

BELIZE**No. HR 5/1/12****HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**Tuesday, 22nd March 2016**10:18 AM.**

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Pursuant to the directions of the Speaker on the 8th March 2016, the House met on Tuesday, 22nd March 2016, in the National Assembly Chamber, Belmopan, at **10:18 AM.**

Members Present:

The Hon. Michael Peyrefitte, Speaker
 The Hon. Dean O. Barrow (Queen's Square) Prime Minister, Minister of Finance, Public Service, Energy and Public Utilities
 The Hon. Gaspar Vega (Orange Walk North), Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries, Forestry, the Environment and Sustainable Development
 The Hon. Erwin R. Contreras (Cayo West), Minister of Economic Development, Petroleum, Investment, Trade and Commerce
 The Hon. Patrick J. Faber (Collet), Minister of Education, Culture, Youth and Sports
 The Hon. John Saldivar (Belmopan), Minister of National Security
 The Hon. Michael Finnegan (Mesopotamia), Minister of Housing and Urban Development
 The Hon. Manuel Heredia Jr. (Belize Rural South), Minister of Tourism and Civil Aviation
 The Hon. Anthony Martinez (Port Loyola), Minister of Human Development, Social Transformation and Poverty Alleviation
 The Hon. Rene Montero (Cayo Central), Minister of Works, Transport and NEMO
 The Hon. Wilfred P. Elrington (Pickstock), Minister of Foreign Affairs
 The Hon. Pablo S. Marin (Corozal Bay), Minister of Health
 The Hon. Hugo Patt (Corozal North), Minister of Labour, Local Government and Rural Development
 The Hon. Edmond G. Castro (Belize Rural North), Minister of State in the Ministry of Transport and NEMO; Deputy Speaker
 The Hon. Dr. Omar Figueroa (Cayo North), Minister of State in the Ministry of the Environment and Sustainable Development
 The Hon. Frank Mena (Dangriga), Minister of State in the Ministry of Public Service, Energy and Public Utilities
 The Hon. Beverly Castillo (Belize Rural Central), Minister of State in the Ministry of Immigration
 The Hon. Tracy Taegar-Panton (Albert), Minister of State in the Ministry of Investment, Trade and Commerce
 The Hon. Elodio Aragon Jr. (Orange Walk East), Minister of State in the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports

The Hon. Dr. Angel Campos (Corozal South West), Minister of State in the Ministry of Health
 The Hon. John Briceño (Orange Walk Central), Leader of the Opposition
 The Hon. Cordel Hyde (Lake Independence)
 The Hon. Francis Fonseca (Freetown)
 The Rt. Hon. Said Musa (Fort George)
 The Hon. Rodwell Ferguson (Stann Creek West)
 The Hon. Jose Mai (Orange Walk South)
 The Hon. Julius Espat (Cayo South)
 The Hon. Kareem Musa (Caribbean Shores)
 The Hon. Michael Espat (Toledo East)
 The Hon. Oscar Requena (Toledo West)
 The Hon. Orlando Habet (Cayo North East)

Members Absent:

The Hon. Florencio Marin Jr. (Corozal South East)

MR. SPEAKER in the Chair.

PRAYERS by Pastor Alvan Gentle Jr.

PAPERS

RT. HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Public Service, Energy and Public Utilities): Mr. Speaker, I rise to lay on the Table Sessional Papers No. HR19/1/12, HR20/1/12, HR21/1/12 and HR22/1/12.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, Sessional Papers No. HR19/1/12 to HR21/1/12 are ordered to lie on the Table and Sessional Paper No. HR22/1/12 is referred to the Ombudsman Reports Committee for examination, consideration and report.

PRESENTATION OF REPORTS FROM SELECT COMMITTEES

HON J. SALDIVAR (Minister of National Security): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present the Report from the Finance and Economic Development Committee: HR23/1/12 and HR 24/1/12.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, those Reports are ordered to lie on the Table.

HON J. SALDIVAR (Minister of National Security on behalf of the Minister of Education, Culture, Youths and Sports): Mr. Speaker, I rise to give the Reports from the Constitution and Foreign Affairs Committee: HR25/1/12, HR26/1/12, HR27/1/12, HR28/1/12 and HR29/1/12.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, those Reports are ordered to lie on the Table.

MOTIONS RELATING TO THE BUSINESS OR SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE

RT. HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Public Service, Energy and Public Utilities): Mr. Speaker, I move that at its rising today the House adjourn to Wednesday, 23rd March 2016 at 10:00 A.M.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the Prime Minister had indicated to the Leader of the Opposition my intention and wish to start at 9:00 A.M

tomorrow. So may I ask that the Motion be amended to reflect 9:00 A.M instead of 10:00 A.M.

RT. HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Public Service, Energy and Public Utilities): Obligated, Sir, I move that at its rising today the House adjourn to Wednesday, 23rd March 2016 at 9:00 A.M.

MR. SPEAKER: Honorable Members, the question is that the House at its rising today adjourn to Wednesday, 23rd March 2016 at 9:00 A.M.

All those in favour, kindly say aye; those against, kindly say no. I think the ayes have it.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

A. Government Business

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the debate on the second reading of the General Revenue Appropriation (2016/2017) Bill, 2016, is about to be resumed.

Before we begin, I should like to draw Honourable Members' attention to Standing Order No. 64, 'Presentation and the second reading of the Appropriation Bill', especially paragraph 5 which reads as follows: "*After the Motion for the second reading of the Appropriation Bill has been resumed, under paragraph 4 of this Standing Order, the debate shall be confined to the financial and economic state of the country and the general principles of Government policy and administration as indicated by the Appropriation Bill and the Estimates*".

Members are therefore asked to please confine your debate within the prescribed limits of the Standing Order. In plain English, please have your debate be about the Estimates.

I would like to remind the Honourable Members of other parts of the Standing Orders, specifically Standing Order No. 42 (b), which states that an Honourable Member shall maintain silence while another Member is speaking, and shall not interrupt, except in accordance with these Standing Orders. Honourable Members are fully aware of the need for me to voice this at this moment in time.

Please, I remind you to have mercy on me as I have to listen to 31 of you.

I would also like to remind the visitors in the galleries that you must preserve silence and must conduct yourself in a fit and proper manner during the meeting.

We now have the resumption of the debate on the General Revenue Appropriation (2016/2017) Bill, 2016.

HON. J. BRICEÑO (Orange Walk Central): Mr. Speaker, you seem to be in a good mood today, Sir. Mr. Speaker, fellow citizens, it is my honour to address this House and our nation in response to the budget presented by our Prime Minister on behalf of his UDP Administration. We in the PUP believe that the budget is the most significant part of our legislative agenda and the budget presentation and debate is a very important exercise. We take it very seriously and participate in this annual exercise in a spirit of patriotism and in fulfillment of our responsibilities as elected Members of this Honourable House. As is our practice,

we prepare not only through our work, as a parliamentary caucus, but also by consulting with our party supporters, the private sector organizations, the unions, the churches and civil society. We do this so that our contribution as best as possible reflects the will and concerns of the people, and so, on behalf of all of us here on this side of the House, I thank all those who assisted us and engaged with us during our consultations. Likewise I wish to thank the fine members of the public service who assisted in the preparation of the budget. All those finance officers, the Financial Secretary, and everyone in the Ministry of Finance, we thank you for your hard work. Perhaps this is a good time for me to lend support to the much needed salary adjustment to public officers, teachers, police and BDF, which the Prime Minister mentioned in his presentation. This is one aspect of the budget we can enthusiastically support.

We believe that at the heart of any budget, and by extension this exercise, should be the confidence that better days are ahead of us. We believe that this exercise should inspire all our people hope, and from all of us it should elicit action. Indeed, we expect the budget to be more than just numbers. Any responsible Government in 2016 should formulate, present and pass a budget that prioritizes its programs. This budget must also show the efficiency and effectiveness of the Administrations stewardship. The budget should be the ultimate exercise in the effective allocation of the nation's resources. Perhaps this fact has been willfully ignored in these past years, since the Auditor General's report indicates that this administration seems indifferent to affordability and efficiency of the spending of the public purse.

Mr. Speaker, Belizeans are incredible people; we are a creative, productive, friendly and compassionate people. For the most part we are an optimistic people. This 2016/2017 budget, I am afraid, does not reflect any of the qualities that we see in our collective Belizean identity. This is not a budget that is optimistic. This is not a budget for Belizeans. It is not creative, and it is neither hopeful nor resourceful as we are. The priorities set out in this budget, if any, are not the priorities of the Belizean people. They are recycled initiatives and programs put in place by an administration that lacks the competence to find real solutions to the serious problems that face our generation. This budget will not make us safer; it will not provide those much-needed jobs that will grow our economy; it will not encourage any new growth in the business sector; it will not expand education for our young people who are out of school; and it is not reflecting the fairness we need if we are to lift up all Belizeans. Indeed, after the tax increase on fuel levied on us just days before the budget speech, Belizeans listened to the Right Honourable Prime Minister's speech with fear, afraid that with the Petrocaribe money all but gone that this government may be one pay cheque away from bankruptcy. Everyone knew that, the elections now behind us, this would be a year filled with pain and sorrow.

Having just won the General Elections in Orange Walk, and let me take a moment here to record my gratitude to the good people of Orange Walk Central. I wished we could all anticipate a good year. After all the best, they said, was yet to come. So before the speech I really expected a good budget. Sadly, this budget is a letdown. UDP's, PUP's and all of us have been let down by a budget that lacks any meaningful plan for the future. It offers no path to the creation of new jobs or the improvement of productivity. There is no plan or idea for an improved investment climate and no blueprint for social uplift for those Belizeans who are living below the standard of living. Will this budget result in any significant reduction in poverty? It will not. Will this budget instill the confidence needed by the private sector to create jobs? It will not. Will it grow the Belizean economy at a pace that can bring some support to our struggling middle class? No it will not! This is a budget that lacks the imagination one would expect from a new administration, and it certainly lacks the confidence that will make young

Belizeans want to stay in Belize and invest. There is nothing here that even attempts to encourage any entrepreneurial spirit, nothing that speaks about reigning in government spending, nothing to make our people on the margins hope for a good year.

Mr. Speaker, during our consultations many issues were raised. Questions were asked and suggestions given, especially on issues dealing with poverty, education, health and safety, jobs and corruption. I will refer to these issues as we go along. However, one point that resonated everywhere we went is that the Belizean people are tired of the way we conduct ourselves in this Honourable Chamber. One woman observed that our behavior was equivalent to a circus. Another inquired whether we behaved with such disrespect, even when students attended our sessions. The point was made that we seem to prefer to conduct the business of this nation like people involved in a street quarrel and hurl insults at each other rather than debate the issues. Another point that was made involved the responsibilities of the Opposition. I was asked directly if our only function, as the Opposition, was to object or disagree. I wish to give every assurance that, as a responsible Opposition, we will do more than just oppose. As the Opposition, we will continue to carry out our mandate in a responsible way. Yes, we will provide strong but respectful reactions to those things that negatively affect our national development, but we are also ready to offer remedies.

Let us now review some of the main points of this budget.

- In 2015, our economy grew by a meager 1.2 %, well below the 2.5% that Government projected and well below the average world economic growth of 1.3%.
- Government overspent by more than \$143 million. In a \$4-billion-economy, Government spending seems out of control. Government is spending 25 cents out of every dollar in our economy.
- At the end of 2015, we owed \$2.35 billion, with a capital “B”, and we are going to borrow another \$183 million this year, and, according to the Right Hon. Prime Minister we should end up at about \$2.8 billion by this time next year. I will say more on this later.
- The national debt will soon be at 80% of GDP
- The government spent Petrocaribe money, bonanza style, over what he called an emergency with a small “e” and we squandered even more borrowed Petrocaribe money on feel-good projects and tacos in an election year. In October alone, Government spent \$44.7 million.
- According to the Auditor General, we continue to be plagued by a lack of transparency and accountability.
- Our agriculture products suffered major hits, and we go into this new financial year with no real plan to help the primary sector recover and return to growth.
- Capital financial flows have gone down by \$100 million.
- Big companies like Fruta Bomba in the north is packing up, and the Meridian group in the south has already closed down, and the oil is drying up.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the chickens have come home to roost, and, in 2016, as the soca song says, “*the paaty done!*” Just before the budget speech, the Prime

Minister whopped us with that fuel tax to the tune of \$50 million and then proclaimed this budget has no new taxes. The truth is that this 2016 Budget is no celebration of stability. There is no boldness in this budget. The big picture here is that Belizeans *wah tek wah lick* in 2016, and when the step up on super bond 2.0 comes next year we will take an even bigger licking.

Let me break down for you and the Belizean people what is really yet to come. In spite of the \$50 million in the new tax on fuel, the deficit is projected to be \$62 million. Of course, last year they projected the deficit to be \$87 million, and it ended up at \$180 million, which they said was because they had to pay Mr. Ashcroft. Well, guess what? Mr. Ashcroft is going to collect more, plenty more, when the arbitration is settled. It is not over yet, because of something that the Prime Minister slipped in into his budget in page, I think, it's 23, where he is saying that the local debt is going to go up to over \$700 million. That would make you believe that he is setting aside at least another \$200 million to be able to pay for the nationalization of BTL. Then there is the \$135 million, which he said was recorded as financing. Call it what you want, the Belizean people still have to pay it back.

Government spending will once again outweigh revenues, this time by \$192 million. Over 39,000 Belizeans who want to work won't be able to get a job, and thousands of new graduates will join the work force this summer. And, for yet another year, Boost and Boots and other so-called upliftment programs will do nothing to lift close to half of our people who are poor or out of poverty. Now grant you the Boost is helping school attendance, but they are not helping people to get out of poverty. These are the facts.

Now the Right Honourable Prime Minister said in his presentation that this budget is a bold one given the current circumstance. It doesn't seem that way to me, and here is why: Of the \$126 million we are proposing to spend in health, not a single penny will be spent on addressing the mental health problem, a growing issue in Belize. Also, there are zero dollars for critical maternal and neonatal services, which affect our youngest and most vulnerable, our babies. Close to \$1 million was cut from housing and urban development. In a billion-dollar budget, only \$1 million is budgeted for poverty alleviation. The food pantry will be cut by \$100,000 from \$2.8 million to \$2.7 million. In the Ministry of Social Transformation, constituency assistance program is \$0, back-to-school assistance program is 0, and Mothers Day Appreciation is 0.

Sorry folks this is not an election year. These actions don't seem bold. They seem irresponsible, for what we see is increased spending and increased debt. Yet our poor remain poor and no better off. What is so bold about that? The Right Honourable Prime Minister also said that we are entering a period of stability in a time of change. What he does not say is that we are already in a recession, one with no end in sight and one which this budget, at best, fails to address and, at worst, pretends does not exist. The truth of the matter is that, for each of the past two consecutive quarters of 2015, the economy shrank. In the second quarter of 2015, the economy shrank by 1.6%. In the third quarter of 2015, the economy shrank by 1%, and, for the fourth quarter, the SIB is yet to announce the figures. But, if you go by the Prime Minister's announcement that overall the economy grew by 1.4% in 2015, then there has not been any growth since the first quarter. Economists define a recession as two consecutive quarters of negative growth. The Prime Minister knew this situation fully well when he unveiled his election promise of "The best is yet to come." So, when the Prime Minister comes up with another slogan, "A period of stability in a time of change", the only stability we are going to get, Mr. Speaker, is continued *haad* times, and the only change we will get is change for the worst.

Mr. Speaker, the last external trade bulletin from the Statistical Institute of Belize spells out the disastrous state of our economy. Exports for January 2016 are down by 29.5%. Drilling down a little bit deeper, and studying those numbers closely, Mr. Speaker, it shows you that marine exports shrunk by 79%. Banana export shrunk by 34%. Sales of orange concentrate shrunk by 30%. These were only partially offset by some sales in petroleum of \$3 million and an increased sale of volumes of sugar. By any standard, local or international, it is clear that our economy is contracting.

Mr. Speaker, we are in a recession. And how is the government planning to get us out of this recession? By spending and putting a \$50-million whap on the Belizean people. Do you know how much of that \$50 million each of us will have to pay? Every Belizean man, woman and child will have to pay \$143 more to Government this year. This is the true picture: an economy in recession; our national debt reaching 80% of GDP; and a Government clueless about how to fix one of the key pillars of our economic growth, the agro productive sector.

Now, Mr. Speaker, recessions come and they go. We survive them best when we ensure that productive Belizeans drive our development. Of course, sometimes government has to intervene. We on this side believe that in times like these we have to work with our partners in the productive sector so that we can put all our collective talents into fixing what is wrong and getting us back on track. I met with people from the agro productive sector, and what they are saying is that 2016 is not looking good. Papaya is going out of production in part due to government's ineptitude. This will cost over 800 jobs and millions of dollars in income. Our people in the productive sector are asking if government can end the delays in paying back their GST refunds. They are once again asking if government would once and for all move to charge GST on the backend of production instead of the current practice of charging on the frontend. We would support this. The productive sector would also like to see its government consult more when it comes to trade negotiations and do its part to get more of our products into the markets in the Caribbean and Central America.

Mr. Speaker, I have no way of proving this, but I would want to believe there is no other government in this region where the word Petrocaribe is used more than here in Belize by the UDP. It would seem like no sitting in this National Assembly can occur without some utterance of Petrocaribe. It seems to be the linchpin of our government's development strategy. Sadly, Petrocaribe can no longer roll it because the bonanza is done! In two years, this UDP Administration spent over \$325 million of Petrocaribe funds. One would have hoped that this kind of spending would have served as a catalyst, a driving force, for our development. So let's see if such was the case. Of the \$325 million spent from Petrocaribe funds, \$35 million was put into the National Bank. From what the records show, it appears that the National Bank is operating at a loss. In the past two years the National Bank has lost about \$2.6 million, and the main reason for that loss is because the operating cost seems greater than the income it can earn. This is not sustainable, and we can't keep putting more and more money into the bank. It must be managed in a sustainable manner.

Let us now look at the infrastructure projects that were done. I wonder if many of the inferior quality streets and roads that were rehabilitated with Petrocaribe funds were done cost effectively. We won't know until we see a report of how much these streets and roads cost and who got those contracts. This may very well be why people keep telling us about a lack of transparency and accountability. You know, Mr. Speaker, the Member from Belmopan loves to remind people of the past and about what we supposedly did between 1998 and 2008. He pretends to forget that it was the PUP who did the Marine Parade reclamation project. We built the Boom/Hattiville road and the Orange Walk by-

pass. We did work on the Hummingbird Highway, and we built the Southern Highway. New communities were built in Fresh Pond, Los Lagos, Mile 8, San Lorenzo Housing Site and Maxboro. And we doubled the economy, we doubled the economy, and our unemployment was at 8.4%. (Applause) That is the proud record of the People's United Party Government, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps the people from the special-vehicle institution called BIL, Belize Investment Limited can provide for us a list of their projects, and let us see if those projects impacted Belizeans the way ours did.

Now I was the person who signed the Petrocaribe Agreement some years ago, and, as I understood it at the time, the role of the fund was mainly to assist in the development of the country. It is clear that some of the \$325 million was spent in fulfillment of that objective. What is also true, however, is that many millions of these loan funds were spent mainly in public sector spending and frivolous cheer programs, instead of investing and strengthening our job-creating-export-led industries like the papaya, sugar, citrus, banana, shrimp and the very important tourism industry. Some of the millions spent giving cheer, buying flat screen televisions and pibil should have been used to develop and fortify a sustainable economic base. We did not do this. Petrocaribe monies should have also been invested in creating a formidable trade infrastructure to support our industries, enabling them to compete not only in the region but also in the international markets.

As we see it, the most important economic challenge facing Belize today is how to create an environment that will allow our private sector to flourish and to grow in these days of dynamic change. We should have used some of that \$325 million to help the productive sector brace for what was coming. Many of the industry stakeholders already have good ideas and answers to some of these problems but lack the resources to fix them. Those Petrocaribe funds would have gone a lot further in helping Belizeans than flat screens, road trips and party bags, the ones that you all gave just before the elections. Do you all remember?

Now turning to job creation and wages, development will come if we invest in our human capacity. It will come if we spend money on efficiency if we focus on those sectors and commodities where we have a competitive advantage, if we can increase the yield and productivity of our production, manufacturing and service enterprises. Did any of this \$325 million in Petrocaribe funding get spent in initiatives that would impact on this either directly or indirectly? Those we spoke to in the agro productive sector and the Chamber do not feel it did. If we are to invest in our people, then we need to make sure that wages are fair and that what we earn is enough. Today 90 cents out of every dollar the average Belizean earns is going in just meeting the necessities of life. That means only 10 cents is left for saving or investing or for taking a little vacation. Earlier I mentioned that we on this side support the salary adjustments for the teachers and the public officers, and we do. But where wages are concerned it ends there.

The Right Honourable Prime Minister took pride in declaring that his Government advanced the wellbeing of the working class by touting the lowest unemployment in a decade and a surge in wages. Need I remind the Prime Minister that, in 2008, the unemployment rate was 8.4%. Simple mathematics will show you that this is lower than what he announced in his budget presentation. Let's take a closer look at the facts. Since 2008, more than 1,500 jobs have been lost in the Corozal Free Zone alone. When we left office in 2008, over 3,000 employees worked in the Corozal Free Zone. Today that number stands at 1,521. In papaya, this year alone, 260 jobs have been lost. At its peak, papaya employed over 700 people. So really the job loss in papaya has been even more devastating when looking beyond just this past year. In banana, over 400 jobs have been lost over the past six months. All together, over 3,300 jobs have been lost in key

industries alone. So to say that the unemployment rate has gone down is at least a fiction, if not a fraud, on the people.

With respect to real income, today's working man or woman who earns above the threshold of \$26,000 annually or \$500 per week and expected relief from this UDP Government is now paying more taxes than ever before. What they got instead of relief was the tax whap on fuel, further eroding their incomes. Today a working-class Belizean earning \$26,000 pays more than 40 cents of every dollar earned to the government. For every dollar earned, Income tax goes with 25 cents, plus 12 1/2 cents on GST, which = to 37 1/2 cents of direct taxes. Add social security, fuel tax, and property tax and you see how we get to the 40 cents.

As for the purported surge in salaries in public officers, let us look at the whole story on wages. No less than the statistics produced by the IMF show that, over the eight years of the UDP Government, the average income per person in real terms after accounting for inflation has increased from \$7,318 to \$7,663, an increase of only \$43 per year or 0.6% per annum, an increase that you can't even buy a pound of beans every week because beans cost more than \$1.00, Mr. Speaker. In other words, with the UDP, this, Mr. Speaker, is in stark contrast to the nine years under the PUP during which the average income per person grew more than five times faster than under the UDP, increasing from \$5,675 to \$7,318 or by over \$182 every year per person. So, for all the hundreds of millions of Petrocaribe monies, the millions more in borrowing and spending by the UDP government, the people have gained nothing, not so much as an extra pound of beans.

Mr. Speaker, our economy will grow, and sometimes, like now, that growth is not going to be enough to lift people up. Still we have to find ways to sacrifice today so that we can do right by our children to ensure they inherit a better Belize than the one we inherited. Our future then depends on investing in our best resource: the creativity and skills of Belizeans. Education for tomorrow, Mr. Speaker, means that today we must provide relevant education. Our students must learn using digital technologies, and they must learn computer science as well as reading, writing and arithmetic. All these subjects should be taught in every primary and every secondary school in Belize. We must commit to this if we are to allow our young people, a chance and a future PUP Government will ensure that we get computers and computer science in all our primary and secondary schools. This should work hand in hand with those critical thinking skills, life skills, the natural sciences, physical education and Belizean history. We should include African and Mayan history. Education is about the formation of the whole person, body, mind and spirit. So we agree with the Right Honourable Prime Minister when he says that, as much as Government is spending on education, it is not going far enough. Education is not only the key to social transformation but also the key to economic uplift and prosperity. This is why when it comes to investing in education it must be meaningful and it must be sustainable.

If we are to properly educate Belizeans for the 21st Century, we can no longer grow in small increments. We need to leap forward. To be honest, I am disappointed every time I think about all that was done with the \$325 million in Petrocaribe funds. I wish more had been invested in education. In spite of its entire purported obsession with education, for the \$325 million in Petrocaribe, a mere pittance was invested in education. Yet the next generation will have to be paying back this money.

I believe that, like the Prime Minister, the Minister of Education care deeply about the future of this nation and about our children and young people. I hope that, like we do, the UDP believe wholeheartedly that we cannot build this

country if we do not have a plan for education that envisions the direction and path we want our country to embark on. Where will our nation be in 2050? Upon what priorities will we build our development? Once we have decided upon that path then we can develop our plan for education.

So I ask, what is this plan? What are the industries of the future that we want our country to be participating in? Please don't tell us that they are the same industries we are already in, as BELTRAIDE, year in, year out, focuses on, that is to say, agriculture and tourism. For, if this is the case, all it shows is that there is no thought, no vision for our future. I suggest we work with the churches and other education providers, with industry stakeholders and with other partners to devise a plan that will result in relevant education, a plan that will provide a relevant and holistic education that equips our young people for tomorrow's careers, a plan that will allow students to create jobs for themselves and other Belizeans. Mr. Speaker, I want to remind all of us what Alec Ross, the author of *Industries for the Future*, wrote: "There is a great shame in our leaders when a life is made less than what it could be because of a lack of opportunity."

Mr. Speaker, \$8 billion in eight years, that is more or less what this Government has spent since coming to office in 2008. This is how much they have asked of the Belizean people. By any measure this is a grandiose amount of money. Of course, the Government will be the first to tell us that their performance over these past eight years has brought about prosperity. And yet after eight years and \$8 billion, 175,000 Belizeans live on less than \$10 a day. The minimum wage is still \$3.25, the exact same place where we left it in 2008. Crime is completely out of control and our economy can't even grow enough to keep up with the growth of our population. The Right Honourable Prime Minister says that the forecasts for the state of the public finances of Belize are sturdy and stable. Is it sturdy enough to withstand another year of anemic economic growth? I fail to see how this will happen, when, by his very admission, the production from virtually all export commodities is expected to contract.

Add to this is the mother of all problems, the rising national debt. I do not believe that we can achieve financial sustainability if government is constantly borrowing to pay its light bill, its water bill, and its rent. This is very much like using your credit card to pay your bills because your expenses are higher than your earnings. The economists tell us that we should do all possible to make sure that the ratio of our national debt to GDP does not pass 60%; ours will soon exceed 80%. As I said, the Right Honourable Prime Minister projected GDP growth this year of between 1.5% and 2%; however, in a recent statement put out by the IDB, countries in our region are expected to grow at a rate of 4.5% thanks to the significant drop in oil prices. This drop in oil prices is creating a favourable climate to implement reforms, to increase productivity and international competitiveness. If what the IDB is saying is true, why is the Prime Minister projecting our rate so low? Or better yet, what must we do to reach that 4.5%?

We share the opinion of those we consulted in the private sector who told us that they believe we can do better than 4.5%, but we have to be focused. In so doing, we are prepared to work with the government on the following:

1. We will help on initiatives that bring meaningful relief to the poor. And, while we are at it, why not involve the churches when we have set aside \$5 million for grants or for help? I think last year they had it as disability. The churches, when we met with them yesterday, they were pointing out that they are tired of just being called to come and bless new buildings and pray for us. They want to participate in the work that we are doing, and, if the government is setting aside \$5 million to help the poor, they are prepared to be a part of that to ensure that that \$5 million gets in the hands of the poor people. (Applause)

2. We will work with the government if they want to find the money to roll out NHI for every Belizean man, woman and child.(Applause)
3. We are prepared to take to the streets if this government will work with us to develop a plan to stop the killings. Mr. Speaker, I beg the Minister of National Security to give us a plan that will bring the killings to under 100 murders per year and end the urban civil war that has overtaken some of our best communities in our cities and towns.
4. Let us come up with a plan to develop our human capacity so Belizeans can be more relevant, efficient and productive both in the public and private sector.
5. We are ready to cooperate on initiatives that will help our struggling agro productive sector.
6. We will work across the aisle with you on initiatives that will help create more small businesses in Belize.
7. We will cooperate on initiatives that will help to strengthen transparency and accountability. Mr. Prime Minister, let us together sign the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC). (Applause)
8. We will work with you to fulfill our commitments under the Sustainable Development Goals.
9. And make no mistake about it, Mr. Speaker, we will work with the Government on finding a peaceful and lasting solution to Guatemala's unfounded claim to Belizean territory clear in the understanding that we will never surrender one square centimeter of what we know to be rightfully Belizean territory, (Applause) be it land, sea or river. We are going to protect every single square centimeter of our territory, Mr. Speaker.

To show our serious commitment to this, let me say now that we say, yes to the following measures in this budget:

- ✓ Yes, we support the salary increases for teachers and public servants and the BDF and the police officers;
- ✓ Yes, we support the provision that will provide for more officers in the police and coast guard;
- ✓ Yes, we support those initiatives that will allow for more money to be spent in education that will directly benefit students as opposed to administrative costs;
- ✓ Yes, we will support those pro poor initiatives provided that they are being properly managed.

We say all these things, Mr. Speaker, because our sole purpose, as PUP's and as Belizeans, is to promote and support a development vision that can succeed in delivering the best quality of life for all Belizeans. Yet, I fear that there are dark clouds looming overhead. The numbers tell us that last year's budget was just a bunch of figures for the government. After all, they outspent what they had forecasted by \$142.8 million. Last year's budget was yet another exercise in

incompetence; it was a fairytale without a happy ending. That is proof enough that this is an irresponsible budget. The projections for this year offer no more than a promise of stability, inadequate economic growth, insufficient funding for investment for our young people at risk, no initiative that will improve the standard, the investment climate, thereby bringing about new job creation, and it will not seriously address poverty and uplift those on the margins. What it will succeed at doing is continue to waste and spend much more than what we can afford to spend. Because we believe that this budget fails the Belizean people, we vote no to the excessive spending.

Mr. Speaker, during last week's consultation a gentleman got up and spoke of the living conditions of a Belizean family he visited. He spoke of visiting a home in the Toledo District where the only possession that family had was one small table and a fire hearth. The children, he said, went to bed every night on the damp floor. This is the sad reality for too many of our people, and this should tear at our conscience. No Belizean should have to live like this in 2016. No Belizean should have to survive like this in our \$4-billion-economy. Every Belizean child who will go to sleep on a cold floor tonight is proof of our failure to lead this nation to prosperity. (Applause)

Our vision, the PUP vision, is for a fair and thriving Belize with an economy that is growing on pace with our population growth, where our children can go to sleep on a bed, where young people can get a relevant education and then find good jobs that they can turn into careers, where our elder citizens can retire with dignity, where parents can send their children to school and families can thrive in safe neighborhoods. We in the PUP believe that, just as responsibility is shared, so too must opportunity. This is what we mean by the promise of prosperity. The PUP is ready to work with anyone who shares this vision. To our supporters we say it is time once again to come home. To everyone else we say, "Believe again"! We promise you that together we can build a Belize that works for everyone. Mr. Speaker, I still believe in Belize. Thank you, Sir. (Applause)

HON J. SALDIVAR (Minister of National Security): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise this morning to make my contribution to the debate on the budget for fiscal year 2016/2017 and beg your indulgence in allowing me to refer to my notes.

MR. SPEAKER: Yes, I was going to remind Members that, and thanks Minister, for the purposes of the Budget Presentation you can read.

HON J. SALDIVAR (Minister of National Security): Mr. Speaker, I will start by saying how extremely proud I am of this United Democratic Party Government (Applause) and of our Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Dean Oliver Barrow. (Applause) This, Mr. Speaker, is the first budget debate since our re-election to an unprecedented third term as the Government of Belize. (Applause) Never before in the post election, in the post independence history has a Government been so popular as to win three in a row. (Applause) Mr. Speaker, even though we are only four months into the third term, I can tell you that we are preparing for the fourth. (Applause) And things are looking good for the fourth term.

But, as I focus now on the budget for fiscal year 2016/2017, I start, as I usually do, by looking at our performance for the year just ended. Mr. Speaker, I start off by looking at the unemployment figures which the Leader of the Opposition spoke about. I don't know if he notice but unemployment today is the lowest it has been in the last five years. (Applause) And the 2008 unemployment figure to which he refers has to be clarified by the fact that there was bloated spending, bloated borrowing, unsustainable, and that's why we were where we were in 2008. (Applause) In 2012, we were at 15.3%. We took it down to 12.9%

in 2013, 11.6% in 2014, and now it's down to 10.1%. (Applause) That is sustainable, Mr. Speaker. That is what we call prudent management of our economy. Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, this single indicator is the main reason why we have won a third term. Jobs are being created. People are working. People are satisfied with the UDP. (Applause)

Right here, Mr. Speaker, in my neck of the woods, the Santander Sugar Factory has created hundreds of jobs for my people here in Belmopan and the wider Belmopan area. (Applause) Every day we can see the Santander bus taking our people to and from work. In tourism, hundreds of jobs have been created. In agriculture hundreds more have also been created. In construction, hundreds of jobs have been created, and that's why the unemployment rate is down to where it is today. We won a third term by creating jobs, and we will win a fourth term by creating more jobs. (Applause)

Gross domestic product, Mr. Speaker, was a mere 1.4% for 2015, a drop from the very impressive 4.1% in 2014, Mr. Speaker, those on the other side are quick to point to the slowdown in the economy. But, Mr. Speaker, decrease in GDP growth is in no way, shape or form indicative of any trouble with the general productive sector. The fact that unemployment has gone down is telling us that jobs are being created. The economy is robust. The economy is still performing. The drop in GDP rate is mainly due, Mr. Speaker, to steadily decreasing oil production, coupled with steadily decreasing oil prices. The fact that we were still able to grow the economy in spite of such heavy revenue loss from petroleum is incredible. The fact that we were still able to create thousands more jobs is commendable. The fact that we still boast one of the most stable economies in this region is miraculous.

