

Wednesday, 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2016

9:00 AM.

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***Members Present:***

The Hon. Michael Peyrefitte, Speaker  
The Rt. 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. 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. 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 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. Florencio Marin Jr. (Corozal South East)  
The Hon. Oscar Requena (Toledo West)  
The Hon. Orlando Habet (Cayo North East)

***Members Absent:***

The Hon. Erwin R. Contreras (Cayo West), Minister of Economic Development,  
Petroleum, Investment, Trade and Commerce

The Hon. Rene Montero (Cayo Central), Minister of Works, Transport and  
NEMO

The Hon. Francis Fonseca (Freetown)

MR. SPEAKER in the Chair.

PRAYERS by Pastor Alvan Gentle Jr.

**HON. W. ELRINGTON (Minister of Foreign Affairs):** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise to make my contribution to the budget debate, Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the Fiscal Year 2016/2017. But before I get into the budget, Mr. Speaker, I would like to crave your indulgence to ask the House to rise for a moment of silence as a mark of respect and of solidarity with our donor partners, the European Union, in consequences of the tragic incident which occurred yesterday, the terrorist attack, in Brussels, the headquarters of the EU and of NATO, resulting in the death of 34 citizens and more than 200 injured. We have an Embassy there with an Ambassador and a staff.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Absolutely, Minister, and just to mention that I was at airport on Sunday two days before the incident. So I feel the intimidation, and clearly the European Union has been a good friend of Belize, and your request is timely.

(All rise in a moment of silence.)

**HON. W. ELRINGTON (Minister of Foreign Affairs):** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I think it is appropriate that I point to the empty seats on the other side and wonder whether it is a issue of forgetfulness or just a mark of disrespect to this Honourable House and the people of Belize, that the Loyal Opposition who are being paid to be here today are, in fact, nowhere in sight. They are absent.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to offer a word of thanks to Team Pickstock and my family and the entire Pickstock family who defied the pundits, the media and all the armchair generals who were predicting my untimely demise at the polls. And I want to thank all of them who worked so hard to ensure that I would be returned to this House for a third time. I want to also crave your indulgence to thank the Belize Protectors Team Belize. The Belize Protectors is a team no. 259, which took first place in the mixed category with total time to complete the 120-mile relay race of 14 hours and 23 minutes. Overall we place 6<sup>th</sup> out of some 264 competing teams, and Belize gathered first place in the special category that we belong to. (Applause) The Belize Protectors ranked 14 highest times to complete such a prestigious race which has been in existence since 1985. It's the first time that we are participating in that race, Mr. Speaker, and I think we did a stellar job. If you would permit me, Mr. Speaker, given the fact that it's the very first time that it occurred, if you would permit me, I would like to call the names of the particular members of our Defence Force that were, in fact, involved. We had Justine William Baptist, Jereen Shanice Chun, Alexander John Lauri, Domingo Cal, Egbert Peter Augustine, Loretta Lois Garbutt, Daniel Jimenez, Jerome Aaron Belisle, Juan Jose Bulum, Adelida Anastacia Pou, Jermaine Alexander Jones, Victor Cyril Martin, Trevor Lennon, Ernesto Charles Villafranco, Elio Tzub,

Calestro Saki, Shoudi Shayeda Reyes, Rashida Natasha Cunningham, Albert Emerson Davis, Rhodmond Richard Smith, Randy Vence Lewis, Fedrick Samuels Gordon III, Herbert Roberto Gomez, Jacinto Sanchez, and Shanae Glenda Nasario Rio. We'd also like to thank the 25 of them, and we'd also like to thank the supporting team. Mr. Speaker, I would also like to make mention of the recent band fest that was held and I can't resist making mention of that because the band fest was enhanced tremendously by the presence of a band from Chetumal and the presence of a band from Melchor de Mencos. And I heard Mrs. Carmen Barrow personally thanking them for the splendid job they did in enhancing the band fest.

I make mention of these three issues and occurrences, Mr. Speaker, because it is a testament to the work of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in enhancing the relationship with our neighbours and our allies. The United States is a powerful ally of Belize. Mexico is a powerful ally of Belize. Guatemala is a neighbour that we have some difficulties with, but by and large we are working those difficulties out but we are able to live in peace and harmony, and, in fact, we are going to be able to cooperate in areas of health, education and, you see, culture. I think that is very, very important for our people to understand.

I also wanted to take this chance and opportunity to welcome and congratulate the new Leader of the Opposition on his appointment as Leader of the Opposition, and I would also like to congratulate him on appointing the advisory team to advise him and his party on the Belize/Guatemala dispute. He has selected perhaps the most informed and perhaps the most enlightened members of his party to be his advisors on this very important issue. They all have long experience in dealing with the Belize/Guatemala issue, and I think it's a move in the right direction.

Mr. Speaker, I wanted to point out also too, going now into the budget, that this budget is no doomsday budget. And I brought with me a glass of water to make the point that we can look at the same thing but see different things. Some people would look at it and say it's half empty. Some people would look at it and say it's half full, but we were looking at the same thing. The impression I get is that those on the other side when they look at the budget they only see negative, those who are missing in action. And it is no wonder, in fact, that they see negative because they are missing in such important occasions. But this budget, like all the budgets after this administration under the Right Honourable Prime Minister, Dean Oliver Barrow, shows a projected revenue, I will deal only with the revenue, of \$1,088,359,568.00. The projected revenue for last year was \$1,031,114,434.00. So this one is an increase over last year. It grew actually some \$57 million, as far as my reckoning is concern.

In relation to the Ministry that I am responsible for, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I note that the allocation for this year is \$21,691,708.00 and the revenue for last year 2015/2016 was \$16,979,258.00, which, again, is an increase of some \$4.5 million. This allocation for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will be able to finance all the activities that we are involved with and handsomely. We have a reputation in the Ministry of Finance for being very prudent in the management of the people's affairs. And none of the monies allocated to that Ministry finds itself in any other activity other than those ordained by the government. It is strictly to carry out the government purposes.

The good thing about the budget, the absolutely unquestionable good thing about the budget is that it provides for no new taxes. No one is losing his or her job in the public service. We are engaged in no IMF Program. We have the capacity to continue to borrow at concessionary rates. We are serving all our debts on time, including the killer super bond. We are paying our obligations. We now own BTL and BEL, the majority shares. We honour our promised raise of salary to public officers. People may not readily appreciate how important that is. But, when you compare our situation at this time with that of Trinidad and Tobago and St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and even Venezuela from who we got so much assistance, you will find that in all those countries situation is grave. In Trinidad and Tobago, for example, taxes were imposed on every single item that was sold and that was taxable. They got rid of what they used to call zero rate goods, and every good, whether it is school supplies, whether it is basic foods, whether it is basic medicine, every good that was sold was attracting a tax of some 12% VAT for the first time in the history of that country. There were taxes on salt, flour, tax on everything. The same thing happened in relation to St. Vincent. They imposed the tax on everything to the point where the people rose up in opposition to the government. And, of course, we know the difficult situation in Venezuela where it is very, very difficult even to obtain basic foods because of the shortage of those commodities and bad financial situation. Every country almost in the world that had oil as its main income earner had been suffering increased hardship because of the drastic reduction in the price of oil on the world market. So, Mr. Speaker, I can say with confidence there is no country, in the entire region which is performing better than this country, given the difficult economic circumstances that, in fact, prevails in the region as a whole and that this budget continues to be a very good budget when looked at overall.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I thought that I would use this morning to debunk some of the myths that the people on the other side are accustomed to saying to the Belizean people and the Belizean public, and the most recent myth is that the Sarstoon is gone, that the Prime Minister and myself have given away the Sarstoon. A piece of Toledo is gone. And we are not soft on Guatemala as they suggest. We, as a government, believe in the power of diplomacy. We believe in peace. We believe that the brain is certainly much more powerful than brawn. We believe that the pen is mightier than the sword, and we believe that we should leave the professionals to do the job of the professionals. They should, in fact, secure our nation. We don't believe in violence. We don't believe in brute force. We believe that we solve our difference at the court which is provided for that purpose. Now I want to reemphasize, Mr. Speaker, that we in this party have never ever done anything to put this country in jeopardy. But we can't say the same for the other side. And I will provide that information now to the public, and I am hoping that it is going to be recorded and replayed and replayed so that there can be no confusion and misunderstanding.

Our country, Mr. Speaker, took a very different position from the Government of the United Kingdom when it came to dealing with the Guatemalan problem. The British Government said to the Guatemalans as early as 1939 as when they came up with this idea that they were going to repudiate the Boundary Treaty, they said to them, "Go to the International Court of Justice. We are not going to negotiate it with you at all." They maintained that position, and, in 1948, the Legislative Council of Belize supported that position. So the decision that we should go to the International Court of Justice was taken by our Legislative Council as early as 1948. It was only when the nationalists started getting

involved in politics, when the People's United Party got involved in politics and started to make representation, that we had the beginning of negotiations with Guatemala. The British refused to negotiate with Guatemala. And the first incidence of negotiation, Mr. Speaker, occurred in as early as 1957, when the Guatemalan Foreign Minister, Jorge Granados, in London proposed to the then Premier Price, Albert Cattuse, Mr. Bowman, and Mr. Jefferies, that if they were not happy with the result of their meeting in London with the British they should go back to Belize and advocate that Belize become an associate state of Guatemala. That was the first, first time the idea came about that Belize should, in fact, become associated with Guatemala or give something to Guatemala, and that was done when the local politicians took charge of the process.

Between 1957 and the present time, Mr. Speaker, or between 1957 and 1981, according to Assad Shoman, in his book, *A History of Belize in 13 Chapters*, the following proposals were put to the Belize delegation in their attempt to try to settle the Belize/Guatemala dispute and to get independence. The first proposal was made as early as 1966, and that proposal in 1966 proposed that we give away to Guatemala the southern portion of our country from just below Punta Gorda to all the way down, including everything that is down there below Stann Creek and everything below Stann Creek. And this you will find in Assad's book, *13 Chapters*, and he has it clearly marked here in red. It is the first line at the top in red. Do you see where it is? It is just below Dangriga. The second proposal was a proposal made in 1975, that we give them the piece of land from the Monkey River down. Do you see the line here? it has the line here from Monkey River down. The third proposal which was made in 1975 as well was that we give just above Monkey River, the Deep River area and from that area down. And then we have a proposal that we give them from the Orange Point, 1977, down. That is below Punta Gorda, Orange Point down. And then we have proposals that we give them from the Temash River and all the Ranguana and the Sapodilla Cayes. These are proposals that, in fact, were made to the Belize delegation by the Guatemalans, the British and the Americans with a view to trying to solve the dispute.

I will not, on this occasion, call the specific names of who made what proposals because that will be too embarrassing. But I promise that, in fact, and unless the People's United Party, that are the people on the other side takes steps to desist from suggesting that we in fact, have lost control of the Sarstoon and, in fact, that we have given it away, when I come the next time, Mr. Speaker, I can promise you that I will tell the nation the specific proposals, who made them, and when, so that the people can see very clearly that under the PUP watch they were the ones that were seeking actively or discussing actively the dismemberment of our nation and our country. (Applause) These maps are taken from the back of Assad's book. He has all these maps here, Mexico, El Petén. See them here, and this is by him. He also has it in other books.

I also want to point out here, Mr. Speaker, that it was Assad Shoman really who in this school text which we use first adverted to the artificial border. He, in fact, was the man who first used the expression. It's page 41, and this is his book, *Chapter 1, Assad Shoman, History of Belize*. It says here, "Africa was a victim of European Imperialism, bidding with the Portuguese slave raiding in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, and in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century most of Africa was colonized. The vast wealth and the labour force of the continent were harness for the enrichment of Europe as rival European nations created artificial borders and states." This is a book which

actually is being taught in our primary schools.

So, Mr. Speaker, there is no truth, there is absolutely no truth in the suggestion that, in fact, we have lost the Sarstoon. The Sarstoon was always in dispute and there is absolutely no truth that we are, in fact, soft on the Guatemala. We have kept our ground. Between the time we got into office and now we have had no negative incidents really to speak of with the Guatemalans, save the ones that recently took place involving the territorial volunteers. And that is particularly worrisome because for the first time we are having civilians coming in contact with the Guatemalan Military Forces and that can really cause big problems for all of us. So that is particularly worrisome. But it was in 2000 that the Guatemalan Military had taken some seven of our security people and had them locked up in Guatemala itself. And, of course, during that early period they were encouraging settlement in our country. Since we got in office none of that has happened.

Now there is also this pernicious position being taken that, in fact, the Guatemalan issue was not being dealt with in a bipartisan fashion between ourselves and the Opposition. Only two days ago I heard an announcer on Love FM speaking quite authoritatively on the fact that we have not been working it in a bipartisan fashion. The truth is that we have always worked it in a bipartisan fashion because the national budget, every single budget has provided for monies to do that kind of thing. When the People's United Party were in office, our Ambassador Fred Martinez was invariably part of the team that went to Washington to discuss with the OAS this matter. And, when I came into office, I never made a single journey to Washington to discuss this matter or to Guatemala to discuss this matter without an official of the People's United Party appointed by the Party Leader accompanying me. And I can remember distinctly that on different occasions I was accompanied by Eamon Courtenay, now Senator Courtenay I think, by Lisa Shoman, by Assad Shoman, and also by the new Leader of the Opposition, the Honourable John Briceño. Every single one of them accompanied me at some time or the other. And everything we did we did by them.

More so, Mr. Speaker, I want the record to be very, very clear that the decision to go to the ICJ was, in fact, orchestrated by the People's United Party in 2007. This is the most authoritative book on this matter at this point in time, matter done by Jose Miguel Insulza Democratic Governance. He wrote on the matter. If you permit me, Mr. Speaker, he says, "In May 2005," the article is captioned, Negotiation between Belize and Guatemala and the Mission in the Adjacency Zone. He says, "In May 2005, when we assumed the General Secretariat, negotiation began on a new Agreement on a Framework for Negotiations and Confidence Building Measures between the two countries. The purpose was to indefinitely extend the enforceability of these measures and move towards a new round of negotiations. The agreement was signed on September 7, 2005." The PUP was in government. "In February 2006, a new round of negotiations began to address the maritime border with the involvement of Honduras as an invited party since it shares a maritime border with both countries. According to the agreed negotiation framework, the agreements reached on specific issues would not enter into force unless there was an agreement on the entirety of the matters defined on the negotiation agenda. Throughout the process, the parties did make significant specific agreements on maritime issues. However, given that the rules of international law dictate that the maritime jurisdiction of States derives from the territory belonging to each country and that,

in this case, the land territory had not been defined, the parties were unable to resolve, after several meetings, the maritime boundary.” In other words, they spent months and months and thousands of dollars negotiating on a maritime border, not appreciating that you can’t get anywhere unless you settle the 1859 border. It’s a waste of time. It’s a waste of money. And that was done between 2005, 2006, and 2007. It was also around that time that the decision was taken to use the expression adjacency line as opposed to border under the PUP’s watch. And the Adjacency Office came into existence, and the Office of the Adjacency Zone, the OAS came into assistance. It was specifically at the request of the People’s United Party. They invited the OAS to assist us in this process, and our party agreed. We were party to it. We did not disagree because we thought it was the best thing, but the initiative came from the then negotiating team which was led by the Honourable Assad Shoman as he then was.

