

The last year and a half that I have sat here, I have seen a lot of things progressing, sometimes small, sometimes slow, but when you look back, a lot of things are happening, and I think it is important for us to commend when things are happening [*Desk thumping*] and it is because of the collaboration between all sides. I think it is important for us all to recognize that.

So what I liked in particular: the procurement board. I like that it is really finally taking a step towards having more oversight and transparency and more value for money. I really liked the Vision 2030 process. I think it is really important. I have recommended this before, so I am very happy to see it is happening that we set goals for ourselves beyond just economics. Economics is only part of our national development. It is important for us to recognize that it is not just about economic stability, but it is also about higher purpose, higher human potential.

The third thing that I really liked was the intention to reduce transfers and subsidies, particularly in gasoline by 2018 and having that defined timeline.

Fourth, selling of assets. I know that a lot of people might think that it is part of our national heritage to have assets, but I think we have to recognize that we do not necessarily have a comparative advantage in running businesses in the public sector. I think it is better for us to do exactly what we are doing, which is to move from that implementation role to a more facilitating and regulation role as a Government.

Fourth, I wanted to comment on the property tax. It was—the rationale and justification is that it is supposed to be addressing the fiscal imbalance, but the fiscal imbalance has been caused by overspending in the public sector, not by overspending in the private sector. Also, it is contradictory to me. I used to work

in tax and we have in our tax incentives, incentives to support home ownership. So it seems contradictory that on one hand we are trying to support home ownership, and on the other hand we are penalizing it.

As a stable society, having home ownership is recognized as something that is important for our economic stability. If we are constantly worrying about, you know, our bills every single month, it prevents us from progressing as individuals because we are so caught in survival mode that we cannot really progress as individuals and as a society. So it is important to recognize that home ownership is a good thing. It helps us to be stable and to be able to expand beyond just survival mode.

In terms of the penalty on home ownership, it again is an extension of penalizing emolument income earners which are already the brunt of the PAYE contributors for the fiscal revenues earned from taxes. There is so much uncertainty around it that a lot of elderly people and a lot of people who own their homes, but do not have a high income are really worried about how they are going to pay for it. I think we have to make sure that we remember that as a leadership, we are here to help support individuals and not to add uncertainty and stress.

I think also there is a negative aspect of it in the sense of—the rationale supposedly for it is that it helps to support local government; it helps to support neighbourhoods, roads, et cetera, work that is in local communities, but we do not have separate funds. Everything that is collected goes into the Consolidated Fund. So it is clear to me that it is going to support the deficit as opposed to really supporting local government. So we have to really look at what the alternatives are. I would not be serving my country if I was here saying I disagree with it, and I have no alternatives to suggest. So I would like to go into those alternatives now.

I see some short-term, medium and longer-term alternatives for us. In terms of short term: one, I think focusing on the strengthening of the Board of Inland Revenue. Again, I like that the Board of Inland Revenue is going to be strengthened. Currently though, we do not necessarily need to wait for it to be converted to the Integrated Revenue Collection Service. The EITI, the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, has said that there is so much leakage that there is so much more that we can be collecting right now without having to necessarily further penalize homeowners and add that stress and uncertainty to them.

So the EITI has said that when they started tracking the amount of revenue that was collected from quarry companies, in the one year that they started tracking quarry companies in addition to the petroleum and other resource-based extractive industries, when they started tracking the quarry companies, the revenues collected went from \$32 million to over \$1 billion in one year in revenue collections from one industry. So there is so much leakage that can still be targeted even without us necessarily creating the new tax institute. Once we collaborate between sectors and we have transparency, we can collect a lot more. So that is one of the short-term mechanisms. Forgive me, while I just check my notes.

The other short-term mechanism was something I had referenced in my last contribution about the policy-based loans available from the international financial institutions vis-à-vis the IDB and the Latin American Development Bank. We have the US \$.3 billion available from the Latin American Development Bank which works out to about TT \$2 billion. We have over time signed between five and six PBLs, Policy-Based Loans with the Inter-American Development Bank which vary between about US \$150 million to about US \$300 million, in total accumulating to about US \$1 billion which is about TT \$7 billion. Now, these are

short term. They are specifically for budget support. They are extremely beneficial in terms of interest rates. The institutions, we are member countries of the institution.

I stated before in the debate on the Latin American Development Bank, the institutions do not have a profit motive, so it is more like a cooperative for development. So the rates are always much more beneficial to go to these institutions than to private sector. Also, there is usually a grace period, two to three years, so that this kind of allows us to have a bit of a break before we have to start repaying them. So these are short term. In total, between the Latin American Development Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank is about TT \$9 billion, and it is disbursed over several years in different tranches, two to three years usually.

Now, this is a very short-term solution. It is not going to be something that we can continually be taking out loans for. So in terms of medium term, we have to really start looking at restructuring our economy, and not necessarily doing what we have been talking about doing for a long time which is diversification, because diversification, the way I see it, it is still very public-sector driven. It is still very much about the public sector deciding. There are the seven sectors where we see benefits. It is really more about how do we change the entire investment climate to make it more amenable for private sector to invest for there to be benefits.

So in terms of the current investment framework, we have the seven sectors we have decided upon and, of course, there is some rationality there. The methodology has never really been explained, but we could all see that we have a comparative advantage in the tourism product. That said though, there have been other sectors that were added over time without any justification.

There is recognition that it is better to have a strong investment climate. So it is not just about picking sectors and incentivizing those, but ensuring that any individual who has a comparative advantage whatever their specialty is, can then start the business and do well at it. So that is just a comment on the productive investment policy's framework and the fact that we need to strengthen the investment climate, and that would be things like having efficient ports, the ability to register online and pay taxes online making sure that services are really accessible to all investors.

Second, the social entrepreneurship incentives is a massive area of potential for us as a country. There are two companies that are great examples of this—they are local companies—and they are really pioneering work in their field. The interesting thing about them is that none of them fall into the seven categories of traditional investment incentives. So one company is Conflict Women, one company is Nourish TT. Conflict Women is a for-profit company. It is a social enterprise that helps support survivors of domestic violence and it helps them with psycho-social support, training, as well as with entrepreneurial training. It helps them with making jewellery which they then sell locally and internationally founded by Asiya Mohammed. It has really been helping women to be financially empowered to help themselves survive on their own as well as to have access to training and mentorship and healing from trauma support.

The other company that I would like to refer to is Nourish TT. It is a registered non-profit. So it is interesting, one is a for-profit and one is a non-profit. We do not have a way that a company can register as a social enterprise in Trinidad and Tobago. So Nourish TT is a non-profit. It is very recent. They launched about a year and a half ago, and they have done a phenomenal job. They

take waste food or excess food from groceries that would otherwise be diverted to dumps and they instead deliver to charities. It is all run through an app. So if you are a registered charity, or if you are one of the charities that works with them, you can go on and you can say exactly what your charity needs that particular day and it helps to feed orphans and homeless people in Trinidad and Tobago. So there are several benefits: one is feeding people; two, it is taking excess waste that would be going to dumps and instead it is feeding and it is reducing the number of trucks on the road. All the deliveries are done at night. It is efficient and it has been—I think it has provided over 100,000 meals thus far—very under the radar; very, very, progressive and very grounded in serving Trinidad and Tobago and recognizing of course there is a link between environmental as well as food as well as service.

So the interesting thing about these two companies is, as I said, they do not fit into any of these traditional investment categories. So they are not in tourism, yachting, marine, et cetera, these categories that we have defined as a country. But there are always companies that are going to be existing that are doing really good work, but they do not fit into these categories. So it is useful for us to think about how do we incentivize social impact companies like this. So what I will suggest is that, one, we have a way that companies that are social enterprises can register as a social enterprise, and two, that there is a tax benefit to them. Whether they are for-profit or non-profit they still have to pay taxes. Only registered charities do not have to pay taxes. Non-profits do not have to pay taxes on receipts and income.

So one, having the ability to register as a social enterprise and, two, once that social impact is measurable and recorded and having a tax incentive to be able to incentivize further work in that field and then further benefits. This helps to

reduce the burden on the public sector because instead of the public sector financing dump trucks, food, trauma workshops, et cetera, now the NGO sector and private sector and social enterprise sector are really taking an active role in solving these problems that were traditionally considered public sector problems. So, again, it kind of relates to this overall framework of how this public sector and private sector merge and what kind of financial instruments can help to improve this relationship and this social impact.

The last thing I would like to comment on is the foreign exchange. The last debate we had on this was in this House in December. At the time, the foreign exchange rate was \$6.78, the monthly average selling rate and then in January, February, it went to \$6.77 which was actually a decline, very small but it declined. The foreign exchange situation at the moment is not sustainable. So we can either choose to do something which is using a purely fiscal approach or a purely monetary approach or a mixed basket.

A purely fiscal approach would say, okay we are recognizing that the foreign exchange imbalance is due to a differentiation between foreign exchange demand and foreign exchange supply and there is a public sector, i.e. a fiscal role, in these imbalances. So a foreign exchange fiscal approach would purely be to wait for things to balance out. If we wait for things to balance out, it might cause more speculation and more speculative demand.

A purely monetary approach would be to listen to what the University of the West Indies or the IMF is saying. They are suggesting that we depreciate to raise it to either \$8.5 or \$8.5 to \$10 depending on which institution you read. Now, the advantage of this is that there will be an end to speculation, an end to speculative hoarding. The disadvantage would be, of course, a weakness in our economy.

Looking at a mixed-basket approach is what I would suggest instead. So in the 12 months leading up to December 2016, there was a very gradual depreciation of about 6 per cent year-on-year, and the economy was able to absorb it. We would have noticed if the economy was not able to absorb it if there was a change in the inflation rate. There was not. So it is very likely that we can increase this gradual depreciation from the 6 per cent where it was to say 7 per cent to 8 per cent. There has been no change at all from December to now. So we can do this gradual depreciation, 7 to 8 per cent, as well as integrate elements of a fiscal approach.

So if we look at foreign exchange supply and foreign exchange demand, the foreign exchange supply is very difficult for us to do anything with on a short-term basis. It is not particularly elastic. Foreign exchange demand is where we can make a bit of an impact. If you look at the components of foreign exchange demand, the number one component of that is crude oil imports for Petrotrin.

Again, I commend that there was an increase in crude oil production locally over the last six months from 50,000 barrels to 60,000 barrels, but if we are currently importing 100,000 barrels a day, then we can try and further change the tax regime to incentivize local production, and that hopefully can have a very short term, immediate impact on reducing foreign exchange demand that is used by Petrotrin for crude oil imports. So that would be a mixed-basket approach of fiscal and monetary.

The last recommendation I have is just to reiterate public/private partnerships and social impact bonds. These are innovative financial instruments for development. There was one final—my final recommendation is just that the approach again really emphasizes moving away from an implementation role

towards a facilitation role and a regulatory role. So away from trying to be the ones behind every single project and every single initiative towards partnership with the private sector and the NGO sector. So that is it for my contribution today. I thank you all for your energy and your time. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President: Hon. Senators, I think it is an appropriate time to suspend. So we will take the suspension now and return at 5.00 p.m. I just want to remind Members of the need to have a quorum here at 5.00 p.m. when we resume. So we are suspended until 5.00 p.m.

4.25 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

[MR. VICE-PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

Mr. Vice-President: The Leader of Government Business. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen The Hon. Franklin Khan): Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. Mr. Vice-President, it is a pleasure to join this debate on the Finance (Variation of Appropriation) (Financial Year 2017) Bill, 2017, more commonly referred to as the mid-year review. In simple terms, this variation in appropriation varies \$1,398,125,544 to fund urgent and critical capital expenditure to September 30, 2017. All the moneys will come from the original budget that was presented from the Ministry of Finance, which means that these are sums already appropriated. So, basically, there is no increase in expenditure, no increase in deficit, it is just the internal movements of money under various Heads.

Again, as I did in the budget debate, let me congratulate the Minister of Finance for, again, prudent handling of the economy despite the fiscal challenges facing this country. As you all know, we were hit by the perfect storm, which I

will deal with in some detail later in my contribution, but the Minister of Finance and the PNM have managed this economy in a prudent and mature way. [*Desk thumping*] Despite a significant decline in revenue, we have managed to curtail retrenchment to a minimum. There have been no major social disruptions, and people have, basically, been able to maintain their standard of living in Trinidad and Tobago.

But having said that, Mr. Vice-President, I just want the population to know that whether you are rich or poor, black or white, East Indian or African, PNM or UNC, we have to adjust to the new reality that Trinidad and Tobago faces. That is the new normal, whether we like it or not. We have to come to terms with a reality that has set in into this country, and a lot of people are still in denial, in particular, the Opposition. I just want to articulate, during the course of my contribution, what this new normal looks like, especially as it relates to the energy sector and its impact on the fiscal fortunes of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Vice-President, one sentence says it all as to what is happening with Trinidad and Tobago's economy. Central government energy revenue in TT billions of dollars; in 2012/2013, it was \$26.6 billion; in 2013/2014, it was \$28.11 billion; in 2014/2015, it was \$18.6 billion; in 2015/2016, it dropped to a mere \$6.5 billion; a \$20 billion deficit gap in terms of the revenue stream that was coming into the country. I just want to commend Sen. Raffoul for her very, very fundamental observation that she made, where she said the deficit started long before the decline in revenue. In Mr. Manning's last budget, 2008 was the year that this country received the highest revenue ever in the economic history of Trinidad and Tobago—2008, 2007, boom years. Mr. Manning—the PNM Government, at the time, expenditure was \$45billion—he was running surplus

budgets throughout most of his term when the revenue was high.

Check how the UNC behaved. Look at the quantum of revenue, 2012/2013, \$52.7 billion, you know, yet, they racked up a \$5 billion deficit. The profligate wastage and inflated expenditure started in 2010. It started in 2010 despite significantly high revenues in Trinidad and Tobago, and that is the reality we face. So when today our budget deficit is almost identical to what the UNC had in 2012/2013, 2013/2014, despite revenues to the level of 58and \$55 billion, and that is where the governance and the handling of economy faltered. And what did they do with all the money? They have a struggling thing in Couva called a hospital that is just a shell that is still there. They did not do anything.

Mr. Manning built, and the PNM built, redeveloped Port of Spain. The Prime Minister opened the Government Campus. The very building we are in today, and the Hyatt, all that was built under the Patrick Manning administration with significantly less revenue, [*Desk Thumping*] and still surplus budgeting. So this deficit position that we are in, we know it is a dicey thing to manage, and we will manage it to the best of our ability. But, Mr. Vice-President, the energy sector is so fundamental to Trinidad's economy that it is worth my spending some time and try to explain to you, Mr. Vice-President, and to the national population, by extension, what is really happening. From 2004 to 2014, the energy sector contributed 45 per cent of GDP and 85 per cent of export by value. Do you know what that means? That means foreign exchange. So when your energy revenue drops from \$28 billion to \$6 billion, which is \$22 billion less, that is hard liquid US dollars, and that is the crisis—and that is the crisis.

However, having said that, we cannot throw our arms in the air. We were hit by the perfect storm, as the Minister of Finance explained, fall in commodity

prices, fall in production. I just want to make the point that it makes no sense coming here and harping about the price of oil and trying to predict the price of oil, and what the IMF say the price of oil will be, and what this energy chamber say the price of oil will be, we are price-takers. We could theorise and analyse from now until thy kingdom come, we are price-takers. Revenue is a function of price by production. If we have no control over price, how can we impact on our revenue? Production. It is as simple as that. So let us try now to take care of what we have control over, production.

Mr. Vice-President, I want to deal now, in a very lucid way, I hope, to deal with what is the most critical situation facing Trinidad and Tobago outside of, say, crime, and its impact on people's life. The most critical economic situation we face is something called the gas curtailment, because Trinidad and Tobago's gas industry was based on a model of significant surplus gas. We had so much gas in this country that, at one point in time, in the eighties, companies had refused to explore further, because when they find more gas it would take them two decades before they could monetize the gas. So then we went into a concept called the monetization of gas; we built Point Lisas and we went into liquefied natural gas production. However, somewhere around 2009—2010 we dropped the ball, because upstream investment did not match the rate of production. It is what we call in the E&P business, walking up the down escalator, because the escalator is coming down and you are trying to walk down. So you have to make investment just to stay where you are, that is what natural decline does to you. Wells decline naturally and you just have to keep investing to find new reserves of oil and gas just to keep your production stable, otherwise it will decline until it reaches the floor.

Upstream investment dried up in 2009, 2010. I remember accompanying the Leader of the Opposition to an energy chamber meeting at the Cara Suites where he outlined—I think that was in 2014 or 2013—that this country faces a genuine gas shortage. You will all recall, Minister Kevin Ramnarine, at the time, denied it vehemently, and saying the decrease in gas production was a function of maintenance, and was a function of a new HS&E systems that bp had to put in place after the blowout in the Gulf of Mexico, and Dr. Rowley articulated that “there is a genuine gas shortage”. I was at the meeting, okay, and here we are today facing it head on in reality. But it was the same former Minister of Energy hustling to talk, every conference you see him appearing. Every time you opened the papers you are seeing an article from him. Every time you go to a chamber he is there. There was a Naparima College career guidance thing, he appeared there too, you understand, but then he had the portfolio and allowed it to slip through his fingers, but I say no more on that.

So, Mr. Vice-President, here we are with the single biggest issue facing this country from an economic point of view, what do you need? You need leadership. This is something that calls for prime ministerial intervention. And how did the Prime Minister respond? First and foremost, to deal with the gas shortage, and the gas shortage is a billion cubic feet per day, you know. The demand, the established demand from LNG and Point Lisas is 4.2 billion cubic feet per day. Our current production is just about 3.2 billion cubic feet per day. So, the Prime Minister, the leader that he is, the first thing he did, he virtually single-handedly put the Dragon deal with Venezuela together; single-handedly, you know. After he won the election he liaised with President Maduro, and, today, we have a signed Heads of Agreement between the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and the

Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. And, as we speak, we also have a signed Heads of Agreement between the operating arms of this deal, which is PDVSA, NGC and Shell—prime ministerial intervention.

Then there is the famous Houston meeting. Mr. Vice-President, never before, and I say this without fear of contradiction, because I was not at the meeting, I was ill at the time, otherwise I would have surely been part of history also, never before has a single meeting borne such fruits. That meeting has literally determined the economic future of Trinidad and Tobago for the next 10 years. [*Desk thumping*] There you had a Prime Minister going to Houston and meeting the leaders of the three largest oil companies in the world, ExxonMobil, world number one; Shell Global, world number two; and bp, world number three, and as a lagniappe he met with EOG Resources and closed off.

At that meeting the Angelin project was sanctioned. BP committed to US \$5billion direct investment over the next five years. A new gas sales contract was sealed with bp, and I would outline that in some more details. With Shell, and Shell has acquired the interest of British Gas, BG, and let me, on behalf of the Government, welcome Shell back to Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Shell is now the second largest player in the energy sector after bp. They have acquired the interest of BG, British Gas, in 2016. They are in the process of finalizing the acquisition of Centrica, which is a company out of the UK in the north coast marine area, okay, and they planned to have significant investment in the sum of almost US \$3 billion over the next three years.

In the case of ExxonMobil, the Prime Minister held discussion with them as to how we can assist the Guyanese Government and to work with Exxon closely as how Trinidad could partner in the energy development of Guyana. I dare say, and

I said it already, that no meeting has accomplished more, in my view, in the economic life of Trinidad and Tobago than that Houston meeting. And you know what happened, Mr. Vice-President, the Member of Parliament for Princes Town and the Member of Parliament for Naparima said he used it as an excuse to go and play golf. What utter nonsense. You are taking significantly important events like that and trivializing it. In the Parliament, you know, right here when the other House met they were saying these things and casting aspersions on a Prime Minister's intervention at that level and saying he went to play golf in Houston. And it may be, Mr. Vice-President, through you, the single most important meeting that could affect the economic fortunes of Trinidad and Tobago for the next 10 years.

Let me deal with some details on the bp project. Juniper supposed to get their first gas by June 2017. It is a five-well subsea completion with an unmanned platform, and Juniper's peak production, which would occur sometime in 2018, would be 590 million cubic feet per day. I want you to keep your maths, we have a billion deficit, 590 with Juniper, by sometime next year that would be taking away half, 590 from 1,000 million. Then there is the joint venture between EOG and the Sercan platform, okay. That is already on stream, and it came on production in April, and in peak production in a couple of months' time it will be producing 275 million cubic feet per day. So, 590 and 275, make some notes and keep adding up.

Then there is the TROC project, which is where they will be decreasing the pipeline pressure, okay, by putting an inlet compressor at Atlantic LNG so you would reduce the pipeline pressure so the low pressure wells could enter into the pipeline and flow to Atlantic, because if the pipeline pressure is higher than the wellhead pressure the gas cannot flow. So the TROC project is to install a

compressor at Atlantic, decrease the pipeline pressure so that more gas could flow. That is almost completed, and that will bring another 200million cubic feet per day; 590 and 200, that is 790, and 275 is 975, just approximately \$1 billion of the deficit. However, while that will make a significant inroad into the curtailment exercise just remember what I said, you are walking up the down escalator. So decline is catching at you so you think—so while it sounds to a billion cubic feet per day, it would actually not close the gap in its entirety, but it will go a long way in solving the issue. If this Government has accomplished anything, it is that Houston meeting and to bring the gas deficit under control. And I compliment the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, and Minister Young, who accompanied him as the Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister. [*Desk thumping*]

Then it was the Angelin project that was sanctioned, that gas will be coming on stream by the first quarter of 2019, okay, and, again, that will be giving us approximately 500 million cubic feet per day. Beyond Angelin, bp continues to explore. Let me just make this point, bp has two rigs now drilling two exploration wells, one is called Savannah, one is called Macadamia, and it has another rig drilling development wells. Mr. Vice-President, through you, there is only one way known to man to produce oil and gas, and that is by drilling wells. So forget all the “ole talk”, any time I come here and I talk to you and I say, we are doing this, that, and the other, ask me, say, Minister Khan, or Frankie, or hon. whatever, just say, how much rigs drilling, and if I tell you, none, I might as well sit down. Right now there are three rigs offshore drilling for bp. There is one drilling for EOG. That is four offshore rigs; it has not happened here for years. And Shell would be bringing in two rigs at the end of this year to drill an exploration well and to drill on a development platform. So all things being equal, we are looking at

five to six offshore rigs operating off the east coast. You only produce oil and gas by drilling new wells.

So it is all well and good to say provide incentives, increase production, do this and do that, there is a process. This is the science, you know. There is something called OBN seismic now, it is called Ocean Bottom Nodes. Imaging technology has revolutionized the exploration business. You are imaging mother earth down there and you are actually seeing what exists down there. Imaging technology has transformed two fields of human endeavour, oil exploration and medicine. Today a doctor cannot diagnose you until he gives you a CT scan or an MRI, but what was happening before the days of MRI and CT scan, they had to put a torchlight and “chook it in yuh eye so” to see something here that will reflect something else in your body. There is no longer a need to do that. You do the CT scan, you do the MRI and you can actually see what your ailment is. By the same token, the ocean bottom cable seismic technology is imagining the earth with such accuracy that the whole process of finding new reserves of oil and gas has improved significantly. And that is the seismic that is being run offshore the east coast, as we speak, and that will improve our chances of success significantly, because the technology that exists today makes the exploration business significantly less risky.

Shell will also be doing OBN work. They will drill some development wells on the Dolphin platform, and then there is a failed project that was done by BG called Starfish, and they will be redeveloping the Starfish prospect, because they had some issues with the drilling fluids that they had used, and in the research in their lab in Houston they think they have come to terms with that. As I said, they would be bringing two rigs into this country later on this year. Then there is BHP

Billiton, BHP is the operator for the deep water blocks that went out to bid a couple of years ago. They have drilled two exploration wells. They have announced that they have a gas line in the LeClerc well as to the quantum and the economics of the feasibility of the development that is still being worked out. I would not say anything more on that, let us see what the work indicates, and we will adjudicate on that shortly.

But, Mr. Vice-President, Trinidad and Tobago is fortunate that in terms of our gas resources it is being managed by three of the top energy companies in the world, which is bp, Shell and BHP, which is an Australian company. BHP was a mining company in Australia 20 years ago, today they are one of the key, key players in the gas business, again, because they have invested heavily in technology. So I make the point, Mr. Vice-President, to show that this administration has not sat idly by and twiddled its thumb as Rome burns, we have put things in place to sort out this gas shortage issue. As I said, we are price-takers. I cannot tell you gas will go to \$5 per MMBtu. I cannot tell you that oil will go to \$60, \$70 and \$75 per barrel, however, I can tell you, with some level of assurance, that over the next 12 months we could increase gas production by a billion cubic feet per day.

Let me now deal with oil production. The Minister of Finance indicated a while ago that production has now gone back up to 75,000 barrels a day. There was a time this country, in 1978, was producing 277,000 barrels per day. I was fortunate to work in Amoco Trinidad Oil Company after A levels because I am from Mayaro. So, your boy passed A levels and “go down Galeota and say, well, my name is Franklin Khan, I am from Mayaro, and look how much papers I have”, good, they gave me a job. I spent one year there before I went to university. We

used to load a tanker once a week, today it takes about a month before they could fill a tanker. TSP: Teak, Samaan and Poui, used to produce 160,000 barrels per day, right now the same TSP, which is operated by Perenco, produces 15,000 barrels a day. The potential is there. It is my intention, and the intention of this administration, our target is that by the end of 2019 we should have production back up to a minimum of 100,000 barrels a day from the current level of 75,000. [*Desk thumping*]

I will tell you why, because for the State of Trinidad and Tobago oil is still better business than gas. Because there are two reasons for that, one, there is no query as to what the price of oil is. So you do not have to negotiate with upstream and see whether it is LNG prices, whether it is posted in Japan, or Henry Hub, or whatever. Every single crude type in the world is benchmarked with a reference price, and we produce good crudes here, you know. The BPTT Galeota crude blend which is a mixture of condensate and TSP production, the highest traded international crude is Brent, and the BPTT crude sells for \$2 higher than Brent.

The BHP Calypso crude sells just around the price of WTI. The land based Petrotrin crude, obviously, is a lower quality high sulphur heavy crude and that sells at around \$4, \$5 less than WTI. But in a basket of crude point of view, we get fairly reasonable prices for our crude. So crude has no problem as to what is the price, it is benchmarked, so there is no question about that. Plus our taxation system is more robust for oil than for gas. At the top there is royalties, at the middle there is SPT, which is the supplemental petroleum tax, which is a windfall profit tax. I have about 10 minutes again, “ent”?

5.30 p.m.

And let me just say something about the Supplemental Petroleum Tax,

because a lot of things this country does not know. The first oil boom that we had in the '70s was a function of three things. In 1974, there was something called the Arab oil embargo where the price of crude moved from \$6 to \$36 in a couple of months, six-fold increase. At that very said point in time, '76/'77, the same TSP fields came into production. So here we were with the perfect storm in the positive sense: high prices, high production, but that did not cause the boom, you know, because the boom was revenue to Trinidad. You know what caused the boom? Dr. Eric Williams introduced something called the supplemental petroleum tax. And today, you have to give credit to people like John Andrews and Trevor Boopsingh who has since passed.

This is the economic history of Trinidad articulating to youths, it is written nowhere, with these two gentlemen who were fundamental to the 1976/1977 oil boom, the supplemental petroleum tax, and coming down at the bottom, corporation tax, which is called PPT, petroleum profits tax, is 50 per cent. Petroleum profits tax for exploration production company is 50 per cent, not 30 per cent like normal industries, you know. So you tax the system with royalties at the top, royalties come from gross revenue, there is no deduction. PPT, you have some deductions, not PPT, SPT, but it is a windfall. That is why it kicks in after the price of oil reaches a certain level and then you have your corporation tax.

So, we have to get production back to 100,000 barrels per day. Perenco is a mature field producer coming out of France. Those leases have been sold to Perenco by Repsol, because after bp went into gas, bp farmed out its acreage to Repsol, thinking Repsol was a low-cost producer. But Repsol itself was a big Spanish company. So Repsol, I think, now has found the proper fit for an asset like that in Perenco. And then the company that sits probably on the greatest asset

for oil is Petrotrin. What do I say about Petrotrin?—the lesser the better. But I will tell you the Petrotrin farm-out and lease operatorship programme has done extremely well.

And I want to go on record and today praise one company that has done tremendously well on a programme called the Incremental Petroleum Service Contracts. It is a company called A&V Drilling based in Penal. They took the Catsil field about three years ago. It was farmed out to them by Petrotrin, making a 130 barrels of oil per day. You know what is A&V Drilling production in Catsil now?—4,000 barrels per day. And you know why it is 4,000 barrels a day?—because they have drilled 32 wells since they took over the field.

The point I make, you cannot get oil without drilling for it. But to drill you need money, to drill you need capital. The exploration and production business is for people with deep pockets. If you do not have the money you “cyar” come into that dance. That is why I feel so confident that having companies like bp, Shell and BHP, because in the exploration business you have to have deep pockets. If you say the chances of success of an exploration well 20 per cent, it means one out of every five wells you drill will be successful, but you must have the money to drill the five wells, because if you are broke after two wells, you could go bankrupt and the potential still remains there. So it is a capital-intensive industry that when you are choosing companies to partner with or to bring in to Trinidad, the most important thing, you look at two things: is one, the technology that they will bring; and two, the capital requirements, how much capital they have to invest, what is the cash flow of the company.

So, we at the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries think we have this thing fairly organized. Okay? The Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries has

its challenges with human resource capacity. And Sen. Mark criticizing; you know, I am not a defender of the service commissions, but I welcome the service commissions' initiative to let the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries recruit its staff. Because we need geologists; we need geophysicists; we need petroleum engineers; we need reservoir engineers; we need chemical engineers; we need process engineers; we need business analysts. It is a whole suite of skills that we need because we monitor these companies.

Mr. Vice-President: Minister, you have five minutes.

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: Yeah. We monitor these companies. Okay? And if we do not have the human resource capacity to do the oversight and to be the regulator of the industry, it makes no sense. And I am proud to say through you, Mr. Vice-President, that I have seen in the Ministry and in the industry in particular some employed, some unemployed, extremely good young talent, island scholars, first-class honours in geoscience, in petroleum engineering, in civil engineering, in mechanical engineering, brilliant young minds and their learning curve is very steep. And I told them, I said, "What you guys are doing in two years it took me 10 years to learn". But the time has changed. It is an industry now driven by software, by IT. And these young, brilliant minds, we can harness them in Trinidad and Tobago because there is a bright future for this country because of the great investment that we have put into tertiary education in Trinidad and Tobago.

So, Mr. Vice-President, I think I have given the nation some comfort that despite the challenges that we face there is light at the end of the tunnel. I think that we will kick this gas curtailment issue, we will get crude oil production back up, we will be going out in a bid round for new acreage later on this year. But I want to warn, or no, just to caution the population, that right now it is a buyer's

market.

So we have to time to see how we send out the acreage because you may not get attractive bids for the type of resource you are putting out if the oil prices stay depressed. Okay? So that is a sense of time. So it is not to say that because the Minister say we going out at the end of the year, if by the end of the year “we eh go out, like he do something wrong”. I may well be strategizing the whole concept as to the timing of when you sell your house, or the timing as when you put your asset on the market for bidders. Okay?

So, just to close, I want to just quote from Mr. Norman Christie in a workshop that he addressed a couple days ago. And I quote:

“In my view...”—

He said:

“...Trinidad and Tobago...has great stories about dreaming big, taking risks and continuously learning. The petrochemical industry in Point Lisas is a great case study in unleashing potential and growth. By dreaming big and taking risks, TT has, for decades, punched its way above its weight as the largest exporter of traded methanol and...”—urea.

And the phrase I like here is that:

“...Trinidad and Tobago, for decades, has punched its way above its weight...”

We are a small island and we are doing extremely well.

And just to close off, I want to announce that Trinidad and Tobago will be assuming the chairmanship of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum, which is the GECF, next year. It is an elite group of players that control the gas export market. It includes: Algeria, Bolivia, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Iran, Libya, Nigeria, Qatar,

Russia, United Arab Emirates, Venezuela and Trinidad and Tobago and we will be assuming chairmanship of this group for one year from 2018.

Mr. Vice-President, I think the energy sector is in good hands because of the quality of the companies that operate at the level of the private sector, and it is in good hands because the PNM Government understands energy and understands energy governance. I thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Khadijah Ameen: [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. I want to begin my contribution on this Bill entitled, an Act to vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation Act, 2016, by extending on the contribution of the last speaker, the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, to say that many of the items he mentioned are, in fact, a list of projects initiated by the People's Partnership in the energy sector. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, a number of investments were made by the People's Partnership between the years 2010 to 2015 which would boost production of petroleum and exploration of oil and gas, and, in fact, it is my firm opinion that those investments will be the saving grace to Trinidad and Tobago from this PNM Government and the rewards will continue to come in.

And I just want to remind the Minister that, you know, every time he makes his contributions he likes to criticize the former Minister of Energy, a young bright man who has been called upon by many non-government and non-political professional organizations [*Desk thumping*] because of his initiatives and his way of thinking. But when he makes his criticisms he must remember that many of the things he mentioned are due to the good work of the People's Partnership and Kamla Persad-Bissessar. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, on my way to this debate I had a number of calls from the media and concerned persons and the headline of a *Trinidad Guardian* published yesterday, “Ministry probes protest outside Lara stadium”. The Ministry of National Security apparently announced that it launched an investigation into protest actions of the Opposition, apparently, at opening of the Brian Lara cricket stadium in Tarouba last Friday. It is my understanding that a number of citizens were protesting and they also had the cricket activity and there was a pile-up of traffic. But, Mr. Vice-President, the Minister went on to say:

“What is even more disparaging is the fact that those persons leading the protesters, included esteemed...Members of Parliament who seemed to care less about how their actions were negatively affecting persons going about their legitimate business.”

I want to state categorically that no UNC Member of Parliament led or participated in that protest. I want to begin by saying that first.

But, Mr. Vice-President, I also want to say that the statement by the Minister is an abuse of power and an attempt to intimidate the citizens of this country. [*Desk thumping*] This was a peaceful protest organized by citizens who were concerned about the hundreds of millions of dollars spent on a stadium that today does not have approvals, to host a “fete match” rather than opening the much needed hospital right next door. [*Desk thumping*] There was no fire, there was no littering, there was no one blocking the highways, blocking the roads, there were no threats, there were no shootings of people, there were no murders, but the Minister wants to investigate. This, Mr. Vice-President, I warn is intimidation and should not have happened. It is an abuse of the office. [*Desk thumping*]

The police on that day were stopping the traffic to allow a number of

Ministers and Government officials to go into the stadium. I am sure that contributed to the traffic. Not one of those Ministers showed any concern or stopped to enquire about the protest and what was going on. It is my understanding, Mr. Vice-President, I want ask the Minister if he could so kindly use his good office to investigate the crime wave that is sweeping this country; [*Desk thumping*] the number of murders on a daily basis; the rapes; the crimes against women; the violence against women in particular; the robberies and this whole issue about traffic pile-up in Couva, it really is rubbish. Today, just a short while ago—it is probably still going on—there was a protest on the Valencia stretch on the Eastern Main Road—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Coppin: Point of order, 46(1).

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Member, sit, sit, sit. The point that you are making I gave you enough leeway to sort of bring it back to what we are talking about in relation to the appropriation Bill that the Minister of Finance debated on earlier. So, I want to ask you to bring it back in or, at least, link what you are saying to what we are discussing here today. Okay? Continue.

Sen. K. Ameen: Mr. Vice-President, forgive me, but if the Senator was not following, I spoke about the issue, the fact that millions of dollars is being spent on a “fete match” and to open a stadium where previously the Government borrowed about \$500 million.

Mr. Vice-President, the fact that the Ministry of Health is asking for supplementation under the Head 28 and you have a situation where the health sector, and I am coming to more details with regard to the health sector, but if you would permit, Mr. Vice-President, to conclude this point with regard to the protest and the statement by the Minister. Because I want to speak about the health sector

and the fact that the Couva Children's Hospital is not yet opened while the Ministry of Health under Head 28 is asking for a supplementation today.

Mr. Vice-President, I wonder if the Minister of National Security plans to investigate the countless protests for water throughout this country over the past few weeks. [*Desk thumping*]. Today, there are trees across the Eastern Main Road on the Valencia stretch because the Government has authorized through the Land Settlement Agency the demolition of squatter homes in that area. [*Desk thumping*]
Mr. Vice-President, this contributes to the Government's approach to being oppressive.

It was under the UNC Government when Basdeo Panday was Prime Minister that the squatter regularization Act came into being. During the following term of the PNM, in fact, there were many of us including myself who were involved in protests to protect citizens because this same squatter demolition was taking place. [*Desk thumping*] And it took the People's Partnership coming into Government in 2010 to begin to issue certificates of comfort that came into being, became law under the previous UNC Government. And, Mr. Vice-President, I want to warn all squatter settlements that this Government has always taken an oppressive approach to squatters. They have never followed the law with regard to regularization and every squatter should be on the alert and on the lookout for this PNM Government. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, I raise the issue of the hospital because I am concerned that while an additional sum is being requested for the Ministry of Health, you have a severe shortage of medication at the nation's hospitals and health centres. Sen. Wade Mark earlier in the question segment asked the Minister of Health about the quality of the drugs that were coming into the country, but I have a concern

with the quantity. Because at many hospitals, surgeries have been postponed because you do not have anaesthetic, because they do not have gauze. This is a serious concern. Not only are people not able to get medication and drugs at the pharmacies and at the dispensary, but even the surgeries are being postponed because of lack of material and lack of medication.

Mr. Vice-President, it also begs the question with regard to the operation of health centres which under the People's Partnership had extended hours to relieve the work going to the emergency at the hospital at the emergency department. I have queries with regard to that. The shortage of staff at hospitals is an issue that has been around for quite some time.

Under the People's Partnership Government we had the Nursing Training Academy at El Dorado there. GATE has been, the GATE regime has been changed and so that affects many people who wish to study nursing and allied health the ability to access education and training. And I want to ask, I want to indicate to this Government that you should make provisions for specific areas where there is such a huge demand and providing nurses, in fact, that facility has the ability to train up to 5,000 nurses at a time. And providing more nurses to the health sector in this country will relieve and should improve the quality of service offered at our hospitals.

So while people are protesting the opening of a stadium while a hospital remains closed, even the hospitals that are open have a lot of issues and our public health sector is falling apart. And I listen to the Minister from time to time make statements here and in other place that are totally out of line with the facts that are actually happening. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, I want to move to another area where the Government

has been asking for supplements to what was allocated in the last budget. During the budget debate, the Opposition and I myself in particular raised concerns with respect to the allocations, the cut in allocations rather, in the school feeding programme, the provision of laptops and security provided for primary schools and secondary schools.

Mr. Vice-President, the School Feeding Programme is of critical importance because so many people are facing the breadline today. The number of meals we have asked on several occasions in this Parliament, as well as in the other place, whether the number of meals would be affected by the cut in funding. And the Minister continues to indicate that there will be no cut in the number of meals.

My next question is as to the quality of the meals being provided to our students in our schools today. And while we on this side advocated at that time when the budget was presented that the School Feeding Programme should not have such a huge cut, today there is a request for supplementation and the Government should have listened to the Opposition at that time and not cut the allocation in our School Feeding Programme. [*Desk thumping*]

Another area is with regard to laptops. The People's Partnership ensured that every child entering secondary school had a laptop. At present, in fact even the primary schools are using technology for learning. And I will tell you I understand that the Minister of Education was on a visit to some schools where he met with teachers and students with regard to the "pennacool" programme. This is a programme used for the preparation of SEA students that is done online. And the reviews from the teachers are that is an excellent programme, they like it, but it requires the student to have an electronic device, a tablet, a cell phone, smart phone or an iPad or a laptop. And yet the children in Standards 4 and 5 are being

introduced to this programme, sanctioned and approved by the Ministry, but when they go into secondary school they still do not have a laptop. And even the programme proposed to replace the programme that the People's Partnership had that gave every child a laptop, when the changes were made they still are asking for additional sums to have that programme.

I want to take this opportunity to say that while the Government recognizes that it needs additional funding for whatever programme they have, because I understand they are no longer giving the laptops to children, it will stay in the schools, they are saying they need additional funding. I want to say that we should be graduating from providing every student in secondary school with laptops, to providing every child in primary school with laptops. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, during the years 2010 to 2015, five years, the children who were in Form 5 would have gotten their laptops in Form 1, and we should be starting with the children who are preparing for SEA and then moving downwards to Standard 3, 2, and so on, to infants department to ensure that all our students in the schools have laptops.