But, just so those on the other side don't start getting ideas that 1.4% GDP is bad, let me remind them that in their last full term, the last full term of the last PUP Government in 2007, GDP growth had already slowed down to 1.1%. That is after they had spent \$1.5 billion that they had borrowed and recklessly spent. Their economy, their version of growth economics had already slowed down to 1.1%. We, Mr. Speaker, borrowed only \$325 million and look all across this country at the wonderful work of this United Democratic Party Government. (Applause) Everywhere you go, Mr. Speaker, there is development. Everywhere you go there is infrastructure work. Everywhere you go roads have been built and continue to be built. Everywhere you go schools have been built, and continue to be built. Even here in Belmopan, thankful to the Minister of Education and the Minister of Finance, Kuxlin Ha is receiving a new school building. (Applause) Right here in Belmopan also there is the beautiful roundabout at the Roaring Creek junction, and three others are currently under construction here in Belmopan, no joke. The Belmopan ring road project is no joke. The Isidoro Beaton Stadium is no joke. (Applause)

All across this country, Mr. Speaker, you can see where our \$325 million went. (Applause) The Marshalleck Stadium, the Santa Elena Stadium, the Carl Ramos Stadium, the PG Stadium, to name a few, are all there for the world to see. What did we get from the PUP \$2 billion? We got the super bond and nothing to show for it. Mr. Speaker, we still have the hangover from that super bond because, if you look in the budget debated here today, under debt servicing, Mr. Speaker, we still continue to pay for that dreaded super bond. This year alone \$52 million has to be spent on the super bond, and we have nothing to show for it. We must never forget, Mr. Speaker. We on this side will not forget. The people of Belize will not forget the super bond.

Talking more, Mr. Speaker, on the performance of this UDP government, it is worth noting the achievement of the lowest rate of inflation in recent memory, minus .9%, Mr. Speaker, phenomenal. And, even though a major

contributor to this negative inflation rate is falling fuel prices, we must give kudos to the Prime Minister and this government that has not allowed the inflation rate to go above 2% in the last eight years. (Applause) What this means, Mr. Speaker, for the common man and woman, I don't know where the Leader of the Opposition studied his economics, contrary to what he has been saying our spending power has been protected by the United Democratic Party. (Applause) Add to that, Mr. Speaker, the fact that public officers will receive their third consecutive raise of pay, and thanks, Mr. Leader Opposition, for supporting it.

Mr. Speaker, I am the Area Representative for Belmopan. Belmopan is the home of thousands of public officers and teachers. Mr. Speaker, I stand here proud to know that the people who I represent, the public officers and the teachers who voted for me in great numbers, especially in Belmopan Central, will be receiving another raise of pay. (Applause) Also, Mr. Speaker, our retired public officers and teachers who will be benefitting from this raise of pay will also along with the other retired workers in this country be benefitting from an increase in Social Security pensions. (Applause) This, Mr. Speaker, is absolutely amazing. I love my Prime Minister, and I love my UDP Government. The people of this country love our Prime Minister; the people of this country love our UDP Government. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, this budget is good for Belize. It is also good for my Ministry to which I now turn. This budget invests in our security and safety. This Government, Mr. Speaker, has increased the budget allocation to the National Security Ministry each and every year since we have been the Government of Belize, and this year is no different. The Ministry of National Security has moved from \$132 million to \$141 million in the current budget. Out of last year's budget, Mr. Speaker, we were able to grow the Police Department by a whopping and unprecedented 320 new police officers. (Applause) The BDF, we were able to grow by 160 soldiers, and the Coast Guard, we have been able to grow by 94 seamen. (Applause) Last year, Mr. Speaker, we also completed dormitories in Hattieville, refurbished the Coast Guard base, repaired the Barracks at Price Barracks, repaired the barracks at Police Training Academy, and repaired the Pomona Police Station.

From this budget, Mr. Speaker, we will add another 160 police officers to our ranks, another 50 coast guard to our ranks and another 80 BDF to our ranks. In this fiscal year, Mr. Speaker, we will complete the forward operating base at Hunting Caye. (Applause) We will commence the ground work for the patrol base at Northern Ambergris Caye. We will complete the multipurpose building within the Coast Guard Headquarters compound. We will support the construction of the joint forces bases at Consejo. We will commence construction of station Punta Gorda, and we will commence construction of station Big Creek, and we will acquire, Mr. Speaker, for the first time in history of this country 200 foot patrol boat crafts valued at over US \$10.2 million. (Applause) This, Mr. Speaker, will allow our Coast Guard to properly police and manage even our economic zone which is over 200 miles out.

In the BDF, over \$2 million will be spent on training for our helicopter pilots. Yes, Mr. Speaker, we now have three helicopters in the BDF. (Applause) Half a million dollars will be spent on the road to the conservation post at Chiquibul and \$4 million will be spent for troop-lifting vehicles and other infrastructure development within the BDF. I am confident, Mr. Speaker, that with the level of support we are getting in this budget, the Ministry of National Security, the Police Department, the Coast Guard and the Forensic Department will all be able to carry out their mandate of keeping Belize safe.

I want to turn my attention just briefly, Mr. Speaker, to the remarks made by the Leader of the Opposition, and, first of all, I welcome him back for his

second coming. This is his second term as Leader of the Opposition. Unfortunately, he may have taken over under circumstances not too friendly because it was very noticeable in his presentation the lack of applause from his colleagues on that side of the House. But at any rate, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank him again for his support that he has offered in his remarks for public officers and teachers to get their raise. But he very quickly ran off the train track as he began to talk about the woes of this Government and tried to compare them to the performance of his Government between 1998 and 2008. He spoke about we are on the brink of bankruptcy. I don't know where he got that one. So much of what he was saying in his remarks was this chicken-little kind of mentality, trying to tell the Belizean people that all is wrong. But we have to keep reminding him. I didn't want to do it. We are in our third term. We shouldn't have to continue to refer back to 2008, but they keep throwing it in our face. They keep trying to say that they performed better in 1998 to 2008 than we are doing. Mr. Speaker, there is no rating agency out there threatening to downgrade Belize to bankruptcy. Do we forget so easily that that's where the PUP had taken us where we had been downgraded to bankrupt?

Mr. Speaker, he says again that the budget will not create jobs. I just went through that in my earlier presentation. The unemployment rate is at the lowest it has been in the last five years, and we continue to take it downwards. It has been going down for all that time, Mr. Speaker. When unemployment rate goes down, Mr. Leader of the Opposition, it means we are creating jobs. That is what that means. (Applause) He says that we are doing nothing to reduce poverty. They like to use these absolutes like nothing. Mr. Speaker what is boost? What is Pantry Program? What is the subsidies, education subsidies? Aren't those poverty alleviation programs? And didn't we get a resounding approval from the World Bank for our Boost Program as an exemplary program to be duplicated and replicated in other countries where the World Bank wish to take it? (Applause) How can you now tell us that we have no program for poverty reduction? And then this is the kicker for me, Mr. Speaker. He tries to criticize our Boost Program and our Subsidy Program which makes schools more accessible to our young people, and he actually said, "You send them to school. You have more children go to school, but that does not help them get out of poverty". Later on in his presentation, he says, he declares, "Education is the way out of poverty". Which one is it, Mr. Leader of the Opposition? You should have read the speech they provided for you before hand to take out those conflicts and contradictions. (Applause) You can't, on the one hand, be saying Boost and Pantry Programs, boost and subsidy, don't take people out of poverty and then on the next hand say that education is the key. So you need to tell me which one it is, Mr. Leader of the Opposition.

He talked about exports are down, and, of course, whenever they are going to give their presentation, they are going to look at the ones that are negative and they won't highlight the fact that tourism is at its highest level ever for the country of Belize. They won't highlight that. They are going to tell you about shrimp that went down 79% because there was a disease, because the industry faced a problem, and that is why shrimp went down by 79%. They spoke about petroleum. BNE is running out of petroleum. BNE is running out of oil. It is not infinite. Eventually that oil field is going to close down. So the fact that they are slowing down on production has to mean that we are going to have less and less money from oil and it has to mean that that will contribute to a reduction in our exports, Mr. Speaker.

And then he talk about Petrocaribe, and he wants to tell us you know, he wants to school us about how to spend Petrocaribe money. I mean I guess they are between a rock and a hard place because they have a job to do, but each and every

time that they open their mouth and try to criticize something from this government we can always point to their slip that is showing. We can always point to what they have done. You can't come and instruct us, Mr. Leader of the Opposition, because when you had access to the Petrocaribe money, and he said that, everything he hears from this government is Petrocaribe, that we are singing the praises of Petrocaribe, Petrocaribe here, Petrocaribe there. Yes, we are telling the people what we are doing with Petrocaribe. (Applause) And that is why in every half turn you here Petrocaribe is building a road here, Petrocaribe is this, and Petrocaribe is that. They didn't want the Belizean people to know about Petrocaribe. They never used to whisper or shout Petrocaribe because they did not want the people to know that we had Petrocaribe. They did not want the people to know what they were doing with Petro Caribe. Over \$80 million they had, and we don't know what they did with it. We know what they did with the Venezuela money. We know what they did with that, Mr. Speaker. So don't come and try to lecture us on how to spend money because the very same people who were in that 1998 to 2008 administration, including the Leader of the Opposition who tries to play Pontius Pilate, were all involved in the fleecing of this nation.

And then I have to defend our public officers, Mr. Speaker, and specifically I have to defend the people at the Statistical Institute of Belize because these people are the quintessential professionals. These are people with integrity that are there. Mr. Perriot, is that the name of the fellow that heads that? Nobody can question their integrity, and, to come here and say that the figures coming out of the Statistical Institute are bogus, that's making an attack on these people's integrity. In fact, I believe, I can proudly say that this government has been the government that has made the Statistical Institute of Belize totally autonomous with no interference from anybody within this government, unlike what the IMF had to say about the Statistical Institute when Minister Ralph Fonseca was in charge of the Statistical Institute of Belize. It is back then that the IMF wrote in their report about manipulation of figures. It is not this government. You haven't heard IMF complain, Mr. Leader of the Opposition, about our controlling of the Statistical Institute of Belize.

And then he talked in this rhetoric that the people have received nothing from the UDP. How comes did we win, and three times and looking to go for our fourth? How is it that we were able to win? How is it that the people returned us to government for a third consecutive time and, according to the Leader of the Opposition, we have been doing nothing for them? And I see the Member for Cayo South doing his finger like money played a role. No, they voted for me because of Isidoro Beaton. That is why they voted for me. (Applause) They voted for me because of Cemetery Road; \$1.2 million we spent on Cemetery Road. They voted for me because we delivered for the people of this country. (Applause) You know the truth of it is, and they are wishing, Mr. Speaker, that because Petrocaribe has slowed down, they are figuring that we won't figure out a way to continue the development. (Applause) We will continue the development. We will figure a way to find monies other than Petrocaribe, and all you have to do is spend the next four years watching us do it. (Applause)

And I will say this, Mr. Speaker, again, in wrapping up, I want to thank the Leader of the Opposition for the about-face that he has made; and notice I'm saying he; I am not saying his party. I am thanking you, Sir, for the about-face that you have made in terms of the Guatemala issue. Thank you! But I don't know, I did not hear any applause from your colleagues when you said so. I have to wonder if that is the view of your party because I have heard a certain good gentleman from the other side who I shall not name but he said, "He can talk what he want, but I know how I feel about the Guatemala issue, and it's not that." (Applause) So I want to thank the Leader of the Opposition. I want to thank

him for his words. I believe him because he is a foreman, but I don't know that your party is with you on that one, and so we will have to wait and see.

And I close off by his reference you know, again, he wants people to feel like all is so bad about civil urban warfare happening on our streets. Facts-check, Sir, last year it was 26 in Belize City. This year it is 6. That's the murder count in Belize City. We have that under control, except for one or two now and then. Last year at this time we had 26. This year we have 6. (Applause) Mr. Speaker, I close again by saying that this budget is good for national security. I thank the Prime Minister for the almost \$10 million more that he is injecting into my Ministry. This Ministry is good for Belmopan. This budget is good for Belmopan. There is so much already happening and so much more to happen in Belmopan, and I support this budget. Thank you. (Applause)

HON. C. HYDE (Lake Independence): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know it's been a long time since I have been in this House, and I want to start by thanking the good people of Lake Independence for returning me to this Honourable House because there was never any guarantee that I would get this opportunity again, and it's not one that I take lightly. I will do my best to do my job to represent the dreams and aspirations and interests of the people of Lake Independence. They are my bosses. It is to their drums that I march. You know it's been five years since I have been here, Mr. Speaker, but nothing has really changed in the House. The Member for Belmopan still blames the PUP every chance he gets for everything that happens under the sun. He probably blames PUP for the closing down of Fruta Bomba. He blames PUP for when it rains actually. He blames PUP when it rains and probably blames PUP for the cold front too. You know nothing has changed. It's like a soap opera. You know you could leave the soaps for years and when you return and watch it it's the same thing. You don't skip a beat. Well, that's what's happening in here today with the Member from Belmopan.

You know he says that jobs are being created, people are working, people are satisfied with their living, hundreds of jobs in tourism, he says, hundreds of jobs in construction. I wonder where the Member for Belmopan lives. I don't know where he lives, but he should speak for himself because I have been all over this country, north to south, east to west, and I don't meet these happy sunny people he is talking about because the people I meet they are taking a licking out here. The people I meet are struggling to pay their bills, struggling to send their children to school. You know this, Mr. Castro. They are struggling to pay their house rent, struggling to give their kids three square meals a day. It may be that the people he meets are people who are being nice to him, because that's what we do you know. We tend to be nice to the Ministers because it's you that have it. So we have to be nice to you.

But the Member for Belmopan says that the budget for National Security has increased every year, and it's true. It has, but every year the Ministry of National Security spends less than is allocated for them. So, it looks good on paper, and he can make that boast that the budget for National Security is increased every year, but, in point of fact, they spend less than what is approved for them. So someone needs to explain that. What that means is that it translates into less provision, less support for people like our soldiers. I mean I have heard stories about our soldiers having to eat corn beef and white rice three times for the day. I have heard stories about some of our soldiers having to eat tilapia.

MR. SPEAKER: One second, Member, Members of the gallery on this side, remain silent when the Members for this side are speaking. Some of you are talking no better than that. Continue, Member. (Applause)

HON. C. HYDE (Lake Independence): Thank you, Sir. They have to eat tilapia four times per day. Now don't get me wrong, tilapia is nice, don't get me wrong. When you get corn beef and white rice you clean your plate, but you can't give me that every day. And our soldiers are complaining that they don't have boots, they don't have bullets, and their uniforms are faded. So something is amiss here. We have this big budget, and everything seems fine and dandy, but it is not translated into better support for our soldiers, and so we got to get that right. Someone has to account for that, but enough about the Member from Belmopan.

Mr. Speaker, the scripture tells us that we must live by faith, that we must believe in things not seen and that they are better days ahead. But, Mr. Speaker, this Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for Fiscal Year 2016/2017 is abusive of that faith. It takes way too much liberty with that faith. Before I continue, let me publically thank the many public officers who I am sure spent many sleepless nights making sure we have a budget on time. I can only imagine how hard it must have been to put down figures for certain Ministries that they know make absolutely very little sense because they know the real needs, they are on the ground, but they work for politicians, and so they must yield or face the wrath. The public officers know that the Ministry of Health needs in excess of \$6 million under Capital II. But the ruling politician says, "No, the Ministry of Health can only get a third of that because the Marion Jones must get another \$4.5 million." The public officers know that the farmers are the bedrock of any country and that the Ministry of Agriculture needs far more than the peanuts they have been allocated to assist the small farmers in the villages. But they have to go with the paltry figures because the politicians say they must.

Mr. Speaker this Budget is a disappointment. But it shouldn't be because it is a mere continuation of the slow, steady march to an unequal society where a few have everything and the vast majority has nothing. The Government has had a combined budget of almost \$8 billion over the last 8 years, \$1.5 billion of which they have spent on infrastructure projects, including the \$325 million from Petrocaribe. And yet there is more poverty today than when the UDP first took over at the start of 2008. Eight years later and there are more people looking for work and can't find work than ever before. Eight years later and there are more school-aged kids out of school than ever before. Eight years later and there are more people living in broken down houses than ever before.

The Government says they are pro-poor, and I agree: They are all about keeping you poor. (Applause) This budget will ensure that. This budget is like all the rest. It will not make the lives of the 175,000 poor persons in this country better. In fact, of the \$1 billion that will be spent in this budget, the Ministry tasked with fighting poverty, the Ministry of Human Development, Social Transformation and Poverty Alleviation, will receive a mere 3% of the entire budget, mere 3%, to fight a poverty rate that is hovering near 50%. But poverty has never been a priority for this Government, despite all their hearty protestations to the contrary. What's priority, as expressed in, budget after budget, is the purchase of new vehicles. What's priority for the Government is the construction of buildings and bridges and streets and drains. What's priority is the handful of contractors who can do no wrong.

Mr. Speaker, every year the Government spends more money on new vehicles than they spend on the entire food pantry program for Belize City. Every year Government spends six times more on new vehicles than the Ministry of Education spends on their entire school feeding program for the many thousands

of primary school-aged children who need the assistance. Every year Government spends \$3.3 million on new vehicles but only spend \$573,000 on the school feeding program, even though \$600,000 is allocated each year. In fact, Government spent more on the purchase of new vehicles last year than they spent on the apprenticeship program, Youth for the future, the National Sports Council, and the Ministry of Housing combined. Now we are talking about a country that has 175,000 poor persons. That means almost half of our people cannot afford \$10 a day to feed themselves, and there are thousands more who are teetering on the edge of poverty, just one sickness away from being poor, or one unexpected expense away from being unable to feed their children or pay their monthly bills. In fact, Mr. Speaker, of the just about 135,000 persons who we have employed nationally, 35,000 are seasonal workers, which is to say they only work certain months in the year. Another 22,000 workers are earning less than \$150 a week, while another 25,000 or so are earning between \$150 and \$200 weekly. Can any of us in here live on that, \$150 a week? We should see if we can, then maybe we would understand a whole lot more what poor people experience each day. And perhaps, perhaps then our policies will be truly pro-poor because how can a Government say they are pro-poor, but effortlessly spend \$3.3 million or \$3.4 million on new vehicles each year with no plan afoot to rationalize its vehicle fleet, so they can spend more money on the people who need the help the most?

You now, Mr. Speaker, the Government boasts a lot about winning three straight elections, and I suppose they are a big deal, after all political parties exist to win elections. But for me I measure success by how many lives you have made better, how many persons you have lifted out of poverty. (Applause) And the reality in 2016 is that the few, the lucky friends and families of the Government, laugh all the way to the bank while the many, the children's of the dispossessed and the disadvantaged, are condemned to a life of poverty. Meanwhile this 2016/2017 budget, Mr. Speaker, is silent, practically silent, on arguably the most pressing issue of our times. What are we going to do about poverty? What are we going to do about child poverty? There are children going to bed hungry at night in this country, in a country so rich yet its people so poor. We have a whole generation of children who will grow up as poor, or even poorer than their parents. And what is going to happen to those children's, children? Spending on infrastructure in politically critical constituencies is politically and strategically brilliant, but at whose expense? And then what? What's the point of all the parks and playgrounds and streets and bridges, if afterwards the people don't have jobs and can't feed their children and send them to school?

My theory, Mr. Speaker, is that the government has no flesh in the game, no personal interest in lacking down poverty. Their children are all set, meanwhile the government wants to boast about the food pantry program in Belize City and in Cayo. But that is a band-aid solution to an enduring problem. There is nothing in this budget that will lift a few thousand people out of poverty and keep them out of poverty. And that is what makes this budget ring hollow, Mr. Speaker, because the budget should not be ornamental or for decorations. It's a moral document. It constitutes and declares to the world who we are and what we are. It is a weapon against the daily genocide of poverty, and numbers do have meaning the same way that words do. I've looked high and low but I can't find any weapons against mass poverty inside this budget. Perhaps those on the other side will be able to show us, and don't tell me about any infrastructure projects because those are beginning to seem like purely get-rich schemes. One point five billion dollars on infrastructure over the last eight years, but just a combined \$15 million or more on the food pantry program, \$1.5 billion on infrastructure projects verses \$15 million to feed the poor that says it all right there. Mr. Speaker, my point is that we are a small country. Everybody knows who is not doing well. It shouldn't matter whether you are red or blue. It shouldn't matter whether you are

Creole, Garifuna, Mestizo, or Maya. But the Government plays politics with who can get the food pantry and who can get on Boost. The Government is being the midwife of poverty instead of waging war against it.

Mr. Speaker, the problems of poverty won't solve themselves without active and decisive and comprehensive governmental intervention. They will only mushroom. As I said, what is the point of all the parks and playgrounds and streets and bridges if afterwards people don't have jobs and can't feed their children and send them to school? I give the Minister and the Ministry of Education some credit for their \$300 high school grant, but it is not enough. I believe that in 2016, we have absolutely no excuse why secondary school education cannot be free in this country. (Applause) Cut out the new rides each year. Cut back on the do-nothing ambassadors living in swanky apartments all over the world and all the free trips Ministers and their cronies take each year. And, if the BTL and BEL nationalizations can't make high school education free in this country, then what was the point? I didn't support the nationalizations to make anybody's kids rich. I want to see all our children have a shot at being better, at better in their lives no matter where they come from, or who their parents are, or what they do for a living. The small island of Barbados introduced free high school education way back in 1955, 60 years later, and we still have our kids dropping out of high school because they cannot pay. We are a rich country, rich with so many, so many natural resources, and yet we cannot deliver on the most basic of human right. We cannot find \$1,000 a year to send a child to high school, but we can find \$5,000 a year to house that child at the Hattieville prison just two years later, if it comes to that.

You see, Mr. Speaker, 75,000 of all the people who are employed in this country only have a primary school certificate or less, 75,000 out of the 135,000 persons who are employed in this country. That's a chillingly real stats, and it tells that chillingly revealing story on our economy and widening inequality that exist. By comparison, Barbados is an island smaller than San Pedro with 330,000 persons and no natural resources to speak of, a banana costs a dollar in Barbados, and yet their GDP is US \$4.5 billion, while ours is perhaps a mere US\$1.7 billion. The key is that they have an educated workforce. They have free education from high school to university. That's the only way, that's the only way. (Applause) That's the only way. Our economy will continue to stagger and continue to feature primarily low paying jobs and our people will continue to drop out of high school because they cannot afford it. That's the choice, that's the challenge, that's the dilemma before us.

Mr. Speaker, I started on the Ministry of Human Development and Social Transformation and Poverty Alleviation, that's the name, right? And I will return to that Ministry for a moment because I found some rather interesting things there under Capital II.

MR. SPEAKER: Member I beg you a favor, given the time, I just need to do a motion and then you can continue.

HON. P. FABER (Minister of Education, Culture, Youth and Sports): Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 12 (8), I move that the proceedings on the Order Paper may be entered and proceeded with at this day's Sitting at any hour though opposed.

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the question is that the proceedings on the Order Paper may be entered upon and proceeded with at this day's Sitting at any hour though opposed.

All those in favour, kindly say aye; those against, kindly say no. I think the ayes have it. Proceed, Member.

HON. C. HYDE (Lake Independence): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under Capital II for poverty alleviation, they allocated \$1 million last year and spent \$892,541. But this financial year they are allocating zero dollars, nothing. For social assistance, they are allocating zero dollars this year for the third year in a row. Under the line item, fight against domestic violence, they are allocating zero dollars this financial year too. The same amount they allocated last year. It seems kind of hypocritical when you consider how much hoopla they make over the 20,000 strong women march. Under the mother's day appreciation program, government is allocating zero dollars this year. But that is the same figure they allocated last year. But last year they spent \$232,867. You heard me right, \$232,867 for mother's day appreciation program. I don't know if that's all in Port Loyola, or he shared the loot. There is also \$150,000 allocated for a national plan of action for older persons. I had just began to get excited when I realize it is actually only a plan of action and not necessarily action. Because of the spiraling any rate of poverty in our country, there is an increasing number of elderly people who are not eating and not living right. They are elderly folks having to live off from \$100 each month. It's just not right in 2016 Belize. And their kids and grandkids are experiencing the same hardship. So there is no help in sight. We desperately need to do something here and fast. SSB, instead of getting adventurous with the worker's money, should build a decent elderly folks home where our elderly can be cared for with dignity and in comfort.

Before I move on from this Ministry, Mr. Speaker, in December we came to this Honourable House and Government approved a Supplementary Appropriation of \$44.7 million. Now \$600,000 of that was approved for the Ministry of Human Development for a so-called flood assistance program. That flood took place in October, I believe, just a couple weeks before the elections, and that Supplementary Appropriation was approved on December 4, 2015, and the fine print at the top of the Supplementary Schedule said the funds were for October to December 2015. But this budget book that we have here for 2016/2017 is saying that that's not the figure we approved, Mr. Speaker. This book is only showing a mere \$84,508. Maybe there is a perfect explanation. I don't know, but it seems a little like dodgy accounting to me. Looking at the budget book shouldn't feel like we are on the corner playing Find the Queen. This is our nation's budget we are talking about. The people's budget, a billion dollars worth of taxpayers' money, and I know they will say that the figures are only projected outturns. But when we have such contradictions it makes me wonder what's going on with the country's finances, and when a government paints itself as the model of probity and virtuosity then it has to be pointed out when they fall a little short of the glory.

As I said before, Mr. Speaker, the budget is not an ornamental of our decorations. It is a moral document, and it constitutes who we are, and it is our weapon against the daily genocide of poverty, and numbers have meaning the same way that words do. Mr. Speaker, let me turn to a point that public officers have asked me to deal with specifically, and that's the matter of the \$1.5 billion the Government says they have spent on infrastructure over the last eight years and the intriguing creative accounting creature called BIL, not Bill Lindo you know, but BIL as in Belize Infrastructure Limited. Those on the other side have made a career out of calling the PUP corrupt and any other colorful synonyms you can think about. But now it seems like it's always just been a case of *pat di cuss ketl blak.*,

There are three or four companies, maybe five, that get all the contracts. They do everything. They build streets. They build stadiums. They plant grass. They could even build warship. They could fly to the moon. They could walk on water. They could do any and everything, and they do nothing wrong. These three or four companies are the most interesting companies in the world. Do you know the *Dos Equis* commercial with the most interesting man in the world? Well, these companies are the most interesting companies in the world. One company alone built Memorial Park, BTL Park, Battlefield Park, Falcon Field in Cayo, the San Pedro football field, another one down South and they have the Belize City Centre contract. Now that's maybe \$50 million to \$60 million in contracts for one solitary company, \$50 million to \$60 million for one company. Now you know the *Dos Equis* commercial says that every time my men goes for a swim dolphins appear and that the owners of these companies their blood smells like cologne. Do you get the picture? There is no open tender procedure, forget about transparency and accountability. In the good old days of open tender procedure, they would insist that bidders must have experience, prior experience dealing with certain contracts and certain sizes. That way most companies need that apply, but now they don't even have to bother with that. They make the contract a shade under \$5 million, and that way they don't need to follow the Finance and Audit (Reform) Act. We have to give it to you guys you know, you are really creative. (Applause)

But the problem is, Mr. Speaker, that, while a tiny group of family and friends laugh all the way to the bank, the rest of the people, dispossessed and disadvantaged, have to wait for some crumbs from the banquet table of the cronies, and, while in the old days that may have been possible, this set of kind of greedy *Tambran*, they fold up their table cloth so nicely that not a crumb drops. But they are not only greedy, Mr. Speaker, they are kind of *facey* too. Month after month, year after year, we have watched millions of dollars been poured into the mother of all public fleecing, the Marion Jones Stadium. You would think that after two terms the feasting at that stadium would have come to an end by now. But there seems to be no end in sight. The government spent a whopping \$10 and a half million over the last three years at the Marion Jones Stadium, and they have been spending millions every year, ever since they started with that ridiculous \$2 million fence way back in 2009. Do you all remember the fence? There is no telling how much money they have spent so far. Some say the figure may be as high as \$40 million. If it is that high someone needs to go to jail. (Applause) It's more like \$25 million; that's still \$25 million; and someone still needs to go to jail. They use that place once a year. Band Fest uses it once a year. You know that is why they refused to sign the UN Convention Against Corruption right, and that is why they refused to properly fund the Integrity Commission. It's been a while since we have seen anything like this, and now there is another \$4.5 million in this year's Budget for the Marion Jones. Can you imagine that, as if \$25 million wasn't enough?

Now it becomes clear the conspiracy at the MCC Garden because, if you have millions to spend on the Marion Jones, and millions more to spend this year, you mean to tell me you couldn't find your own money to fix your own parking lot, (Applause) to put in some proper lights and fix some bleachers. The truth is that we need to give back Princess Casino their money you know because no self-respecting Government behaves like that just for a measly \$2,500 a month, not when you are spending \$10 million and \$15 million and \$20 million at a Marion Jones that nobody uses. The truth be told, Mr. Speaker, it seems like the Government doesn't really care about the tradition of the MCC and the budding footballers in the City. It is all about business. In their minds if Princess wants the thing, they can get it. But it seems they will give them slowly. It will start with the parking lot first.

Not another dollar should be spent on the Marion Jones, until a full accounting is given on what has been spent and on what, and someone needs to tell us what's going on there because the last Minister used to treat it like his living room. You know you put your television here, you move it and you put it there, you put your sofa here and you move it and put it there. Every so often you heard the man put a swimming pool, he wants to do this, and he wants to do that. Nobody knows who he is talking to, or he was talking to. Now we hear about the building that is behind the giant grand stand which is already leaking, and the football field has crab holes. The running track has a three-foot drop. The bicycle track is too narrow and dangerous for the Cross Country to finish there, only in Belize, Mr. Speaker, only in Belize.

You know, Mr. Speaker, a lot has been made recently about the election of district youth councils and eventual election of a national youth council. And it is an effort that we should wholly endorse, despite the hiccups and the evident room for improvements in the electoral process. But that level of commitment on the part of the youths should be matched by the requisite budgetary support for the Ministry of Youth and its ability to provide for the needs and activities of our youths. It's been five years since I was last in this parliament and I still can't believe that I need to come here again and complain about a weak budget for youth.

We say we are for the youths, but every youth and sport initiative gets poor in every single national budget since I was first elected a hundred years ago. Zero dollars is being allocated for Youth Development Services under Capital II, not a red cent. Under Capital III they are getting a measly \$45,000. Some put the figure at 200,000 plus young persons in this country and Government is allocating \$45,000 for Youth Development Services. That comes out to maybe 0.44 cents per youth. I also see they have allocated \$50,000 for furniture and equipment under that same Ministry. But \$45,000 for Youth Development Services, do you see where our priorities are?

There is also \$50,000 being allocated under a program called Youth Programs and Initiatives, and \$100,000 for Youth for the Future, not sure for what. But combine the national budget for youth and sports is still meager. Year after year what we see in our national budget for Youth and Sport only adds to the youth unemployment level, which is already at a whopping 25% and almost twice the national unemployment rate. In the case of sports the budget has not changed much in the last 20 years, \$200,000 for 5 primary school national tournaments, a million dollars for salaries and not much else. We should be allocating at least a few million dollars each year to provide seed funds so that the youths can start a little business. Hopefully the district youth councils can bring some pressure to bear on those on the other side.

Mr. Speaker, it is usually at this point that I would get into some national security figures, and I have addressed it a bit some. But I wanted to be specific. Last year government allocated or approved a recurrent budget of \$40,715,972 for the recurrent for defense. But only \$38,780,839 was spent, almost \$2 million less than what was budgeted. Our soldiers deserve the best. They shouldn't be wearing worn out boots and faded uniforms, and the Ministry of Defense should not be spending \$2 million less than was allocated. I am told the same thing happened the year before. They spent almost a million dollars less on defense than what was budgeted in 2014/2015. Please, man, this is not the time to be cutting back on the defense of our country, not with Guatemala acting the fool and trying to erode our sovereignty and territorial integrity. (Applause) We need to be spending more money on our soldiers, not less. We need more soldiers, new boots, new uniforms, the men and women of our army need to look good and feel good and eat good. (Applause) Morale has to be sky high. So, please, man, ensure the BDF gets every

red cent out of that \$41 plus million we are approving this year or allocating this year, and while you are at it throw in a few million more. And please allow me, Mr. Speaker, to personally say thanks to the men and women of our army. You stood tall and strong in the face of vexing circumstances and you have made us all proud, and whatever we, as a parliament, can do for you we should not hesitate, no effort should be spared.

