



THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD & TOBAGO
LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION
— PENNELOPE A. BECKLES, MP. —

2025

BUDGET RESPONSE

The Opposition Leader, Hon. Penelope
Beckles-Robinson, MP, response to the
budget presentation 2025-2026

Friday 17 October

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DELIVERED BY
**THE HONOURABLE
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Introduction

Mr. Speaker today, I rise to present my first budget response as the Leader of the Opposition of Trinidad and Tobago and as the first Female Political Leader of the People's National Movement, our great party founded by Dr. Eric Williams, our first Prime Minister and the Father of our Nation!

I want to thank all of my colleagues in the Lower and Upper Houses of Parliament; my hardworking staff in the Office of the Leader of the Opposition, staff of my constituency office; my supportive family and constituents of Arima; and each and every citizen who has expressed their gratitude, support and best wishes as we embark on this journey to rescue Trinidad and Tobago together.

Mr. Speaker, I am not speaking merely as Leader of the Opposition, but as **the voice** for the **thousands** left **voiceless** under this **reckless experiment in governance that masquerades as the Government of our Republic!**

As Leader of the Opposition, **I have a constitutional mandate** to scrutinize and examine what this government places before us as policy and plans, and in my response to the budget of this UNC government, **I intend** to do just that:

- cutting through the fluff, deceptive and flowery language,
- dissecting this fake and fraudulent budget,
- so as to expose the harsh, stark reality of this **con-job** to the people of this country.

Mr. Speaker, a budget is **more** than a rhetorical document read out in Parliament!

It is a **plan** for the future, a roadmap for how the government intends to govern and manage this country.

The 2026 Budget Statement achieved NONE of this.

It was remarkable **not only for what it said, but what it did not say.**

It gave NO rationale for its myriad of harsh and oppressive, backward measures.

It provided NO analysis of the economy, and gave NO plans for job creation or economic stimulation, other than pie in the sky, almost childish, rhetoric.

It provided NO hope or blueprint for the future.

It dishonestly claimed the credit for a number of projects and programmes **conceptualized and implemented by the PNM.**

It made wild and scandalous statements without a shred of evidence!

In fact, this government, **in only five months**, has caused our economy to **collapse**, and has brought pain, grief, victimization and misery to the bulk of our population!

Only the favoured few have benefited!

When citizens ask themselves the fundamental question, “are you better off now than five months ago?” the answer is a resounding and overwhelming - NO! we are in a much worse position!

Mr. Speaker, it only took a few months after the April 28th election for our citizens to realize that **instead of winning**, the vast majority of our people LOST!

Further, Mr. Speaker, when I look at the revenue generating measures in this budget I see NO NEW SOURCES **of revenue**, except, new or increased **taxes, fines and fees imposed on the people of Trinidad and Tobago.**

What is **particularly astonishing** is the Government’s plan to raise over **\$2 billion in fiscal 2026 from its draconian 100% increase in taxes on alcohol, especially locally manufactured rum and beer.**

What has motivated this?

Could this ever be described by any sane person as a “win” for the people of Trinidad and Tobago?

Whose idea was this?

No Government in the *history* of Trinidad and Tobago **has imposed this level of punishment on ordinary people**, whose only relaxation is often the occasional drink on a Friday night after a hard week’s work, or at a river lime or at the beach on a weekend or at a gathering at a friend’s home!

The UNC is also expecting to *manufacture* an additional **\$6 billion** in revenue from **Property Income**.

When we dig deeper under this Item, we see this government intends to increase its take of **Profits from state enterprises from \$1.4 billion in 2025 to \$5.5 billion in 2026**.

Mr. Speaker, although this massive increase is not achievable, **it is clear that they intend to raid and squander the hard-earned cash balances at the NGC, Heritage Petroleum and other state enterprises once again!**

One thing is clear when it comes to the Estimates of Revenue for 2026, and that is that this government will NOT meet its grossly **overestimated revenue projections and at the same time, it intends to tax, fine, squeeze and raid its way to make the population pay through its nose**.

The small man Mr. Speaker, *will feel the pinch*.

He will not win, he will lose!

Mr. Speaker, I want to point to another deception of this **Fraudulent and Fake** budget.

The Minister of Finance projected a fake **deficit of \$3.865 billion and** patted himself on the back. However, something does not add up!

Mr. Speaker, when I look at **page 67 of the Draft Estimates of Revenue 2026, produced by the Minister, under Head 10 Borrowing** – this government intends to borrow **\$18.9 Billion in fiscal 2026!**

This is \$8 billion more in borrowing than in 2025. More shocking is that \$10.8 billion out of this is *foreign borrowing*, to be paid back with our precious foreign exchange!

Mr. Speaker, the Government *must* explain to this country why the estimated budget **deficit is only \$3.8 billion, when he is planning to borrow almost \$19 billion in 2026, and to withdraw even more from the HSF.**

Mr. Speaker, another serious anomaly is seen in the Draft Estimates of Expenditure for 2026.

If the Minister is planning to borrow a **whopping \$19 billion in 2026**, then how is it that our debt servicing is projected to decline **from \$12.8 billion in 2025 to \$7.6 billion in 2026? a \$5 billion decrease?**

With a wave of a magic wand, \$5 billion in mandatory expenditure - debt service payments that must be made in 2026 - have miraculously disappeared!

No wonder the Minister could project such a small deficit!

Indeed, when you put back in the **\$5 billion** in debt service payments that have been deceitfully removed from the Estimates of Expenditure, and cater for the billion-dollar overestimate of revenues from petroleum because of the inflated oil and gas prices, the true deficit for 2026 is likely to be closer to **\$10 billion!**

And this does not include the money for the 10% increase in salary for public servants, which **IF** it is paid, will push the 2026 deficit to over **\$11 billion, with another \$5 billion looming in unpaid backpay.**

Mr. Speaker, the budget numbers simply do not add up so this is why we say this is **a fake and fraudulent budget!!!**

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, under the UNC, the Public Sector Investment Programme, which is supposed to be the Government's flagship mechanism for driving national development, has become a shell of its intended purpose — **underfunded, visionless and lacking innovation.**

The PSIP 2026, presented with much fanfare by the Minister of Finance, is nothing more than a continuation of fiscal contraction masquerading as development planning.

Mr. Speaker, the numbers tell a grim story!

The PSIP allocation for fiscal year 2026 stands at **\$4.1 Billion**, a **drastic reduction of \$1.57 Billion** from the **\$5.67 Billion** approved in 2025.

That is a **27% percent cut** to the nation's development budget — the *very* budget that determines how many roads are paved, how many schools are repaired, how many communities receive water, and how many lives are touched by public.

Mr. Speaker, I have no doubt that in the mid-term, this Government will be back in this Honourable House seeking to restore the very \$1.5 billion they have recklessly stripped from the Public Sector Investment Programme.

This **deliberate** reduction was not an act of prudence, but one of deception — designed solely to preserve the illusion of a \$3 billion deficit.

In truth, Mr. Speaker, what they have done is *sacrifice national development for political optics*. The result is a country now forced to project less progress, less growth, and less opportunity.!

Mr. Speaker, this is not responsible budgeting — this is a false and misleading budget. It is based on **false assumptions, untruths, imaginary scenarios and unachievable objectives**. **It is simply not based on reality!**

When closely examined, one third of the 2026 Budget Statement is made up of blaming the PNM for the UNC's incompetence, one third praises the Prime Minister, while shamelessly shouting about “wins” that are really losses, and the final third is made up of fantasy and blatant falsehoods.

However, Mr. Speaker, this Budget will create the conditions for **Total Economic and Financial Disaster in Trinidad and Tobago**.

Mr. Speaker, today I intend to do three things:

Number 1: To state the facts of the plight of the **thousands** of Trinidad and Tobago citizens who are **suffering** under the **incompetent and dishonest rule of an insincere regime** that **never had** and **never will** have their interests at heart.

Number two: To expose the fiction - the hollow promises, the unrealistic estimates, the deception, the fluff and policy blunders that make up this Budget.

And number 3: To remind our people - and this Government - what **responsible leadership looks like, what sober management means, and why the people can and must demand better**.

Mr. Speaker, this budget gave an **opportunity** for the country to gain insight into the plans and policies of the UNC government and their strategies for charting a way forward in human and economic development.

After listening to the Minister of Finance's presentation of this budget it is clear that this government has absolutely **NO PLAN and is simply making it up as they go along or making it up on the fly.**

Mr. Speaker, **they had 10 years to prepare for office while in opposition**, but this **UNC pick-up-side can only offer vindictiveness, oppression and mismanagement to the people of this country.**

They came into office with a set of **populist measures, sound bites and promises** which their advisors told them would resonate with the population.

Once it sounded good, they felt the population would support it.

They **deceived** the electorate into believing that the PNM government was deliberately punishing the population.

However, as all of us know, *this country **just** went through a very difficult decade*, because of external financial and economic shocks, *and a **global pandemic***, as well as domestic structural changes in our energy sector.

Difficult decisions **HAD** to be made after the *wild and reckless spending of the UNC in the 2010-2015 period.*

The economy had to be stabilized and put on growth path, the **disastrous** effects of the Covid-19 pandemic had to be contained and controlled, to **save** lives and livelihoods....., and the country's finances had to be *prudently and properly* managed.

Mr. Speaker, this new government would have you believe that all our economic problems and challenges disappeared on April 28th and now, salt, mauby, milk and honey can flow.

However, Mr. Speaker, it soon became clear to them after April 28th that their hollow campaign rhetoric would not work, now that they were in government, and that this country and economy is very difficult to manage.

*This is a very complex economy **NOT** designed to be managed by inexperienced misfits*, like those who wish to use nuclear weapons against our closest neighbour, not

understanding that if that were to actually occur, we would all die from the nuclear fallout.

For years, we told the country and the UNC that our financial position was delicate and very susceptible to changes in the global economy, global trade restraints, commodity price shocks and other external factors.

They did not listen!!

And now the panic has set in, because they have realized that they made **unrealistic promises** to the citizens of this country *just to win an election*.

They are now faced with two options:

Option One – They do the responsible thing and **engage in conservative fiscal management which minimizes the deficit, does not inflate the debt excessively and mitigates the economic risk**.

However, they are incapable of this Mr. Speaker, and they are too busy being populist to be responsible.

And Option 2 - which they have embarked upon, provides very short-term satisfaction but will lead to severe pain for the people of this country going forward.

This government has taken the irresponsible route, Mr. Speaker, which is to go **against every sensible economic advice available to it**.

They have put in place measures which would severely inhibit and decrease revenue, while planning to spend record amounts which the country cannot afford.

As Dr. Eric Williams once said, “the alternative to the PNM is chaos and confusion” – **absolutely prophetic**.

Mr. Speaker, **under the UNC**, 50,000 workers, primarily at the lower income levels - the people who live from ***paycheck to paycheck*** - **have** cruelly and unfairly lost their jobs in the space of just five months.

Under the UNC, since April 28th, *salaries payments are routinely late, and sometimes not paid at all*.

Contrast this to the very difficult Covid-19 period, when government revenue dropped by \$15 billion in just one year, **yet the PNM ensured that EVERYONE**, including all daily-paid and monthly-paid workers and recipients of social grants, and many others, were paid on time, as we did for the entire 9 ½ years we were in office.

Under the PNM, the people who needed the most help could *feel comfortable* and *be assured* that their Social Grants, such as public assistance and disability assistance would reach them on time. Not late by days or weeks into a new month as is happening now.

Under the PNM, our pensioners got their pensions on time like clockwork so they can buy groceries, go to the market, buy medication and keep the lights going.

Under the PNM, Tobago wasn't suffering from a water crisis.

Under the PNM, loose-cannon Ministers weren't causing geopolitical and international crises with our neighbours on their latest live rants.

Under the PNM, roadsides and recreation grounds were maintained and single mothers and bread winners in families could have fed their children, bought books for school and not have to line up at social services.

Now, potholes and landslides abound on every road, whether main roads or secondary roads, floods occur on a weekly basis, while the Minister of Works and Infrastructure hides from the public.

Under the PNM, sporting, cultural and community organisations were getting money to carry out vital community work.

Under the PNM, our youths had hope with over 50 programs, training them in essential skills in Agriculture, Technical Vocational, Auto Repair, Sound Engineering, Heavy Machine and Equipment operations, Healthcare and many others now shut off to them.

I expect that our young people who are now at a great disadvantage with the termination of all the PNM youth initiatives, are taking notice.

Mr. Speaker, as the people on the ground, in the streets, in the markets, in their homes and churches, temples and mosques, **from Arima to Erin, from Cedros to Charlotteville, from Carenage to Carapichaima** and all areas in between,

are saying - **“We give them the country to run, and they JUST CAN’T RUN IT!” And they just cannot run it.**

Mr. Speaker, this government has **irresponsibly** increased the budget deficit for 2025, **from \$5 billion to \$9 billion**, is **increasing** the public debt to unsustainable levels, **draining** our foreign reserves at an exponential rate, **attacking** the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, even though there has been no natural disaster or global pandemic over the last five months, and has placed our currency under **tremendous strain**.

Mr. Speaker, while publicly and dishonestly speaking about alleged PNM financial management, the UNC has **drastically and deceitfully** behind closed doors, grossly overestimated the revenue for 2026 and has based the budget on highly unrealistic and false assumptions.