Mr. Vice-President, the other area is security for primary and secondary schools. I mentioned in our debate when we had the presentation of the budget by the Minister of Finance that there was a severe cut in the allocation for funding for security officers in schools. In that area you had up to eight armed security guards in a school. At a time when we have so much violence in schools, we have so many incidents of bullying, we have many teachers who do not go to classes because they are afraid of the violent activity in school. We have gang activity that takes place close to some of these schools that are in the so-called at-risk areas, and some of that, of course, comes into the schools, and I dare say that the Government

has to increase or put back the security and, in fact, even further increase the security in schools in both our secondary and our primary schools because our students, our nation's future is at risk.

Mr. Vice-President, allow me to move to some matters concerning the social well-being of our nation's citizens. I mentioned before that the School Feeding Programme would face an additional strain because many parents are losing their jobs. The People's Partnership ensured that there was a social security net to provide for the least privileged in our society. Mr. Vice-President, to this end in 2010, the Cabinet approved the use of a multi-application biometric smart card as the payment mechanism for grants administered by the Ministry of the People and Social Development at that time, now called the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services.

These grants included the senior citizens pension, the disability grant, the public assistance and the food card. This biometric system, Mr. Vice-President, once it was properly implemented and managed would have allowed for streamlining of services to ensure delivery and the elimination of what is called double-dipping leakages, fraudulent activity. The system was comprised of two distinct modules, the identity management module or the biometric platform that used a person's individual fingerprint amongst other things and linked it to their information, as well as the financial platform that supported the transfer of payments to recipients and managed the interface between the bank and the biometric platform with the individual's information.

6.00 p.m.

Mr. Vice-President, the Ministry of the People and Social Development, starting in 2014, an initial cost of the system for that year was \$67.4 million. That

comprised the biometric system that cost \$34.8 million, and the maintenance of the biometric platform which was \$2.8 million, and the financial platform which was \$29.8 million. Mr. Vice-President, I mentioned that to highlight the amount of money, state revenue, taxpayers' dollars that would have been invested in this biometric smart-card system. This system did not come about overnight. It started actually in the UNC regime when Kamla Persad-Bissessar was Attorney General. The former Prime Minister, Patrick Manning, began the implementation. In 2010 it got full implementation because we invested in the equipment, and here we come, we are now in 2017, and you have a total collapse of this biometric smart-card system because of the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of the PNM Government [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, all the staff that would have been trained, the experienced staff, many of them have been sent home. You have further job losses. Job losses which, by the way, the Government is not reporting on. You have, because of this collapse and this incompetence of the PNM Government, you have the recipients of the grants now being paid by cheque. A system that we took decades to move away from. A system that allows fraud to take place, fraud by anyone of the stakeholders that would interface in the process. The staff, the relatives of the beneficiaries, and even other businesses who agree to cash the cheques. You have abuse of the system by relatives of the recipients. Mr. Vice-President, when a person is receiving a disability benefit and they cannot go to the bank themselves or to the post office to collect the cheque, relatives could go, and it happens. They go, they collect the cheque, they take it to—I know in Tunapuna there was a certain hardware that used to change plenty cheques, and they were eventually named in a fraud case at the Tunapuna Corporation. But there are many

businesses where they change these cheques, and relatives abuse the recipients because of these loopholes. Where is the accountability? The PNM has totally thrown that out after decades of hard work with the crash of this biometric smart-card system.

Mr. Vice-President, added to that—in fact, I mentioned the biometric smart card, but there are a number of programmes within the Social—the Ministry is now called the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, that have gone down the drain, that has been eliminated without proper announcement by the Government, while the Government refuses to say that they have discontinued programmes such as the baby grant and so on, the fact is that they have made it near impossible for the recipients to continue receiving their grant. Again, another deception by this Government.

But, Mr. Vice-President, I reiterate that our most vulnerable citizens are being left abandoned by this Government, and we have a situation with growing unemployment in our country. Every day in this country you are hearing of more job losses. This Government has made no secret that it continues to halt several projects where small contractors, for example—particularly in the energy industry, especially those service-oriented contractors, but even in the construction industry as well—they are hard hit, and many of them have had to scale down. Some of them have had to close up shop completely, and the result is that they are sending home workers. There are people who are well qualified in the petroleum industry who have to hustle and wash cars to take care of their family. I remember a story sometime where an employee, a fired employee of a steel company committed suicide because of the financial situation he faced. This Government must be sensitive to the environment it is creating when you have more and more people

being put on the breadline.

Mr. Vice-President, my colleague Sen. Wade Mark, in his contribution, said that there are over 20,000 people who have lost their jobs since this PNM came into Government. I agree with him, and I believe that that figure is actually closer to 30,000 people who have lost their jobs in this country since the PNM came into office. The Government is misleading the population with its statistics on job losses, and I find it an act of convenience when the Government Members on the other side criticized the CSO, the Central Statistical Office, for their inefficiency and they claim that the information is inaccurate, yet when it is convenient, they quote the CSO. And that has happened for some time and particularly with the unemployment figures. This Government in my opinion really continues to betray the working class in this country, and the trade union movement has to be more vociferous in defending the rights of workers. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, sadly, there are some trade unions who are in bed with the PNM and that is why they are silent today. Where are the mannequins? Where are the marches, walking up and down the promenade? Where are the people in front of the Parliament today? [*Desk thumping*] Thousands of people are going home. Where are the placards? I am calling on the unions to defend the workers of this country from the PNM. [*Continuous desk thumping*] Where are the people who plan to shut down? Mr. Vice-President, you know, the irony is that any person in the trade union movement who speaks out against this Government they are labelled UNC. Mr. Vice-President, the labour Ministry, in our laws the labour Ministry requires a business to register the number of retrenched workers only when it is over five workers.

But where you have small businesses sending home workers, a few at a time,

these small and medium businesses that have been so cramped because of the Government's policies at this time, and they are forced to send home workers, there is no count of those people. There is also no count when businesses reduce the number of days that employees get to come to work. Many companies take that approach, so instead of you work five days a week you work three days. Nobody is counting that as underemployment. [*Desk thumping*] So, you must accurately reflect the unemployment situation. In fact, Mr. Vice-President, I want to raise it here and I hope that the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government would take note. The regional corporations recently had a clean-up campaign, and instead of paying the workers overtime for coming out on weekends they are asking workers to come out on a weekend, Saturday and Sunday, and you will get a day off during the week as compensation. That is against—and I am not hearing the unions talking out about it. That is against standard practice. That is against what is our regular employment practices. And where are the unions to defend the rights of the workers?

Mr. Vice-President, this Government has shown that it has no plan to address job creation and no plan for economic growth. This Government continues to be very anti-worker and they have in fact, over the history of the PNM, shown to be very oppressive against workers in Trinidad and Tobago. I am very concerned about the effect of unemployment as well as underemployment of our young people and the lack of opportunities, particularly coupled with the cut in funding for GATE and other opportunities such as technical and vocational studies. I am concerned about unemployment and how it affects our women and our girls the Trinidad and Tobago, and particularly our single mothers who are fighting to make ends meet. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, I want to touch on a couple other issues. I want to come a little more on some issues in local government, but before I do that, being a local government practitioner for just over 10 years, I have an appreciation of not only what the regional corporations are required to do in its definition of local government, but also the community and the cultural aspect of decentralization and local governance. I want to touch on culture and regional carnival as it impacts on local economies, and I am tying this and I am saying this explicitly so nobody on the other side will jump up and ask the relevance. I am tying in culture with local government, and stimulation of local, economic opportunities within communities.

Mr. Vice-President, the last two carnivals this Government has put a damper on the national festival on pan, on mas and on regional carnival in our nation. [*Desk thumping*] The People's Partnership had an emphasis on decentralization in every aspect of Government, whether it was receiving a birth certificate, or cleaning drains, or building box drains. And a focus in culture was placed on support for regional carnival at various locations. They got not only funding, but support, technical support, because there are many professional fields involved in festival management, in the culture, in the art itself that were supported by the Government. What you have as a result, just dealing only with the community aspect, because there are so many enriching parts of having regional carnival. Regional carnival is safer for spectators. A family who wants to enjoy the festivities and who lives, let us say, in Mayaro or in south Trinidad, or even Toco or Sangre Grande, would not have to travel to Port of Spain or to come to Port of Spain, fight up with parking and fight up with all the other issues, traffic and so on, to see the festivities. In each locality, you had people being able to go and witness carnival in their community. So, the spectators were safer and it encourages family

participation, and our families are the building blocks of our communities and nation. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, keeping your heritage close to home allowed each region to develop characteristic elements of the carnival so that you would know that certain areas became well-known for particular characters, for particular styles of mas, for particular styles of even pan music and how they integrate their music and their display of their costumes. You had the craft—not only the craft of the actual wire bending and the actual mas making, but other crafts such as leather craft and so on, as part of the local economy. And when you had people from all over the world coming and going out into the regional carnivals you had these craftsmen being able to maintain a living, you had people who were food venders, even, who were able to provide their goods for sale; you had several other industries who would feed off the activities, but what you really had was a stimulation of the local economy within the communities, an empowerment of people and, Mr. Vice-President, I particularly mentioned that, because many women and girls benefit from these small industries. And, so, again, through that empowerment of local government and the involvement of NGOs, this PNM Government has really taken away from that.

Mr. Vice-President, as we speak today, I remember last year there was a delay in payment of pan players. As we speak, this year, several prize-givings have been postponed. In some regions the prize-giving festivals were held without them getting their prize moneys. So, they got their trophy but no cheques, and they are being told that the moneys have not been disbursed by the Ministry. They are being told that they do not have enough money. And you know what the PNM propaganda is? The PNM propaganda continues to be the lie that UNC and Kamla

“tief” out the money, and the fact is that it is incompetence and poor management on behalf of the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, I want to just continue on—

Mr. Vice-President: Senator, you have five more minutes.

Sen. K. Ameen: Thank you. Mr. Vice-President, I just want to continue on local government, my colleague earlier mentioned that only \$1 billion out of the \$2.7 billion allocated for PSIP has been spent. I want to take this opportunity to express concern to the Minister of Local Government, because in local government when you have construction and you have the rainy season which has official started, the probability of finishing your project is reduced.

When the People's Partnership was in Government, I was the chairman of a regional cooperation, and under the People's Partnership you had an increase in the number of projects that were completed and they were completed on budget and on time. That was because of good management. Under the guidance of the Minister, requests for funding were made immediately after the budget so that contracts could be awarded by December and construction would begin in the dry season.

They used to call us the box-drain Government. But, you know what? As soon as you step out of your house, the first issues facing you are local government issues. The box drain, the pavement, the collection of your garbage. And I am saying that this Government is heading to a position where they could end up with a lot of unspent balances, particularly in local government, because I have been a practitioner I am foreseeing it. And I want to say that unspent balances is not a good sign of saving money. Unspent balances is a sign of being an ineffective, incompetent Government. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, again, I want to touch on the recent—I mentioned—

clean-up campaign by the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government which was recently completed, which I really want to call an advertisement and a PR exercise. My information from every region is that while there were a lot of mikes passing, there was very poor community and stakeholder engagements. So, people heard mikes, but really, the communities were not engaged. Mr. Vice-President, when you have poor planning for the services of—I will use a gully sucker for instance. A gully sucker is a piece of equipment that will suck the silt and slush out of under the pavements, and when you have the gully sucker arriving, going to a location that is named by the regional corporation, and then realizing that the equipment cannot fit into the manholes to do the work, you have wasted an entire day. And really, what could prevent this is proper planning in advance so that you schedule your work properly. When you have abandoned structures to be demolished you must ensure that the relevant notices and so on are served. That has not been done. The removal of derelict vehicles will be hindered where you have legal issues, and again, litter notices to be served.

With regard to drainage again—and this has to be a collaboration between the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government and the Ministry of Works and Transport, where the Minister may receive a complaint. The Minister and all his technocrats will go to visit the complaint and then realize that it is not an issue for the Minister to deal with. And quite frankly, with proper management through local government, they should ascertain what the problems are and stop the PR, because the rain that is coming, and the rainy season and the flood that many of those communities will face will not be wary of the PNM's PR campaign that is going on.

I thank you, Mr. Vice-President.

Sen. Taurel Shrikissoon: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President, for allowing me—for recognizing me and allowing me the opportunity to enter into this debate at this time.

As I begin this evening I would just like to make a comment before I get into my contribution, and it is with respect to the request that we meet and sit as a House today coming from the Government on the last occasion. And on the last occasion we met, this honourable House was adjourned to a sitting today, being Monday. The Standing Orders really prescribe that the usual sitting is on a Tuesday. I would like to say at this point in time that when a situation like this arises, when there is a request for us to meet on a day outside of the prescribed day or the customary day, that at least give us a brief explanation as to why. [*Desk thumping*]

And if I am to say this, on the 25th of November, 2016, we assembled here to debate the miscellaneous provisions Bill on taxes, and although it was on the Order Paper the House was adjourned abruptly. On the 21st of March, we were again debating Miscellaneous Provisions (Trial by Judge Alone) Bill, 2017 and again, while I was prepared to be the next speaker it was adjourned. The Bill never came back. On the 2nd of May, we were debating the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic (Amdt.) Bill, that too was adjourned and not completed. And then we have an irregular sitting and we do not know why. So, we have the debate today, and I am saying, as I do not know if any other Senators would know, do we have a sitting tomorrow? And we do not know. We do not know. What is the Bill to be debated? If you go through the Order Paper, you would realize we have about four or five Bills on the Order Paper. What is the Bill to be debated tomorrow, should there be a sitting according to the Standing Order? And all I am saying here is

while I voiced objection on the last occasion and it received a comment that we are here to do the people's business, once we are here we are always prepared. And on the last occasions the House was adjourned [*Desk thumping*] for other reasons, we were prepared then, and today we are also prepared, or I am prepared.

And all I am saying is extend a little courtesy [*Desk thumping*] to say that we would like to have a sitting next Monday, reason being it may be a long sitting, and we may need a second day. Or that we are having the sitting on Monday, there is no sitting on Tuesday. Or we are having the sitting on Monday and the Bill to be debated on is this, on Tuesday. That is all. How difficult is it to show a little [*Desk thumping*] consideration for another person's time? And we are leading this country and we are saying that we—and I want to quote that this country needs leadership, but I really think that we need to be fair and considerate to all, irrespective of bench. And that is my only concern. [*Desk thumping*]

So, just offer a brief explanation through the clerk. Send a brief email no matter how simple it may be, and just advise so that we can make proper arrangements to attend to the people's business. I do not think that is an ill request. I believe I am reasonable, and that is all I ask. That is all I ask. My role here is not to object to everything or anything that anyone says or wishes to do. But, if I can strengthen, I strengthen, and where there is reason that I can offer perspective, I will, and that is it. That is all. So, all I ask is for fairness and equity in the way that I am treated. I speak for no one else in the House. If the comments are shared by others, I thank you for the support. [*Desk thumping*]

Today we are assembled here to debate the Bill, an Act to vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2017) Act, 2016. And I am going to say from the start that one

thing I appreciate about this Bill is that this time there was no increase in expenditure. There was no increase, or coming to the Parliament for additional funding as per budget statement 2016/2017, and hats off to the Government for such a move. I really commend that initiative. However, when we look at the source of the revenue from which—or the source from which the revenue is going to be taken to fund this additional expenditure, I have a little concern with respect to that. Because it is coming from the Ministry of Finance, the Infrastructure Development Fund for which \$2.7 billion should have been disbursed, only \$1.1 billion was disbursed, and so that remaining 1.7 is used to fund consumption, whereas that 1.7, if disbursed according to projects in the fund that it is resident in, would have stimulated economic activity in the country.

So, rather than creating an asset with the expenditure, we have just consumed the additional money, and that I have a concern with. In keeping with the thrust, and I want to borrow a phrase from Sen. Khan, the Leader of Government Business, who really said, you know, sometimes that this debate we really have to look at the revenue position of the Government, and I want to take a point from him, or the lead from him, and if you evaluate the performance of Trinidad and Tobago's economy over the last six months, it is said that the projected revenue for the first six months is \$18,100,000,000. That is 38 per cent of the projected revenue.

So, at mid-year when we should have been roughly 50 per cent of revenue we are 38 per cent, so we are a "lil bit" lower than what was projected. If you look at the expenditure \$23,500,000,000, that is 44 per cent of the budgeted expenditure, a little bit lower, but that is a good sign where the expenditure is a little less. But, when you look at the deficit, given these figures, you would realize

that the deficit as at the first six months is \$5.4 billion. But, the projected deficit for the entire year is \$6 billion. Then at mid-year we are 90 per cent of the deficit projected. And I have a concern with that, because if at mid-year we are 90 per cent of the budgeted deficit, then what happens in the latter six months?

Mr. Vice-President, the reason why I am concerned about that is because I do not think it is correct to say that we are on track with respect to the projected deficit as articulated. And more so, if you go through how the deficit so far has been funded, it has been funded from a drawdown of the HSF. It has been funded through a \$1 billion five-year 3.8 per cent fixed-rate bond issued on December 15, 2016, and a \$1 billion eight-year 4.10 per cent fixed-rated bond issued on February 14th, and a short-term bond \$1.5 billion, six months, 1.7 per cent. So, if it is at this time, mid-year, where 90 per cent of the deficit—we have already financed the deficit, if the deficit is not \$6 billion and greater than \$6 billion as projected, then how is it going to be funded? How is it going to be funded? Is it that we are going to borrow our way out of it? And given that the expenditure, according to this Bill, remains the same, it is telling me that the revenue has also remained the same, projected revenue. There is no amendments to revenue here, and therefore I have concerns as to whether or not the projected deficit will realized or will it be greater?

When we look at the revenue aspect of the Government, I have noted that the Government's thrust to establish the revenue authority, which they think that through stronger administration would yield additional revenue, greater emphasis on the collection of revenues from VAT, the implementation of the online tax, alcohol and tobacco, and a new tax bracket for high earning individuals. Those are strategies used by the Government to increase revenue. I was particularly pleased

to hear today from the hon. Minister when he laid the paper that there is work going on with the gaming and gambling sector so as to improve revenue collection from there. And hats off to them, and hats off to the Government, and I really hope that you derive more revenue because that is the situation that we are in. I commend it.

With respect to property tax, I was unaware of the litigation document that the hon. Minister spoke of. But what I would say from my end as a revenue measure, when you compare how the Government has approached this, I honestly thought that if the Valuation of Land Act or any of the other Acts needed amending, they would have come to us first before the process would have begun. I do not know if I am wrong to assume that, but I honestly thought, through the Parliament, the laws would have been amended, the people educated, then executed. [*Desk thumping*]

But to begin a process, and I am unsure if the existing legislation allows for it, I think, may just be a flawed process, and may need to be revisited. The complication there is that the revenue derived or projected to be derived from property tax may not really actualized, or be realized, if that is the case. And if that is the case, \$500 million that the Government projected may not be realized, and again the deficit grows. So, we have another concern there. In budget statement 2016/2017 there was the intention of the Government to commence a position with respect to transfer pricing, and if you allow me to quote from that document:

“It has been estimated that since 2011 Trinidad and Tobago has lost at least US \$1.4 billion per annum in reduced benefits from diversions of natural gas sales to higher price markets through unbalanced off-taking contracts.”

I am just saying that if that is the case, given the year, we are about eight months into the financial year, could that not have been addressed as well? But that is also a revenue measure of the Government.

And I would just like to stick a pin here and say this, I would have preferred to see the work on transfer pricing than the rush with respect to property tax at this time.

6.30 p.m.

I want to go to a very important measure of the Government that they are using to fund expenditure this year, which is the sale of assets programme. And the sale of assets programme is projected to earn the Government just about, roughly \$10 billion. And as I said in 2015, I really did not like this programme, this sale of assets programme, but then the Government finds themselves in a position and they need to raise revenue. So you cannot just disregard it, it is an option available to them and they have chosen to use it. So no objection there at this time given the situation that we are in. I respect that.

However, with respect to the plans that were laid out in budget statement 2016, if we go to one of the measures to raise additional funding through the APO, the additional public offering of First Citizens Bank, this measure was projected to yield \$1.5 billion. After this was completely executed we realized that just over \$1 billion was raised from this additional public offering which leaves us with a deficit there as well of roughly \$500 million.

When we go to NGC and the intention of the Government there again, at the budget document, Budget 2016/2017, to have sold additional shares in NGC, we realize that now there is a change in policy position to reduce that sale to 25 per cent. Again, that measure was supposed to raise \$1.5 billion, but if it is reduced from 50 to 25, then would \$1.5 billion be realized? The answer is clearly,

no, and it is estimated here that \$800 million from \$1.5 billion would be collected. That is probably just 45 per cent less. Then where would the additional funding come from?

We looked at TGU and we noted that in the budget statement, again, initially, that from TGU the 20 per cent of TGU was supposed to be sold to earn additional income. That measure was supposed to bring in roughly \$600 million. Today we are seeing a change in policy position up to 50 per cent of TGU being offered, 40 per cent probably to an independent power producer and 10 per cent to the public. But if 20 per cent was supposed to bring \$600 million, then how could 50 per cent be projected to earn between three and \$5 billion? I am concerned about that figure, because 50 per cent is two and a half times greater than 20, \$600 by two and a half would lead us to 1.5, but we are projecting between three and \$5 billion. So I am really concerned about how that math is going to work.

Budget Statement 2016/2017, it says here:

“...an offer for sale through competitive processes for 50 percent of the industrial estates now under the remit of Evolving Technologies and Enterprise Development Company Limited (eTecK)”—park.

No mention has been made of such—of this measure. When you look at Lake Asphalt, budget statement 2016/2017:

“The Government also intends to pursue in 2017 the partial divestment of Lake Asphalt...”

Again, no information on this on whether or not this process has commenced.

So I am of the view that while the one-off sales revenue, one-off revenue positions from the Government was projected at \$10 billion, given the shortfall in revenue from the FCB additional public offering, the shortfall in revenue from the

NGC sales, because of reduced shareholding, the possibility of three to \$5 billion not being realized by TGU, no sale of the eTecK Park and no divestment of Lake Asphalt, it was saying to me that the \$10 billion projected so far, based on the information that I have, the \$10 billion projected in the budget statement may not actually be realized in its entirety. And the reason why I am saying this is that \$10 billion is significant in terms of funding the expenditure of the Government of the country and that was really giving us a net deficit of six. If those figures are not realized the deficit will be larger. And that is my concern. The fact that we are running a budget deficit but it is a possibility, given the shortfalls of revenue, that the budgeted deficit or the projected deficit may be larger than it is actually projected to be. And that is of concern to me.

With respect to expenditure, I have noted the Government's conscious effort to reduce expenditure and again I want to commend the Government for that. We have seen it fall from 63 to 53 and I would really like to commend the Government for this position. When you also look at the conscious effort to reduce expenditure, in terms of what I would like to say, value for money through the public expenditure review programme, again, I want to applaud this initiative and commend the Government.

Hon. Imbert: Senator, would you give way?

Sen. T. Shrikissoon: Sorry, Sir. Yes, Sir. Most certainly.

Hon. Imbert: Mr. Vice-President, I wish to thank the hon. Senator for giving way. Just wanted to bring some clarity to some points you were making. The deficit at this time is an interim deficit. It is just a phasing issue. We had expected to have more cash available to us at this time from sale of assets. Sale of assets proceeds will kick in a little later in the year and that will reverse the trend in terms

of the deficit and then there may be, at the end of the year a lower than anticipated expenditure. So, again, that will help contain the deficit. So that is why we do not believe there will be any increase in the deficit. Okay?

Sen. T. Shrikissoon: Thank you, hon. Minister, and I thank you for the additional information provided. And all I am saying at this point in time is there must be an awareness and no way am I saying that it will not be realized or your strategies would not be reached, but there must be an awareness of where we are at. And that is my position with respect to this.

So just to come back with respect to expenditure, I want to commend the Government for restricting expenditure at a level, as well as embarking on that expenditure review programme where value for money is being sought; really commend you for that.

With respect to the debt profile of Trinidad and Tobago, right now, as I have said before in many of my contributions, I am concerned about the debt levels in Trinidad and Tobago. Over the last year, however, 2016/2017, in the latter six months, the rate of debt expansion in this financial year was slower than the year before and I thank the Government for taking cognizance of that.

However, when you look at the Auditor General's Report of 2016 and you look at the income that is being charged for debt service it is saying to us in 2016, \$7 billion was directed towards debt service. The \$40.4 billion is given as the figure from the Auditor General's Report 2016 as the total tax on non-tax revenue. And therefore 17.38 per cent of total tax and non-tax revenue was used to service debt in that last year. I am concerned that given a revenue estimate or projection for Trinidad and Tobago of roughly \$40billion without one-off measures a significant portion of the revenue being earned is now being ascribed to debt

service. And as we increase the debt profile of the country, moving forward, this figure can increase both in terms of a nominal value and if the revenue does not increase at the same rate it will be taking additional revenue for debt service, leaving less revenue for a position of managing the economy and the country.

And so it is with this in mind that I always say when I stand to speak on a finance bill, I would really like to see a comprehensive debt management strategy for dealing with the debt profile of Trinidad and Tobago. And while the current Government, you may have a handle on it and you may be aware, there is a life after 2020 when you return, if you return or if another party is there and I would really like to know that Trinidad and Tobago is in safe hands with respect to the handling of debt.

Today the hon. Minister mentioned a sinking fund that will be used to service debt. And I take some element of confidence and reassurance that at least there is a plan somewhere to be dealing with the maturity of debt. But I want to raise an issue when we speak of the net public sector debt position which really encompasses the debt to be repaid for Trinidad and Tobago. However, I have always asked for information concerning Government to Government arrangements that may not be included in the net public sector debt position. And what I have found here, in 2008, there was the NAPA north and south project of \$818 million and \$207 million; there is the San Fernando Teaching Hospital project of \$739 million; there is the Couva Children Hospital project of \$1.8 billion; there is the La Brea Port and seven industrial parks, \$750 million. And roughly the projects total TT \$8.4 billion. Is this included in the debt profile? Are the moratorium period assigned to these debts coming to an end? When will repayments begin on this? And is it considered in the debt management plan of

Trinidad and Tobago at this time? I am unsure, and so I am asking for clarity with respect to that. And this does not include contingent liabilities and let us not forget the Exchequer Account that is in overdraft to a tune of \$29 billion.

The Minister in his opening presentation also referred to the credit ratings for which he provided an explanation. I would like to say, in my budget contribution, my mid-year review contribution 2015/2016, my budget contribution 2016/2017 and my contribution with respect to the Andean Development Corporation, I advised that it is a possibility that we would have a downward credit rating. And just to quote Sen. Khan in response to my comment, on the 4th of April, 2017, he says:

“So, forget Moody’s, you know. They could write what they want.”

And all I am saying is we need to be aware that while we may disagree with the rating for reasons, let us take cognizance of the fact that they have issued a report using metrics that we have all the time ascribed and subscribed. [*Desk thumping*]

It is the same process that has been used over the years and not because on this occasion we did not arrive at the rating that we would have liked, it is just reason for us to disregard what they may have to say. [*Desk thumping*] If it is that we are up for a third rating agency I am still okay with that, but I am just saying let us take cognizance of what the report says. That is all with respect to the credit rating. And at least in both cases, as the hon. Minister correctly said, they both presented a stable outlook for Trinidad and Tobago and given the contribution of Sen. Khan with respect to the performance of the energy sector I feel comforted to know that the outlook could actually be a stable one for now and then translate into something positive. I particularly enjoyed that contribution on the energy sector

and the developments in that sector.

With respect to foreign exchange, we have seen a situation where the currency has depreciated slightly just averaging about 6 per cent. But the thing about the foreign exchange here is that we are seeing demand outstripping supply yet there is a deliberate attempt or deliberate effort to defend the currency. And I understand that is a macroeconomic objective and that is okay. But what I am saying is, as we defend the currency our reserves are falling, our import cover is falling and then given the existing the contribution from the energy sector, our supply is also falling. Then if we are to defend the currency, for how long can we defend the currency given the falling reserves? More so, the credit agencies used the reserve figure as a buffer to provide their rating. So that there is some element of security provided in that reserve which the hon. Minister says is just over \$9 billion.

So if we are defending the currency and the reserves are slipping, although we are defending, then the buffer that we are using to ensure a credit rating stands, it is also being eroded. So to which dimension are we really going to ascribe the foreign exchange reserve? And that I may have a little trouble with, because I am unsure as to how long, if the supply of foreign exchange continues to be restricted, for how long can we continue to defend the currency and at the same time use the reserve as a buffer? From what I am gathering, the foreign exchange reserve is probably the largest reserve that Trinidad and Tobago holds over the HSF. And therefore, we need to take care and caution with respect to that fund and not just focus on the HSF.

Also I have noted that the hon. Minister did indicate that there was a directive or instruction and I do not want to use the wrong word, with respect to the

Central Bank issuing or giving an instruction to commercial banks for the sale of foreign exchange to manufacturing companies. I do not want to use the wrong word. But what I would like to say with respect to that and whether or not—and the hon. Minister quoted from two documents indicating that it was a policy of the past. All I want to say with respect to that is that the Financial Institutions Act, section 5, subsections (2) and (3) and I will read them. It says and if you would permit me, Mr. Vice-President:

- “(2) The primary objective of the Central Bank, in respect of licensees shall be to maintain confidence in, and promote the soundness and stability of, the financial system in Trinidad and Tobago.
- (3) Other objectives of the Central Bank, in respect of licensees are to—
 - (a) promote the existence of efficient and fair banking and financial services markets;”

And I am saying, to issue an instruction or directive to give a particular sector preference may not be efficient and fair banking and financial services being provided by the Central Bank. I do not think so.

And my last point, with respect to procurement, or the two points; second to last point with respect to procurement, I wish to commend the Government again for bring this legislation and trying, or giving its best effort to operationalize this piece of legislation. But as debated heavily on the last occasion we met, there was a request, an RFP, a request for proposal that went out and it bothered me when I read the last paragraph of that proposal which says, and if you would allow me, Mr. Vice-President, to just quote from it, it says:

The Ministry of Finance reserve the right to reject any or all proposals, to waive any technicalities, informalities and irregularities, to

accept or reject all or part of the proposals and to be the sole judge of the suitability of the proposals offered.

My concern with this, is that according to the Act the institution that is supposed to appoint the board and the regulators, the Office of the President and this language suggests that there is an authority that can exercise sole discretion, whether in terms of recruiting the agency or not. Whether it is saying that—all I am saying is that Trinidad and Tobago is awaiting the implementation of procurement legislation so as the allegations of corruption that have been made and have been characterizing Trinidad and Tobago could be a thing of the past. And when we have an arm of Government issuing a statement like this, whether the intention is good or by error; or let us just say that the intention is good, the language of it coming from an existing arm of Government into an area that the country is looking at to be independent I think the process appears to be somewhat compromised. I am not saying it is, I am saying it appears to be and the perception of it is very, very, very critical in transforming or influencing the minds of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

And if I just quote from the Holy Book, 1 Thessalonians, chapter 5 verse 22:
“Abstain from all appearance of evil.” [*Desk thumping*]

Not just evil, the appearance. And I am not saying that it is an evil intent, do not misquote me, I am just saying, conduct, you just abstain from the appearance. No disrespect meant in anyway at all whatsoever.

My last point, with respect to productivity, one way in which this country can improve our economic or our GDP is to have our own people improve our own productivity. And if it is that you reflect on the statistics issued by the Central Bank you will realize that the productivity among our own people is on the decline.

And if we are to improve the value of goods and services produced in our own country, steps need to be taken to address our—to be directed towards our own people for us to be able to improve our own productivity. So I want to ask the Government to continue to look at this and find ways in which we can encourage our own people to be more productive.

So as I conclude, just to remind or just to summarize what I have said before, as the Minister has sought to address and I am saying, I am just building an awareness that our budget deficit for this first six months is ahead of what I think it should be given that there are alternative revenues or revenues to come in later, I am still saying let us be aware that the projected deficit may not actually be realized.

Second thing, with respect to property tax. I am unsure of whether or not the revenue to be derived from property tax would be achieved given, as the hon. Minister read today, the possibility of litigation which can compromise the projection of the \$500 million. From the sale of assets programme I have shown that this \$10 billion may not really be realized in its entirety due to the shortfall in revenue from the First Citizens additional public offering; the reduction in shares to be sold from the National Gas Company; no information concerning the e TecK parks and the divestment of Lake Asphalt.

I have asked for a comprehensive debt management plan for Trinidad and Tobago to be issued, especially with respect to how we are going to service Government to Government arrangements and debt that is going to fall due. I have also said with respect to the credit ratings we understand that we have been downgraded, but let us accept the rating. I endorsed the rationale and the metrics that they have used. Let us not criticize it but be more informed by it than

anything else. And we recognize the stable outlook that has been presented.

With respect to forex, I offer a sense of caution in using the forex reserve, one to defend the currency but also to act as a buffer to our debt profile. With respect to procurement I have asked, let us be transparent in this and ensure that this process that we are using will allow us the transparency and to enable and to provide the confidence the people of Trinidad and Tobago require for our country to move up the perception of corruption index.

And my last point was to ask, could we look at the productivity of our people and ways in which we can improve it. I am sure that if these issues or my comments can be addressed, we will restore confidence to the Trinidad and Tobago economy, not only in terms of the revenue position, but with respect to how the people view our economic situation. I thank you, Mr. Vice-President. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat): Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. And I thank Sen. Shrikissoon for his very sincere contribution and I would address a few points that he raised shortly. But, Mr. Vice-President, as I listened to Sen. Ameen I reflected on the late 1960s into the 1970s, at a time when my father had just entered the public service and my mother was still unemployed and I have told the story already of their five children who would add to their burdens by all being placed in school in San Fernando, bringing to them an additional financial burden.

And in that two-bedroom wooden house, with outside toilet facilities and lamps inside, the children will hear from time to time my parents going over the family accounts and a phrase stuck in my head from since then. I would hear them talking about cutting and contriving. And that is the way they live their life; that is

the way I live mine and that is the way we have been taught. And when our Minister of Finance found himself being asked to deal with this country's economy, that is exactly what he has done. And I think that, when we set aside the political banter, every Senator would agree that he has done a masterful job in managing this economy. [*Desk thumping*]

And I thank Sen. Shrikissoo not for the first time for recognizing that, because this is my first term in office as a Senator and as a Minister and I have sat through all but one Cabinet meeting. And it had not been easy, managing as a whole and it has not been easy for me as a Minister managing my part of it. But the Minister of Finance has provided sterling leadership for all of us and he has brought to bear, both on the economy and his portfolio, his vast experience. And I think we are all very, very, grateful for that. [*Desk thumping*]

When I listened to Sen. Ameen's contribution it was so detached from reality. This is not Kamla 2020 and I do not want to spend my time pointing out how we got into this position except to say two things. The first is that, Sen. Ameen must understand what it means to have the level of revenue that the last administration had and still continue to run consecutive deficits. And in my parents' world that would never have happened, because they would have ensured that even in good times we cut and contrive and at a minimum balance the budget and after those four years 2010 to 2014, we came into 2015 which was a ridiculous year, but we would not have known that.

For example, when I was on the platform I would not have known the details. It is my entry into Government and my entry into the Cabinet that brought home to me the reality that contracts, not million-dollar contracts but billion-dollar contracts were being signed with no source of funding. To use the expression that

the young people use, “sticking me”. Like when somebody go into a restaurant and order a whole set of food, and walk out just before the bill reach. That is what the last administration did. [*Desk thumping*] Point Fortin hospital, Arima hospital, what has happened of the Beetham waste water project? Maracas, that moved from \$200-and-something million down to \$160-something million and was awarded somewhere at that level.

The UNC and the six Senators across there, in particular Sen. Ameen, must face the reality that what we had to deal with is a level of debt incurred particularly in the last year at a time when it ought to have been known that the revenue situation was severely impaired, not only because of declining energy prices, but declining production levels. And faced with that and month after month, of having to face up to debts which were now become apparent this country, this Government was literally threading water.

So when you talk about the fanciful thoughts about all the spending and all the projects that should continue, no sensible person, slightly mindful of the financial circumstances in which we found ourselves, would even bother to talk about those things. Because what we are trying to do, we are trying to cut and contrive. And I will only make two points on Sen. Ameen’s contribution.

The biometric card has not been abandoned. In fact, the Minister has come into Parliament on several occasions explaining what has happened. And one of the most important things that has happened to the biometric card is the trimming of the cost because the cost that we found of the system was excessive and unnecessary and the plan to put that in place was unachievable. And all the Minister has done, the Minister has developed and determined a way for a system like that to be introduced at a far lower cost than what was projected by the last

administration. And I have personally heard the Minister stand so many times in defence of that particular system and the effort to move away from cheques.

7.00 p.m.

And the baby grant; the baby grant was not even given birth. The statutory enactments, the requirements of the changes of the law, were never put in place. It was purely an election gimmick and lived as long as the last administration lived and died on election day. It is the people of the country that killed the baby grant, not the PNM Government.

To turn to Sen. Shrikissoon, I would just say that this Bill seeks to do something very simple. As has been said before, there is no increase in the overall appropriation. It seeks to move funds from one side to the other side, and when we look at the Senate document which goes into the details of the need for the funds, we see that, to deal with Sen. Shrikissoon's fears, the Development Programme is unlikely to be affected. The Minister of Finance has said these are projects that are not at a stage where payments are required to be made. There are projects where the work will be done in this fiscal year under the IDF, but the payment period, the time to pay will not arise in this fiscal year. And when it arises, he has used the expression "rolling fund" on several occasions, those payments would be dealt with out of the fund at that time.

And the second thing you would see in the details is that there are several development projects that are going to be funded by the movement of the funds. You would see several in Ministry of National Security, in Ministry of Health and other places. But more importantly, to support your point, Sen. Shrikissoon, you would also see in this document the requirement of the taxpayers to fund a series of employee-related expenses: travelling, subsistence and overtime, contract

employment, brings at the heart of the discussion a point I would make in my core contribution, about the way in which our recurrent expenditure is structured, the majority of payments going to salaries and wages and employee-related benefits, and the fact that if we do not have productivity, we are going to hamstring this country in a way that we cannot develop.

So when you look at the details, a fair amount of this is going towards paying employee-related benefits. And then there is one that really stands out in relation to the Ministry of Housing, and it has to do with the need to transfer \$376,837,045 to the Ministry of Housing, and you would see it there under the Schedule at Head 61. And the bulk of that, \$283 million, is meant to service liabilities incurred by the last administration through their borrowings. And if these debts incurred do not represent spending that brings value for money, it represents an excessive burden on the taxpayers. Money, which if used productively, might have been able to increase the housing stock that we have available, or improve the living circumstances of people who live in these housing estates owned by the HDC.

And that is what we are funding. As a Minister, I wish that all the money that we have available in the appropriations was available for spending on things that we need now and things that we need into the future. But a fair amount of what many of us in Ministries will continue to spend, represents liabilities incurred in the past and we have no choice but to service those debts to contractors and to employees and to utilities and to other service providers incurred in the past.

But, Mr. Vice-President, we must not lose sight of what the Bill seeks to do. The Bill moves money from two places and puts it in the hands of 21 Departments and Ministries in order to deal with things that need to be dealt with in this fiscal

year. And in relation to the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, you would see under Head 77, Mr. Vice-President, an increase in the allocation to that Ministry of \$3,187,153, a small sum with a big story behind it. You see, this is no simple matter, this \$3 million. It is not a simple matter. And it is very important that I share with the Parliament and with the country, the context of this \$3 million.

You see, that \$3 million is meant to settle interest payments owed by the EMBD, the Estate Management and Business Development Company, and that has to do with \$400 million borrowing incurred by the EMBD in the weeks before the 2015 election. And I know, Mr. Vice-President, in my short time on this planet, that once the election date is called, remember the last administration had gone into overtime—three months—and in June the date was announced, and in July the EMBD board at that time—July 2015—committed the company to a series of contracts, and sometime between July and August, 2015, committed to borrowing \$400 million. And then not long before September 07, 2015, managed to pay out the entire \$400 million in respect of works on 10 roads. And that, as I have said before, is the subject of an audit that is under way by the EMBD.

But where has that left me as a Minister and our Ministry? That \$400 million debt needs to be paid and it means that every year, last fiscal, this fiscal and the next two fiscal years, the Ministry has to commit \$104 million out of its allocation to service that debt. And, Mr. Vice-President, if in more sensible circumstances the Government had \$400 million at its disposal and wished to improve the conditions of the farmers of this country, I will tell you that \$400 million could upgrade every single agriculture access road in this country. [*Desk thumping*]

And you want to know what really hurts me about that expenditure?

Everybody who is involved in agriculture knows that those lands in central Trinidad which were formerly under sugarcane are the least arable lands in the country. The most arable lands in this country are in north-east Trinidad, south-east Trinidad, south-west Trinidad. And if this \$400 million, instead of being used for 10 roads in central Trinidad was used on every agriculture access road in the country, it would have truly represented an investment in agriculture in this country and an improvement in the lives of the farmers of rural Trinidad and Tobago. And that is part of a legacy at the EMBD. And let me tell you this, Mr. Vice-President. That indebtedness and that out-of-hand spending in the EMBD during 2010 to 2015 represents an enormous burden on the taxpayers of this country. And I will tell you this. The EMBD, long before 2010, had been engaged in the development of residential lots for Caroni workers under the VSEP. EMBD was formed in 2002. I was there from the formation, not in the company but I was around.