“Consequently,” said Mr. Insulza, “and after having exhausted all other political and diplomatic instruments, including those set forth in the Pact, of Bogotá, on November 19, 2007, we recommended that the parties file the dispute with the International Court of Justice. The countries accepted this recommendation, and on December 8, 2008, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Belize and Guatemala took the most important step in the history of the dispute by signing the Special Agreement to Submit Guatemala’s Territorial, Island, and Maritime claim to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for a definitive judgment. This was the first time the path had been paved for an equitable, honourable, and permanent settlement of the dispute.” So it was orchestrated by the People’s United Party that the Secretary General of the Organization of American States would, in fact, make the recommendation that we go to the ICJ. That recommendation was made, and we accepted it. So everything was done together as a national team, the People’s United Party working with the UDP. And it was done after all other avenues had been exhausted. We had tried internationalization. We had tried Webster Proposal. We had tried mediation and Heads of Agreement, and nothing worked. There was the 1977 Draft Treaty, and nothing worked. So the decision to go to the ICJ was orchestrated by the People’s United Party. And every one of the attorneys, every Foreign Minister in the People’s United Party are on record as supporting going to the ICJ. The tragedy about this whole thing is that the last leader of the party seems to have been totally confused and couldn’t make a decision. And recently when we went to give a lecture, myself and Dr. Assad Shoman, at the University the kids were visibly upset because they said, “What are you doing to us? Are you playing us for jokes? One minute you say no ICJ and the next minute you say ICJ.” But the truth is that the safest and the best solution that have come forth so far, is, in fact, and perhaps the last but one solution, perhaps the only last solution that can be dealt with pacifically, peacefully, is going to the ICJ. And that was orchestrated by the People’s United Party, and the government side concurred.

The difficulty is, Mr. Speaker, that, except for the lawyers and those who were Foreign Ministers in the People’s United Party, most of them seem not to know the details, despite the fact that this dispute has been in existence for over 100 years. And all of them who are critical and oppose it, none has a solution, none. It’s easy to criticize. It’s easy to oppose, but it needs thinking capacity to be able to come up with a viable solution, and not one of them has come up with a viable solution. They just make noise, empty vessels. Emotional knee-jerk position but nobody is able to come up with a solution. But the solution was there. I emphasize the point, Mr. Speaker, that the British said from 1939 to go to

the ICJ, and they did not back down. And that is significant because in 1939 they were perhaps the most powerful country in the world, and they were not saying, "Let us fight." They were saying, "Let's go to the ICJ. You think you owned it let's go to the ICJ." The most powerful country in the world was prepared to go to the ICJ with a small country like Guatemala. They were not afraid to go to the ICJ. And, as late as 1948, the Belize Legislative Council agreed that we go to the ICJ. So this matter really should not be one for debate.

Philip Goldson was a very sensible man. He was the first man in 1967 who went to the United Nations to protect Belize. He went to the United Nations to protect Belize and told the Fourth Committee there that the then Belize Government under George Price was looking to sell out Belize, and he wanted the matter to be put to a plebiscite, to a referendum. He asked that the matter be put to a referendum. The People's United Party never put this matter to a referendum. They never ever put it to a referendum as to whether the people want to go to the ICJ or not, never, never, never. Never once! They went to the Webster Proposal which we rejected roundly in 1966 and 1968. They went to the Heads of Agreement which we rejected roundly because those would have made us subordinate to Guatemala and Assad Shoman in his book states that very clearly. Those were bad initiatives, all under the leadership of the People's United Party.

You hear what Insulza says, he is not a Belizean, and he was the Secretary General of the OAS. He says, "This was the first time the path had been paved for an equitable, honourable, and permanent settlement of the dispute." And he says it was, "the most important step in the history of the dispute" when we signed "the Special Agreement to submit Guatemala's Territorial Island and Maritime Claim to the International Court of Justice." Every lawyer that we have talked to, even the lawyers that the Guatemalans retained tell them that they can't win Belize. Every lawyer, they had lawyers from Harvard, they had lawyers from the United States, they had lawyers from the United Kingdom, and every single lawyer tell them there is no chance. But there is one particular lawyer named Bianchi, an American lawyer, way early in the 1950s, he said you know that "this dispute could possibly be solved. There may well come a day when the population," and I'm paraphrasing it, "when the population in Belize will be so changed that nobody would want to have any problem with the Guatemalans." There may well come a day when the population will be so changed that the people will be contented with the Guatemalans. And if you notice, Mr. Speaker, the migration that is taking place all over the world and including Belize, that is not a far-fetched thought when he said it, and he said it way in the 1950s. I noticed when I'm riding up to the airport, I see more coconut vendors on the side of the road than I see in El Salvador. I also see them here coming up this Western Highway. The influx of people, by the time we decide to go to a referendum, we will not be able to predict the outcome. So time is not on our side. We have an obligation to educate our people. Those of us who have objection and who opposed have an obligation to come up with better solutions. But the status quo cannot remain because every day we delay every day we get in more peril.

There is some suggestion in the media and other quarters that, in fact, we were hiding reports, that incidents had been occurring and that they had to get some secret document to show that over the last 16 years we had 10 incidents. We were not hiding any reports. We were not hiding the fact that incidents are occurring. I have complained at the United Nations about the incidents. And, as I said to you, in 2000, under the watch of the Member from Fort George, the



Guatemalans took 7 of our security personnel. We had to smuggle them out of Guatemala to get them safely back here. That is within the sixtieth time. So it's no secret. We have nothing to hide, but what we are not going to do is to cry wolf. We are not going to make a mountain out of a molehill. We are not going to inflate an incident and make it more serious than, in fact, it really is because the international community is going to condemn us first. They are going to say that we are crying wolf. We are not experiencing anything near to what is happening in Palestine and Israel, nothing, nothing near to it or nothing even close to it. We are not experiencing anything that happens in the case of Russia and Ukraine, nothing like that. We have not lost a soldier. We have not lost a Belizean in any military combat, and that is the way we need to keep it. (Applause) We cannot afford to lose a single person, and that is our resolve.

Guatemalans sees some of our actions as provocative. Provocation is a very funny thing as you will appreciate, Mr. Speaker. You're an attorney and an excellent one at that. A classic case of provocation and people don't understand it. While it is quite lawful for you to walk all over Belize, left right and center, it is not lawful for you to follow somebody you know from morning to night. It's a criminal offense. They called it stalking. They will charge you and give you a fine or perhaps put you in prison. It's a criminal offense. And you cannot stand up outside a person's house all day and look in there. They will become uncomfortable and frighten, and the police will look you up for loitering. What gives people provocation? Different people are provoked by different things, and when people get provoked they do crazy things. So we in Belize must do all in our power to avoid provocation. And particularly people in the media, I find it so incomprehensible, Mr. Speaker, that we have so many knowledgeable people about the Guatemalan issue, and whenever the issue comes up especially involving the Sarstoon, the most prominent media finds the least informed person to interview ad nauseam. The people who they interview can't even talk, they can't ever articulate their views properly. But the media invariably seeks them out. What are you trying to do to your population? In my view, it's an injustice. You are doing a disservice to your population with an incident that is so important.

Mr. Speaker, it will be seen that during the national elections I never once raised this issue, notwithstanding the fact that night and day I was accused of giving away to Guatemala parts of Belize and the Sarstoon, to the point where when I went on the street people would look at and curse me. Nothing was further from the truth, but I never responded and I never responded because this issue is too important to it and trivialize it and to make it a political football. It's too important. (Applause) And I still won because the Belize people are innately sensible. The people who supported me are the descendants of the people who in 1798 said, "We will fight and did not woof." And the people who supported me are the people who in 1968 said, "We don't want the Webster proposal," which was being put to us by the PUP. "We don't want it." And it's the same people who said, "We don't want the Heads of Agreement" in 1981. Three months after we had been foisted that, the Heads of Agreement was being foisted upon us and three months later on we got our independence with no strings attached. No thanks to the People's United Party. If it was left to them, Mr. Speaker, (Applause) we would have been an appendage of Guatemala today. And that was the effect of those Agreements.

So the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is spending its time diligently and assiduously trying to ensure that we solve this matter in the most peaceful and the least expensive way with no casualty to our people. And we are being advised by the OAS and every member of the OAS, and that's another nonsense that you hear talk. I've seen one newspaper, last year they publicized the fact that one individual ask us to get rid of the OAS it's useless. And that newspaper put with pride on the front page that this individual said, "Gid of the OAS." But they don't know what the OAS is. The OAS is the second most powerful multilateral organization in the region. It's our hemispheric region, and it is made up of Canada, the United States, all the countries on the continent, Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Uruguay, all the countries in SICA, and all the countries in CARICOM. That is the OAS, and here is this individual saying, "You must get rid of the OAS," and a prominent newspaper put that on the front line front page. What are you doing to your population when you propagate that kind of ignorance? Absolutely insane, Mr. Speaker, I can't comprehend it. At a time when our people are so confused and a time when you do have intelligent people knowledgeable people inform people who could properly educate the public, we seek to find the least informed, the least educated, the least knowledgeable and give them prominence. As a matter of fact, we go further, we call them national heroes. They are, in my view, born-again patriots, people who were nowhere around when the country was really in trouble. The country is not in any trouble now. The country is in good hands. It is being looked after very, very competently and very well. It doesn't need meddlers. It does not need people who don't know, and worse it does not need people who don't know that they don't know and that there are too many of those in the society. There is a famous saying you know, Mr. Speaker, a little bit of learning is a dangerous thing. That is a very dangerous thing and very prominent.

So given the nature of the claim, given the nature of the terrain, we know and we expect that there is going to be conflicts and disputes from time to time, but we have competent and capable people to deal with these issues. And we take these incidents in our stride and we solve them. As soon as they occur, we solve them, and, as I said to you, Mr. Speaker, on every occasion, a member of the People's United Party is part of our delegation. And my new resolve, I was saying in your absence, Mr. Leader of the Opposition. And the Member for Orange Walk Central, that I commend for appointing your advisory team, I was commending you on your elevation to the status of Leader of the Opposition; and I was saying that since this new term, I have resolved, along with your team really, to make sure that I will not give any more interviews to any newspaper or to any television station, unless I do it jointly with a member of the Opposition Party because this is a national issue. (Applause) And we must speak with one voice. The practice of the media has been to come, take your view and twist it in a way that you don't recognize, it seeming to have one thought in mind, confuse the public and then try to make you look bad. They have not had much success, but I can tell you they don't give up. Well, Mr. Speaker, that era is ended. I will no longer give any interview, on my own. Whenever I am asked to give an interview I will get in touch with the Leader of the Opposition and said, "Whom will you send?" And myself and that person will speak to the nation because this is a matter that we have to keep one head on.

Mr. Speaker, our sovereignty, our territorial integrity will never ever be put beyond doubt, unless we settle this dispute. Other very practical reasons why we

need to settle the dispute is that we will not be able to give anybody any license to do offshore drilling you know unless, we settle the dispute We have to settle our maritime boundaries. Even now with the Mexicans we had to enter not too long ago, we entered into an accord with them in relation to how we will deal with the drilling in our territory because these wells go under the ground. They don't stay in one territory. So you have to have an accord with them even when you want to exploit it. We'll have to do the same thing with the Guatemalans. But, unless and until we resolve our borders, we will not be able to take full advantage of the resources that our country has. And, when we have incidents of an international nature, it is very difficult for us to deal with because when we go to our friends to ask for support they will say, "Yes, but you don't have clearly defined, agreed borders," and that's a reality. So we have to deal with it. It's imperative. It's not a luxury that we can just continue to deal. We're getting more interest now. The seas are becoming much more important for our survival, the waters and so we have to resolve it. Even the fresh water you know, Mr. Speaker, even the fresh water that the people in Cayo use come from through Guatemalan territory. Even the river, so we share a lot in common, not only the fact that we have the same indigenous people and the same Mestizo people and the same Creole people but even the waters. So it is important that we resolve the dispute. It is also important because the Guatemalans are not going to go anywhere. They are at our backs. They are the ones who have to watch our backs. Do you want to have enemies watching your backs? If we have enemies watching our backs, we can't sleep. We will never be secured. Only friends can allow you a goodnight sleep, if they are at your back. They have to stop the criminals from coming across. They have to stop their own people from coming across. They have to work with us and we with them. So it's not a game. It's a dead serious thing, and we have to learn to deal with it.

We recently had the visit of the Taiwanese President and three Caribbean Presidents, and I want to thank the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the splendid job they did in hosting those exalted visitors. We also hosted the Prime Ministers of the CARICOM sub-region. And, again, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' protocol team did an excellent job, and I want to thank them. But, Mr. Speaker, the President of Taiwan was saying to us that how when he got into office 8 years ago, there was no flights between Mainland China and Taiwan because, as you know, Mainland China claim Taiwan. By the time he was here last week he said that there were 120 flights a day between China and Taiwan. Eight years ago there was none. Now there are 120. Taiwan is the biggest investor in China. China sends the most tourists to Taiwan. They have their disputes, and they are dealing with it, but they have a different life to live as well. And they don't allow the dispute to interrupt their lives.

We hear Guatemalans working on a security facility for us out in the cayes, and we panic. "Stop them! Stop them! They can't do it!" Well, you show me a part of Belize where we don't have Guatemalans working. Homes, offices, government, or farms, or hotels, the biggest investor, Santander, one of the most biggest and recent investor we can't lend them any money because they have Guatemalan connection. What madness! Do you know how many jobs they are going to provide? Do you know how much foreign exchange that is that we badly need? But they are not the only ones investing in Belize. They are the only ones we know about. If we only knew the amount of enterprises in Belize with Guatemalan investment, we would not take that position. And those are areas where our media could be very helpful in doing the research and disseminating

the information. And I am sure in that regard the Honourable Minister, or Member from Cayo South, I used the word Minister I might be prophetic. I am sure the Honourable Minister from Cayo South would be very happy to help the media to educate the populace on how important it is for us to get foreign direct investment irrespective of where it comes from. Getting investment is not selling out your country. If that were the case, Taiwan would have been gone. China and Taiwan have a roaring business. Israel and Palestine carry on roaring business. Russia and Ukraine and the United States and China carry on roaring business. They have their disputes but mature people behave in a mature way and a sensible way and resolve these issues.

The role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Speaker, is to bring this to the knowledge and attention of the Belizean people. Belize cannot afford to have a single enemy we are too small and we are too poor. We can't afford to have enemies that's a luxury which we can't have. And we can't hold malice against any nation or country, that's a luxury we can't have. Mr. Speaker, I am amazed at the amount of Belizean right here now who got educated in Guatemala. Veterans, engineers, architects, they are right here. They don't call themselves traitors. There are some of those who when they go over there to get their scholarship they said, "Yes, well, I am a Belizean but since Guatemala claims Belize give me the scholarship." And the Guatemalan Government gives them the scholarship. You have to be able to separate these things and solve your problems properly, but you have to develop. We need them, the water comes through here. Climate change is affecting all of us. We have to work together. Crime is affecting all of us. We have to work together. The role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is to make friends for Belize and to convert enemies into friends. When we do that, we don't sell out our country. We are principle.