Mr. Speaker, since they were elected, **they have not left the political platform and have been campaigning ever since**. They still behave as if they are in opposition and have not yet settled to govern.

These are serious things that they are playing with, and a dangerous mix of incompetence and political agendas which will lead this country down a road which will inevitably result in a debt trap!!!

That is where this government is taking us, Mr. Speaker, **over the economic precipice and the alarm bells are already being rung!** One only has to look at the most recent Standard and Poor's credit rating report which specifically highlighted the scrapping of the Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority and Property Tax, and other revenue generating measures, together with increased spending, and increased borrowing, as the main reasons for the downgrade in our credit rating outlook from stable to **NEGATIVE** and by extension, our economy.

Mr. Speaker, the independent agencies are already losing confidence in this government in a mere five months in office and raising concern about where their disastrous economic policies will take us.

It is right there in black and white!

Mr. Speaker, *they will take us decades back to their origin, the infamous NAR government, which caused so much pain*, that they were reduced from 33 seats to 2 in just 5 years.

Ask any qualified economist what is the true state of our economy and where these policies, if sustained for a few years, will lead us..... and they will say unequivocally, **“to the International Monetary Fund.”**

Mr. Speaker, I use this budget response to issue a stark warning to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

These policies of the UNC government are an economic crisis in the making, the likes of which we have not seen in almost 40 years.

The collection of promises made by this government is the single greatest con job perpetrated upon the people of Trinidad and Tobago in history.

No Plan

Mr. Speaker, before I get into the substantive portion of my discussion on the budget and highlighting the major areas, I want to address a common theme which the Minister of Finance tries to weave into all his presentations in this Parliament.

He continues to claim that **the PNM government crashed the economy, when he knows that this is simply untrue and that all the international agencies have a completely different view.**

Mr. Speaker, in my presentation on the Supplementary Appropriation Bill 2025, I was at lengths to quote the Central Bank, which published growth data for Trinidad and Tobago for the years 2022 to 2024 and into 2025.

I quoted independent international agencies such as the IMF which also confirmed three years of consecutive economic growth from 2022 to 2024 and prior to the arrival of this disastrous government, had projected growth of 2.3% for Trinidad and Tobago in its World Economic Outlook for 2025.

Mr. Speaker, the most recent Standard and Poor's report also confirms growth in our economy under the PNM for three consecutive years.

Indeed, if you examine the economic data presented in the UNC's **own** Review of The Economy for 2025 you will see the Minister's own document points to economic growth under the PNM for the years 2022 to 2024.

So where is this alleged Economic Crash under the PNM?

Mr. Speaker, the records prove that the claim of economic mismanagement by PNM is simply not true, which is why the

Minister's 2026 Budget Statement is **fake** and **fraudulent**.

In fact, **the Review of the Economy 2025, laid in the Parliament by the Minister of Finance, clearly illustrates that this UNC government has reversed the economic recovery this country enjoyed and maintained up to 2024, which would have continued in 2025, if the PNM was still in Government.**

This UNC government has caused an almost irreversible shock to this economy, sent the country into a recession, created an economic downturn and reversed

years of painstaking work done by the PNM in rebuilding the economy after the Covid-19 pandemic.

Fiscal Crisis

Mr. Speaker, at a time when energy prices are declining and projected to fall further, and production is falling, this government saw it fit to damage our **revenue base**.

They **repealed** the Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority Act for political reasons, even though all they said in their 2025 Manifesto about the TTRA is that they would amend the Act to make the PSA the bargaining agent for the employees in the TTRA, which was not something the PNM would have objected to.

As we pointed out during the debate on the TTRA Bill, *the revenue authority would not only enhance revenue and make tax collection more efficient by capturing within the tax net, but it would also have dealt with the many businesses and high wealth individuals who have been avoiding and evading taxes for many years.*

Mr. Speaker, did the government repeal the Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority Act to protect tax evading financiers?

By some estimates, the TTRA stood to collect more than \$5 Billion annually in additional revenues.

However, in one ill-advised, fell-swoop, this government **scrapped** this critical revenue-generating tool along with others.

What will happen, Mr. Speaker, when these unrealistic revenue estimates are not met? Either significant borrowing will have to be undertaken, or they will have to cut expenditure.

If the entire premise of this budget, which is the revenue estimates, is unrealistic, then the ENTIRE budget presented here is a fairytale and a figment of their imagination.

Mr. Speaker, this budget is fraudulent and fake!

The fact remains that **this government is triggering a fiscal crisis in this country** stemming from a lack of revenue and common sense.

On the campaign trail we **warned** the country and especially the UNC, that the finances of this country cannot sustain the fairytale plans, programs and policies which they want to put in place.

Mr. Speaker, we WARNED about the dangers of cutting revenue sources. We WARNED about the dangers of increasing expenditure, and we WARNED about a potential devaluation as their only option.

We red-flagged that State Enterprises and some of the jewels on the crown of the State would be at risk of being privatized, just to keep the government afloat.

We cautioned that this government's policies will throw us into a cashflow and fiscal crisis, and force them to search for cash balances wherever they can.

Now, they are in a *mad search*, to **raid** state enterprises, such as NGC, UTC, NIB, First Citizens, Republic Bank and other entities where the state has an interest, just to pay wages and salaries!

Mr. Speaker, I am sounding a warning again and telling this government, leave the Cash Balances at the Unit Trust Corporation and NIB alone!

They do not belong to you!!!

Mr. Speaker, **after repealing the Trinidad and Tobago Revenue Authority Act**, which would have brought **large, medium and small** businesses into a reasonable tax net, the Opposition is getting regular reports of the BIR showing up at small businesses, asking for VAT registration and if they have made their payments.

Because of the government's incompetence and total botched fiscal management, **the small man has to pay while the UNC's tax evading friends, family and financiers, laugh all the way to the bank.**

Liquidity Crisis

Mr. Speaker, apart from the Fiscal Crisis we have found ourselves in, this government has also thrust us in a liquidity crisis.

This is a **very concerning development** for every citizen because not only does it affect and impact the day-to-day lives of the people of this country, **it also explains the late payments of salaries, the late cheques for social services and pensioners and spending freezes in the Public Sector.**

Without saying it publicly Mr. Speaker, this government has imposed **spending freezes on most areas of Public Sector expenditure, especially goods and services, which also comprise contract employment.**

Mr. Speaker, apart from the revenue element of the delicate financial balancing act, the government has to be concerned **with liquidity and cash flow.**

And while both are related, they are not the same.

Mr. Speaker, when the UNC took office, they admitted that the **Overdraft at the Central Bank had funds which could be utilized.**

The Overdraft facility stood at 70% when they assumed office, versus the almost 100% overdraft level that we discovered when the PNM took office in 2015.

They were also able to utilize unused balances withdrawn from the Heritage and Stabilization fund as well as loans that were left in escrow for capital expenditure purposes, all sources of liquidity left by the **PNM** government.

Mr. Speaker, *the same loans they criticized the PNM for taking*, **they re-purposed them to use for recurrent expenditure**, thus stalling economic activity.

Loans meant for road upgrade projects, HDC and HVIP housing, land development for former Petrotrin workers, school construction, water supply projects, and many other development works **were utilized to pay salaries!**

That is the state of desperation they descended to!

Mr. Speaker, how did this government find themselves in this position in only five months?

HOW???

They spent the first three months attacking big businesses, banks and other financial institutions.

They labeled them as cartels and eroded confidence in the financial system.

Mr. Speaker, Excess Liquidity has declined sharply **from \$7.3 Billion in March 2025 to under \$3.8 Billion in August 2025** and who knows where it is now.

They have drained the liquidity in the system and there simply isn't any more for the banks to lend. Repurposing the \$1.3 Billion in loans for the productive sector has further drained liquidity, taking it to levels not seen in over a decade.

Mr. Speaker, **if** liquidity dries up, payment of salaries is the least of our worries.

We have debt service payments to make, which are critical and timed across the year.

Missing one payment can lead to default, which can see the government impose even more severe austerity measures on the people of this country.

Mr. Speaker, even in the forex markets, the increased rates for accessing forex through credit card purchases can translate to increased prices for consumers.

S&P Negative Outlook

Mr. Speaker, the investment grade rating of BBB-

(triple B minus) by Standard and Poor's is all due to the good work of the People's National Movement.

Mr. Speaker, I want the country to note that the negative outlook for our economy issued by Standard and Poor's, is a forward-looking factor which is based on the future policies and plans of the UNC and whatever the new Minister of Finance told S&P.

Let me repeat, **the retention of our investment grade credit rating is all due to the PNM and the downgrade to a negative outlook is all due to the UNC.**

Workers Targeted

Mr. Speaker, I say this without fear of contradiction, that this government has declared WAR on the lower- income workers of this country.

Out of vindictiveness, spite and bad-mind, this government began putting workers on the breadline. **It started as a trickle at first but now, Mr. Speaker, 50,000 workers have either been terminated or lost their jobs as a direct result of the hand of this government.**

This UNC **"Firing Squad"** celebrates and gets sinister pleasure in firing people, who they perceive as **PNM** and therefore undeserving of a livelihood in this country.

They are NOT concerned that they are affecting families, breadwinners, children and impacting real people and lives in this country.

Mr. Speaker, there is currently a humanitarian crisis in this country caused by the termination of thousands of workers by this wicked and uncaring government.

Not surprisingly, not a single word was mentioned of this crisis at the United Nation's General Assembly.

They say they love you, yet pound you down with a hammer of vengeance. It is clear that the UNC does not care about the people of Trinidad and Tobago!!

Mr. Speaker, over 10,000 CEPEP workers, 4,000 Forestry workers, 400 Workers in WASA, from CEOs to janitors, and thousands more, have suffered under the hands of this callous UNC government.

Mr. Speaker not even the state enterprises and Ministries escaped the UNC **“firing squad”**:

People have been dismissed from:

CAL, RDC, T&TEC, NIDCO, FCB, WASA, NEDCO, Heritage, HDC, TSTT, Paria, various Ministries and even the Constituency Office of Cumuto/Manzanilla.

The UNC “firing squad” is in full effect!

Citizens have been made to suffer, beg for a small change for groceries and line up for social services, which this government cannot even pay on time.

Imagine this Mr. Speaker, having been fired from your job and then having to suffer the indignity of being told by a clueless government Minister, to apply for social services and your public assistance cheques cannot even arrive on time.

Meanwhile a senior Minister tells people to stay home and cook! Cook with what?

Mr. Speaker, threats by this government have left thousands of workers in this country fearful of victimization and fearful of their future.

Mr. Speaker incomes are lost, spending in the economy will decline. **Families will be affected.** This will have a negative economic impact but more so create a human and social crisis.

Mr. Speaker, conservative estimates from our analysis show that the cumulative impact of these mass terminations can result in as much as a **\$1.5 to \$2 Billion decline in GDP over the next year.**

But this is not just the Leader of the Opposition or the PNM saying this.

I reference;

Trinidad Guardian – September 14th, 2025 - URP, CEPEP job cuts may harm economy, communities–Economists

“Economist Prof Karl Theodore was blunt. “Whenever you interfere with the incomes of low-income people, you are interfering with the very lifeblood of the economy”.

Theodore pointed to the well-worn but seldom measured principle of “marginal propensity to consume”, the idea that those who earn the least spend the most proportionally on local goods and services.

“Poor people don’t sit on money. They spend it on food, transport, small shops, and books for their children. That keeps the economy ticking,” he said.”

Mr. Speaker, you cannot shock any economy with termination of 50,000 workers and not have a drastic economic impact.

But this is much more than an economic shock, this is a people issue and a humanitarian crisis. These people will now flock to our social services to seek reprieve.

State Boards Dismantled

Mr. Speaker, in true UNC “firing squad” style, this government upon assuming office, proceeded to **fire** state board members and senior management, persons who were serving, who had given off their time and effort as professionals.

The Prime Minister **herself** attacked them in a most **vicious** manner, calling them shameless for not resigning.

Mr. Speaker, the **State Enterprise Sector** plays a vital role in this economy, providing vital services, acting as implementing agencies and acting as pillars in critical sectors.

They also facilitate investment in our economy through the relevant investment programs.

Mr. Speaker, there are **141 state entities and boards**, impacting every sector in our economy which plays differing roles, some critically pivotal and some less so, but this sector also contributes **significantly to economic growth**.

Dismantling Boards, some of which belong to publicly traded companies, disrupt the governance of these entities, their strategic direction, and management and in most cases its operations as well, because they cannot enter into contracts, gain higher level approvals for operational activities and in some cases even conduct financial transactions.

Mr. Speaker, this government has removed boards of the state enterprise sector and has ground this vital part of our economy to a practical halt or at least stymied their operations.

How many of these boards have been reappointed in five months?

What this government has done is slowed down the economic impact of this sector.

Mr. Speaker, one only has to look at the disruption of operations at the **Exim Bank Essential forex** window as a result of government incompetence in its transition.

This window provides a facility for the importation of essential goods like food and pharmaceuticals.

This window was created by a PNM administration during the height of the Covid –19 pandemic to allow this country to have access to these essential items.