In 2003, the VSEP was offered and at August 01, 2003, the workers exited the company. And in 2007 EMBD commenced the development of these lots to be given out to the workers. And under the VSEP programme, the commitment of the Government was to develop 8,885 residential lots and EMBD pursued the development. And let me illustrate for you the sort of spending that took place. In the period up to May 2010, the EMBD developed a total of 5,170 parcels for distribution—5,170—and it did so at a cost of \$934 million provided by the taxpayers of this country. And the average cost to develop a lot of land was \$181,000. It ranged from a low of \$124,000 in the case of the Calcutta area, up to a high of \$179,000 in the La Romaine area. But for each of those 5,170 lots developed up to 2010, the average cost was \$181,000.

And then we go to that period, 2010 to 2015 and during that period the same EMBD developed 7,221 lots at a cost of \$4 billion. Understand what I am saying, Mr. Vice-President. In the period up to 2010, 5,170 lots at an overall cost of \$934 million, at an average cost of \$181,000, and in the period 2010 to 2015, 7,221 lots at a total cost of \$4.059billion. During that period, in a place called Petit Morne—you would not know where that is—the average cost of developing a 5,000 square foot lot to be given free to a former Caroni worker was \$1.17 million.

Hon. Member: Wow.

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: In Cedar Hill—

Hon. Imbert: And they “doh want tuh” pay property tax.

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat:—halfway between San Fernando and Princes Town, the average cost of developing a residential lot, not to be sold, Mr. Vice-President, to be given to former Caroni workers: \$560,000. So it means over a period from 2007 to 2015, this country has developed—the taxpayers of this country have carried the cost of developing these lots to the former Caroni workers to the point that today, if we continue the development, we will be doing it at an average cost of \$750,000.

And that is the cost structure. Whether it was the Point Fortin Hospital, the Arima Hospital, the waste water plant, the box drain, Maracas or the 10 roads for the \$400 million, one of the most important things this Government had to do was to look closely at the cost structure for every project coming from every agency or institution in this country, knowing that the behaviour of EMBD from 2010 to 2015 was a behaviour that was to be found in every institution of the State throughout the country.

[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

And that is why we are carrying this debt. Because if the last administration could not, as my parents did, cut and contrive and balance a budget when energy prices were high and when revenues were up to the \$61 billion, then how can we manage now with production the way it is and prices the way they are and these liabilities hanging over the heads of every single Minister of Government? I am just one. And this represents a \$2 billion problem. The EMBD has already been sued by one contractor for \$1.2 billion and in the last two weeks by one contractor for \$60 million and today by one for \$40 million. And this is what has happened and this is what this bill is about.

The \$3 million under Head 77, Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, represents the way in which, not only the taxpayers, but this Ministry in particular, has been saddled with the sins of the past administration. And to every farmer out there and to every MP writing, begging for an access road, I say to them this year, last year, the next two years to come once I am still here, that if I did not have to hand this \$104 million every year in service of this debt contracted by EMBD in the weeks before the general election, I would have been able to service every rural access road in this country.

And, Madam President, when you look at each Ministry—this Ministry was allocated \$1.1 billion last fiscal, and again, by managing, by paying close attention to the costs we were incurring, by managing the cost and managing what we were incurring throughout the financial year, we managed in the last fiscal to run the Ministry on \$834 million. This fiscal year, the Ministry has just over \$800 million to deal with and the bulk of that, over \$400 million, close to 60 per cent of the allocation, goes in paying salaries and wages. And consistent with the position taken by the Government which has been made clear over and over, as far as

possible, the Government intends to preserve the jobs in the public service and elsewhere. That is the way we have been operating and it has not been easy. It has not been easy to manage.

But when you spend 60 per cent of what is made available to you on wages and salaries, and when you have fixed costs like telephones and utilities and so on, maintenance of vehicles, there is very little left to work with. And in particular, this Ministry, which I have the pleasure of leading, everything that happens in the environment impacts this Ministry, whether it is flood, whether it is fire, fish kill, damage to boats because of wave action, the locusts, the giant African snail, the weevil. This Ministry has no control sometimes over the costs and the expenses that it might incur.

If, for example, the people who protected the assets of the country during this dry season which has happily ended, if they were not able to do that and we had as many fires as we had last year—21 fires in the Northern Range—if we had that many fires, it would have eaten into the resources given to us by the Minister of Finance. And by management and cutting and contriving, and in some cases praying, we have made it through the dry season. But the wet season is upon us, bringing with it a series of risks and potentially a series of expenses. But whatever happens, Madam President, our commitment will always be to ensure that that 400-and-something million dollars that is required to preserve the employees in the Ministry and the agencies of the Ministry, would be our first priority.

Madam President, on the last occasion during the budget I remember Sen. Shrikissoo lamenting the fact that I had not articulated a plan for this Ministry, and in the context of the budget allocation, and in the context of this Bill, I would talk about that. I would say first that in the manifesto of the PNM which is now a

public policy document, there are set out 16 commitments in relation to agriculture, and there are three commitments in relation to the environment for which this Ministry has responsibility. And that is the framework of the Ministry's plan, to deliver on those commitments which were made—those 19 commitments which were made.

When you look at the sustainable development goals which is a favourite of Sen. Mark for which he brought a Motion which was supported by all of us, of the 15 sustainable goals, 11 are either entirely or partially the responsibility of this Ministry. *[Interruption]* Eleven I take responsibility for in whole or in part. And that is the second element of the plan. And the third thing is that the Ministry has been working on a plan. But I will make this point. One of the very first things I said as Minister is that everything required to move Agriculture, Land and Fisheries in this country has already been written—everything.

I want to draw reference to this 2004 plan written with the help of the University of the West Indies, and when you look at the people who worked on this plan, if I had to assemble a dream team today, 13 years later, I would be very fortunate to have this team: Dr. Manfred Jansen, who has taught a lot of us at the IOB; Dr. Ranjit Singh, a longstanding academic at the University of the West Indies who has been involved in everything agriculture; Dr. Clement Sankat, whose training is in agriculture; Dr. Lloyd Rankin; Prof. Umaharan who has done a lot of work on plant varieties, on pepper and is now involved in cocoa; Dr. Braithwaite; Dr. Indar Ramnarine, who is the fisheries expert in this country, or one of them, in 2004.

And what this team in 2004 identified is exactly the same thing if I had to commission a plan in 2017, I will identify. Not a lot has changed. It has identified

the constraints, the challenges, the high food import bill, low contribution to GDP, the developments in international trade, the need for infusion of technology, the need to address food health and safety issue, land tenure, infrastructure, credit and praedial larceny. Does it sound familiar to all of you? This is 2004. And when it identified the weaknesses, it listed 41 weaknesses, many of which I came into Government having to deal with as a Minister: lack of a clear strategy; poor attitude among Ministry staff. Keep in mind what I said about the recurring expenditure being largely dedicated to the payment of wages and salaries and employee-related benefits and the fact that this Bill before us today commits a significant amount of the spending to employee-related cost and benefit; an extremely bureaucratic structure that fails to effectively respond to and treat with issues of land tenure incentive, access roads and praedial larceny.

And it goes on and on, which is why in my maiden speech in this Senate I set the framework for the operations of the Ministry and for my work as the Minister, where I said I will focus on three priorities: the structure of the Ministry; governance in the Ministry, making sure that the agencies operate the way they should be and making sure that the Ministry itself operates in the way it should. And the third one is dealing with the people. And one of the most fundamental things I said about dealing with people is my wish that as a Ministry we can place people closest to the points that they live at and where the Ministry operates. And that was the context in which, in that first period I was very deliberate in not running off and doing a plan. And this Ministry has been operating in accordance with what I felt should be the priorities and the way it should be structured, that it should be run—

Madam President: Minister, you have five more minutes.

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat:—in the way a business is run; that we should be paying attention to what is allocated to us and managing it. But ultimately, Madam President, the constraint remains and it is something that I have publicly spoken about. The constraint remains in making the employees more productive, more attentive and more responsive to the needs of those people who depend on them for their services. And the areas in which we focused are in the areas of land administration. And I have talked extensively about the way in which land administration has suffered and the commitment made in this year's PSIP to use technology to modernize the way in which land is administered in this country.

And I want to answer a question, Madam President, posed by Dr. Moonilal in the other place, and he was making the point during the debate in that place on this Bill, that since coming into Government, this Government has not issued a single lease for State lands. And it is something that, around Easter time, when you think that people will be more discerning, the President General of the All Trinidad Workers Union also made a point about Government not giving out any—distributing any land. And I want to say to the President General, if you had accepted one of my many invitations to the distribution of leases, you would have known, because the Chairman of Caroni is on record as saying to the public that in this Government's 20 months in office so far, we have distributed 3,019 leases of State land to former Caroni workers. [*Desk thumping*]

Finally, distributing re-leases, not photocopies of the same leases to the same workers over and over; re-leases, over and over, inviting the same workers to distribution of leases and giving them copies of the same documents. We have, as I said we would do at the start—in the budget debate we have reviews and we have commissioned the review of the incentives programme to make sure that when

taxpayers commit money in agriculture, the taxpayers see the benefits of that commitment.

And, Madam President, I could go on and on, but this is not the place tonight to talk about what we have done in the last six months in detail.

7.30 p.m.

What I came here to talk about was the fact that in this Bill many of the expenses to be covered by the money transferred to Ministries represent the situation that I as a Minister have, of being saddled with a debt for moneys which would have been better spent on servicing the farmers of this country, and all it did, Madam President, was to service the pockets of a few selected contractors, and that is essentially what this Bill means to me.

I thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Christlyn Moore: Thank you, Madam President, for the opportunity to address this honourable House on the Act to vary the appropriation of the sum, the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2017) Act, 2016.

Now, Madam President, you know I listened to the hon. Senator, Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, telling us how important this Bill is to him and what it means to him, and what I gather from his contribution is that it means to him, or it represents to him, all the things that he was not able to achieve. [*Desk thumping*] It means the same thing to me. He may have a view, his own view, as to why he was not able to achieve those things and he may blame someone else, but I want to assure him, and this honourable House, that this Bill represents for me, as a Tobagonian, all the things that we have not been able to achieve in the last six months, and it is clear will not be able to achieve in the upcoming six months.

[*Desk thumping*] This contribution, or the contributions by the other side this evening, has really been a learning lesson to me. It has been a lesson in speaking softly and carrying a big stick, because for Tobagonians this is indeed a very big stick.

In all the transfers we are not mentioned. We do not warrant a mention. Now, that may mean nothing to other Ministries who do not warrant a mention. That may mean nothing to other communities who have not warranted a mention, but we are not warranted a mention at all and I will tell you why that is important. Let me start first with a current matrix of life in Tobago as we know it. In Tobago, or life in Tobago at the moment is characterized by a broken tourism sector; it is characterized by a failure of inter-island transportation [*Desk thumping*] both on the sea bridge and on the air bridge; it is characterized by an inability to guarantee either passenger seating or cargo facilitation on the port; it is characterized by uncertainty and unrest as seen in the various protests by the truckers organisation happening over the last 15 days.

In Tobago, a place where protests are almost unheard of, it is now a part of our life. This is what this Bill means to me. Tobago is characterized by rising unemployment and it is soon to be characterized by more depression, more anxiety and, of course, our crime statistics are on the rise. That is where we are. So I searched this Bill for hope, I searched this Bill for a way out, I searched this Bill for a reason for Tobagonians to get up in the morning and feel some sense that it will be all right, that all will be well, but that hope does not come here.

I want to concentrate, if I may, on a few of the allocations that fill me quite frankly with jealousy as a Tobagonian. I note that there has been a reallocation of funds to allow certain ongoing payments to be made, certain commitments to be

made, certain contractors to be paid. Well, the landscape in Tobago is characterized by an absolute absence of a payment to contractors, hundreds of millions of dollars in debt owed by the State. However you call the State, whatever term you use of describe the State, hundreds of millions of dollars in contractor payments still waiting to be paid. In an economy as contracted and as constrained as ours, what that means is contractors selling equipment, contract subject to foreclosure, contractors with very small staff having to lay those staff members off. It means an increase in unemployment. What is being done there? Where is the model that admits to an additional transfer to the Tobago House of Assembly so that these payments can be made? Because in this Bill we are seeing Trinidad being paid, we are seeing pockets of this society across the water being paid, and quite frankly I am unmoved as to who incurred those bills. What concerns me is that mechanisms are being put in place to pay them when they arise on this side of the water. Where are the same mechanisms being put in place in Tobago because there can be no argument you see as to who incur the Tobago bills. There can be no pointing of the fingers that this was incurred by the last administration. That cannot happen.

The PNM Government has been in Government in Tobago for over 17 years [*Desk thumping*] so if the problem in Trinidad originated with the current Opposition and so there is a moaning and a groaning and a bemoaning of the current situation because it was caused by someone else—all right—what is the excuse for Tobago? [*Desk thumping*] You see, that is what confuses me in this governance structure. So that when you starve Tobago contractors, all of them Tobagonian, all of them given work by this PNM Government in—and we have to remember what transpired earlier on in the day. We have to remember that the

hon. Senator mentioned the unassailable position that the PNM enjoyed in the Tobago landscape. So then, why are Tobago contractors not being paid? Why is our economic growth being stifled? Why is entrepreneurship being killed? The historic entrepreneurial spirit of the Tobagonian: Why is that not being fostered by transfers and subsidies to the THA that will allow contractual payments to be made? I am confused. [*Desk thumping*]

I note, Madam President, in the disaggregation there is an \$80 million to squatter regularization—it comes under one of the Heads and you know the squatting phenomena is a large part of the Trinidad landscape, and as I understand squatting, a squatter typically has no title; a squatter typically has no ancestral connection to the land; initial squatter houses are moveable chattel; the lands have no lights, no roads, no water; and you know, no doubt it is because of the desperate situation that can arise out of being on somebody else's land, not having light, not having water and so on, that this Government has committed to continue its squatter regularization programmes and to dedicate moneys in that regard to—I beg your pardon.

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan):
Madam President, in accordance with Standing Order 14(5), I beg to move that the Senate continue to sit until the completion of the business at hand.

Question put and agreed to.

FINANCE (VARIATION OF APPROPRIATION)

(FINANCIAL YEAR 2017) BILL, 2017

Madam President: Continue, Sen. Moore

Sen. C. Moore: I am obliged. It is no doubt because of the desperate situation,

occasioned by being on land that is not your own, not having lights, not having water, not having access to roads and so on, that this Government has seen it fit to redistribute and reallocate funds so that \$80 million is funnelled into this Squatter Regularization Programme. Well, let me tell you a little bit about titles in Tobago.

While we do not know about squatting as it exists in the Trinidad sense, we know about not having titles to land. Unlike the squatter in Trinidad, we have ancestral right to these lands. Similar to the squatter in Trinidad, we have no title, but dissimilar to the squatter in Trinidad, nobody at all is concerned about regularizing our ancestral title to give us a deed. So you know what is the net effect, Madam President? The net effect is that if I decide as someone with no rights at all, ancestral or otherwise, and I decide to go and squat on a piece of land next to the hon. Senator, this Government is prepared to spend money to give me lights, and to give me water, and to give me roads. However, if I am on my great, great, great grandfather's land in Tobago, 22 miles away, this Government is not even prepared to spend money to photocopy a deed for me. [*Desk thumping*] You see, this is a real problem.

Madam President, how did the Tobago land titles issue arise? I read an article some time ago that spoke about Tobago squatters, let me make it clear. If there are squatters in Tobago, they have been imported from in Trinidad. Tobago have no squatters. Tobago has ancestral titles and has suffered from the lack of all Governments since 1900 to make provision for the registration of our titles. Every single Government. Since the annexation of Trinidad to Tobago has not seen it fit until the last administration to allow us provisions to register titles in Tobago. So what happened? In 1889 you had annexation; in 1898 Tobago became a ward. Titles needed to come to Trinidad to be registered because this was the

administrative centre of the twin-island Republic. But how are you getting from Trinidad to Tobago?

In the 1950s you had the interisland ferry, one boat a week. So of all the things that you would choose to do, the last one would be to come to Trinidad to go to the Red House to lodge a piece of paper and wait a next week to go back home. Nobody was doing that so that Tobagonians kept their titles at home. They kept their titles at home and in a quirk of fate you had in 1963, Flora came, took everything—took house, took church, took deed unregistered. So this problem metastasized and crystalized the importance of a registry for titles crystalized in 1963. Yet nobody did anything until about 2012/2013, when for the first time Tobagonians were able to register titles in Tobago without coming to Trinidad. So what do we have? We have now a situation where we are at a profound disadvantage because we are not squatters.

Apparently, if you have no connection to the land at all, you are better off. So the whole of Tobago might be better advised to move to Trinidad, just find a piece of land and wait. Somebody in this Government will come with an appropriation Bill and spend \$80 million on you. These matters concern me, and this Bill—just like Sen. Rambharat—represents to me everything that Tobago does not have. And you know to add insult to injury, Madam President, you sit by for 100 years, you do not regularise my title, I am not important; you sit by, you make me come to Trinidad for over a hundred years to register my titles, I am not important; and then, you tell me expect tax. You tell me, me, who have ancestral titles—I am not asking you for road, not asking you for lights, not asking you for water, but you tell me that my tax is going to go up, and you tell me by omission that “ah still not getting title. Ah better come Trinidad and squat.” [*Desk*

thumping] How can that be right? How can that be right? You see this is why it is so important, Madam President, for me to make this pilgrimage here whenever I have the opportunity, you know. It is so important because Tobago is saying, "Tax whatever you want to tax you know, but doh tax meh land without fixing meh land." [*Desk thumping*] "Cyah be right. It cyar be right".

I am glad for Caroni workers. They work hard. They deserve their lease. Whether it photocopy or it "ain't" photocopy, they deserve that. I am glad for them. I hold no grudge, but, Madam President, Tobagonians deserve their deed. [*Desk thumping*] "We ain't want no lease. We ain' out for dat." This is our land. We inherited this land. We bought this land. This land has been ours since the abolition of slavery. We want our deed. It is the fault of the Government why we do not have titles. Failure, a repeated failure of governance and Government, and this administration has the opportunity to right it and I challenge the Government to right it. I am not interested in who did not right it before because it has not been righted for over 100 years. [*Desk thumping*] This did not develop in 2012. Over 100 years we have been settling. So you want to play the UNC card and PNM card and the DLP card, fix it now and take the glory. [*Desk thumping*] We do not care who fix it. Take the praise, but fix it please. Fix it.

I want to move on to the matter that the hon. Senator Rambharat raised about cutting and contriving. I have a lot of respect for Sen. Rambharat. I have known him a long time. It think his heart is in the right place, a lot of respect for him which is why it pains me when he is wrong. [*Desk thumping*] I know about cut and contrive. No Tobagonian who grew up in the era that we did would not know about cut and contrive. In fact, when we do our Tobago heritage presentation I think last year the theme was cut and contrive. That was the theme of the whole

festival. You cannot tell us nothing about cut and contrive, but this is not cutting and contriving. This is suffering. [*Desk thumping*] Why do I say that? I do not want to be mean to Sen. Rambharat, you know. He has never been mean to me and that is not my intention, but I say to him that while he may be interested in cutting and contriving, his colleagues are not.

So he really speaks from a position that is not shared by Members on his side because you see to me if the Government's policy is cut and contrive, then it is difficult for me to reconcile cutting and contriving with the Minister of Tourism engaging over a four-day period in a phone bill of \$59,000. Cutting and contriving, how is this consistent with the lofty ideals of Sen. Rambharat and with the cutting and contriving we are told about in this document? So that when a bmobile bill reaches my proverbial mailbox and it says to me that the number 1 (868) 720-5986 under the rubric Minister of Tourism, and I read the line item—
[*Interruption*]

Madam President: Sen. Moore.

Sen. C. Moore: I beg your pardon.

Madam President: Yes. I am going to caution you here. If it is that you are publicly calling out the numbers, I do not know, I am listening to you, I am asking you to be very careful as you proceed on this point. Okay?

Sen. C. Moore: I will be mindful and sensitive. Thank you. When I read the rubric that says Minister of Tourism and it quotes a figure of \$59,059.20 and I read through the document and I realize that the bulk of these sums were incurred between January 29, 2017 and February 03, 2017, I am concerned that this is not consistent with cutting and contriving. [*Desk thumping*]

You see, the cutting and contriving is only for some people. So

Tobagonians, cut and contrive. And what do we have to cut? We have to cut tourism, we have to cut jazz, we have to cut transportation, we have to cut land, we have to cut jobs. We have to cut and contrive, but everybody else, no. *Largesse.* [*Desk thumping*] So while I applaud the lofty sentiments of Minister Rambharat, he may well be alone in his quest.

I want to speak if I would be permitted, I want to speak a bit about cutting and contriving where festivals are concerned in Tobago. Again, as a demonstration, that this cutting and contriving is only for some people.

Twelve million dollars were spent on the jazz festival in Tobago—disbursed public funds, \$12 million. We know from previous enquiries by various Joint Select Committees that the jazz festival has never turned a profit. [*Desk thumping*] We know that this year it was an epic and unforgettable disaster. [*Desk thumping*] We know that almost every single night flights were cancelled and visitors who had bookings in hotels were unable to come to Tobago to take up their bookings, far less attend the events. We know that many events were not even half subscribed. We know that persons who eventually made it to the jazz festival had problems returning to Trinidad because boats were cancelled, flights were cancelled. Many of them went back to their hotel rooms and literally begged a lodging because they were uncertain as to when they would be able to leave, so uncertain and precarious was the ferry situation, and so laughable was the air bridge situation.

We know that with regard to artistes there were troubles in those waters, but more than all of that is the unmitigated gall of the organizer to declare a success. How can a loss be a success? That tells you how public money is viewed in those quarters. So while my friend is cutting and contriving to give Caroni workers their

leases and so on, \$12 million by so, \$60,000 by so, who is really cutting and contriving, and who is really suffering? Because just like my friend, I have a lot of ideas as to where that \$12 million could have benefited the good people of Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Just like my friend, I am seeing how that \$12 million would have helped us build one or two early childhood learning centres, [*Desk thumping*] build a better school for disabled. We have a growing number of differently-abled, autistic, special needs children—my niece numbers among them—with challenges for finding proper educational facilities on the island.

Madam Speaker—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Sturge: Madam President.

Sen. C. Moore: Madam President, I beg your pardon, in an era gone by persons with special needs in small rural communities, nobody really knew what they were dealing with eh. So that there were all kinds of theories ascribed and these citizens did not get the help and attention that they need. Now, we are in a different era and I am thinking that that \$12 million that was just wasted on a “buss” fete, that that could have been used towards seeking the interest of a differently abled. So I feel the pain that my friend, Sen. Rambharat feels. I feel it. [*Desk thumping*] Twelve million dollars wasted, \$60,000 on a phone bill, but Tobagonians must cut and contrive.

Our sea bridge, Madam, quite frankly I am embarrassed to keep talking about the sea bridge. I am embarrassed. Every day brings the revelation of a new species of evil being revealed about this sea bridge every day. What is the latest? The latest is “we afraid” to put vehicles on it. The latest is you could put your vehicle but it is not licensed for passengers. So you run up the road and see if you catch a plane. See if you catch a plane and see if you could reach when your car

reach, or when your cargo reach, if it reach. Board the boat if you want, but it “ain’t” sure to leave. You might have to come off. The most uncertain route in Trinidad and Tobago right now is the route between Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] I kid you not. Madam, it is easier for you to get to Biche now than to get to Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] I kid you not. My friend can attest to it.

You do not know and “don’t” tell me get a booking. You are not sure that that plane will come, you are not sure it will leave. “Yuh not sure the boat will take yuh, you not sure when it go come back for yuh.” That is our life. Cut and contrive? I could write a book about Tobago on cut and contrive. [*Desk thumping*] I say it again, Madam President, this is not cut and contrive for Tobagonians. This is our life you know. You know that old proverb “wha is joke for schoolboy is death for crapaud”, well listen, this PNM Government really showing “we dat we is crapaud” because we are dying.

8.00 p.m.

Tobagonians come to Trinidad for surgeries, not only in the public health care system but in the private health care system. So imagine—and this is a true story. Imagine that you have your relative of advanced age needing to come to Trinidad for surgery. “Yuh know the boat not reliable but yuh surgery carded for Saturday so yuh leaving Thursday, yuh ain taking no chances. So yuh get to the port on Thursday for the 6.00 a.m. sailing but the boat not leaving, so yuh come back on Friday and yuh hope that it leave. Well yuh lucky.” It leaves on time, you come to Trinidad, you settle yourself and then you turn up for “yuh” little hernia surgery on Saturday. “Yuh take ah day rest and yuh say yuh go take the boat back up. Yuh drive yuh car with yuh sick husband onto the boat and then they tell yuh something wrong with the hydraulics, come off. Yuh come off, they say they go

fix it in ah hour. Two hours later, they say they ain too sure nah, come back tomorrow. You have yuh sick husband, yuh not home, yuh doh know when yuh going home and yuh have yuh car.” So what do you do?

“Yuh could sleep on the dock and hope that the 18 per cent crime detection rate absorbs you when yuh geh rob because they go figure out who rob you or yuh could shell out some more money and go and find ah lil hotel somewhere and come back tomorrow.” This is our life. Is this fair? Is this fair? And you are telling me about cutting and contriving? “You telling me leases for Caroni but no deed for Tobago and tax fuh all ah we?” Something is wrong. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to talk—[*Interruption*—if I am permitted, I want to speak a bit about the fudging in the tourism numbers. You know, everybody has a version of events and so it is not really fair to say that numbers are misstated because you know, no two witnesses ever see the same person in the same crime. Right? So you and I witnessed a crime, “buh you say the man short and I say, it had no man, it was ah woman”. So all right, let us make allowances for all of that.

But here is what I cannot reconcile, Madam President. I cannot reconcile the so-called rosy Tobago numbers, yet six hotels in foreclosure in Tobago. Six. The last time I was here, it was one. It was one and I am not telling you what I have been told, you know. The one man was my client. “Was one.” In the space of less than two months, five more have gone under, but “tourism numbers good”. [*Desk thumping*] Cut and contrive. “Cutting we throat”. Five more hotels are now under bank management but “tourism numbers good”.

Where are the tourism numbers coming from? There is one reliable source of information, one reliable data source, as to who is a tourist when they enter our shores—the National Security. They collect the data when you present your

passport, they see you are not from here, they record it. “They record how much days yuh staying, they say you is ah tourist, they filter this information where it needs to go.” So they are most reliable source of tourism numbers.

And so it really pains the members of that sector, the stakeholders in that sector, when a rosy picture is painted in another place and it is not supported by their bank accounts, it is not supported by their membership who are able to stave off foreclosure, it is not supported by the men and women who turn up for breakfast in their restaurants or establishments. It is not supported by the statistics from the one reliable authority on tourism statistics. So what are those statistics?

In 2005, the airport authority, gathering the data in the manner that I just described, told us that we had 87,000 visitors, 2005. In 2016, that figure was 19,000. Now, you might say well, all right, look at that big spread, Senator, anything could happen in the middle there. “Ah world war coulda happened, large global catastrophes. How do we know what happened?” Well, here is what we do know. We know that globally, tourism figures are increasing exponentially with worldwide growth of just over 10 per cent. We know that regionally—
[*Interruption*]

Madam President: Sen. Moore, you have five more minutes.

Sen. C. Moore: Thank you very much. We know that regionally, growth is above 7 per cent. We know that Jamaica is recording millions of dollars, US dollars, in tourism profits for the last fiscal and yet we see nobody coming to Tobago. “Buh we not surprised, they cyah get there, is best they go Biche.” Even if they wanted to come, “they cyar reach.” They cannot reach. [*Interruption*] Well, perhaps that is the thinking behind, Madam President, this ferry from Toco to—
[*Interruption*—the Toco port, but that is not my remit today. What I am saying is

when you tell Tobagonians to cut and contrive, we have been cutting and contriving since this annexation in 1898. How much more you want us to cut and contrive? “Yuh want us to cut off ah arm now?” When is it going to end? When is it going to end?

People have stood in defence of Tobago. They have proclaimed that “they red and they ready”. All sorts of slogans have been bandied about and yet Tobagonians continue to cut and contrive, and what I want to know is when are we going to see the light at the end of the cut and contrive tunnel and if this Government can present that, well then perhaps, my friend and I will have a different dialogue. But until then, my friend is alone. I want to assure him on that side, he is the only person that cutting anything and contriving anything and he may do well to give this formula to his colleagues because they have never heard of it.

Finally, the people of Tobago who have supported the PNM unstintingly, [*Desk thumping*] unstintingly for over 17 years, who have died in the service of the PNM, they deserve better than this. [*Desk thumping*] So if not for us who clearly are regaled to cutting and contriving, do it for your own people, they deserve it. Thank you, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Paul Richards: Thank you, Madam President, for the opportunity to contribute to this debate. Before I go into my contribution, it is a little after eight o'clock and I do not think it is too late—and I am surprised no one has done it yet—to wish a happy belated Mother's Day to all the mothers in the Chamber [*Desk thumping*] and by extension to the rest of the country. [*Crosstalk*] Mothers. [*Laughter*] Because mothers are the bedrock of civilization, they are the cradle of life and I think they deserve the recognition from this august Chamber. We have

Father's Day coming up so we will deal with fathers, single fathers and the like at that time, Sen. Sturge.

And let me take time to congratulate Sen. Moore on a great contribution. My mother is also born in Tobago so I have a close affinity to Tobago. I spent much of my childhood, Easter vacation and August vacation—"ah doh say summer"—in Tobago. Anyway. Thank you once again, Madam President, for the opportunity to contribute to this the—an Act to vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2017) Act 2016, and my contribution will focus on what I would like to title "Accountability" and wider than just Government accountability because I do believe we keep focusing only on Government and much to our demise, whoever may be the administration in power at the time.

Just to reiterate some of what my colleague Sen. Raffoul indicated, that eight to nine years, we are engaged in deficit budgeting. At the time when we started, we had relatively high revenue, peaking in 2013/2014 but we also had high expenditure which is not a really good formula because at that time, one would presume that we would be putting away more than we did for a rainy day. Fortunately, we have the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund to kind of fall back on now. Now we are experiencing lower revenue—much lower revenue but higher borrowing and the possibility of higher interest rates because of our downgrading by several of the rating agencies.

You know, Sen. Rambharat indicated earlier on that he referred to a document in 2004 about an agriculture plan for Trinidad and Tobago and the document—which is not Government policy, Vision 2030, which I guess is an evolution of Vision 2020—is also from the efforts of several cross-sector agencies

and persons, which is great. I am glad that Sen. Rambharat took the time to indicate where his Ministry was, moving from the implementation of the document in 2015 and laying it in the Parliament as Government policy, to where he is today.

I also want to commend, like my colleague Sen. Shrikissoon, the Minister for reducing the original expenditure which is commendable, which sends a signal to the population which is important that it is not business as usual, particularly from the Government and I think that is commendable. And also, yes, this is a variation Bill so we are not looking to increase the expenditure and I think that is also very important in the context of what we face today in Trinidad and Tobago, where every cent counts. And that is why I have titled my contribution “Accountability”. We need to not only—and the Bill is a variation Bill but it is also titled a mid-year review which I think is also important and Minister Imbert indicated, upon being appointed in 2015, that he would regularly come to the Parliament and the people of Trinidad and Tobago to account for what Government was doing, and I think his keeping of that promise is commendable.

But when we do a mid-year review, to me, it is not holistic to only look at the Government because there are several elements that make up the governing system in Trinidad and Tobago, that support the Government, any Government in power and if these systems and structures and institutions are not operating efficiently, no Government can succeed. We have found ourselves in Trinidad and Tobago in a state where there are several of the critical institutions in this country, for one reason or the other, that have been failing, inclusive of the Government, which is the Executive, the Parliament—and I am not saying the Parliament is failing but I am just elucidating the institutions: the Upper and Lower Houses, the Judiciary, the Office of the President, commissions, institutions, religious bodies,

NGOs, the media, which is the fourth estate, and civil society; and they are all very, very critical in terms of any Government being able to function effectively.

I remember a couple of months ago that the hon. AG indicating that his legislative agenda was aimed at one, achieving Government's policy and objectives but also strengthening institutions, and he used a reference that he had heard in Jamaica where he said, "We have to fix the plane when it is flying". And I found it quite an interesting analogy but sometimes—and I think this is the view of some of the population that, well, the plane may be in a nosedive so we may need emergency measures at this point in many ways.

I want to also look at the importance of strengthening of these institutions in the context of these institutions working in concert with Government or state objectives to achieve national objectives in the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. These are challenging times economically but to me, they are even more so challenging socially and philosophically because we find ourselves at a critical crossroad. And we have to ask ourselves if the way that we have gone about our politics, our governance and our socializations, which may have worked at some level in the past, is adequate for today and if many of these institutions are working the way they should for contemporary times and I want to posit that maybe they are not. They are not working at all.

What seems like an obsequious adherence to archaic approaches and paradigms will render us obsolete if we do not evolve our thinking, our ways of doing things, especially in the past 10 to 15 years. That means we have to ask ourselves: Is it the PNM at fault? Is it the UNC at fault? The COP? The NAR? The TOP? Or is it the systems and institutions that have failed successive governments, political parties and administrations and are challenging the country

at this time?

Because it cannot be, to me, that we have, for 54 years, elected the wrong people, supported the wrong party and are simply at the behest of the oil price going up and down as a country. We have to start thinking deeper than that. So today, it is the “PNM fault”; two years ago, it was the “UNC fault”; 10 years ago, it was the “NAR fault”. When are we going to stop casting blame and look at the deeper issues that may or may not be moving us forward as a country? Many of these institutions are failing us and they are the foundation of any society. They are bedrock upon which any administration, elected to power democratically, can actually move a country forward and if we do not look at strengthening these institutions, we will be caught in the perceptual cycle of changing administrations every five years and policies every five years much to the chagrin of any progress that can be made moving forward, and I think that also needs to be looked at.

Our country is caught between a declining economy, unchecked allegations of corruption, job losses, and there is a sense of fear and hopelessness in many quarters and while on this, you know, I think it is important, not only to paint a damning picture but also to point out some bright spots in the last couple of weeks or months that we have seen in Trinidad and Tobago, because we sometimes do not realize how much—the kind of psychological impact it is having, even as we seek to vary these sums to Ministries to fulfil their mandates.

And two, in particular, I want to congratulate the Government on, whether or not people agree with it—and this is not to minimize the concerns about these—it is the opening of the Brian Lara stadium and the Government Campus because whether or not people agree with it, it was X or Y administration who built it, they are eventually at the cost of taxpayers. And just like this edifice we are standing in

now when Mr. Manning had the vision to transform the skyline in Port of Spain, among much condemnation sometimes, we are all proud of it now, we all make use of it and we must look at these bright spots like the opening of the Brian Lara Stadium which kind of lifted us on that day, a much needed lift at that. We must look at the opening of the Government Campus. When we pass, we feel proud and it is important for us to elucidate that. [*Desk thumping*]

And I know I would get that reaction from the Government Bench, and equally, we must pay the kind of attention and opening the Couva Children's Hospital because it is an edifice paid for by taxpayers and whoever decided to build it, it may not be used as a children's hospital but some sort of function must be made of it because it is paid for by the taxpayers, and it is a sense of pride when it is opened and completed. And I think we need to stop getting caught because I think the Government Campus took—is it 10 or 11 years to open? The Brian Lara Stadium took what—seven years to open? And this is not to minimize the concerns about the allegations of corruption or the cost overruns or the delays, but when they do open, these are sources of pride for our country and we must use them productively and elucidate that. So I think that is very important.

One of the greatest concerns today, as we debate this appropriation variation Bill is the Trinidad and Tobago economy, declining energy commodity prices, high debt, job losses, allegations of corruption unchecked and allegations for 15, 20 years of squandermania which can be placed at the feet of many an administration. We are, I might add, a very strange society. It seems that the more concerned we are, the more fearful we become, the more we fete, the more we party, the harder we party. It is almost like we like to bury our heads in the sand. Our opiate is fete and merriment.

But we really, you know, because of the importance of every cent counts and that mandate and the fact that these appropriations and the high points that you see, the ones interestingly enough that are receiving the largest transfers are the Ministry of National Security, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Public Utilities and Housing and Urban Development are critical in terms of infrastructure and services to the population.

And we have to start becoming more critically thinking as a society because we have to wake up and smell the coffee. Many economists will tell us that in a declining economy, a country becomes more vulnerable to narco-trafficking, to trans-shipment, to money laundering, because the criminal element in any society, any country that is going through a declining economy, will look at this as an opportunity. Because if we have reduced revenue, we do not seem to, in large respect, have significantly reduced our standard of living in many areas. Yes, there is a slight dent but if you think about it, it is an opportunity for money launderers, drug traffickers, in some instances, even terrorist organizations to flood more money into the system and bolster the economy because the operation does not seem to care about where the money comes from once we could continue having a good time, and these are times when we need to pay particular attention to the institutions and the agencies that will be charged with the responsibility of monitoring these situations.

When you look at the level of suspicious transactions flagged by the FIU and I have a listing of it here, and it is listed on the Ministry of Finance FIU website, and you think of the transactions listed for October 01, 2016 to December 31, 2016, suspicious transactions to the tune of TT \$34 billion—Ministry of Finance website, October 01 to December 31, 2016. October, November, December, three

months, TT \$34 billion. The monetary value of transactions classified as suspicious, US \$5 billion.

Let us go to the intelligence reports disseminated by the FIU TT for the period April 01, 2016 to June 30, 2016 to local and foreign authorities with the intelligence community and that figure was TT \$98.8 million, flagged transactions. For the period April 01, 2016 to June 30, 2016, that was \$98.8 million. For October 01, 2015 to December 31, 2015, the amount was TT \$195 million, suspicious transfers in those short periods of time.

So we congratulate the FIU for doing that but what is next? When we could have \$5 billion of flagged transactions in a three-month period, to me, this is cause for grave concern because what is next? What is the next step? The FIU has done its job. How is the criminal justice system dealing with this? Or are we too happy with the opiate of merriment to even worry about it because “we having ah good time”? And the drug lords and them and terrorist organizations see an opportunity because guess what? “They like tuh party, they like tuh fete; they eh worrying about way the money coming from.”

We have to strengthen these institutions. We have to strengthen the criminal justice system. It is very easy to run down to Enterprise, go up in Laventille or wherever and lock up the gang members on the ground. Very easy to do that. Well, apparently not so much to keep them in jail but it is easy to grab them off the street. But guess what? They are replaceable and we have been replacing them to the number of 300 to 350 in the last 10 to 15 years. When you think about it—if we have 400 murders a year, usually two-thirds of those are classified as “gang related” and in our general consciousness, those are dispensable lives. You know what, “they look for they death because they in gang”. That is not the mindset?

That is our mindset, “it doh matter”. And we have been replacing them steadily every year for the last 10, 15 years. But what about the funders?

Madam President: Sen. Richards, I am going to ask you to just try and tie in what you are saying to the Bill. Okay?

Sen. P. Richards: I am obliged, Madam President. In terms of the context of this Bill—and I make those statements because we are asking for a transfer of \$149,491,000 transferred to the Ministry of National Security, and my connection to the commentary is: Are we getting value for money when we are asking for these transfers? Is there accountability? Is it that we are spending \$149,491,000 more transferred from some other place to the Ministry and it is redounding to a better criminal justice system, a more effective Ministry of National Security? When is it that we are going to reach a tipping point in terms of transfers or allocations in the first place to any of these Ministries to redound to the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago in terms of national security? But I am obliged by your guidance, Madam President.

You know, we need to focus on, as we seek to do these transfers, to strengthening of these institutions in terms of the legislation that will support organizations like the Police Service Commission, which is really handcuffed—to use a bad simile—in terms of its ability to effectively appoint a permanent police commissioner and that has an impact on effective law enforcement. The issue of the Police Complaints Authority and whether these transfers will make a difference in it being more effective to hold police officers more accountable, and very often we think that when we hear Police Complaints Authority, we think that it is only to convict bad policemen. It is also to exonerate police officers who have been wrongly accused and also to provide a check and balance in terms of the relative

operations of the police service to see if it is operating effectively or if changes can be recommended and implemented.

These are my concerns, not that I am against these transfers in terms of operations and fulfilling the Ministries' mandates but we have to ask the question about accountability and value for money and effectiveness because we seem to think that just throwing money at Ministries and throwing money at sectors is going to make a difference in making sectors and Ministries that have been underperforming for decades, suddenly perform because they have more money.