Mr. Speaker, I have already pointed out that there are 175,000 persons considered poor in our country and that there are more than 75,000 workers who are living on the edge of poverty. For those many thousands of Belizeans, any new tax or any new unforeseen expense can prove a huge problem. That is why I couldn't wrap my head around the announcement that the Karl Heusner Memorial Hospital was raising consultation fees by 150%, from \$10 to \$25. Now that might not seem like a lot to some that didn't have to use the KHMH, but for the thousands who do annually it's another unbearable burden. Remember to be considered poor means you don't have \$10 a day to feed yourself, much less \$10 to take to the hospital. And that is why KHMH already has millions of dollars in uncollected fees because they just cannot collect it. The people just can't afford to pay. I think we shouldn't be thinking about raising that fee. We should be scrapping that fee. (Applause) And government should ensure that KHMH gets the requisite resources to provide the best service possible. Government needs to step up and get their priorities in order. Nothing should be more important than the health of our people.

Mr. Speaker, I suffer no illusion about the capability of the government, but I also know that without the Government's direct and intentional intervention then very little will change where poverty is concerned in this country. It is their inaction that fills the wards at the KHMH. Sixteen hundred Belizeans die each year you know. Almost every day someone dies from a cardiovascular disease. Every other day someone dies from cancer, and diabetes kills another 150 Belizeans each year. Non-communicable diseases have killed 5,000 Belizeans in the last 5 years alone, accounting for nearly two thirds of all the deaths in Belize, with communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS accounting for another 20%. I see nothing in the budget estimates for 2016/2017 that gives me hope that we will be robust in our war against these deadly scourges, much less turn the corner against them. These are all largely preventable diseases that disproportionately hit the poor and marginalized. To paraphrase the great Doctor Cornel West, the Prime Minister and his band of Ministers are merely Milli Vanilli. They are lip-synching, paying lip service while the vast majority of our people languish. Our collective challenge is to make Belize a better place, not just to make it look better but to make it feel better, to make people's lives better in a meaningful and enduring way.

Let me conclude, Mr. Speaker, and please forgive me for talking this long, but it's been a long time since I have spoken in this Honourable House. With your permission, Sir, the people, particularly those on the south side, have returned the Members on the other side to the House time and again with huge margins because they expect them to understand their plight. The people see it as a barge of pride and honor, that you are there to represent them with the highest authority in the land, and yet along the way not much has changed for the people. Poverty is still at an all time high, and joblessness and hopelessness and landlessness are still evils we must battle each day. Life for the elites and the chosen few has been so much better while life for the poor has been so much worse. That is not the grand bargain the people struck with the UDP, and the problem is there is no solution to buyer's remorse in this case.

When you buy a pack bread and you reach home and you discover it is not good, you can take it back and get back your money. If you go to Courts and buy

a television and you get home and it doesn't work, you could take it back and get back your money. But, when you elect a government that tells you they are swimming in money and the best is yet to come, and then you discover after the elections that they are all broke and it's only the worse that is yet to come, what are you to do? There is not much you can do, except to get on your hands and knees and pray. And yet I am hopeful, Mr. Speaker, inspired by how much we have in common as a people and how little we differ. I have seen that we, as Mestizo's and as Mayans and as Garifunas and as Creoles, want the same things. We want our children to go to school, and we want a decent job and a safe home. We want our government to stop being corrupt, and we want to have a shot at better, no matter the village or the district, town from which we hail. I believe we can do better. I believe we must do better. Despite the trials and tribulations I still see hope. I see it in the faces of our people all over the length and breadth of this country. We are a small country, but we have a big heart. We are unflappable, undaunted by the challenges. We are optimistic and confident to the core, and that makes me very, very hopeful about our future. Mr. Speaker, the Budget Estimate for 2016/2017 falls way short of the glory and does so little for the least of our *bredrin* and *sistrin* in our midst. I cannot in good conscience support this budget. Thank you. (Applause)

HON. P. FABER (Minister of Education, Culture, Youth and Sports):

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, I rise to make my contributions to this presentation of the budget for the financial year, Mr. Speaker, 2016/2017. I want to begin, Mr. Speaker, by thanking my Honourable friend from Lake Independence for finally getting up to speak in this Honourable House. You know this is about the third or fourth meeting since he has been reelected so I cannot understand the seeming joy that he has to finally get back when, in fact, he has been back for some time and has been rather quiet. But, Mr. Speaker, maybe it was because he was waiting to, at least that's what I thought, to move up a couple spaces on the front bench there to sit right beside our friend, the Leader of the Opposition. But then if you use that kind of logic, Mr. Speaker, you would imagine that we would have heard from him even on the last occasion when others of his colleagues, in fact, made their interventions at the time of the adjournment. And, Mr. Speaker, the people from Lake Independence must have been waiting for him to finally speak, and, in fact, those on the other side were also waiting for him to speak. And, Mr. Speaker, by the testimony given by my friend from Stann Creek West and others on the other side, you would all agree that in fact his return was rather weak. My friend from Stann Creek West fell asleep throughout the majority of the presentation which is not really abnormal for him. But, Mr. Speaker, I think he was particularly bored today. And the Leader of the Opposition, his friend, Mr. Speaker, must have been terribly disappointed because this choice that he has made to bump up his friend, because, Mr. Speaker, he sees this as the way to recovery for the People's United Party, he must, Mr. Speaker, be terribly disappointed as well to have seen, Mr. Speaker, that while, as he put it, not much has changed here in this Honourable House things have certainly changed with him and the man that they used to know in Lake Independence who the people voted so overwhelmingly for. The people are never wrong. But it would seem that he has lost it and, in fact Mr. Speaker, has disappointed even me. I was anticipating you know some kind of luster, some kind of you know the usual. But it's not there, Mr. Speaker. So, while I will speak to some of what he said, let me first do what I had intended to do before being so disappointed by his presentation and then I will get back to some of those remarks that he made.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we are in eight years of the Barrow's Administration. The Right Honourable Prime Minister has led this country, Mr. Speaker, in such a stellar way that, in fact, I am shocked every time my colleagues on the other side still find things to criticize about. And, Mr. Speaker, nine budgets, eight years into

the administration of the Prime Minister, we see that the growth and the development of this country is not, in fact, slowing down, although there are hard times. We see, Mr. Speaker, that, while things might be tough, progress is being made in the forward direction. We whine and compare, Mr. Speaker, to what was happening in the eighth year of the former Prime Minister, my friend, the Right Honourable Member from Fort George. Let us take a look back at what was happening when he presented his budget at an eighth-year mark after being in Government eight years. Let's look at that. I pulled the transcript, Mr. Speaker, from that budget presentation. This particular coverage of it, Mr. Speaker, came from our friend, Jules Vasquez, and Channel 7, this is what the news article had to say Mr. Speaker. This was in March of 2006, ten years ago, eight years into the Musa Administration.

The newscast read, Mr. Speaker, "In past years, when the Prime Minister would present budget speeches that took less than 45 minutes to deliver, we often got the impression that politicians and professional tacticians were writing the speeches. Well, today's budget speech made it clear that the technicians are the ones doing most of the writing now, people like our good Carla Barnett who was trying to rescue him. It was the longest most comprehensive and possibly the most straightforward budget speech this Prime Minister has ever given. He admitted to the \$2 billion national debt and stated it in Belize dollars. He confessed to the massive deficits, boasted about a primary surplus, made it clear that there are continued lean times ahead and revisited his theme that mistakes have been made. The only thing is he didn't admit to making any of those mistakes".

"Here is the story from Belmopan", and this is his words directly now. He said, "This Budget comes at the end of a difficult year for the country and for this government. It was a year when government had to drastically curtail spending and increase taxes to reign in a deficit that had ballooned to 8% of GDP, the product of fiscal indiscipline". Whose fiscal indiscipline you might ask? Look, he was saying, Mr. Speaker, that we would have to curtail government spending. This was when you remembered he said that we will not be giving the increments to the teachers, not even adjustments, not even increases in salary. (That's not what we are talking about.) It was so bad under the PUP'S administration eight years in that they were saying that not even the usual increments that teachers and public servants used to get can they continue with. They froze that. They increased taxation. This was when he had just a little while earlier boasted that, in fact, "who say the government is broke, the taxes are performing", and then he had to own up to the reality here, trickery, Mr. Speaker.

We see a contrast with the Prime Minister. The Right Honourable Prime Minister, today paints the picture of the reality but nowhere in that is he saying, Mr. Speaker, that the growth will be discontinued, that the programs of this government Mr. Speaker to aid the poor and the needy and to assist our teachers and public servants, now complete a cycle that would see them get 25% salary adjustment, unprecedented, Mr. Speaker. (Applause) Now our Prime Minister the Right Honourable keeps the wheels of progress moving in this country, and that is why my friends from the other side, if you didn't get, it that is why the country, the people of this country voted so overwhelmingly again to return the Right Honourable Prime Minister to that position once again and return those of us on this side again to make history to be the first party in government since Independence to be back-to- back- to-back.

The words of my friend, the Right Honourable Member from Fort George, again when he was Prime Minister and in his eighth year, he said, "Government took the decision to rein in the deficit because we recognized that fundamental imbalances had emerged in our fiscal accounts, and time was not on our side in correcting those imbalances." He said, "The alternative would have been to

continue to delay the adjustment with potentially disastrous consequences for economy and our nation.” He had to slow things down. Do you remember the economic train that they were talking about that Ralph had helped them to lead? It had ran away, and they were having serious problems. And, like the ostrich, he for a long while was burying his head in the sand when, of course, some of them from that side at that time, or this side at that time, started to rein him in and the people of the country. We must not forget the unions and everybody else started agitating big time for changes to be made. And so, in order to try to save face and to appease some of his own colleagues who were telling him how terribly wrong he was going, and the people of this country who were outside of these National Assembly meetings rioting and trying to make sure that things go the right way, he had a change of heart and tried after so many years to make things right. But it was too late, Mr. Speaker. The writing was on the wall already!

According to Musa, this is channel 7 now. “Those fundamental imbalances and disastrous consequences aren’t his or his former Finance Minister Ralph Fonseca’s fault.” He claimed it was the fault of the private sector. And let’s hear what he had to say about that. He said, “As private sector counterparts did not or could not repay their loans, government went deeper and deeper into debts, and over time it became increasingly difficult to meet debt payments while at the same time to finance projects necessary to improve the social and economic wellbeing of our citizens”. He was saying that we could not continue with these programs. Nowhere, even when my friend from Lake Independence and, in fact, the Leader of the Opposition, you know they were on display today telling you about cuts here and cuts there in these social programs, and granted things are a bit more difficult than they were some years ago. We understand the Petrocaribe funds are not going to be what they used to be. But, Mr. Speaker, nowhere in this budget can you find, or can they find, or can anyone find the kinds of cuts that will see the social programs be discontinued to help the poor. And I will come back to that in a bit. But this was the reality after eight years of the Musa Administration, and we should never let them forget.

“Government was forced to curtail operating expenses and reduce expenditure on projects that would otherwise benefit the majority of citizens. Today eight years later we need to rethink the policies which we must pursue to ensure a better future for Belize.” He was Prime Minister for eight years by this time you know, and he said that we had to backtrack, and we have to rethink. Shameful, Mr. Speaker! “And, according to Musa,” the editorial says, “Rethinking those policies means making the budget more micro and less macro.” Musa again, “What this budget is signaling in short is a shift away from the policy of facilitating large private investments in the hope that these would provide jobs and improve the lives of a majority of our people to a policy of investing directly in people through improved education and health, promotion of small and community enterprises and consulting with people to define strategies that would reduce inequality and poverty.” My goodness! Is this not what they criticize the Right Honourable the Prime Minister for doing now, investing in the people of this country in social programs, in education, in health and in these kinds of small community enterprises?

But, Mr. Speaker, the Right Honourable the Prime Minister is, in fact, a wizard of such because he is able to merge the two things. We have seen, in fact, where he has encouraged that investment in the private sector as well. We have seen that, and my friend, the Member from Belmopan, outlined some of those areas, looking at investments, the Santander investments in the sugar industry in the north, and investments in tourism. All over this country we see that kind of private sector investment, Mr. Speaker, encouraged by this government, encouraged particularly by my friend, the Minister for Economic Development, the Honourable Member from Cayo West. This is, in fact, what we have been

doing, and we are not saying we have to slow down on one in order to give way for the other one because we were going wrong. What we have, Mr. Speaker, is the right balance. It is the right mix of things, and it is because, Mr. Speaker, we have the right person at the helm of our government in the person of the Right Honourable the Prime Minister. (Applause)

Musa again, “Of course, those failed large private investments like Intelco and Novelos that are now costing government and taxpayers were the ones that were supposed to reduce inequality and poverty in the first place, but something went wrong along the line.” This guy, and we always knew that he was bold. I don’t think that even in age, and you will hear him get up. I think he speaks next. You will see that when, in fact, he gets up to speak you will see that he will have the same gall, the same audacity, Mr. Speaker, to get up like he did not know, just like he did then, to talk and to blame Intelco and Novelos as if those private investments which this country know failed so terribly were not his fault at all. Nowhere did he take ownership here. He simply passed the blame and said that we had to change course. Who was it that signed over that \$30 million to Novelos in one day? Was it not his administration? Who was it, Mr. Speaker, that put together the old boys’ club, the retirement package, so to speak, that we all know as Intelco? Was it not him? How could he have pontificated at that time, Mr. Speaker, and behaved like nothing was going on, that he was not connected? He still had that same mentality, Mr. Speaker. And that is the mentality of all of them on that side. That new leader or that new old leader or that new returned leader or whatever you want to refer to him as, it is the same thing. They come back, Mr. Speaker, wishing for us to forget.

He said, Mr. Speaker, “Unfortunately, several things, some external and others originating internally, occurred which caused these policies to produce unintended and undesirable consequences.” “He didn’t said what ‘thing occurred’, or who was at the wheel when they did. But now the Prime Minister says his government will walk the very straight and very narrow,” we all know that is a lie, “starting this year when they reined in the fiscal deficit, almost bringing it to the target figure.” He said, “We have succeeded in improving our fiscal position. The bottom line is that compared to an overall fiscal deficit of 8% of GDP in fiscal year 2004/2005 the overall deficit in fiscal year 2005/2006 has been reduced by more than half to 3.9% of GDP or \$89 million. But add to that the \$89 million deficit, a hefty serving of debt service requirements.”

Musa again, “The projected overall deficit for the current fiscal year of \$89 million taken together with principal debt repayments of \$306.7 million and payments for purchase of equity \$29.8 million altogether resulted in a financing requirement of \$425 million. The debt,” he says, “was financed mostly by Bear Stearns, but with the new fiscal year rolling around, there is another massive debt servicing bill coming up and the Prime Minister could only say that the experts at Houlihan, Lokey, Howard and Zukin are looking at it.” Do you remember all of those names? Mr. Speaker, do you remember all that was going on? Do you remember how they sold us out, in fact, to Bear Stearns at those ridiculous rates of interest, Mr. Speaker? Then they wonder, why it is, Mr. Speaker, that the recovery efforts for the Right Honourable the Prime Minister and this administration has been so long and hard? And while, in fact, even with the Petrocaribe money things have not been as rosy as we would want them to be and now that the Petrocaribe money is no longer available, Mr. Speaker, to the extent that it was, why we continue to struggle? It is because, Mr. Speaker, these investments should have been made a long time ago.

“A report from the advisors,” Musa says, “Is due to shortly, and their findings and recommendations will be carefully considered and an appropriate strategy will be adopted in consultation with our international lenders and

development partners. An while that unresolved debt financing issue hangs ominously over the next fiscal year,” Channel 7, “the Prime Minister expects sustained growth.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on and on with this, what was said ten years ago 2006, not by the news media alone, Mr. Speaker, not by us on this side of the Honourable House, by he himself, the former Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Member from Fort George. He had to suck it in, Mr. Speaker, and I raise these points mainly at this time, Mr. Speaker, to point out what eight years into the PUP Administration was as compared to the eight years into the good, extremely productive governance of our current administration under the leadership of the Right Honourable Prime Minister. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, I join with my colleague, the Minister from Belmopan, to point out that, in fact, all of those figures that were presented two weeks ago by the Prime Minister bear out the success that we have looked at. The inflation rates, Mr. Speaker, the unemployment rate, and, as my friend from Belmopan said, the constant steady decline of unemployment, it is not just a one shot deal when things are good. There has been that steady, steady decline of unemployment in this country, and, like he mentioned, Mr. Speaker, our figures are real. What the Statistical Institute of Belize is producing today and, in fact, for the last few years is not what was referred to as bogus figures back then. You know I always wondered if we were living in a different country, you know how you watch other countries, Mr. Speaker, and the way those statistics are provided and you are able to say that both sides arguing on the same issue are arguing on the same statistics. Well, back in those days, Mr. Speaker, because I was here. I have long been here. I was sitting on that side listening, and you had to wonder if the statistics that were being presented were really the honest-to-goodness truth. In fact, I remembered, when we changed sides and we came over here, the Prime Minister, in fact had to redo the budget because the figures that were presented in a ploy to trick the Belizean people at election time were completely and utterly bogus. Do you remember when our friend, Mark Espat, said or had that talking about cooking the books and manipulating figures? That is their record, Mr. Speaker. But today, when you hear that unemployment is 10.2%, when you hear that inflation is so low that it is negative, you can bet the cook, Mr. Speaker, that those are the figures. You hear them embrace those figures on the other side as well because it is real. We are not hiding our heads. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, I wish to salute the Prime Minister for the raise on behalf of the teachers of our country. Mr. Speaker, I want to say that, in fact, the teachers of this country work hard and they are deserving of those rewards. (Applause) You know that the discussions started around them getting a salary adjustment of about 30%. And, in fact, while we thought that that figure back then when it was first introduced was a bit farfetched, we proved that working together, and more importantly working with a government that had the kind of credibility and had the kind of mechanisms in place to cut down on the kind of spending that we have seen are cut down and, in fact, getting the revenue in as opposed to when my Honourable friend from Fort George was saying that the taxes were performing and then he had to come right back and raise the tax. No, no, when we tell you, as the Prime Minister did two weeks ago, that those revenue streams are coming in and that they are performing well, it's no joke, Mr. Speaker. It's no lie, and so it is as a result of that kind of practice with working with our partners in the Public Service and the Belize National Teachers Union who are all a part of the committees, Mr. Speaker, that were set up to reduce spending and also to increase revenue. It is as a result of that joint effort, Mr. Speaker, that the Right Honourable the Prime Minister is able to offer once again that kind of significant raise to show love and appreciation for our teachers and our public servants.

(Applause) And Prime Minister, on behalf of those teachers especially, I thank you.

When a raise is in place like that, Mr. Speaker, and when the government is bending backwards to accommodate, because we value so much the contributions of teachers and public servants, there is a flip side to that, Mr. Speaker. And we want for our teachers to be the best that they can be. We want, Mr. Speaker, for them to go the extra mile, and we know that many of them do. Don't get me wrong. But, Mr. Speaker, there is a lot to be desired in terms of getting to the kind of quality that we want to see. So we are grateful for the raise, and I hope that, on behalf of the teachers, but certainly on behalf of the wider education system, Prime Minister, I want to say that we will continue to work hard in order to make sure that the investment that you have made, Sir, in the education system, and this year the numbers will show \$260 million almost on the recurrent side and \$275 million. If you add it all together with Capital II and Capital III investments, Mr. Speaker, that is unprecedented. More than 27 cents or 28 cents almost on every dollar that is spent is being spent on education. So, I don't understand (Applause) how they can talk nonsense.

But before I get into education, just a bit more to say that while, in fact, the kind of deficit was noted, Prime Minister, you know I don't understand my friend, the Leader of the Opposition, because if you listen to them you would believe that they were not here when he presented the budget speech two weeks ago. You heard him harking on the deficit which the Prime Minister has explained was because, of course, of the getting back our national assets like BTL and BEL. How can we ever be against that? If that is what is going to land us into the kind of overspending that we saw in the last financial year, then bring it on again because we know, Mr. Speaker, that that kind of investment is, in fact, the kind of investment that we need. In fact, Mr. Speaker, we know that the spending was overshoot because of building the kinds of facilities that will see this country develop, infrastructure wise. I listen to them and the nonsense that they are talking over there about the fact that we can't eat infrastructure, we can't eat cement streets and drains and whatever else have you and the sporting stadiums that caused us to overshoot in terms of the spending.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I will tell them, I come from south side Belize City. I represent the people of south side Belize City. And, Mr. Speaker, I will tell you, as would any other representative who wants to be honest, over that side you cannot expect much of that, you will understand, but if they wanted to be honest they will tell you that, in fact, it is because of this kind of infrastructural development that many parents, dads and single mothers are able to put food on the table which is, in fact, pulling them up out of poverty. They talked about us not spending monies on poverty alleviation. That is out of nonsense. All of that spending, and listen, I have several of this kind of situation in my constituency. A father, who could not find a job, gets a job, albeit temporary, with one of the infrastructure programs that is going on, let's say, with CISCO construction building the new bridge. That father is then able to use that money to hold his family over, even though it may be short-term, even though it may be a few months to a year, while his children are going to school, assisted by the Boost Program. And I agree with the Minister from Belmopan when he said that is utter nonsense. Did you hear the Leader of the Opposition say that while Boost is sending more children to school that, in fact, that is not helping out with poverty? What kind of nonsense is that? It is, in fact, when these programs exist, and the parents get that work, if even for a little while, that they are then able to take care of their family so that their children at the same time are getting the proceeds from Boost and the Food Pantry and they are able to later on pull themselves up because one thing, he said, that I fully agree with, education is the way out of poverty, and there can be no doubt. (Applause) There can be no confusion when it comes to what this government is

spending on education. And so, Mr. Speaker, I say to the Prime Minister kudos, kudos for all the work that you have done, Prime Minister.

The Minister from Belmopan went on to outline those infrastructural projects, sporting projects. But let me remind people of the words that the Prime Minister uttered in his presentation about these road infrastructures, and it is not only in Belmopan, as the Minister boasted. In fact, the infrastructural developments, as my colleague, the Honourable Member from Mesopotamia, would say, even blind-eyed Jaimsie can see it because when they reach the roundabout they will feel the going around as opposed to going straight. And you will feel the smooth road as you go along. So as he would say, even blind-eyed *Jaimsie* would be able to see it. Belize City, we know, every district, town, including San Pedro, we've seen infrastructural development in terms of the roads. (Applause) Mr. Speaker, if you go to the Philip Goldson Highway right now, you will see, in fact, through Orange Walk and all the way up to the Belize/Santa Elena Road, which is what they call the old Northern Highway, but when you get into Corozal Town all there you see developments in terms of road infrastructure. How in the world can you say that those kinds of infrastructural work are not enhancing the country of Belize?

We've heard that tourism, in fact, is the industry that is booming. You may not have heard that, as the Minister from Belmopan pointed out, from the Opposition because they don't want to hear the good news. They want you to focus merely on the bad news. And so, Mr. Speaker, that kind of infrastructural investment creates jobs. It beautifies the environment, and we are better able to sell a better tourism product which is the reason why our tourists are coming. The old Northern Highway to Altun Ha, beautiful hot mix road now, the tourists have no trouble getting to Altun Ha. The road to Franks Eddie and the Sibun River, when you are going to Jaguar Paw and you are going into the network of caves, that's the road that the tourists are travelling to, that's the kind of investment in infrastructure that the Rt. Honourable the Prime Minister has been making and this Government, Mr. Speaker, is so absolutely proud of. (Applause) The cementing of the road to the Efrain Guerrero Airport on the northern side of Ambergris Caye, beautiful road, we all remember. You know I used to hate having to go to San Pedro, Mr. Speaker, because every time you get in the golf cart and you ride all over San Pedro the next day you feel like someone was beating you up in your back with a stick. The road was terrible, Mr. Speaker. But, since the Town Councils of Elsa Paz and Danny Guererro and, of course, the work put in by my friend the Member from Belize Rural South, and, of course, given the resources by the Right Honourable the Prime Minister, Mr. Speaker, San Pedro, Northern Ambergris, everything is looking good. Tourism is even further advanced. (Applause) We are on honor roll. That is correct. The road to Lamanai is now being paved as well, and I think that that will come through, if I am not mistaken, the constituency of my friend from Belize Rural North, which will create a kind of access from the River Valley area. Mr. Speaker, I am sorry I was looking for you at the back not realizing that you are in the Chair. This is your constituency, Mr. Speaker, getting great things. Boss, that Maskal road it's a dry to drive on. Pretty soon, Mr. Speaker, I think we've already commenced to pave the San Antonio road that goes into Mountain Pine Ridge that will ultimately take us into Caracol, which is probably one of the most beautiful Mayan sites in this country.

So, Mr. Speaker, we are proud of this kind of thing, and, yes, yes, we get value for money. The Belizean people can say that. I listened as my Honourable friend from Lake Independence tried to paint the picture that our Government is corrupted and that things are not going the way they should go. Well, let me make one final point from off this story from 2006, just to show you that it is utter nonsense they are taking. At the end of the news story back in 2006, Jules

Vasquez and his news media said, “And while it wasn’t included in the story, a few key projects included in the new budget,” in 2006 you know, “are work on the Placencia Road, the Blue Creek Road,” Mrs. Lupe, you hear, the Blue Creek Road, “and the building of a sports stadium in Dangriga and work on the Marion Jones Sporting Complex. Ten years ago the Right Honourable Member from Fort George promised this, and we all know which administration was responsible for paving the Placencia Road. They promised us over and over and over, Mr. Speaker, and nothing was done. The Blue Creek Road, what happened to it? Just a promise. They promised the stadium for Dangriga. Go and check the work at Karl Ramos now. It is (Applause) almost completed. It will be inaugurated. After seeing my colleague’s stadium here in Belmopan, the Isidoro Beaton Stadium is spectacular, and my friend, the Honourable Member from Cayo West, promises, in fact, that the stadium in Benque Viejo is even more spectacular although it doesn’t have any artificial turf. It doesn’t have the artificial grass.

But, Mr. Speaker, this is the record of this administration, and you know I can go on and on and on. These are the kinds of work that have been done. These are only a few that the Prime Minister mentioned two Tuesdays ago, two weeks ago. It is only a few. We haven’t mentioned it, but I will mention it just so that my friend from Toledo West doesn’t waste his time when he jumps up because he likes to talk about things in that area there because he thinks we don’t know. Never before when you reach the dump down there in Toledo, Mr. Speaker, and you turn right to go to the west, right Senator Macario, when you take that curve and you start to go right to the border, Jalacte with Guatemala, man, it’s like a road to heaven. Thanks to this administration. (Administration) These are not pie-in-the-sky promises. And I’m not mentioning the palm oil factory and the soybean factory and the condense milk factory and all of those pie-in-the-sky promises that they made. These people are full of trickery, and this Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Speaker, he likes to try separate himself from all that went on there you know. But I will tell you that it’s one in the same, and we should not be fooled by it. You see how they jump up, and you see how they pontificate.

Mr. Speaker, there is an old proverb, I think its German, that says, when the fox is preaching watch your geese because, Mr. Speaker, when you see them preaching and pontificating, I watch that one from Lake Independence talked about corruption. My goodness! He is talking about corruption. But anyway someone texted me while he was presenting and he will talk about 5,000 and what you can do with 5,000. Anyhow, we won’t go there. Mr. Speaker, they are the last ones who should talk about corruption, and even when they point to these infrastructure projects they cannot deny Mr. Speaker, no matter who they are saying got contract, that we have not gotten value for money. In fact, those projects, Mr. Speaker, bear testimony, they bear testimony to the good work, to the decent work of the Right Honourable the Prime Minister, Mr. Speaker and his United Democratic Party Administration. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, I now turn to our issues on education. And Mr. Speaker, they will be quick to point out, as he did just now, that in some areas there are cuts, small cuts, nothing to talk about, Mr. Speaker. But, if you look at the overall picture, if you look at what the Right Honourable Prime Minister has allocated this year, Mr. Speaker, for all of those areas, the overall area of education, the overall area of sports, the overall area of youth activity, Mr. Speaker, there is an increase in each and every one of those larger sectors, if you look at them collectively. Yes, there is the kind of juggling, and, yes, we have to revisit some areas, Mr. Speaker, and because we are not getting the same kind of funds, the kind of support from Petrocaribe and so on, Mr. Speaker, we have to do things a bit differently. But, if you listen to that set over there and those who have spoken already, you would be wondering, you would be thinking that we are cutting out the apprenticeship program, for instance. They didn’t have any apprenticeship

program you know. They promised it over and over, which is a trademark for them. They promised it over and over. In fact, that was their pledge again in this last election. How could you be so *facey*, man, to say that you will put forward, you will continue the apprenticeship program when, in fact, you had an opportunity to do so and you did nothing about it? And then now because we asked for 560 odd, you know I always see it as a dangerous thing to publish what the Ministries asked for because they take that and they run with it Prime Minister. It is not a real cut from what we got last year you know, but it is merely because we did not get what we requested, and anybody who understands the budget processes know that you have to put forward what you want. The ideal thing is to ask for what you want and then the experts who put together the budget will decide, and sometimes what we consider in our Ministry to be priority is not really considered to be priority for them. But that is alright, especially when there is the kind of initiative that sees the teachers and the public servants get that tremendous kind of raise, again, to continue. Then it is okay. We will continue to survive. We will continue to have in place these kinds of programs.

They will have the gall to talk about, my friend from Lake Independence, the youth councils and the fact that monies were never allocated before but now we are going to allocate because that is what we asked for. We want to do that for the youth councils. We want to empower them. And I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, I was a part of the National Youth Commission in my day. When I was 16 years old, I was President of the National Youth Commission. That was when the last National Youth Policy existed, and throughout the ten years of the People's United Party Administration, not a finger was lifted to support the young people in their drive to be a part of the government and the decision-making processes of this administration. It took the return of the United Democratic Party Government to once again see that, (Applause) and the mere fact that one of the PUP's could jump up in the elections and try behave like they, the party, had some hand in getting there. Do you know why he was able to run, Mr. Speaker? It was because, as the Minister with responsibility for youth, I said to the officials, those who came to seek my advice, and they do not have to listen to me, I said to them, involve the political parties, youth movements in it, because two things, one, we have to encourage young people's participation no matter who is engaging them, if they are doing something positive as opposed to, although some may compare being a part of the PUP as being a part of a criminal organization. I think that was what Hubert Elrington said at one point. But we would want to hope that that has been changed and that they really have Belize at heart, especially at the point where they are changing, they are trying to put the face forward that they are supporting the young people. But when they came to ask me for advice I said, "No, let them be a part." The other reason I supported it was because I knew that, if it came down to a challenge between our young people in the United Democratic Party and the young people in the People's United Party, the comparison would have been like day and night. And you see that what I thought back then came to light because Mr. Stafin Duncan, (Applause) was victorious. But I don't want to discourage the young man. Micah is a friend of mine, I would like to think, and I salute him for trying to offer himself as we salute all young people who offered themselves in that respect, Mr. Speaker.

In this budget, Mr. Speaker, we are spending, as I have said, more on education than ever before. And in this budget, if you comb through it, Mr. Speaker, what they will not tell you is that more money is being spent on creating access to education. When I became the Minister and when the Right Honourable Prime Minister became the Prime Minister and had that confidence to invest in this country's education system even more, I think, when we came into office, we were spending about \$160 million or so on education. Today, are you hearing me? It is \$250 odd million, (Applause) never seen before. And then they have the gall to get up and talk about access. You know I wonder, and this is what I am telling

you about that Member from Lake Independence you know. He has been missing for five years, and he has refused to study the situation because I would want to think even from when he was here in those couple of years in Opposition he was not on track with what was going on. In fact, he lost all interest in the work of the education sector, when they booted him out of the Ministry of Education most unceremoniously for his bad practices. The then Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Member from Fort George, had to assume the portfolio of education himself. Do you remember that, former Prime Minister, when you had to take it under your arms yourself? He had to take it then. He held it for six months. Then he gave it to the Attorney General who was already very loaded with work. That is the kind of love that he himself, a former Minister of Education, demonstrated for the education system in this country. You know I often give him credit because, when he was Minister of Education, he was a good Minister of Education. The problem with him was that he went bad when he turned Prime Minister. But they know the issues of education, they know these issues, and they know that there can be no easy fix.