Mr. Speaker, the government has created major problems by mishandling their transition and I quote;

Trinidad Express - July 16th, 2025 – Exim Bank forex disruption hits SMEs

“Small and medium-sized businesses in the country are facing growing strain amid a sudden halt in foreign exchange allocations from the State-owned Export-Import Bank (EximBank), the Express has confirmed.

According to a source directly affected by the situation, the EximBank has not allocated US dollars to any of its clients in recent weeks, citing bureaucratic delays caused by a shift in ministerial oversight and the absence of a functioning board.

It is **irresponsible** management of the economy on the part of this government, and this has potential to reverse the growth recovery trend I discussed earlier.

Mr. Speaker, look at **NGC** - a chairman was appointed and a month later, his appointment was revoked and an attorney who has questions to answer in the Court was then appointed.

How could we be serious when we make decisions like these about an entity as critical as the NGC which is a lynchpin in our energy industry?

FCB

Mr. Speaker, as if that wasn't enough, we have this government **interfering** with our delicate financial sector.

First Citizens Bank was founded in Trinidad and Tobago in 1993, under a PNM government, through the strategic merger of three existing financial institutions:

- The National Commercial Bank (NCB), the Workers' Bank, and the Trinidad Co-operative Bank.

This merger aimed to create a stronger and more competitive local financial institution.

Mr. Speaker, FCB has become a highly successful financial institution in Trinidad and Tobago.

It is a publicly traded company which allows citizens to own shares in this bank.

It falls under the regulation of the Central Bank and the Securities and Exchange Commission and among other things, is governed and regulated by the Companies Act.

But despite all of this there is a serious issue of government's interference at FCB.

I was urged to call upon the government to come clean on the matter of the CEO when we were receiving conflicting reports. Some were stating she resigned, some reports stated she was on vacation and other reports suggested she was about to retire.

Mr. Speaker, you cannot have this level of uncertainty regarding the head of one of the pillars of our financial sector, a publicly traded company.

It shatters confidence.

Why are government Ministers getting involved in the management of a Publicly Traded Financial Institution?

Mr. Speaker, that is not good governance. That is a **political hijack of a public bank.**

What message does this send to the people of Trinidad and Tobago?

What message does this send to investors, to the international community, to every citizen who entrusts their savings, their mortgages, their future with First Citizens Bank?

I want to warn the nation to keep a close eye on the government's dealing with First Citizens Bank.

YOUR SAVINGS ARE AT RISK.

Attacking Big Business

Mr. Speaker, this government is making a habit of attacking big business in this country including some of the largest non-energy contributors to the economy, employment and government revenue.

They have gone out of their way to collect and divulge private information from the Central Bank, something that is clearly illegal.

The Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance have continued the false narrative of the existence of a "forex cartel" and threatened to expose this so-called cartel.

But Mr. Speaker, this turned out to be totally fabricated and another distraction by this government.

The Central Bank Governor, in a presentation to the media on September 5th, 2025, stated clearly for the record that he had no evidence of any forex cartel existing.

Unemployment

Mr. Speaker, I now turn to a serious injustice, which has been inflicted upon the people of this country.

I speak of the heartless mass terminations and non-renewal of contracts of workers across this country by the UNC's "firing squad".

Mr. Speaker, it is shocking that in a government where trade unions have seemingly become a key ally, with unionists holding ministerial positions, the absolute decimation of workers has taken place right before the very eyes of these so-called comrades and with their permission.

This is the worst display by the Trade Union Movement in our modern history. They have even described the sending home of workers as collateral damage.

Mr. Speaker, our single mothers and school children being described as collateral damage and this from a government who supposedly cares. Obviously no Prime Minister can hate you more.

For almost 10 years, a PNM government proudly kept the unemployment rate down.

Even through the worst of the Covid-19 pandemic, we ensured that salaries, grants and other facilities stayed in place so that the affected people of this country, many of whom formed the most vulnerable, had the ability to feed themselves and pay their bills. Critically important, no public servants on the establishment were sent home.

Mr. Speaker, what happened after the election in April this year?

50,000 people were fired or did not have their contracts renewed. In a mere five months, they placed 50,000 people on the breadline and this continues to climb.

Mr. Speaker, this scorched-earth strategy of the UNC impacted almost 200,000 citizens.

How can that be an economic policy, to deliberately put such a large number of people on the breadline with no incomes? To affect and pauperize 200,000 citizens?

Mr. Speaker, apart from the social impact, there is also an economic impact. The loss of 50,000 incomes will negatively affect this economy both directly and indirectly.

The shops, groceries and parlors will feel it. The markets and vendors are already feeling the pinch. The roadside food vendors are telling us that business is slow and people are buying less. Clear signs that a recession is at hand.

This is a self-induced economic contraction. We see this reflected in the **negative economic growth for 2025 in the Review of the Economy**, the first time our economy has shrunk in four years.

Mr. Speaker, I heard the Prime Minister say that the government would provide income support grants for those who lost their jobs. So, let us get this straight.

You fire workers who were doing something productive and then promise them grants?

Obviously, the Prime Minister doesn't think so, because to her they **are lowly grass cutters**.

However, they were maintaining our environment and improving the health and safety and security of our citizens.

To add insult to injury, the government is consistently late in paying these public assistance and social services grants.

This is what happens when you have no plan and only operate based on hate and vindictiveness.

They **have pushed this country's unemployment rate to the worst levels in decades and worst among regional counterparts**.

Mr. Speaker, youth unemployment has always been at a higher figure than the national average, but the PNM government had taken deliberate steps to empower young people and provide sustainable and viable alternative employment opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, we created an entire Ministry of Youth Development and National Service and *developed over 50 programs* where young people were being trained in various fields from **Agriculture to Mechanics to Air Condition Repair and Heavy Equipment Operators and Technicians, to take advantage of available opportunities and anchor their own lives and futures**.

Mr. Speaker, they were being trained to acquire highly skilled jobs in the energy sector such as operators, riggers and technicians. We are all familiar with the successes of these programs.

In the middle of this training and transition for our young people, these programs have been abruptly halted and dismantled.

I repeat to our young people, please take notice.

The UNC is ANTI-YOUTH!

Monetary Policy

Mr. Speaker, I turn to the issue of Monetary Policy. I cannot discuss the issue of Monetary Policy without discussing the Central Bank, which is the institution responsible for executing such a policy.

Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that this government has absolutely derailed and shaken confidence in the Central Bank. They tried to intervene in the operations of the bank, forcing the then Governor to do something which he knew was wrong and which they ought to have known was illegal.

Mr. Speaker, in their **misdiagnosis** of the forex problem, they sought to sell the narrative that the reason for the forex shortage lay in the distribution of foreign currency.

In doing so they launched a vicious attack on some of the largest businesses in this country, that pay taxes, contribute to revenue, GDP growth, foreign exchange earnings and employment.

What did they call them?

A forex cartel, demonizing the main users of forex in this country.

Mr. Speaker, it is no secret that we have large conglomerates in this country. We have businesses in the food distribution sector operating supermarket chains. Our food import bill is over US \$1 Billion. Of course, these will be some of the large users of foreign exchange!

Mr. Speaker, but this reflects a deeper problem regarding the tastes and preferences of the population.

A major part of the forex issue lies in a demand problem, and unless we can curb our appetite for imported goods, especially food, we will continue to face problems like this.

Mr. Speaker, this government in demonizing these businesses does not only erode business confidence but also places the Central Bank and particularly their chosen UNC Governor in a very difficult position.

Mr. Speaker, I quote from

Trinidad Guardian – June 6th, 2025, Entitled - PM: Central Bank refusing to divulge forex info

"Getting back to the topic of the forex cartel, Prime Minister Persad-Bissessar said the "blocker" the Government is getting from the Central Bank is its failure to provide information. She said the Central Bank is "using certain provisions of the law, saying they don't have a duty and that they are not under any obligation to disclose information."

The regulations are quite clear on this matter.

Section 56 of the Central Bank Act states:

"Except in so far as may be necessary for the due performance of its objects, and subject to section 8 of the Financial Institutions Act, every director, officer and employee of the Bank **shall preserve and aid in preserving secrecy with regard to all matters relating to the affairs of the Bank, any financial institution or person registered** under the Insurance Act or of any customers thereof that may come to his knowledge in the course of his duties."

Mr. Speaker, this government was therefore asking the Governor of the Central Bank to do something that was in breach of the law, to disclose the private banking information of the top users of foreign exchange.

Why did they need this? To demonize our business community? To go on a political platform and "buss mark"?

Mr. Speaker, this is the law we are speaking about, but more than that, this is business confidence: this is business interests which are being attacked.

As an admission of what she was asking the Central Bank Governor to do was wrong, **the Prime Minister announced that the government will bring legislation to allow for the disclosure of private banking information.**

Which country does that and expects confidence in the banking sector to be maintained? Are we now a Banana Republic?

FOREIGN EXCHANGE CRISIS

Mr. Speaker, the Budget Statement should have been an opportunity to stabilize our economy, rebuild confidence, and set out a credible plan to restore our foreign exchange position.

Instead, what we have been given is an exercise in economic recklessness by a government that has neither the understanding nor the competence to manage one of the most delicate systems in our economy.

Our foreign exchange framework is like a delicately balanced house of cards. **It is not perfect, but it promotes stability. And yet, this UNC Government is prepared to collapse those cards without understanding the consequences, not because they have a sound plan,** but because it seems their family, friends and financiers are whispering in their ears.

If you pull the wrong card, Mr. Speaker, the entire thing will collapse. When it collapses, it will not be the Cabinet that suffers, it will be the shopkeeper in San Fernando who can't pay her suppliers. It will be the manufacturer in Couva who can't get raw materials. It will be the family in Diego Martin who suddenly faces soaring prices for basic goods -

and yes - there will be people on the streets, angry and seeking answers and solutions.

I want to let this government know that sound economic management is **not** Public Relations or populism, it is rooted in facts, research and a deep understanding of the economic realities which we face as a country.

It is not about sound bites or politics.

The Government's Misdiagnosis

This Government's central mistake is that it believes the foreign exchange problem is about *allocation*. They believed that if they tinkered with who gets forex and when, the problem would be solved.

Mr. Speaker, they continued to attack the businesses which form fundamental pillars in our economy.

The government, starting with the Prime Minister, has given them the racist "one percent" label and branded them a "cartel". Remember when they first assumed office, there was this talk of a "forex cartel"?

They would have you believe that forex allocation was the problem and that some were being favored over others.

They **mised** the population into thinking that all they had to do was change the way forex was reallocated, and the problem would be solved.

How quickly they went quiet when they faced reality.

What became of all of this talk about forex shortage and unfair allocations? Did forex suddenly free up in the country? Is the problem solved?

Of course not, Mr. Speaker! In fact in the few months of this government's tenure, it has worsened.

This government needs to explain the rapid, precipitous decline in net international reserves **of over US \$600 million in their first five months of office. And this is after withdrawing over US\$200 million from HSF after April 28th.**

The UNC's mismanagement of our foreign reserves has led to our import cover shrinking to just over 5 months by the end of August 2025, **the lowest in several decades.**

You will recall Mr. Speaker that during the debate on the Mid-Year Review, the new Minister of Finance expressed his feigned "shock and dismay" at discovering that the PNM Government left the country with 7 ½ months of import cover. I wonder how he feels now that in less than 6 months he has caused our import cover to drop to barely over 5 months?

Mr. Speaker, the system of allocation is not the disease - it is only a symptom.

The disease is our inability to earn foreign exchange at the levels our economy requires, and that ability is tied fundamentally to our energy sector's performance and our capacity to export competitively.

Simply, it's a demand and supply issue.

Debunking the Refinery Closure Myth

Mr. Speaker, not one single reference was made to the refinery. As a result, we wait to see if the Prime Minister will make another 180-degree turn, as she did with the Dragon Gas.

When the PNM government demitted office in April, we were at a point where we had a preferred bidder for the Guaracara refinery.

Mr. Speaker, on the campaign trail, the Government promised the people of Trinidad and Tobago that the UNC would reopen the Guaracara refinery, yet this Minister of Finance was conspicuously silent on this last Monday. They painted the false and fake picture of jobs restored, foreign exchange earned, and prosperity revived. Five months later, that promise remains only on a platform stage – **Promise made. Promise broken.**

The PNM Government did not just make promises..... they acted. The process to restart the refinery was advanced through a **competitive evaluation exercise**. After extensive technical and financial assessments, **Oando PLC of Nigeria was selected as the preferred bidder** to lease and operate the refinery.

That represented real progress:

- A private sector operator was identified.
- Taxpayers would not bear ANY cost of restarting a loss-making facility.
- A framework existed for moving from mothballing to operation in a structured way.

The public could see the pathway forward.

What has this Government done since coming to office?

They **scrapped that process!!**

Instead of building on the groundwork laid, they appointed a **12-member “refinery restart committee”** in July 2025.

That committee was given four months to prepare a strategy.

We are told the committee will report soon, but Mr. Speaker, the fact is this: **no concrete plan has been presented to the population.**

In fact, even the committee itself admitted to “little progress” on a restart plan, citing the enormous capital cost of refurbishing the refinery and uncertainty about financial partners.

In fact, what we have is a video of the Minister in the Ministry of Energy, shaking like a leaf as he said, he has the report and the refinery is ready to go, except for the financing.