Can you imagine I m selling out my country? Where will I go? I have no green card, never wanted one, will never want one, and I will die right here. And before most of these people who you hear are born-again patriots talking, before most of them, I was in the trenches dealing with the Heads of Agreement, I was in trenches dealing with the Webster Proposal. As I said, I got arrested and convicted in 1968, when we were rioting against the Webster Proposal. So I've been there and I know the dangers that are inherent and I know the importance of having a good positive relationship with all our neighbours the Mexicans as well as the Guatemalans. All the countries in the OAS belong to the United Nations and many of them are in the Security Council. We have to deal with the OAS first, and, if things get too bad, then we go to the United Nations. But the United Nations has always been our friend. The International Court of Justice is the arm of the United Nations that is dedicated to solving border disputes and international disputes, are not new. Border disputes are not new. Almost every country in this region had border disputes. The International Court of Justice has presided over very many disputes. Yes, some of them have implemented the decision and some of them have not. But all modern mature countries now look to the ICJ to solve the disputes.

Belize and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the monies that we get from the allocation, Mr. Speaker, we serviced the Belizean Diaspora. We have a Diaspora desk, and we do all in our power to make life easy for them. We give them special concessions when they are coming back home. I was exceedingly pleased to listen to the resume of Dr. Petters which was read on Sunday at the Convention. He's an absolute genius, brilliant son of the soil, mathematics and

physics, absolute genius. And he is nationalistic to the bone. He hails from the culture capital of Dangriga, a district which I like to associate myself with and regard as my own.

Mr. Speaker, I will try to wind up so as to give other Members a chance. I remember, Mr. Speaker, that in the last meeting that I attended in this House I was justly praising the Prime Minister on the wonderful work he was doing and the Member from Fort George said that it sounds as if I was singing for my supper. Well, we went to the polls and the people returned us resoundingly. It was a clear vindication (Applause) of my position. And I was not singing for my supper because, Mr. Speaker, I have always been able to earn that, that and more. I want to say that this budget is an excellent budget. The glass is not half empty. The glass is half full. It is only those with impaired eyes and mental problems would look at this budget and say that it is a bad budget. Something has got to be wrong. No retrenchment, increase salary, no increased taxes, what else can one expect? It is therefore with great pride, Mr. Speaker, that I support this budget. I support this budget wholeheartedly and I would want to make a prediction, Mr. Speaker, before I sit, I like to think of myself as being prescient. I think that this budget is laying the groundwork for what I like to terms as a four-peat for sure. (Applause) Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. J. ESPAT (Cayo South):** Good morning, Mr. Speaker. Good morning, Members on the other side. Mr. Speaker, with your permission, I would like to refer to my notes as I make my budget debate presentation. Mr. Speaker, it is futile to try and analyze the numbers from the budget when we all know that it will eventually change anyway. This is due to the fact that the party in government has consistently made a mockery of our system of governance in this Honourable House. Every year, Mr. Speaker, we come to this Honourable House to listen to the budget proposed by the Prime Minister, and every year, Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister ignores it once it is passed. He eventually spends any amount of the people's money in any way that he pleases. I can appreciate though, Mr. Speaker, all the hard work that the public servants put in, in preparation of the technical work because it is from them that I find out the frustration that they go through when they put in all this effort and all this knowledge and it really means nothing.

You see, Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's continued use of Supplementary Appropriation Bills and special warrants undermines the essence and purpose of a national budget. This is a continued abuse of the financial regulations of this country. He, in reality, Mr. Speaker, uses this method of bypassing regulations to enable him to do his political spending. Clear examples of this are his Christmas Cheer Program, his Mother's Day Program, and his Back-to-School Program, and, of course, Mr. Speaker, his abusive use of the Petrocaribe Funds. And there are other examples. Mr. Speaker, the provision of the Finance and Audit (Reform) Act provides for the use of special warrants to authorize the issue of money before passing an Appropriation Act to meet urgent and unforeseen needs for expenditure only. And in any event it requires that such special warrants be confirmed by enactment of a Supplementary Appropriation Act within three months of the date of the special warrant and limits the value of the special warrants, not so confirmed, to 10%, Mr. Speaker, 10% of the approved head of expenditure being exceeded, or \$500,000.00 as a ceiling. Mr. Speaker, \$500,000.00 is the extent to where they can go and use the Supplementary Appropriation. Mr. Speaker, this government has not satisfied any of these

requirements. And I will give you examples why.

In March 2015, Mr. Speaker, government got approval in this House to spend \$1,154,241,544.00. That's a lot of money, Yellowman. It is almost \$1,200,000,000.00, and this is General Revenue Appropriation (2015/2016). In July 2015, Mr. Speaker, government went back to the House to get an approval for an additional spending of \$52,557,874.00 for fiscal year 2015/2016, Less than 6 months after the March budget, Mr. Speaker. And that is General Revenue Supplementary Appropriation (No.1) for last year. On September 2, Mr. Speaker, government went back to the House to get approval for an additional spending of \$80 million. And that is General Revenue Supplementary Appropriation (No. 2) for last year, Mr. Speaker. On September 14, Mr. Speaker, government went back to the House to get approval to spend an additional \$162,700,000.00, General Revenue Supplementary Appropriation (No.3), Mr. Speaker. And on December 4 of last year, government went back to the House to get approval for an additional spending of \$44,743,185.00. This is General Revenue Supplementary Appropriation (No. 4), Mr. Speaker. We all know what the last one was all about. That was the one where \$44 million was spent in one month, and it coincidentally came at a time when we had general election. Do you remember that, Member from Toledo West? The Member says that it came deliberately, not coincidentally. Mr. Speaker, this gives us a grand total of \$340 million, Mr. Speaker. That is a whopping 30% increase of the approved budget for last year. Thirty percent more than was budgeted was gotten through Supplementary Appropriations. Any suggestion by the Prime Minister who is the Minister of Finance, that the expenditure were urgent and unforeseen then simply shows a total disregard of the express provisions of section 117 of the Constitution, Mr. Speaker, also section 5(1) of the Finance and Audit (Reform) Act, and as such a total disregard for the rule of law.

In other words, Mr. Speaker, the way the Prime Minister makes use of the Supplementary Appropriation Act to spend large amounts of the people's money is an unlawful act. I was reminded yesterday by the Former Right Honourable Prime Minister, Said Musa, that it is also a criminal act now, as we all know the same Prime Minister on the other side changed the law to make it a criminal act. It is a very sad situation, Mr. Speaker, but it seems that once again we will be forced to lean on the judiciary to seek a judgment as to the unlawful practices that the Prime Minister continues to adhere to. Meaning, we will take him to court again. It seems that this is the only avenue left to us, Mr. Speaker. The laws of Belize were designed for all of us to follow. It is not written anywhere, and I am not an attorney, and I have been reading all over, but it is not written anywhere in our laws that the Prime Minister has the right to circumvent the laws. As a now Right Honourable himself, he more than anyone should lead by example. I might be wrong, Mr. Speaker, but based on his past actions I expect that he will probably again introduce a new law to cover this unlawful act too. Time will tell, Mr. Speaker, time will tell!

Mr. Speaker, let us be honest with ourselves and frank with the people of Belize. The country is broke and in debt. In Creole they say, "*We bruk.*" "*Well, Boots noh bruk, but the country bruk.*" This is mainly due to the fact that the Right Honourable Prime Minister spends more money than he can possibly collect in taxation or that he can legitimately raise elsewhere. The problem is confounded though by the fact that in order to fulfill this need of wanting to spend more and more, Mr. Speaker, they keep borrowing more and borrowing more and

borrowing more. But you see, Mr. Speaker, the record shows that the Prime Minister borrows and spends only on projects that are financially and politically beneficial to Members of the House on that side, but it is not only that, it has to also be beneficial to their families and friends too.

Mr. Speaker, I still do not see any budget allocation for the duly elected village councils of the rural communities. I have gone on record in this House explaining why it is important for our chairmen and their councils to receive a budget that is not dependent on the fees derived from liquor licenses. It seems that our positive recommendations are never listened to or adhered to. They don't pay us any attention, Mr. Speaker. That is the truth. Mr. Speaker, I was listening to the Member from Toledo East yesterday, and he went meticulously through all the columns and rows in the budget and he carefully and meticulously explained that the rural communities absolutely received nothing. Mr. Speaker, a clear example of this is the beautiful village of the Valley of Peace. The village has a population of approximately 3,000 residents. The council is supposed to receive revenues from the liquor license of approximately \$1,500 per year. This leaves them with a proposed budget of \$125.00 per month. In addition to this, there is a little stipend that the chairman should receive of \$50.00. So let's say it is \$175.00 per month to run a village of 3,000 people. Well, you know me, Mr. Speaker, I did my little calculations, right, and I came up with this at the villagers of Valley of Peace and I have to laugh, to run the village of Valley of Peace, it takes \$.05 per villager per month. Now, Honourable Member from Lake Independence, what can you do with \$.05 per villager per month? I mean it gets ridiculous, Mr. Speaker. (In my days, they used to sell an ideal for \$.10, and that was like about 30 years ago. Not even a hard-time biscuit you can buy. How much for a hard-time biscuit now, John? Is it 3 for shilling? It is 3 for shilling, Mr. Speaker, for a hard-time biscuit I don't know if you still eat that because I know you all are on a different level right now, right. The ginger one is nice. Well, just imagine the Valley of Peace Village can't even eat a ginger hard-time biscuit, \$.05 per month.)

Mr. Speaker, when we speak of inequality in the rural communities, we are not exaggerating. We base our assessments on the facts. To add insult to injury, Mr. Speaker, the duly elected village council of the Valley of Peace has not been able to collect its stipend for the last 2 years. Now imagine that it is not only \$.05 per month per villager that they are been given, but they punished them even further by not giving it to them for 2 years. (If I was in charge, I would deal with them with the interest for real. How much is it right now? It is 17% interest. We have to put it at that rate.) Mr. Speaker, I will quote a paragraph of a letter sent to me by the village council members and some of the members are up there. And it says:

“For the past 2 years the duly elected village council of the Valley of Peace has not been able to get its rightful subvention. We have been caught up in a web of back and forth between various staff members of local government. We have had to provide them with financial reports various times because they say that they have lost the reports, or that they have had various change in staff. We lean on you for assistance, Honourable Espot, as it seems to us that the government does not care about us way back here in the jungle.” I'll repeat that part, Mr. Speaker. “We lean on you for assistance, Honourable Espot, as it seems to us that the government does not care about us back here in the jungle.” (Well, the man who owns about 50 houses cannot understand about hard times anymore.

So I think he has to shut up! Are all those houses coming from the pool table, my brother?) Member from Corozal North, maybe through your assistance we may be able to solve this problem. I still have hope, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I do not see anything here in this proposed budget to assist with the dire need for health clinics in the villages of Cayo South. And I am mentioning Cayo South because I represent them, but I also understand the same applies to all the Members here on this side that are Representatives of rural communities, especially the two gentlemen from Toledo. Some of the lucky villages do have some rudimentary structure. By the way they were all put in under the Right Honourable Said Musa's time as Prime Minister. (Applause) But they have no furniture. They have no medication. They have no nurses and they absolutely have no doctor. The majority of these villages though have absolutely nothing in place to care for their health needs. Mr. Speaker, from my personal survey and that of our Cayo South medical team, we have been able to go into the villages and make the necessary assessments. Our internal statistics show that our two villages on the Hummingbird Highway, namely Armenia and St. Margaret's, have a serious problem with gastrointestinal diseases, which result in serious vomiting, diarrhea and dehydration. It is especially in children, Mr. Speaker. It is more prominent in children. I would say maybe about 75% of the patients that suffer with this are children. From the survey of 100 patients, Mr. Speaker, that we attend to in those villages 20 to 30 of them have these symptoms. So you are talking between 20% to 30% of the people that we deal with concerning health issues in these two villages have this type of problem, which is gastrointestinal diseases. The villagers though, Mr. Speaker, from Roaring Creek, Camolote, Young Bank, the Valley of Peace, Teakettle, Arizona, Ontario, Blackman Eddy, suffer more from another disease called vector-borne diseases. The most prominent one of that type of disease, Mr. Speaker, is dengue; I think we know what dengue is all about. (Do you know what dengue is all about Yellowman? It's a lot of fever, a lot of your bones feel like they are broken up.) Again, Mr. Speaker, of every 100 patients that we attend to about 25 of them comes up with this dengue-type symptom.

Mr. Speaker, this budget does nothing to address this serious problem. But it is not rocket science, Mr. Speaker. It is not that you need to have a PhD like my Honourable Member from Cayo North. It is simple. Why do we have these diseases in the rural communities? Well, it is because of poor drainage of our streets, if you can call them streets, poor cleaning of the drains, and if you have any drains, poor quality or no water supply in some of these villages, and lack of a proper system of collecting garbage from residential use or from community activities. And I am always quarreling because I have said that I have 13 villages that I am concerned about, and I am worry when I talked to my Honourable colleagues from Toledo West and the other one from Toledo West, and they say that they have 28 and 27, and my brother there from Belize Rural North who has about 26, I think. So I am still not as bad as them. There is the poor or no education on proper sanitary practices and minimal, if none, of spraying against mosquito. Mr. Speaker, it got to the point where we in Cayo South went out and sought donations from friends of Cayo South. We bought a machine. We equipped the machine with the necessary chemicals, and we got the information from the Ministry of Health because the public servants are also frustrated. They understand that the people need it, but they said that they have no resources. They can't take it out as they are not given the permission. And so at least they give us the information that this is the chemical, this is what we need to buy, and this will



work, and what's not. So we bought the equipment, and we bought the chemicals, and the villagers have put in the labour. So we are doing our own little community thing to be able to try and minimize the problem. What is wrong, Mr. Prime Minister? And I wish he would be here to listen. What is wrong? We demand to know why is it that you continue to treat us in the rural communities as underclass citizens. (Applause) It is inhumane, Mr. Speaker. In the Indian system, in the caste system, we are what you called the undesirables, and that is something that hurts me from the bottom of my heart, Mr. Speaker. Why is it that they treat the villagers of the rural community as if we are less and if we mean nothing?

Member from Belmopan, the money that you all spent on one roundabout like the one we all drove by when we came in to Belmopan, as we entered Forest Drive, could have been used efficiently to solve all of these problems in Cayo South, one roundabout. And I am not saying that it's a bad roundabout. I mean I think it cuts off like two seconds of the time it took me before. It is efficient, two seconds we are saving of the driving. (The Party Leader says it's also a cause for traffic jam. I didn't even think about that, Party Leader.) But one roundabout and the man said we all like to talk that we all can't eat concrete and we all can't eat roundabout, but, boss, with that roundabout I could have solved my health problems in Cayo South. And what are we putting priorities on? Are we putting priority on the goddamn concrete streets? Or are we putting priority on the lives of our people? (Applause) Sorry, Mr. Speaker, but this whole situation is just screwed up. I still have hopes in the Member from Belmopan though, Mr. Speaker, because he too was once, only once, the representative for the villagers of Cayo South. After, I think about the ten times he tried he made it once. So he too understands. Well, I don't know if he still remembers but he should understand the plight that these villagers go through every single day. And now that he is vying for party leader, no, that is only a little joke. They want the top. I have his back too, Mr. Speaker, by the way. I got his back because we from the west you know we have to protect our own. So if I could vote, maybe if you allow me to vote, Yellowman, I will vote for the man. You could put me as one of your delegates from Mesopotamia.