One of the commendations that I have for the Minister of Finance is this mid-year review that he has kept to but I would have liked to see a bit more detail in terms of what Ministries have functioned effectively, what Ministries have fallen short. To me, that is true accountability and to me, it is not a negative indictment. Very often, we talk of the public service and the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications is to receive \$56,230,000 but we keep talking about the public service and how ineffective many sectors in the public service are without possibly looking at: Are the systems that they are operating under just too archaic for efficiency? Maybe it is not the people working in the public service because I have been to several government agencies in the past six months and even before that and they are effective depending on the management structure in place.

Those are some of the issues that we need to deal with in Trinidad and Tobago: strengthening the public service, strengthening the office of the CPO, so that we do not have these retroactive negotiations that saddle every new administration that comes in to put them at loggerheads with the unions and further negatively impact our productivity in Trinidad and Tobago which renders us less

competitive.

Madam President, in terms of institutions—and I want to be very careful with this—we need to be very careful about public confidence when we are spending near \$60 billion in the last fiscal allocation and asking for these transfers on critical institutions. Because one—which I shall not name for fear of running afoul—has found itself and sadly so, in the midst of a terrible controversy and this institution is critical in terms of law/order, societal structure, confidence and critical players have found themselves in a public discussion with their names brought into odium and disrepute, further damaging public confidence even as the institution seeks financial autonomy which if these transfers are granted, they are going to fund these kinds of institutions.

And we have to ask ourselves if some institutions in Trinidad and Tobago are sacred cows, and are beyond question or critique or analysis, or if we are serious about cleaning up all institutions and making all institutions effective and accountable in Trinidad and Tobago, and it does not seem like that. It does not seem like that.

8.30 p.m.

The Bill has raised—is asking for the education Head to be raised to the tune of \$180,476,866. But once again, I ask the question: Are we getting value for money? [*Desk thumping*] Have we gotten value for money for the last 10/15 years? And we have free primary education, early childhood care centres, free secondary education, a much tighter rein on tertiary education spending, thank God, but when you look at it, are we producing the kind of citizen that makes for a better society?

Madam President, you know, I was reading an article, but we are so

exam-focused in Trinidad and Tobago, and in Japan—I am not going to spend a lot of time in education as everyone expects, but I have to mention it because it is my passion. In Japan, the State insists that no child gets a test or an exam until they are seven years old. Because until they are seven years old, they are not too focused on a child's knowledge base. It is not that they do not teach them curricula, but they are more focused on developing character and integrity because they understand, in the long run, that is going to make for a better individual. That is the kind of, to me, when you ask for a transfer and you have a Ministry of Education and a Ministry of Social Development, that is the kind of out-of-the box, new-age thinking that makes for a better society. To me, that is value for money; understanding that character building, as a part of the curriculum, is as important as math or English. Because you can develop a maths brain who would “tief out all de money from de Treasury”, or a doctor who is unethical. We have to start thinking out of the box. We have to start getting value for money as to what is needed in Trinidad and Tobago.

Let us talk about national security. Again, the issue of the Head being increased. I could well understand why I have no objection to it. But, again I am asking myself, you know, when you ask for a transfer to the Ministry of National Security, is this going to impact crime fighting? Are we going to just accept under 10 per cent detection rate, under 7 per cent solvency rate, under 5 per cent, depending on what year you are starting in? When you are asking for—how much is it? [*Interruption*] More than \$10 million total, in all. But, in terms of this transfer, \$149,491,000.

How is that going to be spent to make the citizen of Trinidad and Tobago feel safer? How is it going to make police officers more empowered? How is it

going to make the families of the 23 women and girls who have been brutally murdered since December last year feel safer in Trinidad and Tobago? And I will keep raising this point, because at 23 women murdered since mid-December, that statistically almost one per week; almost, I am not saying, I do not want to be misleading. And that is not even talking about reported rapes and assaults.

In 2008, 670; 2009, 642; 2010, 632; 2014, 829, sexual assaults and rapes reported. At 829, that is almost three a day, reported. Do the normal matrix and double it for what probably occurs. Are we comfortable with that for what we are spending in Trinidad and Tobago on national security? Should our women feel safer and more secure? This is not blamed at the Government, you know. This is all of us I am talking to here. Are we comfortable with that? Have we just resigned ourselves to the fact that that is how it is and the women just have to take that? That is life in Trinidad and Tobago? No, I say absolutely not. We have to get to the point where an \$11 billion spend and a transfer of \$150 million, six months after to the Ministry of National Security, and I am not saying it is not warranted, redounds to women feeling safer in Trinidad and Tobago. It has to, otherwise we might as well reduce it and “whatever happen, happen”. Give the women the money to put up more bars around their houses. Something is wrong.

Is it that this transfer will be put towards increased technology for the police service, so that they can be more effective? Better training for police officers? More effective management of the police service and law enforcement? Is it going to redound to better training that results in the public having more confidence in police officers, so that they can cooperate more fully? Because police officers cannot do the job by themselves. They have to have the support of the public and the cooperation of the public to be effective. Is it going to ensure that police

officers who are honest and hard-working are put in a position where they are equipped to carry out their jobs in a safer manner, because they are also at risk?

Sometimes we do not take into consideration, that, guess what, every day a police officer puts on his or her uniform they may not get home that night, because of how bad the criminals are; how intense the criminals are in Trinidad and Tobago. Yes, we like to malaise police and demand more of them but we should also be compassionate, in terms of how challenging their job is on a daily basis.

I also want to deal with the issue, in terms of the national security transfer, Madam President, in terms of how much we are focused on improving our penal system; as we call it “prisons”, which I think is a terrible word, because it suggests it is a holding bay, as opposed to a correction system, which is focused on rehabilitation and restorative justice. The classification and the word is important.

We have extremely high recidivism rates in Trinidad and Tobago. Ten years ago it was 45 year per cent. Five years ago, it rose to almost 60 per cent. That means if 10 inmates are released, six get back in, go back into the system. That does not make any sense because all we are doing is putting excessive cost on the system. Our prison system basically is a repository. And I am going to say it plainly, primarily for little black boys who, in many ways the system failed, who decided to run afoul with the law and end up on remand inhumanely long, due to shortcomings in the criminal justice system, robbing them of their constitutional human rights for expedient and fair trials.

And if, I am sorry, someone is on remand for 10 years or seven years, it means that their justice is already thrown out the window before they reach the courtroom, [*Desk thumping*] contrary to several UN and International Conventions that we are signatories to. But we are comfortable with that because it does not

affect brother or our sister or our father. It is critical we change our penal system in Trinidad and Tobago, you know.

1963, Garrett Report—extreme overcrowding. Big issue since 1963. Pronouncements on prison conditions, 2003, Deosaran report: terrible overcrowding, health concerns for prisoners.

The Garrett Report: overcrowding causing frustration and again acting out on aggression and violence. It also causes gang behaviour, victimization and also makes the duties of prison officers more onerous and more dangerous.

Former Chief Justice Satnarine Sharma, in his opening speech in the 2004/2005 Law Term, where he noted that:

“Double punishment is not part of our criminal jurisprudence – and is unacceptable under any circumstances.”

And by that he was referring to the fact that in many instances, the conditions under which inmates are held accounts to double punishment. If I am accused of committing a crime, I should, according to the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago, have the right to a fair and speedy trial; and seven, 10, 11 years is robbing me of my constitutional right, and we are comfortable with that whilst spending \$10billion on a criminal justice system.

People go in there for what may be considered minor infringements and come out hardened criminals, because they are angry. “Ah going een for ah joint yuh keep me for four years. You know wat? What happen to me in there I going and run ransack in society. I doh care 'bout nутten. All yuh mash up my life. I going and mash up more lives out dey.” That is the mindset, and I am not saying that we are supposed to be soft on people who run afoul of the law but rights of inmates are also guaranteed and we have to start honouring the humane treatment

of persons who run afoul of the criminal justice system and the laws. Yes, and look toward re-socializing them and educating them and getting them ready for productive engagement in society, because guess what? “If 10 go in, seven coming out.” Do you want them to come out angrier and more violent than they went in? Or do you want them to come out with the realization and the training and the mindset shift that: You know what? I made a mistake, I paid my time and I want to productively contribute to society now. With our present system, it is not encouraging the latter. It is encouraging the former, and when we look at the transfers we are asking for, we need to ask ourselves: Are we getting value for money?

Finally, I want to focus, Madam President, on the issue of job creation. I see the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development—and my good friend the Minister is there. “Doh look at me cokey eye. Ah going and compliment you.”
Sen. Baptiste-Primus: I am not looking at you “cokey eye”. I am paying attention to you.

Sen. P. Richards: You know, I commend the Minister because I have seen many initiatives aimed at a different kind of approach, in terms of dealing with the unions and resolving labour issues, which we will always have, because of our stall system in Trinidad and Tobago. But I really want to focus on the issue of job creation in the context of job losses, and I am not going to get into the banter as to who has the right figures, in terms of unemployment and under-employment. Because the number of tertiary level students that we are training at that level and investing in, cannot, if we are honest with ourselves, and are not finding the types of jobs that they are trained in.

Madam President: Sen. Richards, you five more minutes.

Sen. P. Richards: Thank you, Madam President. —that their training is preparing them for. It comes down to wastage in the long run because in many instances they are either going to go away and other countries are going to benefit from it. I know there has been talk about the alignment of the training with the requirements in various aspects of the job sector but I am not seeing it happening quite yet.

I really want to focus in my last few minutes on the creation of more and the tracking of micro and small business because if anyone looks at the trends, the developed world has been buoyed and stabilized by the mentoring, the encouragement, the incubation of small and micro businesses, because it takes the burden off the State to employ and it takes the burden off the conglomerates to employ and it makes the larger part of the society more productive.

And I just want to make a suggestion of something I researched called the Business Community Organization, which is a non-profit organization, which was formed in Hong Kong, whose mission is to lead, inspire and support businesses and to have a positive impact on people and communities

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: What?

Sen. P. Richards: Communitybusiness.org. There is also a branch of it in Florida where, for example, the Ministry of Rural and Community Development can partner with the Ministry of Labour and encourage business because communities, small communities, have built-in markets. So that—and it is also an empowering thing for the community to make cottage businesses and the Ministry guide them, because we also do not have a track record of, in terms of NEDCO and all the work they have been doing, into how much of the investment in NEDCO has resulted in sustainable business? I have looked for that data. I have not seen it.

So if we spent for instance \$4 billion on NEDCO in the last 10 years, how

much has that resulted in sustainable businesses? What went wrong with those businesses if they fail and how can we help those businesses get back on their feet and profit, much to the benefit of the wider society? I think we need to look at community-based businesses in the area. And we have so many options: cocoa to chocolate, value-added, confectionaries. I saw tamarind candy the other day. I was so happy to see tamarind candy. I mean, we know it as tamarind balls, but you know. Soaps and personal care products. There are many small households making these and if they get the right support, it can turn into more lucrative and sustainable businesses.

Entertainment and cultural products, not only for Carnival, but for export, because we tend to laud our soca and chutney and stuff, but it is really for us. “We ain” really making it for outside yet because the structure is not in place. Renewable energies, technology, recycling, eco-tourism. We are too dependent on big business and State to carry the load, and I hope we can look in that direction.

Madam President, I want to end with an old Chinese, saying. Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime. We need to start teaching people to fish so that we have more sustainable contributions to our society.

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

The Minister of Trade and Industry (Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon):

Thank you, Madam President. First, let me thank and congratulate my colleague, the Minister of Finance, for the work that he has done on this mid-year review, a very inspiring presentation, very insightful thoughts, and thank him for his very measured approach to economic recovery, because he has brought us to this point of stability. I mean, we all know the state that we met this economy in, a state of

malaise, as a result of wanton wastage, poor management and irresponsible expenditure, and I have to say that the Minister of Finance has very ably brought us to a place once more of stability and we can now look forward joining with him in our various Ministries to economic growth going forward.

Taking off from last speaker, Sen. Paul Richards spoke about accountability but in fact the Ministry of Trade and Industry did benefit from the variation. We are here to discuss this mid-year review and we benefited by \$8 million, so I think it is only right that I account for the work that has been done in the Ministry in the last six months. I may not take the full time, but at least I can explain some of what is going on.

Just to respond very briefly to Sen. Moore. She was very peeved that Tobago was not mentioned in this Bill. Well Sen. Moore, it is because Tobago, we have not cut and contrived as with regard to Tobago. Tobago remains with its full package that they were endowed with in the budget. [*Desk thumping*] We have not taken anything from Tobago. The only two Ministries that we touched and we took anything from were the Ministry of Finance, \$1.3 billion; from the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, \$35 million. But Tobago's money remained intact, a percentage of the last national 2017 budget. So there is no need to be concerned about Tobago being left out or anything like that.

I know you spoke a lot about the deeds for Tobago. I know that this has been a matter which has been spoken of, perhaps, for decades. I want to say that this Government is giving attention to it and that whilst you were campaigning in January 2017, we on this side laid in the House, the Land Adjudication (Amdt.) Bill, the Land Tribunal (Amdt.) Bill, the Registration of Titles to Land (Amdt.) Bill, the States Suits Limitation Bill and part of this is intended to settle the land

issues in Tobago. So, Tobago's land issues will finally be dealt with by this Government.

Again, you spoke about these six hotels that are now in trouble and that are on the verge of liquidation and they are in the hands or they are up for foreclosure, and so on. Well, I am going to ask you or the person who is speaking after me to name those hotels. Yes, certainly. Madam President, I have checked and I do not know of any Tobago hotel, not one Tobago hotel, that is earmarked for foreclosure but you can correct me, or the speaker after and let me know if you find that I am wrong on this matter.

With regard to the Tobago Jazz Festival, the temporary Senator spoke about this \$12 million loss. I want to ask her about the \$34 million that that Government spent out of the Consolidated Fund, out of the state entities on Soca Monarch, and so on, in 2015. Where has that money gone? And in fact all of those projects were in fact losses as well.

So, I mean, I do not know the true profitability of the last Tobago Jazz. If you say \$12 million has gone astray, I am asking you about the \$35 million. That is just one instance, \$34 million down the drain by your Government. I am not going to spend a lot of time any more on you all.

What I want to focus on is, I mean, the key objectives of the Ministry in particular, revenue generation. Right? I think the Ministry has a key responsibility, in terms of revenue streams. I mean, we are just a fraction in the budget, a very small amount because we are meant to be a facilitation Ministry. In other words, we do not spend on projects and that kind of thing. But there are other projects that are not costly. So, we are more of a facilitating Ministry.

However, we are responsible for creating revenue streams and adding to the

country's coffers. But you know, my colleague, Minister Khan, the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, gave such a great account of the energy sector, where we are, the realities of it, where it is going. And, of course, I think he brought great comfort to all of us and indeed the population as to where we can find ourselves from 2019/2020. I think it is going to be a much better picture than we are seeing today.

I do not think, in my own humble view, that we are going to have the kind of revenue streams, the kind of prices that we have had, perhaps, in the last five years and under the last Government. But certainly I think there will be consistency in terms of oil and gas production and we look forward under his guidance to increase revenue streams, sustainable streams from that Ministry and from that sector.

But the responsibility lies with many of our Ministries for improving and shoring up the non-energy streams: Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries; Ministry of Public Administration, who has responsibility for the development of the ICT sector. We have undertaken some in the Ministry as well. Certainly, in agriculture and certainly the Ministry of Trade and Industry. Let me stick with that, in terms of increasing our revenue streams, our foreign exchange flows, attracting higher quality investments as well and, of course, making it easier to do business in Trinidad and Tobago.

So, again, the stark reality is we need to improve our revenue streams and we are going to do that through increased exports and increased trading activity. We are going to do that through diversification and this Ministry of Trade and Industry has responsibility, has undertaken the responsibility for particular sectors, enhancing and improving the manufacturing sector, the maritime sector, and I am going to speak to those and also the creative industries.

I am going to focus on those a little bit later on. We have also taken on, in the last six months, and there is going to be great focus on reforms and operational efficiencies, in terms of doing business. Is that a revenue generating project? I would say not really but, however, it leads to less expenditure and if, of course, there is less expenditure, somewhere along the value chain there are increased revenues. But all of these reforms speak to the whole question of leanness and agility, efficiency, effectiveness and the ability to be nimble and to seize opportunities as we go along, especially as it relates to increasing the country's revenue streams.

So the work of the Ministry of Trade and Industry can be and is contextualized in our Vision 2030 Development Agenda, which speaks to short-term goals related to the Ministry again, a more attractive destination for investment and trade. And goal IV, firms will produce high value-added products and services that can compete in export markets. And these are pretty much mirrored in the medium-term goals, and in the long-term goals, where in the long run the goal is to have and to create a globally competitive economy.

In order to achieve all of these short and medium and long-term goals, the Ministry of Trade and Industry has developed and implemented a series of strategies that are aimed at diversifying the economy and, of course, increasing our trading activity as well thereby generating economic growth in the medium to long term as well.

So let me go to trade; trade being one of the most important areas for revenue generation and, of course, creating employment, opportunities for employment, restoring economic growth, foreign exchange reserves, and so on. Some of the ways that we are improving activity within the scope of trade is

through the implementation of current trade agreements, and I will only speak to those activities that we have done in the last six months, and of course, the development of new trading relationships with strategic countries. There are two important initiatives that are coming, that I need to speak about, that is Chile and also Cuba, once again and of course, improvement in trade deficiencies as well.

I would tell you why we need to be concerned because really our overall position, when you look at the numbers—and I did not bring them here with me today—is that there is a decline in trading activities and even in the Caricom region our trading activity has decreased. Part of it is demand. Demand is certainly less. Those economies are under strain. But every economy is looking to do what it can for itself and to have less reliance in other countries. And, therefore, even in our global economic conditions, some of which we have control of, some of which we do not have control of, have all impacted our level of trading activity.

And so the Ministry of Trade and Industry, we are working tirelessly to improve our trade position and our level of trading activity. One of the ways is through policy development. I would have spoken about this before, this national export strategy. But then it was just a mere proposal and I want to say just simply, not going into detail because this will be completed by June 2017.

Another way, by strengthening exporter capacity and competitiveness and also enhancing the local trading environment. And, of course, as well by promoting exports.

You would have heard us speak, in the last week or so we spoke about our Aid for Trade Strategy. I am just speaking a little bit Madam President, about some of the policies within the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the Aid for Trade Strategy was launched and I am going to tell you that arising out that, one

project is already on its way and it will impact our competitiveness in a substantial way and that is the adoption of the international standard for Trinidad and Tobago, a national quality policy, which will be completed by August 2017 and across the board, across the value chain in trade we are going to see significant improvements when it comes to quality.

In terms of market access I want to say that exporTT has been very, very active in the field and, again, if we are to measure their new export business targets and what they have achieved, these have in fact been substantially increased, in terms of values for new orders and definitely it is dollar value.

I can tell you within the last six months, exporTT has successfully participated in the Outsource LSC Trade Show in Costa Rica and also another expo trade show in Panama in March of this year; and as well in Costa Rica, 15 ICT companies benefited from participating in a trade show there in Costa Rica; exporTT also has organized several seminars for exporters in Trinidad and Tobago, looking at the Nicaraguan and Canadian markets as well.

Also, they have completed a series of matchmaking meetings as well. Even National Flour Mills, they have also been engaged through exporTT with Cemex and Allen Port of Cuba and also other purchasers of dog food and tilapia, and so on, which they have gone into in the Dominican Republic. So there has been a lot of activity there.

Generally, exporTT has been working in conjunction with AMCHAM and with all the chambers within Trinidad and Tobago, working very cohesively with the TTMA as well. For this year, a few months have just gone and the months to come, there would be approaches to Panama, to Costa Rica, to Nicaragua, to Cuba, once again to Chile, to Canada and to Guyana as well.

9.00 p.m.

With regard to—you would know that in November, I led a large contingent of exporter hopefuls to Cuba. I want to say that market has been very good to us with 11 million consumers. It was a high-powered delegation from the Ministry of Trade and Industry and also from the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries. I am going to go straight to the outcomes, Madam President, and to let you know that the interest expressed by Cuba has been with the immediate export from us of 12 cargoes a year of LPG, liquefied petroleum gas; also the export of 12 to 24 cargoes of gas oil by Petrotrin. That also has been indicated—that is an interest indicated. Exports as well of cargoes of gasoline; blending of lubricants from NP is also being looked at as well and also the provision of technical expertise, knowledge sharing and, of course, building capacity in energy-related areas including pipeline engineering, port and estate management, et cetera.

Actual outcomes, actual successes: companies like Trinidad Tissues Limited, Angostura Associated Brands Limited, Grand Bay tissue producers, they have all benefited in terms of orders that, again, will redound to the benefit of the people of Trinidad and Tobago through increased revenue streams from taxes, et cetera, from orders and new business gained by these business houses. As well as, there have been orders for glass bottles from Carib Glass and also containers of soft drinks on a test order of SM Jaleel and Company Limited.

So, I want to just say that trade mission is just an example of the kind of missions that you would expect from our Government and there are two more missions coming up which will be led by the hon. Prime Minister, but again it is nothing compared to the kind of bogus trade missions that you had under the last Government like, for instance, the mission to India in 2012 where there was a

whole shebang. I think maybe about 70 or 80 persons had gone on that mission and we are still awaiting the benefits from that. Just November, a high-level team to Cuba and already tangible benefits to the economy to those businesses and also to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

I spoke about agreements, and just a quick update on the TT Panama Partial Scope Agreement. We are at the implementation stage. We are also reviewing now the El Salvador Partial Scope Agreement and also the TT Guatemala Partial Scope Agreement. We have gone back to the business community to ensure that nothing in those agreements would impact or impinge on their capacity to continue to manufacture and to trade and to export as well. So that is with regard to those countries.

With regard to Europe, we all know of the success of the Fit-for-Europe Programme where 26 firms participated. Let me just speak to the outcomes again. Confirmed orders for animation production and identification of strategic partners for the development of that particular sector; fashion jewellery orders fulfilled with an online store and there is another jewellery designer who is also showcasing at a store front in Soho in London. There has been appointment of distributors in the UK and Netherlands by food exporters, and as well there is interest in Trini Pack sauces and condiments and spices and, of course, there is going to be post-project support by exporTT in terms of the mentorship of firms in 2017. So they are not just going to be left there. We are going to continue with further support and mentorship.

I just want to speak to Chile. I did speak to the fact that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago had engaged, virtually, I think it was sometime in 2010 about the prospects of a trade agreement. As it is, I would tell you that the trade with

Chile is quite substantial and, in fact, it is favourable to Trinidad and Tobago. That is because we are exporting energy products to Chile in terms of methanol, urea and also LNG. The scope is quite extensive and it is for that reason that we have sought to engage with Chile, once again, and to establish a working group to look at the possibility of a trade agreement.

Well we have done that. We have established the working group. We got Cabinet's approval. Online, we were able to hold meetings with the Chilean working group. Thus far, we have had one meeting. Another meeting is carded for this month. We are working toward this final document which will be the document which will reflect the trade interest in the particular sectors with which we expect to do business, and that document will highlight all of our strengths and our opportunities and so on. Once that is completed, hopefully, by August, then we would actually move towards the negotiation of the actual agreement.

The hon. Prime Minister, along with several—and he is going to speak to it I guess, or the communications person will speak to it—along with several Ministries will be on a state visit to Chile sometime I think at the end of this month where we will be exploring increased trading activity in terms of energy and also non-energy products and the prospects are just very great with regard to Chile.

With regard to Cuba as well, I just want to go back. I did not say but I know that there is to be another high-level delegation. I think perhaps at the level again of a state visit headed by the Prime Minister and an announcement will be made by that. Again, we continue with our building of our relationship with Cuba and the rewards are going to be great for both of our countries and, certainly, it is going to improve our revenue streams in the long run as well.

I just want to go now to trade and services just to say very quickly and to

add, the importance of trade in services and just to say that this development of the national services sector policy is paramount to the long-term development of the sector. Within that national services sector policy is the creation of a services sector strategy and an export expansion plan and the development of a national export strategy as well with regard to services. Trade in energy services is also very, very important and we need to strengthen this area and this is going to be part of the focus of that national services sector policy. There remains enormous opportunity in terms of trade in energy services, especially with regard to the burgeoning oil and gas market in Guyana and in Suriname as well down the road. So tremendous opportunity there as well.

I want to speak to diversification just a bit. I think it was said that the Minister of Finance spoke nothing of diversification in his mid-year review, and that is because it is left to us to speak to it. Very briefly, Madam President, again, as we did benefit from a variation, I think I am obliged to speak to it especially since an amount of funds from the variation is for CreativeTT and investTT, so I am going to have to address those.

With regard to diversification, I said to this honourable Senate that we were focusing on the maritime sector, the manufacturing sector and also the creative sector in the Ministry of Trade and Industry. So our plans for the manufacturing sector, just to say that it remains important, and this is an extremely dynamic sector as it is. I think it is certainly a sector where we can have major, major changes. I think that we really must seek to do more to improve the sector and also to work alongside with these private sector individuals to again improve the sector. The benefits are tremendous. The manufacturing, as it is, employs about 60,000 persons and it is an earner of foreign exchange as well.

So, again, the Ministry has conducted its initial research as to how we may improve the product range and, of course, ways of improving technical capacity as well. Again, we have commissioned another study to look a little bit deeper as to the possibilities that abound in the sector. We are finding again ways to stimulate economic growth, development and wealth creation as well.

At the end of the day, the specific objectives and the outcomes that we are hoping for would be increased productivity, as well we would have addressed all the constraints to enhancing the manufacturing business environment as well; we would have addressed the improvement of domestic value addition as well and technical capacity; we would have facilitated research and development and innovation as well and, of course, we would have strengthened a strategic partnership between the public sector and the private sector. We expect this to be a real game changer when it comes to increased revenue streams as well.

Just to the maritime sector, it is well known that the Government did establish a standing committee on the development of the maritime sector and, of course, the chairman of that committee is the Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan and the Ministry holds the position of secretariat for the maritime sector. I can tell you coming out—this committee has now being doing work for the last six months, and I can tell you we are in a position where we can better understand the sector where it is and where in fact it can take this country.

We have examined the economic viability, for instance, of the local bunkering industry. In the last meeting, we heard submissions from the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries and also from Petrotrin. We are at that point where we are making a determination as to the way forward of that bunkering industry. It is the same approach that we are taking with regard to trans-shipment

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and also cold stacking where we would be in a position to determine can our revenues be increased from these sectors? Shall we invest in those particular sub-sectors and so on? And that is the value of this committee. But at the next committee, for instance, we are going to be focusing on projects and projects in the particular area of ship repair and dry docking and also the development of marinas in Trinidad and Tobago. So the focus will be on those.

Can I just tell you that in the last six months as well, Madam President, there has been the development of a Maritime Apprenticeship Programme by YTEPP Limited in conjunction with Caribbean Dockyard & Engineering Services Limited as well and, again, this is to address the need for skilled labour in the ship repair and dry docking industry. So we have paid attention to ensuring that we have the capacity, the skills, the technical capacity to feed into the development of this maritime sector.

Of course, we have also facilitated meetings between the local entities that are involved in ship repair and dry docking. We facilitated meetings with them with some accredited agencies including the Andean Development Bank. As you know, the kinds of investments that are needed for this sector are quite substantial. If you are going to do just one floating dry dock, you are talking about an investment of about US \$25 million. So, we have been bringing all parties together.

At the end of the day, again, what we are looking for is increased revenue streams for this country, especially in the non-energy sector. The focus is on that. We have also moved ahead to the development of a maritime spatial plan for the Gulf of Paria and the Galileo's Passage as well and that is under the chairmanship of the Institute of Marine Affairs. That is where we are with that.

With regard to the yachting sector, we have had to focus on that sector, because the figures have shown us that that is a declining sector. This is an industry, a sub-sector which has tremendous potential. The fact is it was striving many years ago. Trinidad and Tobago is an ideal location and, therefore, it is perfect in terms of storage of yachts and also for provision of world class yacht repair and maintenance services. It is an export-oriented service as well so, of course, it can be a significant earner of foreign exchange. Of course, there are about 180 small businesses that are involved in the sector and, of course, they probably employ about in the vicinity of about 1,700 persons or so. But the prospects are great and the potential is great.

My understanding is that the figures from research in terms of potential are about TT \$130 million to TT \$150 million annually. But as I said, there has been a severe downturn in the local yachting industry and for various reasons and it is that the Ministry and the standing committee on the improvement of the maritime sector are going to be very focused on improving this sector.

The Ministry of Trade and Industry has prepared a yachting policy for 2017—2010 and it is currently before the FGP Committee of the Cabinet for its determination. The end of the day, we hope to improve the Trinidad and Tobago's yachting product and to do the necessary improvements that are necessary so that this sector can, in fact, be of value and we are going to be in a position to improve all of the necessary infrastructure and facilitate the ease of entry of yachts between Trinidad and Tobago; develop high standard of operating procedures; ensuring high service standards as well and, of course, improving the human resource base again and embarking on an aggressive marketing programme in conjunction with the Yachting Association of Trinidad and Tobago.

The other sector now, I told you that CreativeTT benefited directly from the variation in the amount of \$4 million and that is for operating expenses—largely for operating expenses—salaries and so on. I would tell you why it is important for us to continue to focus on the creative sector. Although I can tell you, to this point—this is a company that was established I think in 2013 under the last Government and to this date it has not generated one cent of revenue. Now, we could easily say, let us close that company down but that sector, Madam President is a very, very important sector and it has tremendous, tremendous potential.

I was just doing some research as to the value of the industry to justify as to whether we should have in fact put any extra money into that sector and it is that I came up with—and I am going to quote from UNESCO Creative Report 2013:

The world trade of creative goods and services totalled a record of US \$624 billion in 2011 and more than doubled from 2002 to 2011;

the average annual growth rate during that period being 8.8 per cent. Then I went on and I looked at something else again because I was really very curious as to whether or not we should have put a cent extra into CreativeTT and, again, my research led me to this.

The International Confederation of Authors and Composers Society and this has to do with music, because the areas of focus in the creative sector are film, music and fashion. They commissioned Ernst & Young to conduct a study on the cultural and creative industries and this study was published in December 2015. The data revealed that in 2013, cultural and creative industries worldwide generated—this is in the 2013—revenues of US \$2.250 billion. That is US \$2.3 trillion and employed 29.5 million people and that, Madam President, is the scope of the creative industries and the creative sector.

So I think we must focus on it; however, it is very important that we go back into these companies, both CreativeTT and investTT which I think were badly set up. I think, as a matter of fact, CreativeTT was set up to accommodate—when I looked at the organizational structure—something like 66-something people or so. There is just no way that we need to operate with those kinds of levels bearing in mind that to date not a cent has been produced from CreativeTT. But I think it is very, very, valuable so we are going to look at the organization or to the organization structure; ensure that we have organizational agility as well, make sure that we do away with all of these subsidiary companies.

They set up this company CreativeTT with three sub-companies. So it is, in fact, four set of audit fees; four set of directors' fees. You are spending \$1.3 million a year on directors' fees. Legal fees are for four sets of companies as well. That just tells you that you need to improve the governance structure of that company, and that is what we are moving to do and we are going to ensure that it integrates well with all of our plans in the tourism sector as well. We think that the creative industry—we are saying that— it is critical to our national development and I think that it is very valuable in the long run in terms of improving our revenue streams and non-energy revenue streams.

So, just out of interest, I, myself, have said, but Mr. Minister, you do not know what is going on in this sector enough. You do not have a feel for the quality of the films that Trinidad and Tobago is producing and you will be surprised. Digging into things, for instance, there is this last film called the *Cutlass* which has been accepted and is to be screened at the Cannes Film Festival in 2017. *Play de Devil* which is being screened at the Film Fest in Washington DC. *Sally's Way* which has gone on to achieve international acclaim and has been screened at

several international film festivals. *Hero*, which is focused on the life and times of Ulric Cross which was shot in Ghana and UK and Trinidad and Tobago. All with great potential.

So this Saturday, 20 of us are going to be looking at 20 minute-slots of films that are being produced—[*Interruption*]

Madam President: Minister, you have five more minutes.

Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon: Thank you. But we think investing in this sector is very valuable, especially the film sector as well. Cabinet has recently approved the extension of the Production and Expenditure Rebate Programme. I can tell you that was a programme which was introduced under the PNM some years ago and since its establishment, there has been a spend of at least TT \$37 million on location in Trinidad and Tobago doing film. As I said, we have just made a few steps, the potential is enormous. This is why we are really going to be focusing on this film sector as well.

Again, the music sector, very important. I would just say that we have done the intellectual property workshop and several other workshops. When Calypso Rose was here we did the business of a calypso workshop as well. With regard to fashion, we will establish the local garment production facility in conjunction with UTT and once that is done, it is going to be a model for doing more of those, all over the country and reviving that fashion garment production again.

We are looking again at another project which Andrew Ramroop OBE, famed Savile Row elite tailor has, in fact, put a project for us again to consider with regard to a certificate in Ultra Bespoke tailoring, pattern drafting, cutting and fitting. So, again, we are looking at the tailoring industry as well.

I would just go on very briefly, you know that the Ministry again is

conducting a number of business reforms. I do not have the time to speak to them but in terms of its ease of doing business report, the Ministry of Trade and Industry is really leading the charge to improve the ease of doing business in Trinidad and Tobago and there would be substantial—by the time, in another two or three years, as a matter of fact, we are going to come to a place where we are going to be registering very high on the ease of doing business chart.

When it comes to paying taxes, starting a business and dealing with construction permits which we are automating: The first phase will be completed in eight months. I am pleased about that but regarding all of the other business reforms that are necessary, the Ministry of Trade and Industry has undertaken to do those. Also, Cabinet has approved a committee to fast-track approvals of investment in the non-energy sector and to also look at streamlining all of the internal processes of our regulator and approval permits that are required as well, and that committee has met for the first time and it is well on the way.

Cabinet has approved the committee again to look at the development of special economic zones which are to replace the current economic free zone policy and this again will be under the charge of the Minister of Trade and Industry working along with key Ministers who are connected to the development of this particular policy.

Generally, Madam President, this is the kind of work that has been going on in the Ministry of Trade and Industry in the last six months. We are well on our way to contributing in a very substantial way to improving this country's revenue, both in terms of trade and also in export and also certainly in terms of diversification and ensuring that we provide a better environment for the private sector in Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Rodger Samuel: Madam President, it is always an honour for me to stand in this Senate to speak and to participate in this particular debate “An Act to vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorised by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2017) Act, 2016 and though this may seem to be a simple gesture of moving funds from one area to the other, in this case, from the Ministry of Finance and another aspect to several other Ministries, it could be deemed an approach to supplement shortfalls in many of the Ministries; it could be deemed a lack of planning with many Ministries; it could be deemed also, Madam President, the fact that in so many instances, Ministries would submit their budget and there is a tremendous cutback and now we have to adjust things mid-year to facilitate where we cut back in many instances.

But, Madam President, one of the things that comes to light is that the Government of the day continues to talk about what they met when they came into office and how tough it was and the perfect storm. But, Madam President, in 2010, a similar scenario took place. As a matter of fact, it was worse because then we found that we had the Clico situation. We had the situation of the Hindu Credit Union, Madam President. We had the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development having an \$8 billion problem. Madam President, we had loans for the Tarouba Stadium of \$500 million and since then that cost has gone up to one point something billion dollars. [*Desk thumping*] It is a very expensive stadium, \$1.3 billion. Madam President, the expenditure on the Tobago Hospital, not only that, but we absorbed a tremendous amount of lack of management from the previous Government. And, you know, when you listen to Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat, a very honourable person, he gives you the impression that the Government had trashed the Treasury and destroyed everything that was existing.

Madam President, we too had some \$9 billion in wage negotiations to deal

with when we got into office. [*Desk thumping*] We had to deal with that. Madam President and, we honoured all of that. But, Madam President, you see when we talk is one thing, when they talk everybody must shut up. We have heard also that the Government, through its prudent financial management was able to save \$10 billion. Well, we keep cutting back and it meant that it was budgeted and we cut back and saved, but when [*Crosstalk*] we cut back and saved, to what expense? [*Interruption*]

Madam President: You know Sen. Samuel does not need prompting. Okay?

9.30 p.m.

Sen. R. Samuel: [*Laughter*] Thank you, Ma'am. We cut back and saved, at what cost? Madam President, while people are suffering all over the country, medical situations are at its lowest. I was at the hospital this morning and just to get simple drugs, this guy needed some Lasix, or whatever they call it, for water retention, and they did not even have that. I was there this morning. He was trying to get authority for me to buy it, to bring it in for him, if they would have permitted me to do that. Madam President, while that is happening the entire local economy has contracted considerably. The construction industry has almost collapsed. As a matter of fact, you know, there are statements about, you know, when I listened to the presentation in the other place, likewise, about, you know, the 25,000 people who are without jobs is exaggerated, but, Madam President, in the Central Bank's *Economic Bulletin*, March, 2017, the Central Bank said that:

“The labour market continued to slacken in the first half of 2016. The unemployment rate increased to 4.4 per cent in the second quarter of 2016...”

And I am certain it is worse, because commentators are saying that with the

problems that they had at CSO those figures that they are purporting cannot be accurate. [*Desk thumping*]

[MR. VICE-PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

As a matter of fact, Mr. Vice-President, the bulletin says from the Central Bank that:

“While the number of persons with jobs fell by 16,200 persons, a significant decline in the labour force of 8,200 persons resulted in the number of persons classified as unemployed rising by just 8,000 persons over the twelve months to June 2016.”

But something was meaningful, Mr. Vice-President; it says:

“Meanwhile, labour market indicators for the second half of 2016 were mixed. The pace of job separation may have declined as fewer retrenchment notices were filed at the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development in the last six months of 2016 from the year-earlier period. However, a large decline in advertised job vacancies suggests that the demand for labour might have weakened.”

So something is going on in our country where it is not only that people are being retrenched, people cannot get work, and that is a reality in the country. The employment market is really at a low and people are being sent home on a regular basis. As a matter of fact, Mr. Vice-President, I think it was at the Office of the Prime Minister some 70-something security personnel were just sent home with a “vaps”, without explanation, and it is a fact.

So to talk about saving, and reducing \$10 billion, we have to figure out at what cost, because every day they are crying that there is no money, there is no money, but, Mr. Vice-President, but the money that was allocated in many

instances they could not spend it. To add insult to injury, you hear them talking all kinds of stuff, but, Mr. Vice-President, I have before me the Auditor General's Report for 2016, and it in no way concurs with what has been bandied about all the time. As a matter of fact, you know, the old story about the Treasury was empty, everything was gone, we are living on fumes, and all kinds of stuff, Mr. Vice-President, the Auditor General's Report for 2016 says, clearly, that the Unemployment Fund you had \$8 billion—in the Unemployment Fund. As a matter of fact, the very next page, this is page 160, page 161 talks about the balance brought forward from September 30, 2015, was \$893 million; so, in other words, Mr. Vice-President, what you had was some \$8 billion or \$9 billion that was brought forward from September 30, 2015.

So when you hear all of these statements about, "Oh, the Treasury was dry", and, you know, "The last Government back up ah truck", and all this kind of nonsense, and it is that they won an election on, it is coming to fact that now, Mr. Vice-President, the Auditor General's Report does not agree with those on the other side. So they fooled a nation—fooled a nation. [*Desk thumping*] That is what they did. That is what they did, Mr. Vice-President.

And while that is taking place people are struggling. People are struggling to put food on the table. People are struggling. I mean, I have had people who have called me, Mr. Vice-President, because they have lost their job, okay, and they just do not know where to turn. They are all scared because all we have had from this Government since September 07, 2015, is increases in every aspect of living. Mr. Vice-President, increases with a smile. And I have to say increases with a smile because, you know, it is the present Minister of Finance who would smile and increase gas, and smile and increase gas, and smile and increase gas,

[*Desk thumping*] and then suggest that, you know, the country did not riot as yet so I may just do it again, but he has changed his mind now.

So this is a Minister and a Government that instils pain with a smile. If you think about instilling pain with a smile, you know what we are talking about, it is a dangerous kind of person. Mr. Vice-President, not only that, but the figures, you know, that the people are being sent home regularly, every day people are going home. In the *Guardian*, dated August 30, 2016, if I am permitted to read it, Sir, the author is Nadaleen Singh:

“The Central Statistical Office (CSO) reported yesterday that the overall unemployment rate had increased from 3.5 per cent in the last quarter of 2015 to 3.8 per cent in the first quarter of 2016...”

Subsequent to that they talk about how it has increased again. But, again, Rosemarie Sant, in commenting on November 08, 2016, Mr. Vice-President, says that:

“The country’s unemployment rate has increased again. The latest data from the CSO indicates that the unemployment rate increased from 3.8 per cent in the”—last—“quarter...to 4.4 per cent in the second quarter—April to June 2016.”

But—

“Economist Indera Sagewan-Alli said given the number of challenges facing the CSO she is concerned about the validity of the 4.4 per cent unemployment rate.

...she agrees with the trend that ‘the unemployment rate is rising, given the contractions in the energy and construction sectors, especially given that the construction sector is a major employer.’”

Mr. Vice-President, that has not increased. That has not improved, and if it has not improved I know of many small contractors who have shut down. They have sent home all of their employees because they cannot afford. I know of many contractors when this Government took office that were never paid. They had all their documents and they were never paid.