Mr. Speaker, let me warn this government and point out to the people of this country, that given the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property Act, the government cannot simply hand over the refinery to any entity without following a proper procurement process.

It would be a breach of the provisions of the Procurement Act. We will be monitoring the evolution of this situation closely. I want to remind the people involved that the Procurement Act involves hefty fines and jail terms.

Current Crisis – The Exim Bank Disruption

Mr. Speaker, the idea of reverting the Exim Bank to simply providing loans and insurance guarantees will be detrimental to our exporters since the facilities to provide them with forex will no longer exist.

Today, small and medium-sized businesses — the backbone of our diversification efforts — are facing a new crisis because the Government is about to restructure forex allocations from the Exim Bank.

While the government is saying “relief is coming”, this budget provided NONE.

Tariffs

Mr. Speaker, the current global environment has made it even more difficult to implement these strategies.

You see, while this government was firing workers, attacking financial institutions and businesses and undermining independent institutions, they were not doing their jobs.

At that time, the US, our largest trading partner, had imposed a 10% reciprocal tariff on exports coming out of this country. This government did nothing to have this tariff removed or negotiated.

Having done nothing, while the rest of the world was feverishly trying to negotiate away these tariffs, the US imposed another round of tariffs and this time ours went up to 15%.

Mr. Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago has been and will be impacted by this new tariff which will also impact our foreign exchange earnings. Now that the government is scrambling with economic realities, all we hear is political rhetoric, but NO solid economic plans and actions.

This new Minister of Finance is totally out of his depth and will surely lead this country into economic disaster!

Foreign Reserve Risk

Mr. Speaker, they have done nothing to avert the decline of our foreign reserves, and they have now entered the high-risk territory. Our reserves are now well below US\$5 Billion and falling quickly to \$4 Billion.

If the Minister of Finance does not understand that if we run out of foreign reserves we **cannot** import, pay our foreign debt and make simple foreign exchange transfers, **then it is MY job to make him understand where he is taking us.**

Mr. Speaker, this road will inevitably lead us to harsh realities of potentially defaulting on foreign debt which will cause us to default on most of our other debt obligations, which will become immediately due for payment as well.

Another significant consequence, because we operate a managed floating exchange rate regime, is our reserves are still required to defend the exchange rate of the TT Dollar. If we run dangerously low on reserves, we will be unable to maintain **our \$6.79 rate against the US dollar**. You know what would happen after Mr. Speaker? Guess. Just guess!

This Minister of Finance is smiling because he knows, the dreaded “D” word.

Mr. Speaker, we warned the country that given their promises, the UNC threatened to crash the economy and trigger a devaluation. It was the only way they could pay for all of these promises.

How can they manage all that they promise while operating on such diminished revenues?

Mr. Speaker, Debt and Devaluation will be the order of the day and more and more this government seems very likely to, in the near future, come to this country, looking to blame the PNM again for forcing their hand to devalue the TT dollar. But we shall take absolutely NO responsibility for this Fraudulent and Fake Budget or this incompetent Government. We have nothing to do with this nonsense.

We warned them, Mr. Speaker, about the *irresponsibility* of their promises and the expectations they were creating!

We specifically warned the country that the only way they can do this would be if they **devalue the TT dollar to 10 to 1, even 15 to 1.**

Mr. Speaker, watch them carefully because this is where they are taking us and remember, we warned you, **and we are warning you again!**

If they continue down this road, we will face a full-blown foreign exchange crisis.

It will not be academic.

It will not be abstract.

It will mean empty shelves, shuttered businesses, job losses, and a cost-of-living explosion.

When that happens, it will be because this Government misdiagnosed the problem, ignored the warnings, and played politics with the economic lifeblood of this nation.

Energy

Mr. Speaker, the Energy Sector contributes approximately 40-45% to our GDP and has traditionally been the largest earner of foreign exchange for Trinidad and Tobago.

It is also responsible for approximately 80% of our country's export revenue.

It is widely accepted that our country's energy sector is the foundation of our economy, and it has traditionally provided governments with the ability to fund its initiatives.

Accordingly, I, like many citizens, was looking to the new Minister of Finance's budget speech to see what this government's plans and initiatives are for the energy sector.

Unfortunately, I am disappointed, but not surprised, as the budget speech said very little about the energy sector and then out of the little that was said there was not a single new initiative declared.

NOT ONE Mr. Speaker. NOTHING NEW!!

It has become clear and patently obvious to everyone, that the government is **LOST** when it comes to the energy sector, but the whole population can see it.

The stakeholders must be salivating when preparing to negotiate against this government as it is obvious that they are unsophisticated, out of their depth and, I fear, that Trinidad and Tobago will be taken advantage of.

Under the heading of what was delivered in the first 150 days in office the new Minister of Finance stated with much aplomb that "**We Secured Landmark Energy Deals**".

He then goes on quite unashamedly to claim for the government that they signed a historic agreement with Exxon Mobil.

Mr. Speaker, **it was the former PNM Government that secured the interest of ExxonMobil** for our ultra deep-water blocks.

It was the former PNM Government that took a Cabinet decision in 2024 to negotiate with ExxonMobil for the ultra-deep-water blocks.

It was the former PNM government that oversaw the negotiations of the Production Sharing Contract with Exxon.

This was all the work of the PNM!

It was the first time in Trinidad and Tobago's history that a government secured interest in our ultra deep-water acreage.

This government turned that work into a signing ceremony and now wishes to claim it as an achievement!

But I am calling on the Prime Minister to tell this country what are the terms of the Production Sharing Contract? Did you secure a signing bonus? If so, how much was it?

If there was none, *then why was there none?* What are the terms that you claim that you agreed with Exxon?

Is it true that you gave these blocks away?

What are the shares of profit for the people of Trinidad and Tobago?

The Prime Minister must tell the people of Trinidad and Tobago what is the cost recovery? What concessions did your government make?

The next "Landmark Energy Deal" that the new Minister of Finance claimed is that on October 8, 2025, they obtained "the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) license from the United States Treasury Department to pursue development of gas on the Dragon Field.

This hollow boast reeks of hypocrisy.

This UNC government is absolutely shameless!

Is this not the same Dragon Gas Field that the UNC opposition spent nine years attacking the PNM government about?

The government needs to be honest!

The work that was done to secure the Dragon gas deal was that of the PNM!

It was the PNM in December 2023 that secured and delivered a 30-year Exploration and Production Licence from the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to develop the Dragon field and to export the gas to Trinidad and Tobago.

It was the UNC opposition that did everything possible to try and scuttle that deal.

It was the UNC in an unpatriotic manner called for former Prime Minister Dr Rowley and the member for Port of Spain North / St. Ann's West, to be sanctioned by the United States Government!

The number of times Mr. Speaker, that we sat in this Parliament over the past nine years, **and heard the UNC attack the Dragon and attack us for pursuing the gas from Dragon.**

Well, I want to remind the population today that that gas belongs to Venezuela, and I want to ask the Prime Minister who does she recognise as the President of Venezuela?

Let me ask again who does the Prime Minister recognise as the President of Venezuela? That question urgently arises at this time!

It was the PNM government that acknowledged the need to try to secure gas from an alternative source.

It was the PNM that identified the Dragon Gas Field and negotiated with Shell, with the Government of Venezuela and the Government of the United States to secure and pursue this **and the UNC will not be allowed to pretend that they have the ability and the foresight to secure Dragon.**

We, on this side, **want** Dragon Gas for Trinidad and Tobago!

It was the Prime Minister, who on her assumption to office, **immediately said that Dragon is dead.**

It was the Prime Minister, with glee in her eyes, who said that Dragon is dead.

She also said that they will get gas from Grenada, Guyana and Suriname. Then they rushed off after being rejected by Guyana and suddenly realising that there are no proven gas reserves in Grenada and being out of their depth in Suriname and ended right back at Dragon.

Today, the question Trinidad and Tobago has for the Prime Minister is, “what did you promise in exchange for a six-month provisional OFAC licence?”

Mr. Speaker, **every single energy project** that the new Minister of Finance mentions in his budget speech that is holding our gas production steady and at 2.7 bcf per day **is the work of the former PNM administration.**

Mentos PNM.

Cypre PNM.

Perenco taking over Woodside and bpTT's shallow water assets PNM.

The deep-water bid round they want to claim is a success was started, opened and launched by the PNM.

We wait to see if they manage to award any blocks and if so, on what terms as they are notorious for giving Trinidad and Tobago away cheaply and at a loss.

Even the restarting of steel production the new Minister of Finance wants to try and claim, was started, negotiated and done by the PNM.

Shamelessly, the UNC is trying to claim progress in the solar energy sector.

The 92.2-megawatt Brechin Castle solar project is again all the work of the PNM.

It was the PNM that secured the deal, negotiated the deal and began construction of the largest solar power plant in the Caribbean.

The Green Hydrogen **that they want to claim** *is also the work of the PNM former government.*

It was the PNM Cabinet that took the decision and approved the building of a green hydrogen facility in Trinidad and Tobago and all of the wind generation projects that they are claiming are the policy decisions and work of the PNM.

Mr. Speaker, **there is not a single energy project that has been commenced by the clueless Minister of Energy and the UNC government!**

NGC

Mr. Speaker, the National Gas Company (NGC) is critical to the energy economy of this country. It engages in midstream transmission of gas from upstream to downstream and is the centerpiece of all elements of our gas sector.

But under the UNC Mr. Speaker, the NGC has been highly politicized and utilized like a piggy bank to be smashed and raided and utilized for political purposes.

You may recall, Mr. Speaker, in the period 2010 to 2015, this vital and highly profitable state enterprise held \$16 Billion in cash balances. *Over that period, every cent was drained, extracted through special dividends and spent by the UNC Government.*

Mr. Speaker this was equivalent to 10% of the GDP at the time.

An amount larger than this year's already massive fiscal deficit, emptied from the NGC. To be spent on what?

The **highly dubious and overpriced Beetham Wastewater Treatment plant**, costing over a billion dollars, which was a total waste and squandering of taxpayers' funds.

A total giveaway!

Mr. Speaker, I want to remind this Honourable House, that it was the UNC that cost taxpayers \$700 Million, while the owner of SIS fled to Panama after the UNC lost the elections in 2015.

Under the PNM, NGC fought SIS in an arbitration and won, and the Government and the Chairman of NGC have refused to tell the population what the decision of the arbitrator was.

I call on the Prime Minister and the Ministers of Energy to tell us - did NGC win (*a real win, not a fake UNC win*) the Beetham Wastewater Arbitration, and does SIS have to pay NGC over \$350 million, and what is the government and NGC doing to collect this?

Social Development

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of the People and Social Development, once the conscience of the State, **is now being hollowed out in the name of reform.**

What is being presented to the country as innovation, *is in fact a systematic weakening of the institutions* that safeguard the poor, the elderly and the vulnerable.

It is important to remind this nation that the solid foundation of this Ministry was laid by the People's National Movement.

It was under the PNM that a comprehensive partnership was forged with the World Bank to assess and modernise the country's entire social protection system.

That work produced a detailed framework for reform, focused on accountability, data integrity and efficiency.

The systems, policies and digitisation projects that the current administration boasts about were conceived, built and implemented under PNM leadership.

The present Government has simply inherited those efforts, rebranded them, and now parades them as their own achievements.

Adding to this dysfunction is the creation of the National Payment and Innovation Company of Trinidad and Tobago.

It has been promoted as a new digital mechanism for government transactions, but in practice it centralises control of social grant payments under the Ministry of Finance.

This move strips the Social Development Ministry of its operational independence and places the welfare of citizens under political management. It is a consolidation of power disguised as modernisation, one that risks turning social assistance into a political tool.

This is the broader truth of the Budget before us.

It is not about empowering people; it is about controlling them.

It is not about continuity; it is about dismantling what works.

When the PNM was in office, the Ministry of Social Development operated with accountability, purpose and humanity.

Under the UNC, that legacy has been replaced by political theatre.

In the budget the UNC tried to take credit for the work already completed by the PNM, **another example of a Fake and Fraudulent budget.**

Housing

Mr. Speaker, the government has signaled that its target is twenty thousand houses in 2 years, using Public Private Partnerships and innovative mechanisms.

This objective is a carbon copy of the PNM's Vision 2030.

The UNC is shameless and bereft of ideas, stealing without imagination.

This objective is unachievable for the following reasons:

- i. Lack of availability of suitable lands;
- ii. Reluctance by the banks and contractors to engage in a genuine PPP and
- iii. Lack of suitable contractors with the skill and know-how to carry out such a programme.

The use of the PPP to achieve this target is flawed. Affordable housing does not produce large margins of profit and hence would not generate the rate of return to appeal to investors and financial institutions.

The redress then is likely to be the State supplementing the shortfall.

In addition, PPPs are notorious for the private partner defaulting and the government having to acquire the debt. The entire allocation for the Ministry of Housing is \$668 million with \$200 million earmarked for HDC.

Sport

Mr. Speaker, the sporting sector has been left visionless, untouched, and directionless under this UNC Government.

The new Minister of Finance took credit for the work of the PNM.

This government has NO plan for sport and the youth, NO plan for new programmes, and NO plan for development of our youth.