The road to fixing the issues of education, and, if we are talking about access, let's talk about access, getting more children to school. You do that by first making sure that there are schools in their area, and he can talk and they can talk on the other side, all of them can put their years of education governance together and they can never say that they have open more schools and built more classrooms than this United Democratic Party Government. (Applause) Mr. Speaker, I am telling you last week I visited every one of the districts in this country. I broke grounds for new schools in three districts: at Kuxlin Ha here in Belmopan, in Trio in the Toledo District, in the northern part of Toledo, and at Santa Cruz in my friends constituency. Give credit where credit is due, man. Mr. Speaker, I announce sometime ago that, in fact, with the support of the Right Honourable Prime Minister again, we would seek a loan, and you know that that loan has passed and we are building 35 new schools and we are focusing on early childhood education. More preschool aged children are going to school as a result of the efforts of the Right Honourable Prime Minister and this Ministry of Education than ever before. That is a fact. (Applause)

Talk about access, they are talking about it. The Leader of the Opposition spoke about sustainable development goals. Well, the only reason we are able to go on to the sustainable development goals is because we did so well with the millennium development goals. And the millennium development goals for the Ministry of Education were for us to reach 100% net enrollment at the primary level by the year 2015. And by the time the year 2015 came we were at 95%, a stellar record. Mr. Speaker, of all the countries that we were competing against, Belize did very well. And, if you want to know where the 5% went, because they will come back with that, there are areas that still need work you know, areas like special need I heard my friend, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, spoke about this, and I know that this is, in fact, a passion for him and for his wife, Rosanna, who is the principal of St. Peter Anglican School in Orange Walk that has a Special Need Unit in the school. Mr. Speaker, so I know that this is real talk when he says that, in fact, we would want to see that more be done in terms of special needs in this country. And I am with him because you see Mr. Speaker, we are not like the ostrich. We do not burry our heads in the sand.

The things that they will counteract, Mr. Speaker, and they will come with, in terms of criticism for education, are the things that I have told them in the last eight years and that I have said when going around this country, Mr. Speaker, because we are not afraid to put the issues that we are facing out there about education on the forefront. The idea is to tell people exactly what the problems are. So nothing that they can tell us on that side will show us up. We know what these problems are, and rather than tearing down and that is why I am saluting the

Honourable Member, the Leader of the Opposition, rather than tearing down. What we must be doing is what we've always said is our mantra in the Ministry of Education: It is everybody's business to do their share in order to help us develop the education sector. It's real.

Just now I told you about increasing that access, and you know that early childhood education is not mandatory. In fact, you don't have to really send your children to school by law until 5 years old. And, Mr. Speaker, I would desperately want to change that. In fact, I think that we will be changing that. I will seek support to do that. It will mean that we will have to invest more monies in terms of what we spend at that level and it would mean not, as some of my colleagues would have you think on that other side because you heard them talked about wanting more, wanting more, and wanting more. We don't need another dollar, Mr. Speaker, out of the national budget to fix the issues of education in this country. We don't need it. Twenty-eight cents out of every dollar is already being spent on education in this country. What we need to do is to get it right in terms of our efficiency and our effectiveness in what is being spent, and that requires coordination. It requires collaboration. It requires the Opposition to stop playing the games that they play. It requires the parents to support. It requires the communities to support. It requires the churches to support. That is the kind of effort that we need, you will see how we can turn around that over a quarter billion dollars that is being spent on education.

I salute my friend, the Member for Freetown. He was in the time when he could spare a little time from the Attorney General's Office and signing those secret Accommodation Agreements and all of that with my friend, the Right Honourable Member for Fort George. You know, Mr. Speaker, he looks at me as if I am saying something that I am making up. The difference between me and he is that I don't make up those things. He actually did those things. But anyway one of the things the Member for Freetown did was that he said we are going to start attaching preschools to primary schools across this country. And when the administration changed, Mr. Speaker, contrary to what is normally done, they throw away the baby with the bath water, we did not do that. It was the right thing to do to push for early childhood education. It is child stimulation month, Mr. Speaker, this month of March, and I encourage parents, I encourage teachers, I encourage all because it is everybody's business to engage in stimulating our children. Those children need to start strong. That is the platform upon which this government, under the leadership of the Right Honourable Prime Minister, came in, starting strong and then later building stamina. That is the platform, and just to complete my point on access everywhere you go across this country access has increased to preschools. It has increased to primary schools. It has increased to secondary schools.

I listen to them talked nonsense about more than half of the high school aged students are not in high school. They are reading the wrong statistics again. I said the Member for Lake Independence needs a fact update because he was missing for too long. He went missing. That is why he doesn't know the real figures. In fact, the attendance rate at the secondary level for high school aged children now stands at 68%, which is a mark improvement from years ago. Well, he was right, under 50% in this country. So we are moving on a forward pace. It is not to the pace that I would like to see. But sometimes, Mr. Speaker, change is difficult, and change is hard. You have to sell the ideas and get everybody on board, and we are on that path to seeing much more being done.

They want me to talk on access at the tertiary level too. That is in the budget, Mr. Speaker, what is being allotted for places like the University of Belize and about a dozen or so tertiary level institutions, junior colleges across this country, that the government pays the salaries or 70% of the salaries. We give UB

\$10 million. This is an investment, Mr. Speaker. When those on the other side were in government, there was merely 2,000 students at UB. When, in fact, my friend, the Right Honourable Member for Fort George, aided by his trusty Attorney General, the Member for Freetown, could not stand the breaking up of the country, they came to the steps of the National Assembly every chance to riot against him because he was so very wrong to the Belizean people. He said, “No, no, no, we can’t afford to have any more riots. We can’t afford to have the students against us.” Do you remember that, Prime Minister? “So you know what we will absorb those additional fees that UB want to charge and we will only do it for six months.” They hoodwinked the people then, that guy. My goodness! Mr. Speaker, well, six months turned into six years. But the reason we were not able to continue it, Mr. Speaker, was because the number of students attending the University of Belize doubled from 2,000 to 4,000 students.

Under the leadership, Mr. Speaker, of the United Democratic Party Government, more are accessing tertiary education. But you all know that even when they come, if they want to be honest, when they bring their papers, Mr. Speaker, to help more students, we help them. It is not like when my friend, the Honourable Member for Fort George, used to be Prime Minister and I send my letters asking him for things for the children of Collet and he turned it back. You know he had the same good friend, Dr. Carla Barnett, writing these letters because he wasn’t man enough to send the letters, Mr. Speaker, himself, and Dr. Barnett was merely trying to fix the mess that they created. He turned us down. In the entire five years that I was in Opposition, Mr. Speaker, they gave me for my people in Collet, well, at one time they gave me \$5,000, and that was the Freetown representative. The next time they promised \$5,000. I didn’t really get it. I had to pay it myself when I became the Minister, and the then Minister of Economic Development, Mark Espat, had sent some funds, I think, to the tune of about \$1,500 to us in Collet. If you add it all up, let’s say we give them credit for the \$5,000 that he gave, which price I never pay, that is \$11,500 in five years for all of my people in Collet. You ask them what kind of assistance they are getting now from this United Democratic Party Administration in this very same budget, Mr. Speaker, that they are fighting against. That is the kind of generosity. Well, it is not generosity because it is our duty really. But it is the kind of mindset that we have under the Right Honourable Prime Minister. So access has increased.

I want to talk on one other topic, Mr. Speaker, before I go in terms of education. Quality education, Mr. Speaker, there is no government, none, and you know when my friend, the Member for Fort George, was the Minister for Education he spoke about training the teachers. When my friend, the Member from Lake Independence, was the Minister of Education, he spoke about training the teachers. When my friend, the Member for Freetown, was the Minister of Education, they spoke about training the teachers. All three of them put together cannot add up to the number of teachers who have received their training courtesy of the United Democratic Party Administration. (Applause) And, Mr. Speaker, we did not ask a single teacher whether they voted for UDP or they voted for PUP because, Mr. Speaker, we do not play that kind of game in the Ministry. If we do not train the PUP teacher, God knows they are already thwarted in their minds if they are supporting the People’s United Party. But imagine if we don’t give them the training, and then they get into our classroom, right teacher Wally, imagine the kind of damage they would do. My goodness! Wow! (That is a tall order, really tall order there, Member.)

Training at the early childhood level, we are embarking on heavily right now, Mr. Speaker, with the Europeans Union Support Program in the north, the Sugar Measures Program. We trained a significant portion of primary school teachers and secondary school teachers in the south of this country under the European Union Banana Support Program, again, Mr. Speaker. We implemented

the certificate in primary education program. Again, monies are allotted in this big book, Mr. Speaker, for such programs. It is a reality. We have been giving more and more. We implemented bus runs, Mr. Speaker. Now we are enjoying school transportation in the Orange Walk and the Corozal Districts. Is that not the case, my friends from the north sitting in the gallery?

Mr. Speaker, this is unprecedented in this country when it comes to education and all of that has to do, and I listened as my friend from Lake Independence criticized what the government is spending on school feeding programs. Ask him how much they were spending on school feeding programs when he was in office, zilch, *nada*. We have a state-of-the-art school feeding program on the south side of Belize City where there are many poor children and in Dangriga and in River Valley, and we help countless numbers of school feeding programs across this country with resources and materials. We engage our partners like the Japanese, Mr. Speaker. You go down, right Principal Macario Coy, Senator, my apologies, you go down south and you will see that every school in the Toledo District, thanks to our partnership with the Japanese and our partnership with the Ministry of Health, have received school feeding assistance for equipment and not only for that but for gardening as well. So that they will be able to sustain their school feeding program. Don't watch the noise in the market. He will tell you that the figures have been cut for school feeding program. More children are being fed as a result of this administration's push for feeding programs and support for those feeding programs than ever before. The record is there. It speaks for itself. (Applause) Better quality of education, the quality child friendly school initiative, the EQIP program, Mr. Speaker, \$20 million is for teacher training and leadership training. You know I really don't have enough time and I know my colleagues want to go on. You want me to stay and go on. I can tell you about all the initiatives.

You know I tell a story quite often at the graduations that I go. I tell them about my own graduation from sixth form. It may have been, Mr. Speaker, and you are a SJC boy like me. Well, there was a guest speaker who went on and on and on, and then, yes, the people started to clap trying to hope that he would get the impression, get the understanding and finish. But, no, he, and the man is now deceased. So I can talk about him, but I still won't call his name. He was a good UDP. So I won't. But he misinterpreted the applause, Mr. Speaker, to believe that he was doing such a great job. Well, I won't put you in that category today. I won't put myself in that category today.

Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my speaking just a little bit about my constituency, the great Collet Division, the smartest people I would want to think in this country who continue to vote for me every time more and more overwhelmingly without buying them like some of my friends from the other side, Mr. Speaker. I am not calling any name, Mr. Speaker. You know it would be improper of me to impugn such motive on their part. So I won't go there. But, Mr. Speaker, you know what really bothers me when these on the other side get up, and I think the Prime Minister outlined the amount that was spent in that flood. You hear them criticize the Prime Minister about that \$1.9 million. I heard the Leader of the Opposition repeat the ridiculous talk about flat-screen TV and a whole lot of nonsense. Why do you continue to spew nonsense? Where is the evidence that any flat-screen TV was bought after that flood? Nonsense! He talked about pibil and so on. You would think that pibil is caviar. You would think that it is something grand, and I warned you about criticizing barbecue and pibil. It did not work for you. It did not diminish my margin in the Collet Division. In fact, it increased the margin. (Applause) And no matter what kind of nonsense you all talk on that other side, the people of Collet are in love with Patrick Faber, and Patrick Faber is in love with the people of Collet. You cannot come between that. (Applause) And if I can put in a plug for my campaign the people of the UDP

are in love with Patrick Faber and Patrick Faber is in love with the people of Collet. (Applause)

But what bothered me Mr. Speaker, is the way they twist this \$1.9 million as if it were a splurge, a waste. The entire Collet division, Mr. Speaker, was under water. I want to take him into my constituency, and, Mr. Speaker, it was as a result of that flood I admit that, in fact, I was able to get into the homes of many of my constituents to see, my goodness, this is how some of our people live. You know I was very glad to have that opportunity because it reminded me why it was that I became a representative, and sometimes we need these kinds of activities to remind us. Then he complained about \$1.9 million. Our people, even after the spending, our request to the Prime Minister was for over half a million dollars for one division, and that was not to give anyone a flat-screen TV, as the Leader of the Opposition would want you to believe. That was to help them get a decent mattress back because the mattresses were soak in water. It was as well, Mr. Speaker, to provide them with those warm meals in the times when they could not access their homes and blankets, Mr. Speaker, and to buy some very basic meager materials. I will tell you, I don't know who you are talking about, Member from the other side, but I can tell you that every dime that the Prime Minister allotted to us in Collet was spent on the people and on their needs. And I am telling you it was nowhere near those needs that they had after that flood. So, please, stop talking nonsense about that \$1.9 million.

Why wouldn't they get any money? I didn't get any money. You see, Mr. Speaker, you see how ridiculous he is. We don't do things the way he did it. When the monies for the Venezuelan housing grants came, when we did not give get, the duly elected representative from Collet, any access to the money, when I say we get it, I don't mean I got it physical in my pocket. How ridiculous are you? That's the way how you did things. (Applause) When I say that, we, the people in Collet, I don't walk around with the government's money in my pocket. Maybe you believe so because that may have been your practice. (Applause) Absolutely ridiculous, Mr. Speaker, absolutely! Every dime, Mr. Speaker, we spent. We gave simple materials like plywood and zinc, Mr. Speaker, to help people in their homes, and they can say what they want, Mr. Speaker. That is the kind of assistance that people needed at the time, but I am telling you in one constituency, and the Prime Minister didn't even give us what we asked for, maybe not even half of what we asked for. But we were grateful for what we got, and we made do with the situation.

Mr. Speaker, the Collet constituency can be looking forward to great things. Mr. Speaker, we are about to launch an initiative in Collet that will see one particular area, that same area probably that was hardest hit by the flood, the Antelope Street extension area, Mr. Speaker. And we will attack the issues there in a multi-pound way, Mr. Speaker. I want people to pay attention. We are going to deal with the issues of single mothers. You know that we have already been doing this. That was why Gwen Liz was opened, and Mr. Speaker, 600 adult learners go to the Gwen Liz evening program, and, yes, they might have temporary construction jobs and other kinds of jobs. But, when they are finished with their high school diploma, is it not that they will be in a better position? We will work with our single mothers. We will provide daycare facilities for them while they go to Gwen Liz in the evening, Mr. Speaker, or night care facilities. We will feed their children. We will encourage them to beautify the place, Mr. Speaker, because not because you are poor you are to be nasty. We will encourage them in that regard. We will build our women's ability and capacity by giving them training in entrepreneurship and financial literacy, Mr. Speaker, to help them to better be able to manage monies. These are not promises pie-in-the-sky Mr. Speaker. These are realities with the help of the south side poverty alleviation social component and the other support that we get from our partners, Mr. Speaker.

The young people we will engage in the use of technology. My friend, the former Senator Mr. Blades, will tell you, Mr. Speaker, that our young people will embrace the raspberry pie technology, which is a programming that is fast catching on in Belize. In all our high schools now we will train our young people in that regard. We will give our males jobs, Mr. Speaker, to help in terms of some of the same temporary jobs. But, while they are working sustaining their families, their families will be pulling themselves up by the bootstraps, Mr. Speaker. So Collet division can continue to look forward to these great things.

You know, Mr. Speaker, across the country the resources of the Ministry of Education has been spent, and even in the Opposition constituencies they can tell you that we have been fair in terms of the distribution of resources, if they want to be honest. And you will understand that that is sometime difficult for them to do. But charity begins at home, and I make no apologies about that. The people of Collet have no want for educational opportunities, and one day we will rise. And, Mr. Speaker, we were gifted one single, what do we call them, my brother, it is a mobile school, Mr. Speaker, that comes equipped with all the technologies, about 50 computers in there. It is a gift from, I believe, the OAS, and the people of Collet will know that it will be situated right there, smacked in the Antelope Street extension area between the Unity Presbyterian Primary School and the office of the Area Representative for our children who live on those london bridges, which exist, Mr. Speaker, not because the government encourages it. It is a dangerous situation, and we will have to talk to the community as well about getting off that lagoon because it is a dangerous situation. The other flood that comes might well not cause the kind of small damage that was caused, but that is another issue. We will put that mobile school right there in the Collet division, Mr. Speaker, and we will continue to build the capacity of our people. I wish I had much more time to talk about all that we do in the Collet area. Sorry, it is not mobile. We will put it on a foundation. And the foundation, by the way, was a foundation that was built by your former colleague, the former deputy leader, who you most unceremoniously kicked out of play, the former challenger in Collet who tried twice and could not defeat yours truly. So they built a foundation. I don't know what kind of games they were playing with it. But we will use that foundation now to put the school on so that it can serve our Nation.

Mr. Speaker, inclosing, let me say this, that I thank the people of Collet tremendously for the kind of confidence that they have bestowed on me, the kind of love that they have shared with me. I place on record my gratitude to my aides, Mr. Roosevelt Blades, and Mr. Rayford Gordon, and the former representative, the woman, the first woman champion of the United Democratic Party, the Honourable Faith Stuart Bob, who is continuously at my side, serving the needs of the people of the constituency of Collet, Mr. Speaker. (Applause) I thank them for the work that they have done in the constituency, and I go on to thank even the wider people of the United Democratic Party and the wider people of the country of Belize who give me support every day. You know yesterday was my birthday, 38, and the amount of love, pouring out, that I received yesterday was also because I was launching my campaign, my bid, and it was a very successful launch. I thank my colleagues who supported me in that regard. But the love was overwhelming on Facebook and in real life. And so I want to thank you all for always supporting me, and you know you have my commitment to service for my constituency and for my party, but most importantly for the people of this country. I thank you, Mr. Speaker. (Applause)

RT. HON. S. MUSA (Fort George): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, before you leave the room, Honourable Minister, happy birthday. Mr. Speaker, over the past one hour and twenty minutes, you would have thought that we were debating the budget for the year 2006/2007. I felt a little privileged, in fact, honored that the

Member for Collet Division, the Minister of Education, would spend so much time trying to debate...

MR. SPEAKER: One second, Member, members of the gallery over here, listen to me, please, quietly leave, if you are going to leave. Do it quietly, please. Proceed, Member.

RT. HON. S. MUSA (Fort George): Yes, I felt a special privilege that the Minister would spend so much time trying to debate a Musa budget of 2006, instead of trying to make his contribution to the 2016 budget debate. But I suppose this wannabe Prime Minister could not find it within himself to really concentrate on the budget before us today. So he harps back to the 2006. And it makes me feel that this man has an obsession, an obsession with me, Mr. Speaker. (You wouldn't want that, right. I don't think I want it either.) (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, it's a lot of hot air listening to this Minister. He spoke for one hour and twenty minutes and it was a lot of hot air because the more he spoke, the more I am reminded of the old expression, fish got caught by its mouth. This roundabout Minister, because we are building a lot of roundabouts now you know Mr. Speaker. This is a roundabout government. Millions have been spent on infrastructure, on roundabouts and I can understand why we have a roundabout government now because, just listening to the Minister of Education, he is a roundabout Minister. Mr. Speaker, he dared me to say that the PUP did not built as many schools as the UDP. Well, I will stand up today and say that the People's United Party Governments have built more schools than the UDP by any stretch of the imagination. (Applause) And you can go right across this country from Corozal to Toledo, from San Pedro to Benque Viejo del Carmen, that's right, PUP built more schools; PUP built more houses than the UDP; PUP built more health facilities than the UDP; PUP expanded more electricity than the UDP; and PUP built more water systems across this country than the UDP. Well, as for land, PUP distributed far more land than the UDP. Isn't that so, Honourable Gaspar Vega, Honourable Minister? Isn't that so? You will not dispute that, right? Clearly what the Minister of Education came here today is to give his campaign speech to become the next Prime Minister or the next leader, I should say, of the UDP. Ambition is one thing you know, Mr. Speaker, and even though he had the Honourable Member for Mesopotamia, the Honourable Minister, there supporting him, and even though he brought out his Bishop, that doesn't mean anything you know, Mr. Speaker, because the man sitting right next to him want it too, exactly, the Member for Belmopan. So it is not over yet until the fat lady sings. (Applause) It is just an expression, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: You are obsessed with fat jokes.

RT. HON. S. MUSA (Fort George): It is just an expression. Forgive me. I turn, Mr. Speaker, to my contribution to the budget. In a previous budget speech, the Right Honourable Prime Minister compared himself to the Greek mythical figure, Prometheus. He imagined he was Prometheus unbound and proclaimed boastfully that, as Minister of Finance, he will go for broke. Those are his words. "Now we are going for broke." Well, Mr. Speaker, today I can say there is also another word from the Greek language which is called hubris. Hubris which in Greek tragedy means excessive pride and arrogance, in defiance of the Gods themselves. Hubris leads to nemesis, which means, of course, eventual downfall. You see, Mr. Speaker, over these past eight years, as the Honourable Member for Lake Independence pointed out, and, indeed, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, the Prime Minister has presided over the expenditure of about \$8 billion, \$8 billion dollars with a "B". And so obsessed, hear this word comes up again, so obsessed was the leader of the UDP to win a third term, so obsessed were all of them, in fact, that he has, indeed, gone for broke, and now the country is broke. Thousands of Belizeans are broke. The Treasury has been raided, Mr.

Speaker. The Central Bank has been raided. The amount of Treasury Bills have more than doubled. The Government has been on a spending binge. And, like the proverbial drunken sailor, while the spree was going on, there was no concern about tomorrow.

In addition to the billions spent from the budgeted amounts collected from the people in taxes, they also borrowed and spent millions more. We've heard about the \$325 million of Petrocaribe funds, loan funds, squandered. They also blew away \$160 million of budgetary support from Taiwan; \$20 million every budget year they get from Taiwan. They borrowed millions more from the World Bank, millions more from the IDB, millions more from the CDB, and millions more from CABEL. And, in order to prop BTL, which they had taken over, they raided Social Security funds for another \$50 million, \$15 million in addition went to the BEL acquisition. Mr. Speaker, as the Leader of the Opposition said, the chickens have, indeed, come home to roost. And, before the Caribbean Court of Justice was about to deliver a stinging indictment of the government's compulsory acquisition of BTL, the Prime Minister ate humble pie and struck and he lent our deal with the same Lord that he had demonized before. Government has paid so far for BTL, Mr. Speaker, \$163 million and will soon be paying out another or at least \$200 million or so for the final settlement of the BTL compensation after the international arbitral award is expected in the next few months. It is not just me saying this. As the Leader of the Opposition pointed out, the Prime Minister is saying this too in his budget speech at page 23 of his speech.

So, Mr. Speaker, the Belize Government and the taxpayers of Belize will end up paying over \$360 million for this aging telephone company which now under the bright-eyed boy, that is now the CEO of that company, another \$40 million is now being borrowed to install, as the say, high speed Internet. All along they have been telling us for the past eight years you know that we had high speed Internet. Now we are going to have 4G LTE. Or is that the SMART one? It's 4G LT, \$40 million when the other competitor is spending about \$10 million. Anyway that is how the money is going, Mr. Speaker.

With all these millions that the government has saddled our people with, the outturn for the 2015/2016 Budget is a disaster, showing an overall deficit of \$180 million or 5.1% of GDP. The simple fact is, when you look at the record, this government, from the time it came into office in 2008, has not been able to present to this House a single balance budget, never once. In every year since 2008, there has been no surplus, only deficits. But this one is one of the worst, Mr. Speaker, a deficit of \$5.1 billion. And you might think, well, what is the big deal, 5% deficit of GDP? It's a big deal, Mr. Speaker. It is a big deal for a government that says, "We behave with prudence." It is a financing gap that has to be closed off now \$266 million. And, when you add in the \$135 million which the Prime Minister himself had to admit is not reflected in the budget but is somewhere in the financing section of the budget, when you add that in, you get \$401 million financing gap. And, when the award comes in now of the other \$200 million that the government has to find we are looking at a financing hole in the red of over \$600 million, Mr. Speaker.

The other thing I want to mention right from the outset, the Prime Minister in his budget speech makes the bold assertion, almost as matter of factly, that the Petrocaribe program has been transparent through and through, he said. Mr. Speaker, he may be suffering from selective amnesia, but we on this side of the House and the Belizean people will not forget that this Government and this Minister of Finance borrowed and spent most of that \$325 million without the prior approval of this National Assembly, without. So it was illegal from day one and in violation of the Finance and Audit (Reform) Act. In fact, it was a criminal act because it was made a crime by that government, the UDP Government. And

it was only after the Member for Cayo Central, Cayo South, forgive me, filed a claim in the Supreme Court against the Prime Minister that he rushed, he the Prime Minister, rushed to this House, rammed through with the sheep like “ayes” of the majority on that side. He rammed through that Bill to, what? It was to confirm and validate retroactively the illegal act that they have already committed. I shouldn’t just say he, but they all committed it because they all benefitted from it. (Applause) Yes, Mr. Speaker, there was absolutely no transparency or accountability when they were spending the money on dubious, bloated contracts, tacos parties, and, well, the Member for Collet admit you know that he won big in Collet because of the pibil. That was what he was saying a while ago. Mother’s day cheers and Christmas day cheers for their supporters, of course, that’s the kind of accountability we had, Mr. Speaker. Where is the accountability for any of that \$325 million that was spent? All we got is a list of headings, no kind of accountability. In fact, there has been no accountability for the entire spending of the Capital II budget for the past eight year.

But going back to the Petrocaribe, Mr. Speaker, that program will go down in history as the biggest piñata, the biggest grabbed tub, slush fund for UDP cronies and a vote-buying campaign. And they make no apologies for that you know, Mr. Speaker. I never forget you know. One good thing about getting old, Mr. Speaker, is that you remember the important things. I never forget that in 2007, when we presented that last budget, you know when the election was in the air, the now Prime Minister, the then Leader of the Opposition, could not believe it that we were presenting a budget when there was nothing in there to win the elections with. But we were presenting a realistic budget, Mr. Speaker. We were presenting a fairly austere budget, of course, because that was the nature of the beast at that time. We had to present an austere budget, and I never forget it, the Member, the then Leader of the Opposition, was shocked. He thought we would have come here with a lot of major spending, a lot of plums for the people because that is exactly what they have done. They have blown away the budget, in order to win the so-called third term the obsession they had to winning this third term. Eight years, that is all they have been doing you know. They have only been worried about winning elections, not worrying about thinking of the next generation. (Applause)

Not only was there no transparency in the borrowing and spending of Petrocaribe, as I said, the entire Capital II infrastructure budget is without transparency, done in the dark, in secret, done by very dubious organizations like BIL, done by a few choice crony contractors, yes, like Emir Hernandez, I will call names, like the Arguelles brothers, yes. (Applause)

The many financial improprieties, Mr. Speaker, in the Immigration Department, I see they are coming with a law now so that the Member for Belize Rural Central will be able to sign for passports and all that. They did not do that when Mr. Penner was signing all those illegal passports, but he doesn’t want to admit that now. There has been so much corruption and scandal in the Immigration Department, Mr. Speaker, so much corruption that even the Prime Minister called the Lands Department was a hotbed of corruption. Maybe that is the reason why the poor Deputy Prime Minister decided to leave. He has had enough you know when his own Prime Minister can say that. (Applause) His own Prime Minister is saying that he is presiding over a hotbed of corruption. So why should he stick around with that? I cannot blame him. Yes, Mr. Speaker. (Did you hear what he said? He is tempted to join the PUP. Sorry for misquoting, you Minister.)

We have to question, Mr. Speaker, the reliability of the financial statements from this government. The last audit for the 2011/2012 Fiscal Year, the Auditor General had this to say, and I quote her words. “In my opinion the

financial statements do not give a true and fair view of the government's financial position in accordance with the Finance and Audit (Reform) Act". Mr. Speaker, the position remains the same today in 2016 but only worst.

I turn now to the issue of unemployment, Mr. Speaker. In 2008, the UDP came to power when the unemployment rate was a little over 8%. They can't dispute that. Oh, yes, you can. Well, then go and look at the budget speech of your Prime Minister for Fiscal Year 2008 to 2009 on the last page where it shows that unemployment is 8.5%. (Applause) In one year under the UDP, when they took over, unemployment shot up to 13%, and by 2010 it had peaked to over 23%. These are all the figures in the budget books of the UDP you know. According to the Prime Minister, the unemployment rate has now fallen to 10.2%. But, in yet another of his many exaggerated, hyperbolic utterances, he said that we now have the lowest unemployment in a decade, another case of gross deception. If I was outside of the House I would say he *laiyad*. (Applause) Yes, Mr. Speaker, the point is that even the Member for Belmopan had to correct him and said, "Yes, but let's say for the last five years not the decade you know." Actually for the last five years, in 2013, it was 12.9%. In 2014, it was 11.6% and in 2015 it was 10 point something percent. So in the last five years they did bring it down to 10.2% you know. But certainly when the Prime Minister said it was the lowest in a decade that certainly was not the truth, not accurate.

The other point to note, Mr. Speaker, on this whole issue of unemployment, because unemployment is a good guide as to where we are in the state of the economy, is that, according to the Statistical Institute of Belize, in 2015, 18,700 persons, according to the Labor Force Survey, worked an average of only 20 hours a week, 20 hours a week. In other words, Mr. Speaker, this large number of people were underemployed and that is included or that is part of those employed, fully employed. So, when you deduct that 18,700, you realize the real unemployment is much higher, and, as the Member for Lake Independence pointed out as, for the young people, that is more like 20% to 25% unemployment. That is the reality that we are living with. The Cayo and the Stann Creek Districts, I had to go into the figures because I had to check out these numbers, Mr. Speaker, and, you look at the SIB report for 2015, the Cayo District and the Stann Creek District had the highest rates of unemployment, of joblessness, 14% and 15.2%, respectively.

So, Mr. Speaker, the economic prospects for Belize, if we continue along this same misguided path, are very bleak. As we have heard from this side of the House, the agroproductive sector is not expanding. The Prime Minister has admitted that production from virtually all export commodities is expected to contract. The sugar industry is in deep trouble. The cane farmers will be getting much less for their crop. All the other major agricultural industries are down, banana, citrus, farm shrimps, rice, beans, all down. And, of course, we have heard and we know the major producer of papaya for exports is shutting down, laying off hundreds of workers. Local oil production by BNE is trickling. Belize's exports in 2015 totaled \$535 million, but the country imported \$2.1 billion in 2015. This is the largest trade imbalance ever in the history of Belize: imports at \$2.1 billion; and exports at \$535 million, half a billion. So we are importing \$1.5 billion more than we are exporting.

This Easter I am told, Mr. Speaker, we have this disgraceful situation where Belize is importing fish from Vietnam, of all places. Fish is coming all the way from Vietnam to feed our people this Easter. Yes, Member, I want to hear you on that. I want to hear you on that, Minister for Tourism. I want to hear you on that, Minister for San Pedro, where you are supposed to have some fishermen still. We are importing fish from Vietnam, Mr. Speaker. This is the disastrous state of affairs we are in. We are fast approaching, Mr. Speaker, if the present trend

continues, a collapse of this economy when we will be unable to pay for the goods we need to import.

And, tourism receipts, Mr. Speaker, cannot alone, cannot cover the growing trade imbalance which will continue to widen and eat up all of the country's international reserves, especially now that the Petrocaribe Program is in the oxygen tent, on life support. Belize, in fact, if the present trend continues, is becoming a basket case, not a bread basket for the region, Mr. Speaker, as we used to hope it would become, a basket case under this UDP government.

We are perceived as a money laundering/ human trafficking country with rampant corruption flowing like a tidal wave into the Departments and Ministries of Government in Belmopan. That is the perception, Mr. Speaker. And you know what they say about politics, perception is everything. And, when the people out there, international community, see us as a money laundering nation, is it any surprising we are having all these problems with the corresponding banks? They are all shutting down on us.

The government, Mr. Speaker, has refused for the past eight years to subscribe to the assessment of this international organization called Transparency International. Under the People's United Party, we were not afraid of being subjected to an assessment by Transparency International. As soon as the UDP got into office in 2008, that had stopped. No longer can you get a report from Transparency International about Belize. Mr. Speaker, we have to ask the question, if this UDP Government has nothing to hide, if they have been operating as an honest government, not allowing even the whiff of corruption to taint their reputation before the Prime Minister pulls out his machete to chop it down, do you remember that famous statement, Mr. Speaker? What happened to the machete? They lost the file or what? What are you afraid of, you on the other side of the House? Why are you afraid of Transparency International, if you have nothing to hide? We ask this question, Mr. Speaker, because until the Belize government, whichever party is in government, subscribes to such organizations as that, and, as the Leader of the Opposition said, until we subscribe to the United Nations Convention Against Corruption we will continue to be attacked by these international forces as a corrupt government, as a money laundering government, as a human trafficking government. We will become a pariah in the international community.

Mr. Speaker, never before, since the time of Independence, 35 years ago, have the Belizean people been faced with so much uncertainty, so many threats to our economic survival, so many threats to our national sovereignty and territorial integrity. Our forest is being raped and denuded by Guatemalan chainsaw lumberjacks and xateros. The Chiquibul Reserve is under constant threat by Guatemalan squatters. Now our own BDF had to face down the Guatemalan military who have threatened our patrol traveling up the Sarstoon River to our outpost at Cadenas. And we have a new government in Guatemala, whose Foreign Ministry has put out a public release, stating that the entire Sarstoon River belongs to them, and this is a brazen attempt, Mr. Speaker, to usurp ownership and control in open violation, Mr. Speaker, in open violation of the long established and agreed boundary line between Belize and Guatemala over the Sarstoon. As the Leader of the Opposition has said, we are prepared to work with the Government to rebuff this kind of threat and attacks coming from the Government of Guatemala and the military, in particular, because we have to stand up as the united front in the face of this matter. But never before in the post independent Belize have Belizeans felt so vulnerable and insecure. On the home front, our trade and investments, our way of doing business, our international payments have been jeopardized by the corresponding banking crisis looming before us. Private sectors investments have slow down. The Prime Minister this

time did not even bothered to consult with the private sector on this budget. I believe he has only done so about twice in the past eight years.