Sen. Ramdeen: Up to now.

Sen. R. Samuel: Up to now. [*Desk thumping*] And, as a result of that, some of them sold some of the equipment to try to keep their employees, but then they could not sustain it for any lengthy period of time and they had to shut down.

So when I hear Ministers talk about what happened, and what they encountered, and if they had only had that money, and all kinds of stuff, there was money. There was in the Unemployment Fund. There was money in the IDB. There was money there, and we complained over and over, but you know something, those on the other side, they are good at propaganda, [*Desk thumping*] and people bought in to the propaganda that everything was gone. And you know something, the Auditor General's Report is now saying the propaganda was only propaganda, it was not the truth. It was not the truth. I almost said it was something else, but I would say it was not the truth. Mr. Vice-President, I mean, that is what is taking place in the country.

So the capital expenditure programmes are shut down. The development programmes are shut down, what do you expect to happen with the economy?—the internal economy of Trinidad and Tobago. If all these things are shut down what do you expect to happen? You expect to what?—have a recurrent—you expect the economy to hold itself? No, Sir, when you shut it down everything will shut down with it. It means, Mr. Vice-President, one, if more people are without jobs it

means there is less money to spend on the local market. If there is less money to spend on the local market then, obviously, it will start to contract because business people will make less money in their businesses and they will send home more people, and there is a cycle that continues to take its course in a natural way, and that is important. And then, all of a sudden, you have an absolute downward spiral, and with a Government that has no ideas, with a downward spiral you end up with absolute chaos in a country like ours, Mr. Vice-President. [*Desk thumping*]

And what has happened, to date there is no clear direction, none whatsoever. I mean, Mr. Vice-President, when I looked at the Bill that is before us, and I recognize that we are crying out, we have no money, but we are spending money on a golf course—on a golf course? Yes, Ste. Madeleine Club, it is a golf course. Did I see it right?

Hon. Senator: Yeah.

Sen. R. Samuel: It is a golf course, yes, Ste. Madeleine Staff Club and Golf Course development. I mean, we have no money. We are broken. Things are bad. Things are terrible. You go tell the average person who has lost their job and they have a family to sustain that you are going to spend money to develop a staff club and a golf course. Go and tell them that.

And the Minister of food production is talking about if he had that kind of money what he could do; I wish they could give you the money that they are going and spend on the golf course. Give it to your Ministry so you can help produce more food, but no. How much of us in here does play golf? I wonder how much people in this House does play golf. I mean, I tried playing golf but it was on the computer, and it was a real abysmal failure to play golf on the computer, Mr.

Vice-President, but how many people play golf? And we are talking about spending money, and saying that we have no money in the country, and all kinds of stuff, but everything has been going down. Up to now we have heard nothing as to how this Government intends to change the revenue stream besides taxing, you know, Green Fund tax, and everything has increased, now it is a million-dollar tax, you know.

In Trinidad and Tobago a million dollars, it does nothing to you really. Let us be real. Online tax—that is all we have had. So you earn it, you are taxed; you save it—“Oh God, doh talk about de banks”, but the Government “ent” doing nothing about that, eh. The Government is doing nothing about the kind of charges, oppressive charges that are coming to us from the banks of this country, the banks that are in Trinidad and Tobago, they are ripping you off. As a matter of fact, it is not worth anymore putting money in the bank below a certain amount, best you keep it in your pillow, best you put it in your mattress—why? Because every month it is going down, every month, fees upon fees. Just for them to keep it, it is going down; before long you have nothing to keep, and they would start to charge you to keep your account that is empty.

Mr. Vice-President, that is what is going on in this country, you know. Then, what we had besides a hike in all of that, you know, the Minister of Finance clearly says—he said it:

“...it is...noteworthy that notwithstanding the expansion of the VAT base, the gradual 7% depreciation of the currency over the last year, increases in fuel prices, and other tax adjustments...”

I mean, he has acknowledged that there has been a gradual depreciation of the currency. You know, if you go into the Cambio in the airport, you know how

much for one US dollar?—\$8.70. That is where we reach, because—

Sen. Cummings: What Cambio is that?

Sen. R. Samuel: In the airport.

Sen. Cummings: Whose Cambio—?

Sen. R. Samuel: Yours. In the airport, Mr. Vice-President—you know, I had to silence him because it is his own.

Sen. Ramdeen: “He doh go in de Cambio.”

Sen. R. Samuel: You know. But, Mr. Vice-President, and we have had so much adjustments, and so much adjustments, and so much adjustments, and the only thing that is not happening is that the poor and the needy, they have no adjustments for them because they have to face everything over and over and over, and hear what is happening, now what is going to happen is that if you have a house, you are going to be taxed more again. That is what is happening. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Vice-President, that is what they propose to do, the same thing that was rejected in 2009 they bring it back again, same thing. Mr. Vice-President, it is important for us to realize that if that is the case, and people are being sent home, and things are getting harder and harder and harder, what is going to happen when you demand more from the same people? You know what is going to happen?—chaos. You know what is going to happen?—riot. You know what is going to happen?—people will feel oppressed. You know what is going to happen? All kinds of—I am not inciting anything, it is a reality, Mr. Vice-President, the more pressure you put on people after a while the pressure cannot be contained.

Hon. Senator: “Pressure does buss pipe.”

Sen. R. Samuel: “Pressure does buss pipe.” So, really, do you believe, Mr. Vice-President, that things are getting better? On the streets, no. To the person

who was working for a month and now they have to cut back for one week, or a person who was working for a week and now they are only working three days, things are not getting better. And all the Government can do, rather than come up with brilliant ideas, is talk about the past Government. Well, I could talk about the Government before that and all.

Sen. Rambharat: So you did.

Sen. R. Samuel: And I did, and it is a fact. So, really, you know, as much as they could talk, I could talk.

Sen. Rambharat: The past passed.

Sen. R. Samuel: Same thing with you, Sir. Same thing with you. I am not going to comment on him, he is just trying to disturb me. You know, he is just trying to throw me off, you know. I am not going to allow him to do that, Mr. Vice-President, I promise you I would not.

So, Mr. Vice-President, where are we today? One thing I am certain of, we are not better off than we were in September—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Senator: 2015. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. R. Samuel: The average person has to survive on less and less and less, and until this Government wakes up and realizes that campaign talk nobody “ent” taking that on anymore, until this Government wakes up and realizes that all that was propagated no longer has traction, that is old talk, and, as my colleague says, “robber talk”, and people “ent” buying that anymore. People are suffering in this country, and there seems to be no silver lining, but there is a possibility that they will incur further suffering when this Government is allowed to continue along the path, and continue along the direction they are going, we can find ourselves in tremendous chaos.

Mr. Vice-President, I promised that I was not going to be long, but I needed to clear up the issue of cutbacks, so-called savings, while people are starving. I needed to clear up the issue, Mr. Vice-President, of what they received when they came to office that they did not tell the public, but I wanted to put it on record that it was there, the Auditor General's Report does not lie. [*Desk thumping*] And we scared the society, and we made the society believe, "Wow, dem people is real crooks, dem fellas real bad, dey do all kinds of stuff"—we scared the society. You know something, Mr. Vice-President, you know they would not come and read out the Auditor General's Report in public and let the public be educated, you know why? They have to hide this.

As a matter of fact, they must be sorry there is an Auditor General's Report. Why? If you could propagate something you should have the fortitude to come back and correct it in a society, educate a society and say, we said such and such when we campaigned and we took office, but the proof says that we were wrong, absolutely wrong. Then people would respect people who are politicians, then people would respect you because they realize why, if you know you said something wrong and you correct it everything is going to be all right.

So, Mr. Vice-President, I urge those on the other side to counter what I just said. I urge those on the other side to say what I just said from the Auditor General's Report is not true. I want—[*Interruption*]—Mr. Vice-President, this is not farmland here you know, I am standing in the Parliament. Mr. Vice-President, I dare those on the other side to say that the AG's report is wrong, and that they had not money. Get up again and say, it had no money, it had no funds in the IDF, it had no funds in the Unemployment Fund, that it had nothing. Go and say that and prove it from the Auditor General's Report, they cannot. They come and cry

crocodile tears, they cannot, and I will continue to say it, prove me wrong, prove me wrong, you cannot.

So, Mr. Vice-President, you know, I have said it, and I want them to prove it, and I am challenging them. Because people who spoke before cry, you know; they cried about, “Oh, if dey had that money dey coulda build roads, and if they had de money, dey coulda build cars, and dey coulda buy dis, and dey coulda build tracks”, and all kinds of stuff, crocodile tears, and it had the money. [*Desk thumping*] And they still have it. So who are we fooling? Come clean. Come clean. Come clean. Yeah, come clean. I know it is emotional, but come clean. Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Ramkissoon. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Melissa Ramkissoon: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. Almost nine hours later, we are debating an Act to vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation Act, 2016, which, basically, means relocation of funds that was in the 2016 budget to different Ministries. So, yes, there is no increase or decrease, it is just a relocation of funds.

Mr. Vice-President, after looking at some of the relocation of funds, and the millions, I have to say I hear you, Sen. Rambharat. I share some of those same concerns and questions about our present situation. It truly resonates, what next, where are we at, and what can we do? So, like the different Ministers, they would have additional information because they sit in Cabinet, but to the wider public, and the Members who are not in Cabinet, how does it really look, what does it say about our public funds, where is it, what is left, and what are we going to get? So I have to say I commend the Ministers of Energy and Energy Industries, Trade and Industry, and Agriculture, Land and fisheries for sharing, or giving more details

into what the relocated funds would do for their Ministry for the remainder of the fiscal year.

And with that, saying that, Mr. Vice-President, I have to add that there were a few points, or Heads that we saw the funds relocated to that I must say that I have some questions that I will like to lay before us, that if there are errors let us not repeat it, and if it is that we have no choice then a little explanation would do a lot for our public, because this is the public money. It is not our money, it is the people's money, and we have to be mindful what we do and how we do it.

So, Mr. Vice-President, let us just dive into the Bill before us, and there was an increase in Head 08, Elections and Boundaries Commission of \$21,857,680, and the reason that was put forward was it was because of the 2017 THA elections and the 2016 local elections. There was a breakdown on the overtime monthly paid officers of \$2.3 million, and then there was a short-term employment of about \$9million. Now, I could not do the maths of that. As an employee looking on, you know, when you have additional work you would hire contract staff so you will carry down your overtime rate so you would not have to increase it, but here we are seeing \$9 million in short-term contract employment, and then we are still seeing \$2.3 million in overtime rates. I cannot understand why we are having additional staff if you are going to have such a high over-cost rate. So that was one of the issues I had with this relocation of fund.

Another one was Head 06, which is the Service Commissions, and we saw that \$2.5 million was for funds for the associated administrative costs of the recruitment for a Commissioner and the Deputy Commissioner of Police. Just recently, Mr. Vice-President, we had before us the recruitment of a Procurement Regulator. I hope we are not going to be spending \$2.5 million for the recruitment

of a Procurement Regulator.

Head 22, Ministry of National Security. The Ministry of National Security is one of our biggest budget allocations; unfortunately, it is not immediately reflected on our streets, in our neighbourhoods and even in our homes, but we see that—I am very grateful that the Minister of Finance, in his introduction, spoke about the two development projects that are being undertaken by the Ministry of National Security, that was amounted to approximately \$126 million.

Mr. Vice-President, please permit me to just spend some time on these development projects. What he did not say though was that these projects were under the remit of the previous administration. So I am not sure if it is just an inherited project that they left, that they had no other choice but to pay these amounts, but allow me to share the information that I found on these projects, and then we could probably do some analysis. But one of the development projects is the acquisition of a digital public safety communication system for the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service where \$18million was required to settle outstanding payments to Harris Corporation, which is a US agency.

Now, what does that really mean? In 2012, 15th of March, the Ministry of Finance, Communications Unit, issued a media release about this Harris Corporation project, and it gave details that this Digital Public Safety Communication System would be to advance the mission of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service to deliver effective and efficient services to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. And it would be a first-class public safety technology where the position of the police service would be like a 21st Century policing initiative. Now, in this statement in 2012 they said the supplier contract will be financed by a US \$26.333 million from a direct loan, and US \$4.6 million from the Republic

Bank Limited commercial facility.

10.00 p.m.

And this was an arrangement, and later said, the system will be in place by the end of 2013. So why I am speaking about a project that was supposed to be completed in 2013 when we are in 2017. Simple, right? Now this is a \$31million project. Unfortunately, four years later this project is still being funded because we are seeing an allocation or relocation of—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Senator: Reallocation.

Sen. M. Ramkissoon: Reallocation. Sorry. Thank you, Senator—of reallocation of \$18,563,000 to this Harris Corporation project. So, I am not really exactly sure what is happening with this project because obviously I did not see it in the budget package, thank goodness it came up in the mid-year review that I was able to learn about this project and do some research. So, we have funds now going to this project, I do not know if it is a completed project that we are still funding. I do not know if it is that we have made a commitment, I am not really sure what the status of this project is because this is all the information that is available publicly.

So this leads to my question: Where is the comprehensive debt management plan promised by the Minister of Finance in his 2016 budget delivery? [*Desk thumping*] I do not how many more projects like this \$31 million projects we are still paying for and we have not received or we have received, I do not even know. So let us move to the next development project.

This one is a little bit more and we have been, in this Bill before us, we are allocating \$108,328, 000 for the National Operations Centre to settle outstanding payments. And this particular project, Mr. Vice-President, is something that as a lawmaker I am a bit concerned by, because just like when we had the FATCA

debate and we were demanding privacy and ensured that we are very transparent, people's information is protected, and our citizens are very valuable, internationally. This came up when I looked at this particular project. Because if you do some research on this particular NOC project, you will see in the *Washington Times* weekly dated 02 January, 2017 "Lawmakers urge...Huawei deal probe".

Then the BBC news said on 16 October, 2014, "Huawei boss says US ban 'not very important'". When I say these things is because we heard in the introduction that one of the development projects would be the Huawei technology that would be feeding into the National Operations Centre. So if you look at the BBC article in 2014 they said:

"Huawei and other...tech companies such ZTE have been banned from bidding for US government contracts, because of suspicions that they undertake industrial espionage for China."

They said the:

"Huawei's founder...had served in the Chinese army before he started the company in 1987 and that is one of the reasons why US lawmakers believe that the company still has links to the state."

Another country such as Australia had similar concerns and they also did ban Huawei Technologies.

Our *Express* dated May 09, 2015, by Anika Gumbs, the headline is "Chinese firm gets \$512m secret contract". This contract was under the previous administration, and the article went on to say asked if the Ministry at the time was aware of the ban, the US ban of the Huawei Technologies and what is way forward, also said that investigation showed that they paid \$170 million to the

company already. It also went on to say that there was potential cyber espionage taking place with this company, and I was a bit concerned as well because, what are we saying to our citizens? Is it that it is okay for national security to have agencies such as this to be building our technology and cyber-protection units? Because this is our National Operations Centre for the national security. Also, I saw that the Prime Minister and his team did tour the National Operations Centre in 2016 and I did not see them make any mention of this development project. So again, I do not know if this completed, but yet we have a \$108 million going into this at this time in 2017.

So, Mr. Vice-President, these are very important questions that need to be—or rest assured, or give some assurance that this will not happen to our citizens, our information will not be fed into Chinese spies or we will not, because we are an oil and gas country, we do value our assets, we do value our people. So when we have things that are outstanding and we are spending a lot of money, because this is \$512 million contracts.

So the article when on to give great detail on what the US House of Representatives and their permanent selection advised, and also even—the article in the *Express* could not identify how much money was spent on that particular project to date. So, I am asking the hon. Minister in his winding up or even in another place to just explain to us what is the status of this project? What do we expect to gain from a project such as this? Is it that we are going stop it? Is it that we would not aware of it? What is it?

So, Mr. Vice-President, in the 2016 budget there was a restructuring of the intelligence agencies so the SSA is now in charge of this National Operations Centre. So maybe the chairman could answer those questions. So, I am grateful to

have learnt of this hot item from this mid-year review reallocation of funds.

So, Mr. Vice-President, we have a change in the Government administration and we do demand that we get what we pay for, we do demand value for money. For example, I had worked on a particular project and there is a scope of works, there is a contractual agreement, there are general condition agreements that are signed by the providing services agency, and we need to find out what are the clauses. If we need legal aid we have those provisions in the different Ministries. We need to ensure that whatever is in there, if we want to cancel the project, then do that. We should not continue to pay for something that we do not want or we continue to pay for something that we have not yet received.

Mr. Vice-President, we will now look at Head number 26 which is the Ministry of Education. And we see that for Minor Equipment \$60,658,000 was spent for 1,000 laptops for teachers and 12,600 laptops for Forms 1 and 2 students. And I did hear the cry for laptops in our secondary schools at the price of \$60 million. Is it that the teaching in our school system has changed?—meaning that we no longer use textbooks and now we use eBooks? It is that we are emailing homework; is it that the teachers are now looking at it as assignment online or via the computer; it is that we have changed that? Because now we still to write your, well it is not CXC anymore, CSEC, we still have to hand write it. So is it that we have evolved to that level that we need to be spending such a large quantity of money on laptops? It is just concern that I have.

And we also saw that there was \$50million relocated for the National School Dietary Services which is the School Feeding Programme. I am a little concerned by this large number that was put into this or reallocated to this Ministry for the purpose of the School Feeding Programme. Because if you looked the report from

the JSC it spoke of wastage in this School Feeding Programme and it also had a commitment from the *Guardian* 20 October, 2015, a commitment given by the Minister of Finance to say that he will be looking at wastage in this Ministry and this particular programme hence in 2015 he allocated \$250 million to this School Feeding Programme and then 2016 he allocated \$235 million, so he cut it by \$15 million. So obviously he was chastised for cutting it by \$15 million. But now he has cut it he is now adding back \$50 million so that is \$35 million. So, I am a little bit confused. We have cut it because we said we have wastage, but yet now we are adding a big number, \$35 million more, to this School Feeding Programme. Why?

So this Bill does not come with explanations, but it really does raise some red flags into what we are doing with the money that we are putting to these different programmes or these different Heads. Because there would have to be a reason why you are doing this. We do not expect you to just wake up one morning and say, I need \$50 million more. But if you are saying you are going to prevent wastage and you are going to be more scrutinizing this particular programme, and then you decide, okay, no, I am going to add \$35 million. There has to be a reason and we are just asking the Ministries or the Permanent Secretaries to be mindful when commitments are given.

I want to just touch briefly on Head 61, the Housing and Urban Development squatter settlement regularization which is amounting to \$75 billion. I know today we had some striking action in Valencia with some squatters, so I know this is a hot topic so I would not want to dwell too much on it, but for \$75 million that is being relocated here, it is for persons who have fulfilled all necessary requirements under the State land Act, No. 25 of 1998, and they did say in here that it would have different infrastructure works for several sites. And my

simple question is: which sites would be considered?—because there would be drainage works of \$34.9 million, they would have land surveying for \$2.7 million. So it has money that—so I do not know if this is probably a new project that is being done or if it is an existing one that we just putting money into, but what are the areas? Is it that we are going to be targeting Laventille, Beetham, Sea Lots, Marabella train line? Well I am sure those people probably did not apply for the state land any way. But the question is: which areas will we be targeting, as we have to have a systematic approach?

Now, Mr. Vice-President, I would like to commend the Ministry of Finance the IT department and other workers who were able to speedily put on their website the mid-year review speech that was given by the Minister of Finance in the other place. I thought that was very commendable because they were faster than the *Hansard* so it was really good to see that level of commitment by the workers.

And from that speech there was a review on the energy fiscal regime. And the explanation in the speech in the other place was to help us better understand the true nature of the issues affecting Petrotrin. The Cabinet recently appointed a seven member professional committee comprising representatives from the public sector, the private sector and the majority trade unions to conduct an independent review of the operations at Petrotrin, and this committee is expected to present its first report next month.

My humble recommendation or suggestion, Mr. Vice-President, our country spent \$15.6 million on a DNV audit of all our energy assets and every company or state entity was given findings and recommendations. And we are forming another team and all I am asking is: is this team in the position to implement

recommendations or are they just there to get a true understanding of the issues faced by Petrotrin? And I hope that if that is all they are doing, I hope it is charity work, because we all know the issues faced by all our state enterprises, we have spent \$15.6 million to do so. We wish we have \$15.6 million to implement the recommendations maybe we would not be in the state that we are because, yes, are an aged assets. So it very upsetting when you have a project and you have to cut cost because you have limited budgets and then you are spending so willingly on other things. So, please understand my cry and my plea, Mr. Vice-President.

There was also in the speech a talk of the Dragon project which is to access the Venezuelan gas and it is envisioned that a new pipeline would be constructed from the Dragon field to the Hibiscus platform which is already connected by a pipeline to the Atlantic LNG facilities in Point Fortin. So a separate container, connector pipeline, sorry, would be constructed to Point Lisas to supply gas for downstream petrochemical industries. And to advance this project there was a preliminary project agreement that was signed on March 15, 2017. So there is an expected or anticipated the first gas from the Dragon field to obtained during the 2019 to 2020 period.

Unfortunately, Mr. Vice-President, from the history of our country in the construction of pipelines we have never really been on budget and we have never been on time. If you look the recent 2017 state enterprises budget package, you would see one of our offshore pipelines that was over budget and that was new bulk line from RP10 to RP1 and it was asking in the budget then for an increase of \$271 million to complete with no justification given. So, I do not know what it will really cost us to get this promised gas in 2019/2020. But again, I did not expect it to be in a mid-year review because this is something that should really be

in our 2020 budget so where we could look at and really be a revenue generation measure.

Mr. Vice-President, there was also mention of a public expenditure review body that would consist of the following: an assessment of the public spending budget processes and institutions; making education spending better through the World Bank because this is the body that they will be using to do this public expenditure review, and they will be evaluating the efficiency and the effectiveness of public spending. Also, they will be looking at health, social protection spending and assist with social assistance, labour programmes and pensions.

But, Mr. Vice-President, just for a moment, let us look at the Auditor General's role and function. And I took this from their website the Trinidad and Tobago Auditor General's website and it said that:

“The Auditor General is required by law to examine and report annually to Parliament on accounts of Ministries, Departments, Regional Health Authorities, Regional Corporations and such State Controlled Enterprises and Statutory Boards for which the Auditor General is the statutory auditor. The portfolio also includes the audit of:

- The accounts of projects funded partly or wholly by International Lending Agencies;
- All pensions, gratuities and other separation benefits paid by the State in accordance with the Pensions Acts and other Agreements;...

The audit services take the form of financial audits, compliance audits and value for money audits intended to promote:

- Accountability

- Adherence to laws and about regulations
- Economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the collection, disbursement and use of funds and other resources.”

Maybe I am not seeing it, but I am not really seeing a big difference or what we expect to get by law from our Auditor General and what we are expecting or asking a public expenditure review to be done by the World Bank to give us. If it is that we have extra money, why not staff or address the concerns or the cries of the Auditor General to ensure that we get timely reports? I am not seeing the benefit to us as a country to asking an external body the World Bank to get us something that we should be getting from our Auditor General's function.

Sen. Ameen: I listening to “yuh, doh worry”.

Sen. M. Ramkissoon: Now, this is from the mid-year review or a look at where we are at and where we are going. I believe I spoke passionately at the last budget debate on the Point Fortin highway, and it was estimated to cost \$7.5 billion, where \$4.9 billion was already spent. Unfortunately, upon passing it every day there was no works yet had started. I do not know if Sen. Sinanan will say more on it, but in this fiscal it was promised that the works would be started. To date, we have not seen any works started on this project. Unfortunately, we still have the unbearable traffic, the clogged drains that every time a drizzle happens there is a line of traffic. The people from south are people too. We are all people, citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, unfortunately, we do live in south as well. So, we are asking; when will this Point Fortin highway start back or restart? There are alternatives and they are not any better. So, please, I would like to hear, what is the initiative and when would this be starting?

My last point, Mr. Vice-President, is on something that the Minister of

Finance briefly spoke about which was the 2 per cent fund of the NIB. In 2017 budget package *Review of the Economy* persons aged 24 years or younger represented 36.6 per cent of the population, and those 60 years and over represented 13.4 per cent of our population. And, Mr. Vice-President, there was a nice article that was written by the president's council on bioethics from the Washington DC in September 2005 which is *Taking Care: Ethical Caregiving In Our Aging Society*". And most citizens in developed countries can now expect to live into their 70s and 80s with many living into their 90s and well beyond. And not only are these people living longer, but they are staying healthier longer with a real chance to enjoy their golden years.

And even in our budget package in Appendix XIII, we saw that in our country over the age of 50 years we have approximately 345,000 people living in our country. We also have over the age of 60, 181,000 people. So there is quite a significant amount of people living in our country over the age of 60. So they are of the retired or pensioners as we refer to them.

Now, the Government understand the concerns of these persons and have had many initiatives done such as the community care programme and the programme for partnering with adolescents in the community, as well as the pension ready programme which was recently launched to assist members who are entering or expecting to enter retirement, to enter into this programme so as to prevent delays in their payments and collecting their retirement package.

So it is recognized that the Government is aware of the difficulties faced by retirees and by virtue of some of the measures that have been implemented to benefit over 60 like: NIS; rebate on electricity bills; public transportation assistance; no fees on certain services like your driver's permits and your passport,

as well as provision of medical services via the CDAP.

Now, pensioners have contributed to the development of our country whether in the industrial sector, the government services and other sectors of society, and life expectancy is increasing in our country and measures must be put in place to reduce the negative impacts on retired persons.

The people who live to age 90 should not still be living on a fixed salary from the age of 60 because the price of water, electricity, telecommunications are not fixed. Unfortunately, Mr. Vice-President, they increase. So, you have fixed income, but yet you have increasing rates that you have to pay, and now they have an additional property tax because you are not exempted from this property tax if you are retired or over the age of 60.

So there are significant challenges that include: fixed income due to their retirement package; for those who are renting the rent increases, but they still have to maintain this; the increase in health care cost, because special units designed to facilitate the needs of these persons are not there so seniors are expected to wait lengthy hours in public health centres, the hospitals are just very unfair and unjust to have these persons who are over 60 to—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Vice-President: Senator, you have five more minutes.

Sen. M. Ramkissoon: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President—live under these conditions, as well as it is very expensive to go to these private institutions.

Now, to provide a subsidy for home care is expensive for the elderly. So for persons to have caregivers or persons to stay, they should have a subsidy to assist them. Retirees are taxed at the same rate of the working class; there is lack of opportunities for tax relief on investments especially for those over 75 years and this creates an increase in tax over 75 to endure; and also providers of annuities, et

cetera, do not provide the service of persons once they have attained the age of 75. Also, we looked at medical coverage from insurance providers which ceases after the age of 75. People live over 75 in Trinidad and Tobago.

10.30 p.m.

And I know there is in the public domain the discussion for raising the retirement age from 60 to 65. I am one of those who are looking forward to 60 and not 65. But, however, if we are looking at that and increasing the age, and even having retirees not have such a high dependency on the State, we need to provide them with the tools so they can sustain themselves. So, some of the measures that the Government can consider would include to provide a framework for addressing the housing needs of retirees, a plan to allow ownership to avoid the rent spikes. Also, the government institutions should allocate special days of the month for senior citizens so they do not have to wait in lines, they do not have to clog up the waiting areas, they have that special provision. Also to provide tax allowances for those who are financing or supporting their dependent relative over the age of 60.

Now, I believe in the question and answer session there was a report of 157 abused elderly persons, and they said of those 157 the majority was abused in their homes. And, the Minister did go on to say that they do have random audits and they do these things, but in the privacy of your home, I believe if we look at retirees in a different light, and we really empower them, and we allow them to move around, they will have that independence and they would not have a dependency aspect. As well as, we need to look at medical plans, especially since they have special needs like diabetes, heart attacks, and such like that, so they would not have to wait these lengthy times. And just as we have day care for children, there should be a consideration for day care for elderly persons. So, if

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you are a working person you should have that privilege to allow your persons to be dropped off and then return after work to collect them. It is simple. So, there needs to be an awareness. These things are programmes that we can start, and they have start initiatives, it is just to follow through with them.

So, Mr. Vice-President, there are different areas that the mid-year review is definitely red flagging, different issues that are in the public domain that are not resting well, and we do hope that the Government can answer or address some of these concerns. Now, before I take my seat, the hon. Sen. Shrikissoon raised a very important issue about untimely or not proclaimed sittings. Just like how we have incentives for the young and the elderly, we need to be kind and caring to one another. We are leaders, we cannot be saying let us do this together with one breath and then not working with one another. It is either you want to work with us, or you do not. [*Desk thumping*]

Simply knowing, like coming here today, I do not know what time I am to return home. I do not know if we are going beyond eight o'clock, beyond nine o'clock. I do not know if we are sitting tomorrow evening. You see, these things I find are so unprofessional. [*Desk thumping*] How is it that we are saying you are here, oh, you have to sit here for the people's business. How am I supposed to give my 100 per cent effort if I have so much uncertainties on what next?

So, with those few words—my time is up, right?—I do thank you and I hope we can change the system. Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan):
Thank you. Madam President, thank you for giving me the opportunity to make a contribution on this mid-year—

Sen. Mark: Mr. Vice-President.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Sorry—Mr. Vice-President—review and to demonstrate through the Ministry of Works and Transport that this Government is indeed obtaining value for money. That this Government has a distinct plan for the development of this country and more so, to stabilize this country. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, I just want to refer to Sen. Samuel, who indicated that there was \$8 billion in the fund when there—unemployment. What you referred to? [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Vice-President, what the hon. Senator did not say is that his Government pledged the fund against an overdraft, that when they demitted office was \$10 billion. So although the money was there, and we are coming clean, yes, there was \$8 billion, but it was pledged against an overdraft for \$10 billion. And what the hon. Senator as well did not say is that in 2010 there was \$6.5 billion in the fund. However, when they demitted office, it was in negative \$8.5 billion.

Mr. Vice-President, this is a serious time in the development of this beloved country, and this Government is well on its way of recovery from the mass insanity of improprieties that was levelled on this nation by the former Government. [*Desk thumping*] I just want to touch on two things that the hon. Sen. Christlyn Moore said when she was speaking. I almost took out my handkerchief and passed it across the floor [*Laughter*] because the hon. Senator spoke about the sea transportation to Tobago. I mean, I felt, well something has to be wrong, the passion that the hon. Senator spoke with—but then I recalled the hon. Senator was part of the Government that brought that same vessel, the *Galicia*, to Trinidad.

What the hon. Senator did not say is that her Government spent \$1 million to mobilize the vessel, \$1.6 million to demobilize the vessel, brought it here for six months, and for five months the vessel did not work. Each day we paid close to US \$16,000 for that vessel.

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Sen. Gopee-Scoon: When it was not working?

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: When it was not working—for the first five months. Eventually they renewed the contract for an additional six months, so the vessel came for a year. And I would think that if I am so passionate about my people in Tobago, the first thing I would do I will question the Government. “Why are you bringing a vessel for six months? Why just extend it for one year? Why not fix the problem permanently?”

Then I realized that, wait, maybe I need to put back my handkerchief in my pocket. *[Laughter]* Then the hon. Senator went on to talk about the land tenure in Tobago. Again, I wanted to take out my handkerchief. But then I realized that the hon. Senator again came to Trinidad and started to deal with land leases. Unfortunately, the land leases—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Vice-President: Please allow the hon. Member to make his contribution in silence.

Hon. Member: That is right.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Unfortunately, Mr. Vice-President, the land leases were not for the people of Tobago. It was for the people who had land associated with the Point Fortin highway. I would think—again, if I am so passionate about my people and I have the opportunity to deal with land issues, I would want to deal with the land issues for the people in Tobago. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Vice-President, this Government intends to deal with the people of Tobago and fix the problems once and for all, and that is why this Government is going to not only fix the land issue which was already laid in the Parliament, we will also deal with the sea transportation on a more permanent basis. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Vice-President, my words may seem strong, but truth is always piercing to one's conscience. Today I want to give you and all of Trinidad and Tobago the assurance that this Government is creating growth in the economy.

Sen. Samuel also spoke about the construction sector—[*Interruption*] “yeah, yeah”, because you see, I like to correct the—what—alternative facts that you all like to put into the public domain. [*Laughter*] Sen. Samuel spoke about the construction sector failing. The Ministry of Works and Transport is responsible for stimulating economic growth that supports the social and economic development of Trinidad and Tobago through the provision of quality infrastructure, land, sea and air transportation service. The Ministry of Works and Transport has already begun the following through on its major projects as promised to the people of Trinidad and Tobago given our economy that has to get a kick-start. Mr. Vice-President, this Government is committed to national development, and the Ministry of Works and Transport is working hard to develop Trinidad and Tobago via new infrastructure and upgrading existing infrastructure, thus providing employment for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Vice-President, as the Government stands this course, this country is evolving into a more modern, progressive, industrialized, stable and developed country. As the Minister of Works and Transport, I uphold the Government's overriding objective of no squandering of funds as the Government focuses on a commitment of value for money, achieving greater efficiencies with the Ministry of Works and Transport operations, and also ensuring that we eliminate corruption once and for all.

Mr. Vice-President, I just want to go into the projects that the Ministry of Works and Transport has embarked on in this fiscal year, and we start with the

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value for money projects: The Maracas beach facility. Mr. Vice-President, you would recognize that this project a couple years ago was earmarked at about over \$200 million. The last administration changed the scope of works, they brought it close to \$150 million. Unfortunately, the project started and stopped, and was going nowhere. This Government decided that based on economic circumstances facing this country, looked at the project and got the project down to a mere \$60 million. Mr. Vice-President, I can assure you that when this project is finished it will look like the \$250 million project that it was earmarked to be. [*Desk thumping*]

But, Mr. Vice-President, more important, what this Government did is that we started to think about the smaller contractors to some extent, and what we decided to do is to give everybody an option to tender for the project. We broke the project up into three package rather than giving it to one contractor. Everybody was welcomed to bid, and I am happy to say that the Maracas project was started some day last week. We have three packages, and we expect a completion date by the end of August, at least to be in an acceptable standard. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, I also want to go into the Solomon Hochoy extension into Point Fortin. I know that the hon. Sen. Ramkissoon wanted a date for when this project will restart. Again, I am proud to say that—Sen. Ramkissoon, I would like to invite you to the sod turning tomorrow, if you are available—

Sen. Ramdeen: Who get the contract?

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: No, in the PNM people do not get contracts. They win. They tender and they win. [*Laughter and desk thumping*] So, that contract has been awarded and the restart of the project is tomorrow, and that project will not stop until we reach to Point Fortin, without any corruption. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, let me just go in again to the Valencia to Toco highway—

Sen. Mark: Who are the contractors?

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Well, again, you see we do not just give contractors, we tender.

Sen. Mark: All I ask—I ask you the name of the contractor?

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: So, this highway is in the development stage where the route alignment have been earmarked, and very soon tenders for this project is going to be released.

So, we expect the highway to Toco to be started in fiscal 2018, in terms of boots on the ground. [*Desk thumping*] Again, without any corruption. The fast ferry port to Toco, another project where the consultant has been engaged and the designs—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Mark: He answered?

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:—for this project is on the way. Again, no corruption.

Mr. Vice-President: Again, Sen. Mark, can we allow the hon. Minister to make his contribution in peace, please? Thank you.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: You see, Mr. Vice-President, you know what is difficult? This Government is going in 19 months and there have been no corruption allegations. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Senator: “Ooooooh.”

Sen. Mark: The Massy deal!

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Compare 19 months with this administration and the first—sorry. [*Interruption*]

Sen. Mark: Sorry, Sir. Sorry, Sir. I know it is late, “nah”. I just want to keep the

crowd alive

Vice President: Exactly, it is late, and every time you interrupt him, it lengthens the time that we are here.

Sen. Mark: Sorry, Sir, my apologies.

Mr. Vice-President: Please allow him to make his contribution in peace. I am not going to say it again. Thank you.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Mr. Vice-President, I know he wants me to forget what I just said, but I want to remind you. Compare this 19 months with the first 19 months of the last administration. You could “ah” write a book on allegations.

Mr. Vice-President, again—and we are talking about stimulating the construction sector, because Sen. Samuel is the one who said the construction sector is what? I forgot the terms he used. Construction of the Manzanilla to Wallerfield highway, tenders for this highway have been closed, they are being evaluated, and we expect the start of this highway by the end of this month. [*Desk thumping*] Now, this is a highway that for the last 25 years, the country has been trying to start. This Government will have this highway started in this fiscal year.

Sen. Mark: We are in the rainy season?

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Rainy season, dry season, it will finish. The Moruga upgrade road, another project went through Governments’ cycles. This project is going to be started in this fiscal year, where the residents of Moruga will no longer have to complain about landslips, and roads, and things like that. We are right now in the design phase for this Moruga upgrade.

The Port of Spain to Chaguaramas roadway, the consultants have been engaged, and they are looking right now at the route alignment for that project. Well, we spoke about the Maracas Beach Facility. Mr. Vice-President, I am very

proud to know that this Government is going to finish and bring Maracas back to the pristine beach facility that we know it to be. Mr. Vice President, construction of the Sea Lots walkover—when I went into the office in November, I saw these plans there from 2013, and what was sad is that this is a project that did not take much. This probably was, compared to the projects that the former Government was doing for billions and billions of dollars, this was a simple project, \$10 million. Maybe under them it might have been about \$20 million, but under this Government we brought it down to \$10 million.

Sen. Mark: I think ours was \$4 million, yours is \$10 million.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Mr. Vice-President, what is strange is that nobody saw it fit to build this overpass. Again, this Government decided that the people of Sea Lots will get their overpass. [*Desk thumping*] About two weeks ago we turned the sod on that.

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: I think they build one, you know.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: They built one, where?

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: By the Divali Nagar.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: The Divali Nagar—again, they deserve a walkover. [*Interruption*] No, you know what I found strange, there were some Members on the other side raising the issue of the cost of that overpass. And the Member mentioned about the Divali Nagar, I have no problem with that one, but what struck me is that nobody questioned the price of that one then. And if you work out the size of that overpass and the size of this overpass, you would realize that you are getting value for money here. All right? But, that is enough said on that.

Mr. Vice-President, another project that the last Government tried to start—and for some reason or the other some Minister got fired, and some did not get

fired, and some Minister had their favorite, and some did not have their favorite—is the Curepe Interchange.

Sen. Mark: You better declare your interest.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: This Government—yes, I have declared my interest, so “doh” worry about that. No, that Curepe Interchange brought down a Government, because some people lost their seat in that project. This Government, the tenders for that project is going to close on the 7th of June, and the country will get a Curepe overpass that would eliminate the traffic going up the East-West Corridor. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, I am saying all of this, “and if you look at the Bill before us, the Ministry of Works and Transport did not get no increase, eh. When I asked the Minister of Finance, he said “nah, your hand ha barakat”, and Sen. Ramdeen will know what “barakat” is. I did not get no increase, but we were still able to produce all of this, eh.

Sen. Ameen: “Well, tell us who doh know, nah.”

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Well, okay. “barakat” is, you know, sometimes when you go by your mother and they have one pot of food and a 100 people pass and everybody is still getting a fair share, the say “the food ha barakat”, well, right.

So, the Ministry of Works and Transport is achieving all this with the limited funding that we have. Mr. Vice-President, in this fiscal year you would have seen construction on the Beetham Highway for last month. What we were doing is change the culverts on the Beetham. That was a major project to assist with the flooding. The Ministry of Works and Transport was able to achieve that, working on weekends over the past month, and that project is completed. [*Desk thumping*] I can go all night with projects that we started.

Finance (Variation of Appropriation
(Financial Year 2017) Bill, 2017 (cont'd)
Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan (cont'd)

Hon. Senator: Go ahead, go ahead.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: The Diego Martin overpass—

Sen. Mark: Go ahead. Yeah, we are here till five.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: You sure you are here till five?

Sen Mark: Yes, yeah, go ahead, man.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: All right. [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Vice-President, the Diego Martin overpass, another project that the consultants have been engaged. And, again, every project here is where we expect to get value for money, because what we are using is competitive tendering.

As I said before there is no way anybody is going to get any contract under this Government. It is competitive tendering and the country is getting value for money. Just like how we restarted the Point Fortin highway, package one, package two, and package three have been tendered out, and I am happy to say that package one, which is going to be started tomorrow, came in within the budgeted price.
[*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Mark: Is that under the new procurement regime?

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Mark!

Sen. Mark: Sorry, Sir. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Vice-President: Apologizing over and over again it loses its meaning, eh. So, please, this is the last time I am going to say it, maintain some silence. Let him speak, you are interrupting the hon. Minister, and seconds are passing and we are just going to be here till the sun comes up, and I am sure nobody wants to be here for that. So, again, the next time I raise to my feet to invoke silence, people are getting put out of this Chamber. Hon. Minister, continue.

Sen. Mark: “I going home.”