Mr. Speaker, precious little has been said about sport in the Budget, **except for the good work of the PNM.**

Mr. Speaker, a PNM Government would have expanded our partnership with GC Foster College of Jamaica, enhanced the utilization of the Elite Athlete Programme facilities, expanded the July/August Vacation Programme -

an extension of the Community Cricket Programme.

These plus many other sporting programmes were all started under the PNM.

Mr. Speaker, they are telling us that after five months in office, the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs has failed to meet stakeholders.

Mr. Speaker, **we are talking about the major sporting bodies in this country, and the first fundamental duty of the Minister has not been completed.**

The UNC obviously has no plan for sport.

Youth

Mr. Speaker, **this budget has tragically gutted the youth agenda in our Development Programme!**

Under the PNM, we created the Ministry of Youth Development to specifically promote holistic youth development, by producing over 50 youth centered policies and programs for the largest demographic in this country.

Mr. Speaker, the new Minister of Finance *has said little to nothing on youth development simply because the **budget is bereft** of any real youth developing initiative.*

Half of a page with nothing of substance was dedicated to youth in their public sector investment programme.

Mr. Speaker, we allocated \$50 million to the development programme for youth in the last fiscal year, while they have proposed a measly \$10 million, \$8 million of which is to repair indoor arenas and the rest for IT services.

In summary Mr. Speaker, the youth of this nation have received ZERO dollars for their development.

How sad is that??

Mr. Speaker when the new member for La Horquetta “won”, the young people of Trinidad and Tobago lost everything.

This would NEVER happen under a PNM administration!

I again implore our youth to take careful notice.

Local Government

Mr. Speaker, I turn to the allocation in Local Government.

Local Government is critical to the development and maintenance of our major cities, boroughs, towns and villages.

Local Government accounts for more than 80% of our roadways, drainage systems and streets and primarily acts as the first responder to disasters in our communities.

Mr. Speaker, what we have seen by this Government in relation to Local Government is political victimization coupled with regressive policies, crowned with a lack of vision.

Mr. Speaker, the PNM-led corporations which accounts for more than 50% of the population saw drastic reductions in their recurrent and developmental plan allocations. **However, UNC corporations received a greater share for themselves.**

This is a most vindictive, draconian and discriminative move by this government!

I will give a few examples:

The 2026 Development Programme allocation of the Borough of Arima has been cut by \$12.6 million when compared to 2025.

The Development Programme allocation of the Borough of Diego Martin has been cut by \$6.3 million.

The development Programme of the Port of Spain City Corporation has been cut by \$15.6 million, and so on.

Every single PNM Corporation has had its 2026 Development Programme allocation drastically reduced.

Yet UNC Corporations, like the Borough of Chaguanas and the Princes Town and Penal/Debe Corporations **have seen huge increases in their 2026 allocations, in excess of \$20 million**, making their Development Programme allocations for 2026 more than 6 times as large as the PNM Corporations.

Imagine the Development Programme allocation for the Princes Town Corporation is now twice as large as the allocation for the Capital City and our Second City, San Fernando!

Mr. Speaker, to compound this inexplicable and cruel discrimination in allocations, they have failed to release money for the PNM controlled corporations for their development programmes, which includes money for the repair and cleaning of the roads and drains.

Mr. Speaker, it is utterly disappointing to see a Minister who once served at the helm of local government allow this administration to stymie the ability of some corporations to provide for the basic needs of their communities.

The PNM must be credited as the only government that has been serious on the policy of Local Government Reform, allowing for greater autonomy in law, executive management and increased resources for our communities to advance real and progressive development.

We passed legislation without the UNC support which set the stage to shift our local government bodies into new 21st century managed institutions.

Agriculture

Mr. Speaker, the agriculture sector that this UNC government inherited in April 2025, was rebuilt, modernized, and strengthened through a decade of structured investment and innovation under the stewardship of the PNM and the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries.

When the PNM assumed office in 2015, Agriculture was in decline, plagued by poor infrastructure, lack of access to land, and weak institutional support. By 2025, through deliberate policy and partnerships, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries delivered tangible, measurable results across all sub-sectors.

The 2026 Budget conveniently rebrands these achievements by calling them “new plans” while failing to acknowledge the existing framework that made them possible.

The new Minister spoke of A 3-Year Priority Commodities Programme for 15 high-demand products, with annual focus on three crops and one livestock category, as if these were new areas of focus. **The truth is that these initiatives were launched and implemented under the PNM government.**

In fact, on May 18, 2025, 3 weeks into this Governments’ tenure, **they executed PNM POLICY** by distributing an additional 100 tonnes of high-quality rice seeds procured from Guyana under the same MOU arrangements for the 2025 rice growing season.

The seeds are expected to support the commercial planting of approximately 2,000 acres of land across Trinidad and Tobago. This strategic intervention was part of the PNM government’s commitment to reducing the national food import bill, improving local agricultural resilience and increasing rice self-sufficiency.

Again, sound PNM policy!!!

The 2026 Budget’s promise of “new agricultural roads and irrigation projects” mirrors exactly what the PNM completed over the last decade. These works built the foundation for food security and rural economic growth.

Yet this administration now speaks of “starting” where the PNM already succeeded.

The budget claims of “regularizing farmers and granting leases” again rest on groundwork completed under the PNM.

In addition, while the 2026 Budget highlights digital transformation, the record shows that it was the PNM government that modernized the sector:

- Fully digitalization of the import permitting system via ttbiz link.
- Grow-Trinbago platform
- Drone mapping and LiDAR surveys for land management.
- Digitalization of all state land paper records
- Online farmer training via Moodle and youth-focused 4-H programmes reaching over 33,000 participants in 10 years.

Under the PNM agro-processing was greatly expanded. In fact, under the PNM:

- Moruga Agro-Processing and Light Industrial Park was opened in 2020.
- NAMDEVCO’s e-market platform and Farmers’ Market expansion strengthened farm-to-market linkages and increased monthly consumer reach to over 21,000 shoppers.

Mr. Speaker, the new Minister reported “In agriculture, India donated agro-processing machinery valued at **US\$1 million** to NAMDEVCO and extended technical support in Natural Farming systems.”

Mr. Speaker, **what he didn’t say is the India/Trinidad & Tobago collaboration for the provision of grant funding of \$1M USD in agro- processing equipment designated for Namdevco was negotiated by the PNM administration.** These negotiations began in June 2023.

These are the kinds of structural transformations that the UNC now attempts to claim as new projects under the UNC government.

Mr. Speaker, the PNM ensured access to agricultural credit through the Agricultural Development Bank (ADB) approving over \$1 billion in loans.

Mr. Speaker, as agro-processing, aquaculture, hydroponic, aeroponic, indoor farming, and poultry production are categorized as commercial customers they will now experience a rise in their cost of production since the Government proposes the introduction of an Electricity Surcharge as a targeted fiscal measure.

This could lead to increased prices for consumers for agricultural products.

Mr. Speaker, **the full implementation of Tax-Free concessions for the Agricultural Sector is PNM Policy and all steps were initiated already to review the various pieces of legislation that caused ambiguity in the system.**

It must also be noted that most Agricultural Machinery and Equipment are already free of VAT and duties, and existing provisions provide for farmers to apply to the Ministry of Agriculture on a case-by-case basis for duty free concessions and relief on any input they wish to procure for their operations. Provisions were also made under the existing Agricultural Incentive Programme (AIP) for rebates of up to 50% of the cost of many inputs for the various subsectors in Agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, going further, it was sound PNM policy that led to an additional Line Item of funding at the Ministry of Finance for the Agro Incentive Grant funding of up to \$100,000 to persons or entities wishing to upgrade their farms into climate smart systems, move primary production to agro-processing and add value to their operations.

This wicked and vindictive Government came in, met cheques prepared at the Ministry of Agriculture and blatantly refused to distribute them allowing some to go stale dated.

Most of the farmers affected are their own constituents and will certainly be the judges of their actions.

Tourism

Mr. Speaker, this budget failed to sustain and continue policies already in place, failed to maintain investor confidence and has failed to articulate its vision for the tourism industry.

This budget offers only empty slogans, ambiguity, and vagueness.

Mr. Speaker, this Government inherited the foundation of a tourism sector positioned for take-off. What we expected, and what the country deserved, was a Budget that would consolidate and build upon that momentum.

Instead, what we have is a document full of re-announcements, contradictions, and vague plans.

The new Minister declares that “tourism remains a high-growth sector” and lists accommodation projects such as the Four Points, Hampton Inn, Maracas Bay, and the Tobago Marriott and Elephant Tree resorts.

He conveniently omitted, hopefully not by accident to mention the already approved the 125-room Hilton Garden Inn, the planned operationalization of the NAPA Hotel, where a hotel operator was already chosen. While these projects are expected to bring jobs and economic generation, they are not new as they were already underway.

Mr. Speaker, they were in Opposition for almost ten years, and for almost ten years they claimed to have all the answers. Yet today, in their first budget statement, there are no new initiatives, no policy direction, and no capital allocation to support Trinidad and Tobago’s tourism diversification efforts.

The Government speaks of tourism as a high-growth sector, but the fiscal measures announced by the new Minister of Finance will achieve the exact opposite. This Budget introduces new taxes, surcharges, and fee increases that will undoubtedly drive up operating costs for hotels, restaurants, tour operators, and every small business connected to tourism.

What this Government has done, under the guise of “broadening the tax base,” is to broaden the burden, placing it squarely on the backs of those who are trying to grow the non-energy sector.

You **cannot** speak about diversifying the economy on one hand and then impose higher costs of doing business on the other.

You **cannot** declare tourism a high-growth sector while simultaneously draining its lifeblood through higher operating expenses.

This Budget punishes participation in tourism rather than encouraging it.

How can you speak about making Tobago competitive while increasing the operating costs of every hotel and guesthouse on the island?

Mr. Speaker, the Minister proudly announced that the A.N.R. Robinson International Airport will be fully operational by the second quarter of 2026, which is 9 months after the date that the PNM had scheduled for full operationalization.

Let us be clear, this project was virtually complete before the UNC Government took office. Further, an airport terminal is simply infrastructure. **What is needed is a complete tourism ecosystem**, such as what was planned and envisioned by the PNM government, with international flagship hotels, airline partnerships, and world-class marinas.

While the new Minister spoke about the airport, he said nothing about airlines.

There was no mention of Caribbean Airlines and its strategic routes, no mention of new partnerships, no plan for increased airlift, no destination marketing, no route incentives, and no international promotion of Tobago as a world-class destination.

Equally troubling, the new Minister announced no initiative to attract new international flagship hotels since they chased away Sandals, those global brands that anchor destinations and create a pull factor for airlift.

Additionally, Mr Speaker, please permit me to mention a few marquee projects that were delivered in partnership with the Tobago House of Assembly:

- The acquisition of the Cove Estate and its establishment as an eco-industrial hub for economic diversification
- The landing of a \$1 billion natural gas pipeline and natural gas processing facilities in collaboration with the Natural Gas Company;
- The construction of a dual-powered electricity generation plant at Cove;
- The designation of the Cove Eco-Industrial Business Park as a “Special Economic Zone” with a view towards accelerating the transformation and diversification of the Tobago economy;
- Financial Support for the acquisition and expansion of the Assembly’s Land Bank;
- Construction of the Scarborough and Roxborough Hospitals,
- Construction of the Roxborough and Shirvan Police Stations
- Construction of the Roxborough Fire Stations

- Construction of the Speyside Secondary, Mason Hall and Goodwood High Schools
- The introduction of the inter-island fast ferry service and the recent acquisition of three new fast ferries, the APT James, the Buccoo Reef and the Galleons Passage, resulting in significant improvement in the inter-island transportation system.
- The construction of the most modern airport terminal in the Caribbean, the New ANR Robinson terminal, is scheduled for opening soon.

Mr. Speaker, it is **astonishing** that the word “cruise-ship” does not appear anywhere in this Budget Statement. The cruise industry, which has brought thousands of visitors and millions in foreign exchange, is now being completely ignored. The sector faces serious challenges due to the International Maritime Organization’s Net Zero Framework, which compels cruise lines to reduce their carbon footprint and shorten itineraries. As a result, many now operate five-day cruises that exclude Trinidad and Tobago.

This new reality jeopardizes tourism jobs, foreign exchange earnings, and our cruise sector. Yet there is no mention of incentives to attract cruise lines, no intent to negotiate, and no plan to mitigate the effects of this shift.

While other Caribbean countries are adapting to remain relevant and competitive, this Government has chosen silence.

The Budget boldly claims that the marine and yachting sector will attract US\$3 billion in two years and US\$9 billion in five. Yet the new Minister provided NO policy, NO plan, NO feasibility study, NO legislative framework, and NO PPP agreement.

These are not projections; they are crazy fantasies in this fake and fraudulent budget.

The Minister also spoke of the Orange Economy and the creation of a “Carnival City.”

But again, there are no details.

Where is it to be located? How will it operate given the Government’s policy to limit noise in urban areas? What will happen to this sector with the huge increases in the price of alcoholic beverages? Where is the funding and the business plan?

Cultural tourism requires investment in people and experiences, **not vague declarations!**

Our creative industries are a living asset, but they need structure and support, not speeches.

Tobago

Mr. Speaker, like most Tobagonians, I welcome any increase in the allocation to Tobago. We on this side will never oppose 'more for Tobago.'