While our people from our rural communities continue to suffer, Mr. Speaker, these politicians in government and their contract officers drive by in their flashy \$250,000.00 SUV. They get exorbitant salaries with no work to show for it. And I don't know if you know about this, Mr. Speaker, I know you can afford it, but they fly first class too. And if I recall it right sometimes first class costs you between 2 to 3 times or maybe more the value of a normal flight. (But you didn't get a success fee? Okay, sorry. We have to keep our sanity sometime, Mr. Speaker.) For example, this past Saturday, American Airline is coming in from Miami, I don't want to mention his name, but a certain Ambassador was seen in first class, and the Member from Cayo West would know because he was close by, first class, Mr. Speaker. I still can't understand it, the amount of money they waste. I think the Honourable Member from Lake Independence was dealing with the fuel part, but it is not only the fuel part, Honourable Member from Lake Independence, it is the \$250,000.00 that they pay for the vehicle, and they change it every 3 to 4 months. It's ridiculous. That is why I was making a joke yesterday about the million dollars that they allocated for vehicles. It was only 4 that they bought you know. It's not like they bought a lot. It is ridiculous and inhumane to think that a country that is broke and in debt can have these contract officers abuse our public funds with the consent of their Ministers while the village of

Armenia has still not gotten its overdue water system, Mr. Speaker. I can never forget that in response to my request for a measly \$75,000.00 for the water system in Armenia 3 years ago, the Prime Minister wrote me a letter saying, I think it was like 10 words in the letter, "I have no money for you." But it was not for me. It was for the 2,000 and odd villagers in Armenia. You don't believe me, Yellowman. I will give you the letter so that you can see it. Seventy-five thousand dollars, in 3 years and the village of Armenia still don't have water, Mr. Speaker. Boy, you know how much water systems I could have gotten for one vehicle, that is 7 times 4, which is 28, nearly 4 water systems for four villages, and that is one vehicle.

But imagine, Members from the other side, and I am talking to you, Boots, and all of you on the other side, imagine, imagine one day living in your mansion without water! (Well, in your case, your 7 yellow mansions.) Imagine one day living in your mansion without water! Imagine your house covered up with garbage to the front everyday! Imagine that your house has clogged-up drains all around it! For you all Ministers over there, imagine not being able to get medical attention when one needs it the most! But the Prime Minister don't have that problem you see, Mr. Speaker. The Prime Minister don't have that problem. Yes, but I don't have the access to resources to be able to help people. He is the Prime Minister of this country, and not because he can go and spend and take care of himself, and that's fine. I have no problem with it. In fact, I am proud that a Belizean like him can do it. But that Prime Minister has an obligation to make sure that our people in the rural communities have access to health. (Applause) And he has been there for over 8 years and people are dying every day for 8 years.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Officer, the next person that makes noise over this side just remove him. Don't even wait for me, just remove them. Proceed, Member.

**HON. J. ESPAT (Cayo South):** My people, they tell me, "Boss, this is a sick joke because we are still trying to remember the possibilities." I mean we go to sleep with candle light in our villages, and we are still trying to remember and imagine the possibilities. Mr. Speaker, it is immoral to expect that the taxpayers of this country, who in reality are the poor people of this country, have to pay for the sins of these reckless and heartless politicians on the other side. Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister comes to this House in his usual flamboyant and arrogant way, stands up, well; he used to stand up properly. He tries to stand up in front of everybody and proudly states that he has always done the legal, the accountable and the transparent reporting of the people's money by bringing his expenditures to the House. Have you ever heard former Prime Minister Musa, how many times he has said that? He is accountable, he is transparent, and he does it in a legal way. Well, Mr. Speaker, I need to remind the Right Honourable Prime Minister, Member from Queen's Square, that he has been bringing those reports to the House because his hands were caught in the cookie jar. His hands were caught in the cookie jar, and I have to thank the Honourable Member for Mesopotamia for coining that term in this House. So I am just using what he has used before. He was doing an unlawful act by freely spending the people's money and not reporting it to the House, Mr. Speaker. It was only after we took him to court, Mr. Speaker, that Prime Minister backtracked and passed various Motions and finally a law to try and cover his devious unlawful act. What do they say, Mr. Speaker? "*Haad ayz pickni haftu go da maakit too-taim.*" Well, that's what caught him, Mr. Speaker. What a shame, I say. What a shame!

Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is very good in cloaking himself and his Ministers in the leadership virtues of accountability, transparency and integrity. We in this House are compelled by our very oath of office to hold these virtues highly. Without them, you see, Mr. Speaker, our very democracy and our qualitative civilized way of life can be threatened as it is commonly felt is already happening. The Prime Minister's utterance of zero tolerance for corruption, his swift and effective action for the slightest whiff of corruption, the sharpening of his, and I had the word sword, but former Prime Minister reminded me that we are in Belize, his sharpening of the machete on two sides are all sound and fury signifying *absolutamente nada*. This reckless disregard for honest reporting and callous inaction to transgressions of proclaimed virtues certainly does not go down well for us.

Mr. Speaker, let me now turn to the last Auditor General's Report as proof of how accountability is being undermined by this very government under the leadership of the Right Honourable Dean Barrow, Prime Minister, who has taken such virtues to a rhetorical high. Mr. Speaker, the result of the almost \$1-billion budget has not and cannot be evaluated because the budget is not performance based. But because it is an input-oriented budget the Auditor General's audit is limited to probity and compliance. The audit is only to determine that the Ministries spent the money in accordance with the line item budget and follow the supposed rules and procedures laid down in the internal controls to protect the people's money. Well, imagine with all of this supposed accountability that they don't do, they still don't want to trust it. So they go out of the system now, Mr. Speaker, and they create what they called it now, Party Leader, BIL, Belize Infrastructure Limited. So even though the accountability system is bypassed, but just to take away any doubt, they go and create BIL which by the way does not fall under the Auditor General's reach, not that she can reach much because they don't give her the opportunity too. Mr. Speaker, in the last attempted audit the Auditor General is saying, as was said for many previous years, she could not satisfy herself as to the money collected and spent and as to the whereabouts of stocks, vehicles, heavy duty equipment and other assets that our hard-earned taxes paid for.

Mr. Speaker, in Chapter 1 of that report, 1.5, the Auditor General said, "As explained in the analysis of financial statement, 23 commercial bank accounts presented for auditing were not reconciled. Bank statements from the financial institutions were not reconciled with accounts held with the Accountant General. Payroll clearing accounts which are temporary accounts used to transfer deposits to financial institutions hold a significant amount of transactions which require immediate reconciliation. Adjusted budget column include unapproved supplementary appropriations made without the requisite approval of the National Assembly. Statement of arrears of revenue does not include arrears for most Ministries." She then concludes in Chapter 1.7, Mr. Speaker, and she says, "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, 2005." You all can say I am a politician and I lie, but you can't say the Auditor General is lying because that is of the highest post in the country. It is the Auditor General saying it, and I will repeat, "In my opinion the financial statements do not give a true and fair view of government's financial position in accordance with the Finance and Audit (Reform) Act, 2005."

Mr. Speaker, you are an attorney, you are a corporate attorney, you

understand that in the business world a statement like this by your accountant or your auditor means that your banks will come for you. It means that something is seriously wrong with your accounting. It means that you are hiding something. It means that we were right, and we are right, Mr. Speaker. It means that the country is in serious problems because the people on the other side, and not all of them because some of them have no say in this. It is one man I blame for all of this and that is the man that has us where we are because of this. And so I don't place the blame, especially on the younger ones that are just coming in, but this is a serious allegation made by the Auditor General, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Public Accounts Committee, which is an integral part of this House charged with the responsibility of oversight, in other words, the PAC is to ensure that Ministers, and the new ones here and I have Members who are also Members of the PAC, ensure that Ministers properly account for monies under their stewardship. But we have not been able to do so, Mr. Speaker, because there is no up-to-date audit. The last one I mentioned is maybe 4 years ago. As we can appreciate, Mr. Speaker, 4 years is a long time. You need to be able to analyze what happened the year before so that you can make the necessary corrections, so that you can see how you will better those errors, and so that you can, in your new budget, put in the things to make sure that the errors that were committed in the past are not committed again. Also, if we had the Auditor General's Report, then the PAC, well, I know why they don't do it because they don't want the PAC function. But, in reality, Mr. Speaker, the PAC should be there to make sure that the Ministers are spending the people's money in the proper way. And you know we have a problem with that because, how will you have the same man that you are trying to investigate be on the same committee that is trying to investigate this man? Do you understand how that works, Yellowman? It is ridiculous, but that is the system that we have. Many Members on the other side that are on the PAC represent Ministries that have the problem. And I have been repeating this and repeating this. How will they ever allow that system to work when they have to check themselves? Do you understand the problem that we have? People need to understand this, Mr. Speaker, and we Belizeans take these things lightly. These things don't concern us, but when we cannot get our health system and when we cannot send our children to school and when we cannot go to the hospital then we you realize why. It is because the money is not being spent where it needs to be spent. It is because the money mysteriously disappears into thin air, and there is no system in place to make sure that the people that commit those illegal acts are penalized. And that is where, I believe, we need to go.

But here we go again, Mr. Speaker, approving another \$1 billion. Former Prime Minister, I know they used this a lot but billion with a "B" \$1 billion to spend, Mr. Speaker, with absolutely no accountability. We have heard though, and we not only heard it, it's a proven fact, that millions and millions have been spent on litigation, all to the benefit of attorneys from the Prime Minister's family and friends. And I am not exaggerating, Mr. Speaker. It's a fact. It's out there, and you could check it. Anybody could check it. If he believes that I am saying something that is erroneous, then prove it that it's not so. Mr. Speaker, we have also heard in the Ministries of the UDP activists that are being paid. They put them under contract officers, and some of the public servants told me, "Boss, they called them Ghost worker". I said, "But why do you all called them Ghost worker?" They said, "Well, because they only appear when it is payday. You don't see them during the week nor during the month, but when it's payday they are the first ones in the line." And that's another problem that we have, Mr. Speaker.

We have also heard of the corruption in the Lands Department. I won't even go into details with that. That has been discussed too many times. It gets boring at times, but it's there. We've also heard the corruption in the Immigration Department. I'm hoping that the new junior Minister with the powers to sign will do the right, thing and not end up like her predecessor because you now have the power to do what is right ma'am. We in this House gave you that power. So we are only hoping that you used it for good.

It seems that the Prime Minister is oblivious to all that is happening to world leaders that surround him, Mr. Speaker, I don't think the man is watching the television or is checking the internet. You see, Mr. Speaker, the law is finally catching up with all the political leaders of countries that enriched themselves and their families at the expense of their own people. Our Central and South American brothers have suffered enough, Mr. Speaker, and they have hit the streets protesting against political corruption. Brazil is a clear example. I don't know how they do it, but the last protest was nearly 4 million people who hit the streets in the Rio de Janeiro. Guatemala, Mr. Speaker, General Otto Molina is in jail. His Vice-President is in jail. Some of his Ministers are in jail. They went to the point where even the judge who was trying to protect them is in jail. It is just a matter of time, Mr. Speaker, that the people of Belize will wake up and open their eyes to know that the power really lies in their hands. (Applause) And that they should demand, and this is where I will get into a little warm territory, and they should demand that all our elected officials, irrespective of which party forms government, are held accountable for their actions and that they can also be penalized for illegal acts just the way all Belizeans are held accountable to the laws of Belize. (Applause) So, gentlemen on this side of the House, we are aspiring to be on that side of the House, but we have to be careful when we reach there that we do what we preach or not we will also be held accountable by the people of Belize. This time is now.

Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is proud of the fact that his government supposedly is driving this economy, utilizing a public sector engine that is fueled mostly by borrowed money. This is what one derives, Mr. Speaker, when one looks at the broad money supply, and that is on page 6 of that little booklet that was given to us, under review of the economy 215 document. It shows that the broad money supply rose by 7.6%; 3.1% of that, Mr. Speaker, is attributed to the private sector. Mr. Speaker, this is only an economy's jargon of saying that our economy is driven 60% by government-spending-based-borrowing compared to 40% from the private sector. This, Mr. Speaker, is unsustainable, and on top of that the primary source of money that government relied on, I think, we know what it is now right, the infamous Petrocaribe money is gone or, as the Prime Minister says, almost gone, a little bit is left, and the oil industry which is, as we all know, also drying out. So his two main sources of where he got his money from are not there anymore. Mr. Speaker, and yet the Prime Minister in his budget presentation goes on to proclaim, and I quote. "Our consistent and long record of judicious financial management, Mr. Speaker, has produced an unbroken period of steady growth and optimal economic condition." And he likes to repeat it. You know what I mean because it just gets to me. Mr. Speaker, everybody knows that is hogwash. Everybody knows that is rubbish. The paper means nothing to us. It is rhetoric.

Mr. Speaker, every hardworking Belizean understands that if you go to a

lending institutions, let's say a bank, a credit union, as most poor Belizeans they don't go to the bank and the credit union, they go to a pawnshop, right, or they go to a little corner at a loan shark who charges 25% interest per day. You have to have a plan to pay back the money. It is simple. You go to a loan shark, and you have to pay 25% per day. Boss, if you don't pay back the money, what will they do to you, Yellowman? Yellowman knows that you can't pay back that 25%. If you go to the pawnshop, what will happen if you don't pay? It doesn't really matter, but the Belizean people who go to the pawnshop and cannot pay the money, or don't have a plan to pay it back, you don't have a problem, Boots, because you play pool and build 20 houses. So you don't have a problem. The Belizeans that borrow and have no plan and spend recklessly, Mr. Speaker, always ends up losing their assets, losing their investments, losing their homes, and at times even losing their lives or their freedom as they are booked into our prison system because they did not have a plan on how to pay the money that they borrowed.

You see, Mr. Speaker, a large part of the plan has to involve how is it that one will be able to pay back this money that was borrowed. It is not rocket science again. If you borrow money, boss, you just can't take it and spend it crazy. You borrow the money you have to figure out how you will pay it back. (I don't know if you understand that concept, Boots. Do you know what I am talking about? If getting into government means becoming someone like you, then I don't want to reach government.) As such, one has to use a part of that borrowed money, Mr. Speaker, to invest in something that generates money. So, in simple terms, you borrow \$100, your interest is 10%, but you cannot spend the entire \$100 on jolly you know like how Easter is coming. You cannot do that. You can spend \$70 maybe, and you carry home maybe another \$10 if you wish. But you have to left a portion of that money to be able to pay it back. And how do you do that? You don't take it and pay it back with the same money that you borrow. You invest it in something, in your wife's panades shop, or in your bicycle repair shop, or in my case in my business that generates income. You have to invest it back into something that generates enough money so that you can pay back the loan. Yes, you probably have to invest back into the pool table.