So we have a situation, and they cannot deny this, that the real economy is stagnant. Some would say even heading into depression. Workers are being laid off. Petrocaribe is over or almost down to a trickle. The flow of oil from Spanish Lookout is down to a trickle. The Government is taxing the people another \$50 million more on fuel price. Millions of dollars owed by the government to creditors, including judgments of the Supreme Court, Mr. Speaker, are not being honored. The government is fast becoming a hard pay government. They do not want to pay even judgments of the court, but they have no problem finding the millions in legal fees to be paid to such people like the brother of the Prime Minister. I notice under operating cost, item number 41 in the Ministry of Finance, page 46 of the budget estimates, under the heading legal and professional fees, in 2013/2014, the sum of \$5 million was paid. In 2014/2015, the sum of \$4.9 million was paid. In 2015/2016, another \$4.9 million was paid. And for good measures, for 2016/2017, another \$5 million is being budgeted.

Then in Capital II budget, in the same budget that we are looking at today, Mr. Speaker, Capital II in the Ministry of Finance, item 1808, legal and professional advisory services, for Financial Year 2013/2014, it is \$9.2 million. For 2014/2015, it is \$2 million. For 2015/2016, it is \$1.4 million, and, for 2016/2017, it is another million. But let's just deal with the figures between 2013 and 2015, Mr. Speaker, to sum it all up, a total of \$26.4 million has been paid out by this government on legal and professional fees to their family attorneys. Since we are dealing with these special fees, Mr. Speaker, for special people, mention must be made of the \$1.6 million, according to the SmartStream now, paid out to an organization called Hallmark Limited on the 21st of March 2013, plus an additional \$658,333 on the 21st of August 2013, to quote, this was for "success fee," and advisory services which incidentally, according to the SmartStream payments record, to Hallmark again, \$20,000 monthly retainer.

So you see, Mr. Speaker, while the special family, friends and cronies are getting richer, the poor are getting poorer. And, with all the millions and millions spent on infrastructure and special projects, this kind of economic growth, Mr. Speaker, is not benefitting the vast majority of the Belizean people. The poverty rate, as the Member for Lake Independence and the Leader of the Opposition have pointed out, has increased to over 40%, going closer to 50% now, I think, when we left it, it was at 33%. With over 8 billion spent over the past eight years, the GDP per capita increase is negligible, as the leader pointed out. By comparison, between 1998 and 2008, according to the IMF World Bank Report, the GDP per capita went from 5,675 to 7306. The per capita is per person, Mr. Speaker. That's an increase of 1,631 per capita. Now between 2008 and 2016 UDP, it has increased from 7,306 to 7,663, an increase of only \$375. It shows now which government has been working for the people and which is not working for the people. (Applause)

What is worst, Mr. Speaker, or just as bad, is that the outstanding external debt at the end of 2015, according to the Prime Minister, not me, according to the Prime Minister, and I am going by his budget speech, is \$2.6 billion. The external debt is \$2.6 billion at 2015. This is the highest the government debt has ever been in the history of Belize. Incidentally, Mr. Speaker, at the end of the PUP term in office in 2008, even with the so-called super bond and all the accumulated debt, PUP Esquivel debt, everything, the total debt in 2008 was US \$971 million or Bz \$1.9 billion. In other words, it's less than \$2 billion, Mr. Speaker. So to recap because I hate to talk figures too much, Mr. Speaker, because we tend to get lost with all these numbers, but I need to recap. The Barrow UDP external debt, according to his budget figures, is \$2.6 billion, and, according to the Prime

Minister's budget figures in his June 2008 speech and budget presentation, the debt, when he took over, was \$1.9 billion. In other words Mr. Speaker, the UDP with all their talk and propaganda has sent the debt much higher than the PUP when we left it by over \$700 million. We owe over \$700 million today than we did in 2008. So, Mr. Speaker, I would invite the Prime Minister to eat his words when he falsely claimed that the public debt, as a percentage of GDP, has shrunk by 15% from when the UDP took office in 2008. That is just not true by his own words.

Mr. Speaker, this is by far the worst Budget, and I am winding up now, worst budget presented by this Prime Minister in his eight years in office, even worse than the 2009 situation when we had a deep recession, when there was no growth at all. The Right Honourable Gentleman could not muster up his usual hyperbolic, verbal, gymnastic flights of fancy to cover up his Government's waste, extravagant waste, and gross mismanagement. The illusion of prosperity has faded from his usual deceptive sophistry. The gentleman seemed decidedly bored with himself when he was presenting his budget speech. He seemed bored with himself. He seemed bored with even listening to his own voice. So, Mr. Speaker, I think that is the true reflection of where we are today when the Right Honourable Prime Minister of this nation is so bored with the present situation, with his performance, that he almost fell asleep while giving it.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I do need to say a word about education, sports and culture. I really shouldn't have to because it has been fully dealt with by the Member for Lake Independence. But there is no denying the fact that over the years all governments, both PUP and UDP governments, have made significant allocations in terms of dollars and cents to the education budget. And, in 2015, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and Culture now is budgeted for \$250 million, almost a quarter of the budget, very commendable. In the upcoming 2016/2017 budget, the proposal is to increase it to \$275 million, very commendable, but don't forget they have Culture with them now. But, Mr. Speaker, over 90%, and this is where, and it is not necessarily a criticism of the UDP per say. It's an objective criticism. Over 90% of the \$250 million is going on recurrent expenditure. The bulk of which is in salaries. And, while we certainly applaud the fact that teachers and public officers and police and BDF will be getting an increase, the fact of the matter is that we are totally ignoring programming, real programming budget to provide for programs, programs that need to be implemented, if we are to improve our education system.

Culture, NICH, is getting a measly \$2.6 million, total, and sports about the same, and they have spent over \$25 million on the Marion Jones Stadium, and they still can't finish it. Well, and then there is this ridiculous figure of \$56,000 for science and technology. Now, if you are going to spend \$56,000, and the Member for Cayo North should appreciate this because he is a scientist. You have a doctorate, right. Or is it a masters? Yes, Dr. Figueroa. It is a ridiculous figure of \$56,000 on science and technology. Now, Mr. Speaker, we all recognize in this Chamber that science is where we are going. An essential part of our culture has to do with science, information technology, but yet we are programming to spend \$56,000. That is a shame, ridiculous, absurd. And how much was spent last year? It is \$17,000. You really have to do something about that, Member for Cayo North. If you manage to decipher the vision of the Ministry of Education in the budget book, and, Mr. Speaker, I have to confess here that I had great difficulty understanding anything in this budget book. I could not read it. The figures are so small. I had to get a magnifying glass to try and make out what they were saying and that is obviously deliberate. They are trying to slow me down right. It is a book that does require a magnifying glass. (Talk for yourself. Talk for yourself. It's not how old you are. It's how old you feel.) (Applause)

So, Mr. Speaker, when we look with the magnifying glass at the vision of the Ministry of Education, it is for “equitable access to an efficiently, delivered quality and relevant education at all levels for all Belizeans,” very commendable, Mr. Speaker, very lofty goal. The only thing is that I have heard it before, many times before. The only trouble is that the Ministry is failing miserably in the realization of this vision. What is the use of providing key performance indicators in the budget book? What’s the use? When if you check those key indicators, all that you will come across is blank pages, blank pages, and blank sheets of paper. What kind of indicators are those? The majority of our students, Mr. Speaker, are still doing very poorly in Mathematics and English. Excellence may be the goal but the outcome, Mr. Speaker, and the reality is growing mediocrity.

To quote from the report on education by the study done by the Inter-American Development Bank, Belize is paying a lot for education but getting little. So the Minister of Education, instead of having this vaunting ambition, can’t wait for the Prime Minister to step down, because if you listened to him on the television last night you would have really think that they are going into a contest for the Prime Ministership you know. Yes, this vaunting ambition, all his mind is on becoming Prime Minister now, becoming the leader of the UDP. Mr. Speaker, instead of focusing on that, what he should do is focus on the work he should be doing in education. And, instead of criticizing the teachers, I notice this time he was quiet about that. Yes, that is exactly what he will do. He has already given them notice that a lot of them will go. He is going to fire them. Anyways, instead of focusing on really improving the quality of education which is what he should be doing, he is more concerned about his political aspiration to become the Prime Minister.

So in concluding, Mr. Speaker, finally, after all the millions and billions of dollars that have been spent over these past eight years, there is prosperity for the few, the few and the well-connected, Member for Mesopotamia. For the many, it is persistent poverty and grinding misery. The gap between the rich and the poor has widened. The standard of living for far too many Belizeans has deteriorated, and there is growing dependency and hopelessness in the land. But, like those who have spoken before me on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, I too say to all Belizeans, “We cannot lose hope.” The feeling of despair is not an option. We have to have hope, and there is hope because there are good people in Belize, good people who are prepared to stand up and struggle for what is right and what is just. There is hope because there is still love among the Belizean people. Yes, Mr. Speaker, we speak of love in this House, and the power of love will eventually predominate over the love of power and the forces of hate and discord. I too, like the Members on this side, I too believe we are living in a good country; Belize can become a great country. When instead of being obsessed only with wining elections and spending the resources of the people with a focus on the next election, we need to harness our talents, our energies and resources into taking Belize to its rightful place, in a peaceful world of freedom, justice and equality. Let us do our work, not just for the next election, Mr. Speaker, but for the next generation. Thank you. (Applause)

HON. T. TAEGAR PANTON (Minister of State in the Ministry of Investment, Trade and Commerce): Mr. Speaker, allow me, first, to publicly acknowledge and thank the voters of the Albert constituency on whose behalf I am pleased to make my contribution to this important debate. I thank them especially for their vote of confidence in my government’s administration, a government for the people. I am humbled by their stellar support and the divisive mandate they have afforded me to serve as their duly elected Area Representative. (Applause) You see, Mr. Speaker, the Albert Constituency is no different than the other 30 electoral divisions who have been the primary beneficiaries of the people-centered, pro-poor policies that continue to be the driving force of this

UDP Administration. I can confirm that, through the Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports and Culture, young Albert residents have received unprecedented access to educational opportunities at the primary, secondary, vocational and tertiary levels. In addition to tuition support, there has been support for the purchase of textbooks, school supplies, feeding programs and other extra-curricular activities, particularly in the areas of music and sports. I am proud to report that this year's national football secondary schools champion hails from the Anglican Cathedral College one of the oldest established academic institutions in this country and one of two coed high schools in the Albert Constituency.

Our residents have also benefitted significantly from the housing grant program administered through the Ministry of Housing. In this current fiscal year, 500 households were able to tap in to funding, made available for home repairs through this people-centered initiative. Access to land was made available at Cotton Tree for some 50 first-time landowners, via our Ministry of Natural Resources. Several families have been given access to the Food Pantry Program designed by the Ministry of Human Development and Poverty Alleviation. Already even before the passage of this budget we are in the process of accessing another group of households who will benefit tremendously from an initiative that affords, even the most vulnerable, the opportunity to put food on their tables daily. Infrastructure works have been made available through the support of our central government, the support that the government has provided to local municipalities via the Petrocaribe fund. Just a couple months ago, Mr. Speaker, a crew of 20 young men from the Albert Division were part of a community outreach program to rebuild Wagner's Lane and Burkly Streets. For these young men and their families, this allowed them to work together in harmony as a community and to do for themselves. There was no fanfare, no media blitz, but I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, there was a great deal of pride and even a greater sense of accomplishments. I am proud of these young men from Jump Street. It is these initiatives that help us to rebuild a sense of community.

As we debate revenues verses expenditure, I implore my colleagues in this Honourable House that we must also take into account both direct and indirect impact as well as the tangible and intangible benefits such as programs like these that are planned for those we are elected to serve. Mr. Speaker, many of my constituents have benefited from the mortgage write-off programs, the write-off of outstanding bills at the KHMH. Many have been recipients of the extraordinary support provided during the flooding we experienced in the latter half of last year. Those in my constituency who work in the public service continue to receive annual wage increments as part of the government's comprehensive salary adjustment program. Improvements in health services provided by the Ministry of Health, improvements to the citizen protection programs and community policing efforts being spearheaded by the Ministry of National Security, access to affordable mortgage capital made available through the Ministry of Finance and the National Bank of Belize have all provided a renewed sense of hope.

As I have said before, Mr. Speaker, ours is a government for the people. Our programs and our policies are designed to ensure that we maintain equity and that we create new opportunities to those who may be marginalized and underserved, policies and programs that will allow us to maintain stability in our local economy even in a sluggish global reality. I make reference, Mr. Speaker, to the areas of investment, trade and commerce for which I have been assigned oversight responsibilities, in areas that continue to attract strategic investments to Belize. Reforms actively being pursued through stakeholder engagement and cross-ministerial collaboration will strengthen the investment infrastructure to allow for more seamless facilitation and greater predictability in the investment process. Our plan seeks to improve Belize's visibility as a prime investment

destination in this region. This will support foreign direct investments but will also support local investors and investors from our Belizean Diaspora who hold Belize at heart and who wish to come back and participate in Belize's development. We are in the process of tailoring our investment portfolio based on the needs and priorities of our country by districts to encourage the expansion of existing Belizean businesses and see the formation of new SME's, the small and medium enterprises on whose very perseverance our national economy has been built.

Our national investment portfolio will also comprise a new dimension. Over the past two years, the government has commissioned an assessment of Belize's readiness to utilize a Public/Private Partnership Platform for development. It has been determined that this new model is relevant and timely within the present outlook and can serve as a mechanism to support both the development and management of major infrastructural works, projects such as new port facilities, new airport facilities, an upgraded road network that will take into consideration the movement of people, the movement of settlements, access to markets, improved land transportation systems, and the use of waterways to further expand tourism and tourism auxiliary services.

High on our list of priorities, Mr. Speaker, is our desire to influence the quality of our outputs from the conceptual phase so that local goods and services can be designed to be export ready from the onset and able to command a greater share of regional and international markets. Through the support of this budget we will also complete a national investment policy and strategy that will be aligned with our national development goals in an effort to improve investor confidence and advance priority sectors for growth. It is important to note that the government has been relentless in its efforts to attract and facilitate credible investments with meaningful effect. Our collective efforts have catalyzed the evaluation of Standards and of Poor's sovereign rating for Belize from B negative (B-) to B positive (B+). ECLAC has also ranked Belize as fifth in the Caribbean in terms of foreign direct investment inflows in relation to GDP in 2014, and third in the Caribbean in terms of profitability of FDI's between 2008 to 2013, attesting to Belize's innovative FDI approach and by extension our increasing competitiveness. Mr. Speaker, the incentive programs support enterprises in several strategic economic activities and provide a legal and physical framework to stimulate the productive sector even with its challenges. Belize is not a large country, but we are punching well above our weight in satisfying the appetites of consumers in Central America and the Caribbean regions and beyond.

One of Belize's export growth sectors for the past five years has been the grain sector. We now produce significant quantities of grain, including corn, red-kidney beans, black-eyed beans, soybeans, chaya, and other beans such as small red beans and cranberry bean. We also offer value added products such as cornmeal and corn grits for the export market. Belizean farmers have also produced grains like corn, rice, and beans for our people. And, as our population has grown, so has production. More recently, though, the grain industry has been developing into a sector that looks outwardly, bringing in significant amounts of foreign exchange. The principal grains which are being exported are yellow corn and various types of beans mainly grown in the Cayo, Orange Walk and Corozal Districts.

Agro processing facilities have benefited from export processing zone status and their respective farms have been supported through the fiscal incentive program with duty exemptions in initial capital investments. This has allowed these sectors to grow and emerge and allowing for market entries opportunities on a global scale. Farmers are also aggressively seeking to increase their production

per acre and implementing an active research strategy. With the assistance of both EPZ's and fiscal incentive regimes, Belize hopes to stimulate new business, better incentivizing companies to benefit along regional and global value chains by adding new commodities and services and building on the successes that have already been achieved. Where the agriculture and agro processing sectors are concerned, this remains an imperative for food security, not only in Belize but also in the region.

Mr. Speaker, the establishment of the sugar cane milling and cogeneration facility with supporting plantation, by Santander Group, for example, is an investment of over BZ \$200 million which has contributed to the creation of over several hundred jobs. Test runs of the mill are currently being conducted and is expected that production will commence later this month. This too was supported by the revenue neutral incentive regimes being offered and supported by my government.

I would be remiss not to mention the decision by Fruta Bomba to exit Belize. My colleagues on the other side had quite a bit to say about this, politicizing what has been a difficult situation for the government and for those families who have been most affected. As a government, I can assure you that we extended every effort to support this investment and safeguard the papaya industry. The fruit packers arm of the operations held an EPZ from 1999, that is still in effect, with an expiry date of 2019. Fruta Bomba itself was an incentive holder from 2003 to 2008, with the renewal of this facility from 2008 to 2013. In 2013, when the operation was struggling with a virus that affected the papaya crop, the decision was taken to divest and consolidate. With this decision, the company had difficulty in meeting the criteria for a third renewal of the fiscal incentive regime. Even so, the Ministry worked closely with the principals to see how best FI renewal could be justified. The Ministry continues to work with the principals to find a new investment group to fill the gap, even as we speak.

In terms of investments and developments in the tourism industry, there are several major projects that are in the final stages, NCL being one, and there are prospects on major flagship developments that are promising both in terms of employment and job creation and in development of the country's visibility in the broader tourism landscape.

Like the grain sector, the business processing outsourcing (BPO) industry has shown significant growth over the past five years. The term BPO refers to the increasingly mainstream practice of large international companies subcontracting, or outsourcing, their routine task to companies which are specialists in these services. The two main types of task outsourced are telemarketing and customer care programs. The BPO industry has been strongly supported by government and over the last two years the Belize Training and Employment Centre, better known as BTEC, was instituted to ensure high standards by training and retraining of BPO agents. Over the past five years growth has increased steadily, and experience has shown that inbound call centers, customer support for telecommunication companies and telemarketing are currently Belize's strong points in this industry. International BPO specialists with whom government have consulted recently have indicated that Belize will remain a growing and a viable player in the BPO industry because of our language and access and proximity to important North American Markets. Mr. Speaker, for the record, it is important to note that there are 23 BPO companies currently operating in the country of which 14 hold EPZ status supported by the government. In total, the BPO sector employs 2,300 people in 2015 alone. When this is compared to employment of 927 agents in 2008, it represents a growth in employment of almost 2 ½% two and a half percent. The BPO EPZ companies have reported wages paid to the

industry employees amounting to \$34 million and total benefits to the government paid in tax and Social Security totaled almost \$3 million for 2015. We are encouraged by the increased attention and interest being expressed by new players in this industry, and we foresee that employment figures will increase significantly in the coming year. We expect that our local entrepreneurs in this sector will continue to innovate and find ways of tapping into ambitious talent, innate in young Belizean graduates, elevating the industry into more sophisticated value added services. This will impact the youth and our women who are directly employed in the BPO sector.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, the National Trade Policy Framework has been conceived as a set of policy commitments to be adopted by the Cabinet, making them mandatory for long-term returns. The main purpose of the Trade Policy Framework is to guide the actions of both government and the private sector in key policy areas that have been identified for the period 2015 to 2025. The Trade Policy Framework will also serve to organize the processes of the policy cycle and provide accountability for trade stakeholders and largely the people of Belize. We will continue to actively negotiate our Partial Scope Agreements between partners to provide access to new markets. The Belize/Guatemala Partial Scope Agreement which came into effect on April 4, 2010, has provided trade potential through preferential access for a range of Belizean goods to enter Guatemala and potentially the rest of the Central American Economic Integration System.

There have also been discussions between the Foreign Trade authorities of Belize and Mexico. These discussions have advanced considerably. Both countries have commented on the negotiation framework, and it is expected that active negotiations will resume in the second quarter of the upcoming fiscal year. This again will provide investment and export opportunities for Belize's private sector, thereby increasing contributions to our GDP. Neighboring El Salvador has reiterated its interest in negotiating a Partial Scope Agreement. Initial discussions have commenced this week, in fact, and the necessary strategic actions would be undertaken with the involvement of our partners in development.

Mr. Speaker, the Government of Belize through the Ministry responsible for Investment, Trade and Commerce, continues to provide financial support for the development of the services sector and the Belize coalition of service providers. Global and regional statistics indicate a continuous increase in services to the gross domestic product, and this also holds true for Belize. Spa and wellness providers, many of them, I can tell you are in the Albert Division, medical tourism services, music and information technology associations are making great strides in developing their export capacity which will derive greater revenue on an exponential basis through increased employment and skill development that are geared to meet regional and global standards. The Belize coalition of service providers continue to revise its strategy to increase its outreach and to contribute to other service industries. Through our Export Belize Unit at BELTRAIDE a high-level trade mission to Cuba is being planned for this summer with at least ten industries being represented in collaboration with the Belize Embassy in Cuba and the Chamber of Commerce. A national export strategy has been completed and once endorsed will move towards implementation with a technical and financial assistance from the Commonwealth Secretariat. A food safety certification program is also in the planning stage to increase the number of new exporters and expand market access for existing ones.

Due to the national success of both Small Business Developments Centre and Export Belize, and as part of a long-term entrepreneurship and innovation vision for this country, the Ministry responsible for Investment, Trade and Commerce, in partnership with the Ministry of Education, UB and BELTRAIDE,

has moved to its second development phase for the creation of a national entrepreneurship and innovation hub which will be called the Belize Enterprise and Innovation Institute. The Institute is being built at UB's Faculty of Business and Social Sciences in Belize City and will house the expanding offices of the Small Business Development Centre and Export Belize. The Small Business Development Centre continues to assist in the formation of small businesses seeing 150 businesses get off the ground during the first three quarters of the fiscal year 2015/2016 and accounting for more than 550 jobs. The business start-up program is enhanced by specialized training opportunities.

BELTRAIDE is currently receiving extensive technical assistance from the World Bank, InfoDev's, Caribbean Accelerated Program in developing the best incubator models for innovative start-ups in the areas of agro processing, ICT services, and music.

Through BTEC, we have been able to secure quick wins by leveraging resources and building partnerships with other institutions and initiatives. Partnerships have been forged, for example, with the National Institute of Culture and History, the Belize Tourism Board, the University of Belize, the University of West Indies Open Campus for the rolling out of a National Tourism Training Program. Partnerships have been forged with the Caribbean Vocational Qualification Program to accredit our instructors as well as to accredit specifically designed job preparedness programs. Partnerships have been forged with Restore Belize and Wagner's Youth Facility and high schools on the south side of Belize City to develop and execute job training programs for at-risk youths. Partnerships have been forged with NGO's such as the Belize Audubon Society and with The Nature Conservancy to create sustainable livelihoods for citizens living in and around our protected areas. You see, Mr. Speaker, it's not always about the dollars and the cents, the revenues and the expenditure. It is more importantly how we effectively pull finite resources to have the greatest impact, and then there is the issue, of course, of sector standards to secure the greatest results in changing lives and building a strong Belize.

On the matter of sector standards, Mr. Speaker, with the support of the Tenth EDF European Partnership Agreement undertaken under the Economic Partnership Agreement, the Belize Bureau of Standards will become the first government department to be certified in quality management systems. It is now one among two government institutions that have received ISO certification. It is the second Bureau in the entire CARICOM region to have attained this accomplishment. This standard is one of the premiere standards used by the public and private institutions around the world. It focuses on the management of the processes needed for an organization to better be able to demonstrate its ability to satisfy customer needs and expectations on a continual basis.

With funding from the European Union via its Belize Rural Development Project II, the Bureau of Standards will be completing installations of its new facilities at the Ministry of Works compound in Belmopan. The new facility will house administrative offices but most importantly meteorology laboratories. Funding has come to the tune of \$3.4 million as well as support from the Government of Belize in counterpart support for critical components needed to complete the project. This first fit for this purpose facility is one of its kinds in CARICOM and as such a major accomplishment in advancing Belize's national quality infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, the talk on every international medium, the IMF, the World Economic Forum, and others, talk about the downturn in the Global Economic Outlook for 2016 and the expectations of yet another economic downturn due to

inflationary pressures that go well beyond falling commodity prices. The growth expectations seem to be falling consistently, downgrading growth estimates by 0.2 percentage points across the board, worldwide. The advice given to policy-makers is to build short term resilience and find ways to bolster its activities for sustained long-term growth prospects. Actions should include structural reforms, fiscal reforms and financing of public debt to bolster confidence. The principles we will gage in have a holistic approach to investment promotion, export promotion, trade and commerce. These principles are the same principles we use in the building of the tourism sector, that of transparency, consistency, predictability and accountability. We can be pessimistic about the challenges or we can choose to build on the successes gained by strategically aligning our resources to support the meaningful gains and ensure sustainability. We must remain proactive, yes, and vigilant to take advantage of our growth prospects and best position ourselves to seize these opportunities. This is exactly what the (2016/2017) Appropriation Bill hopes to achieve.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Albert constituents, and all who continue to work in the areas of investment, trade and commerce, both in the public sector and the private sector, I am pleased to record my support for our Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Dean Barrow. I pledge my support for my government's pro-poor-people-friendly policies, and I offer my full support for this budget. I thank you. (Applause)

HON. F. FONSECA (Freetown): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise to make my contribution to the debate on the General Revenue Appropriation Bill for fiscal year 2016/2017. Mr. Speaker, as many on this side have said, the budget for 2016/2017 is disappointing, to say the least. Apart from the usual political grandstanding and the usual political rhetoric that we have become accustomed to from our Prime Minister, it is a budget that offers no sense of purpose, no sense of direction to the Belizean economy, to the Belizean people, to the Belizean nation. After the 2015 election year, Petrocaribe party, Mr. Speaker, now we have the 2016 hangover. After the 2015 election spending feast that we all witnessed, here we have in this budget the 2016 famine. After blowing, as my colleagues have pointed out, after blowing some \$300 million in eighteen months, including \$44 million, Mr. Speaker, in a five-week election campaign, \$44 million, more than a million dollars a day of taxpayers monies, blown, now they cry out to the Belizean people in this budget, tighten your belt. That is the message in this budget, Mr. Speaker. During the election, money couldn't done, could not finish. There was talk of an endless supply of money. After an election campaign, Mr. Speaker, filled with empty boasts and promises of the best is yet to come, this UDP Government now, without shame, without shame, Mr. Speaker, is now reduced to quietly proclaiming that they are on some search for stability in times of change. (Applause)

The truth is, Mr. Speaker, that this budget for fiscal year 2016/2017 offers the Belizean people neither stability nor change. It offers no meaningful sustainable path to economic growth and development. It offers no solutions to the serious social and economic challenges facing our nation. Instead, it continues to advance the UDP agenda, Mr. Speaker, of tax, borrow, and spend. Instead of stability, this budget presents to us a dark, uncertain future, grounded in mounting debt and a shrinking economy. Our growing public debt, as the Leader of the Opposition has pointed out and as my other colleagues have also reiterated, places us in the top 20 worst countries in terms of debt to GDP ratio, Mr. Speaker, at almost 80% with a public debt approaching now, rapidly approaching, \$3 billion. It's up to \$2.7 billion. Our debt to revenue ratio is even more alarming, Mr. Speaker, and I know, as an economist yourself, Mr. Speaker, you understand the alarm that I am speaking of. Debt servicing commitments are projected to grow

by at least 10% per annum as interest and principal payments on our debt pile continue to fall due.

Mr. Speaker, you know very well that debt is a reality that all nations have to deal with. Debt is not a bad thing. It is a way of life, especially for small developing countries. We cannot survive without debt. But what is particularly troubling and worrisome here in Belize, Mr. Speaker, is that, while we continue to have growing debt, we have a stagnant economy. And, as you know very well, that is a recipe for disaster. Debt is manageable in the context of a growing economy where there is growth to provide for servicing of that debt. But where you are dealing with a stagnant economy, as we are here in Belize, as the Leader of the Opposition very rightly pointed out, and, as you know, in terms of a recession what you are talking about technically is two quarters of negative growth. He is absolutely right, and that is what we have been dealing with here in Belize. So we are, in fact, in an economic recession in this country, and the government should say so to the Belizean people, if in fact, they are asking them to tighten their belts.

Mr. Speaker, what is particularly troubling, as I was saying, was that we have growing debt but we have a stagnant economy. There is no new source of revenue. You can search the budget book from top to bottom, except, of course, the tax, the fuel, no increase in the tax base, meaning that you are not growing the tax base and collecting tax from more people, no new meaningful investments, no real growth in the economy to drive revenues upward. And this really should not come as a surprise to the Belizean people, Mr. Speaker, because what we are reaping in this budget 2016/2017 has been sown over the past eight years. You can't grow an economy, you can't develop an economy, you can't develop a nation when you are not creating long-term jobs. You can't do it creating temporary three-month jobs. That can't develop and build an economy, and that is what we have been doing for the last few years, no creation of long-term jobs, no increase in skilled labor, no sustainable stimulation, Mr. Speaker, of the economy. Those are the integral factors of sustainable growth, of growing your economy, developing your nation. None of that has been taking place over the past eight years, and we have been warning the government that this day would come.

Mr. Speaker, the reality today is a Belizean economy in which all our major export commodities are at risk. My colleagues, of course, will go into great depth on the issue of the challenges facing our agricultural sector. But suffice it to say, that as we have pointed out, sugar, citrus, banana, all of these major export commodities face very serious challenges, perilous challenges while the Government of Belize has been missing in action. I think the Leader of the Opposition reported to us, when he met with the agro productive sector over and over, their concern was that the government was missing in action, unprepared to deal with these serious challenges facing this very vital sector. The ones promising papaya industry, as we have all pointed out, is on its death bed. I remember when we were earning over US \$12 million a year from the papaya industry, I think it was 2007, US \$12 million, important source of revenue, foreign exchange for the country. That industry now is on its death bed. Crude petroleum earnings are down some 65%. Excess liquidity, Mr. Speaker, in the banking system is at an all-time high. That, as you know very well, is the surest sign of lack of confidence in the Belizean economy, excess liquidity. Nobody wants to invest in expanding their businesses, Mr. Speaker.

Instead of stability, Mr. Speaker, there is growing uncertainty. Every week just look at the newspapers, more and more homes are foreclosed upon, as the middle class struggles to get by, and more and more of our people fall into poverty. The correspondent banking crisis looms like a large, dark shadow over

the Belizean economy. The real estate, the offshore sectors have contracted and face grave, grave challenges. In fact, many in those industries feel that they are on the verge of becoming extinct.

And, Mr. Speaker, this 2016/2017 budget offers no new development projects, no new investments in agriculture, no manufacturing projects, and no new housing developments. By the way, Minister, it was the first time in the House that I heard the Honourable Member for Albert talking about your great kindness at the Ministry of Housing, 500 grants to the residents of Albert, one division, as I understand, good Member. Well, the budget does not reflect that there is money. The budget this year does not reflect that you have money, but apparently you have money. So my colleagues and I certainly will be looking for some grants for our people because we have people in need, not just in the Albert division. We have people as well. Mr. Speaker, no new housing developments, that's a big need, no new housing developments, and you know that is one of the greatest, I think, my friend, the Member for Lake Independence, mentioned it this morning, one of the greatest needs of our people, housing, good, adequate, decent housing for our people, no new housing development projects in this budget. What a shame! No meaningful investments in arts and culture and youth, none of that is reflected in this budget. No tax reform, year after year we hear all the rhetoric about tax reform. The private sector, year after year when we meet with them, the same song they are singing, the same wishlist they present to us every year, and nothing gets done. The government does nothing. These are the things that need to be done if we are serious about growing the Belizean economy. No tax reform, no governance reform, nothing, none of that is reflected here in this budget, Mr. Speaker.

Jobs, jobs, jobs, jobs, that is the cry out there from the Belizean people, no jobs. Our people need good, decent jobs with living wages. Young graduates we meet them every day, young graduates, working mothers, skilled laborers, and I just talked about skilled laborers. The unemployed people, so many people have given up, and are no longer looking for work. That is not even captured properly in the statistics. Don't even talk about the underemployed. People who used to work 40 hours, because they don't want to lose their jobs because they still have to put food on the table, are now working 20 hours, 25 hours, 30 hours, working on shifts. These are serious matters, Mr. Speaker. So these people find no hope at all, Mr. Speaker, in this year's budget.

It is also a budget, Mr. Speaker, that continues to neglect and abandon our rural communities, some of which, and I am sure my colleagues will talk about that, those who represent rural communities, some of which still have no access to water and electricity, no water, no electricity in 2016. You go into some of these communities, and what we take for granted, having access to the Internet on our phones, you see everyone on their phones using Internet, you go into some of these communities and the children don't have access to the Internet. Their education is devoid of access to the Internet. In 2016, rural communities, as my colleague just said, are with crumbling infrastructure, where children still have to walk miles so that they can get on the bus. The bus can't go into their village because the road is too bad. So they have to walk out to the bus. Sometimes they walk four miles. They have to wake up before dawn and walk miles to the bus. The bus can't come to them because of crumbling infrastructure. This is the reality for too many of our people, Mr. Speaker. We can and we must do better for these communities.