However, we will always insist on truth for Tobago!

Mr. Speaker, what is being sold to the public as a 'record spend' of over \$3.7 billion dollars — made up of 5% of the budget allocation and an additional \$763 million in central government expenditure — is, quite frankly, deceitful, deceptive, and dishonest.

Mr. Speaker, the Government has blurred the lines between two very different types of expenditure:

- Direct THA allocations, which the Assembly can actually use to manage Tobago's affairs; and
- Central Government expenditures in Tobago, such as oil-spill response payments, WASA upgrades, T&TEC works, and other national programmes.

They are not the same!!!

Central Government projects in Tobago cannot be substituted for the THA's development funds.

They do not build Tobago's autonomy, nor do they expand the Assembly's fiscal authority.

Mr. Speaker, it was the People's National Movement — both in Trinidad and in Tobago — that voted to guarantee Tobago a minimum of 6.8% through the Tobago Island Government Bills. It was the UNC, aided and abetted by their ally in Tobago — the current Chief Secretary — who derailed and rejected that constitutional amendment.

The result, Mr. Speaker, is that instead of receiving 6.8% — roughly \$4 billion — Tobago is now getting only 5%, or \$2.96 billion. So let the record show: the UNC did not give Tobago a billion dollars more — they cost Tobago a billion dollars less.

Mr. Speaker, what are the facts?

This is NOT the highest percentage the THA has ever received.

In 2018, under the PNM administration, Tobago's combined allocation — including both direct THA funding and central Government spend — represented approximately 6.4% of the national budget.

So, what is being trumpeted today as 'historic' is, in truth, record-breaking spin.

When UNC Spins, Everybody Spins!

FAKE AND FRAUDULENT!

Mr. Speaker, the development allocation, which funds Tobago's growth, construction, and investment **actually decreased** by \$4.5 million, from \$205 million to \$201.5 million.

This is the same figure the Chief Secretary once described as 'fiscal wickedness.'

Today, he accepts it in silence.

And when we look for URP and CEPEP — two programmes that sustain hundreds of Tobago households — we cannot find any clear allocation. So, I ask: is it that CEPEP and URP will be shut down in Tobago after the next THA election, just as they are being dismantled in Trinidad?

Mr. Speaker, Tobagonians are not asking for favours; they are asking for value.

Since 2021, this THA administration has received over \$11 billion, averaging \$2.7 billion per year — more than any administration in the history of the Assembly.

Yet our people keep asking: what has improved in their daily lives?

My information is that over \$300 million in development spend has been awarded to contractors outside of Tobago, for works that Tobago contractors.

The economic effect is devastating — Tobago contractors who previously executed these services now face cashflow crises, and banks are moving to foreclose on long-standing local firms.

Mr. Speaker, tourism should be Tobago's economic engine, yet we see real signs of collapse.

According to the Tobago Hotel and Tourism Association (THTA), international tourist arrivals have dropped by nearly 70%, with only 24,500 foreign visitors recorded last year. This decline, confirmed by the THTA President in August 2025, represents an economic and social crisis for the island.

Mr. Speaker, we should also be honest about investments in Tobago: the PNM initiated both the Marriott and Elephant Tree projects. After spending over \$25 million on overseas travel, what new, bankable investments has the THA secured?

To those who once ran Sandals out of Tobago today I say, as the region embraces similar models — look at St. Vincent — see the opportunities we chased away.

Mr. Speaker, perhaps the greatest insult of this budget is the complete silence on Tobago's autonomy.

It is clear that the UNC's name is a misnomer!

Mr Speaker, there is no 'National' in the United National Congress and soon there will be no United. How could you be a National party and say not one word, not one line, not one promise in a budget about Autonomy for Tobago?

The Chief Secretary, who once declared Tobago's autonomy his life's mission, who led marches and accused others of betrayal was ignored by the Congress.

Today, besides his Congress partners the very ones who voted down the Tobago Bills, he presides in silence.

National Security

Mr. Speaker, the Budget Statement was eerily silent about crime and criminality.

This visionless Government did not present any workable anti-crime plan but boasted that murders were down.

Another fraudulent and false statement in the face of 10 murders in a 24-hour period and all within a state of emergency.

Since my appointment as Leader of the Opposition, I gave the country an undertaking that this People's National Movement Opposition will do, as it has always done in the national interest, cooperate with the Government on all initiatives and legislation that will advance the national good of the country.

Crime and criminality have been this country's "**Archilles' heel**" for decades. From legislative interventions and social programmes, criminal justice and policing reforms, the challenge remains pervasive, and the landscape remains fluid.

A sustained national effort is the only way to fight this menace, and the petty blame game will take us nowhere very fast.

As a matter of fact, we have seen political obstructionist behavior by the UNC when the PNM brought legislation to reform our justice system and to give law enforcement the upper hand in the fight against crime.

Today, many of the key spokespersons in the Government speak with a level of brazen hypocrisy on this matter that even the criminals probably hold their heads in astonishment.

The UNC has played petty politics with crime and has not cooperated with previous PNM governments in our efforts.

From the cancellation of the purchase of Offshore Patrol Vessels to protect our national borders, the dismantling of the Special Anti-crime Unit, the misuse and abuse of the air assets of national security, the appointment of a telephone operator to lead the country's premiere national intelligence agency, the dismantling of the country facial recognition systems, are just a few example of political misbehavior and wickedness that work towards protecting criminals and giving them the upper-hand to wreak havoc on our citizens.

*The country must never forget that it was the Prime Minister who once said the "**war against the criminals is not on the seas but is on the streets**" – to justify her government's reckless and irresponsible cancellation of a contract for the purchase of high powered and high-speed naval assets to protect and secure our nation's porous borders.*

We must ask ourselves the sobering question, how many lives this has cost the people of Trinidad and Tobago and our eastern Caribbean neighbors.

In case citizens are asking why they need to remind the country about this, it is because our circumstances today are as a direct result of uncooperative, undermining and destructive politics, practiced by many in the past 15 years who now sit in Government and who today are still on the stage pretending that they are now the champions and defenders of the people against the scourge of crime.

Mr. Speaker, fast-forward to today. Since assuming office on April 29th, 2025, the new UNC Government and its Ministers of Homeland Security and Defense have not articulated anything that inspires confidence!

As a matter of fact, their presence and utterances in this government have caused more fear and consternation in the national psyche than crime itself.

Mr. Speaker, National Security is in deep crisis and grave instability.

Within a state of emergency called by this Government to address a specific national threat, this is the present state of affairs:

- I. **Approximately 230 murders since this Government assumed office;**
- II. **Approximately 85 committed since the state of emergency was declared;**
- III. **30 murders already recorded in the month of October;**
- IV. **Removal of the Prisons Commissioner from his position;**
- V. **Sending the Commanding Officer of the Regiment on leave and rescinding the decision within 48 hours;**
- VI. **Termination of the appointment of the Chief of Defence Staff**
- VII. **Minister of Homeland Security in a recent passing out parade at the Police Academy, pleading with Senior Executives to stop infighting.**
- VIII. **To add insult to injury, this unpatriotic government cancelled our national Independence Day parade, because of a fear of attack by criminal elements. However, several ministers have been seen in very public places without fear of criminals. The nation remains in the dark on whether these threats were credible.**

Mr. Speaker, it is clear to the national community that the UNC has once again fooled the population.

They have no obvious plan to tackle crime from its root causes and are unable to demonstrate what it will do differently from the previous PNM Government.

Mr. Speaker, so far what the country has gotten from the Ministers in charge of our national security is nothing but astonishing and bizarre **for example (a) calling for the trying of child offenders as adults (b) asking the public to be patient; (c) advising that attorneys stop drinking milk from their clients, (d) invoking standing orders 27 (1) to evade answering questions on serious national security issues.**

All they can offer us is plastic bags of Hot air. These are certainly frightening times, and the road ahead will be bumpy and rough.

Public Utilities

Mr. Speaker, the new Minister of Finance, boldly mentioned and boasts about projects completed during the UNC's 5 months in office in the water sector.

Mr. Speaker, as Minister of Planning and Development in the last PNM Government, I worked closely with my colleague, the Member of Parliament for Arouca/Lopinot in the transformation agenda for the Water and Sewage Authority.

As part of this transformation roadmap, we secured funding from the Ministry of Finance through the development programme and the Inter-American Development Bank for a suite of projects that saw water flowing in communities for the first time.

Mr. Speaker the PNM was successful in completing over 400 small, medium and large projects that brought relief to many rural communities throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, over 600,000 thousand people experienced an improvement in their water supply, and no amount of UNC misinformation will erase our stellar achievement in the sector.

I urge the Government to continue the work that was done and the plans and programs put in place by technocrats and professionals that placed Trinidad and Tobago on the path towards achieving water security for all.

Projects that started in Guanapo, North Oropouche, Carapal, Freeport, Goldsborough, Santa Cruz and the Chatham Water treatment plants.

These projects started under a visionary PNM Government will bring relief to the citizens and we expect to hear that this UNC Government will carry through with them for the good of all.

The undermining and the demonizing of the transformation agenda for narrow political gains, has already reversed years of hard work by true patriots in the sector and the country has already started paying the political price.

Mr. Speaker, no amount of press releases to fool the people will bring about water relief. It was hard work, fairness and a commitment by the PNM to take on difficult decisions and undertakings that will secure our water future.

Mr. Speaker, although the Budget was silent on climate change, its impact on our water surface and groundwater resources is already bearing down on our citizens and the Government has said nothing that points towards a direction that inspires hope.

Mr. Speaker, the announced electricity rate increase for Commercial and Industrial customers came like a shock to many customers.

This is the same Government that campaigned and promised that there will be no increase in electricity rates in Trinidad and Tobago and in August this year, the Minister of Public Utilities boasted that the Government has rejected the last RIC report, which was submitted to the last PNM cabinet and was under consideration.

The PNM government gave no undertaking save to say that whatever decisions may be taken, the poor and the vulnerable will be insulated.

Mr. Speaker, in true UNC fashion, the country got a six (6) for a nine (9) with massive increases in the price of electricity, with these increases to be borne by all consumers in our supermarkets, small businesses, hair salons, shops, malls, and variety stores etc.

The Government has failed to put in place systems or policies to safeguard the poor and vulnerable in society against these price shocks.

Yet another example of a fake and fraudulent budget!

Education

Mr. Speaker, under the People's National Movement, education stood as a pillar of empowerment and opportunity. We invested in our students, protected the vulnerable, and built a system that worked for every child.

Under this UNC Government, that legacy has been destroyed.

Our education system has been gutted, neglected, and left visionless.

This Budget exposes a government without compassion, without foresight, and without a plan for the young people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Under the PNM, no child was left behind!

We funded the Remedial Education Programme, the Book Grant, and the School Feeding Programme.

Under this UNC Government, those very programmes have been cut.

The Remedial Education Programme was reduced by 4.4 million dollars.

The Book Grant was completely removed, leaving 20,000 students without help.

The School Feeding Programme was cut by 10 million dollars. And for the first time in years, no Vacation Revision Programme was held to help struggling SEA students.

Mr. Speaker, that is not policy, that is punishment. Mr. Speaker these people cannot run this place!

Under the PNM, we provided consistent funding for primary, secondary, and special schools.

With this UNC Government, there have been no increases, only deception.

The Minister boasted that 13 partner schools received 11 million dollars in support, pretending it was a new initiative. However, that same amount was allocated under the PNM in 2024.

Once again, the UNC has taken PNM projects, rebranded them, and claimed them as their own.

When we look at school repairs, the picture is even worse. Under the PNM, 98 million dollars was spent on repairing and upgrading schools.

Under this UNC Government, they were given 192 million dollars and spent only 26 million, less than 15 percent.

They even received an additional 83 million in the midyear and still failed to use it.

Mr. Speaker, schools had to turn to Regional Corporations for help to reopen. One school was forced into a shift system because there was no furniture, even after the Ministry of Education delayed reopening by a week.

That is incompetence and failure!

Under the PNM, we modernised education with the E-Classroom Project and the Educational Technology Unit, bringing digital learning to life.

Under this UNC Government, that very project was simply renamed NEXTCLASS and presented as something new.

The UNC recycles PNM achievements and pretends it is innovation.

In the youth sector, the pattern continues. NEW funding was cut by 45 million dollars. There are no new programmes at UTT, NESC, National Training Agency, Accreditation Council, YTEPP, or MIC. The provision for contract employment across both ministries of Education and Tertiary Education was reduced by 30 million dollars, putting the jobs of hundreds of professionals at risk.

Mr. Speaker, this Government has not only cut funding, but it has also cut hope. Under the PNM, we built educational opportunities. Under this UNC Government, they built excuses. They have dismantled what worked, silenced what mattered, and betrayed the young people of this country.

This Budget is not about building a nation. It is about breaking one. It is a Budget of broken promises, misplaced priorities, and fake delivery.

Sales Tax

Mr. Speaker, the only new source of revenue suggested by this government is the sales tax, which is intended, they say, to replace the VAT.

However, this new dispensation will take a minimum of five years to be fully implemented and not a cent of revenue will be derived in this financial year.

Wage Negotiations

Mr. Speaker, I noticed that PSA is celebrating what they perceive to be a done deal with an increase of 10% in their salary.