But no, Mr. Speaker, this outrageous UDP Government has blown away not one, not two, not three, \$325 million. How much you got out of that, Yellowman. How much you got? You didn't get anything? It's a problem.) Three hundred and twenty-five million dollars was blown away, and they spent it mostly on infrastructure projects for the roundabout that we are talking about that were mostly politically influenced. This borrowed Petrocaribe money was also used for part-payment of bad nationalization decisions and later on I will explain why I consider them bad decision. This, give me a little break there, Mr. Speaker; I have coffee if you want. This borrowed Petrocaribe money was also used to jumpstart a National Bank. Well, I will give you a little joke, some of the guys that works in my office at the Cayo South, I told them, "Let us test the system, 3 of you all go," and they are married, "and get a small loan." Well, the man put his name; "I Mario Lopez, am applying for a small loan from the National Bank." The man at the bank said "Who are you?" my worker said, "Well, I am a duly elected..." the man at the bank said, "From where?" my worker said, "Valley of Peace." And the man at the bank said, "Oh, you are a PUP, boss, go away." "Politically affiliated people are the only people that have access inside. Yellowman, did you get a loan? You didn't get? Boy, you have to go get one.)

So, Mr. Speaker, this money that was used to jumpstart the National Bank, in my opinion, is only to facilitate their people, the people that Mark King spoke of, the ones that are on top of the list that Mark King was talking about, those people. And this borrowed Petrocaribe money was injected into the famous BIL, Belize Infrastructure Limited. Now we have to look, and I think many Members on this side highlighted BIL already, who are the people that benefit from the contracts? And where are the contracts located, X, Y, and Z? I don't even want to get into that, but I mentioned before that the reason that BIL was created was so that there is no accounting from the government that pertains to them. So basically they could tell you that they spend \$10 million, and they called that accountability you know, Honourable Member from Corozal South East. Do you know what the Prime Minister called accountability? It is when he comes to the House and says, "Boss, I just spent \$300 million in line item 5 and another next \$25,000.00 in the next line item. I told you already. So that is accountability." Well, as the Honourable Member from Pickstock says, he called us fools because we don't know how to read and write because we are not attorneys. But you can ask any attorney or anyone out there that by just telling someone that you spend \$300,000.00 doesn't mean that you are accounting for it.

With all that money about to dry up, Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has still not invested any portion of that money in areas that would enable this country to progress. How can I tell you this? Well, of the \$325 million, and it's in the budget booklet that the Prime Minister proposed to us, \$149.4 million was used for infrastructure which is 46% of the \$325 million. Thirty-four point two million dollars was used for social programs, and that is where you all came in, by 11%, do you remember that? It was for political spending. Also \$89.3 million was for nationalization. It is 27%. If you notice the infrastructure, the social programs, the nationalization payment, the \$35 million that was spent on the National Bank, none of those, Mr. Speaker, generates any revenue. And I put the rest together which is 5%, and \$17.1 million, on other government expenses. So you can safely say that \$320 million of the \$325 million, and the Prime Minister has all the right to correct me if I'm wrong, \$320 million of the \$325 million that we borrowed has not been invested in anything that can generate any kind of income. So how are we expected to pay back this loan?

Well, what happened right after election, Former Prime Minister Musa? What happened right after the election? They raised the fuel tax. So \$50 million will be taken out of our pocket, not their pockets, because they don't pay any tax on any fuel. Do you know who pays the taxes on the fuel? It is every single person that's in here, every single Mennonite that's out in the field producing for this country, every single farmer that we have in Cayo South producing vegetables, every single farmer that Oscar has producing rice, everybody. Honourable Member from Albert, you would know. The people from the tourism sector, they suffer. Everything suffers when you raise up the fuel. It is not like you will catch one man, two men, three men, you are catching everybody. And, Member from Lake Independence, do you know what they said? They said that they are not raising any tax you know, they are not raising any tax, yet everyone is taking a lick. There was absolutely no significant investment in the agro productive sector of this country. They are the people that give us food on the table. They are the people who gets up around 4:00 in the morning, suffer the sun burn, and have Tommy Goff biting them. They are the people who go to the market to make sure that we can get up and buy the vegetables, the little sweet pepper, the tomatoes, and the cilantro so that we can do our ceviche. In fact, they

are the same ones that give you the conch so that you can make your ceviche. They are the ones that we have to, if we are serious about driving this economy, they are ones that we need to invest money into. I think maybe it's because they are rural too you know. I have a little personal thing going on now because the farmers and the villagers come from rural communities. Most of them come from PUP constituencies. And you know I didn't remember that one you know, Oscar, but most of them come from PUP constituencies, the hardworking Belizeans do, and they have not invested a single penny into the agro-productive sector.

There is no investment or initiative to assist either in the manufacturing sector, Mr. Speaker. I dabbled in that sector for quite a long time, and so I can understand how difficult that sector is because we are a small society. We don't have many skilled people, but that is where education comes in. Former Prime Minister Musa, last night around 11:00 P.M. I was watching a little article from the United Nations, and it mentioned a country called Kazakhstan. I thought it was that funny movie that Borat acted in, but it was not that. It was a real country. It's name is Kazakhstan. And it says Kazakhstan made a decision that they would invest in education and science. And they pumped in as much as they could in educating their people. And now Kazakhstan is ranked, I think, No. 42 of the 196 countries, and they came from the Soviet Bloc era where they were probably 190 of 196. They are now at No. 42, Mr. Speaker, because they have made a conscientious effort to educate their people and apply that education in science so that they can be competitive in the world. So people say, "Oh, we Belizeans can't manufacture because we don't know. No, man, after we are not simple. I am not simple. We need to educate our people so that they can have an opportunity. Mr. Speaker, you know you studied abroad. When we Belizeans go abroad to study, we excel; we rank either first, or second, or third. The Member from the Albert can attest to that. The Member from Cayo North can attest to that. These are talented people; we have talented people in our country. I think the Member from Orange Walk East can also attest to that. So why do we not believe or see it important to educate our people?

Now the guy from Port Loyola can't handle that. Yes, I am ranting and raging. Yes, I agree. I am ranting and raging because the people of Belize are suffering, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, you got an education, and you are not suffering. I got an education and I am not suffering. Do you know why? It is because an education puts you at a certain level that you can be competitive with anybody from anywhere in the world. In the past I can recall, and maybe the former Prime Minister experienced this, in the past, even if you studied you probably didn't have access to those libraries. Do you remember those libraries, former Prime Minister? Only the elites would have access to the libraries so that you can increase the way you think. It's not like that anymore, Mr. Speaker, every single person has access to information because of the technology, because of the Internet, because of the Smart phones. It is instant access to information. We just need now to push our people in that direction and show them that by educating them, and you all are taking about Mr. Petters who went to your convention. Well, yes, he is a good example of somebody that is talented in this country that went abroad, that got an education, and he is one of the most prominent Belizeans in the science field. I am proud of him, Mr. Speaker, even though he went to that convention. I am proud of him. I am proud of him, Mr. Speaker. We Belizeans have to be proud of our bredrin that have the ability and that can show everybody that we got it. Boss, we got it! We just need you all to help us with some money so that we can get it. Do you all understand me?



Mr. Speaker, the government rarely consults with the private sector who in reality is the only sector in this society that can drive this economy. When I say private sector, it goes from the large companies like Santander, it goes to the small farmers from the Valley of Peace, it goes to cover everybody, Mr. Speaker. The private sector is the one that drives this economy. In fact, Mr. Speaker, totally the opposite is happening. Government turns around, and since the money is drying up and they have now decided to raise the taxes, they put it on the fuel. So, instead of investing in an industry that would allow us to be self-sufficient in our food supply which is important, that same industry would allow us to employ more people, that is important, that industry would help us with foreign exchange, that is important, and that industry would help us to drive the economy. They decide to cripple it, Mr. Speaker, by raising the taxes on the single item that they need the most. Mr. Speaker, even the service sector like tourism, as I mentioned before, will be affected negatively by this increase in fuel taxes. Tour operators, boat operators, bus operators, taxi drivers, hotel owners, now they will find it more difficult to make ends meet when they have to end up paying more for the gasoline or diesel that runs their machines. So, Mr. Speaker, as I said, it's not rocket science, we have been saying it over and over and over again. This government needs to empower the private the private sector. This government needs to educate our people.

I saw something the other night too on the trip that President Obama made to Cuba, and they were beating up on the President of Cuba, Raul, and they were telling him about human rights. The man said, "Agreed! Of the maybe 70 human right issues that you can deal with we don't deal with all of them we haven't reached there as yet but, we have found it fit to spend on education. We have given the right of people to be educated. We have spent the money on health. We have given the right of the people to be healthy." So you see, Mr. Speaker, all over the world, irrespective of the system of governance, people understand why is it that it is important to spend the money on the people.

Mr. Speaker, the private sector is telling us that they need true meaningful consultation. They don't want papisho consultation. They don't want for you to just call them and take their picture and say, "I was with you." They want true consultation. In fact, now they are not even getting the papisho one because they are not even meeting with them. Party Leader, they met with them or for the last 4 years they met with them two times, I think. So not even the papisho ones are getting now. They have to involve the productive sector more fully in trade negotiations and allow members of the private productive sector to participate with government at these forums abroad. Well, what does this mean? The guys from the agro productive sector are saying that we cannot send government bureaucrats to be able to negotiate on our behalf when they don't have a clue as to what we are doing. So you have certain people on the front row who talk about a man who has a machine, that is driven by a GPS, that has to level the farm fields, that has to gain more productivity depending on the type or the specie of plant that he is supposed to put down, and this man is supposed to go abroad and negotiate on our behalf. And this man is also supposed to go abroad and try to find markets for us. The agro productive sector is saying enough is enough. We want to help this country. We want to drive this economy. We want to move Belize forward, give us a space. We don't need to fly first class. You can put us in the back. In fact, they will pay for their own ticket. But they say, take us, and you don't have to take us in the meeting. If you don't understand something, just

pop out and say, 'Boy, what am I to say?' And then you go back in." That is all we are talking about. What do you call it, Landy? Corridor negotiation said the Honourable Member from Cayo. Well, he is an expert so he understands, he used to go and negotiate on behalf of the poultry association, right. So he understands. Do you see what kind of talent we have on this side, Mr. Speaker? That is what we are talking about, man.

So the productive sector is saying, "Let's do this thing as a partnership," as what the gentleman from Orange Walk East said, and I agree with him to a certain extent, public private partnership. It doesn't only have to be that you take the private man's money and then you work out. It doesn't have to only be about money. It can be about talent. It can be about knowledge. You take the people that understand the product, you take the people that understand what to do, and you have them participate. That is what the productive sector is saying.

Mr. Speaker, to really drive this economy the government needs to increase investor climate confidence. You've heard this before I assume, and I have said it a couple times. How can you do that? Well, you need to invest more money in the judiciary, and that affects you as a professional more than most. At the moment, Mr. Speaker, 1% of the budget which is approximately \$9.8 million is being allocated to the judiciary. I believe, Mr. Speaker, and we believe, Mr. Speaker, that it is of national importance that this allocation be increase. There are other problems that you guys face with the judges and the attorneys and that cases are not brought up in time that is a different issue but maybe if we give them a little bit more money with accountability, then we can demand more from them it's just, I believe, it is important that at least we try it. It can't hurt us give them a little bit more money and give them some rules and regulations and say, "Alright, this year I will give you all 10% or 15% more, but I expect X, Y, and Z." And that will also help us with investor confidence climate, because if investors both local and foreign don't believe that the judiciary is working properly, it does affect investor.

Also, Mr. Speaker, well, the issue of corruption at high levels, again, I just mentioned it, but it is becoming rhetorical. I don't really want to get into that but it's a fact. Reducing crime rate, I think Chester Williams is doing his thing again. The man went to study. He is an attorney now. I am just using him as an example. He is an attorney now. He is a police officer, I think, Assistant Commissioner. He is trying his best and is showing some results. Well, let's send more men. The Member from Orange Walk East, he became politician but, again, an educated police officer. We need to spend more money so that we can find a way to reduce crime. No, I think the PUP sent him away. Is that not true? The British sent you, and we promoted you. Is that so? So that is why you are wearing the blue guayabera today. I thank you very much. But he understands that when the PUP is in government we are not vindictive. We take care of Belizeans. So he is an example. (Applause)

Also, Mr. Speaker, the complaint that the foreign direct investors and the local investors have is that our bureaucratic system is not efficient at all. I don't even want to get into the corrupt part of the system. I'm just talking the system in itself is not efficient. And the people in Cayo South and in Belmopan, well, we can afford some time to come to Belmopan at the Lands Department 50,000 times for them to tell us no. It doesn't cost us that much relatively, but it costs to the people from Punta Gorda, the ones from Toledo East and the ones from Stann

Creek West, the amount of money they take to come to our Ministries to get a simple thing done. I have seen people come 20, 30, 40 times, and they turn them around and around for simple things like a signature, or a stamp. I mean it gets ridiculous. And if they do that to our people, Mr. Speaker, how do you think a man that wants to spend his money, that does not have much to waste, to be fooling around, he will come two times and if you turn him around too much time he will go to another country. And that is what is happening. Mr. Speaker, well, and they get tire of doing what they have to do to get something done too. The Lands Department is a clear example.

Why I bring up the nationalization, Mr. Speaker? The mere fact that you nationalize a company in the global aspect of things it means that you are having a serious lack of respect for property. Am I right, Honourable Member from Caribbean Shores? Do you have clients like that? The mere fact that you nationalize a company means that you are not respecting the right of property. That sends some major, serious signals out there.

And, last but not least, the private sector is saying we need to minimize the interference of Government Ministers in the process of potential investors. A major concern for them is that certain middle men from the United Democratic Party act as agents outside of the legal system so that things can get done. They are saying that is also affecting us in Belize when it pertains to how the people have confidence in our economy. But you see, Mr. Speaker, this UDP Government refuses to see the economic reality and so they refuse to adjust accordingly. Instead they spend the money recklessly with no regard for the future, Mr. Speaker. And then the Prime Minister comes to this House and says that he gives us a budget that says, "Stability in a Time of Change." But at the same time it is penalizing us for the same irresponsible actions that they have done. So they want us to tighten up our belt, they want us to behave as if nothing happened, after they have already spent all of the goddamn money. And we are now supposed to pay for it. But it is not only us, Clerk, it is not only us, it is our children that will pay for it. It is our grandchildren that will pay for it. It is our great grandchildren that will pay for it. That is a major major problem. And in the end what happen? It minimizes what I was trying to say, Mr. Speaker. It minimizes the ability to be able to invest in the things that can better our quality of life.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, we all know how the Prime Minister forces his will and bullies his way on the poor people of Belize. We now also know how the Prime Minister has pretended to fight publicly with the Lord. But at the end of the day, in my opinion, it was just a devilish plot so that both could reap the benefits of these public disputes. It was a set up. It now seems that these public disputes have now changed to a public display of affection right after all the fees have been collected. (Applause) So they were at war saying, "You are this and you are that." (Applause) "You are the devil, and I am the bad man. I will take you to court. He didn't take me to court, whatever." When the millions and the cheese started to pass and the fees went into the red pocket, all of a sudden now they are loving up each other. "Oh, I want you back boy I love you I want you to do a little terminal for me so that we could take back the terminal, so that I can take you to court again, and we can collect more money." They are devious. I know you are not in that, Honourable Member from Mesopotamia, so. This always ends up with the money. They, from both sides and their team, from both sides, always end up with the money. I know you didn't get any of that, Member from Mesopotamia.