Mr. Speaker, while we welcome and support the investments being made in education and health, we continue to be very concerned that, as a nation, we are not getting a fair return on these investments. In health, for example, Mr. Speaker, we have budgeted this fiscal year to spend some \$126 million, yet as we know

only too well, the Belizean people know only too well, you just need to turn on your news, the evening news, to know that our health care system remains in chronic crisis with ongoing cases of corruption and managerial incompetence reported all over the country at all our regional hospitals. Morale is low among our healthcare workers, and regrettably, Mr. Speaker, citizens continue to lack confidence in our health care system. We have many good people, Mr. Speaker, working in that system, many good doctors, many good nurses, and many good workers, healthcare workers, across the country. But there is a fundamental problem as it relates to the direction that the Ministry of Health is leading the health sector. There is a fundamental problem there, Mr. Speaker. We expect, Mr. Speaker, that this \$126 million will be used in part to establish well-equipped diagnostic and treatment centers at all district hospitals. This is one of the cries we have been hearing out there that at all of these district centers and district hospitals our people have access to labs, radiology, have access to ultra sound services so that people and my friend, the Member for Toledo West, and my other friends from the South don't have to be bringing people all the way, sometimes at midnight, 2 o'clock in the morning bringing people, operating like ambulance, indeed. We need these services in 2016. We need to be in these areas in these regional hospitals.

Another big cry we hear out there, Mr. Speaker, is that we need more investments in the training of medical specialists. I am glad to hear that something is being done about that, but it needs to be addressed with a sense of urgency. All the time you hear people talking and patients talking that we need trained nephrologists, we need trained oncologist, we need radiographers, we need medical technologists, we need intensive care specialists and specialist nurses. Sometime we forget the nurses, and they are vitally important, and there are many nurses who are well trained. We need specialist nurses to be trained. So these are some areas of concern as it relates to health, Mr. Speaker.

In education, my colleagues have spoken at length about some of the challenges facing us in education. As was pointed out we are now up to really \$275 million projected in the fiscal year in spending. Obviously, Mr. Speaker, obviously without question, we support the investments being made in early childhood education. We support the ongoing investments being made in primary, secondary, tertiary education, teacher training, all aimed at improving quality and improving access. Those are things we all support, critically important. The Honourable Minister of Education, he just walked in. As he is fond of saying, I think he said it today, education is everybody's business. It's everybody's business, and, indeed, he is right about that, Mr. Speaker. It is everybody's business. It is our business on this side of the House, of course, and like many Belizeans, and I believe like him as well, we are very concerned about the state of our education system. We are, as a country and as a people, investing, as he pointed out, \$0.28 out of every dollar on education. That is laudable. But the more and more we invest we do not appear to be reaping the positive benefits of those growing investments. Too many of our students, Mr. Speaker, are still not successfully completing high school, still falling short. Writing and communication skills continue to be shockingly poor at every level. Our mathematics and science programs with a few notable exceptions, Mr. Speaker, you see the same schools performing well every year, but our mathematics and science programs are generally weak, very weak. Our technical and vocational skills training programs lack a strong foundation and are in need of urgent upgrading, Mr. Speaker.

I talked about arts and culture before, but music, arts, culture, sports, Mr. Minister, I know very often we are focused on trying to deal with the fundamentals of education that we forget these important areas, music, arts, culture, sports, and all of us are guilty of it. Sometimes you relegate these things

to a secondary status in the education system. We need to do better in those areas. So, Mr. Speaker, there is a lot of good taking place in our education system, but there is a lot going in the wrong direction as well. And this, as I think we have all said, is not any Minister's fault. It is not any governments fault. We have a collective, a national collective fault, if you like, for what is taking place, for failing so many of these young people. But we have a responsibility to get it right. All of us have a responsibility to get it right, and we on this side are certainly, as the Leader has said, we on this side are certainly prepared to do our part.

So, Mr. Speaker, in closing, the 2016/2017 budget does very little to advance the wellbeing and the interest of the Belizean people and nation. As I pointed out earlier, Mr. Speaker, it exposes the lie and it exposes the danger of years of enjoying the Petrocaribe and the oil bonanza with no plan for the future. (Applause) It's one thing to enjoy that party, Mr. Speaker, if you have a plan for the future. But it's a sad, sad, sad occasion when you are enjoying that party, when you are engaged in that spree, when you are participating in that Petrocaribe and oil bonanza, and you don't use that opportunity to plan for the future, no agenda for real meaningful sustainable development. And, as I started out by saying, Mr. Speaker, the Belizean people must understand that what stability in times of change because that's what we have been reduced to now. We have gone to a quiet stability in times of change. What that really translates to, Mr. Speaker, to the Belizean man and woman and child out there, understand what that means is tighten your belt, the party is over, hard times are here, and hard times are coming. That is the reality, Mr. Speaker. Tighten your belt, that is the code language to tighten your belt, stability.

Mr. Speaker, allow me to thank the people of Freetown for their continued support, for their continued confidence, Mr. Speaker. On their behalf, Mr. Speaker, and for them, for their sake, I am unable to support this budget. I thank you, Sir. (Applause)

HON. E. ARAGON (Minister of State in the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports): Good afternoon, Speaker of the House, good afternoon, colleagues and Members of the Opposition. First of all you know I am a very young Minister here, and I was listening to the discourse today on this budget debate for 2016/2017. Listening to the Honourable Member of Freetown, I feel like I am living during the course of 1998 through 2008, or the better part of 2000, the last term they served. I say this because everything or most of his discourse have to do with how dreaded, how doomed, and how everything is so terrible in this country. I don't believe we are living in the same time. When we listen to a lot of our colleagues from the Opposition talking about how bad things are and that there is no sense of purpose you know, I tend to wonder about our Belizean public out there who are listening. I know, as a young person, that things are not as bad as they set out to show. I'll tell you, that they talked about this gloom and doom, and they criticized this budget, but this budget that they criticized only assures me and the general public that all the promises of their recently failed national election campaign of 2015 was bogus because they promised a lot of things to the Belizean people. If they promised so many things, where would they have gotten the money if this government was not doing well enough? So I know that the public out there knows that this gloom and doom presentation of theirs is nothing but a bunch of lies.

You know I have sat here and I have listened to the Honourable Leader of the Opposition earlier today when he mentioned and he said that there was a reduction of \$100,000 in the Food Pantry Program, that it was down from \$1.8 million to \$1.7 million. Well, I would like to say that this so-called reduction Mr. Speaker, is \$1.7 million more than they provided or that they did not provided in any of their ten budgets passed during their term of 1998 to 2008, when they

budgeted nothing, zero, in any of the social assistance programs for the Belizean people. It is the United Democratic Party Government that made these social programs a reality for the Belizean public.

This UDP Government continues to be the pacesetter, and I am talking about being innovative as we govern this beloved country of ours. I heard this morning likewise the Honourable Member of Lake Independence and the Member of Fort George talking about our sporting facilities and how there is nothing in the budget for sporting facilities and the amount of money that have being spent in terms of the Marion Jones. He put it at \$25 million. The truth of the matter is that I am still trying to find out the real number because, excuse me, I am trying to find out if it is in fact, \$25 million because our records only that \$17.5 million has been spent thus far in that. I want the general public to know that the Marion Jones Stadium started in 2004, and it started under your government, under your PUP Administration, and that is why we cannot account for the rest of the \$25 million that the Honourable Member for Fort George mentioned. We can only account for the \$17.5 million under the United Democratic Party Government, but we need now to finish the Marion Jones Sporting Complex. And I will tell you that under the able watch of the United Democratic Party Government we will get that done within this term. But definitely this is an issue and the Member of Lake Independence and the Opposition should know that the Marion Jones started under their watch in 2004. They had well over four years to get it done. They did not. But they never did budgeted to get that program from start to finish. It is under the UDP that we have been putting money every year to try to see how we move with this project, but trust me we will get it done this term.

When I hear the Honourable Lake Independence Representative talked about the MCC, you know the public/private partnership that we have done, well, I want him to know because he have been absent for quite some time in politics. I am new in politics and he have been absent, but he is back. Well, I want you to know that things change, things always change and when you came back then you realized how much things have changed and that this is not business as usual. This is about us, as a government, looking at how best we can continue to work with our community, work with our partners and stakeholders out there to get things done for the betterment of this country. The MCC, is a partnership, public and private partnership, that we have done with the Princess Casino Enterprise where at the end of the day the government puts nothing down in terms of the investment which will be close to \$100,000 on their part, and we get paid to assist them with parking only on the days that we are not going to use that facility. And this is not a contract that is signed that we cannot break. We can break this at any given day. The contract is right here for you all to see, and this is the kind of partnership we are doing because at the end of the day it will benefit our sporting facilities that need to be renovated and fixed for the continued use by the general public. But these are the thing we are doing.

We have to be real and we have to be conscious of all our sporting facilities because I think you also mentioned that there is not much being done for our young people and for sports in this country. Well, I think you have missed the page when one of your Opposition colleagues mentioned that there is \$50 million that has been spent on sporting facilities across this country. That is being done by the United Democratic Party for the betterment of our young people across this nation. (Applause) It is \$50 million in infrastructure, and that goes directly for our young people across this country. I am proud of that. We must be real and sincere. Under your ten years of tenure, how much did you invest in sports? Of course, we have done the investments. So now we need to begin to make better plans in terms of the programs that we need to do, and that is what we are setting out to do.

I would like to also mention that I heard a lot being mentioned about the debt, of a country. But we all know that debt, like the Honourable Member for Freetown mentioned, is a part of running a country. It is a part of everybody's household. Everybody who owns a home more than likely has a mortgage, owes the bank for some investment or otherwise. So it's a part of how we run our homes. It's a part of how we govern a country. So I'll tell you that when you look at debt now we have to be real because it is easy to stand up and say that we owe this and we owe that because that's their job, as the Opposition. But I have to say that it is under the United Democratic Party that we saw ten cents of every dollar compared to the seven cents under the PUP that is being paid today for national debt. We have to understand that between the People's United Party Government and this United Democratic Party Government the difference is clear. Under the PUP it's about commercial debt, and under the UDP it's about concessionary debt, two big differences that set the governments apart. When we talk about debt, the debt of this country cannot just be thrown upon the shoulders of this United Democratic Party. We have done well with the monies from Petrocaribe. There is no question about it. That is value for money across this country. (Applause) In a few I will also tell you directly how it has impacted my community.

But, first, I want you to also know that when we talk about debt you must realize and understand that under your watch the super bond was born, and that Super Bond will affect this country starting with our bullet payments in 2019 of millions upon millions of dollars. I will say that this year \$50 million of debt alone must be paid towards the super bond. That's \$50 million that could have gone into the needs of our people, many of which you have spoken about, but we have to pay back that super bond. When you ask about value for money, compare it, and I ask the public out there to compare the debt that the United Democratic Party Government has taken on and spent to that of the People's United Party super bond. The difference is clear, and the answer will come to you like a bullet. And I will tell you this that we talk about confidence in the People's United Party, but I wonder because if that confidence and trust was there from the Belizean people then you would have been sitting here on this side. Today you sit on that side because the true confidence and trust for good governance lies with the United Democratic Party and that is clear. We have seen it here on the November election. God forbid you would have won. All in all, they can say what they want, the Belizean people know better.

My good friend, the Representative for Fort George, you know he mentioned about this spree and squander of Petrocaribe. Like I said, you know it's all about value for money. The spending that we have done for our young people says clearly where and what our strategies and policies are to move forward investment in education, grants for our young people to go to study to get an education, young teachers to qualify for their teaching positions and the many other investments that have been made within our communities both far and near and which speaks for itself. You know when we talk about corruption, and I had always said that when I come to a House Meeting, if I would have ever gotten the chance and now I am getting the chance, I wouldn't go into the back and forth. But you know sitting down here and listening we have to make it clear to our Belizean people, that there is nothing because, out of the many talks that I have listened to, it's about corruption and how the UDP this and that. Well, I want the public to know and I want my fellow colleagues across the floor know that whose name is synonymous with corruption I need not say. The general public knows. They know about the INTELCO fiasco, the Novelo fiasco, and the selling off of our national assets like BTL and BEL. They talked so much about debt and why we have to pay back BTL so much. The reality is that you all made that the issue and problem for this government to solve, and we will solve that one way or the other for the interest of our Belizean people and this country.

They talked about things are going bad with Social Security, etc. Well, definitely in your time look at DFC that went bankrupt and look at the millions that were spent and were not accounted for. Look at the international airport management, the deal that you all made. You talked about contracts with our PPP, the Private Public Contracts that we are doing now. Look at the contracts you all did under your watch with the international airport. When I look where we need to move as a country, I look towards the kind of governance that this country needs, and I think that the United Democratic Party, when lined up side by side with you all on the other side, I think the difference is clear. And this country saw it. They know it. They trust and give us their confidence, and that is why today we are on this side.

Now I would also like, Mr. Speaker, to touch a little on my division in terms of where some of this money has been spent and where some will also be going. I would like to say that within the last six months we have inaugurated 3 new community centers in the Orange Walk East Division, in Santa Martha, Chan Pine Ridge and Tower Hill, all with their own computer centers and bathroom facilities. We are reaching out to technology for our people in these villages. You know we have also inaugurated bleacher systems in both Carmelita and Palmar along with their rehabilitation of their existing sporting areas and the establishment of bathroom facilities. Now, of course, I know the Member of Orange Walk South might want to get up and say, "But, what's happening with the Orange Walk Stadium?" Well, the Orange Walk Stadium is being worked on and reenergized with more committed people and better management, and slowly we are rehabilitating and improving the facilities and creating a robust sporting program for Orange Walk. As we speak, yes, you know, of course, the \$5 million that was given to each District. You are speaking about that right? For the stadium, well, I don't know about the \$5 million. All I know is that the 5 million that was to go for the stadium was put into the newly, and I will get to that, newly built hot mix road that passes through the Town of Orange Walk. And remember that is for the public, for every single person that uses these roads, especially the main highway that passes through Orange Walk District. And it's been put to good use, and it is accountable for and transparent. When you look at what we are doing at this People's Stadium in Orange Walk, we are working to get that up. Recently we have gotten a tractor and a new riding mower along with installing new lights, security lights, and the rehabilitation of the basketball court. We are also doing some work on the Complex that has been built. We are working to get that going.

Recently we had the Chan Pine Ridge Agriculture and Trade Show which was a great success being supported by our Ministry of Youths, Sports and Culture. We have street festivals that are being planned in our great and beautiful Orange Walk District in the very near future. Also, we have seen a new primary school being built in Carmelita Village, and during this year we will be seeing a new high school building being built there. So that is where some of our monies are being spent, and it's being put to good use. I would like to also mention that we are enjoying that Petrocaribe road that passes through the Orange Walk Town, and it is a pleasure for every single person who owns a vehicle or rides a bike or walks it through that road because the situation that it was first was terrible and it needed some repair. But we are glad to have gotten it, and we are glad for the government to have invested in that road, and that is where the additional \$5 million went. That is what we have done as a government.

When we look at the people's town council, the PUP's town council, I want the public, the general public, to know, and the people of Orange Walk East already know this, our roads, our citizens pay taxes every day, are in dilapidated conditions, and they need to fix it. You know they need to fix it. They need to take that responsibility because good governance does not only lie on the central

government it relies on our municipal elected officials. (We have fixed that road already, my brother. That is the main road.) You know so definitely there is a lot to do, and I would just like to mention that because I think that is important.

Now I would like to touch a little bit more in regards to the Ministries under the Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports and Culture, having direct responsibilities for Youth, Sports and Culture. I would like to just highlight a number of things that are happening and will be happening this year in regards to our budget. The Department of Youth Services has been working in establishing the National Youth Council. As you may have seen in the media, young people across the country were engaged in the election of their district youth representatives. They campaigned hard and for the first time ever, with the support of the National Elections and Boundaries Department, piloted the use of the electronic voting system in Belize. The national elections for youth representatives will take place in April, and these young leaders show no sign of slowing down. They are ready and rearing for an opportunity to showcase their leadership skills to help shape the future of this beloved Belize. This is an initiative that has long been there waiting to be done, but it is under the Youth Ministry that we have realized it, and having had these elections now we are giving the youth a voice, a voice that will impact upon policy and other decision-making.

In November, the Department collaborated with Love Foundation and private sector organizations to host the youth gala awards. That was another great success and opportunity that highlighted the achievements in arts, business developments, sports, volunteerism, media development academic excellency and agricultural development of our young people, and it showcased the Belizean Youth. The department has also held numerous rallies in this country, you know, and we will continue to support these initiatives because they strengthen the capacity of our youth and serve them well. I also want to mention that we have several staff members from the Ministry of Youth who are attending UWI, the Youth Development Certificate Program because youth work is now a specialized field of work, and our Ministry is supportive of staff members who wish to build their skills in this area.

The Department has also been working closely with the Ministry of Agriculture and international partners to promote youth entrepreneurship in the agriculture industry, aquaculture, agro forestry, ecotourism and fishery sectors. Though this project, we plan to strengthen and expand youth 4-H Centers across the country. This project will foster youth entrepreneurship as well as ensure food security for this and the next generation. The Department of Youth Services is also this year upgrading office infrastructure in Dangriga and in the Orange Walk District. Moving forward the department will be establishing new youth drop-in centers across the country and will focus on integrating the youth population into Belize's revised National Plan of Action for Children and Youth. This process is currently underway, and the Ministry of Youth plans to chair an inter-ministerial youth committee within this national plan. The aim is to enhance coordination and collaboration across youth programs. Already we are working closely with the National Committee for Families and Children and Restore Belize to have one coherent system through which we address the needs of our youths.

In terms of culture, as the Minister of State with responsibility for culture, I embrace the opportunity to prove that culture is a major pillar of sustainable development. It is undoubtedly our natural resources and our diverse cultures that attract tourism dollars to Belize, making culture one of Belize's most promising emerging industries with much potential for growth. The development of culture industry and quantifying its contributions to economic development is one of the priorities of this administration. To maximize cultural development opportunities,

the Ministry will be launching Belize's first National Culture Policy 2016/2026 on March 31, 2016. This culture policy sets out to protect the intellectual property rights of local artists engage the Belizean Diaspora in national development, open up new archaeological sites, establish new thriving cultural industries in Belize and develop a solid legislative framework within which to build the culture industry. For this reason, the Ministry is working with the Ministry of Tourism and the Attorney General's Office to finalize a draft Cultural Heritage Bill that seeks to protect and preserve important colonial structures from destruction and dilapidation. We are also working on the development of a draft film industry legislation and a music and entertainment industry action plan. Also in the pipeline is the revamping of Belize's Creative and Cultural Industry Act to protect local artisans and ensure that copyright issues are addressed. The recently launched unique Belize brand in local arts and crafts is catching on and we intend to intensify the campaign to promote these local artisans. This is what we are doing for our young people and artists across this country.

The Ministry also continues to document and share Belize's rich cultural traditions with both locals and foreigners. Just this last month the Institute of Social and Cultural Research launched another In the Walk Through Belize series. This one being the booklet, A Walk Through Dangriga, and the week before that we launched the Carnival series with CD's, audiovisual and posters that documented this rich tradition within our Mestizo culture. The Institute of Creative Arts has, since January of this year, launched the primary school art development program and the women in art exhibit in Belize City. The Institute of Creative Arts has also implemented its annual National Festival of Arts for preschool children, exposing them to the arts from the early stages of development. This will be followed by the primary and secondary school festival of arts. The Institute of Creative Arts has done an excellent job in implementing the Belize City Art Festival and taking cultural activities to the Chan Pine Ridge Festival in the Orange Walk District. These festivals alone have positively impacted over a thousand children and over 500 Belizean artists, musicians and other service providers. In the next two years, the Institute of Creative Arts will, by popular demand, expand the Street Art Festival to two other districts in Belize, one being the Orange Walk District and another will be planned for later on this year.

Renovations to fix the Bliss will also commence in a few months time, as soon as we finalize with APBEL in terms of the monies. Again, we wouldn't had to spend that money on the Bliss if the Bliss was built to standard, and we all know who built the Bliss. I need not call names because we know, and that person definitely is not sitting on this side of the House. We also have plans for expanding other festivals and make them into annual events that local communities will continue to enjoy. One of these is the Tacos Festival in Orange Walk Town accompanied by a Lamanai to Banquitas river canoe race. NICH has also initiated the process of securing land and a design for Belize's National Museum in the City of Belmopan. Once the design is completed we will actively mobilize resources for its construction, both international and other wise. In the mean time we will be moving ahead to launch two new Houses of Culture, one in Dangriga in 2016 and the other in the Toledo District in 2017. The Ministry is working closely with the Ministry of Tourism to implement a \$15.1 -million investment in the Belize House of Culture and Downtown Rejuvenation Project. In the next two months, the House of Culture in Belize City, better known as the Government House, will be rehabilitated and a new structure built in an adjacent compound to enhance the tourist experience. Additionally, the project team is mobilizing community engagement to document, record and report on the strong cultural traditions of the Yarrowborough and Belize City downtown communities.

Earlier this month the Institute of Archaeology opened a new archaeological site in Benque Viejo Del Carmen. In this 2016/2017 period, the Institute of Archaeology will focus on the opening of the Cuello Archaeological Site in the Orange Walk District and begin to create a new tourism destination. The Institute of Archaeology has also began strict compliance monitoring of health and safety standards at all archaeological sites to ensure that visitors have a safe and enjoyable experience in Belize.

The Ministry of Culture is also working closely with the Ministry of Tourism to roll out the Sustainable Tourism Project better known as STP2. In this project, several archaeological sites will benefit, mainly Caracol and Las Cuevas in the Chiquibul National Park in the Cayo District. New restroom facilities will be built. Trails will be upgraded with new signage, and the recreational and public plazas will be remodeled. This is complemented with the road infrastructure that government has committed to do in these areas, and this will no doubt increase access and tourism dollars in this country and in the area. On a smaller scale the project will develop infrastructure at the Santa Rita and Cerros Sites in the Corozal District, and Nim Li Punit in the Toledo District. This will be accompanied by the establishment of a cultural heritage plaza in Corozal Town and a welcome plaza in Punta Gorda Town. These are the kinds of works that the Ministry of Culture is working on, and this is where our budget goes.

In reference to sports, Mr. Speaker, I would like to mention that the Ministry is serious about promoting sports. We see sports as one of the best solutions to reducing crime and violence in our neighborhoods. Children and youth have clamored for more sporting and recreational facilities and programs in their communities, and this government has responded. Construction is well underway for new sporting facilities in Dangriga Town, Punta Gorda Town and San Pedro Town. We have upgraded the Victor Galvez Stadium in the Cayo District, and just last week we celebrated the opening of the Isidoro Beaton Stadium in Belmopan. This is Belize's only stadium with a synthetic field built to FIFA standards, and also in Belmopan the Hilltop basketball and tennis fields have gotten a facelift to allow for greater use and enjoyment by children, youths and athletes of all ages. And this is only a fraction of the many stadiums that have been built across this Country, and we need not mention them here because the general public who live in those communities know fully well of the facilities that exist there.

The MCC grounds in Belize City is currently being rehabilitated, and a new state-of-the-art Civic Center is being constructed at the site of the old one. In relation to the Marion Jones Sporting Complex, we have partnered with the Mexican Government and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) to begin the implementation of a US-five-million-dollar project for the construction of an indoor volleyball and basketball facility as well as the construction of lighting facilities for the football field. And soon the Olympic and Commonwealth Games Association will be constructing their new office building within the Marion Jones Sporting Complex, making it a truly national sport icon for Belize. And, of course, in relation to the grandstand at the Marion Jones Stadium, the Ministry is proud to announce that we have successfully closed out phase two of the construction process. We are now embarking on phase three to complete the finishing touches in the changing rooms on level one, the offices on level three, and the VIP media section on level four. (Well, we have to phase it because you all didn't budget the money in your time. If you all would have done that, then that stadium would have done in your time. We have to do it in phases because we do not have the kind of money in terms of just putting it out there. We are working on it.) We are rehabilitating the football field and have mobilized support for the upgrading of the cycling track as well as smoothing out the edges of the new synthetic athletics track. By next year we will be able to end the

Annual Cross Country Cycling Classic at the Marion Jones Sporting Complex. In February, the 20,000 strong women's rally was successfully conducted at the Marion Jones Sporting Complex, and just last week the National Band Fest was successfully held there. In September, the Belize City Carnival will also end at this facility.

All these sporting facilities represent major investments that this government is making to ensure that we achieve our Horizon 2030 vision of living in peace and tranquility, in harmony with the natural environment and enjoying a high quality of life. Sport is not just about the game. It is about our frame of mind, about our thirst for excellence, and our determination to achieve. Sports develop the whole person, and in so doing has the ability to bring people together in the most magnificent ways across ages, ethnicities, cultural background, social classes, intellectual levels and geographic locations. That is the true value of sports as one of the most effective vehicles for building patriotism among our people and the reduction of crime and positive engagement for our young people, and that is what we set out to achieve.

The Ministry has also developed a new National Sports Policy 2016/2025 that will be launched next month. The policy proposes a new vision for sports founded on three major thematic areas: sports for all; sports excellence; and sports for development and peace. This policy highlights sports as one of the main tools for personal, social and economic development. I wish to thank the Secretariat for Social Integration in Central America and the Government of Taiwan for supporting the publication and the launch of this new policy. To implement this new policy, the Ministry is serious about strengthening public/private sector partnership, and these are the innovative ways we need to go. In doing so, we seek to create new opportunities for multi-sectorial collaboration. Our role, as a government, is to be an enabler and that is why we are moving in a new direction, one that embraces our multiple partners, not only as promoters of sporting activities but as investors in developing a new cadre of sporting champions for our country.

As stated in our National Sports Policy, the sports sector provides a great opportunity for private investment in the development of national talent to achieve excellence. We envision that the private sector will be investing in the management of sporting facilities, the adaptation and ownership of sport teams and clubs, funding athletes and teams to prepare for and participate in competition and assisting community groups, sporting clubs and national sporting organizations in the funding of various sporting programs and initiatives.

Using this public/private sector model, the Ministry has mobilized technical and financial support to rehabilitate the MCC grounds in the Belize District. We are doing further upgrades to the MCC grounds by partnering with the business community to generate income that will be reinvested in the MCC grounds to ensure greater sustainability in the maintenance and upkeep of this historic sporting facility. This public/private model is what will be employed to ensure the sustainability of several other major sporting facilities across this country. We are serious about our sporting facilities, and we will do all with what we have to ensure that we keep this up to standard. It is not about us saying that we will do one thing and then do the other because we well know how that game is played, right. With our sporting facilities being self-sustained and well-maintained, we can continue to strengthen our focus towards implementing more sporting programs which our children, the youth, families and communities can enjoy. After all this is the point of having these facilities. They are there to bring a stronger sense of community spirit and to ensure that Belize has more positive and safe spaces for sports and recreation.

In fact, in July of this year, Belize will be hosting the first ever Under-Thirteen Central American Games in Belize, better known as CODICADER. We expect to have over a thousand and odd children, parents, coaches and government officials here in Belize for under-thirteen male and female competitions in football, volleyball, basketball and table tennis. This will be a great opportunity for the government agencies, civil society and the private sector to rally around and support our young team as they face their counterparts from the other Central American countries. Hosting the games bring tremendous opportunities for sports promotion, sports diplomacy and sports tourism. It allows us to showcase the talents of our children on a regional level, surely a stepping stone to international recognition.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I would just like to reassure the Belizean public that we at the Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports and Culture are committed to making Belize better. We are committed to working for the betterment of our people and country, and we will work together in partnership with the community to make things happen. I also, Mr. Speaker, want to thank my constituents, the Orange Walk East Constituency, for having given me this great opportunity to represent them at this Honourable House and to represent them at the highest level of government. I do think that all that we have been through in the Orange Walk East Division is a testament to us for coming together for the betterment of our communities. I want to thank them for having given me that opportunity, that confidence and that trust by supporting me in the general elections of 2015. I want to tell them that I will be their voice here in the House and wherever it may be in the fight for better governance, in the fight for a better and much more improved country, and that is why I am here today you know to support this budget.

I am also here, and I would like to take this opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to wish the people of this country a happy and safe Easter Holiday because I know they will be moving about a lot in this country, visiting our beautiful country, to the cayes, etc., you know wherever in their communities, and I just ask them to be safe, especially to the people of Orange Walk East. I wish them well. I wish them the best for this Easter Holidays, with their families and friends. I also look forward to our sporting athletes who will be participating in the upcoming Annual Cross Country Cycling Classic this Holy Saturday. I wish them well. I hope our Belizeans come on top, and we, as Belizeans, will be rooting behind them. I also want to say that I want to big up our public officers, Mr. Speaker, because our public officers are the people, especially our military and police officers, who will be out there in full support in terms of ensuring safety and security for our Belizean public across this country. I want to big them up because while others have fun someone has to take up the helm for security, and it always lies on our law enforcement personnel, coast guard likewise.

But before I close, Mr. Speaker, I would just like to reiterate and make mention that the general public needs to understand that the Opposition has its job to do and we have our job to do which is to govern to the best of our abilities, and I just want to reiterate some of the good points because we have all been hearing the Opposition with their boom and gloom scenario of our budget. But, Mr. Speaker, I would just like to say that, under the United Democratic Party Government, we have been moving forward and we will continue to move this country forward for the people of Belize. When we look at all the great things that this budget has, it may not be the kind of budget that we have with the wings of Petrocaribe on our sails, but definitely that work that is being done by Petrocaribe has done so much for Belize and great things will continue to be done in Belize this year as a result of those Petrocaribe funds in regards to all our sporting facilities and road infrastructure that will be done.

I would just like to focus on some of the great things that will be happening, and one of the things for the general public, especially our public servants out there, is to understand that this government, this UDP government, is the government that has delivered in terms of salary increases for teachers and public servants across this country. And this salary increase that they have gotten is one of if not, the best raises in the region. We are also seeing the increase in Social Security pension. We are seeing a lowering of the unemployment rate, and one of the good things of this budget, ladies and gentlemen is that there is no new taxes on the poorest of the poor, no new taxes on prorated goods. Yes, there may have been an increase in taxes in terms of the fuel, but that again is something that, as a government, we needed to do.

Also, I want the Belizean people to know that, when you look at what has been done and what is being done by the government, we have \$55 million being spent on road infrastructure, some of which is already been done and some of it is left to be done, \$50 million in sports infrastructure across this country. That is something that we have to be proud of because our population is growing and the young people who make up the majority in this country will benefit tremendously of this across this country. When you look at the millions of monies being spent on education, this is by far more than the PUP gave in their tenure. When you look at the amount of schools, 35 new schools will be built. The amount of money that will be spent on national security, I was a police officer for many years and never, had I seen that amount of money being spent on national security. And that is only under the watch of the United Democratic Party that the policemen and women are seeing as well as the coast guard and BDF. These are the kinds of things that the people's monies have been spent on. And it is being spent on wisely; it is being spent on through transparency and accountability, as I could attest in my division on some of the projects that have been done.

At the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, the people's money has been spent wisely through the Petrocaribe, has been spent on the people of this country and not in the pockets of a few, not like what had taken place during the course and the tenure of the People's United Party way back then. I do believe that, at the end of the day, when the general public went to the polls in 2015, they made that decision of who they had a confidence and trust in, and that is why we are here today as a United Democratic Party Government for a third term. That is why, if we do what is right for this country and for the people of this country, we will have a fourth term because it's not about who is PUP or UDP, it is about who will deliver for this country and people. As a young Member of the United Democratic Party Government, my God it will be the United Democratic Party that will work for these people because that is our legacy, that is deeds and actions and not words and promises. Therefore, I look forward, as a young Minister, Mr. Speaker, to continue working in serving and representing the people of this country, especially the people of the East division. To them, my heart is with them always because I believe in my community, I believe in them, and I believe in this country. That is why, Mr. Speaker, I support this budget 2016/2017. Thank you. (Applause)

HON. R. FERGUSON (Stann Creek West): Mr. Speaker, the Member from Orange Walk East talked about the Marion Jones Sporting Complex. A contract was signed in 2006 to complete the entire project for Belize, \$16 million. In 2008, when the government was changed, that contract was canceled, and now every year you hear they are investing and investing until it has reached now over \$25 million. As the Minister responsible for culture, I want to ask him, what will he do about Nohmul in Orange Walk? (Applause) That is an area that can bring in some vested funds for the people of Orange Walk. Also, you talked about the Petrocaribe and what Petrocaribe has done over the years. I want to make mention of the \$52 million that was paid to the British Caribbean Bank which should not

have been paid. It could have been used for the Belizean people. But, Mr. Speaker, in relation to the budget, the Prime Minister talked about stability in a time of change, and four months ago he talked about the best is yet to come. What is happening to them today, the second highest man in his Cabinet, in his party, wants to destabilize the party and he has said that he has now relinquished his position as Deputy Party Leader because he felt that he was the giant of the north, and because of his hard work that he put in he was able to deliver five seats in the north and that gave the UDP the victory in 2015. So now he feels totally disrespected and says he cannot continue anymore. He will just leave and let them decide what they will do, and at the next election then we will see what will happen.