However, while they celebrate, it is interesting to note that nowhere in the estimates of expenditure can the allocation for the backpay of \$5 billion or for an increase in annual recurrent expenditure of over \$500 million, which is just for the civil service, be found.

It's not there. Did they forget? Was it a billion-dollar oversight?

And what about other workers and other trade unions? Will they also get a 10% increase? Or is the UNC playing favourites?

If they deprive the other trade unions of a similar 10% increase, which they simply cannot finance without devaluing the dollar, they will create massive industrial unrest.

Contract to Permanent Establishment

Mr. Speaker, the new Minister has outlined a policy of transition of fixed term contracts to the permanent establishment but let slip that only 40% of existing contract positions are targeted for this transition.

Apart from the fact that creating permanent positions on the civil service establishment is a complex undertaking that can take years to complete, what will happen to the other 60% of contract workers? Will they be terminated and sent home?

This will be another 10,000 workers who will lose their jobs.

In this context, I say to workers watch out! Your contract positions will now be filled by a UNC supporter, friend, financier, family, wife or husband, while you are sent home.

Because in this new Government, nepotism is the order of the day. Just look at the number of wives, husbands, siblings, children and outside women and men that are now on state boards.

This UNC simply doesn't have any moral or ethical code.

Development Programme

The Development Programme or PSIP is estimated at \$4.1 Billion or 6% of total expenditure. Is it enough? Can all those promises be fulfilled?

Will the population be given full disclosure on the areas of new revenue streams as bandied about boastfully during the election campaign? What are these new revenue streams?

Are they part of the development programme; are they part of recurrent expenditure or are they a figment of someone's fertile imagination?

While destroying the TTRA, no mention was made of any new significant revenue streams. As we all know Mr. Speaker, the PSIP is designed to promote growth, generate employment and attract investment.

No mention is made of how the PSIP will be used.

CEPEP and URP

Mr. Speaker, after mistreating and brutalizing the CEPEP and URP workers for months, the new Minister of Finance on Monday finally killed the programs and indicated the Prime Minister will perform the final rites.

This is the ultimate betrayal of workers who have been told that they would be getting back their jobs in a short space of time.

These workers who the government put on the breadline with an expectation that this would be temporary have now found out that there is no prospect of being rehired.

Another Fake and Fraudulent Promise!

What is their only consolation, Mr. Speaker? An unemployment fund? I must ask where will this fund reside and who will administer it?

Will we now see political patronage in exchange for employment?

Who will workers now have to grovel to in order to gain employment through this fund?

Another plan to suit the UNC's friends, family, financiers, wives, parents, children, husbands, sisters and brothers and outside partners.

Revenue Estimates

Mr. Speaker, this new Minister of Finance predicated the budget on an oil price of **US \$73.25 per barrel of oil and US\$4.25 per MMBtu** for natural gas.

He has severely overestimated the energy prices on which this budget is based, **therefore overestimating his revenue and severely underestimating the deficit.**

Mr. Speaker as I speak, yesterday **West Texas Intermediate oil price, a benchmark used by Trinidad and Tobago for decades, was just over \$57 per barrel.**

Shockingly, the US Energy Information Administration, a source used by the Ministry of Finance for decades for its forecasts, is currently estimating a **WTI price of US \$48.50 per barrel in 2026.**

This is **almost US \$25 below the Minister's estimate of \$73.25**, indicating that the Minister has grossly and deliberately overestimated the price of oil in 2026, in order to inflate his estimate of revenues from petroleum, thereby giving himself the ability to withdraw from the Heritage and Stabilisation Fund, when his bogus oil prices is demonstrated to be false.

Fitch Ratings, another source used by the Ministry of Finance in recent years just last month lowered its oil price forecast for 2026 to **\$60 per barrel**, based on increasing global oversupply of oil.

When we exposed the ridiculous oil price estimate quoted by the Minister on Monday, one of his inexperienced but talkative colleagues claimed that the UNC had looked at various scenarios, both optimistic and pessimistic, to arrive at that dubious \$73.25 oil price for 2026.

Mr. Speaker, the International Monetary Fund is similarly forecasting oil prices below \$60 per barrel for Brent Oil in 2026 and oil from Trinidad and Tobago fetches much lower prices than Brent on international markets. The World Bank is also estimating similar declines.

In an effort to avoid any form of doubt, Mr, Speaker, there is NO credible source in the world that is currently predicting an oil price above \$60 per barrel for oil in 2026.

That \$73.25 price was pulled out of a hat and is as fake and fraudulent as the rest of the Budget and only has one purpose, to falsely inflate the estimates of energy revenues, in order to meet the HSF rules for withdrawal of billions of dollars from the HSF.

Analysis of Fiscal Measures

Mr. Speaker, after inheriting an economy that was growing, year on year, this government successfully flatlined and brought our economy into stagnation in five months.

The Review of the Economy 2025 produced by the Minister of Finance is estimating a -0.8% contraction in the economy in 2025, a complete reversal of the growth curve in previous years.

This is after growth of 0.9% in 2022, 1.5% in 2023, and 2.5% in 2024, under the PNM.

Mr. Speaker, nothing in this budget is designed to address our stagnating economy, stimulate growth over the next year and provide the groundwork for an economic recovery. This is purely a budget of delusion.

But it is worse. The new Minister of Finance has brought fiscal policies which are **contractionary, inflationary and arbitrary; a fantasy designed to fool people.**

Mr. Speaker while this government congratulates itself, businesses will be reeling from increased taxes, surcharges, fees, prices and doubled costs at the port. Mr. Speaker in its haste to extract revenue, this government has put the business sector under immense pressure, sent up costs and has set the stage for this stagnation to turn into a full blown and persistent recession.

And these new draconian and punitive taxes are so hypocritical.

In 2020, the Prime Minister, who was then the Leader of the Opposition, loudly declared that:

"You cannot Tax a Nation into Prosperity. For a Nation to Tax itself into prosperity, It is like a man standing in a bucket and trying to lift himself up by the handle of the bucket. A UNC Government will lower Tax and put money back into the pockets of Citizens"

Look at the UNC now – Tax after tax after tax! The irony. They are SHAMELESS

Mr. Speaker, who do you think will bear the brunt of these increased costs for businesses?

The increase in electricity rates for industrial and commercial users will be certainly transferred to consumers, people will feel the pinch in everyday purchases. Increase in freight will increase prices of all imported goods, LPG increase will impact restaurants and small food businesses alike.

Mr. Speaker the banks have already stated that it is the customers who will pay the increased taxes charged to them.

With alcohol taxes doubled, will we see bars closing down across this country as persons now curtail their consumption? The UNC is the Grinch that killed Christmas limes and a killer of Carnival fetes, bands and events.

Mr. Speaker, the price of the cheapest locally produced bottle of rum has increased from \$110 to \$160, a whopping 45% increase. A bottle of Stag or Carib will now cost \$13, up from \$10 last week.

And to add salt to the wound, as his colleagues banged their desks and shouted that this punishment for our citizens was a “win” for everyone, the Minister described these huge increases ranging from 30% to 50%, as “small”, so out of touch are these nouveau elitists with the ordinary man in the street.

Mr. Speaker it is clear, an analysis of these measures indicate that it will only stymie business growth and investment and increase prices for consumers. These are clear

examples of contractionary and inflationary fiscal policies and in an economy that is stagnating, these policies are not the recommended approach. But the new Minister of Finance will not even admit under his tenure the economy has taken a turn for the worse, so he is in denial, head buried in the sand while he presides over a developing economic crisis.

Fiscal Measures

Fiscal Measures – Budget 2026 (UNC's Inaugural Budget)

Mr. Speaker, let me briefly review some of the fiscal measures and their implications.

1. Levy on Banks and Insurance Companies

0.25% Asset Levy on total assets of commercial banks and insurance companies.

This will automatically and immediately increase all bank fees to customers.

Commercial Banks do not have a history of absorbing costs and will pass it on immediately to the customers.

The Prime Minister said the Government will intervene to avoid this possible scenario.

The question now becomes how and through what mechanism?

2. Landlord Business Surcharge

New registration requirement for all landlords with the Board of Inland Revenue.

This will lead to an Immediate increase in rents throughout the country to all tenants. In addition, since it is going into the Consolidated Fund, this new tax deprives Local Government Corporations of badly needed funds to maintain local infrastructure and amenities

3. Electricity Surcharge

A fixed \$0.05 per kilowatt hour surcharge on commercial and industrial users.

The increase in the electricity rates will be passed on to the consumer through food, groceries, manufactured products and services. Our manufacturers stand the risk of losing their competitiveness in the Caricom market and further abroad.

4. Increases in Excise Duties, Fees and Charges

Alcohol and Tobacco and related Industries will face difficult times.

This will have serious negative effects on the Tourism industry in this country, since with this move alcohol is now much cheaper in ALL of the Caribbean Islands that compete for Tourist dollars.

Trinidad and Tobago was already struggling to compete with other countries that have a much better tourism product. Several bars and restaurants could also be facing imminent closure.

5. New National Investment Fund (NIF) Bond

When the first NIF Bond was issued under the PNM, the Prime Minister, then Leader of the Opposition described NIF as a dangerous and risky fraud and told her supporters to resist it because according to her, it was a **“Ponzi Scheme”**.

Mr. Speaker, this is yet another 180-degree twist, like the Dragon Gas with the Prime Minister continuing her flipflopping.

But Mr. Speaker jump high or jump low.

Let them say what they want, NIF 1 and NIF 2 are major success stories of the PNM and are two of the most successful investment vehicles and gifts to citizens in the history of Trinidad and Tobago and the region.

6. Higher Penalties for Traffic Offences

The government virtually scrapped the **demerit system introduced** by the PNM which had reduced road fatalities and road accidents significantly, but now, in yet another flipflop, wants to implement huge penalties for traffic offences as a **“revenue generating”** measure.

Some of these offences are very subjective such as careless driving, which when left to the interpretation of a police officer could mean anything while you face a \$15,000 fine.

7. Removal of Motor Vehicle Tax Concessions for Returning Nationals

Just last week the new Minister of Finance was quoted as calling on the diaspora to return to the motherland of Trinidad and Tobago, now that the UNC is in power.

But within hours of that cry, the Minister of Finance is disincentivizing the process by removing the incentive for returning nationals.

In other words, Mr. Speaker, they want nationals living overseas to return to live in Trinidad and Tobago, but they cannot bring their personal effects and vehicles without the imposition of punitive taxation.

This has to be some kind of bad joke.

8. Adjustment to LPG Subsidy

Mr. Speaker, this will have an immediate impact on small businesses who sell food like doubles and corn soup, and fast-food outlets, food carts, restaurants, parlours, cafes, roti shops and the myriad of caterers who sell food to working people, which must lead to an increase in the price of these food items.

The Prime Minister, who has a habit of making spontaneous ill-founded statements, was quoted as saying that not many people use the 100 lb. cooking gas cylinder for business purposes, which is absolutely not true.

9. National Insurance System (NIS) Reforms

According to the Prime Minister when she was Opposition Leader on the Campaign Trail;

“Any discussion about changing the retirement age would need serious consultations and, should that be the option preferred by the majority it should be one by choice.

That is to say those who wish to go home by 60 fine, those who wish to go home by 65 fine.

But you can't tell a man work his entire life, put his savings in NIS every week, every month, and you come to tell him now sorry sir you can't get it. You have to wait until 65.

You cannot continue like that."

In actuality, this measure, which will add 3% to national insurance contributions in **2026** and another 3% in 2027, thereby increasing the NIS contribution rate to from the present 13.2% of insurable income to 19.2% of insurable income by 2027, is **DOUBLE** what was discussed by the PNM, and **will lead to a 45% increase in NIS contributions.**

For the average worker, earning \$7,500 per month, this will increase their monthly contribution **from \$350 to \$500 per month**, thus wiping out any illusory "wins" from the UNC.

Further, the Prime Minister as the Opposition Leader said, emphatically, that before ANY increase in the retirement age is implemented, consultations must be conducted with the population.

However, the UNC did NO consultation on increasing the retirement age, and reducing NIS pensions, with ANY affected stakeholder or working person.

Notably, the Trade Unions, like the PSA, who screamed in outrage when the PNM publicly discussed this exact same measure with them in 2021 and 2023 are quiet as a mouse, while former trade union leaders, now in this House, banged their desks in glee when it was announced on Monday.

To use the exact words of the PSA in June 2021, still on its website: *"No to retirement at age 65 - Government Ministers – Shame on Them for suggesting an increase in the retirement age"*.

The words of the former UNC Member of Parliament for Couva South in April 2023, speaking on behalf of the UNC, also reveal the sheer hypocrisy of this UNC Government.

Indarsingh, a former trade union leader and shadow Minister of Labour in the then UNC Opposition said, on April 5, 2023, just over 2 years ago, and I quote:

*"the recent announcement by Minister of Finance Colm Imbert that the Rowley-led Government is seeking to increase contributions to the National Insurance Fund **is one***

of the most oppressive, anti-worker, deceitful stabs in the back of workers across the country”

“...the People’s National Movement has made mention of a consideration **to increase the retirement age, another measure which I vehemently and totally reject**”

“between the increase in the retirement age to 65 and this new dictatorial move to increase NIS rates, **it is clear that this Government continues to pick the pockets of the workers of this country**”

“more so, an increase in contribution rates means that all businesses will have to pay more to the (NIS) Fund. Given the increases in utilities, property tax and other related inputs, can this be afforded by small and medium businesses? **Increased expenses will lead to business closures, which will lead to unemployment**”

Property taxes. Of the 55 commonwealth wealth countries 49 have some form of property tax whether they are called land tax, rates building tax. Further, of the 194 members of the United Nations well over 100 developing countries have some form property tax in their tax systems. It is considered an essential mechanism for collecting taxes to fund local government bodies to enable them to complete their local area maintenance and development responsibilities. So that is the basic principle.