While the Belizean people who watched this soap opera because it is a soap opera, from since when we were hearing this thing? From when they were starting taking company? From 2009, we are seeing this soap opera. It looked like Days of our Lives Belize style. In Spanish, they call it *Telenovela*. You put on that television at 5 o'clock and you don't take it off. It is every day. While our Belizean are watching this *telenovela* on their nightly news, they are now realizing that they have been hoodwinked by these action. Bamboozled some would say. Because in reality they are the ones that have to pay all these bills for the nationalization. All these legal fees, all these payback, who has to pay? It is us, our children, our grandchildren, everyone. And it affects Mesopotamia, it affects Port Loyola, it affects everyone because we are paying, in my opinion, more than value for money. It's a sick way of putting money in your pocket because it is at the expense of the people of Belize it is at the expense of the poor people of Belize.

This same personality now, Mr. Speaker, comes to us that he wants a bipartisan approach to the issue of Guatemala and the ICJ. But yet he has never given the respect to the Loyal Opposition in any request when it pertains to the needs of the constituencies that we represent. So they want us to work with them, but anytime any Member from this side needs something for their constituency, the only man I didn't go to as yet is the Member from Mesopotamia, and I know when I go to him he will handle me properly, but they disrespect us, Member, because I have personal experience that not a single item that I have requested from your Prime Minister has he even given thought to. So I have a problem with that. (Did you gave Johnny? Well, maybe Johnny got, but I didn't get.) I can understand and I can also respect our party's proposal for a bipartisan approach to many issues, and the Party Leader has voiced the party's position in his presentation. But one word of advice and caution to the party, it is a proven fact that partnerships only work if there is a mutual trust among the partners, marital partnership, business partnership, political partnership. You have to have mutual trust among the partners. There has to exist mutual respect among the partners. That is a must. Both partners have to be honorable. That's a must. And not the word "Honourable" that we use here. I am talking the true sense of being honourable. Both partners have to want to achieve the same goals. I think when it pertains to national security and the sovereignty of our nation we want to achieve the same goals. So we agree on that one. The dominant partner now, the dominant partner in any relationship has to be willing to listen to the other side. You can't have a dominant partner and he will not listen to the next partner and expect that it will fly. It won't work. In my case, my wife is the dominant partner. So she has to give me a little respect to make this thing work. It only works if both partners are willing to set their differences aside for the benefit of the greater good. We on this side as I am seeing, we are trying our best to put our differences aside for the benefit of the greater good.

Any budget that is allocated in a partnership, again, marital, business, political, any budget that is allocated in a partnership has to be equitably distributed. That's basic. So you all want us to join up then you all need to help our people the way you help your people. That's basic. If I have to hustle for my people, then that's what it is, boss. And it only works, Mr. Speaker, if none of the players involved, if none of the partners in this partnership are devious, vindictive, or arrogant. So, if you have anyone in that partnership who is vindictive, if you don't do what I say I will chop you, or arrogant, don't you talk to me because I will not deal with it, or devious, well, I don't even want to

describe that one. Those are the traits that people cannot have if you want a partnership to work. My advice to the party is that if it proceeds it should proceed cautiously until we can verify, if any or all of the above will be adhered to. We have to make sure that we are not there to be told what to do. We have to be sure that our concerns will be listened to.

And what the Party Leader presented for the party was not only the ICJ. Listen, my boy, he was talking about anticorruption. It was 10 valid points. But they will not work if we do not join together and do it together and be serious. You cannot use me when you want me. You have to have it all the time. You can just come and say, “Bop, and then you roll and then come back and treat me like a dog. It doesn’t work like that. Do you want us to participate? We are talented on this side you know, and we are willing to participate. And some of you all are talented, no doubt, but imagine if we join together it can work. But it has to be based on respect and credibility, and you have to be sincere on what you are doing. I personally, since I have been elected from 2012, the only gentleman that has shown any respect is the Member from Mesopotamia. The newer ones that are coming in now, who some of them I know personally, we need to work on that respect. But the others they don’t care. They don’t care because all they worry about is their pocket. (Maybe you will make me run to Mesopotamia, I don’t have a problem.)

Mr. Speaker, and I will give you an example, my clearest example as to why I have a concern when it comes to that respect, and why I have a concern and I am closing.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Are you sure? You said that already about ten minutes ago. That is a long closing. That is a very long closing. But go ahead.

**HON. J. ESPAT (Cayo South):** Yes, I serious about it this time. This same Prime Minster who leads that clan, in his closing remarks at our last House Meeting before the last general election, went ballistic, his vein popped out of his head, and literally lost it, can’t even get out of his chair, and went as low as any Prime Minster in this country has ever gone, and you allowed it, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** I allow you too. Officer, why are you waiting? Just remove that person.

**HON. J. ESPAT (Cayo South):** Yes, I agree but you allowed it. The man called me, Mr. Speaker, the duly elected Representative from Cayo South. The man called me a Pig. Boss, I was smelling under my arm. I was checking if I had a tail. And I realize that I am not a pig, but the man called me a pig. Now this is the man who wants us to work with him, Honourable Member from Lake Independence. This is the Right Honourable Prime Minister of this country, and he will call someone that was only saying the truth a pig. But guess what, Yellowman, I was feeling funny and was thinking why that man called me that. So I went to Cayo South and around Christmas one of my Chairmen told me, “Boss, but something is wrong” I asked him, “Why?” He said, “In Cayo South and in the rural communities, the English definition of a barrow is that of a castrated pig that is being led to slaughter. The official English definition from the Oxford Dictionary of a barrow is that of a castrated pig being led to slaughter. So now, Mr. Speaker. how ironic, and that is not insulting the Member.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Is it not?

**HON. J. ESPAT (Cayo South):** No. I am only defining and using the English Dictionary.

**MR. SPEAKER:** He will have a chance to respond you know, Member. Alright.

**HON. J. ESPAT (Cayo South):** that's fine. They can't go lower than that, Boss. I can take it.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Open the door wide, wide, wide.

**HON. J. ESPAT (Cayo South):** Mr. Speaker, we cannot trust a Barrow to defend us against our true foes. We cannot trust a Barrow to negotiate on our behalf. And for that reason, Mr. Speaker, I have a problem in going to the ICJ because the movement is being led by a Barrow. And to the people of Belize, I say, not one blade of grass, not one grain of sand! Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I do not approve of this budget. (Applause)

**HON. A. MARTINEZ (Minister of Human Development, Social Transformation and Poverty Alleviation):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to make my contribution to the debate on the General Revenue Appropriation Bill for Fiscal Year 2016/2017. Mr. Speaker, it is with a great deal of satisfaction and pride that I note that this is the first budget being presented by our UDP Administration in its historic third term in office, despite the criticisms from the Opposition. Despite all the misinformation, half-truths and, in some instances, "no truths" that they tried to feed to the Belizean people last year, we were victorious. Despite the doom and gloom that we have heard and will continue to hear from our friends across the aisle, the Belizean people were not fooled. The Belizean people knew that they were on the right path, and they demonstrated their confidence in the UDP by the most powerful means in our democracy through the ballot.

I think this is very important to note because the Member from Cayo South, he purports himself as a champion, as a formidable opponent, but I am saying to you now, Sir, you are looking to get to a position that I am looking to leave. (Applause) I've been four times a Representative and three times a Minister. So at the end of the day when you purport yourself like you are a champion of the cause, the UDP is so terrible, and you talking about corruption and insider trading and all kinds of things, tell the people how you got the Chief Justice's house for \$100,000.00 and you sold it for over \$2 million. (Applause) The property right here in Belmopan at Forest Drive, is also one of them. When you talk about corruption, you need to look within yourself, Sir, you need to look within yourself. (Applause) People believe in the UDP because the UDP delivers.

Do you remember 2008 when the then Prime Ministry said to the country and to his colleagues in a press conference that we received BZ\$20 million for housing from Venezuela? Well, it was US\$20 million, and the people remember when the United Democratic Party came to power. You all spent that \$20 million in one month from January to February, and the next \$20 million the United

Democratic Party shared it with the Belizean people, including the elected Representatives from the People's United Party. (Applause) And that is how the people remember the UDP, and that is why people believe in the UDP. It was the United Democratic Party that wrote off all the housing loans. (Applause) Again, that is why people believe in the United Democratic Party. It was the United Democratic Party that wrote off all the loans again from the Small Farmers Bank (Applause) That is why they believe in the United Democratic Party. This is not about word. It is about deeds. And then, when you are talking about fooling around, it was the People's United Party who went and gambled our money on the stock market and they lost US\$5 million. So at the end of the day, Sir, people believe in the United Democratic Party because we don't talk we deliver. (Applause) And every time we on this side have a heart for people you know, Sir. We do have a heart for the people because none of our programs, housing or otherwise, saddled down or are a burden that people need to pay the bank. We relieve people of their debts. So we free up the people who are paying for their mortgages because we give them a relief so that they can help themselves and repair their building and move the economy forward. (Applause)

They are hypocritical again, Mr. Speaker. Under a People's United Party Government and I served as the Opposition you know. The UDP is very respectful and grateful to the People's United Party on the other side because under the People's United Party regime I served as the Opposition and we didn't get any community vote. We didn't get any assistance at all. We did not get any community vote, Sir. Under the People's United Party, no Representative from the United Democratic Party get anything from the People's United Party. So I am saying that we opened the door, because we are collegian, and we are friendly. We didn't get anything at all from the People's United Party, not one single cent, and they are so hypocritical. When the United Democratic Party offered the Mother's Day, the Father's Day and the Christmas Cheers, all them run there. One would have believed that they didn't take anything from the United Democratic Party. But I am saying that they talked against it, and they still run to it. Everything that you all had was for yourselves. There was nothing for the Belizean people. (Applause) So when we do things, Mr. Speaker, we do things across the board.

When they talk about people are standing in long lines, it was in the Ministry of Human Development where people were lined in long lines for \$5, Sir. Under the United Democratic Party, we fit it under a program where people were restored with their dignity. If they have their credit union account or their bank account, whatever they are to get from the government it goes to their account. So I can tell you that there are no more lines at the Social Department. (Applause)

So I am saying to you that you must look on the positive things of this government. I think that the positive side of this government had been transpired when the people of this country returned back the UDP to a three- consecutive term in a row. (Applause) And you can say what you want that this is a so-called term. Well, let me say to the attorneys or whosoever, a term in terms of in parliament is the opening and the closing or the dissolution of the House, and that is a term. (Applause) It doesn't matter. A term, Sir, you are an attorney, a term means when the parliament is opened and when it is dissolved. That's a term, Sir. Yes, he should know. This is a big man game so you should know what you're in for. (Applause) So I am telling you that the definition of a term because people

are saying, “Oh, it’s a so-called three-term.” It’s a three-term, Sir, no so-called about that. The definition of a term of the National Assembly is properly defined even in the Standing Orders of the House Representatives. (No, I don’t want to divert too much from the budget speech which is very important to the people of this county, and what the ministry is doing.) (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, the people can literally see how their money is being spent. The evidence is all around us in the infrastructural upgrades countrywide: the streets, the drains, the sporting facilities, the jobs that have been created as a result of these massive infrastructural projects and from other efforts and the pay increases to the public officers and teachers that has meant more economic security for their families. These are just a few of the things that have inspired the people’s confidence in us. And it is not just perception, Mr. Speaker, the fact bears it out. The inflation figures, the unemployment figures and other economic indicators provide hardcore evidence of our success. And the Right Honourable Prime Minister has clearly articulated how through his budget speech we will stay the course and that has inspired such overwhelming confidence. He has clearly articulated how we will ensure stability during this time of change in the global economic environment.

We are continuing on the path that has served the people of Belize so well since 2008, and in my Ministry we will continue to be an integral part of the efforts to transform our society. We have made good strides in strengthening our systems, especially those that support the most vulnerable in our society.

During the last financial year, Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Human Development, Social Transformation and Poverty Alleviation continued to provide client-centered services for thousands of children, adolescents and adults. My Ministry is mandated to provide protection services for children who are abused and neglected assistance to domestic violence victims, rehabilitation services to juvenile offenders and shelters for the indigent elderly and homeless. This financial year we continued to do so through the various conduits of our Ministry. These individuals and their families were provided with a wide range of services, including socio-economic support, psychosocial interventions and other forms of case management support, all aimed at helping them to normalize their lives and restore family functioning.

In addition, 385 children were cared for in children’s homes or foster care placements. A hundred elderly and homeless people benefitted from residential and in-home support. Another 100 people deemed to be beyond parental control or who had been convicted of crimes were placed at the Youth Hostel. The Conscious Youth Development Programme provided services for over 1000 gang-involved youths and youths at-risk of joining gangs. And our Women’s Department served clients with domestic violence, life-skills enhancement, economic support and other complementary services. This is apart from the support that they provided to 38 women’s groups countrywide.

Through a regional SICA project on gender-based violence my Ministry partnered with BELTRAIDE to provide training for over 300 women, and 240 of them were provided with micro business grants.

Mr. Speaker, our social safety net programmes continue to provide tangible and much needed relief to some of our most disadvantaged citizens. This



past financial year we were able to assist over 22,000 individuals in cash or in-kind through these programmes. Over 1,200 units of public assistance were delivered to individuals and families in the form of emergency food, medical care, education assistance, burial assistance or rent assistance. The Food Pantry Programme continues to assist families in the Belize City, Cayo and Toledo Districts. And I think we will try to extend it to Dangriga to maintain a better standard of nutrition by providing their staples at a subsidized cost. That means that over 12,500 people are eating better. A client survey was just recently completed on the Food Pantry Programme, Mr. Speaker. Through that survey beneficiaries are saying to us that because of the food pantry they are able to stretch their small incomes and provide a better standard of living for their families. They are telling us that they are able to meet their other living costs a little easier. This programme has been ongoing for the past four years, Mr. Speaker, and it is making a difference in the lives of beneficiaries. We are not guessing. They are telling us directly through these surveys. These are the things, Mr. Speaker, that clearly demonstrate the unwavering commitment of the Barrow Administration to bring relief to the poor.

Our BOOST Programme continues to assist close to 9,000 children, elderly and disabled persons from 3,500 households through direct cash assistance. I continue to reiterate that BOOST is not a handout as our critics like to paint it. Mr. Speaker, it is a partnership with families. They must ensure that their children go to school and get their vaccinations in return for the cash assistance, and if they are not holding up to their end of the bargain, their benefits are cut. And we are finding out that families are holding up to their end of the bargain and making sure that the health and education needs of their children are attended to. That is the nature of these social safety net programmes. They provide direct relief to those people who are most in need. Yes, other parts of this government are working towards increasing the level of foreign investments and creating more jobs. But in the meantime people need something to tie them over, and that is what these social safety net programmes are designed to do. This year, through funding from the OAS and the UN, we will be piloting wraparound services to BOOST families, providing them with even more support to help them move themselves towards self-sufficiency.