Now looking at the Draft Estimates, it clearly shows revenue and grants amounting to \$1.088 billion for the 2016/2017, while estimated expenditure is budgeted at \$1.151 billion. This results in a projected overall deficit of \$62.6 million which is equivalent of 1.7% of GDP. In addition, loans amortization accrues an additional \$86.8 million which is needed to be added. So the total financing gap need is \$149.4 million.

Three years ago we heard about the formation of the Belize Infrastructure Limited (BIL). The Prime Minister boasted that BIL will drive the economy. The Office of the Contractor General was ignored, and with that it paved the way for anybody, once they are in bed with the U.D.P, to apply for contracts. We saw the rise of many contractors that are not properly qualified, and we see overpriced and inferior jobs. Three hundred and twenty-five million dollars was spent over a period of two years. To be honest, I don't see value for money, and the infrastructure is already breaking up. You may say that this is not so, but drive around and you will see the cracks. They are all over social media too. The people are watching. Who will have to repay the Belizean people? But you said the best is yet to come.

Development was concentrated only in the major cities and towns, and I want to ask the question, who is driving this economy? It is the rural people and the farmers of this country. They are not getting anything in return. There is very little assistance to the productive sector. While infrastructure of our country is very important, there should have been a balancing act. While there is development in the infrastructure, concentration should also be in creating new industries and preserving and upgrading what we have. Last year we saw a serious drought in the north, and a meager \$20,000 assistance was given to the farmers, while \$44 million was spent just in the month of October to win an election.

The European Union provided the funds for the Hopkins causeway; I must say that was a good investment. Hopkins is a striving tourist destination, and infrastructure is key to its development. The development should have gone further by paving one mile north and one mile south to where the resorts are. As of next week, I will be dialoguing with the business community and the villagers to see how we can come up with a solution to pave the two miles of road. We will come back to you, Government, for your participation. Perhaps a bond could be floated with Government guarantee. Mr. Minister of Tourism, a 9% tax is being charged to resorts on a monthly basis. The best suggestion would be that 25% of that monthly revenue that is being paid to the Belize Tourism Board can go to service the bond.

I can only name two villages that got minor assistance from the Petrocaribe money, Independence and Placencia. In Independence, the main entrance in the village, Fadden Avenue, was paved. From the entrance to the stadium and around the triangular park was paved with hot mix and from the stadium to the water side was paved the traditional way that is already decaying and that portion which is less than half mile will cost the Belizean people some

\$500,000. In Placencia, a contract was signed for some \$400,000 for less than one hundred yards of road. You can go there for yourself and see it. It was for \$400,000 for less than one hundred yards of road, and the Belizean people will have to repay it.

In Capital III budget, see 291698, we have some \$5 million proposed for the upgrade of the Northern Highway and \$8 million and \$10 million forecast for the next budget cycle. This is good once we get value for money. Similarly I see allocations for the continued improvement of the George Price Highway, this \$6 million proposed and the next two budget cycle, \$17 million and \$23 million, respectively. It's a lot of money when the base of the road already exists. You are telling us that it is still costing \$1 million per mile when the base of the road already exists.

In Capital II 29627, \$450,000 was budgeted for feeder roads. I don't see the effect of that when there are so many feeder roads across the country. There is no specific allocation. So there is no guarantee that the feeder roads of Stann Creek or Toledo or any other district will be directly touched. It is time for the government to start to secure funds for the Southern Highway. Between the Six Miles Junction and the PG Junction, it is constantly decaying, and there seems to be no maintenance program. Ministry of Works across the country continues to be a failure, and employees are being paid, but there is no equipment. The compound at the Stann Creek Valley Road is a visible example. When you pass there, you will see very little equipment, and they are all broken down. I was promised by the Minister of Works over three years ago that the bulldozer that was based in the district would have been returned. To date nothing has been done.

The farmers are dying for improvement of their farm roads and opening of new village streets. While you brag that unemployment is at its lowest, how long will that last? Stann Creek was the breadbasket of this country, the land of milk and honey. I can say over that over the last two years we are taking a devastating blow. Unemployment is at its all-time high. Many women are out of jobs in the citrus, banana and shrimp industries. Just Belize Aquaculture Limited last year this time had over 800 people employed, and today it is down to a mere 130. The figures need to be revisited so that the Belizean people can get the true picture of unemployment in this country. The close down of the Meridian Enterprise Limited has caused a major blow to the region. Mainly women are affected. It seems that Government will do nothing to try and resolve this issue. This farm is not being sprayed for any disease. What will eventually happen is that the disease will spread to the other farms and then the entire industry will collapse. This will cause more unemployment in the region. Everybody that invests in industries in Stann Creek is worried what will happen next. While these are private investors, when they fold up it will have a negative effect on Government revenue also. Now is the time to set up a committee from both the public sector and private sector to study the situation before it is too late.

The Prime Minister boasts about the N.C.L filling the gap for the unemployment. That is highly impossible. People from all over the country will start to migrate to the south to compete for the limited jobs. Just N.C.L alone is not the answer. N.C.L is planning to open in November of this year. I don't see any preparation in surrounding communities to accommodate any passengers that would want to visit nearby communities. I was told that the island is preparing for an all-inclusive package. It will be a country within a country. It doesn't appear that any entrepreneurs will derive out of this venture.

Some 75 million was borrowed to rehabilitate the entire Hummingbird Highway. I just hope we get value for money. I hope the entire highway will be resurfaced eventually because I see hop-scotching all over the place. Certainly this does not cost \$1 million per mile. Culverts, drainage and other infrastructure

are already in place since the last road improvements. The stretch of road between Alta Vista and Middlesex is much narrower than other sections. There are no shoulders for pedestrian. I hope this will be taken into consideration. The quickness of how the pavement is being done I would have thought it was something temporary. I hope it last for another 25 years. I already saw some decaying of the new pavement. The removal of the single-lane bridges is most welcome. That will maintain smooth flow of traffic. More Belizeans will purchase vehicles with the improvement of the road. The only sad thing is that government decides to raise the taxes on fuel to balance the budget when the price of fuel on the world market is at an all-time low. Our farmers believe that they would have gotten some relief with cheaper fuel.

There is a major development about to take place in the village of Mullins River. I hope the Minister of Tourism is aware of this. As we all know, Mullins River was destroyed by Hurricane Hattie in the year 1961. It's a beautiful village on the coast of Belize that is being washed away by erosion. From time to time, I brought up this issue in this Honourable House and it has fallen into deaf years. This developer wants to pave some 7 miles of road from the junction of the Hummingbird Highway to his development. But it is difficult for him to even meet the Commissioner of Lands or then Minister of Natural Resources. He is even prepared to enter into an agreement to pave the entire Coastal Highway. He is restoring the village by repairing the community church and the community center. He will also improve the water system to provide the village with potable drinking water. The most important thing that he has improved is providing employment for the villagers. Mr. Prime Minister, I will suggest that you have an audience with this developer as quickly as possible.

Minister of Education, I welcome the initiative of new school buildings where it is necessary, but consideration must also be given to schools that need expansion and renovation. I know you will say that it is the responsibility of the churches that manage the schools; it is obvious that they cannot do it. In the meantime, our kids will be the ones to suffer with deplorable classrooms. If in this initiative there will be a new school for Santa Cruz village at the Placencia junction, I support that one 100%. I believe that is the fastest growing village in the country of Belize. It is only 15 years old and it's already the capital of the region. While most schools are denominational, the churches cannot keep up with the maintenance of the buildings because of limited resources. San Juan Busco R.C. in the village of Cowpen needs at least two additional classrooms. Minister sorry you are not here at your seat, but I have a picture of the classroom that is housing the children at San Juan Busco. This is a very deplorable condition, and I hope that something can be done as quickly as possible. So many millions in education, look at the condition at the school at San Juan Busco R.C. This was recently built by the community because there is no assistance from government. I will leave with you the pictures of the building.

Saint Mathews Anglican School in the village of Pomona is in dire need of additional classrooms. Mr. Minister, it's an Anglican school and here what they did for over the last five years is that they are building their own school. So now they need the assistance from the Ministry to complete this building. The school is very overcrowded. The management and the school took it upon themselves to start the construction of a new building; the flooring and siding are already up. They applied to the Social Investment Fund and their application was denied. Minister of Education, this is an Anglican school that should be dear to your heart. All it needs is about \$100,000 to complete the structure that is under construction which is about 70 by 45. I still want to say that you are one of the few Ministers that answer your phone and respond to your emails. Thanks a lot for the

educational assistance; it really goes a long way even though I go beyond the assistance you give.

Minister of Transport, the people of the south, especially in these hard times, are crying out for the high cost of transportation. No adjustment was made since the road was paved more than five years ago, in some instances 10 years ago. Independence to Dangriga is only 45 miles, and commuters are paying \$9.00 one way. From Cowpen and Red Bank, the commuters are paying \$8.00 one way. From George Town, San Roman and Santa Rosa, they are paying \$7.00 one way. From Santa Cruz, they are paying \$6.00 one way. From Silk Grass, they are paying \$3.00, and Dangriga is only 13 miles away. When you do the mathematics, commuters in the south are paying \$0.20 cents per mile while the rest of the country is only paying \$0.10 cents per mile. This is the third time I am bringing this up in the House. Please look into this situation.

Minister of National Security, I don't know what provisions will be made for Special Constables, but I am getting complaints from so many of them that they want to see a gradual movement, whether they can get enlist in the Police Training School. The tourism police are complaining that ever since they now fall under the regular police unit they no longer receive any allowances. When they were under the Belize Tourism Board, they used to receive it. Some of them applied to enter the Police Training Academy, but majority of the times they are not accepted. This year, while crime in the city has reduced, we see a spike across the country of Belize. Just for January and February the figures are higher than last year. I want to sympathize with the family of young David Chinchilla, who lost his life on Sunday night in the village of Independence. This is the second murder in the village over the last two weeks.

As we enter into the period of village council elections, now you will see a spike from government going into do fast work, grade street, grade road because they want to make sure that they win the village council elections. What I am doing is that I am telling all my village councils, or all my people who want to challenge village councils, "Do not challenge the village council as a PUP team because what it does it hurts small communities." The time has come for us to take away politics from village councils. I am not afraid because at the end of the day you will see the results. Those who want to challenge will challenge it, and you will see where the PUP will win the majority of the village councils in the Stann Creek West constituency.

So, Mr. Speaker, the farmers are crying out for improvement of farm roads, but nobody hears them. It is just a difficult period. When you check Ministry of Works in the district, there is no equipment. House lots are still a matter of concern for villagers. Many young people are crying out for a lot, but there is none available. Under a PUP Government when I was the representative, lots were issued unabated without bias. Constituents, please, understand our system. The only opportunity I have to lobby on your behalf is when I am in the National Assembly, and many times they go on deaf ears. There are constituents that are still unable to pay their yearly rental on their land. Before 2008, lots were issued, and the survey plans were not authenticated. Leases were issued by the then Minister of Natural Resources. I can tell you those lots, those leases are legally bind documents that should be honored. Over the years the leases were ignored. New leases were issued to the other individuals. There is a new Minister now. I know you are hearing me, and I want to visit your office in the near future and see if we can resolve this matter. The time has come for us to be mature enough to respect the wishes of the people and provide each constituency with their own vote. It can still be controlled by the Ministry or Departments. I am appealing to the Prime Minister, that would be your best legacy to the people of Belize. People have to stop suffer because of the way they voted in an election.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot conclude my presentation without giving the nation a detailed report of the state of the citrus industry.

MR. SPEAKER: Member, I don't want to be accused of attacking you, but it seems like you have combined all your adjournment speeches, but that is not the purpose of the budget debate. It is not the purpose of the budget debate.

HON. R. FERGUSON (Stann Creek West): Mr. Speaker, the citrus industry is going through a serious crisis.

MR. SPEAKER: Yes.

HON. R. FERGUSON (Stann Creek West): So they called in.

MR. SPEAKER: Yes, which you raised properly on a matter of urgent public concern the last time.

HON. R. FERGUSON (Stann Creek West): And they asked me to give a detailed breakdown in the National Assembly so that the nation knows what they are going through.

MR. SPEAKER: Yes, and it is your job to tell them that today is not the purpose for that.

HON. R. FERGUSON (Stann Creek West): Of course, how everybody else did it?

MR. SPEAKER: Okay, Member, listen to me. I don't want to quarrel with you. Are you going to tie that into the budget estimates?

HON. R. FERGUSON (Stann Creek West): Well, the Member from Collet spoke about a budget from 2006.

MR. SPEAKER: Alright, so you speak about any budget, a budget from 1985, any one. Just speak about a budget, Member. Continue, please.

HON. R. FERGUSON (Stann Creek West): I just want to let the nation know what is happening in the citrus industry. (Applause) Mr. Speaker, I cannot conclude my presentation without giving the nation a detailed report of the state of the citrus industry. I grew up and worked in this industry before I ventured into electoral politics. Let me start by commending the resilience and efforts of our citrus growers. Despite all the challenges facing our citrus growers, they are doing the right thing to transform this industry and improve their contribution to our national economy. While I will discuss the challenges facing this 103-year old economic boston, I want to make it clear that the outlook for this industry remains positive, but we must absolutely address the needs of the growers, to work with them, to increase production, find new markets, and get more growers to come into the industry. I will demonstrate the following points to the Honourable House and to all the growers, Belizeans and audience listening to this debate far and wide: (1) the outlook for the industry is positive if the right things are done; (2) the importance of this industry to our national economy; and (3) this government from 2009 pretty much sat on its hands and turned its head away from the challenges facing this industry. And, when the industry collapses, not only the investors will feel the effect, the entire country will. Finally, I want to list some recommendations on what must be done so that we can see and we can ensure that this industry rebounds and contributes like never before.

One, Florida and Brazil are the two major citrus Producers region in the world. Their production has tumbled significantly over the last ten years, mainly due to disease. This gave rise for the demand of citrus products. Frozen concentrate is sold by pound solid. In 2014/2015 crop, grapefruit was at 1.7886

per pound solid and oranges were at 2.3137 per pound solid compared to 2009 when grapefruit was at 1.2580 per pound solid and oranges were at 1.5914 pound solid. It is good business once we can combat diseases that are affecting the industry.

The Board of the Citrus Products of Belize Limited has consolidated all citrus processes to be at the Belize Food Products Factory. This will increase factory utilization to about 70%, reduce waste and save about \$3million per year. In exchange for the assistance brought forth for the MOU, the growers were given the ultimatum to give up 10% of their holdings so that they do not have majority control of processing. While this is a topic for another day, Mr. Speaker, it is instructive to note that the defacto agriculture and economic policy for this UDP Government is built on wanton disregard for the members of the CGA because among them are the majority of small growers in the industry.

The CGA has established its Plant World Nursery, which is the largest citrus nursery in the Caribbean and among the largest in the region, including Mexico. The facility produces some 350,000 clean certified citrus nursery plants for planting season. We must commend the good folks of Atlantic Bank for financing this project in the heart of the turmoil in the industry. That was good, and we need them to do more. Let me not forget the 17 or so other nursery producers who together can produce some 200,000 certified plants. In other words, the industry has the capacity to produce the plants required to increase production and take advantage of the good prices to come.

The CGA's Citrus Research and Education Institute is a regional player in the control of citrus greening, provide training and other diagnostic services, not only to our industry but on a limited basis to CARICOM and Central America.

The importance of this industry, for the period 2011/2015, Citrus accounted for an average of 14% of our domestic exports down from 22% during the period 2000/2010, when for many years it was the largest major export earner, becoming second to petroleum in 2008. Mr. Speaker, this budget is the government's tool to foster an environment to allow our industries to develop and thrive and to improve the quality of life, even for our small growers who some of the technocrats view as disposable. They have children too. We have fixed exchange rate, Mr. Speaker. This means that we must earn foreign exchange to maintain that peg and procure the goods and services we need to grow our economy and care for our people. I will show that, when it comes to the threat of manageable, yet at this time, incurable citrus greening disease, this government has not contributed one dollar to this effort. And there is nothing, absolutely nothing in this misguided budget to address that issue.

If Belizeans think this industry is not important outside the south, think again. Citrus is everybody's business. It represents 14 cents out of every dollar of major export earnings and used to account for 22 cents out of every dollar. On a per capita basis, Belize is the most citrus dependent country in the world.

With the consolidation of this citrus processing to the BFP factory in Alta Vista, the Citrus Company of Belize, CCB, facility can only exclusively produce MB-2 pineapples. Last year CCB processed approximately two million pounds of pineapple, and if scaled up, it can get up to 57.6 million pounds of pineapple per year. We have protected markets in CARICOM for our pineapple juice which is at the verge of losing if we do not increase production and processing. Pineapple concentrate was selling for US \$4,000 metric tons this past year. Do the mathematics, Mr. Speaker, hundreds of millions of dollars in earnings, creation of wealth all over the country by all the Belizeans and investors who are anxious to participate in this initiative, jobs, spending and economic activity that has enabled us to defend our Sarstoon and pay the bomb that is coming in that BTL arbitration

ruling. It would replenish the \$52 million paid to Belize Bank for no good reason. Why? It is because the Prime Minister wanted to pretend he was fighting with the Ashcroft group. It is now looking like that was all one big farce, trick the Belizean people and sell them out to become the three-peat Prime Minister of the country.

How much money has this Government of Belize provided to growers to assist with greening and replanting? One, in two words, Mr. Speaker, absolutely nothing, not one penny, after squandering all the Petrocaribe monies for which the juice from this industry could be used to repay when pay day comes. What is in the budget in terms of direct money contribution to assist in this industry? Absolutely nothing! Why? It is because the growers aren't important, because the people in the south and the west are not important. We already know that our brothers and sisters in the north are not important. The government sat by and watched the papaya industry leave Belize and refused to assist the sugar cane farmers on having an equity stake in BSI. Instead of developing the competency of our farmers and membership associations, the elitist mentality that drives the policy of this government resulted in the marginalization of the farmers in the north. When drought caused some \$35 million in damage, the Prime Minister politely suggested that now that the rains have started, the grains farmers are okay. Oblivious to the economic hardship the people of the north were feeling or more so are about to feel. The pre-election spending spree has masked what is coming, and for those who had voted and thought the best is yet to come, it is the best for the few elitists.

The growers who are members of this Citrus Industry Association, which includes CPBL, as it should, are the only ones contributing to the effort to manage the citrus greening. This Honourable House voted \$1 million in 2011. To date not one single cent was sent in the industry to assist with the citrus greening.

What is in the budget to assist the industry, the growers in dealing with citrus greening? One, easy analysis here, Mr. Speaker, nothing, absolutely nothing, 22% of our major export earnings have gone to 14% and nothing tangible has been done and is being done. The growers have submitted proposals and countless letters to this government, and it has reached deaf ears when it comes to this disease.

When the citrus industry was arguably nationalized with the MOU that saved the industry and yet had a recurrent cash flow shortage, the CGA was given the ultimatum to give up 10%, surrender majority ownership and they would in turn receive robust funding for replanting and controlling HLB. What have the growers gotten? No bust, not a penny, despite all the Petrocaribe cheap monies. The growers have asked for loans, although it is my view, that in addition to 3% loans, they should have received incentives to replant and adopt the four-pronged approach to control HLB.

Recommendations, one, put the framework in place to ensure the implementation of the four-pronged approach to controlling HLB. What is this four-pronged approach that I have been referring to? One, control of the vector; two, replanting using only certified citrus plants produced and certified by the Belize Citrus Certification Program and BAHA; three, eliminate uneconomic diseased trees; four, use of timely and evidenced based nutrition programs.

Government needs to work closely with the principals of the industry since Social Security and the growers own the majority shares in the industry. It must play a key role in securing a cheap financing to replant 5000 acres of oranges and 1,000 acres of grapefruit for the industry to survive.

Two, BAHA needs to work to detect and eliminate illegal nurseries. For nearly three years, the industry has been told that there is a defect with the S.I.

that should allow BAHA to destroy illegal nurseries. Mr. Speaker, how can it take three years to amend an S.I. to protect an industry that accounts for 14% of our export income, some \$76 million per year? We cannot watch this industry disappear like papaya, or slip away like our Chiquibul and Sarstoon, if we do not wake up and act quickly. I guess, if you do not live in the south, this threat is out of sight, out of mind like how the growers are people in my constituency have been treated and are being treated with this budget.

Three, government needs to ensure all growers support the efforts to coordinate the control of citrus greening. In doing so, the GOB needs to compensate the Citrus Research and Education Institute and the CGA for carrying this national burden only out of the funding being provided by the members of the CGA which includes the CPBL growers. I want to again thank all financial institutions for showing confidence in our citrus industry and all the growers who have been resilient and are starting to replant the industry again. When you drive pass CCB compound in Pomona, there are about 30,000 plants that were produced by CGA's Plant World Nursery and some 100,000 plants by CPBL in 2015.

The objective of the industry 20 years ago was to reach a production of 10 million boxes. Today we are diving downwards.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I want to give kudos to the Minister of Health and the Minister responsible for Transport and NEMO. Whenever I call your phone, you answer it and you assist my constituents in whatever way possible. We are all colleagues. All the people are paying taxes, and they deserve the government's assistance from time to time. Residents of Stann Creek West, thank you very much for once again, giving me the opportunity to represent you. It was a hard fight, but in the end I prevail. As the Prime Minister said, there will be a slow period after the election. Be patient! You will see what I will do. I will not sit and remain idle. My opponent came very close. You should have won with all the resources you had, all the truck loads of lumber, cement, steel, repairing of houses, repairing of roofs. The people still see the silver lining in me and they voted for me on November 4. (Applause) Mr. Speaker, I cannot support this budget when I can't identify anything that will directly impact the lives of the people of my constituency. Thank you very much.

HON. R. MONTERO (Minister of Works, Transport and NEMO):

Mr. Speaker, before I begin I would like to thank the good people of Cayo Central for having the faith and confidence in me for once again allowing me to represent them here in this Honourable House. I will continue to work for the people of Cayo Central, and I will work tirelessly to transform Cayo Central for the benefit and enjoyment of everyone in Cayo Central and Belize. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the 2016/2017 proposed Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure. It gives me great pleasure to report to this Honourable House the investment our government has made in infrastructure during 2015/2016 budget period and what we can expect during the upcoming 2016/2017 Fiscal Year.

For the Fiscal Year 2015/2016, the Government of Belize through the Ministry of Works and Transport invested over \$144 million in infrastructure works. This is a clear signal that our UDP Government is committed to the development of this country. Mr. Speaker, during the last fiscal year over \$44.2 million was invested in the Belize District, the bulk of which was geared towards promoting tourism development through the upgrade of the Belize District's vast array of road networks. Thirty-eight million dollars was invested in road works. These included the paving of 14 miles with hot mixed asphalt, 2.5 miles with chipseal surface dressing, 4 miles of rigid concrete pavement and over 50 miles of street resurface with gravel. Close to \$1 million was invested in drainage improvement with an additional \$110,000 allocated for emergency drainage works caused by flooding while \$65,000 was dedicated to bridge maintenance

At the community level, Mr. Speaker, I am proud to say that our government invested heavily in Belize District through the Poverty Alleviation Program. Through this program, \$5.5 million was invested in construction, renovation and filling of properties of over 100 families in this district. Mr. Speaker, the Toledo District, which had become the forgotten District and known as the Siberia, under the PUP Administration, has received significant investment under this UDP Government. A total of \$435,000 was allocated to bridge maintenance; \$252,000 was invested in the rehabilitation of the old market and market plaza in Punta Gorda Town; and \$2.5 million was invested in the improvement of drains and roads throughout the district. This equates to approximately 42 miles of rehabilitated roads in the Toledo District. Mr. Speaker, the 22 miles of road from Dump to Jalacte has been fully upgraded to paving standards at a total cost of \$62 million. This also includes eight new reinforced concrete bridges. This road will bring long needed economic activities to that part of the Toledo District with villages of Mafredi, San Antonio, Santa Cruz, Santa Elena, Pueblo Viejo and Jalacte directly benefitting. In addition, our government has made available \$6.5 million for the upgrade of the remaining one mile road as well as the construction of a high-level bridge. This, Mr. Speaker, will bring the total investment in the Toledo District to over \$72.2 million. Under this UDP Administration, Toledo has received unprecedented development. And, therefore, Mr. Speaker, I stand here and say loud and clear that under the UDP Administration Toledo is forgotten no more. You know, Mr. Speaker, the past Minister of Works was from Toledo and it took a representative from Cayo to bring development to Toledo. Imagine that! (Applause)

The Stann Creek District, Mr. Speaker, has also received its share of development. A total of \$115,000 was used for the maintenance of bridges. Over \$1.6 million was invested in drainage improvements. This included not only the cleaning and excavation of drains but also the installation of over a hundred culverts throughout the Stann Creek District. Additionally, \$56,000 was allocated to assist residents in the filling of their lots. Mr. Speaker, but that is not all, an astounding \$20 million was invested in road improvement in the Stann Creek District. These road works include the rehabilitation of over ten miles of road with granular material and over twenty miles of road to paved standards. Work has also commenced on the rehabilitation of the Hummingbird Highway, an investment of over \$16.4 million. The investment made in the district will directly benefit approximately 32,000 inhabitants and over 29 settlements. Our government will continue to invest in these southern districts in an effort to ensure that our people can improve their standard of living.

Over the past couple years, Mr. Speaker, the northern districts have received significant investments from the Government of Belize. Major investments were made particularly in respect to infrastructure improvements to assist the cane farmers. This year a total of \$6.8 million was invested in infrastructure upgrade in the Corozal District. This includes not only the development of roads and drains but also community projects, community projects such as the expansion of water services in Patchakan Village, the construction of multipurpose metal structure and upgrades to parks in Xaibe Village and the upgrade of the northern border facility, all amounting to an investment of over half a million dollars. Drainage improvements amounted to over \$100,000. This included the installation of over 120 new culverts throughout the rural villages in Corozal; \$6.2 million was invested in road works of which over ten miles were upgraded to paved standard. Importantly, over fifty miles of farm roads were rehabilitated, bringing much needed relief to our farmers of the north.

Mr. Speaker, the Orange Walk District benefitted from an investment of over \$17 million in infrastructure improvement. Of that sum, 1.3 million was

dedicated to community development projects which included the renovations of community centers such as Carmelita, Chan Chen, San Carlos, San Felipe and August Pine Ridge. In addition, new community centers in Tower Hill and Santa Martha were constructed. Mr. Speaker, the work did not stop there. Our UDP Government oversaw the construction of basketball courts, the renovation of parks as well as the construction of public restroom facilities in several communities throughout Orange Walk District. Additionally, \$15.5 million was invested in the improvement of road network of which approximately 105 miles of farm roads were rehabilitated and 49.2 miles rehabilitated to paved standards. Drain improvement activities were also made throughout Orange Walk amounting to over half a million dollars.

Mr. Speaker, the Cayo District saw significant improvements of areas of community and public spaces. In Cristo Rey and San Antonio, the community centers were rehabilitated. In Santa Elena, the old building that was once the Belize Marketing Board has been transformed and rehabilitated into a health clinic. This health clinic will also own its own ambulance. In Armenia Village, a water system was installed and a pump house constructed. These investments were over \$640,000, the benefits of which will extend directly to approximately 10,000 residents. Mr. Speaker, the Santa Elena Stadium will soon be completed; this, when completed, will house an indoor basketball stadium, a track meet and a FIFA standard football stadium. In areas of drainage and investment, over \$700,000 was made in the excavation and cleaning of two miles of drains and the installation of several culverts in strategic places to allow for the proper flow of water runoff. In roadworks, approximately twenty miles of road network were upgraded to paved standard and some forty miles of road were rehabilitated with gravel. A significant achievement is the construction of the new Macal River Bridge, which is currently under construction at a total cost of \$20 million. Total investment of roadworks infrastructure in the Cayo District amounted to \$35.4 million. Mr. Speaker, it is important to note that in the Toledo District we invested twice this amount.

Mr. Speaker, whilst the above-mentioned works were carried out by individual private contractors, the Ministry is responsible for the supervision of these works to ensure that every Belizean receive value for their monies. In addition, the Ministry of Works continuously performs routine maintenance on all roads, bridges, drainage and culverts under our jurisdiction countrywide. Other routine works carried out by in-house staff of the Ministry this year included the draining, shaping, placement of appropriate materials and compacting of over 500 miles of rural roads. Works also included generous pot patching with premixed and grouting material, the clearing of over 3,400 acres of road reserve and bridge maintenance repairs, Mr. Speaker, projects that are ongoing and pipelined projects that are on the table.

Mr. Speaker, in order to ensure that we continue the transformation of this jewel, our government with the assistance of international partners will be carrying out the following projects. In Santa Elena/San Ignacio, work has commenced on the final phase, lot two, which involves the construction of a high-level bridge structure spanning over the Macal River which, when completed, this will be the longest bridge in the country. The bridge alone is an investment of 20 million and is expected to be completed in February of next year. The airport junction to Buttonwood Bay Boulevard with funding secured from CDB, the Fifth Road Project is divided into three sections: Section A is the rehabilitation of 5.4 kilometers from the airport junction to the Haulover Bridge. This work has already commenced and was contracted to Cisco at a sum of \$13.6 million. This work will include the rehabilitation of pavement as well as the inclusion of a 1.5 meter paved shoulder. Section B focuses on the rehabilitation of 4.8 kilometers of road between Haulover Bridge and Buttonwood Bay Boulevard. Work will

include the construction of four lanes from Buttonwood Bay Boulevard to Belize Best Western after which it will reduce in three lanes up to the Haulover Bridge. This section B of the project is currently in procurement process with contract evaluations having been completed. Section C of the project is the replacement of the Haulover Bridge. A qualified designed consultant has been identified with work expected to commence shortly. There is no doubt that our country is growing with more and more vehicles driving our streets every day. These projects will alleviate morning and evening traffic and also shorten community time to and from Belize City. This, Mr. Speaker, will benefit all Belizeans, whether you drive or you take the bus to work.

Mr. Speaker, under the climate resilience infrastructure project, this project is being funded by the World Bank which totals \$60 million. This project includes the rehabilitation of the highway from airport junction to Gardenia Village and will include proper drainage measures to ensure climate resilience. To date, proposals for the undertaking of the technical and economic feasibility study and environmental and social impact assessment have been received and evaluations completed. The contract is to be signed shortly. Mr. Speaker, the mere fact that we are able to secure funding for the project is a strong indication that our international agency not only have faith and confidence in our coming but also faith in our UDP government.

The Hummingbird Highway contract was signed with E & A Construction for a total of \$16.4 million for the rehabilitation of the road from Belmopan roundabout to Sibun Bridge and Alta Vista citrus factory to Dangriga Town. Work has commenced, and, as projected, time of completion is of eighteen months. Mr. Speaker, our government is also in discussion with CDB to construct another bridge over the Belize River and build five miles of road that will link the Philip Goldson Highway in the area behind Gentrac in Ladyville and the George Price Highway in the area of Eight Miles. The airport link road, as it is being called, will be constructed at a total cost of \$30 million and will create redundancy in our north to east west road network which is necessary in our growing economy and in preparedness for flooding associated with climate change. Again, Mr. Speaker, the economic impact of such project cannot be overemphasized.

Mr. Speaker, our UDP Government is determined to continue the infrastructure tsunami that is sweeping this country. We are currently in discussion with OPEC for the paving of two miles of Baking Pot road and the replacement of the ferry with a high-level double lane bridge at an approximately cost of \$16 million. This will no doubt alleviate the problems associated in flooding in that area. The benefits of this development must not be underestimated as it will greatly improve transportation for farmers, students and the entire business community in that area. Yes, Mr. Speaker, the best is yet to come.

Mr. Speaker, agreement has been signed with the Inter-American Development Bank for funds for the rehabilitation of the George Price Highway between miles 47 and 67. This project proposes the construction of a new Roaring Creek Bridge, improve paved roads with drainage to ensure climate resilience as well as the construction of a roundabout as a road safety measure. Contract has been signed with Hakrow Limited for the final design of this project which is expected to be completed by the end of 2016. The European Union funded roads under the accompanied measures for sugar, the European Union has financed major road rehabilitation projects in the Orange Walk and Corozal Districts. While majority of the work has been completed, work is still ongoing on the section from August Pine Ridge to Blue Creek. Work is expected to be completed by July of 2016.

Mr. Speaker, the support that we have been receiving and will continue to receive from the various international funding agencies speaks volume of the trust

and confidence they have in this UDP Government. It is an indication of the government's prudent fiscal management, that is, our ability to properly manage, utilize, and account for monies borrowed, a confidence that had eroded prior to 2008 under the previous administration. The paving of the Coastal Road/Manatee Road, the Government of Belize is currently in discussion with the United Kingdom government and the Caribbean Development Bank for accessing of grant funding for the paving of the Coastal Road. The 36.2 miles of road will be developed into a fully paved two lane highway with all the necessary road safety features. It will also take into consideration climate changes factors in order to make it an all-round climate resilience highway. The replacement of at least three bridges will also be a part of this project. The total cost of this project is estimated at approximately over a hundred million dollars. The paving of this highway will bring economic progress to the entire country and will have a significant impact on agriculture and tourism sector.