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Mr. Vice-President, if I have to go into details of all the projects we will be here until the sun comes up, eh. So, let me just go into just some of the projects. I know Sen. Chote wants to go home. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Vice-President, drainage: We are entering the rainy season, and the Ministry of Works and Transport have four major drainage projects going on right now, the Diego Martin river rehabilitation, the Maraval river. We have major drain cleaning and desilting of the watercourses throughout Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] On my tour throughout the constituencies, what I recognized is over the last five years, 2010 to 2015, the East-West Corridor was totally neglected. Totally neglected. And, what we intend to do is not to just clean the East-West Corridor, but to maintain the watercourses throughout Trinidad and Tobago. Because this Government is not about just seeing about one section of the society.

So, we have a major drain and river cleaning project that have started, and we intend to continue that throughout Trinidad and Tobago. We have coastal protection programmes going on. We have four major coastal projects going on, and the Ministry of Works and Transport is not only about infrastructure. The licensing office—this Government came into office, and unlike the previous Government where they left the Brian Lara Stadium, and as we are on the Brian Lara Stadium, I want to say how proud I am as a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] to have a stadium like the Brian Lara Stadium here in Trinidad.

A couple days ago, unfortunately some Members on the other side tried to shut down the opening of the stadium by organizing a protest. I think that was a shameful act, because there was a lot of foreigners in this country who came to see the game, and they could not believe how unpatriotic some people could be. But I

was very fortunate to be standing next to someone from the CPL and his comments were, “this facility is probably the best facility in the entire Caribbean” and I think that is something we have to be very proud of. That could have been opened five years ago and we could have had cricket being played there.

So, having seen what happened there and compare that to this Government coming in in 2015, looking at the Caroni licensing office, we could have left that right there. This Government decided, no, money was already spent there. We went forward, we finished it and opened it. The licensing office now, in Trinidad and Tobago, has five major offices where facilities can be obtained—meaning renewal of driver’s permit, certified copies, inspection of vehicles; services that you only found in Port of Spain and some in Tobago. Now we have five offices that have full licensing offices in Trinidad and Tobago. We intend to take that to seven, and you can compare that to January this year when you had certified copies just in one office in Trinidad.

If you were in Tobago and you wanted a certified copy, you would have to place the order in Tobago, you will come, produce it in Trinidad, and then you will go back. Now you can go to Tobago and get your certified copy immediately. We actually launched the new driver’s permit in Tobago. So, for anybody to suggest that this Government does not have Tobago on the front burner, the proof is in what we are doing for Tobago.

Hon. Senator: Performance beats “ole talk”.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Performance beats “ole talk”. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, what we launched just last week, again, is the certified copy the validation for the vehicles. You do not have to go to Licensing Office anymore, you could stay home, you could look at your phone, your computer, and

you could check your certified copies.

Hon. Senator: Is that the way you all are going?

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Yes, you could check yours now, but you need to know the license and your chassis number. But, I do not think you could find the chassis number on a Range Rover. [*Laughter*] But, make sure you check the correct chassis number.

Mr. Vice-President, the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, and I know this is one that—oh, Sen. Mark left. He wanted to hear about the port. I am happy to announce to the people of Tobago that the port authority board spoke to me this evening and they have an option that they are going to submit to the Ministry of Works and Transport tomorrow so that we can eliminate the service of one of the vessels that is being used right now. The Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago is definitely going to improve its service, and that is one of the commitments that the new board has given to the Ministry, and it will not only improve the service to Tobago, but for any user that is using the port.

The port has just recently upgraded its barrel shop, and very soon, I think by next month customers at the port will be facilitated at the new facilities. So, when you go to the port you will see state-of-the-art facilities where you can go and clear your barrels, and your boxes, and whatever, what you have to do. The port of Trinidad and Tobago will improve under this Government. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, let me just close by going into the procurement methods used by the Ministry of Works and Transport. Because it is nice to say that you are doing this and you are doing that, but the country wants to understand what is the procurement method that is being used. This is not same old, same old, and I guarantee you we will not be making any billionaires in five years in the Ministry

of Works and Transport like what happened in the last five years. There were some people who became billionaires—

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: Overnight.

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:—overnight. Mr. Vice-President, we know that the procurement legislation is going to be in effect in this fiscal year, and at the Ministry of Works and Transport we are already practising proper procurement methods. We have in place a system where we have set up our own procurement department, and anything that is being procured at the Ministry of Works and Transport has to go through that system. Once the procurement legislation has been enacted, the Ministry of Works and Transport will be in the forefront, ensuring that proper procurement regulation is being carried out at the Ministry.

Mr. Vice-President, I do not want to keep us too long, but I just want to give the country the assurance that the Ministry of Works and Transport is doing whatever it has to do to make sure that this economy is kicked start and employment is created for all the citizens in Trinidad and Tobago.

I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

11.00 p.m.

Sen. Sophia K. Chote SC: Thank you, Madam President, for the opportunity to speak at two seconds to eleven tonight. I just have a few queries with respect to some of the Heads in the Explanatory Note to the proposed legislation which we got, and I will simply go through them in order.

If we look at Head 03 which deals with the Judiciary, which for obvious reasons immediately attracted my attention, we see that there is a rubric of Recurrent Expenditure, \$20,500,000, and then there is a breakdown which says

that repairs and maintenance of buildings will get \$2 million. Now when you look at this \$2 million you see that this is supposed to cover repairs to three Magistrates' Court buildings and the air-conditioned system at the Hall of Justice.

One of the courts in question is the San Fernando Magistrates' Court which for many years now has had part of its roof covered by a tarpaulin. They have had to take steps to ensure that the pigeons do not fly over the heads of the attorneys, that rain does not fall on the heads of the attorneys, and it is rumoured that the roof has asbestos.

Now, I am comparing this, \$2 million with the cost of telephone service which is \$3.5 million and janitorial services which is also \$3.5 million. So it means to say that there is very little being done or used efficiently by the Judiciary with respect to the maintenance of its buildings. And that is an area of serious concern, especially with respect to the San Fernando Magistrates' Court where attorneys have stopped attending court on occasion, prisoners have rioted; they have threatened judicial officers, and this is all that we are seeing here in the allocation for repairs. It is somewhat disappointing.

Now, I move on to Head 06 under Service Commissions, we see that even the associated administrative cost for the recruitment of a Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner of Police is \$2.5 million. Even that is more than what three courts and an air-conditioned system for our Supreme Court is being allocated. What price are we paying or placing on justice?

I continue, Head 08 under Elections and Boundaries Commission, the price we pay for justice is the same price we pay for postage under Head 08. If I may continue, Head 13: Office of the Prime Minister. There is a Development Programme, \$2,550,000 for a Think Tank project. Now this concerns me a little

bit because it is common knowledge that over the cost of the last year, SERVOL almost shut down. SERVOL was down to two workers.

Childline which is listed on the website for the Office of the Prime Minister and to whom children are directed from the Children's Authority, Childline has not been receiving its subventions and I have received this information from a member of the board which runs Childline. So we have all this money being spent on a Think Tank project and, I mean it is a perfectly good objective, but the fact of the matter is, could some of it not be given to some of these essential support services because it seems as though these are the essential services which are being hurt the most.

Head 22: Ministry of National Security. Now it is called a development programme, and when I look at it, National Operations Centre Construction Project for \$108 plus million. But this is not a development programme, this is a debt. Funds are required to settle outstanding payments—I keep forgetting how to pronounce the name of this company.

Hon. Senators: Huawei.

Sen. S. K. Chote SC: But Sen. Ramkissoo had—Huawei—had used the name when she had been making her contribution. So it seems as though money has been shifted around in this piece of legislation simply to service debts, because this is not the only example of it that I saw.

Head No. 23: Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs. Electricity, \$3 million; telephones, \$5 million. All of that, when you add it up, that is four times the amount that you have to fix the San Fernando Magistrates' Court, the Rio Claro Magistrates' Court, the Couva Magistrates' Court and the air conditioning at the Supreme Court. That is the price of justice. [*Desk thumping*]

Then we see that some 50million is set aside to bring to account foreign payments for the provision of legal services and to meet bills on hand as well as anticipated expenditure to the end of the fiscal year. So some foreign lawyers are going to earn \$50 million, it appears, but we may not have the courts in which they can practice.

Head 28: Ministry of Health. Recurrent expenditure, \$196 million plus. Well, again this is not recurrent expenditure, this is servicing of debts or outstanding moneys. It says here:

“To pay outstanding trade payables for the provision of critical services, such as: medical supplies, equipment, plant maintenance, food at institutions, security, private medical institutions...”—and so on.

So it means to say that the three RHAs which are listed here had not paid their contractors these sums for some period of time. And I honestly do not think that the explanatory notes that we see in this document really are sufficient. [*Desk thumping*]

Head 31: Ministry of Public Administration and Communications, \$56 million plus, recurrent expenditure. So when I read this I saw that it was to meet payments as agreed to by Cabinet for:

“The acquisition and management of enterprise-wide licences for use of Microsoft software in Ministries, Departments, and Agencies for three (3) years with effect from the 01 July2016”—to—“June 30, 2019...”

And it goes on to speak of a contractual agreement between the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and Microsoft Corporation. But then I read this which causes some amount of concern:

“However, due to the delays in approval for and signing the agreement the

Ministry has an outstanding debt of US \$4.6Mn approximately...”

And it is broken down:

“...TT \$31Mn (US \$4.25Mn for software licence and US \$.350Mn penalty);”

Now, we are given no explanation as to why there was any delay in approval for this agreement and for the signing of the agreement to attract this US \$.350 million penalty. Who was responsible and why? And if it was unavoidable, then could we not have had some kind of explanation as to why that was so.

Head 39: Ministry of Public Utilities. And when I look at Recurrent Expenditure it is \$275 million plus. WASA attracts or gets \$227 million plus and this is to make outstanding payments to Desalcott for the period from August 02, 2016 to December 01, 2016 and then debt obligations to security service providers in the sum of \$30 million. So it means to say all this time WASA was not paying its contractors otherwise this large amount would not have been allowed to accrue.

So, again, in the absence of any explanation I think we have to say that perhaps these things could be cleared up when the Minister makes his reply because the issues that I have raised are simply clarifications which I respectfully seek with respect these Heads of Expenditure.

Thank you very much, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir: Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, I would like to be brief, but before I start my own contribution, I would like to endorse the comments of my colleague Sen. Shrikissoon and Sen. Ramkissoon with respect to the Standing Orders which state quite clearly that Senate normally sits on a Tuesday at 1.30 p.m. and that when we are called out on days other than Tuesdays it really should be for emergency. We were called out on

a Saturday once because of the emergency on the THA election writs. So that I am hoping that we will regularize our sitting days and allow us to really plan our business so we can discharge our obligations to the people effectively and efficiently.

But on the matter at hand, Madam President, first of, let me indicate my total support to the hon. Minister of Finance for the position that he has taken with respect to the foreign exchange allocation regime that he has recommended, with respect to the proper use of foreign exchange aimed at using that scarce resource for furthering economic development and transformation in Trinidad and Tobago.

I, for the life of me, cannot understand how individuals could question that something as valuable as the foreign exchange in a small open economy should not be managed carefully so that that resource—this is not a plantation economy anymore where land is the most critical resource, this is an exchange economy and if we are to participate fully and efficiently in international trade we do need to ensure that the scarce foreign exchange that is available to Trinidad and Tobago which, as the Minister rightly indicated, belongs to the Government and by extension the people of Trinidad and Tobago, ought to be used for the benefit of the people and not necessarily for the short-term gain as the private sector may want to use the foreign exchange, but for developmental purposes in particular the use of the foreign exchange to stimulate economic activities in the non-traditional—in areas of the economy that we would like to grow and develop.

I think foreign exchange ought to be used to ensure that it is consistent with the growth of the economy and if the manufacturing sector, the productive sectors and the other sectors are in need of that, they should not be in any way starved for that kind of resource. So we do need to look at our regime very carefully and as

indicated, as I suggested in the budget presentation I thought the Minister would also have looked at an investment tax credit for the manufacturing sector so that that particular sector, faced of course with a higher corporate tax, could offset some of those taxes as they invest in fixed plant and equipment. So hon. Minister, I support and endorse that particular position that we do need to examine the scarce foreign exchange available to us, so that we could use that critically scarce resource now to contribute to the diversity of the economy.

On the matter of the foreign exchange, there is a related issue, and that is the vexing and vexatious issue of the unresolved bank fees that Sen. Samuel spoke about. There is a problem and one awaits the amendment to the Central Bank Act, to determine when, in fact, these fees will be regulated. The regulation of the fees will simply be to ensure that the fees are related in some way, cost of service provided, because when we are operating in an oligopoly structure, that is a structure with few firms, you could be sure that they will be exercising market power and the customers would not be in a position to select, because there are not many competitors out there.

But I would want the hon. Minister to consider, as a policy position, where individuals can obtain their salaries now at credit unions as Sen. Creese had once indicated or whether in fact retirees' cheques and so on cannot now be sent to credit unions. I understand that they are sent only to banks, and in order to have a bank account, you do need to pay those fees. So if we can look at a policy change where these cheques can be sent on to the credit unions, so that this at least can be avoided.

But from a strict economic perspective I understand the predicament that we are in. The price of our commodities are really low and they have been low for a

while. It is in this context that I think we need to be monitoring very carefully. This stock of reserves as Sen. Shrikissoon has indicated, we do need to examine our stock of reserves and to put into place measures to ensure that our foreign reserves level does not fall below six months of import cover. I understand right now it is hovering around nine months of import cover, but really we do not wish our reserves to fall below the six-month period, Madam President, because that means in an environment of prolonged commodity price slumps, we may have to take more drastic actions to defend the currency.

So I would recommend to the hon. Minister to keep an eye on the months of import cover. [*Crosstalk*] It is 10 months, yes, but I would recommend that we keep an eye to ensure that it does not fall below that six-month target. Reason for the six-month target, Madam President, simply that in an extended period of depressed prices, you would find that the foreign exchanges are running out and you get into a crisis situation where you have to borrow to add to reserves at extremely high interest rates given the ratings we currently have. We do have the options to borrow to add to reserves, but at the ratings that we have we may have to pay higher interest rates. So we do need to be looking at that at this particular time.

The question before us again now, is the heritage fund. When the Minister withdrew some \$250 million, the question I asked myself is, is that all? Because the way that the heritage fund was conceived, initially, in the early days in 1998, was that if we were to have a certain amount in that fund then, Madam President, the interest on that fund will provide maybe up to 10 per cent of Government revenues to finance the Government's spending in times such as these.

So at this time if the price of oil were to rise from 50 to 80 anytime soon one

hopes that the Minister having seen the value of the returns, the interest and dividend payments of that fund in difficult times will understand the need to have in that fund a certain stock. I had always thought that a \$15 billion stock, Madam President, was going to provide for us a valuable buffer because it would give us in a depressed economic environment about 10 per cent extra revenue over and above the taxes that we collect. So I look at it as a policy perspective for both Government and Opposition on having a targeted size of the fund and I think that US \$15 billion is something achievable if we were ever to get again an oil and gas windfall. It is possible, but we should not waste or squander the opportunity on a third occasion.

Madam President, we do need to start collecting the correct data. Sen. Shrikissoon raised a valuable point and that valuable point is with respect to our debt stock. We know our foreign debt, we know our contingent liabilities. I am not sure we have all the debts of all the state agencies out there, the Caribbean Airlines, the Petrotrin, the WASA, the T&TEC, but colleague, Sen. Shrikissoon, raised the issue of these government to government arrangements. These are contractual obligations which take a while to get into the books and all the while they are building up and we need to keep an eye on them, keep proper statistics, because one of the reasons we were downgraded recently, by the rating agencies, is that our data was not of the highest quality. We need the high quality data to ensure that there is some level of transparency as to—why do the rating agencies need this data? They need to know exactly how risky Trinidad and Tobago's paper, internationally, is. And if they do not have adequate data they cannot assess the risk in any meaningful way and therefore they will err on the side of caution and they would downgrade us. I think if we were to get better data we may even

find ourselves having an upgrade, and a downgrade is not necessarily a bad thing. It is just telling us that there are some things amiss and we need to correct them.

Recently, the same agency Moody's downgraded the six major Canadian banks because it had concerns over the mortgage loans on their books, given the fact that there is some fragility in the Canadian housing market. So that it is simply sending a signal that you need to understand that the mortgage book may be a little bit compromised and you need to look at this fidelity a little closer. So that the downgrade is an indication for us to get back on our crease and to do that which we have to do to ensure that there is a greater level of transparency in fiscal operations.

Madam President, let me come to the Bill itself and like some of my colleagues I have some concerns with, first, whether when these proposals were submitted to the hon. Minister through his staff in the Ministry of Finance, was there really a review as to whether the amounts requested were the minimum necessary to achieve the purposes or was it that these requests were made and they were simply agreed to? Let me focus now on two issues I have. One is with the National Operations Centre Construction Project. That was raised by my colleague Sen. Ramkissoo and Sen. Chote. It said, in this particular—under Head 22, National Operations Centre Construction Project, \$108 million:

“Funds are required to settle outstanding payments to Huawei International and Huawei Technologies...”

What this means is that there are bills which are due for work that is already done, but if work has been done one would imagine that this project would have already been in the PSIP and that if it were in the PSIP allocations would have been made to honour the obligations under the appropriations Bill. If it is in the PSIP, I have

checked I did not see it, but if it is there, why are we not using the funds allocated for the purpose? And if it is not in the PSIP, my question is, are there projects within the state sector not approved by the Parliament for which there are bills due, obligations outstanding and for which I must now in the Parliament approve? This seems to be rather nebulous and imprecise and vague and does not, in my mind, really accord well with proper budgeting practices.

So I think the Minister will want to clarify why a project which ought to have been in the PSIP, which may be in the PSIP and for which funds would have already been allocated, would now need funds to be shifted around from one set of areas to another so that this particular project can be financed. If we do have projects like this I think we would want to regularize all of them and ensure that in this period of financial scarcity we are a bit more structured with our PSIP. And only projects which have been approved by the Parliament will then be subjected to funding. And if we are to vary any type of resources from one head to the next, it would have to be justified on the basis that there was a renegotiation of contract, the initial cost was too low, the contractors had an agreement which indicated that they need more money, we did not budget for it and therefore it is a critical project and we have to vary.

So I think the Minister will have to provide a little explanation—should provide some explanation on that. And the other one is that which was raised by Sen. Chote on the Water and Sewerage Authority, \$227 million of which \$138 million, let us say—\$137.8—\$138 million represents arrears for desalinated water purchased during the period August the 2nd, 2016 to December 01, 2016. So here we have a state entity, WASA, for four months purchasing water, desal water comes at a cost, it is purchasing water for \$138 million and it is supposed to resell

this water. I do not think WASA can take the desal water and give it to the companies close to the desal plant. It has to sell the water.

If WASA sold the water, because it is the first time I am actually seeing in a variation an item such as this, where WASA would sell the water; and what did it do with the money? Why would WASA, having taken water from Desalcott, sold the water, put the money somewhere come and ask me in the Parliament to approve for \$138 million for a four-month period. What happened? The clarification that Sen. Chote has sought is what I would like clarification as well because it begs the question, if they purchased water during the period August 02, 2016 to December 01, 2016, it meant that they perhaps purchased water from January 01, 2016 to August 01, 2016 during that period and there was no issue at all with respect to debts outstanding. What happened between August 2nd and December 1st? What is so peculiar about that period and it is really very strange therefore, without further explanation, to ask the Parliament to approve a huge sum, \$138 million, which is just hanging there for four months of the year. So I think that would warrant some explanation, in any event, in a period such as this where every dollar counts for the hon. Minister of Finance.

11.30 p.m.

I do not know if he is collecting more than \$38 billion or 37 that he said he wanted to collect. But if he is not collecting more than the \$38 billion, then \$138 million appears to me to be quite a lot that you are simply going to give a State agency which ought to be collecting that amount to run its operations. So that there are a number of issues here I would not go—it is 11.30p.m. But these are the matters that I think we would want to have addressed.

When I looked at the variations, I saw consistent with what Sen. Ameen

indicated, there was really nothing to local government. I understand the Minister of Works and Transport indicating that work seems to be running very efficiently, but there was no transfer to the Ministry of Local Government, and I would have thought that given that we are on the cusp of the rainy season and that floods may be upon us—and every year for the last number of years the Diego Martin river has been breaking its banks and causing untold damage to the residents of that regional corporation—I would have thought that there would—unless they have solved the problem. I do not know. We will have to wait until maybe September/October to see if that Diego Martin problem has been solved.

I would have thought that if there was a variation, there should have been some variation in local government to the regional corporations at this time to ensure that all the tributaries, all the drains, all the clogged systems are ready and cleared between April and May and we needed money for that, and you had the regional corporations working assiduously to prepare adequately for the impending rains. But I did not see anything on local government. I am sure that the Minister of Local Government, perhaps, indicated that he did not need anything. I do not know if he said he did not. But I would have thought that there would have been, given the problem we have had year after year, after year, with flooding in a number of areas, not only in Diego Martin—that is the one that we see very often. But I would have thought that all the regional corporations would have been given something extra for drainage works.

The Minister of Works and Transport, in his contribution, indicated that he had a great deal of efficiency in his Ministry, and that he was making do with what he had. But one would have thought that the Ministry of Works and Transport, too, would have been transferred some funds to upgrade certain areas. Madam

President, I did not see any kind of project with respect to making sidewalks amenable to people with mobility issues, wheelchairs and so on. A lot of our sidewalks, called pavements here, are not constructed for wheelchairs, and I would imagine the Minister of Works and Transport would have started a project that every year, maybe in Trinidad and Tobago, at least a mile of the pavements would have been redesigned so that people with mobility issues, the visually impaired and so on, would, over time, have greater access to the roadways.

That, of course, is a matter for public policy. And when we come to look—I know things are very difficult financially, but financial assistance to the disabled, I do not know if the Government is looking at the assistance that is currently given to people living with disabilities; families living with members who are disabled, but the cost of living for that family is greater than the cost of living of a family that is not living with someone who has a disability, either who is in a wheelchair or who has some visual or hearing difficulty. And a review of the grant system for people living with disabilities is something, I think, one would have seen if, in fact, that was an important priority of the Government.

But, Madam President, there is a final issue that I want to raise and that issue is with respect to revenue. One understands that the Government, as hard as it tries, cannot bring the level of expenditure down to the \$45 billion where I think it ought to be in the short term. The minister is cutting. I think he can cut some more from here. If you were to go through and if I were to work with the Minister or the staff in the Ministry, I am sure I could shave off a few millions dollars from here. When I look at each of these things I would simply ask: can we get it for less? But there is a limit to how much you can cut. There is a limit to how much you can shave. We do need to raise the revenues, and one of the revenues that we

need to raise is that revenue, the property tax. [*Interruption*] Can I get some quiet, Madam President? I am hearing some mumbling, and so on.

Madam President, I am on the last point and I know it is a little bit late, but, really, the issue of the property tax is something that we have to address. It is facing some challenges in the courts. I would not go there. But, really, what has happened is that we have not paid this tax since, I think, 2009. It means that from 2010 to now, that is at least seven years, the Government has not been the recipient of the taxes under the old law.

My recommendation is that a property tax ought to be carefully thought out to be fair and it should not cause the kind of furore that it is raising and the kind of anxiety that it is raising in the country at this time. [*Desk thumping*] My recommendation would be as follows: Given the issues which are sure to arise, would the Minister simply give consideration to trying to collect the taxes which are due to him from 2010 to now at the old rates? I do not know how many people are prepared but I, personally, am willing to pay to the Government all the taxes I owe from 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017 as long as the Minister is willing to waive the interest rate, because when you are late on the taxes I think there is a 15 per cent interest rate. Would the Minister be willing, as a short-term measure, to waive the interest rate? And say, “We would like to collect all of our taxes”. It is as if the citizens got an interest free loan at the old rate and we will pay the taxes while we are thinking, Madam President, through the problem.

What are the problems I am seeing with what I am hearing? One, we are trying to stimulate manufacturing business. We are trying to diversify the economy. We are planning to allocate foreign exchange to them. There is a

recommendation which I am sure is being given consideration for having the manufacturing sector get an investment tax credit against their corporate taxes when they add to plant and equipment. But under the regime that I understand it to be, we are now going to defeat that purpose by taxing machinery, by taxing plant and equipment. We cannot on the one hand promote manufacturing business via forex concession and via fiscal concession and take it away on the other hand via a property tax which can undermine what we are doing on one end. Fiscal policy must be consistent and it must, of course, be geared towards achieving an objective.

So I think that we need to be looking at that particular aspect of the matter, especially with the business taxes. When the law was initially crafted—the initial property tax law—there would have been good justification, I think—I saw it was clause 9 in the initial law—good justification for taxing plant and equipment. But given that we are now seeking assiduously to change the structure of the economy, I think it would be important for us to review that policy decision and to make it consistent with our view on the manufacturing sector. This is something, of course, for the consideration of the Minister of Trade and Industry and the Minister of Finance himself.

The other issue with the property tax is that it is onerous, it is excessive, and is suddenly dropped on the people is this. If we are trying to stimulate the construction sector and to ensure that more and more families own homes as opposed to renting homes, then are we going to impose a tax structure that is going to act as a disincentive to property ownership? I think the objective of Government ought to be to expand property ownership, particularly where the one asset that every individual in the society can have would be his or her home,

however small it may be and however humble it is. I think it is something that we would wish all of our citizens to aspire to, and property tax, therefore, should be reasonable.

The history of property taxes go a long way to Lord Harris days, where Lord Harris used the property tax via the Warden's Office system to finance schooling in Trinidad and Tobago. So we do need to pay the taxes. I would recommend that we, as a society, give serious consideration to paying the Government what we owe since 2010 at the old rate and let us think through what might be a new rate. And thinking through a new rate is this: I have seen this issue of rental value. Well, in a community or in an environment where there are no rental properties—I have two where there are no renters around. I do not know for what they will rent. Do we not need a proper rent assessment board in place while we are working through the thing to determine what would the proper rent be? And according to the law, it is what an individual would reasonably expect to pay.

My own position from an economic angle is this: A person who owns a property, purchased the property based upon a mortgagee he or she could afford. The mortgage that he paid may be \$5,000, \$3,000, \$2,000. He has no control over what the property value is 20, 30 years down the road. When he contracted his mortgage he contracted to pay \$4,000 a month. What he can afford to pay in a mortgage is \$4,000 a month for 20 years. Given that you are going to live in the house for 40 years, my view is that the rental that a person can reasonably expect to pay is simply half your mortgage rate. That is from an angle where there are no rental markets, there are ways to use the mortgage that you have paid to show your affordability to pay. Simply divide it by two. But that could only be justified with a proper rent assessment board. [*Desk thumping*]

We need to understand what is the proper mechanism, what is fair, what is just and we need to give the population some kind of comfort that when we spend money we are going to take as little from you as possible—as little tax as possible. It is not as if we are going to slap a huge tax on you and then we are just going to fritter away the money on some of the expenses I see here. It has to be that we do need the funds from all sources. The property tax is the law in Trinidad and Tobago but it has to be well thought out; it has to be just and it has to be fair.

One has to understand there is a concept called the tax incidence. What is the incidence of the tax? The incidence of the tax is who ultimately bears the burden. We may very well find that a very high property tax may cause the construction sector to decline, especially the sector for residential construction. A high tax on shopping malls may very much result in the closure of some shops and the poorest people, who are the shop clerks in there, may not find jobs. This is the general equilibrium effect of a tax. We need to work it through. I am in support of the property tax. I look forward to the day when I will continue to repay it. And I look forward to, if I could pay it online. But I want it to be well thought out and I want it to be subject to a proper rent assessment board, and in the meantime I want to offer to the Minister the consideration that: Why do you not for 2017 simply collect all the taxes that are due from 2010 to now? At least that might be a few hundred million dollars. And waive the interest rates while you are thinking through exactly how this tax is going to be properly implemented.

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

Madam President: Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs and Minister in the Ministry of National Security (Sen. The Hon. Dennis Moses): Thank you very much,

Madam President. I am thankful for the opportunity to contribute to this debate on the Finance (Variation of Appropriation) Bill, 2017, and to give account of my stewardship as Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs, as well as Minister in the Ministry of National Security over the last six months.

Madam President, the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs endeavours to deliver quality services to its partners, its stakeholders and to maintain focus on achieving results in accordance with the action plan as articulated in the official Policy Framework and the National Development Strategy, 2016 to 2030. To this end, the Ministry engages on a consistent basis with stakeholders at home and, indeed, with the international community, thereby acting as a protagonist through which the national interest and the national development of Trinidad and Tobago are achieved.

Madam President, in an inclusive manner, members of staff of the Ministry are rotated amongst the different diplomatic missions we have abroad and, indeed, with headquarters, in a way that focuses on transparency, equity and the requirements of the job portfolios. We have reinstituted guidelines and checks and balances to safeguard the public purse and ensure propriety. Madam President, one of our main goals is to ensure that we achieve value for money expended. We seek to inculcate a changed operational milieu at the Ministry so as to ensure higher levels of productivity among our staff and we do so, mindful of the changed fortunes in which we find ourselves currently. At the level of our missions, one of our missions, that is the High Commission previously that we would have had in a Uganda, it has been closed. This was closed since it was determined that the resource could have been better employed as we seek to maximize the benefits that accrue to our country in these stringent times.

Madam President, the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs continues to do the preparatory work inherent in the opening of missions—diplomatic missions that is—in Barbados, as well as the United Arab—

Sen. Sturge: A point or order. 46(1).

Madam President: Minister, while you are giving an account of what has taken place in your Ministry, there is a Bill before the Chamber and I would just ask you to try and match your contribution to the Bill. Okay?

Sen. The Hon. D. Moses: Thank you very much, Madam President. I had alluded a little earlier to the need to ensure value for money and, indeed, I sought to detail, to some extent—it would have come subsequently—my stewardship at the Ministry of National Security and, indeed, there is a variation here in respect of the Ministry of National Security. I hope that some level of cogency and relevance could be borne out as I cover the different areas in which we would have ensured savings, efficiency at the both Ministries, that is.

Madam President, with your permission, if I can continue. Beyond the new missions that we would have sought to open in the countries I mentioned: Barbados and the United Arab Emirates, we have entered into a framework agreement with Guyana seeking to ensure that we can cooperate with Guyana relative to the energy sector so that—

Sen. Ameen: Madam President, 46(1).

Madam President: Minister, continue, but just remember what I have said before. Okay?

Sen. The Hon. D. Moses: Thank you very much, Madam President, once more. As I was about to say, in an attempt to secure sources to relieve ourselves—Trinidad and Tobago—of shortages in the energy sector relative to gas, and indeed,

petroleum, we would have entered into agreements with countries, Guyana being one of such countries. We would have entered into a framework agreement under which we expect to reach agreement on a memorandum of understanding in the energy sector. Also, we have undertaken—we expect to undertake visits to Cuba—

Sen. Sturge: Point of order, (42)11.

Madam President: Minister, continue, please.

Sen. The Hon. D. Moses: Thank you very much for the protection, Madam President. I would resist attending to the barrage of interjections. As I was saying, we intend to undertake visits to Cuba led by the hon. Prime Minister, and Chile. The one to Chile would be later this month, while the one to Cuba would be towards the end of June and the beginning of July. In both visits we expect to reach agreements, understandings, and explore possibilities for a joint cooperation in the energy sector, tourism, to secure markets for our products. In the case of Chile, we are an important exporter of NLG to that market, amounting to almost 90 per cent. We also expect to reach agreements in other fields, such as culture, health and agriculture.

Madam President, I would now turn my attention to some other agreements that we would have undertaken with other countries, such as the United States of America where we would have signed an agreement PISCES. That is the acronym. It is Personal Identification Secure Comparison and Evaluation System, which will strengthen the security of Trinidad and Tobago, the United States and all other partners participating in this agreement. It allows for border control that documents, arrival and departure, of international travellers.

There are other such types of agreements that speak to the strengthening of

ties between Trinidad and Tobago and other countries that would secure our borders and ensure that we can conduct our business in other areas, inclusive of trade, and Trinidad and Tobago would be seen as a credible country, a law-abiding one, one that attaches importance to democracy, national sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs of States and allows for a certain security in investments—protection of investments—thereby contributing to national development as we seek to make the adjustments necessary in these times of changed fortunes.

Madam President, in this regard, we have recently appointed two heads of missions, one in the United Kingdom and the other in Costa Rica.

Sen. Sturge: Point of order, 46(1).

Madam President: Continue, Minister.

Sen. The Hon. D. Moses: Thank you very much, Madam President. The head of mission that would have been appointed to Costa Rica presented her letters of credence last week while the High Commissioner designate has not yet presented his letters of credence, but it already at post and has assumed his responsibilities. Both of these persons are properly seized of Government's economic and social objectives and have a comprehensive and sound understanding of the needs of our country. It is our expectation that they would contribute in no small manner to attaining the goals and objectives and in ensuring that the adjustments that we are currently involved in lead to the amelioration in our present circumstance.

Madam President, other areas that we are involved in at the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs relate to a number of issues in institutional strengthening to allow for greater efficiency and savings. Recently, we have put in place the necessary requirements for the establishment, the extension of a voice

over the Internet network. In the upcoming two/three months, by the beginning of August, we should have included Belgium, Costa Rica, Switzerland and a number of other countries where we have offices in that network, thereby reducing the communication costs associated with communicating between members of staff at the missions and headquarters.

Madam President, we, on our end, have finally come around to resolving and to treating with a number of seemingly intractable problems that over the years would have resulted in loss of moneys—funds—unbeknown, perhaps, to the national population. One such area relates to the Chancery at our mission in Ottawa, our High Commission, where subsoil pollutants—hydrocarbon pollutants—entered the adjoining property and a claims for remediation were instituted. This matter has been in contention for in excess of 10 years—

Madam President: Minister, just have a seat. I have been giving you some leeway but I need for you, at this stage, to link what you are saying to what we are dealing with, which is the Bill which is currently before us dealing with the appropriations. Okay?

Sen. The Hon. D. Moses: Thank you very much. It is in this setting that the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs has been able, with the limited resources put at its disposal to meet in full all the objectives contemplated at the start of this financial year. The measures that we have instituted, and we continue to implement with the robust vigour that has resulted in the reflection in no transfers within this Bill.

Madam President, with your permission, if you would allow me, I would just briefly enter into the realm of the Ministry of National Security before I close. [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much. [*Laughter*] Similarly, Madam President,

since assuming the portfolio of Minister in the Ministry of National Security, I have taken steps to examine the existing system and processes and to identify which systems could potentially be abused or exploited, or used improperly, and we have been able to make some changes and adjustments that would lead to more transparency and greater inflows of funds into the national treasury.

Madam President, I would like to mention that we have been looking at the fee structure of immigration services offered to non-nationals in the context of what obtains for similar identical services in other jurisdictions and we have found that in the case of Trinidad and Tobago, the fees are woefully on the low side so we have embarked upon the process to rectify such a situation.

12.00 midnight

In the area of work permits, we have a committee that treats with the issuance of work permits fortnightly, totalling probably in excess of 200 applications per week. Similarly, we have modified the processing of the system that leads to the issuance of work permits. It allows for greater transparency and efficiency in the system. Other permits, whether they be missionary permits or Minister permits, similarly, I have been subjected to review and currently we are modifying and rendering certain adjustments so that the public purse can be protected, and the savings and efficiencies can be manifest as we seek to contribute to the national development and implement Government's policy.

Many thanks to you, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Gerald Ramdeen: Good morning, Madam President, and it is my pleasure to join in this debate on an Act to vary the appropriation of the sum the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2017) Act, 2016. At 12.01 a.m., Madam President, before I start, I would like to endorse the sentiments of the

Leader of the Independent Bench and Sen. Shrikissoon—*[Interruption]*

Madam President: Sen. Ramdeen, just—first of all, there is no leader. There is a Coordinator according to the Standing Orders. But apart from that, enough Senators have raised that issue already and I would advise you at this late hour to move on. Okay?

Sen. G. Ramdeen: I am obliged, Madam President. Madam President, having heard the Minister in the Ministry of National Security and the Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs, I would have thought that in his discourse we would have heard something that would bring relief to the 25 Venezuelans who are now stranded in Venezuela for the last four weeks because the port in Icacos has been closed and they cannot come back to Trinidad and Tobago, but that just goes to show the disconnect between the Government and the citizens of this country. *[Crosstalk]* Trinidadians.

Madam President, I want to go straight to reply to some of the things that have been said in this debate this afternoon, and I want to start with one particular issue that is very close to me, which is to reply to some statements made by the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries in his contribution in this debate. The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries was at pains to give us the details about what transpired under a People's Partnership administration with respect to the Caroni lands, how many leases were given out and what took place with respect to those leases, and how they were photocopied and what was not photocopied, but it seems as though when the Government speakers speak, there is a certain degree of convenient amnesia about what has happened on these particular issues.

I have great respect for the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries and

he chose his words as he always does, very carefully. In his contribution, he said that 5,170 lots were developed by the PNM for the cost of \$1 billion, almost. Why I say he chose his words very carefully is because he used the word “developed”. What would have been more interesting is if the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries should have told us, up to 2010 how many lots were actually given out by the PNM?—because it was a PNM administration that closed Caroni in 2002, [*Desk thumping*] it was a PNM administration that promised the Caroni workers the VSEP package, it was a PNM administration that broke that promise that the workers had to go to court, and after they won their matter before Justice Deyalsingh it was a PNM administration that appealed the order to prevent the Caroni workers from getting the land that the People’s National Movement promised them. [*Desk thumping*]

So the 5,170 leases that Sen. Rambharat speaks about, those leases were not given out under a PNM administration. It was a People’s Partnership administration, having assumed power in 2010, that withdrew the appeal against Justice Deyalsingh’s order and started to finally give the people, who worked in Caroni for generations, the leases that they were promised by the PNM administration.

Then, Sen. Rambharat went on to talk about the 7,221 leases and the cost was \$4 billion, and it cost \$1.1 million per lot in Cedar Hill and Petit Morne, but you know, Madam President, that is quite interesting because I do not apologize for the People’s Partnership spending \$4 billion on 7,221 lots that went back to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Do you know why? They got something for it. What I would have liked to hear is what the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago got for the \$3 billion that they spent on the World GTL project in Petrotrin; and how

many people benefited from that? Three billion dollars gone down the drain and nothing for the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

The Leader of Government Business spoke about the perfect storm. Well, Madam President, if we cast our minds back to 2010, the People's Partnership administration assumed the perfect hurricane in 2010, not the perfect storm. [*Desk thumping*] We have heard about this Government talking about the fall in revenue from the energy sector, and how revenue has fallen by 92 per cent, and we must understand that with a fall of 92 per cent in revenue, you have to cut back and cut back.

When the People's Partnership administration was faced with a \$20 billion bailout that was as a result of the advisor of the present administrator not performing his role as Governor of the Central Bank, nobody "ain study" what was a perfect storm then. [*Desk thumping*] It was because of prudent management that we still have an economy and a financial system that did not collapse when Duprey went to the Central Bank on the 13th of January, 2009, and asked the Government to intervene, and when they intervened they took \$5 billion and it went down in a black hole. Nobody knew where it went.

It took prudent management to bring the Clico fiasco to a state where it could have been managed properly and, today, that same Government, that criticized the People's Partnership, is reaping the benefits of that and all of the dividends from those Clico companies. [*Desk thumping*] It is that PNM administration that wants to sell the Clico assets to their friends and family. It is convenient for the Minister of Works and Transport to talk about giving away and nobody is giving away. We want to know what is going to happen to No Man's Land and who is going to give that away, and if they feel that is going to happen

while this UNC Opposition is here, it have another thing coming, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*] It have another thing coming.

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries in his contribution said do not criticize the Ministry of Agriculture, Land Fisheries because they have no plan, because they have a plan since 2004, and he called out all the names of drafters of the plan, but between 2004 and 2017 the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries tells us today that the situation remains the same. So between 2004 and 2010, what the PNM was doing with that plan? And for the last 20 months under this new administration, without any plan, what have they done with the plan since 2004? The agricultural sector is the sector that everybody is saying must be the answer to our problems of diversification. So, Madam President, let me go straight to that.

The budget documents that were presented to us last year say that the Public Sector Investment Programme is going to be funded to the tune of \$5.1 billion, \$2.629 billion is going to come from the Infrastructure Development Fund. Madam President, please, forgive me, but if I seem to be sarcastic is because I just cannot understand some of the statements that have been in this particular presentation. The Minister of Finance tells us that you are going to cut down the Infrastructure Development Fund by \$1.25 billion—\$1.25 billion, that is almost half—but following that is the explanation that no development projects are going to be stopped or curtailed. The development programme is going to remain the same. So forgive me for not understanding that. I only did economics at A levels. But I cannot understand if you cut the development programme in half in terms of funding and there is no change in the development programme, it means that what? Half of it there was to give away? How can you get a whole when you cut it in

half? What was the other half there for? It does not make any sense, but the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries gave us the perfect explanation.