You see, Mr. Speaker, it is very important that we provide the wraparound service. This simply means that we look on all aspect to help the family on a whole. So at the end of the day it was never intended to have a person to be cling on the state. At some point in time we will help you so that you can stand on your own, so that you can move on with your life. (Applause) But we will give you that help, and the wraparound service, as far as I understand it, will be making sure that at least a family member is working, making sure that all the children are in school, making sure that the housing conditions for the people are better, and then from there we can move on. (Applause) Mr. Speaker, these social safety net programs are a significant investment, and my Ministry wants to make sure that the people of Belize get good returns on their investment. We are therefore in the midst of an evaluation of the BOOST Program that is being done by an international firm with funding from the United Nations. We are determined to ensure that BOOST continues to be the world-class program that the World Bank itself has said it is.

And to that end, Mr. Speaker, we have seen some successes in the BOOST Program unlike what people would tend to want to believe. We have some people who already coming off the BOOST Program. It has helped them. They have gone

through their education. They are working now. So I think that they have gone a long way. (Applause) Like I said the program is a program geared to help the less fortunate, and it tries to encourage you to stay in school and get educated so that you can get a job and so that you can give way to the less fortunate people. It is not a program that is intended for you to be under it for a lifetime, and it's a partnership program between the government and the citizens. (Applause) And, indeed, the Ministry of Human Development has demonstrated that it is a good steward of the public funds allocated to us. And this is not an idle claim, Mr. Speaker, but supported by evidence.

A cost benefit analysis conducted by the IDB on the recently completed Community Action for Public Safety Project, which was implemented through my Ministry, showed that US\$9 million of benefits were realized from the US\$5 million loan. Through the Community Action for Public Safety (CAPS), we constructed the Gateway Youth Center on the compound of Gwen Lizarraga High School. This center that is now being managed by the Ministry of Education provides an array of services to young people to keep them off the streets and away from gangs. Through the CAPS Project, we have also constructed a new dorm and resource center on the campus of the Youth Hostel, and we have significantly strengthened the quality of the rehabilitative services being offered to the adolescents of that institution. We were able to build a second dorm and a kitchen and mess hall that were not initially budgeted for in the loan, but which we were able to complete due to prudent financial management.

The Ministry of Human Development is also the executing agency for a complementary project called the Youth and Community Transformation Project or YCT that is now well underway. Very shortly, we will have two ground breaking ceremonies under this project. The first is for the Lake Independence Resource Centre which will house an indoor basketball and sports auditorium, as well as spaces for a host of other programmes. Apart from sports, many other social development programmes in the areas of literacy, skills training and life skills will also be delivered to the community from this resource centre. The other ground breaking will be at the Wilton Cumberbatch Field as through this project significant upgrading will be done to that community asset. Funding for the YCT comes through a CDB Loan. And the CDB is so pleased with the way that we have been managing the project that last month their board approved \$1 million grant for us to expand our interventions to San Ignacio and Dangriga.

The strides that we have made this financial year will continue into the next. As the Prime Minister has said, the work will continue, and the 2016/2017 budget of the Ministry of Human Development certainly reflects that. That is why, Mr. Speaker, I personally and the people of Port Loyola give this budget its full support. (Applause)

**MR. SPEAKER:** Before I do that, Member, just let me read the Standing Orders, given the time.

**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 matter on the order paper be entered upon 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 matter of 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.

**HON. DR. O. FIGUEROA (Minister of State in the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development):** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to give my full support to the Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for Fiscal Year 2016/2017. Mr. Speaker, my colleagues on this side of the aisle have outlined both, yesterday and today, the key components of this 2016/2017 budget aptly entitled "Stability in Time of Change". Thus, Mr. Speaker, I will use my time to highlight a few key projects and programs under Capital III that fall within the portfolio for which I have primary responsibility, climate change, environment, including protected areas and sustainable development. These areas you will agree, Mr. Speaker, constitute core components of Belize's national development agenda. But before I commence, Mr. Speaker, please allow me to join with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle in expressing my gratitude to the many public officers who spent countless hours, days, in fact, weeks in preparation of this budget. I know for a fact that many folks from our Ministry worked tirelessly in this regard. The government acknowledges your hard work, and we are grateful.

Since 2008, Mr. Speaker, the annual budget of this UDP Government of Prime Minister the Right Honourable Dean Barrow has always been characterized by sound, economic, fiscal and monetary policies. This year is no different. Our Prime Minister continues to be open with the Belizean people about risks and challenges. This budget, Mr. Speaker, like those the Prime Minister previously presented, continues to demonstrate our belief in the fundamental principle that money with this government, with this UDP Government belongs to the people. (Applause) This money belongs to the people, and we have the sacred responsibility to spend it prudently, to spend it wisely for the welfare of the Belizean people, especially the poor and the less privileged.

While I do not wish to enter into any protracted discourse on Petrocaribe, I feel obliged to make mention, especially because the program has been criticized in this debate, that the people of Cayo North will always be grateful for the projects and programs funded through this initiative. For the next 20, 30, perhaps 50 or 60 years, Mr. Speaker, the evidence of these projects will remain there for everyone to see and for everyone to enjoy. You can contrast this, Mr. Speaker, rather easily to the many shady projects that characterized the PUP Administration prior to 2008. You will note, Mr. Speaker, that most of the projects that I will briefly mention are not included in the capital III, perhaps because of the post election transition and high workload of our finance officers. Nonetheless all of the funds that I will mention will in fact, be spent in the 2016/2017 fiscal year and thus should be included in Capital III.

Firstly, Mr. Speaker, this administration continues its efforts to maintain good stewardship of our environment incursions, including protected areas, despite the challenges of illegal incursions for farming and hunting on our western and southern borders. In an effort to strengthen keys management efforts the National Protected Areas Secretariat located in my Ministry is implementing a 5-year \$18 million project known as the Management and Protection of Key

Biodiversity Areas. This KBA Project will, upon its successful completion and implementation, enhance Belize's management of its key protected areas through:

1. Increase forest protection and sustainable management;
2. Increase monitoring compliance and enforcement; and
3. Through the strengthening of institutional capacity through training of relevant staff.

In this 2016/2017 fiscal year, Mr. Speaker, the KBA Project will invest over \$3.5 million to achieve these objectives. While not included in this budget, Mr. Speaker, I am also most pleased to announce that GOB, the Government of Belize will be signing later this month a \$7.6 million grant agreement from the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility through the World Bank for the reduced emissions from deforestation and forest degradation or Red Plus Readiness Project that will be implemented over the next 5 years. This Red Plus Project will further contribute to our sustainable forest management to:

1. The assessment of historical greenhouse gas emissions from deforestation and forest degradation;
2. The development of a national red plus strategy that identifies the drivers of deforestation; and
3. The articulation of a comprehensive cost cutting monitoring framework for measuring the results of the red plus initiatives.

On the marine side, Mr. Speaker, the Ministry is also currently implementing a \$10-million project entitled The Belize Marine Conservation and Climate Adaptation Project (MCCAP), with funds provided by the Adaptation Fund. Our very own Protected Areas Conservation Trust serves as the fiduciary manager for these funds. MCCCAP, over the next 5 years, will implement priority eco system based marine conservation and climate change adaptation initiatives to strengthen climate resilience of the Belize barrier reef system. The MCCAP Projects is one small but important initiative that will enhance our adaptive ability to the adverse effects of climate change. For example, MCCAP will invest almost \$5 million in sustainable alternative livelihood opportunities and income diversification for users of the reef thereby contributing to employment generation and poverty alleviation. This is truly laudable and noteworthy, Mr. Speaker, for people should always remain at the center of our development, as they always are under this UDP Administration. (Applause)

I am also heartened to report to this Honourable House, Mr. Speaker, that our government is contributing over \$3.5 million as in-kind contribution over the life of this project. Up to June of this year, the MCCAP Project would have invested over \$2.7 million in the attainment of these objectives.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry is also implementing a fourth flagship project entitled Biodiversity Finance Initiative or Bio Fin in partnership with the United Nations Development Program. Bio Fin is a 3-year- \$1.06- million project that will see the completion of a national biodiversity financing plan for presentation to this Honourable House as well as the implementation of that plan. In 2016/2017 this project will expend another \$300,000.00 in the attainment of these objectives.

Mr. Speaker, my Ministry under Capital III is also implementing a fourth

project entitled Capacity Building for the Strategic Planning and Management of Natural Resources in Belize. This project will expend over \$3 million over the next 3 years, including over \$700,000.00 in this 2016/2017 fiscal year. These funds, Mr. Speaker, will be invested in the following areas:

- Monitoring and assessment of environmental impacts;
- Piloting natural resources valuation into environmental impact assessments; and
- Strategic environmental assessments to better improve the regulatory framework within both the Forest and the Environment Departments.

Mr. Speaker, climate change remains an existential threat to small countries like Belize. It is for this reason that my Ministry which has responsibility for climate change will be embarking on an ambitious plan to seek significant funding from the Green Climate Fund, the world's largest climate financing institution, over the next few years even as we continue our existing efforts to source additional funds for climate change adaptation measures. For us, climate change has been a reality that we readily observe in the increase of extreme weather events such as droughts and floods that together have devastating impacts on our agricultural and forest sectors and road infrastructure. Over the next fiscal year, the Ministry will be implementing our National Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan, thereby improving our resilience to climate change.

Furthermore, the Prime Minister will be signing the Paris Agreement on April 22, 2016 at the United Nations in New York. This landmark agreement once signed and ratified will commit Belize to the goals and objectives emanating from this historic agreement signed by over 195 countries. The Senate is expected to ratify the Paris Agreement at its next sitting. The attendance by the Honourable Prime Minister at this event demonstrates the government's commitment to doing all it can

to assist our people to better adopt to the adverse effects of climate change. In an effort, Mr. Speaker, to increase awareness of climate change among the public, I hope to sign very soon a Memorandum of Understanding with the Solar Head of State Nonprofit Organization to put solar panels on the roof of the building that houses the Department of the Environment. This initiative will serve to demonstrate publicly the benefits of renewable energy and the reduction of carbon emissions, while educating the public about climate change mitigation efforts. Despite our small sized and carbon footprint, we too can do our part to reducing carbon dioxide emissions and thus mitigate against climate change.

Sustainable development, Mr. Speaker, is also a portfolio under my responsibility. Both my Ministry and the Ministry of Economic Development will be launching the Growth and Sustainable Development Strategy that seeks at its core to improve the quality of life of all our people through wealth creation, poverty reduction and social cohesion. Our successful implementation of the GSDS will allow us to achieve the sustainable development goals. My Ministry will continue to play a critical and leading role in this process particularly as it relates to coordination and implementation of the monitoring and evaluation framework and the attainment of objectives related to the environment.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, this budget, while scrupulous, demonstrates

yet again that this United Democratic Party Government is driven at its core by fiscal prudence. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, this budget thus, indeed, provides stability in a time of change. As such even as we prepare to face uncertainties in the source of revenues from Petrocaribe and our own petroleum industry, this budget preserves the hallmark programs of this administration, investment in education, healthcare, infrastructure, natural resource management and stewardship and social programs such as BOOST. This UDP Administration has always been the best manager of the people's money. (Applause) We are, of course, Mr. Speaker, very proud of the trust given to us by our people. This is why the majority of Belizeans returned this UDP Administration to a consecutive and unprecedented third-term. (Applause) Some on the other side may want to convince you that the Belizean people voted for a slogan or were somehow misled, but Belizeans are way smarter than that, and we all know it. The Belizean people voted UDP again in 2015 because they understand, Mr. Speaker, and they appreciate the value of hard work and of responsible fiscal management. We shall not disappoint those who put their trust in us as we continue to strive to achieve sustain growth and prosperity for all of our people. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, I just want to make one final addition one final comment in response to some comments that were issued from the Member for Cayo South. From the core of my presentation, you see that we can't just always lean on the Prime Minister and beg for a street or beg for healthcare clinics. There are funds out there, and we need to roll up our sleeves. There are grant funds out there. We need to roll up our sleeves and get to work, man. Show us what he has been doing for his constituency other than coming here and crying and getting personal all the time. (Applause) He was begging for some healthcare for his people. I want to put this on the table to him. This year I am starting in Cayo whereby we will be bringing down a lot of medical experts that will be attending to the people in Cayo, not just in Cayo North. If he wants, Mr. Speaker, he can reach out to me and we can take some of his people to get good medical attention out there. (Applause) The Minister of Health is cooperating with me and helping me in this endeavor and so are many Belizean from the Diaspora who are medical experts out there and are bringing together teams of experts that will be attending to our people here in Belize. (Applause) So with that, Mr. Speaker, let me just say that I fully support this budget. I am proud to be a part of it. And I look forward to the next fiscal year. Thank you. (Applause)

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thanks for your merciful brevity, Member. I recognize the Member for Caribbean Shores.

**HON. K. MUSA (Caribbean Shores):** Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker, Members of the National Assembly. Mr. Speaker, I rise to make my contribution to the budget debate for fiscal year 2016/2017, and I do so proudly as the Area Representative for the good people of Caribbean Shores. (Applause) Now I remember at the first sitting of the House I mentioned how proud I was to be the Areas Representative for the Prime Minister, but I should also mention that I am also the Area Representative for the good Member for Pickstock and the good Member for the Albert Division. I say this, Mr. Speaker, not to suggest that they may have voted for me, not at all. I say that because you would have thought that with three Members on that side there would be more coming to Caribbean Shores. The only thing that I have heard in this budget debate so far coming to

Caribbean Shores are two projects that have been complete and utter disasters. I am talking firstly about the Marion Jones Complex which sits in the Caribbean Shores Division and it's a running joke in the Caribbean Shores, Mr. Speaker, that they refer to the Marion Jones Complex as quick sand because whenever this government pours money into Marion Jones the money just disappears. It just disappears, Mr. Speaker, and it does not help that the Minister responsible for sports comes to this House and has the audacity to say he cannot account for the monies. We are saying that they have spent over \$25 million on that complex you know, and he is saying that he can only account for \$17.5 million. But even that \$17.5 million where has that gone? In the fences is that what they are saying, in the bleachers. It is \$17.5 million, and that is ridiculous.

And then you look at the MCC Grounds, a football field that has such a rich legacy also sits in the Caribbean Shores Division. But what have they done, Mr. Speaker? Did they invest any of that \$325 million in Petrocaribe into the MCC Grounds? No, they decided to prostitute the MCC Grounds to the Princess Casino. (Applause) They are prostituting this legendary field. Imagine that \$325 million you had and not a dollar went into that sporting field.

Mr. Speaker, like my fellow junior Members of the House, I have to confess that even though I sit on this side I listened with much anticipation, much excitement, this is my first debate after all, and much hope when our Prime Minister rose to deliver his budget presentation. After all we were all promised that the best was yet to come. But unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, my excitement was very short-lived, as within minutes of listening to this Prime Minister delivered his presentation, I felt as though I was listening to a death announcement. Mr. Speaker, I felt as though the Prime Minister was recording the death of our economy. I cannot recall, Mr. Speaker, ever hearing any Prime Minister described segments of our economy as flat lining. Now you don't have to be a doctor, Member for Mesopotamia, to know that flat lining is never a good thing. It means that you are dead. Correct me if I'm wrong, Dr. from Corozal South West. (Applause) And the Prime Minister said this so causally, so nonchalantly.