And Mr Speaker despite all the fanfare about the keeping promises about property tax the Minister was clear.....he has only “halted the implementation of the Property Tax Act. That piece of legislation is not repealed and therefore still stands as part of legislative framework. Where does leave property holders, especially those who are selling property and Give an undertaking to ensure that their property is properly conveyed?

And what is is surcharge on property owners who renting their property? It is not calculated on the net income derived from the rental of the property net of expenses, it’s calculated on the gross value of the rental which is penal! What about those corporations and or individuals that currently rent properties and already tax on their income? They too are landlords and now to be subjected to another tax on that same income?

Similarly many retirees rent out part of their property to supplement their retirement income if they have any and must now pay the surcharge too?

This is hypocrisy Mr Speaker and attempt to mislead the public? Property tax by another name ?

These statements, which were in response to a mere public discussion on the NIS initiated by the PNM some years ago, are all now ironically applicable to this UNC Government, which according to Indarsingh's logic in 2023, has now come in 2025 like a thief in the night to oppress workers, increase their NIS contributions by almost 50%, reduce workers' disposable income significantly, and damage the livelihood of small businesses, without any consultation whatsoever with the population.

10. Agricultural Incentives

The Minister made a **loud boast** about removing VAT on agricultural equipment.

However, because of the PNM's policy on the Agriculture sector, this sector is already a **VAT Free Sector**, something the Minister should know.

This is just smoke and mirrors, gambage and obfuscation by the new Minister of Finance

11. VAT Removal on Basic Food Items

The promise to give the population another UNC "win" by removing VAT on vegetables like cucumber, tomatoes and lettuce and on coconut water is **ABSURD** and it shows that the new

Minister of Finance is clueless about key elements of his portfolio.

The items that he mentioned fall into the first category of zero-rated items published by the PNM Government in 2016, that is unprocessed food of a type for human consumption.

It appears that UNC Ministers have become accustomed in the short space of 5 months since April 28th of dining at high end establishments like the **Hyatt** and having food delivered to them.

Clearly, they don't go to the grocery store or the market. If they did, they would know that the items identified by the Minister for removal of VAT have been **EXEMPT** from VAT for almost 10 years, with the exception, possibly, of salt.

Ironically, the removal of VAT from salt is a clear indication that the UNC now wants the thousands of dismissed workers in CEPEP and URP to suck salt, while eating grass!

Before I conclude, as the **first female Leader of the PNM**, and in my own right as an accomplished professional woman, I must speak of the complete absence of gender equity in this Budget.

Mr. Speaker, I currently hold the distinguished position of **President of the Women Parliamentarians of Trinidad and Tobago**.

This organization is a strong advocate for Gender Based Budgeting, which is a process that utilizes fiscal policies to promote gender equality.

Through Gender Based Budgeting, the gender gaps in government policy can be better addressed to serve the specific needs of men and women alike.

In consideration of this gender based approach, I am compelled to ask;

- **What is the gender impact of these allocations and is there a gender equity component in this budget?**
- With women facing additional barriers in the workplace, the creation and support for childcare centres and homework centres could increase female labour force participation.
- Why isn't this mentioned in the Budget Statement?
- Given the drive towards digitization and the underrepresentation of women and girls in STEM (Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics), where are the policies to channel girls towards these higher paying fields with growth opportunities?

These are just a few policy considerations I would like to raise Mr. Speaker as it relates to gender considerations in our policies and our budget.

The budget was silent on the issue of gender, which is unfortunate, but not unexpected from this myopic UNC Government.

Gender Budgeting goes beyond one New Project.

THE CONSTITUENCY OF ARIMA

Mr. Speaker, I would not have the privilege of addressing this august House today were it not for the Smart, Intelligent and Strong People of Arima — a people who rejected the false narrative of the UNC.

The people of Arima proudly supported the **People's National Movement**, rejecting the Member for Siparia and her “star team” of **empty rhetoric and broken promises.**

The people of Arima learnt their lesson from 2010 to 2015 and chose the **PNM once more**. The people of Arima have said **Never Again UNC!**

Mr. Speaker, I have had the **honour of serving the people of Arima** for over **sixteen years**, and for more than **thirty-four years as a proud member of the PNM**. Service is not a slogan for me; **service is my life, my love, and my purpose.**

The good and wonderful people of Arima, by **an overwhelming majority**, placed their confidence in me once again at the 2025 polls.

Arima, Mr. Speaker, is the **best and most beautiful**

constituency in Trinidad and Tobago, from **Las Cuevas, La Fillette, Blanchisseuse, Morne La Croix, Brasso Seco, Verdant Vale, and Calvary**, to **Mt. Pleasant, Arima Proper, Wallerfield, Demerara Road, Aripo, Pinto, and Santa Rosa**, and now proudly **Valencia**.

I have **walked every inch of this constituency**, ensuring that **no community is left behind**. To better serve the people, **sub-offices** have been established in **Blanchisseuse** and **Santa Rosa Heights**, with another soon to open in **Valencia**.

Under the People's National Movement, **Arima became a centre of development** in every sector — health, housing, digital access, social services, and youth empowerment.

That, Mr. Speaker, is what **PNM Delivered for the People of Arima**.

Under the PNM, **Arima became the first Smart City in the Caribbean**, implemented through the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development and the Inter-American Development Bank.

Stand anywhere in the Arima town centre and enjoy **free, high-speed WiFi — PNM working for the people of Arima**.

The **Arima Connect Project** revolutionised public service delivery, integrating healthcare systems under the **“One Patient, One Record” model**, connecting radiology, pharmacy, and laboratory services.

PNM Delivered Digital Transformation for Arima.

Thanks to a PNM Administration, we delivered the **state-of-the-art Arima Public Hospital**, serving Arima and surrounding communities.

Under the PNM, we also opened the **Blanchisseuse Health Centre**, which now includes an **Incident Response Unit, Conference Centre, and Non-Communicable Disease Services**.

In 2025, the Centre received a **portable ultrasound machine**, improving diagnostic care for rural residents.

PNM Delivered Better Healthcare for Arima.

Mr. Speaker I am proud to report that in 2025, the PNM upgraded the **Blanchisseuse and La Fillette Fishing Facilities** under the *Upgrade of Fish Landing Sites Project*.

These works benefitted **over 120 fisherfolk and their families**.

PNM Delivered for the Fishing Villages of Arima's North Coast.

Mr. Speaker, under the PNM, youth from **Blanchisseuse, La Fillette, Brasso Seco, Avocat, Morne La Croix, and Temple** participated in **NEW placements** and **Youth Agricultural Programmes**.

Today, the UNC has **shut down those opportunities**, leaving young people **jobless, hopeless, and abandoned**. Arima will not forget.

PNM Empowered Youth – UNC Destroyed Hope in Arima.

I have supported **over 700 families** in Arima with school supplies and materials. This year has been especially hard, Mr. Speaker, because the **UNC Government fired over 50,000 hardworking citizens**.

Not a single mention was made of the **Book Grant Programme**.

Under the PNM, however, we launched the **Arima ICT Access Centre** — connecting communities, empowering citizens, and **driving real digital inclusion**.

The Students of Arima will not forget the callous treatment of the UNC.

PNM Delivered the Digital Society for Arima.

Under the PNM, **roads in Aripo and surrounding communities** were improved. But today, I must urge this Government to continue upgrading access roads into Aripo and along the North Coast, because **development must not die under the UNC**.

Arima is the **ancestral home of our First Peoples**.

Under the PNM, the **Santa Rosa First Peoples Community** received **25 acres of lease land** along the Arima-Blanchisseuse Road, along with **electricity and pipe-borne water**.

PNM Delivered for Arima's First Peoples.

Mr Speaker we thank our partners, **Habitat for Humanity, Republic Bank Foundation, and Proman**, for supporting this historic development.

Mr. Speaker I call on this UNC government to **show respect to the First Peoples with action, not photo opportunities.**

While the UNC has **fired staff** from the Land Settlement Agency, the **PNM continued to build communities** through the **Home and Village Improvement Programme** in Demerara and across Arima.

We did not just talk about development; **PNM Delivered Homes, Hope, and Dignity for Arima.**

The **PNM reintroduced social development services in Arima** through the establishment of the **Arima Social Services Centre**, fully constructed, relocated, and outfitted under a PNM Government.

PNM Delivered for the People of Arima.

The PNM delivered major water upgrades through the **Community Water Improvement Programme**, including the **Aripo Water Treatment Plant** and the **refurbishment of the Guanapo Water Treatment Facility**, boosting production by **2.5 million gallons per day**.

Yet the UNC shamelessly took credit for it.

Communities such as **Central Arima, Allenor Gardens, Mt. Pleasant, and ByPass Road** now enjoy a more reliable water supply.

PNM Worked. PNM Delivered. PNM Cared for Arima.

We also completed the **Charles Street, Myra Lane, Darwill Gardens Extension, and Tannis Lane Pipeline Projects**, improving water service for hundreds of residents.

Work began on the **Arima Public Library** and the **Arima Velodrome upgrades**, both initiated under the PNM.

I urge this Government to **complete what we began** for the benefit of Arima's youth, athletes, and families.

Mr. Speaker, this Budget reveals one undeniable truth: **under the UNC, Arima does not win.**

They have **abandoned every project started by the PNM** — no **Pinto Community Centre**, no **Pinto Pavilion**, no **roadworks for Aripo or the North Coast**, no **jobs**, no **youth programmes**, no **community development** and no hope. Mr. Speaker the people of Arima will not forget.

Mr. Speaker, the truth is clear: **when the PNM governs, Arima grows; when the UNC governs, Arima suffers.**

The people of Arima deserve **delivery, not deception.**

And the People's National Movement remains the **only party that works, delivers, and cares** for every citizen of this proud constituency. **PNM Delivered. PNM Worked. PNM Cared**

Conclusion

Mr. Speaker, this government in only five short months, has lost the trust and confidence of the people and now that the mask is unveiled, and the true plan is at hand, the people are realizing they are taking us to a place where no one wants to go.

Mr. Speaker, in five months, the government has attempted the following:

To completely **destroy** our national Independence Day celebrations.

To completely **destroy** our nation's achievement of independence.

To completely **destroy** our republican status.

To **destroy** our national sovereignty.

To **destroy** our relations with our Caricom neighbors.

To **destroy** our Caribbean region as a zone of peace

Mr. Speaker, in only 5 months the government has fired the board of directors of every state enterprise and every statutory body.

In five months, the government has tried its best to destroy racial and ethnic harmony.

They have tried to promote a notion of ethnic superiority, but we in the Opposition cannot and will not support the **Mass Firing of 50,000 workers;**

We will not support a social crisis brought about by targeting the poor and vulnerable.

The **PNM** will not support forced austerity in this country and the hardship it is causing.

The **PNM** will not support attacking small medium and big businesses.

The **PNM** will not support fiscal incompetence and clueless Ministers.

The **PNM** will not support the depletion of our FOREX reserves while misleading the population about cartels.

The **PNM** will not support a devaluation of our dollar.

The **PNM** will not support the government taking the country into a debt trap.

The **PNM** will not support the destruction of the very fabric of our society while the UNC seeks to *rewrite our history*.

The **PNM** will not support the diplomatic and national security crisis being perpetrated by this government on *innocent citizens* who now live in fear of being targets in a greater geopolitical game.

The **PNM** will defend the rights and freedoms of all our citizens while this government abuses its *constitutional majority*.

The **PNM** will defend our independent institutions which we hold sacred and dear and which the UNC is determined to destroy.

And finally, the PNM will not support this **fake** and **fraudulent** budget.

Mr. Speaker, this government has lost its mandate, they have lost the goodwill of the people. Never in the **history** of this country has this happened so quickly.

Mr. Speaker, this is a budget of **deception**, a budget of **treachery**, a budget of **betrayal** and a budget of **destruction**.

Mr. Speaker, we warned the nation, and it is sad to say it is coming to pass.

This is a government that is so caught up in the limelight of the dance with powers greater than itself, that it has forgotten the people and has become tyrannical in its governance.

Mr. Speaker, the hope lies in people who refuse to forget who they are and in an inherent pride in ourselves and our struggles.

Mr. Speaker, this was demonstrated as the masses congregated to celebrate our Independence despite the actions of a wicked government to deny us our patriotic right.

Mr. Speaker, the people of *this* country will **always prevail**, and we are coming together under the banner of unity.

They have totally rejected the divisiveness perpetuated by this government and are ready for the steady, stable and competent hand of the **Peoples National Movement**.

Mr. Speaker, after they have destroyed all that have been built over 63 years of independence and beyond,

it will fall to this side to rebuild, and we are prepared to do so hand in hand with all the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.