He says, “Well what we are going to do is that there are contracts that are not going to be paid for in this financial year, and there are things that are going to be incurred that are not going to be paid for. So that is why we are cutting back.” But I was wondering if the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries had read the documents that came to us which said that under the IDF the \$1,257,619,525—this is the explanation that was given to us.

“Funds provided for capital projects under the IDF will not be fully utilized in fiscal 2017”—and this is the part I did not understand—“given that contracts have not been finalized as initially projected. In addition, outstanding bills have not been verified for payment.”

So is it that the IDF funding that is supposed to go to the PSIP, work is going to continue without any contracts because they say the contracts have not been entered into? So work is going to be carried on without any contracts being entered into.

Well, Madam President, we were also provided with some documents in the budget debate and there is a whole booklet on the Public Sector Investment Programme for this country, and I wonder if people understand—which is a point that Sen. Shrikissoon made—the idea for set-up under former Prime Minister Manning was for two purposes you know. It was set up as a fund to fund only capital projects and large capital projects. The IDF was set up in about 2007 to 2008, you know to do what? To set up UTT and to fund e Teck, which is what is saddling the backs of the Government today and has drained the Treasury, because when you look at the projects—take the Tamana Intech Park, in the back of

nowhere, billions of dollars gone down the drain. What do we have to show for that? What do we have today as a country to show for the investment in Tamana Intech Park? That is what the IDF was set up for.

As Sen. Shrikissoon made the point, is it that you are going to take constantly money that is supposed to be devoted to the capital projects in the country, the development programme, and simply spend it on recurrent expenditure? Because out of all these 21 Heads of Expenditure, there are four that are described as part of the development programme. I am happy that the Minister of Works and Transport was able to list all of the large projects that are going to be started. We were told about the Toco port, the Moruga port, the highway to Manzanilla, the highway to Toco, the Diego Martin interchange, left, right and centre. I would assume that when those statements were made, the Minister of Works and Transport would have understood that the IDF is now cut in half. So if the IDF is cut in half, those capital projects that are going to be entered into, according to the Minister—not given away, but entered into—within the next few months where tenders have gone out for, they are all going to be funded by borrowing because they cannot be funded by \$1.3 billion out of the IDF.

So we are going to build all of those projects with the capital budget cut in half, but you see I am happy that the Government is talking about building the highway to Toco, and the port in Moruga, and they are going to continue with the highway to Point Fortin and it is not going to stop. Madam President, under the documents for the PSIP funding, this Government published a document boasting about building a highway to Point Fortin, port in Moruga, highway to Toco, highway to Manzanilla, and in the document that is published by the Government, and more so the Ministry of Finance, you know they talk about education. At page

93 of the Public Sector Investment Programme for fiscal year 2017, they are finding money to do everything, you know. Money to build interchange, money to build walkover. They promised the people of this country that there was going to be a seamless education system. Do you know what they met?

They talking about ECCE centres. They published a document where the Sonny Ladoo ECCE Centre was 95 per cent complete—they cannot find the money to complete that, 5 per cent in 20 months—El Dorado SDMS—probably that is why—95 per cent complete; Maracas Valley 95 per cent complete; No.1 Cascade Road 38 per cent complete; Bay Road, Picton, Puna, Petit Morne, Horquetta, La Brea, Farah Street, all of them under construction. But you are studying to build the port, and to buy barge, and to continue the highway, but you cannot build and finish the ECCE centres that you talk about would be a seamless education system. Under the PSIP, the Government continues to place emphasis on this element of education and has allocated \$40 million under the Infrastructure Development Fund for the early childhood care programme. This programme will involve the designing, building, outfitting and supervision of ECCE centres, and would include the completion—not the start—the completion of 14 ECCE centres.

Madam President, the Minister of Finance has come in the other place, and here, and presented us with these documents, asked us to debate it and make a meaningful contribution to the people of this country, and up to now, at 17 minutes past 12, we cannot be told today, as we debate this Bill, the \$1.2 billion that is coming out of the IDF, what it is coming out from; what are the projects that are not going to be completed? We are not entitled to know that? Just like how you set out in this form where you are going to allocate this money into these 21 heads of spending, do you not think the people of this country are entitled to know? It is

their money that you are spending. What is it that you are talking it from to spend it here? Fourteen ECCE centres to be completed—that was under the IDF—are they going to be completed? Spring Vale Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha, Ben Lomond, Reform SDMS—that Reform SDMS ECCE Centre is a “stone throw away” from the Brian Lara Stadium that they boasting up and down for.

It is listed here to be completed under the IDF. You do not study the \$40 million—well, \$40 million under the IDF was going to fund Spring Vale, Ben Lomond, Reform, Gasparillo, Petit Morne, Bay Road, Farah Street, Puna, Morvant, Picton, Cascade, Sonny Ladoo, Maracas Valley and El Dorado. Fourteen ECCE Centres for \$40 million. You could not do that in 20 months, but you borrow \$90 million to finish the stadium. Ninety million dollars, that is how you care about the children of our country. That is what you call development under the PNM.

Madam President, diversification, that is the song of the PNM. Under agriculture, under the IDF, PSIP, this is what they promised the country.

In 2017 an investment of \$112 million will be made, to support the goal of the Government to diversify the economy and continue the programme of works in the agricultural sector aimed at ensuring food security and reduction of the national food import bill.

Hear what the PNM promised the country under agriculture.

- “• upgrade of fishing landing facilities
- land development for farmers
- provision of irrigation systems and access roads
- development of the agriculture business and the continuation of scientific research
- development into new agricultural technologies”.

They promised \$29 million to the people under the IDF, to do what? To fix the fishing facilities: construction of fishing landing facilities at Blue River, construction of fish landing facilities at Cacandee, completion of the Carenage fishing facility—that is the best one out of them all because when the Minister of Finance presented the first budget in this Parliament, you know what he said? Twenty months ago, you know what he said? The people of Carenage will finally get the long-awaited fishing centre. The people of Carenage still selling red fish and carite under “two piece ah galvanize” opposite the health centre. [*Desk thumping*] And you know what, they are lucky they get two schools under the People’s Partnership and the people of Carenage have an up-to-date most modernized health centre under the People’s Partnership. [*Desk thumping*]

If they were waiting on the PNM, they would still be waiting now, like the fishing facilities—construction of fish landing facilities at Cumana; construction of fish landing facilities at La Brea; development of Las Cuevas fishing facility phase 1. That is six projects. Madam President, six projects, six months into the financial year and not one of the six projects have been started—not one—and the PNM talks about diversification. Not one.

Oil spill, 300 barrels. The Government expects us to believe that 300 barrels of oil reached from Petrotrin to the coast of Venezuela—300 barrels. From Claxton Bay to Caroni in the north, and from Claxton Bay to King’s Wharf in the south, not a fisherman could ply their trade as a fisherman. What has the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries done about that? What compensation has the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries given to those fishermen? What help have they given to those families and those fathers who cannot put bread on the table—because of what? The negligence of Petrotrin. Not one. Page 75, the

Finance (Variation of Appropriation
(Financial Year 2017) Bill, 2017 (cont'd)
Sen. Ramdeen (cont'd)

Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries:

“Agricultural Access Roads...

Urban Forestry Programme

Friendship Estate Agro-Park Development”.

Where are these things going? The Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries has done absolutely nothing to diversify the economy of Trinidad and Tobago.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries is supposed to be the driving force behind the diversification in Trinidad and Tobago. They have done nothing for cocoa, they do nothing for coconut, they do nothing for fisheries, they do nothing for livestock, and come here today and preaching about what the People's Partnership has done. Absolutely nothing! They talk about what they were saddled with. Madam President, every time you drive down the highway, and you pass Chaguanas, and you look on the left-hand side, watch the two towers in Edinburgh and see what the People's Partnership was saddled with; and when you pass in Valsayn South look at the two buildings that you have there. Two more towers there with nobody in it, saddled on the back of the People's Partnership, and they want to talk about they were saddled with debt.

We were saddled with the Scarborough hospital that the people of Scarborough Tobago voted 12-0 for the PNM to stay there. It was a People's Partnership administration that finally delivered a hospital to the people of Scarborough. [*Desk thumping*] We were saddled with a teaching hospital in pieces, like a shell—they are talking about shell on the highway. We were saddled with a teaching hospital in San Fernando that we took and developed into one of the most modern medical facilities in this country under the People's Partnership. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Madam President, they must be careful when they point fingers because they have a saying—“when yuh point one it have four looking back at you”. The energy sector—take the energy sector. The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, the Leader of Government Business, talked about the energy sector. The energy sector, every single project that was called out—about going to Houston, it was like if we were on the campaign trail and we had to promote the Prime Minister. Sercan, that was started under the People’s Partnership. There were nine deep water contracts signed from 2012 to 2014. [*Desk thumping*] Angelin was a project was done under the People’s Partnership, Juniper was a project done under the People’s Partnership. [*Desk thumping*] “Doh” come here and talk about how the energy sector is going to bear fruit. It is bearing fruit because what we did to the energy sector then.

Let me set the record straight, Madam President. Let me set the record straight once and for all because this idea of the PNM propaganda has to be put to an end, and let me set it straight tonight. The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and the PNM has this idea of going around and talking about this gas curtailment and how the PNM has turned upside down to save the energy industry, and that is the biggest problem outside of crime. Let me read into the record of *Hansard*, a letter written by Norman Christie, Regional President of BP, on the 28th of August, 2015, one month before the election. This is a letter being written to Mr. Indar Maharaj, then President of the NGC.

Orinoco Drive

Point Lisas Industrial Estate

Point Lisas

And it goes straight to the propaganda of the PNM:

Dear Mr. Maharaj

Re gas sales contract effective January 1st, 2000.

Who was in Government then?

A natural gas company of Trinidad and Tobago buyer and BP seller—

This is what going on in the gas industry. Listen:

Unless otherwise defined in this letter, terms and expressions defined in the contract shall have the same meaning herein.

And this is what I want to read into *Hansard*:

We refer to your letter—that is the NGC's letter—dated August 18th, 2015 and I have noted buyer's account—that is NGC—of the reason for the seller's current level of gas supply to the buyer.

That is BP's supply to NGC.

In this regard, BP wishes to remind NGC that its reduced supply of gas has resulted from a combination of factors including:

1. the requisite maintenance and safety works post the Gulf of Mexico incident in 2010;
2. notice given to the buyer—that is NGC—in early 2010 that it is no longer economical for seller—that is BP—to continue to make available cushion gas; and
3. the buyer's indication to the seller in 2010 that it would require a reduced gas supply.

So it was your Government in early 2010 that was telling BP that they wanted a reduced gas supply, and you are trying to put that on our back? [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, the truth about it is, the facts will speak for themselves, that the PNM Government in 20 months has failed to inspire anybody to invest in

the energy sector in this country, and that is the cross that you have to bear. Because just like how you cannot generate revenue, you cannot generate investment, and that is what has us in the position that we are in today. If you had the ability to generate investment, the energy sector would not be in the position that it is in today, and then you come and talk about BP and \$5 billion, and EOG, and you welcoming Shell. This is craziness. The Minister of Finance has said Moody's downgrade us, Standard & Poor's downgrade us, so you know what we do? Let us try somebody else, they will upgrade. So do you know what that is? "You go by de doctor, he tell yuh yuh have cancer; yuh go by ah next one, yuh geh a second opinion, he tell yuh yuh have cancer too; yuh know wey he do? Leh we try a third one and see if he go change it."

You know, I wonder if the Government realizes you are not getting ratings by Fitch for free you know. It is money we are going to spend to do that. So is it that when you go to Fitch, Fitch is going to take the same figures and give you a different result? Do the same thing and expect a different result. Instead of you saying we admit that things are not going the way we want them to go, let us try and find solutions to the problems, see what the rating agencies are saying we are doing wrong and try and correct it, try and fix it. No, the answer of the Government is, we will go to Fitch and see if Fitch go fix it, and Fitch could tell us what the position is.

Madam President, like the Minister of Finance said, the matter of the property tax is one we must be very careful about. So I am not going to touch on what is before the court, but the property tax is one that clearly has not been thought out properly. Everywhere you go in this country people are asking questions: what are they going to pay; how are they going to pay; what is going to

happen; what is this deadline about; what do they have to submit; what they do not to submit?

12.30 a.m.

And you know what that clearly is, Madam President? It is an indictment on a Government that clearly has not thought out their plan. If the Government wanted to implement the property tax, do you not think that before taking that step, there should have been a public education drive so that people would understand what is your policy and what is your plan, so that people would not be asking the questions that they ask every day to people who they are not sure they are getting the right answers from? But no, the plan of the Government is “take that”. We will implement the property tax. “We doh care if yuh pay or if yuh doh pay.” Right? “We doh care if yuh know or yuh doh know.” Right? And that is their policy.

But, Madam President, there is a bigger picture to this property tax thing, you know, because what has happened is this. When the Government decides to implement this property tax, there are implications that have not been thought out. People are now going to take the position that whether they were going to add one bedroom or tile their house or do renovations, they are not going to do that anymore in fear of what will come thereafter. And what is the spin-off effect of that, Madam President? Construction is going to go down. The people who are trying to make a living as carpenters, painters, electricians, labourers, masons, tile men—they are all going to lose employment. And what you have done, by halfway killing the development programme by cutting the IDF in half, you are going to finish kill it by the rest of your policies. [*Desk thumping*] That is all that is going to happen.

Madam President, is it not ironic that today, we are debating this Bill and one of the main Ministries that is going to benefit from this realignment of funding is going to be the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development. We have heard, time and time again, the cry of the Opposition which is that this is a Government that cares only about the elite rich. And you know every day, you hear about the contractors at EFCL who are owed \$600 million, the contractors at HDC who are owed another billion. You hear about the contractors in the Ministry of Housing, UDeCOTT. Everywhere you go, you hear about the contractors. They are not being paid. But the Government clearly saw it important to pay ANSA \$283 million for their loan. They must be paid. And \$13 million for the second loan that was taken under this Government.

But what is even of greater concern is simply this. Today, when we are debating \$75 million for squatter resettlement regularization, you have 15 people who, tonight, do not have a house over their head because their houses have been broken down. [*Desk thumping*] And that, Madam President, because I remember clearly, there were many people that I represented where the LSA, in the face of certificates of comfort, would go in and break down people's houses. People who legally had the protection of a certificate of comfort and just like how I debated in the last debate we had in this House last week about the important pieces of legislation that strengthen our democracy, always seem to have been passed under a UNC administration, the same could be said about the protection of squatters because the squatters, the same piece of legislation, the State Lands Act was a piece of legislation that was passed by a UNC administration to give squatters the comfort of understanding that what took place today, in Sangre Grande, would not happen again in this country.

But so said so done. That is the policy of the PNM—\$75 million. I wonder how much of this \$75 million is going to help the people, the 15 of them, who lost their houses today in Sangre Grande. And it is going to continue because everywhere that the so-called highway to Toco and the so-called highway to Manzanilla is passing, the Commissioner of State Lands, a puppet of the Government, is giving out notices to people to move their houses. People who have been there for more than 30 years. People who have been there who do not even need the protection of the State Lands Act because they are entitled to remain there and to get the freehold vested in their name because the title of the state in those lands has been extinguished by possession. And because those people do not have proper representation in those same areas that are occupied by a PNM MP—only for the while. Because you know what they have said? The people of Sangre Grande have seen the light and you know what they have called for today? “Call an election” because they want to get rid of their MP. [*Desk thumping*] Because the promises that were made to them then are only exactly that. You promised to be a hero in 2015 and all you could deliver is zero. “Dais wah going on.” [*Desk thumping*] From hero to zero.

Just imagine, Madam President, this Government complains that they do not have money and you are taking \$86 million that is supposed to be used to provide food to families who cannot afford—[*Interruption*]

Madam President: Sen. Ramdeen, you have five more minutes.

Sen. G. Ramdeen: I am obliged, Madam President. Eighty-six million that was provided to provide help to people who are today unemployed, homeless, cannot put food on their table for their children. Today, you take that \$86 million and you spend it on salaries. That is what you have done. Caricom Development Fund.

Madam President, this situation that we find ourselves in today is only going to get worse because every time we come and the Minister of Finance presents a piece of legislation, it is to do one of two things. It is to borrow or to shift and all that you are getting out of that is what we have said even before September 2015, that you “red and ready” but you are not ready to run this country, [*Desk thumping*] and 20 months. Madam President, the country is fed up, you know, the country is absolutely fed up with the PNM. They are fed up. And you know who are complaining the most? Not the Opposition constituencies you know, it is the PNM constituencies that are voicing their complaints the most. Because you know why? The promises that were made to them, to all of the people who voted for the PNM, in September 2015, have realized that when they put them in power, the only people who have benefited are a few handfuls.

David Brash, right, the man with the barge. “And yuh know what they doing? They talking about nobody going to get any contract.” They have a contract for US \$106 million lined up in Trinmar waiting for David Brash. Let them say it, let the PNM say, “David Brash is not a financier of the PNM”. Let the next speaker get up and say that. [*Desk thumping*] This must stop. This must stop because you know what they say?

I sat and listened to the Minister of Transport did his budget contribution and talked about “and nothing will be stolen”, right, and “there will be no corruption”. Right? But you know what will happen also and what we have experienced? “Is there will be nothing for the poor people.” Right? And you know what? All of the contracts that are being given out now and that were listed by the Minister of Transport, “they rushing” each and every one of them before the procurement legislation comes into effect. [*Desk thumping*] So it does not give us any comfort

to tell us about “tender next week”, “sod turning tomorrow”. “All ah that is happening for ah reason” and it is happening for “ah” reason because the procurement legislation and the freedom of information legislation is the death knell of the PNM; they will fall under that.

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

Sen. Stephen Creese: Thank you, Madam President. The variation of appropriation Bill presents us with an opportunity much like the appropriation Bill did for discerning the path forward, and I am wondering whether what we are experiencing is the “casa gallay in the pack” and whether instead of investing in the future, we are really merely settling past debts and throwing away the opportunity for future gains.

Because I think at the end of the day, the question that is before us is what to make of our strategic options. You know—the whole SWOT analysis of analyzing our strengths, our weaknesses, our opportunities, threats—and in looking through that Senate document at page 11, I got a clue of where this is all going. Because the only reference to that kind of analysis is on page 11 and if I may quote from it:

“Head 13 - Office of the Prime Minister

Development Programme - \$2,550,000

...Strengthening of the Strategic Threat Assessment Capacity in Trinidad and Tobago - Think Tank Project

Cabinet agreed to grant approval for funding in the sum of US\$375,000...”

And it goes on to say that this is:

“...to support and strengthen the Strategic Threat Assessment Capacity in Trinidad and Tobago - Think Tank Project which would be based with the Integrated Threat Assessment Centre (ITAC), National Security Secretariat

(NSCS). The project is aimed at capacity building to strengthen the technical skills of staff in areas such as research methods and methodologies and strategic analysis.”

It is the only area in that document where there is any reference to any former strategic planning, any attempt to think things through and to link the priorities in this variation Bill back to the main priorities, even back to the Government’s policy initiative, which, of course, is based on the manifesto coming out of the last elections.

But in looking at this Senate document, one of the things that struck me is that I was able to identify quickly the top six items, which were listed and which were in receipt of the larger sums and the top six listings read like this: Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, \$376 million plus; followed by the Ministry of Public Utilities at \$275 million; and in third place is the Ministry of Health at \$196 million; followed by the Ministry of Education, \$180 million; and then Ministry of National Security at \$149 million; and finally, Ministry of Public Administration and Communications with some \$56 million.

And I could not help but notice that inside there, while paying attention to the ones that received the larger sums, there was also the question of those that received even less. And it crossed my mind while looking at it as to whether the area where the food card would fall in all of this and the fact that the food card seems to be disappearing into our history, and the competition for who is the most caring administration between the last two administrations, the answer seems to be self-evident. That those who do need the food card—and I am not here to defend that there may have been excesses in terms of how it was being distributed, but I always have the problem when you throw the baby out with the bathwater, because

the water you could always recycle, but I do not think we are in the business yet of recycling humans. And therefore, when you made the food card unavailable, there are people who are hungry tonight with no promise of when that relief will be forthcoming.

But the whole question of strategizing is one that bothers me continually because it is so very easy in the public service to fall into the habit of routinizing, of doing the usual, of following the usual tired, trodden path and of course, you know the definition of madness: doing the same things over and over and expecting a very different result. I had hoped that since the opportunity was missed when the national budget was being presented, that the opportunity would now be sought to correct that fault. But it would appear that this is not about to happen, that it will fall to some of us tonight, this morning, to remind the Minister of Finance, to remind the administration in power, of the need to deal with the historical problems that have brought us to this juncture.

You see, there is a whole culture, subculture, that bedevils us and we do a lot of this fiscal and monetary analysis, economic analysis and we divorce it from the social system in which it has to be located. So that somewhere during the night's debate, I heard mention of the question of productivity and I always find that amusing. Because I remember, I think, it is Chalkdust's calypso, about asking for his grandfather's backpay and there is a link between that theme and the broader question of productivity. Because what I find amusing is when we are claiming that others are unproductive, it takes you back to the age-old theme of the lazy Sambo, and it is that lazy Sambo who, ironically enough, invented the steel pan. It is that lazy unproductive Sambo who also took kaiso and soca international since the 1930s as a matter of fact. It is that lazy Sambo who "pulls bull" whole night,

probably up and down the Laventille road right now with a PH. It is that lazy Sambo who, in the average long weekend, would build his squatter house, his “shack”. And you see, the list of productive enterprises of the so-called lazy Sambo is really long.

Sambo’s fault really—his only fault is that he refuses to be the willing fodder, as it were, or tool of an exploitative class. Sambo has decided for whom he will be productive. It is that Sambo who, when he migrates to New York City, has two and three jobs. So it is the failure—*[Interruption]*

Madam President: Sen. Creese, listen, please, I need you, at this hour, to really speak to the Bill. Okay? Please, directly to the Bill.

Sen. S. Creese: I was making the point that we have failed to inspire our people so that they—not on our conventional work site—make the contribution that builds the economy. Because if we have said that the oil price is falling, if we are saying there have been so many layoffs and up and down the country, there are domestic construction sites, in other words, homes are going up and are being repaired all over the place, then the question is, they are productive workers, they are productive people but they are about their own business and they are not labouring, as it were, in the vineyards of others. That is the point. The “lazy Sambo”, this whole question of productivity has to—*[Interruption]*

Madam President: Sen. Creese, please. You do not need to tell me the point because I, more than anybody else here in this Chamber, I am listening attentively to what you are saying and I am saying to you, please, you do not need to tell me anything about any point, you just need to talk, please, about the Bill. Thank you.

Sen. S. Creese: The Bill does not provide the basis for motivating your average citizen because it is lost, it is of an old model. It is an old and tired economic

framework. It has no relevance to the future of our country. That is the problem with the Bill; that is the problem with its provisions. That is why I went through the trouble to list the six biggest areas and none of them are linked to the critical problems before us.

The critical problem which was exposed in the original appropriation Bill spoke to the question of the need for foreign exchange, of the need to increase local food production, quote unquote, and there is an element of productivity in food production and that is the dichotomy—the disparity between how much we produce locally, especially in the area of food because our biggest problem in terms of foreign exchange is the foreign food bill and nothing in the original appropriation Bill really addressed that and this variation also fails to address that.

So that is why it is critical to understand the people who we call unproductive are producing. They are not producing in spheres that we want them to because they have long discerned that the path that the national economy is on is a failed path and that is the critical issue. That is what is fundamentally wrong with the Bill, that where it is flawed. It is on a failed path. It is persisting along a failed path. We are really travelling nowhere fast with hundreds of millions of dollars. That is what is so sad about all of this.

Take the EMBD issue which the Minister alluded to. EMBD has spent millions of dollars in a most cost-ineffective way. The average squatter could teach EMBD a thing or two about planning and development and certainly about housing arrangements. Because when you compare the \$1 million per housing lot per square foot to what is involved in your average squatter settlement, somebody did not go to university but knows a lot and practises it effectively and somebody has a Master's and a PhD and is unable to deliver at a reasonable rate per square

foot.

But you see, there is a larger issue behind the failure of the EMBD and it is linked to the failure of this variation Bill. The broader analysis that is necessary is to understand where the national economy is, where Trinidad and Tobago is, where our own energy industry is in terms of the world energy industry, where the world energy industry is, where oil is in the world energy industry. Is oil on an upward swing of the curve or a downward swing? Are we caught in the games that the multinationals are playing as they try to delay the advances of the new energy technologies, realizing that fossil fuel technology should be on the decline?

So are we, in the pursuit of this arrangement, are our projections for the funds identified here and the continued receipt of revenues based on a failing, outdated and anachronistic economic plan? And that is the question we have to answer while we cling desperately to the petrodollar. Are we on the downward side of that spiral, swimming against the world tide, caught in the games that the big multinationals play as they delay the advance, the obvious advance of the new energy technologies? That is the fundamental question and we are skirting on the edges of the real issue and for each day that we do that, it is costing us millions. Millions spent in the wrong direction. We are still holding on to the old oil dream.

And the challenge before us is to learn quickly from the mistakes of EMBD because pretty soon, along will come an administration which will admit the truth and the truth is that we cannot sustain the bourgeois lifestyle that oil has gotten us accustomed to. All the trappings, all the benefits, that your average retired oil worker expects the oil industry to generate and provide for him, there are no resources there to sustain it and as I think, as Sen. Shrikissoon pointed out, the life expectancy of our retirees is getting better and better and therefore, the welfare

systems to prop that up will be making greater demands on the State.

So we need to get to the point where what deceased Prime Minister Manning did with Caroni has to be done with PSCL, with the holders of oil properties because we cannot sustain the lifestyle that oil has generated or has caused us to expect in the same way we could not sustain Tate & Lyle, the same way we could not, out of the Treasury, keep propping up the Caroni enterprise. We have to come to the realization that we have to fashion an EMBD for oil, even before we have managed successfully the operations of EMBD for Caroni. But that is the challenge, and each day lost in getting our act together, in that regard, will cost generations, yet unborn, much sorrow.

1.00 a.m.

The items and the sums transferred from one Ministry to another are largely irrelevant, because we are caught up with the bookkeeping function of balancing the budget when, at the end of the day, it is really never neither here nor there for a national government, whether they balance the budget or not. The issue is whether the total economy is travelling forward. That is the bigger and more critical issue. You could go for years without balancing your budget, and the sky would not fall on Chicken Little. What is critical, at the end of any period of time, is whether the whole national economy is moving forward. That is the more critical thing. Whether, you know, the accounting thing of balancing it dollar for dollar. That is largely irrelevant, if you are travelling in the right direction, if you are stimulating the economy.

And that is the problem that we are not facing squarely. Is there light at the end of the oil tunnel as presently structured? And my contention is the answer to that is no. And for every month, day, or year that we defer facing that squarely and

getting on the new course, then a great opportunity is lost. So, I was looking, in terms of where the biggest variation would have been for it to lie somewhere between the Ministries responsible for youth, the Ministries responsible for education, and the Ministries responsible for agriculture.

Because it is my contention that the return to a basic needs strategy, recognizing that we have to feed ourselves, recognizing that the biggest part of our foreign exchange problem is that food import bill. So we have to find a way to make our farming methods much more creative, much more scientific and we have to educate our young people at the university to be modern scientific farmers. The age of the hoe and the age of minor agricultural equipment is gone. You have to have scientific approaches where the focus is on improving yields, not necessarily having large area of farms, but yields, because we have a million-plus people to feed. And if we do not get that right, everything else will fall apart.

So I am saying to the Minister of Finance that if in this variation there is no talk of how we are going to create at the University of the West Indies, at Cipriani Labour College, at any of the other tertiary institutions, the new farmer of Trinidad and Tobago—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: At Cipriani?

Sen. S. Creese: Yes, at Cipriani.

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: No, no, no, no, no.

Sen. S. Creese: At Cipriani. All our tertiary institutions have to be focused on what is our main problem. We cannot be spending money unless it is strategic, unless it is focused on what is the nation's number one problem. And the number one problem is foreign exchange, because we cannot feed ourselves so we have to buy food from abroad. The bulk of the starches, and so on that we consume, are

coming from abroad. The bulk of the juices that we consume are coming from abroad in the form of powder. The bulk of the meat that we eat, coming from abroad. And there is nothing in this variation that speaks to that. And until our budget, or mid-term reviews of the budget address our core problems, we will continue to spin top in mud.

I thank you, Madam President.

The Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development (Sen. The Hon. Jennifer Baptiste-Primus): Thank you, Madam President. At 1.05 a.m. Sen. Mark has us here. [*Laughter*] Madam President, at this hour of the morning we have to have a little bit of humour otherwise we shall all fall asleep.

I just want to clarify a point—well, not really a point, a complaint that was made earlier by some of my friends on the other side about the Senate meeting on a Monday because we are into Tuesday. And I just want to draw attention to Standing Order No. 10(1) and 10(2), Madam President, and to remind that it was this Senate, last week, that took the decision for us to meet on Monday. So therefore, the complaint was really an unfair complaint and I wanted to put it—
[*Interruption*]

Sen. Mark: Madam President, point of order. I think that when we were raising that point you said you had ruled on that matter.

Madam President: That is a point of order, Sen. Mark?

Sen. Mark: Yes. Ma'am.

Madam President: That is a point of order?

Sen. Mark: When the point was raised by my colleague—[*Interruption*]

Madam President: Actually, not that we are in the—it is normal for my rulings to be questioned, but when Sen. Ramdeen was speaking, he was going to be speaking

to echo what was said before. So that is why I said to him it had been raised before. The Minister is bringing a different point. She is actually answering what was said before. There is a difference. Sen. Mark, that might have been a point of clarification you were seeking, as opposed to a point of order.

Sen. The Hon. J. Baptiste-Primus: Thank you Madam President, and Sen. Mark is a clever one. He is well aware of that. So, Madam President, I just wanted to put it on the record, in keeping with Standing Order 10(1) and (2) that this Senate did take a decision to meet on Monday and, therefore, the complaints were unfair complaints.

Secondly, Madam President, I just want to respond briefly to one or two points that Sen. Ramdeen, in his very impassioned pronouncement in the House, and to give this House and Trinidad and Tobago the assurance that with regard to the PSIP of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, all of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries projects are on track. [*Desk thumping*] To date, 75 per cent of the \$112 million is committed to projects. The fishing facility in Carenage is under way, Cocorite nearing completion, Cumana completed, Las Cuevas, completed and the reduction in the idea does not impact on the Ministry's two IDF projects, which are \$5 million for the zoo and \$27 million for the fishing facility. So, Sen. Ramdeen has sought to place incorrect information into the records of this Senate, and I am compelled to correct such inaccuracies, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, I crave your indulgence under Standing Order 42(11), to permit me somewhat. In my contribution on this Bill, which is an Act to vary the appropriation of the sum, the issue of which was authorized by the Appropriation (Financial Year 2017) Act, 2016.

[MR. VICE-PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

Madam President, even at this late hour—Mr. Vice-President, awfully sorry. Mr. Vice-President, even at this late hour, I want to express my pleasure in addressing this honourable Senate and the people of Trinidad and Tobago really on the variation of appropriation for fiscal 2017. It is also my privilege to contribute to this debate. I have sat here for many hours, listening to the various contributors giving their perspective on the Bill before us. Some points of views I agree with, some not in agreement with, but I respect the right of everyone in the Senate to express their particular point of view.

Now, Mr. Vice-President, I want to seize the opportunity to congratulate the hon. Minister of Finance and his team for doing such a wonderful and exceptional job in assessing the current state of the economy and reviewing the Heads of Expenditure within the Appropriation Act, 2017, and presenting to this Senate and to the other place, a comprehensive revised budget for Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Vice-President, I also wish to express my confidence in Trinidad and Tobago, our beloved twin island state. Though we are faced with economic challenges, Mr. Vice-President, we have proven to be a creative people, a “resilient” people and an intelligent—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Ramdeen: Resilient.

Sen. The Hon. J. Baptiste-Primus: Thank you, “resilient”. Well, let me put it this way, all of us in this House, even your good self, I thank you, we are not always correct and at 1.11 in the morning. We have proven to be an intelligent people, Mr. Vice-President. We have also shown that we are resourceful and we can work together, once we can put aside our partisan, political positions.

My confidence, Mr. Vice-President, in our people was recently reaffirmed

Finance (Variation of Appropriation
(Financial Year 2017) Bill, 2017 (cont'd)
Sen. The Hon. J. Baptiste-Primus (cont'd)

when I visited the JSEP, Junior Achievement Fair at Woodford Square about two or three weeks ago, Mr. Vice-President. Fourteen schools participated in that fair at Woodford Square and where all these students, hundreds of students came together from different schools, combined their skills and talents collectively and produced items, various items, with their hands, Mr. Vice-President. And you know what, Mr. Vice-President? They produced and sold items with recorded sales in excess of \$160,000 on that day. And I want to commend the organizers of the Junior Achievement and JSEP, which came out of the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, in particular the cooperative sector. I was so proud of those young people on that day, Mr. Vice-President, that I became so enthusiastic that I contributed towards their creativity by investing \$500 with them and it was worth it, all the items that were bought. And I can only encourage those young people because they are the businessmen and businesswomen of tomorrow.

Mr. Vice-President, our administration has conducted a careful examination of our current national financial situation and has taken the responsible action of consulting with all stakeholders in deliberating on reasonable measures to maintain stability and to restore economic growth in our beautiful twin island country.

Mr. Vice-President, you know, it is in times of economic hardship that we draw from within and we realize that we possess the answers. We do not have to look outside of Trinidad and Tobago for answers. And it is imperative therefore, that Ministries in Trinidad and Tobago—we recognize that they must be properly resourced. And what the hon. Minister of Finance has done, he has looked at various areas and he has moved moneys from under the Ministry of Finance and from the Ministry of Energy to the other Ministries.

I am quite known for the boast, Mr. Vice-President, that I often make, that at

the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, there is an excellent team of hardworking and committed public officers, and despite the cutbacks in our allocation—we did not get all that we asked for, but despite the cutback in our allocation—the team at the Ministry have proven that they are able to develop truly home-grown solutions with our very limited resources. For this, Mr. Vice-President, I wish to publicly commend the employees of the Ministry who go beyond the call of duty to make things happen, given our limited financial constraints and our staffing constraints.

Mr. Vice-President, I turn to contract employment and short-term employment. As a key advocate for the promotion of decent work in Trinidad and Tobago, the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development seeks to set the right example, especially with regard to timely payment of employees and upholding their terms and conditions of employment.

We at the Ministry believe that we ought to be the beacon in that regard, in setting very good examples. In this regard, the increases proposed to the contract employment under general administration vote, and the short-term employment vote of the Ministry of \$3.5 million and \$750,000, respectively are of critical importance to the functioning of the Ministry. This would allow the Ministry to meet payments to its employees on contract employment and short-term employment up to the end of the current year.

Mr. Vice-President, we have faced a situation at the Ministry, and I dare say other Ministries may be experiencing similar situations, where very, very valued employees have left the employ of the Ministry because of short-term contract employment. And I will get to that a little later on, Mr. Vice-President, how this Government intends to correct that situation. On this note, I wish to remind that

this Government made a commitment in our official policy framework to review and reform the use of contract labour in all sectors.

Mr. Vice-President, this process started with the establishment of a Cabinet-appointed committee in 2015, which was chaired by the Head of the Public Service and Permanent Secretary to the hon. Prime Minister, Mrs. Sandra Jones. Subsequently, the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development hosted a workshop on contract employment in April of 2016.

Given that the issue of contract employment is wide-ranging and complex, we have allowed stakeholders significant time to review the discussions arising from the workshop and to submit comments and input into actions that should be taken to address contract employment in Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Vice-President, some of the ideas presented would be considered at the Ministry, together with the other stakeholders. We are in the process of collating those points of view to submit to the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago. In certain instances, we have requested the Service Commissions Department to appoint officers to vacant permanent and pensionable positions and we are awaiting feedback from the Service Commissions Department in that regard.

Mr. Vice-President, I turn to OSHA, Occupational Safety and Health Authority. As this honourable Senate is aware, when I assumed duty, the Occupational Safety and Health Agency had no home, Mr. Vice-President. I have personally worked with the Minister of Public Administration and Communications to secure accommodation from which the staff of the agency can operate. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Small: I agree with that.

Sen. The Hon. J. Baptiste-Primus: Today, I am proud to say that OSH Agency's

head office now functions from 9 Alexandra Street, St. Clair. [*Desk thumping*]
We have also acquired accommodation for OSH in Tobago, at Caroline Building, located at 36 Wilson Road.

Mr. Vice-President, when I became the Minister, I found a situation that was really incredible existing at OSHA, where almost all of their inspectors were operating from home for more than two years. And, therefore, understanding what that meant, people working from home, I worked assiduously to correct that situation and every one of those officers are on the job performing as they should have been performing over the past couple of years.

It is our intention to remove one or two units from Duke Street to free up additional space for the OSH Authority who would be employing additional staff in order to properly manage the sector. So that, Mr. Vice-President, in addition, the increase in allocation would allow the agency to meet its various expenditure. The work of the OSH Agency was also affected by the absence of a fully functional OSH Authority, which stymied decision-making and the operations of the agency.

[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

Madam President, a new board was appointed in May 2016, and the initial allocation for remuneration of the board members would be exhausted by June 2016 and, therefore, requires the proposed increase in funding of \$.15million, up to the end of September 2017, in order to ensure that board fees are paid. Madam President, I am very, very pleased and satisfied with the functioning of this board, under the Chairmanship of Dr. Victor Coombs. They are really making tremendous headway and I can only encourage them in their quest to bring the OSH Authority up to achieve the objectives set, so to speak. Madam President,

additionally, the proposed increase in OSH Contract Employment Vote of \$3.9 million will assist in meeting payments to the current contract staff complement in the agency and the engagement of additional officers under the approved structure.

Madam President, I turn to the Cipriani College of Labour and Co-Operative Studies. Madam President, Cipriani College of Labour and Co-Operative Studies popularly known as Cipriani was established in 1966, and is the only tertiary level institution in the Caribbean whose core focus is on labour and cooperative studies.

The college plays a critical role in educating our people on labour studies and has expanded its programme to include certificates, diplomas, associate degrees and bachelor degrees in a range of areas.

The proposed increase in the provision for Cipriani College of Labour and Co-Operative Studies, \$0.75 million, is as a result of the new rental accommodation acquired for the Tobago campus of the college. Over the past years, the college has delivered its teaching at two rented locations in Tobago, catering for some 500 students who pursue certificates, diplomas, associate degrees and bachelor degrees in six fields. Madam President, these locations severely limited the ability of the college to meet the current needs of the stakeholders and its ability to take advantage of expressed demand for the expansion of the programme in our sister isle. In light of this, the college has acquired new accommodation at Caroline Building, located at 36 Wilson Road, Scarborough, with a three-year lease, which commenced on the 1st of March, 2017.

Madam President. I am very pleased to say that the new location boasts of 19,886 square feet, of which the college will occupy 12,271 square feet and the remainder will be shared with the National Entrepreneurship Development Company Limited, also known as NEDCO, the Occupational Safety and Health

Authority/Agency, OSHA and the On-The-Job Training Programme (OJTP).
Madam President, it would be virtually similar to a one stop shop in Tobago.

In addition to providing the college with more adequate space to serve its stakeholders, the new location will provide the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development and its agencies with the ability to deliver improved services to its stakeholders in Tobago more effectively.

Madam President, I turn my attention to the contribution to the labour liaison branch in Canada. And this branch in Toronto, Canada plays a critical role in the management of the Commonwealth Caribbean Seasonal Agricultural Workers Programme, popularly known as the farm programme, in which Trinidad and Tobago has been a participant since 1967. Madam President, this programme involves the placement of Trinidad and Tobago nationals on farms in Canada, during peak harvesting and planting periods when there are traditionally shortages of qualified Canadian workers.

Madam President, among other things, the labour liaison branch seeks to negotiate terms and conditions for our workers in Canada. They also mediate in disputes between the farmers and the workers and among workers among workers and they also monitor working environments in Canada.

In short, the labour liaison branch seeks the interest of all our nationals who function in Canada. On average, Madam President, approximately 1,000 persons participate in this farm programme each year. In the past, the operational cost for the labour liaison branch in Canada has been met from a 5 per cent reduction from the workers income. Madam President, the Canadian Government instituted a piece of legislation that made it illegal for those types of deductions to continue. As a consequence, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago assume full financial

responsibility to meet the operational cost for the labour liaison branch in Toronto Canada, hence the allocation of those funds.

Madam President, in closing, the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development remains cognizant of the need to demonstrate value for money. This can be ensured through greater efficiency, productivity and accountability. To this end, the Ministry is currently finalizing our strategic plan 2017 to 2020, which emphasizes multipartite stakeholder engagement, results-based monitoring and service delivery. With the total proposed increase in our allocation of \$9 million for the rest of 2016/2017, Madam President, the Ministry will continue to encourage the creativity that I have seen displayed in no small measure by the employees of the Ministry in developing new and creative and home-grown ways in getting the job done with the little that we have received, and in also meeting our vision of decent work, industrial peace and opportunity for all. Madam President, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

1.30 p.m.