The paving of the Caracol Road, our Government, Mr. Speaker, is also in discussion with the Inter-American Development Bank and the Kuwait Government for the paving of the 48 miles of the Caracol Road and the replacement of major bridges along that route. Discussions are also underway, as we have already received commitment from both the Inter-American Development Bank and the Kuwait Government for the funding of the studies required for the pavement of this road which will be done from Georgeville and Santa Elena entrance. Not only will the communities of Cristo Rey, Georgeville, and Seven Miles benefit from this road upgrade, but it will positively impact tourism, agriculture, forestry, education, health and national security. This project, Mr. Speaker, is estimated to cost approximately a hundred million dollars. The implementation of these construction activities related to road infrastructure, no doubt, will create employment opportunities for the residents of Cayo Central and the entire Cayo District.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Works, Transport and NEMO will continue to fulfill its mission statement every year, ensuring quality work in our national infrastructure. Despite the internal challenges of lack of equipment, materials and human resources, the district offices continue to meet and exceed annual maintenance work plan. I therefore take this opportunity to thank every member of my staff for the role they played in contributing to our vast achievements, my CEO, the Chief Engineer and the Engineering and Technical Team, workers, project units and all support staff who have worked tirelessly over the past year to bring us to yet another milestone of development of our country. Mr. Speaker, my Ministry is committed for the needs of our growing society and continues to create an enabling environment for future economic growth. Our government continues to invest in areas that will be most beneficial to all Belizeans. Mr. Speaker, I fully support the proposed Estimate of Expenditure for 2016/2017, as it addresses all the social and economic issues of our country, a budget for all, a government for all. God bless Belize. Thank you. (Applause)

HON. B. CASTILLO (Minister of State in the Ministry of Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I rise in full support of the 2016/2017 General Revenue Appropriation Bill. This budget, Mr. Speaker, is a bold budget. Like the other eight budgets presented by this administration and by this Prime Minister, this 2016/2017 budget allocates sufficient resources to three pillars of our country: education, healthcare and national security. However, before I get into the specifics of this year's budget, Mr. Speaker; please allow me to highlight some of the accomplishments of last year's budget. As the Prime Minister so proudly stated, the Petrocaribe sponsored funds greatly transformed the lives of our Belizean people, specifically in the areas of infrastructure, social welfare,

education and healthcare. The growth and transformation in these areas were truly phenomenal. I am proud to say that all 9 villages in the great constituency of Belize Rural Central (BRC) were a part of the unprecedented infrastructural transformation. The signs of the drastic improvement are everywhere to be seen in these BRC communities. I stand here today, Mr. Speaker, in large part because of the significant improvement in the lives of the people of Belize Rural Central constituency. I worked hard to ensure that we reached as many of our people as possible. To this end, we ensure that our people received educational assistance through the Back-to-School Program, home improvement and disaster flooding assistance, in respect to food and materials to the people who were impacted by the November 2015 flooding, specifically in the villages of Western Paradise, Freetown Sibun and Gracie Rock, Food Pantry Programs to those of our people less fortunate, upgrading of streets in Ladyville and Lords Bank with hot mix as well as the upgrading of roads in all other villages, clean up of garbage hot spots in multiple villages, the allocation and distribution of land documents and lots, improved electrification in the Old Well Road area in Lords Bank that benefitted the many families who have lived in darkness for many years. These are but a few things that a good and caring government does, Mr. Speaker. This is an administration that has provided, and will continue to provide the environment to uplift and empower our people.

Mr. Speaker, with your permission, I would like to acknowledge the people of Ladyville, Lords Bank, Western Paradise, Hattieville, Freetown Sibun, Gracie Rock, La Democracia, Mahogany Heights and last but by no means least Gales Point Manatee. (Applause) This is an opportunity to public acknowledge them for the vote of confidence on November 4, 2015. To all residents of Belize Rural Central, remember I walked with you, I talked with you, I shared with you, together we will continue to transform our great constituency.

As I turn to this year's budget, Mr. Speaker, I am reminded that the reason why we are here today to support this budget is because the Belizean people, for the third consecutive time, have entrusted us with this sacred responsibility to manage the public purse on their behalf. This responsibility, Mr. Speaker, is given because of the stellar past performance of this government. Mr. Speaker, allow me to remind the people that we promised that the best is yet to come. The best thing a government can do for its people is to provide stability in a time of change. In the 2016/2017 budget, you will see the focus remains on improving the quality of life for all our people by making sure the Ministries have funds to capture and address those actions that will ensure that all our people, including the good people of Belize Rural Central, are never left behind.

This budget allocates an initial \$20 million for salary increases to public officers and teachers, pending the tabulation of the revenue increase over the last year. Mr. Speaker, this raise represents an unprecedented salary increase for our public officers and teachers. This is unprecedented in post independence Belize. This raise, of course, is in addition to the 6% and 8% raise they received over the last two fiscal years, respectively. The fact that this government is able to accomplish this feat is testament to the fact that this UDP Government is the best at governance and the management of our public monies. This is a government that makes and keeps its promises.

Mr. Speaker, I am most pleased that this government will continue to invest in our little ones by expanding preschool opportunities for the over 7,500 preschoolers in this country. We all know how critical it is for us to invest in our children from the early years. This government effort to stimulate and nurture our children by expanding opportunities for a preschool education is a critical first step in the achievement of our sustainable development goals.

Mr. Speaker, this budget provides an additional \$60 million for building new high schools and payment for CXC's for our students. This demonstrates that this administration is committed to building our nation through the empowerment of our people. Education, after all, is what will lift our people out of poverty.

In healthcare, Mr. Speaker, we have allocated funds that will allow for us to increase the delivery of primary care services by doubling the funds for medical supplies, upgrading of our medical buildings, as well as expand our programs to control vector-borne diseases. These efforts, in no small measure, Mr. Speaker, will ensure the health and well-being of our people and thus contribute to the prosperity of our nation.

Mr. Speaker, national security is our core responsibility as a responsible government. As such, you will note that we have allocated significant resources to these efforts. The budgeted amounts reflect the importance of this budget to the safety and security of our people. We are doing everything to make sure the lives of our people get better. We have a great head-start in this budget.

Mr. Speaker, history has shown that I and my UDP Government have brought great transformation to Belize and the Belize Rural Central. We were elected a third term based on the performance of the last two terms. Thus, we cannot and will not disappoint our people. We will work every day to ensure that we deliver on all of our manifesto promises, and thus improve the lives of our people. Now, as in the past, Mr. Speaker, this budget guarantees a stable future in a time of change. Allow me also, Mr. Speaker, to say safe and Happy Easter to all Belizeans and in particular those in Belize Rural Central. I support this budget Mr. Speaker. Thank you. (Applause)

HON. M. ESPAT (Toledo East): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I guess we are getting to the end of the day. I would like to refer to my notes in regards to what was said before by the Honourable Member, Minister of Education, who was saying that the people of Collet love him. But, yet, this Minister is not even living in the Collet Division. He loves the people so much that he has to live far away from them so that they do not molest him and do not bother him every day. One other advice I want to give to him, Mr. Speaker, is the matter of vocational and technical education in our school system in this country because we are failing when it comes to vocational and technical education. Why, Mr. Speaker? It is because most of the time we end up putting academic principals to run a vocational school. What we need to do is find people that are trained in vocational and technical education to run these institutions. We saw this happened right here in the Belmopan Comprehensive School. They had the best that you could think about in vocational and technical. You can't find a screwdriver now. You go to Dangriga, and the same thing happened. You go to Toledo, and the same thing happened. Now you have Georgetown, one of the most modern areas for vocational and technical education paid for by the European Union, and the same thing is happening again. The people who are in that area are disgruntled, and they are not satisfied because of the administration of those schools. So this is something that the Honourable Member for Collet needs to look at and to address.

I also listened to the Honourable Member for the police, Belmopan. Mr. Speaker, he bragged about, I don't know, how many hundreds of people that he is taking in to the police, how many he is taking into the BDF, and how many he is taking into the Coast Guard. But do you know what he is also doing, Mr. Speaker? Every applicant that applies to the police, the BDF, or the Coast Guard has to be vetted by him. And they are only putting in, once they know that you are PUP or that your family supports the PUP, this is what they are doing. (You can say

nonsense. This is what they are doing.) Mr. Speaker, so this is something very important for this country that this country does not belong to the United Democratic Party. This country belongs to all of us, man. Therefore, we must respect. I have seen young graduates from the university, with sixth form, apply to the police and they are not accepted. Why? It is because they are members of the People's United Party or their father or mother is part of that. So people are out there complaining. That's why I am complaining because I represent them. And, if I represent them, then I have to also try to defend them. So our Minister of Education, again, seems to be living in the past, and tries to blame the PUP. So who will blame the UDP when they go out of office? Will we do the same thing? Just continue to blame or continue the blame game. This has to end, Mr. Speaker. We are talking about what is actually happening under the UDP Administration.

Mr. Speaker, if you look at the budget carefully, about 11% is allocated to the fisheries management, including fuel. You know it reminds me of a story, and I will get back to some of that later on, where this young man went to his father and he wanted a car. His father said, "I have no problem giving you the car." Next day he went back and he said, "Dad, I want fuel." His father said, "That was not a part of the agreement. You wanted a car." Well, that is what we are doing right here. We are giving these public servants a position, a salary, but they cannot work because they do not have the necessary resources in those departments to do their work. And you can ask anyone of them. Seven percent of the budget goes to the resources in forestry; 10% goes to environmental management, plus fuel; 7 % goes to defense from this budget; and 11% goes to maritime security and the coast guard.

Now we see the problem that we are having down south with the Sarstoon River. This is not a new problem. I don't know if you have been to the Sarstoon River, but that is a very secluded area. Very few people live along that river now. In the past, it used to be a rosewood dumping ground, where the barges used to go up that river and they load all the rosewood there to take to Puerto Barrios, to load on the ships that take it outside to China and to Japan. Today that area is totally deserted. That is one of the biggest drug-trade route that we have in this country. Do you think they are protecting it because it is for us? They don't want a base there because that base will be checking on every single vessel that is passing through that river. And who controls all that passage? It is the same military that is protecting it. So just look, the military from the next side, they don't want us there. I told people long ago that there is an old police station at Cadenas, cement building, you know, nice big building, no window, no door. That is right there where, and, when the Sarstoon River gets to that point, it divides into two. That used to be controlled by an old man that the British sent to Belize many year ago, Mr. Flinn. And, when Mr. Flinn died, his son took over that base because they used to charge the Guatemalans, you know, to pass over the Belize territory to go into Peten. They did not have the road that they have today from Rio Dulce. And that is how the British made the Guatemalans understand that this is our land and, if you pass over this land, you will pay. And they paid for many years. Mr. Flinn stayed in the Toledo District for many years. That building is still there. The BDF now, they are way on top of the hill up there. You can't even see them unless you are on the Guatemalan side. So the presence, we need that presence along that river, and, if we had done that before, we would not be experiencing the problems that we are having today. So, Mr. Speaker, we, as a country, have a very serious problem with these Guatemalans. And I don't think that it will blow over. I think we are in a very bad situation, and it might get worse because some of these members of the BDF have hot fingers, and anything can happen.

The Minister of Works was ranting and raging about all the wonderful things that they have done in the Toledo District. The market project, Mr. Speaker,

is an EU project, an old project. I actually designed the plan for that market area. The old market that was built under the Esquivel Government, that was only refurbished and it took them nearly two years to paint that building. They had the whole Front Street in the Toledo District blocked by market venders because they had nowhere to go to sell their produce, over two years. The road going to Jalacte, I signed that contract with Cisco before we left government. Myself and the then Prime Minister Said Musa signed that document because we had already arranged all the money for that road. So they can knock their chest and say, "Oh, yes, we found the money there so we did it." They had no choice, Mr. Speaker, because they were the same ones who used to say that the PUP wants to build a road that is going nowhere, and I think I've said that before in this House. Well, the road is there now, and it is going somewhere. (Applause) And I also said, and, I believe, it was the Honourable Wilfred Erlington that was sitting right over here, who said to me, when I made the statement in this House, that the people of the Toledo District would be affected by this road if we, as a people, did not prepare them for what that road will bring to the Toledo District and to Belize. And it will happen. We already see what the Chinese are doing in the business community in this country. They have wiped out every single local businessman in the Toledo District, totally wiped them out. And this is exactly what is going to happen when that road is finish. If our people are not prepared, they will be left behind.

Mr. Speaker, he was talking about the Stann Creek road. Now what I see happening on the Stann Creek road, I believe we came to this House and we approved some \$70 million for that road, and they were now getting the money in little pieces. But what they are doing, as the Honourable Member from Stann Creek West said, it's all patched work, and in June and July it is going to proof the quality of work that we are getting on that piece of road. That agreement that came to this House also said that there would be 5 foot shoulder on both sides of that road. They are not doing that. And, if we are paying top money, Mr. Speaker, the roads need to be done properly for the safety of the people that are using these highways. You do not have a center line. You drive those roads at night, Mr. Speaker, and your life is hanging in a string because even when you have the center line, a lot of drivers will come over that line to meet you and then you will meet your God. So these things are important, and I don't want any cheap paint because they put cheap paint, you know. I was a Minister, and I used to buy paint too, and I never bought no cheap paint because it will only last six months and then it starts to wear out.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the Minister, again, reported \$100 million for the Coastal Road. Well, I don't know how many of you know the Coastal Road, but I got caught in a flood right at Manatee junction in my vehicle right up to my waist. So they better do some good feasibility study before they decide to throw away another \$100 million on that road because that is not the actual Coastal Road, and they should go back and study the plans to see where the actual Coastal Road should run.

Mr. Speaker, you know, I would like to refer to the budget, and this one is very important, but all of us take it for granted in this country. That is the Ombudsman. That is on page 30 in the estimates book. This is a very, and you know, I think, our past Party Leader raised up a point in here when the appointment for the Ombudsman came to the House. Now I don't have nothing against the Ombudsman, you know. I was his principal for 4 years when he was in high school. I have nothing against the Ombudsman. What I have against is the budget allocation that is given to the Ombudsman because, Mr. Speaker, \$235,000, I think, \$11,000, if you look in there, is for fuel alone. But that's it. The man doesn't have anything to work with. I need the Ombudsman. The people in Toledo East need the Ombudsman. (Applause) The people in this House need the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman is also a member of parliament, an independent

member of parliament. That is in the law you know. So, Mr. Speaker, that Ombudsman has more power than all of us in this room.

MR. SPEAKER: Is he a Member of parliament, really?

HON. M. ESPAT (Toledo East): Yes, an independent member of parliament. Mr. Speaker, well, it was the Honourable Said Musa that did it you know, but I think even from back then it didn't work because the Ombudsman has the authority to investigate any injustice, any injury or abuse, any discourtesy or refusal to act, no discrimination against religion, race, creed or political affiliation, corruption and wrongdoing. And he should not be controlled by the Prime Minister. Yes, the National Assembly appoints the Ombudsman, and until we start to respect the same laws that we put in this House, Mr. Speaker, we are going nowhere as a country. (Applause) I need the Ombudsman because I have a lot of people that get affected. They don't have money to go to a lawyer like you, Mr. Speaker, or any other lawyer in Belize because they cannot afford it. So the Ombudsman is there for that purpose that even if you don't have money you go to the Ombudsman and he should protect your rights as a citizen of this country. But we just put the man there, we dress him up in a suit and we send him all over the world to attend these conferences but does nothing for the Belizean people. There were 200 and something cases in that book that was just tabled. How many of those were solved? (Total disrespect, but that is the problem when you have no discipline. That is a problem, and we are living in a country that has no discipline.) Mr. Speaker, I don't know when we will decide to change our attitude and our behavior, because we see the behavior in this House and people outside are looking, people outside are criticizing the attitudes of the Members of this House.

Mr. Speaker, \$387,000, Crique Sarco Bridge is still not finished. Eight years of UDP and Crique Sarco Bridge is still there. They said they paid \$387,000, you know, last year, but the bridge is still not finished. So, you know, I wonder, you are spiting the people because they voted for the People's United Party. That is not true. You don't know. Yes, we won Toledo East, but you don't know who voted PUP or who voted UDP. Yes, you can look in a box, but most of these villages vote in one box. So you can't tell which one put their vote where. So it is ridiculous to try and victimize a whole nation of people that are very poor people.

I heard them talked about poverty over there, you know. I heard the Albert Representative said that, "Oh, Albert can never be compared with." Man, I have 100 miles to run, I wish you would go and enjoy a 100-miles constituency, and then you would know how it feels to be out there traveling. And this \$50 million, I don't hear none of them say anything bad about raising money from the people's head, \$50 million on fuel. So the Prime Minister tomorrow can say, "I need some more money. We are going to raise \$75 million." And nobody would say nothing. Everybody is happy. So why should we take that burden because you are putting a burden on the whole nation to get through with what you want to accomplish? (Applause) That is what you are doing. You are putting that burden on every single Belizean that has a car that has to move. Oh, but we say, "Because they have a car, they can afford to pay," and we like dodo birds we pay it and say nothing.

Mr. Speaker, public work is dead. That is my first cousin. Public work is dead. He can say all he wants about the millions, but he has no equipment at the public works to do works in our villages and towns, none. (Applause) We just had a big Maya fair. I think the Honourable Member from Toledo West called public works and said, "Could you please go and grate the road for us because we are

having this big fair in Blue Creek at the school?" The school was trying to raise some money. Nothing worked. Mr. Speaker, do you see how they behave? I want him to prove it, and I want the other one to prove it as he likes to raise it all the time because they know fully well, and like Said Musa said, if I was not in the House I would say they are liars. (Oh, he was going to sleep. Well, I hope he wakes up.)

Mr. Speaker, all the roads, when they talked about roads, man, from Dolores, the kids are still walking to get to a bus to go to school. Otoxha, Corazon, Sunday Wood, Crique Sarco, Conejo, all these roads, Barranco, are 2 miles an hour, unless you want to break up the vehicle. But go further than that right into Punta Gorda Town, and you have to drive 2 miles an hour. The streets are terrible. Oh, yes, they cement one street. Yes, they are fixing the streets, Melendrez Boulevard and R.K. Pennel Boulevard. They are joining a UDP and a PUP on two streets that are dead, to honour them, but all the rests of the streets are in a total mess. We do not even have a grader to grade those streets, and the town council is UDP. It is not a PUP Town Council. It is a UDP Town Council. And, if they are treating their own like that, then something is seriously wrong because the people hear all these millions, you know. Don't forget. They are listening and they hear about all these millions, but it means absolutely nothing to them. So, Mr. Speaker, I don't know where it will all end, but we have to complain. That is why we were sent to this House. We got to complain.

Rural electrification, Mr. Speaker, page 188, zero, do you know what is zero from zero? It is zero, entry number 762, zero. Man, the PUP extended electricity all over the Toledo District, except some of the far remote areas that they could not reach. Eight years of the UDP and it is zero. We have nothing for you. And you look at that same page 188, Mr. Speaker, assistance to municipalities, 878, zero. You look at the EU electrification. I rail up with them too, you know, because they came with all this rubbish about electrifying 1,500 homes. I said it right here in this House, and they did not electrify not one single home. But they took the electricity to all the packaging sheds in the banana industry. But the slaves could not get none. The masters get the electricity, and the poor slaves sit by. So just before this election now they started to move and they started to cut lampposts. They were not cement posts that we are all required to get you know, a cement post with a 2-inch pipe. They went and cut old lampposts and painted them green. And that is what they are using right now under this EU project, but in here Government of Belize is not putting anything. It is the European Union, zero.

But yet, Mr. Speaker, purchase of vehicles, 188, entry 1316, \$1 million, that is more important, \$1 million. Social assistance, Mr. Speaker, that same page, 1656, I don't know who is the Minister for social assistance, but it is zero. What do you have? Yes, you have a Ministry. This is what I am saying. You have the car, but you don't have the fuel. You don't have anything to help the people. Those are the people who vote, you know, remember. It is not the highway. That doesn't vote. The roundabout does not vote. The cement street does not vote. It is the people out there that we have to serve. Those are the people who vote. And we have to be careful and we have to make sure that we are taking care of those people.

Contributions to NHI, Mr. Speaker, I heard them saying that they would extend NHI, \$200,000 for NHI, same page 1624. Now you go to Placencia, 1723, this is the water and sanitation project for Placencia, and that is the area for the Member from Stann Creek West. They have budgeted \$200,000. So I don't know how far that will go. But the Right Honourable Member from Fort George talked about this professional legal service, page 188, entry 1808, \$1 million. Why are we paying all this money when you have an Attorney General's Office and you

have a Solicitor General's Office that is supposed to be equipped with lawyers? Are you saying that those lawyers are no good and that you have to go outside to pay a professional lawyer or whatever number of lawyer, \$1 million, \$2 million or \$3 million that they pay? I don't know, but I am just giving you a report, Mr. Speaker, of where in the world are these people when it comes to serving the people who vote in this country. They take advantage, of the poor voter, you know, because the poor voter does not understand. They take advantage and it is a sorry situation when they don't realize who benefits when they vote. This is a very serious matter. Who benefits when they go to the poll to vote for a particular party? And that is something that they need to consider.

Mr. Speaker, school assistance, back-to-school, you hear them talk about all the education thing. Last year it was \$40,000. This year it is zero. Sporting facilities, you will build all the beautiful facilities. Do you know what that will bring? When the young people want to go and use that facility, the amount of red tape and bureaucracy they will have to go through to get in, they will not be able to get in. So, Mr. Speaker, I am going through this because it is important that we understand the priority of this government. Build the facility but the facility cannot work by itself. The facility needs people to make it work, and they have to remember that.

Under the Medfly Project, I don't know if they have another entry somewhere else in this book, but the Medfly Program through BAHHA is a very important one for our exports out of this country. And here it is zero, same page 191, entry 1117, zero, and this is a very important area, Mr. Speaker. Now I saw them putting a rice project entry, the same page 191, for \$175,000, and I don't know what they will use that for because the rice program in the Toledo District is basically dead. They are now harvesting the rice in Toledo, selling the paddy to the Mennonite and then buying it back from the Mennonite. Have you ever seen anything so stupid, when you have all the facilities in Toledo to do this? But they are selling the paddy that they are producing which is like over a million pounds of paddy. They sell the paddy and then buy it back and then sell it to the poor people at a higher price when that rice could be sold on the market at a cheaper price that the people of this country can afford. Mr. Speaker, I don't know what school they went to, but it is terrible.

Natural Resources, Mr. Speaker, page 191, entry 1658, disaster response, immediate, you know, impromptu, immediate, it is only \$17,000. Man, our people are still paying the price for the last disaster. (You said you receive a lot of money but we didn't get none. You are lucky. We got none.) Our people right now in the villages are paying the price because all the corn that they had planted had been destroyed. And where is NEMO? Where is the Government to assist these people? They didn't asked for a stove, you know. They didn't asked for a refrigerator. They didn't asked for a mattress. They asked for food because that is what is important to them, food. But even that you all refused to give them. And you all have these millions and millions on top of millions, but you all refused to give them food. Come on, man!

Lands and Survey, I said at the last Sitting of the House, Mr. Speaker, it is a bed of corruption. It is still a bed of corruption. A man buys a property for \$1,500. (I won't call names this time because then they said I had to go and apologize. I am not apologizing to anybody.) He buys a property for \$1,500, and he waits 2 years to get his title. That is what he paid for you know, \$1,500. He goes to the Land Department, and 2 years he is waiting, back and forth. And then the man called me because it is not the first time it has happened to him. So he went back and they charged him \$3,000 and he got his paper the same day at the Lands Department. This is our Government Lands Department with a new Minister you know. They changed the other one that they said was corrupt, and

they put another one, a new Minister. But the same thing is going on at the Lands Department. Now how can a poor man who is trying to live in this country cope with a situation like that? This week 4 villagers went there. I think 2 of them are preachers. "Oh, come back next week Wednesday". Yes, they have to pay the bus to come. Yes, they have to pay the bus to go back. This is total, and I am trying to find a word for it, Mr. Speaker. But this is what they are doing to everybody from the south. "Come back tomorrow." We cannot be coming back every time. We need to be in a situation where our people can get service, man. I don't know, but, yet, they have a land titling project for \$50,000. I don't know what they will do with that \$50,000 for land titling project in the budget. And then mapping is at \$300,000 and \$50,000 for titling projects, but yet our people cannot get service when they go there.

Solid waste is a total disgrace. Eight years of UDP and go and see the dump in Punta Gorda. It is a total disgrace. With a UDP Town Council, you know, and they are doing absolutely nothing about solid waste in the Toledo District and Punta Gorda Town. Now let us look at the other one now. They demolished the old sports center in Punta Gorda that was built by the PUP. The building costs \$50,000 when I was the Area Representative and Minister, \$50,000 for the building. To take it down, Mr. Speaker, it costs \$103,000 to take it down. (Tell them man.) This is why we need the Ombudsman you know, to investigate them. That is the role of the Ombudsman, to investigate every one of us in this House, if you call on him to do it. Maybe we will start with you. But they need to be investigated, and all of us need to be investigated, if that is the matter, because that is the law. But we, as the Representatives, refuse to respect the law, we refuse. We just feel so big because we make the law, that we have the authority to break the law. Come on, man! All of us, yes, we will start with you. I don't have any problem. It was \$103,000 that was paid to take down the building, entry no. 881, Mr. Speaker. My colleague from Toledo West maybe will complain, but you know they always put in one little heading in there, you know, for drains in villages. At the end of the day you don't know where that money goes, 425,000. That is nothing with all the villages we have in this country. That is nothing. We have 53 villages.

I go back, Mr. Speaker, to NEMO which is a total disappointment because, if you look at page 193, entry 916, Hurricane Preparedness Conference workshop, it is half a million dollars. Mr. Honourable from Toledo West, it is half a million dollars you know for conferences and workshops when your people are out there dying and starving and cannot get a dollar from NEMO. Yet, they have half a million dollars to throw away on conferences and workshops. It looks like maybe my book is different from their one. But my book is the same book, Mr. Speaker. Now, how can you justify that? How can you, when people are sleeping in a center for 3 days or 4 days eating a biscuit that we have to try to provide to them because NEMO is ill-equipped. That's why I said that the facility is there. But they don't have the working capital to make it work, and then they have to blame somebody else higher up because they cannot work and function the way they should.

Now we have a new one, Mr. Speaker, 194, entry 1905, Maya Land Rights Commission. Now what is that? It is another waste of money? Half a million dollars, Mr. Speaker, for this year and for next year another half a million dollars and for the following year another half a million dollars, but for what? Did that matter not go to the international court? Did the court not give a judgment on what the Government is supposed to do? Now why you have to go and set up a commission to study what for half a million dollars a year? To study what? It is just to give a former Minister a job? It is because that's what you did. It was just to give a former Minister a job. That is all. Half a million dollars, total waste, read your book.

Housing assistance, page 195, Mr. Speaker, it is \$50,000. Ask Juan Coy what he did with all the steel and all the cement that he got from the Government of Belize to help the people in his constituency. He built private homes for his family. That is what he did. That is what the Ombudsman should be doing, investigating this type of corruption in this UDP Government. (Applause) It was \$50,000.

Mr. Speaker, I don't know but assistance to town council, most of the town councils are UDP you know, \$100,000, terrible. Now rural development, contributions to village councils, is for \$125,000. For 191 villages it is at \$125,000, but you can give away half a million dollars in different pockets that don't really need it and here you have people that you go to and beg to vote for you and you will help their village. "Vote for us and we will fix your street. Vote for us and we will pick up your garbage." It is \$125,000 for 191 villages in this country. Where are the priorities of this government? Where? We are going to village council elections soon you know. And you are going to go and beg them to vote for UDP. You are going into village council elections soon for \$125,000. Now they said that better must come.

Now, Mr. Speaker, for village council chairmen, \$53,400 is for 191 chairmen. It is \$50 a month, and better must come. Man, this people take on a responsibility for you to lead their villages and you will insult them and continue to insult them and give them \$50 a month. That is a total shame and disgrace in 2016. (Applause) It is a total shame when you talk and brag about all these millions of dollars that you have to spend, terrible. All of them are UDP nearly. Only one, I think he is protecting Cayo South, good for him. Mr. Speaker, this needs to be increased. You cannot pay an alcalde \$100 a month. These people are policemen you know. These people are magistrates you know. These people have to come out at night out of their bed at 2 o'clock when somebody is fighting with machetes, and they might get chop in the process. But you give them \$100 a month. He is taking more risk than the police because he becomes the police in his village. You know these are things that we need to start to look at. I mean these are down-to-earth people that want to serve their community. If we don't speak about it, Mr. Speaker, no change will be made. But yet we are saying that better must come. This is a pile of people you know. You are talking about a lot of people. You are talking about a lot of villages that some of you represent. And they will come back to you, but I am telling you here today that you all better do something about increasing the stipend for these people that represent their villages. (Applause) We have to stop, Mr. Speaker, with this foolishness.

Mr. Speaker, you know, Toledo East, I will just end by saying that there is no electricity extension, except for Eden Martinez. He is the only one that got extension of electricity in Punta Gorda. No road improvement for the villages, so let them not confuse Jalacte with the general public roads that we have in the Toledo District. We have no equipment in the Toledo District. And stop your foolishness in saying that Mike Espat sold it because that is your continuous foolishness. You know that, if you had proof of that, I would be in jail, knowing the kind of mentality that you have. You know that. There is no money to help our poor flood victims in the Toledo District. There is no help for the unemployed in the Toledo District. And they talked about employment when all the banana farmers or workers had to leave south Stann Creek because of no job. All of the people who were laid off from the shrimp farms were over 400 to 500 people. What are they going to do? What are they going to do now? When they lose their jobs, these people go into the bush and they plant their food. But then they cannot even get a piece of land because they start chasing them off the land. So we need to improve these situations that exist for our people because we are making it harder and more difficult for them to live in this country. And it seems that we take joy, we really take joy in doing that, hurting people. We have to stop. There is

no help to our farmers, absolutely none. The Agriculture Department is a waste of time. You should close it down because it is not serving a purpose or the purpose for which it was designed because they are just as broke as everybody else. They are there, they have the building, they have the vehicle, they have some equipment, but they do not have any working capital, absolutely none. And this is what is killing us, Mr. Speaker.

They brag about education. Why don't they offer free education? Why? If they can tax all of us \$50 million on fuel, then I want them to tax us another \$50 million for the students in this country so that they can be able to go to school because that is a priority. (Applause) Maybe you all don't believe it is a priority because you can afford to send your child to school. That is why they don't see it as a priority. But I see it as a priority because I represent people that are poor that cannot afford to send their children to school. (Applause)

There is no housing development. Eden Martinez went and built some cardboard box houses for people which are already falling apart in Punta Gorda. We built over 75 cement homes in Punta Gorda Town and 25 homes in Independence under the People's United Party at \$20,000 and \$29,000 for a home. Tell me how many homes have the UDP built for the people that they love so much in Belize? Maybe they are still blind, but they will wake up one day. Believe you me, they will wake up one day.

Water system, Honourable Member, I heard them advertising one for Conejo Creek. I heard them advertising it under SIF. But, Mr. Speaker, we cannot continue like this. We are not asking for everything. It is that strategically these things need to be done. We don't want everything to happen overnight. We know that is impossible, but we need to share the wealth of this country. We need to share and not put all our money in one place. We need to share.

Mr. Speaker, school buildings, did you heard them talked about that? Ask them how many school buildings were maintained, if they fixed the windows, if they fixed the doors, or if they fixed the bathrooms. Go and check on some of our primary schools in this country. They have done absolutely nothing. "We will build new one." What, are you building new ones and not taking care of the old ones? Then you are wasting time. Well, I don't know!

Mr. Speaker, the last one I want to deal with is the hospital in Punta Gorda Town. We have raised that matter. We don't want no new building you know. We want qualified people in that hospital to deal with our sick people so that we do not have to be shipping people like cattle in an ambulance over 100 miles to get to a hospital. That is what we are asking for, and I do not think that is a big job to find qualified doctors to work in the Toledo District. We need them there, man, because we are sick and tired of putting our sick people in an ambulance to travel over 100 miles to get to a hospital. Mr. Speaker, these things hurt, but when it happens to you then you will know how it feels. But you see most of them here don't have that problem. Our people come to Belize City in an ambulance and then when they are finished they have to find their way back home by themselves. There is no assistance for them. These people do not have any money in their pockets to pay for a bus from the hospital. But once they are finished with you there you need to find your way home. This is totally ridiculous and uncalled for in 2016, and yet we are talking about all these millions of dollars and this billion-dollar budget which has absolutely no meaning to the poor people of this country. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. (Applause)

MR. SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the House will now adjourn. We will resume at 9:00 A.M. tomorrow when I will recognize the Honourable Member from Pickstock. The House now stands adjourn for today.

Meeting suspended at 6:15 P.M. to Wednesday, 23rd March 2016, at 9:00 AM.