Sen. Wayne Sturge: Madam President, it is exactly 1.30 a.m. which means we have been here for the last 12 hours. So with that in mind, I would try to be as concise and as relevant as I can. Now, if I may be permitted to go immediately to the Bill, I see under Head 39: Ministry of Public Utilities and I see an increase of \$275 million. I have to ask—I mean, I read the documents and I understand why we are giving this Ministry an increase of \$275 million, but I think that this Ministry owes this country \$255 million. [*Desk thumping*] So that what we should really be giving this Ministry would be \$20 million.

I say that because, Madam President, when we reflect on many of the things said here today about cutting and contriving, and I reflect on an answer to a

Question on Notice given earlier in the day—an answer given by none other than the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, about losses suffered by farmers who suffered great loss because of an invasion of locust. The answer by the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries was, we are not in the business of bailing out or compensating farmers for loss. [*Desk thumping*]

So it is amazing that the Government is not in the business of compensating farmers for loss. This is the agricultural sector which is a driver of the economy and which can help in leading the process of diversification. So we are not in the business—the Government is not in the business of compensating farmers for loss, but the Government is in the business of compensating financiers for \$255 million in loss. [*Desk thumping*] Let me tell you why it is compensation. Because when I—the information coming to me, and it is now in the public domain what the Chairman for Massy Communications has said, that it has given Massy Communications the option to avoid further losses. What that means is that Massy Communications was operating at a loss and this must be taken in the context of TSTT, which comes under the Ministry of Public Utilities. TSTT was also operating at a loss. [*Desk thumping*]

Now, let me tell you why this does not make sense, because if TSTT was operating at a loss in the same field of communications, more particularly, the cable market, and Massy Communications was only able to capture 3,400 households thereabout, it means that the persons who selected Massy Communications as its cable provider rejected TSTT as its cable provider. So if they rejected TSTT, and they have gone to Massy and now that TSTT has bought Massy, do you think they will stay? [*Desk thumping*] They will reject them. So you are making losses. You cannot recoup that loss. So what you have done, a

business decision—[*Crosstalk*]
—under public utilities, a business decision—
[*Interruption and laughter*]

Madam President: Sen. Sturge, may I just tell you that I am hearing you very well, so there is no need to shout.

Sen. W. Sturge: I am sorry. I am so very sorry. I would try to keep it down, but it is the hour of the morning. I am trying to stay up, because I am actually capable of putting myself to sleep. Sen. Ramdeen can attest that I have actually fallen asleep addressing a jury. But the trouble is the PNM—this Government has a history of saying that—well, conglomerates—there is such a thing—they are too big to fail. So Clico was too big to fail, they bailed them out, and now Massy Communications is operating at a loss and instead of letting every “pot fall on their own bottom”, the Government bailed them out, but you would not bail out farmers. In fact, you are not prepared to bail out anyone else and something has to be wrong with that [*Desk thumping*] because it is not the Government’s money; it is our money. So, one, you bail out Clico and, two, you bail out a toilet paper factory and now you bail out a cable company with our money. [*Desk thumping*]

So I would like to see— I mean, it is not going to happen. I can riot, I can do what I want, it is going to remain at \$275 million, but this is atrocious—not members of the jury—Madam President. This has to be atrocious. And, you know, the thing is had this been done by the previous administration there would have been riot on the streets.

Now, I read certain documents in the other place in preparation for this debate, and before I go to that point, let me deal with something that is troubling me with respect to our debts. I understand that one of the solutions advanced is that we sell certain assets and so on, which the Government now holds. And a

little birdie—a little banker bird from Republic Bank told me that HSBC, one of the biggest banks in the world, is coming to Trinidad this week in an attempt—*[Crosstalk]* Yes. I see I got the attention of the Minister of Finance—in an attempt to purchase 27 per cent of Republic Bank which is owned by Clico and which is owned by the Government and, therefore, owned by us. There is an attempt, I understand, for this—*[Crosstalk]* I did not pay anything for that information. Well, we will find out. I hope in wrapping up that the Minister of Finance, since he is engaging me, will tell us how much they are going to pay for this.

Now, that is not necessarily the issue. I understand that there is some issue as to whether they will be allowed to buy the 65 per cent owned by CL Financial.

Madam President: Try and—

Sen. W. Sturge: Link it.

Madam President: Yes, please. **Sen. W. Sturge:** The link, Madam President, what I was getting at, is we are seeking to cut and contrive and we are looking at an asset, and this is an asset that is performing well. As I know for a fact, recently having spoken to the bankers live on TV, the banking industry is the one industry in this country that makes money whether we are in a recession or not. They make billions of dollars in profits a year—*[Interruption]*

Sen. Small: Loss proof.

Sen. W. Sturge: Loss proof as my friend says, Sen. Small. We are going to sell an asset like this that is making money for us and imply sell it off. Now, that is only part of the issue, because the other issue is you have to be careful who you are selling to. Because I looked up on the Internet, and although it is four years, an article in the *Guardian* on December 11, 2012, which revealed that this HSBC was fined \$1.9 billion—terrorist financing, money laundering and so on. So that is a

concern I have. Well, the bona fide—I have questions about this deal, but I would move on to something else, and I would get back to that eventually.

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: On a point of order, 46(1).

Sen. W. Sturge: Yes. Now, it seems again when I flip to Judiciary, my pet peeve, I look at the expenses. I see \$20,500,000 for the Judiciary, and when I look at the explanations in the document I am a bit perturbed. Now, I am not going to go into what Sen. Chote referred to, but there is a related point. You see, it seems as though the philosophy of the Minister of Finance is that his way—it is described as voodoo economics—but it seems as though the only plan we have is to tax your way out of recession which makes no sense.

You see, as I understand it, the way to get out of a recession is you spend your way out of a recession and you stimulate the economy. So when I saw this increase to the Judiciary, I was hoping—seeing that I understand the need for new plant and buildings and so on in the Judiciary—\$20 million is a lot. If one knows the state of Rio Claro and San Fernando Magistrates' Courts, you cannot repair those. I am not going to repeat what Sen. Chote has said, but you simply cannot repair those. They have to be demolished and rebuilt with an opportunity for expansion. Because what we need now—and we have said it several times before in the debate—that the rate we are operating at with the existing number of courtrooms, we will not clear the backlog in less than 25 years. [*Desk thumping*]

So an opportunity arises where you can kill two birds with one stone. You can build more courts and, therefore, solve the problem of delays, you employ more judges, do more cases and so on whilst at the same time—that is construction—and you are engaging in construction that is needed—more jobs, stimulate the economy. Because you see, the thing is, when you bail out Massy

and you give them \$255 million of our money, we are not going to see it, but the poor man in this country has very little available after. When he gets his income, he is the one who drives the economy. When he gets his money, he spends. There is no culture of savings with the poor man. The interesting thing is the construction sector is one of the drivers, one of the main drivers that can get us out of what is stagnation.

So I was hoping I would have seen this \$20 million go towards building a building, but sadly that is not the case, but what I do see—and I now have confirmation, having read certain documents, that there is a court which there is now confirmation is owned by a senior Cabinet Minister or the wife of a senior Cabinet Minister—the Children and Family Division Services Court—and it is already being rented. I have a concern about that because it seems as though—the concern is, this is One Alexandra all over again. [*Desk thumping*] That is what I am getting at. It seems as though whatever solutions we seem to be coming up with, it does not benefit the small man. It seems as only the big men in this country seems to be benefiting. You know, I say that and I reflect on what the Minister of Works and Transport said earlier, and I had to wonder who is benefitting because I cannot understand how it is going to cost \$60 million to finish Maracas. [*Crosstalk*] Madam President, no, but \$60 million is a lot. Then I reflect on the \$10 million he says about building a walkover in Sea Lots. I did my checking and even if you put two elevators: one on each side, it would not come up to \$10 million. [*Desk thumping*] So, I am prepared, at this stage, to give way and sit down so that the Minister could disaggregate and tell me, how Sea Lots walkover could cost \$10 million unless it is plated in gold. I am prepared to give way for a minute.

Sen. Sinanan: Madam President, if I was to go back to one of the Divali Nagar which cost \$9 million and it is 75 per cent of the size of this one. So aggregate that and you will see how we came to \$10 million. [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. W. Sturge: We are still waiting to hear how a Sea Lots walkover could cost \$10 million even if you gold plated it, I do not think it will come up to that. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

Now, let me move on. Before I get into agriculture, because agriculture is really where I want to get to—[*Interruption*]

Madam President: Members, please, please. I think we are on the homestretch now, so let us listen to Sen. Sturge in silence. Okay? Sen. Sturge and remember that I can hear you very easily. Thank you.

Sen. W. Sturge: I am sorry. Yes. Now, while we are on the \$10 million, I should not move on to agriculture without touching on what is happening in Tobago. I am not going to say anything about what my colleague, Sen. Moore, said but it seems as though when we move two steps forward, it is like four steps backward with this Government. I listened with great attentiveness to what was said in the other place, and I listened to the Minister of Works and Transport, who seemed to studiously avoid this issue. But, what is very interesting, because I am hearing now, that the *Galicia* did not meet five out of the seven criteria. I want to ask the Minister—I will give way again—to tell us how many of the seven criteria the barge meet. The barge meets six of the seven criteria. Lovely! The barge now, from what I understand—and this has to be Tobago love as they called it—because 160 less trucks per week, less food? What was a four-hour trip is now a 15-hour trip. We were paying 14,000, we are paying 28,000. So I do not understand where the cutting and contriving is coming in, particularly when we look at what is

happening in Tobago. My learned friend, Sen. Moore, has already addressed the issue with the consistent loss making of Tobago Jazz, so I would not get into that.

But I once made an argument in this Chamber that there were four areas that I felt we could diversify and, therefore, take ourselves out of this rut: agriculture was one, sport tourism was one and health tourism was one—and the other one sport and health—it is almost two o'clock in the morning, but anyway. I wonder now what we are going to do, because tourism is really one of the areas I felt we could pour some more money into. I see we have only given \$5 million. I suppose that is to market, and I do not know what we are going to market, in light of the fact that we have difficulty keeping the crime rates down. I do not know who we are going to attract—[*Crosstalk*]*—*someone is saying it might go to the phone bill. But, being serious, we need to seriously do something about Tobago. I do not think \$5 million is a lot in terms of tourism. I do not agree. Maybe there should have been some shifts, I particularly think out of national security—we spend so much money on it and get so little results—but much more money should have been going to tourism, which is something that could act as a driver. It is imperative that we do that now, because very soon Cuba is going to be back on the market and I do not know how Tobago is going to fare when Cuba re-enters the tourism market in the Caribbean.

Now, with respect to agriculture, which seems to be our last hope, because we are not getting far with sports tourism. If we are to go by what happened on Friday in Tarouba after spending \$1.3 billion on a stadium and we only got 7,000 spectators, I am wondering if someone in the room will tell us how much money we collected at the gate on Friday night. How long—if we are going at that rate—are we going to take to recoup the money we have spent on Tarouba? It might take

a million years before we actually break even the rate we are going. But agriculture, which I think is our last hope, I am hoping that when we “cook the book” so to speak, and shift the figures around, perhaps the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries can, perhaps, absorb much of the job losses in CEPEP. Because, you see, we have a huge food import bill and I believe we can save on our food import bill if we make greater use of CEPEP, bring them into productive activity like agriculture, and we might even reach to the point where we can actually export and earn foreign exchange through agriculture.

Now, I dealt with the Judiciary. The only other issue I have with the Judiciary and I wanted clarification, because information coming to hand is that Amalgamated Security Services made \$98 million in the last 10 years transporting prisoners which is something we do not need. So I am wondering if this might be a great opportunity—seeing that we have given the Judiciary \$20 million—if one of the courts we can build with that \$20 million is a remand court. So with \$20 million a remand court would actually save us \$98 million and will save us from giving Amalgamated Security Services \$98 million. So, you see how—[Crosstalk] Yes, I am not a great Minister of Finance, but I am trying to cut and contrive and see how best we can save. Now, on the homestretch, I would not deal too much with national security.

I have an issue with what is the new exchange control system, because it seems as though we have moved away from that system 25 years ago. I remember that system. I remember having to fill out forms and so on. I was going abroad in 1987, and it was a very difficult process, but it seems as though we have gotten back to that stage. I heard what the Minister said in his presentation, but it does not answer the questions raised, particularly by the columnist who the Minister

insinuated was piggybacking on Dr. Farrell. But the concerns are, at this stage, you are basically handing over this regime of exchange control, because that is what it is, regardless of what—[*Crosstalk*] Yes that is exactly what it is.

Hon. Imbert: You know what you are talking about?

Sen. W. Sturge: Yes, I know what I am talking about. Because what you are doing now, we are fooling ourselves to say exchange control does not exist right now, because the average man, when he goes to the bank, any morning, and he goes to get his US, the bank will tell him: “Well, it sell already even if you are first in line.” You have to wonder sold to who. The information coming to me is that it seems as though there is a little cartel. So that the banks already know who they are going to sell to, and one wonders what price they are selling for and who are the beneficiaries.

Because if we are operating in a free system, which I recall was one of the prerequisites for signing on to the Free Trade of the Americas and so on, how can we still exist with these modalities? Call it what you want, there is exchange control, because if you cannot get foreign exchange freely as we used to, and banks are now going to have sanction for the Ministry of Finance sanctioning this new regime where the banks will determine who they are going to give to, then something is obviously wrong. If that is not exchange control, I do not know what it is. You can call it by a different name, but the short point, if it is not you exercising the control, clearly you have shifted your responsibility to the private sector and now the private sector, the banks will determine—sorry, I know I got loud there—the banks are now going to determine who gets foreign exchange, and that is our foreign. That cannot be right. It cannot be right that the money we earn as a country, injected into the commercial banks and the commercial banks, private

entities, will determine which of our citizen have access to that money. That cannot be right and that is extreme. [*Desk thumping*] Because, obviously, one knows how the banks operate.

Obviously, in Trinidad they would call it “a friend, friend thing” but is who know who. Because I have problems—even I have problems getting US. I am in what they call this thing? Premium banking, and they will tell me, well, you could get US \$500 and nothing more. So I had to tell them recently, which was true, my grandmother passed on and I had to make a trip, and they said well all we can give you is US \$500.

The amazing thing is, I met a friend downstairs who was in the bank before me and he could get none. The banks said they had none, but they had US \$500 for me. So if they had US \$500 for me who is nobody and have no money in the bank, imagine about the people who have. This is a very dangerous thing, and it seems as though we are not far, sadly, we are not far—I am not talking in terms of miles—we are not far away from Venezuela. That is how it seems to me. [*Desk thumping*]

Now, before I close, there is a whole lot more I wanted to say, but I think the hour is late. The brainchild of the former Prime Minister, Patrick Manning, the Government Campus was opened last week, and not a single Minister made mention of Patrick Augustus Mervyn Manning. But when I reflect on what happened with “Stretch” and what happened with the squatters who voted for them in Valencia, you understand why.

Now, just one issue in closing. It was touched upon briefly by Sen. Shrikisson, it deals with the sale of 20 per cent of the TGU to Institution Investors and we know who they are. There was a figure of \$600 million given for the 20

per cent. I understand it is now 50 per cent they are going to sell to a German company, I believe it is Ferrostaal. This raises new concerns, because the figure we are now hearing it seems as though this is something—it does not add up in my mind. I am hoping that issue would be cleared up when the Minister rises to wind up the debate in a few minutes.

But what we need now, in closing, Madam President, and what we seem to lack, it seems as though the ship of state is rudderless. It seems as though we are lacking ideas; we are lacking direction; we are lacking incentivization; and we are lacking leadership. What we need is some sort of inspiration. So, I hope—this is mid-term so it is a bit late—when we come around in September or October when the next budget statement is delivered—and I know when he stands up he would say that the Opposition said nothing for the 12 hours we were here. [*Laughter and crosstalk*] But I hope that the Minister of Finance would reflect on what I have said so that come September 2017, there can be some sort of relief brought to the most vulnerable in the society, and that the money we have been cutting and contriving and so on that we can release it into avenues that can bring money for us and stimulate the economy, more particularly, the construction sector so that we see how soon we can get back to prosperity. Madam President, these are my thoughts on this Bill. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. David. Small: Thank you very much, Madam President. Good morning, and it is 1:58:35 which is much nostalgia that I join in this debate. I recall my first opportunity to speak in this august House, I spoke after 3.00 a.m. My good colleague on my right here will remember, and we had lots of energy to go. Madam President, I would try, with your indulgence, I need a couple of minutes just to lay a short framework before I dive into the few issues I want to raise on

this Bill.

But, Madam President, it is remiss of me, I would have been one of persons who would have been called and asked for in this House, more than once, what is the plan? I must make a comment that having perused the Vision 2030 document, I finally have a sense of what is the plan. Whether we agree with the plan or not, at the very least, it is a starting point for a discussion and, more importantly, for me, it represents a planning horizon beyond the next election date. This is something that we have to get in the mode of in terms of how we operate as a country. We cannot be planning on the basis of the next election date, we should be planning for a particular set of objectives.

2.00 a.m.

Madam President, with regard to what I see as one of the main challenges to be overcome in the medium term, a core issue is the transformation of our economy to one that is more resilient to external shocks. The individual issues to be fixed are many and varied and they fall into two main groups: policy challenges and institutional challenges. One of the most critical issues the Government has to deal with is the minimization of our emerging vulnerabilities to, in what is called a low-furlong environment. All of us have been schooled, certainly me in the energy sector that the energy business is a cyclical one, prone to periods of boom and bust. But I wish to posit that nothing has prepared us for the low-furlong scenario where energy prices remain relatively low for a long time. And I believe because that is starting to happen, it is starting to expose some of the structural deficiencies in our economy. How we adjust to this is what will determine the quality of life for our children in the future. What needs to be achieved is a rebalanced economy that expands or contracts within expected tolerances given a certain set of

circumstances.

The core of the institutional challenges that we have to deal with, Madam President—and one of these was mentioned before—is the abject level of productivity amongst the large sectors of the workforce; two, the huge amount of the unpaid taxes owed to the BIR by individuals and companies; and, three, it is—I do not want to say corruption but I describe it as the day-to-day pillaging of the public purse by thieving and scheming employees of the State. The one common factor, Madam President, among these issues, is the yawning gap between the endless rhetoric about what is going on as compared to proactive, definitive and decisive action to hold persons accountable and apply the existing penalties.

Madam President, I know that the Bill before us has the effect of a reallocation of a sum of just over \$1.3 billion and I want to go to Head 03, because I am diving straight into the Bill and I think I made a promise to speak for 20 minutes or less but I will see how I go. [*Laughter*] Madam President, at the Schedule, Part I, I noted that there is an increase of \$20 million for the Judiciary which, while by itself, I have no material issue with. However, I take the opportunity to seek an update from the hon. Minister of Finance regarding the action to date and any timelines given his commitment in the budget to seek dialogue with providing autonomy to the Judiciary on its financial affairs.

Madam President, I find it is often difficult to imagine that in this great and endowed nation, the judicial sector, which is regarded as the last hope of the common man, the small man, no pun intended, is not insulated. It must be part of the plan for this important arm of the Government to move forward so that it is able to protect itself from any interference. This is a situation whereby it is complete—this situation, Madam President, where it continues, like other arms, to

be completely dependent upon the Executive for funding is not necessarily the best arrangement.

While I think it cannot be denied that the Judiciary is really independent, a lot still needs to be done to strengthen institutions to discharge its constitutional mandate as the pillar of constitutional democracy. The fact is the conditions of the service of the judicial and allied officers should be improved, and the courts' infrastructure must also be improved. Achieving this, firstly, on the basis of the SRC, in terms of the remuneration and then the typical Government approval system where the Judiciary's needs have to compete with the needs of other actors is part of the reason for its condition today.

Madam President, I move to Head 04, the Industrial Court. I have noted that the Schedule, Part I, also provides for an increase of \$4 million. Again, I have no significant material issue with that. I just wish to state that this is one of the key protections in our system for the small man, the ordinary citizen who finds himself being victimized. While there is little argument that we have a major productivity issue in our country, this should not to be an excuse to act unjustly against workers. If there is nothing I have learnt in my few short years on this planet, Madam President, is that most issues are not cut and dry, rather there are shades and culpabilities often shared. I wish to just applaud the members of this court for the high integrity demonstrated so far.

Madam President, I want to move to Head 05, the Parliament, and I have to be, probably, a bit careful here but—this shows an increase for \$10 million to the Parliament. As I have said, in this hallowed Chamber on more than one occasion, there can be no real democracy without a Parliament. In that vein, I remain one of the few voices in the wilderness advocating for autonomy for the Parliament.

Many of the arguments for this, mirrored those that I have outlined for the Judiciary so I will not repeat them. The staff here of the Parliament have my everlasting respect and admiration. It would be remiss of me to say that this situation is not an accident, rather the staff are being led by and are replicating the behaviour of a true national treasure, the sitting Clerk of the House. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, I move to Heads 06 and 07, which deal with the Service Commissions and the Statutory Authorities Service Commissions. Total increase for these two entities is about \$5.7 million. Madam President, these entities were established with the objective of maintaining neutral services operating on the basis of merit, free from patronage, discrimination, nepotism and injustice. And at that time, the size of the civil service, in the 1950s, when this was first put in place, was in the hundreds. I wish to put forward what might be seen as a heretical theory, perhaps, just perhaps, after 67 years of operation the core basis for the existence and operation of the Service Commissions needs to be reviewed and updated to deal with the realities of the world in the 2020s and beyond. Woefully inefficient, outlived its core mandate, has become a hindrance to good governance, and, most damning, completely ineffectual in applying discipline. How many persons have been fired for poor performance in the civil service? And we keep adding money to the fire, but I am one of those, I am saying, is there any harm in relooking the mandate of this entity. Why it is such a sacred cow?—for want of a better phrase. I am one of those, let us look at it and try to see if there is room for improvement.

Madam President, I move to Head 30, Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development. Madam President, I have noted, and I want to put on

record my congratulations to the hon. Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, because the Occupational Safety and Health Authority is one of the core and most important elements in the way in which we protect workers in this country. It is probably one of the most underappreciated agencies in the entire Government service. Given their mandate, for too long they have been under resourced, and I must offer my congratulations to the hon. Minister for getting the funding to properly resource this vitally important activity. The group of tremendous professionals that have responsibility to ensure that adequate safeguards are in place to ensure workplace safety for every person working in any entity in the country, that they have been soldiering on under the radar with low resources, is a credit to the entire staff of the OSHA, many of whom I have worked personally with for many years, and I can vouch for their work rate and dedication to duty. And the increase, while it allows for things to happen, it is an increase that is well merited and long overdue.

Madam President, as I start to go down the list, when I looked at the issue with the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries where there is actually a decrease, I understand why there is a decrease, and it is linked to the issues. But, Madam President, in all honesty, my expectation, given the recent announcement about the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries, being able to hire persons directly for positions that are unique to particular Ministries, I was expecting an increase. Madam President, it is my considered opinion that the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries is currently a shadow of its former self. When I joined that august institute in the late 1980s as a young professional, and I walked down the corridors there were persons like Hayden Toney, Tensing Ramlakhan, Winston De Govia, Helena Inniss, Frank Look Kin, Tony Paul,

Bajnath Sirinath, Vernon De Silva, Andrew Jupiter, Rupert Menezes. As a young professional, I am walking around the corridors and I am meeting these people. That was just an inspiration to be in their presence and learn from them.

For anyone with any tenure in the sector these names are familiar, not only for their contribution in the past, but a lot of them are still making a contribution giving service to our nation. I would be one of those to say that the challenge to the Ministry was, the industry expanded quickly throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s and it simply could not cope with the rate of change, and, critically, the remuneration arrangements are well below comparable rates in the sector with whom it is competing directly for resources. That continues today, and I was hopeful that we would try to put some resources in there, because the industry, the rate of change in the energy industry is such that we need to make sure we have all the resources available. And I applaud the move to allow the PS, energy, to be able to go out and hire directly, and I hope that he has the authority to pay more, or improved rates to really attract the talent that we need to really monitor this sector. I am not sure what those arrangements entail, but I was looking at this Bill and I was hoping to see an increase, rather than a decrease.

Madam President, as I begin to wind up, I have to plan to detain, I just had a couple of points I wanted to make. Madam President, this debate, for those of us on this side, Senators without portfolio, continues to be that rare opportunity to speak on national issues in one go. With specific reference to the details of the Bill at hand, this is an exercise in incremental budgeting, and zero creativity is required. I say this in the context of an environment in which we operate, experiencing unique challenges, but our policy response seems to be stuck in neutral, hoping that the status quo will somehow magically reappear. Madam

President, I ask the question about the State: does the State really need to be involved in running some of the enterprises its running? And it is a general question, I have heard all sorts of statements before, but I think it is time for us to have a national discussion, or some type of discussion. Is it necessary? I hear all the arguments about things being strategic for the Government. Is it necessary for the State, through a directly controlled or own-state agency to be involved in air transport, vehicle maintenance, telecommunications, oil refining? Is it absolutely necessary that a state, because we have seen instances of these entities where the operations have gone awry, and I think I have been very polite by saying that.

I ask, is it so—such a heretical question—is it heresy I am preaching that we should ask whether or not, let us examine whether we should continue to be in these businesses as a state owned by the Government, rather than trying to allow those things to allow market forces, and under some kind of public/private arrangement, some other arrangement, because we have seen where the operations are less than optimal. And, I think, I am also being very polite there. My personal belief is that the Government should remove itself from a lot of these businesses, and where it has no special aptitude, and for which there is a plethora of competitive options. I think the Government has no right, or the State has no right in some of these industries, and we need to take a harder look, because the portfolio of state enterprises is large and wide. I think the official record is, nine of them generate revenue, or 10 of them generate revenue, and I think only nine are turning a profit, something is wrong with that out of a hundred, it is a huge burden that we continue to carry, and I do not believe it is sustainable.

Madam President, I will close as I began, we are facing a fundamentally changed energy market scenario, shale oil and gas productivity, if you would

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permit me, is seeing the end likely of cyclical pricings, and likely replacing it with a sustained lower price environment, but everything is relative, Madam President. Today West Texas Intermediate, I just checked, is about \$49 per barrel. For the period 1946 to last Friday, the average WTI price adjusted for inflation is about \$43 a barrel. So all that is happened now is that oil price has largely retreated to its long, long-term average. But, you see, I have probably been in this too long, Madam President, those of us who have been following the oil price of recent vintage, the average price of WTI from 1990 to last Friday was \$46. The average price of WTI from 2000 to last Friday is \$62. The average price of WTI from 2010 to last Friday is \$77.53. So those of us who are following the recent history of the oil, we are comfortable, or used to relatively high oil prices, but going back past 1990 oil prices were in the thirties, at best, and this is something we need to get used to.

All this data suggest, Madam President, is that oil prices in this situation, which we would be making hard decisions, and the hard cuts now, that is what I am suggesting before the situation worsens. Madam President, as is my wont, I believe it is a privilege to stand here and share a few thoughts, and with those who are willing to listen. And now that I am essentially done, I want to thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to speak. Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President: Minister of Finance. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam President. At this late hour I wish to thank all those who have contributed to this debate. “It is you who says it”, that is a direct quote from the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ—“It is you who says it”. Now, Madam President, I would just like to clear

up some issues.

Sen. Chote, who has left, was concerned about the additional allocation to the Judiciary, particularly the allocation for repairs to magistrates' courts, such as the Rio Claro Magistrates' Court. For the benefit of the hon. Senator, and other Members present, the variation of appropriation has to be read in context. It should not be looked at in isolation. It is a variation to the original appropriation, and the original allocation for repairs to the Magistrates' Court in Rio Claro was \$4.6 million. So you have to add this to, you get \$6.6 million, to put into context, the money that has been allocated for repairs to these Magistrates' Courts. So if one believes that the variation of appropriation is the entire appropriation for the fiscal year, one can fall into error.

Similarly, what this is, is not a supplementary appropriation. In other words, there is no additional revenue, it is simply a redistribution of the original appropriation. And for that reason, the Tobago House of Assembly, whose allocation is a percentage of the national budget, remains the same. In fact, this PNM administration has been giving the Tobago House of Assembly a significantly higher percentage of the national appropriation than the administration that preceded us, which included Sen. Moore. So that, because this is not a supplementary appropriation, in other words, we are not increasing the national budget beyond the \$53 billion figure, and because Tobago is allocated based on percentages, there is no need for an increase in the appropriation to the THA, because that would mean the percentage would go up, and it would also mean we would have to take funding from some other department of Government in Trinidad and Tobago.

So that this variation is not to be confused with the appropriation that

Tobago has and will receive for fiscal year 2017. In fact, Tobago is in a very privileged place, because even when there is a reduction revenue, and there has to be a reduction in expenditure, as occurred in fiscal 2016, where we reduced expenditure by \$10 billion—\$11 billion, actually, because the arrangements for appropriation to Tobago are fixed in the law, even if you reduce the actual expenditure, because you do not reduce the appropriation, the amount to Tobago remains the same. So Tobago benefits in a strange way from the appropriation exercise, because it gets the same amount of money whether or not the expenditure is reduced in Trinidad. So Tobago is in a very special place, and even in this year 2017, if, which is likely, the overall expenditure may be less than \$53 billion, Tobago would still get its original allocation as if the actual expenditure was the original \$53 billion. So that Sen. Moore's comments were not in context.

With respect to money to pay bills, that is precisely one of the reasons why you vary an appropriation, because at the beginning of the year you would allocate money to a Ministry for various reasons, and as the year goes along you would look at income and expenditure, and in the case of the Ministry of Public Utilities, the money earned by Desalcott is used to finance WASA's operations. One must understand that WASA is subsidized by the Government to an amount in excess of \$1 billion per year. In some years WASA is subsidized to the tune of \$2 billion. That is the level of subsidy that the country pays in order to ensure that water rates are kept at a particular level. Up to \$2 billion per year, and, therefore, \$138 million earned from Desalcott is but a drop in the context of the subsidy. So even though it earns 138, or it earns 150, or whatever it earns from selling the desalinated water to Point Lisas, that cannot in any way compensate for the loss that WASA incurs in every fiscal year.

Sen. Dr. Mahabir: Minister, would you give way?

Hon. C. Imbert: Sure.

Sen. Dr. Mahabir: On a point of clarification, Minister, the information given was that there was a particular period, August to December, I think, a three-month period, and it gave the impression that there was something special about that particular period. It just struck me as odd that if it is a subsidy it should not be linked to the Desalcott issue, it should be a general subsidy, because it would appear that there was no problem between January to August, that WASA was paying its bills to the Desalcott from January to August, but something happened between August and December to cause you to dip into the public purse to provide \$138 million. And so what you are saying is that it is just part of a general subsidy, as opposed to be linked to the Desalcott, and that is where I needed the clarification.

Hon. C. Imbert: Okay, thank you very much. You have summed it up very well. So that the Government, the taxpayers of this country, subsidized WASA to the tune of \$2 billion, and, as a result of the fact that the expenditure and income is not imbalanced at WASA they have to move money around, and they would use money earned from desalinated water to pay salaries, and things like that. So they built up arrears, and we are now giving them money to clear off those arrears because of the tremendous overall subsidy to WASA.

In terms of some of the other matters mentioned, let me turn now to the second to last speaker, who seems to be running competition with Sen. Ramdeen and Sen. Mark for “bussing mark”, and I simply want to put on the record that the allegation made by Sen. Sturge that the HSBC Bank is coming to Trinidad and Tobago to buy 27 per cent of Republic Bank is preposterous, absurd, wrong and

false. It is simply not true, and the reason why it is impossible is one must understand the shareholding of Republic Bank. Twenty-five per cent of Republic Bank is held by the Clico Trust Corporation, which is the collateral for the Clico Investment Fund, which trades on the stock exchange, which is the units given to policyholders who sold their policies for years 11 to 20. Instead of receiving cash, the policyholders received units in the Clico Investment Fund, the bulk of which was financed by Republic Bank shares. So in order to sell these Republic Bank shares one would somehow have to pay all of these unit holders somewhere in the vicinity of about \$10 billion, and we would have to find that money in order to clear off all these units and monetize all of these units which are currently trading on the stock exchange.

In addition, Clico Investment Bank, which is in the hands of a liquidator, namely the Deposit Insurance Corporation, is not permitted to dispose of the 18 per cent of Republic Bank that is held by Clico Investment Bank, because there is a dispute as to the ownership of these shares which has to be settled by the court. And then Clico itself owns 7 per cent of Republic Bank. Again, the ownership of these shares are tied up in a claim, a counterclaim coming from Clico Investment Bank. So the only entity that could sell any part of Republic Bank is CL Financial, which is not the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. That is owned by the Duprey family, and other shareholders of CL Financial. These are not Members of the Government, so that the idea that HSBC Bank is coming to Trinidad to buy 27 per cent of RBL from the Government is preposterous, nonsensical, and just wrong.

Now, let me deal with another point. The hon. Sen. Sturge somehow got caught up in some commentary in newspapers about distribution of foreign

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exchange. I want to repeat for the record, Madam President, the instructions given to the Central Bank, which by the way are covered by the Exchange Control Act and not the Financial Institutions Act. In managing the foreign exchange regime in Trinidad and Tobago, the Exchange Control Act gave the power to the Minister of Finance to give special or general directions to the Central Bank with respect to the policy in managing foreign exchange in Trinidad and Tobago, and that is a 20-year old provision in the Exchange Control Act. It is over 20 years old. Because we liberalize our currency in and around 1994, '93, '94, and when we did that we amended the Exchange Control Act, which previously would have given the Central Bank the power to control the distribution of foreign exchange.

And most of the provisions with respect to exchange control were repealed and removed from the Exchange Control Act, and the one provision that was left was to give the Minister of Finance the authority to give special or general directions to the Central Bank in the management of the foreign exchange regime in Trinidad and Tobago. In pursuit of this authority, since then to now, and I have been able to find records going back 10 years, and the Central Bank is searching for me, and they say they can go back to the 1990s, the Central Bank has, whenever it injects foreign exchange into the system, told the commercial banks to give priority to trade or manufacturing.

2.30 a.m.

This has been going on for 10 years, it has not dropped from the sky. And when I listened to Sen. Sturge say the banks are now going to have the power to sanction who gets foreign exchange. That is, unfortunately, a political nonsensical statement because when foreign exchange controls were removed, the banks were given complete freedom with the sole exception of the general instruction coming

from the Central Bank to give priority to trade or manufacturing to distribute foreign exchange. We removed foreign exchange controls over 20 years ago, and the only thing remaining that even resembles a control is this instruction, this routine instruction from the Central Bank to the commercial banks, when the Central Bank intervenes and injects money into the system, that would you kindly give priority to trade and manufacturing.

And that is why I was deeply disappointed when persons who should know better and do know better, know that the Central Bank has been giving this guideline and direction to the commercial banks for more than 10 years, I dare say 15 years, and using the exact same words. When you read the aide memoire, when you read the letters from the Central Bank to the commercial banks, word for word, please give priority to trade and manufacturing US dollar transactions in the distribution of this foreign exchange; word for word.

And in my mid-year review statement, I said that I had requested the Central Bank to ask the commercial banks to give priority to trade and manufacturing US dollar transactions whenever the Central Bank injects the Government's foreign exchange into the system. Those were the words I used, "Please give priority to trade about manufacturing", the same words used by the Central Bank for 15 years. And what bothers me is that for 15 years, persons in the banking sector know what the word trade means. They have known it for 15 years, and the dictionary definition of "trade" is the buying and selling of goods and services between countries. So if you are dealing with US dollar transactions, clearly, ipso facto, trade in the context of foreign exchange means providing US dollars for imports. So, for 15 years the Central Bank has been telling the commercial banks when you are using the Government's foreign exchange, because in a typical year, let us take

2015, the total amount of foreign exchange available in the country for that year was approximately \$7.3 billion of which about \$5 billion or \$4.8 billion was converted by the private sector and the balance about \$US2.4/2.5 billion was injected by the Central Bank.

So, the Central Bank did not tell the commercial banks what to do with the \$5 billion that it acquired through conversion from the private sector, but it told the commercial banks what to do with the \$2.5 billion of government forex that was put into the system and it told them in exactly the same words. When you are using these funds, give priority to trade and manufacturing that is 2015 and 2014 and 2013 and 2012 and 2011 and 2010. So this has been going on year after year after year after year and trade means imports, because you do not pay US dollars to export. You earn US dollars when you are exporting, but you need US dollars to import. So for years the Central Bank said, give priority to imports when you are distributing foreign exchange. And it also said, from time to time, give priority to US dollar transactions for imports of materials, raw materials for the manufacturing sector. I read out a 2010 letter which said that, “give priority for imports for the manufacturing sector”. So therefore, I am just flabbergasted that anybody would say that what was said in the mid-year review is such a profound change in the foreign exchange regime that the whole system would collapse. And it is just unfortunate that Sen. Sturge would just repeat what others say that really has no basis in reality.

Coming back to the matter before us, let me just clarify that what we are before this Senate today is to move money around within the original appropriation, and there are explanations for everything here. And in the case of the Ministry of Health, for years when we came in 2015, Madam President, we

found a number of unpaid bills in the health sector, payments for critical and urgent medication, for example. There were bills in the hundreds of millions of dollars owed to NIPDEC for the supply of pharmaceuticals to the various regional health authorities, for the CDAP programme, for the hospitals and so on, hundreds of millions of dollars in bills. And eventually these bills are going to catch up with you because you cannot keep staving off your creditors and telling them those were bills incurred by a former Government and we are not going to pay them.

It is the same thing with Huawei. The money that we are providing in this variation of appropriation is to pay for a \$500 million contract entered into by the last Government, and we came into office finding unpaid bills on that contract in excess of \$300 million, and we have been struggling to pay this \$300 million bill for the last 18 months. This money that we are varying here, appropriating to the Ministry of National Security, will clear off most of the outstanding arrears to Huawei for the equipment that is installed in the National Operations Centre based on a contract entered into by the previous administration and based on arrears of bills created by the previous administration.

The same thing with Harris radios. This is a radio communication system for the police service. Again, a contract entered into by the former administration and bills not paid by them. And when we came in we met these bills, and you just cannot keep pushing Harris radio away for ever, sooner or later you are going to have to pay, otherwise they will hire Sen. Ramdeen to sue you and take you to court, hypothetically speaking of course. *[Laughter]*

So that when you go through this variation of appropriation, many of these things are bills that are catching up with us, we have to pay them. We have to pay the principal and the interest on the loans for the Housing Development

Corporation taken out by the UNC Government and spent by the UNC Government before we even reach here, that \$1.5 billion was borrowed and spent by the UNC Government, but they made no provision to pay the debt servicing. So, what are we going to tell ANSA: is UNC borrow that money, go behind UNC to pay it. No. As a responsible Government, government is continuous, we have to make arrangements to pay these bills.

So in this variation of appropriation we are trying to make the best out of a very difficult situation, a very, very difficult situation, because we have inescapable expenditure for salaries and wages and essential goods and services, and then you have all these huge truckload of bills coming at us from the 2015 era. And Sen. Samuel, I will keep talking about the burden that has been placed on this country by the former administration forever. [*Laughter*] Because those who forget the mistakes of the past are doomed to repeat them. But the whole point about this variation of appropriation is that we are moving forward. As we remember the past, we are moving forward.

So we are clearing off the Huawei bill that you left for us so that we will not get into a contractual dispute with the contractor. And we are clearing off the Harris Communications bill that you left for us so that the police will be able to communicate with their radios without having to worry about litigation coming hypothetically from Sen. Sturge or Sen. Ramdeen or another lawyer of that ilk, and we are dealing with the payment of principal and interest on the loans entered into by the former Government and spent by the former Government. We have cleared off most of the arrears of salary, the backpay to public officers, \$5 billion and you gifted us, we got that out of the way.

So this variation of appropriation is an attempt to clear the decks to sort out

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long outstanding bills that had nothing to with this Government, but as a responsible Government we are honouring our commitments and paving the way forward for growth and recovery in this economy. I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Hon. C. Imbert: In accordance with Standing Order 57, I beg to move that the Bill not be committed to a committee of the whole Senate.

Question put and agreed to.

Question put and agreed to: That the Bill be read a third time.

Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.

Madam President: Acting Leader of Government Business.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Trade and Industry (Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon):

Madam President, I beg to move that this Senate do now adjourn to Tuesday 23 May at 1.30 p.m. and that day would be designated Private Members' Day.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, if I may, with your leave.

Madam President: Sure.

Sen. Mark: May I advise the hon. Leader of the Senate, acting that is, that we shall be pursuing Motion No. 4 under Private Members' Motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Senate adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 2.43 a.m.