And then in the same budget presentation speech he had the nerve to rub in our collective faces that while our industries were collapsing he and his Ministers were enjoying a Petrocaribe Bonanza. That is what he called it, you know a bonanza, while our industries were failing and he was just sitting right there. It was a bonanza, Mr. Speaker, that saw this government built streets that led to nowhere, no new industries at the end of those streets, no new jobs for our young people at the end of those streets. It saw them building, Member for Belmopan, roundabouts like it is nobody's business. I heard the Member for Belmopan boasting about his \$13- million roundabout at the entrance of the city. He built not one but two roundabouts in a city that has no kind of congestion to warrant two roundabouts. I find it so fitting, Member for Mesopotamia, I find it so fitting that this government prides itself as some sort of specialist in roundabouts. (Applause) Ever since the days of Zeneida that is you all your thing, roundabouts. It is just so fitting, Mr. Speaker, a roundabout is truly emblematic of the type of vision, or I should say the lack of vision that this government has. Where does a roundabout takes you, Member for Belmopan? A roundabout takes you nowhere. (Applause) That, in my opinion, describes this administration perfectly.

Mr. Speaker, it really is a case of a Tale of Two Cities because while they

manage to blow this bonanza on streets and roundabouts nothing was done to save these industries. The Banana Industry is collapsing. Papaya has packed up and gone. Not even the shrimp, Mr. Speaker, cares to live under this UDP Administration. The shrimps are dying. As the Right Honourable Prime Minister said, even the oil is drying up. Mr. Speaker, while they were on their power-drunk-spending spree blowing \$325 million in 2 years, more and more Belizeans were falling into poverty.

The Member for Collet boasted about his government's success in creating temporary employment. He used the word temporary over, and over and now that Petrocaribe is done, what now, Member for Collet? He is not here but I have to ask him what now in terms of employment for the Belize City residents and those across this country? Let's be real, government, let's be real with our people. There are no opportunities out there for the Belizean people. The government has done nothing absolutely nothing to provide financial assistance or a little startup capital for the young entrepreneurs graduating from 6<sup>th</sup> form and graduating from the other tertiary level institutions. There is nothing for the mom and pop businesses in this country. Our people have ideas, Mr. Speaker. Our people are brilliant, but they have not been given a chance to shine. Instead, do you know what this government and their close family members do when a normal Belizean has a brilliant idea? They try to steal that idea. (Applause) Just ask Mr. Curtis Dale Swasey, Mr. Speaker, ask him about what BTL and Mek Mi Rich did to him. Mr. Speaker, this government in its 8 years has done not a single new housing project, Member for Mesopotamia, not one new single housing project. (Applause) Is it that you expect our people to sleep on these nicely paved streets and these roundabouts? Is that your idea of housing for Belizeans?

Mr. Speaker, each year hundreds of our young people are graduating from secondary and tertiary level institutions, but they have nothing to look forward to aside from fixing streets, aside from Ready Call or transparent BPO, not even a sewing factory, Mr. Speaker, for our single mothers. If you go and tell any normal Belizean out there, Mr. Speaker, that we just experienced an economic boom of \$325 million, thanks to Petrocaribe, they will tell you straight, "The Barrow family may have experience an economic boom." The special handpick cronies contractors may have experienced an economic boom. But for normal Belizeans life continues to get progressively worse. (Applause) Just check any weekly edition, and this is a plug, Cordel, of the Amandala Newspaper, and you will see the hundredths of middle class families losing their homes. Not to mention the cost of fuel, Mr. Speaker, in Belize the cost of fuel remains excessively high, despite the fact that worldwide the price at the pump has fallen drastically.

Mr. Speaker, now that the Petrocaribe bonanza is over, now that most of our industries are collapsing under this administration, I want to encourage the Minister of Tourism to do whatever he has to do within his power to ensure that our tourism product is protected and guarded with his life. Member for Belize Rural South let me tell you that now that Petrocaribe is done they are going to come to you like vampires in the night to suck the blood out of tourism. They will come to you; it is one of our last surviving industries, Member for Belize Rural South. As you know, Mr. Speaker, our tourism product is far superior than any other countries. But that does not mean we have the right to abuse it. That does not mean we have a right to neglect it. As you know, Member, tourism is a very fragile industry. Just recently our industry received a black eye when we lost our own Danny Conrique at an archaeological site, when a Canadian movie



producer and a Chicago based ABC news anchor were murdered in the Cayo District. So we have to be vigilant, Member. We all have to do our part and that includes the Minister of National Security. (Applause) We have to do our part to ensure that our Belizean people and our visitors are safe and secure at all times. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, and while the Prime Minister might not want to swallow his vomit, I see he took some of my advice the last time about correspondent banking. (Applause) But maybe he'll acknowledge that I gave him good advice this time. He might want to downplay the effects of the loss of correspondent banking, but that threat is real, Mr. Speaker. And if we completely lose our corresponding banking relations, we could say goodbye to our tourism product as well. There is also the very real threat, Member for Belize Rural South, that Belize, like our neighbours in the Caribbean, will be affected once Cuba opens its doors to America. We must, Mr. Member, we must be prepared for this eventuality. We must be ready and willing to take serious steps and this part I want you to listen to because you seem to be focused solely on San Pedro. I want you to take this serious, Member, that we must construct a proper docking facility in Belize City.

Mr. Speaker, I say to the Member and to the Prime Minister that when it comes to tourism we don't just need stability in a time of change we need vision and we need action to ensure that our industry remains competitive. And, if it is, Mr. Speaker, that this government doesn't have the finances to proceed with the type of development for the docking port in Belize City, then I want to encourage the government and encourage the stakeholders to seriously reconsider the Stake Bank Cruise Port as proposed by the Feinstein Group. Let me take this opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to remind this Honourable House that the Feinstein Group proposed three projects in one. One of them is a cement factory which is much needed in our country. It has already gotten the approval of the banks. This is a \$35 million project which would create 90 permanent jobs. That has been put on hold, Member for Belmopan. The second project is, of course, the Stake Bank Cruise Port Facility for which the investor has already secured financing of \$200 million which should have created thousands, Member, thousands of new jobs for Belize City residents. Thirdly, Member, is the North Drowned Caye Project for which millions have already been spent over 5 years and thousands of additional jobs would have been created to build 5 miles of causeway. But, again, your Prime Minister does not seem interested in that, even though both sides of this House voted in support of it, 'All three projects Members, are linked, and the Prime Minister and his government are now throwing away all three projects in order to negotiate another deal with the Ashcroft connected Port Loyola Project, the same man you all called devil, the same man you all demonized and you are negotiating with. Now he is the master again, and that project, I hate to tell you may never ever happen. And Belize City will end up with no cruise port, Members.

The Prime Minister has shown scant regard or respect for both sides of this House. Like I said both sides voted for this project. His feeble excuse, Member, and you can confirm this, is that Mr. Feinstein wanted exclusivity but our understanding is not so he did not ask for exclusivity for the whole country, he is simply saying that Belize City cannot handle two cruise tourism ports. The government, let me remind you, did not hesitate to give Harvest Caye, which involved a well-connected UDP family of brothers, and you all know who that is, an exclusive license for the south. You don't have problems with exclusivity down

south, do you? It is because it is a UDP family, and that is how you all behave, man. So to deny this multimillion dollar project by a Belizean who was asking for a practical undertaking to limit the development of only one cruise port for Belize City is plain and simple bad mindedness. (Applause) You all are bad minded. Mr. Speaker, so many Belize City families depend on cruise tourism for jobs and putting bread on the table, and I need not say that it would be a devastating blow to these families if we were to lose this industry.

Mr. Speaker, if I may now touch a little on an issue that is of serious concern to civil society, and that is the issue of the Integrity Commission. Since 2008 when the UDP came into office, the Integrity Commission has existed in name only. Under the Barrow Administration, the Integrity Commission has been non functional. The Prime Minister has not even bothered to appoint members to this commission. UDP Members have not filed their annual declarations of assets and liabilities even though the law, let me tell you about the law, the Integrity in Public Life Act, even though the law requires that every Member of the National Assembly and local government is to file. This government only pays lip service to the principles of good governance. They preach one thing but they practice the opposite. (Applause) They preach democracy, but they practice hypocrisy. (Applause) Last year the Prime Minister put in the budget \$114,116.00 to give the impression that he is doing something, they only spend \$82,161.00. Don't ask me what they spent it on, if there is no Integrity Commission. Perhaps just to have an extra secretary get a job sit in an office with a desk and a filing cabinet to receive declarations filed by the PUP Members of this House.

It is a farce, Mr. Speaker. All this talk about fighting corruption is just talk. Has there been any investigation into the rampant corruption taking place at the Lands Department? Do you remember who described it as a hotbed of corruption? Has there been any investigation into that? The answer is no. Has there been any serious investigation of the blatant corruption in the Immigration Department with the rampant sale of passports? Do you remember Nanes Schnitzer? Do you remember Kim Wong Hong and a slew of other Chinese? Do I need to go over all of those again? Has there been any serious investigation into that and all the permanent residence visas that were signed over to Chinese? Was there any investigation into that? Mr. Speaker, we cannot even get the investigative file in the Penner case from the Commissioner of Police. My goodness, Member for Belmopan, maybe you could tell us about that. What is holding up this investigation? Why has he not turn over this investigative file? The Supreme Court ordered him to investigate, and today he cannot deliver that. (Applause) Mr. Speaker, the government said the Auditor General was also, the Auditor General not just the Commissioner, the Auditor General was also investigating. But, as we know, Mr. Speaker, that report has not seen the light of day.

Mr. Speaker, if I may now shift gears a little to mention a few things about my profession and the judiciary, Mr. Speaker, despite the call of the Honourable Chief Justice for an increase in the budget to cope with the rising crime rate in order to cope with the overload and the backlog of criminal cases and the growing civil mitigation, this call has gone unanswered once again by this government. The judiciary, as you know, Mr. Speaker, is an essential component to any thriving democracy. It is one of three essential pillars. In my opinion, the judiciary is the most underfinanced pillar, considering the amount of work that they put in on a daily basis. The budget for the judiciary remains stagnant, despite

repeated calls and warning, from our Chief Justice for an increase. In 2014, the budget for the judiciary was \$9.3 million. In 2015, even less was budgeted, only \$9.1 million. It later had to be revised because of the strain that they were putting on the judiciary to \$9.685 million. And for this year, Mr. Speaker, despite the promise by the new Attorney General at the Ceremonial Opening of the Supreme Court that the budget allocation would be reassessed, the government has only increased the budget for the judiciary by a measly \$400,000.00.

Mr. Speaker, you just look at the nightly news and you will know that the criminal justice system is failing our country. The number of persons on remand awaiting trial is growing by the day, which speaks not only to an increase in the crime rate but it also signals the slowing down of the wheels of justice. The truth is, Mr. Speaker, that our magistrate's court is severely understaffed. We need more magistrates. Prosecutors need to be better prepared and become more efficient so that we can expedite hearings. As for witnesses, Mr. Speaker, they are now more than ever scared to come and testify in court. They are reluctant because the state the government can offer them no protection. There is no witness protection program in Belize.

And what about the promise, Mr. Speaker, of a DNA lab to assist the police and the courts in criminal investigations? That was a promise from this same Prime Minister before the 2008 elections. But, Mr. Speaker, do you remember what he said after those elections? He said that his government could not deliver on the DNA lab because they were in a cash crunch. A cash crunch is what he called it. Well, since then, Mr. Speaker, since 2008, there was the great Petrocaribe bonanza which saw this Prime Minister and this government swimming in public funds. But do you think they used any of that money to build a DNA lab to assist the citizenry in regaining some sense of security, some sense of confidence in our justice system? There is no hustle in DNA labs, Mr. Speaker. (Applause) Just like the promise of the oil refinery, do you remember that one? Just like the promise of an oil refinery, the DNA lab was just an election gimmick.

The undeniable truth, Mr. Speaker, is that this government has never been serious about bringing down the cost of fuel and never been serious about increasing the conviction rate in our country. All they knew, Mr. Speaker, is that they had \$325 million in their coffers and they wanted to spend that money as fast as they possible could before the general elections. Now look where we are. I would have to agree with the good Member for Fort George that this budget is a hangover budget or, as they say in Creole, this budget *da wa goma* budget. That is what the Prime Minister should have called not Stability in a Time of Change, the *goma* after the Petrocaribe bonanza. That is what he should have called this because this is a hang over budget.

For the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions in charge of all prosecutions in our country in the Supreme Court, Mr. Speaker, the budget in 2015 was \$2.3 million. The revised estimates for 2015 show that government actually shortchanged the Office of the DPP, only allocating \$1.8 million, half a million less than what was budgeted for. What kind of strategy is that to fight crime, Members? Is it any wonder that our conviction rate for murder in Belize is less than 10%? The very low conviction rate has a direct correlation with the astronomical increase in crime and violence in Belize. Those who are determined, Mr. Speaker, to live on the wrong side of the law are no longer fearful of being caught because they believe it won't be long before they walk free again.

This crisis of confidence in the justice system is as much a threat to the rule of law in Belize as Guatemala's recent assertion of sovereignty over the entire Sarstoon River. It is an existential threat to Belize's territorial integrity. And, as you know, Mr. Speaker, under our Constitution, the Chief Legal Advisor of the Government is the Attorney General, and the Minister responsible for the conduct of our foreign policy is the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Now I believe, Mr. Speaker, this morning the nation took a collective sigh of relief because we finally received the good news that the Minister of Foreign Affairs will no longer be speaking to the media. Ever since he described our border as artificial it has been downhill ever since. So hopefully, Mr. Speaker, that signals the end of footing mouth disease on that side of the House. If only he could realize that not only do we want him to not speak to the media, we want the Prime Minister to have him removed as our Foreign Minister. (Applause)

The Honourable Member for Pickstock as you know, in the last term was also our Attorney General, and, under his watch as Attorney General, the Bar Association, he spent the majority of his time attempting to destabilize the Bar Association. The Member for Pickstock, that's what his sole objective was to destabilize the Bar. The Attorney General who was the titular head of the legal profession waged an unceasing and unrelenting war against the Bar Association, going so far as to amend the law to remove the requirement that all practicing attorneys must be registered members of the association. That was a failed attempt Member, to destroy the institution. It is a tribute to the overwhelming majority of lawyers that the Bar Association continues to grow in strength.

But when you look at this budget, Mr. Speaker, and the previous budget you could see why the Member for Pickstock had so much time on his hands to launch attacks on the Bar Association. While he was busy attacking the bar, his Prime Minister was busy running a parallel underground operation that saw legal work that was to have been handled by the Member from Pickstock and his Ministry, after all year in and year out they are paid to handle the legal work for government you know, the Attorney General's Ministry. But while he was attacking the bar the Prime Minister was running a parallel operation contracting out to select private attorneys, three of whom, Leader of the Opposition, just by coincidence, bear the last name Barrow. It is just coincidence though, three of them. And do you want to know how much money the Prime Minister as the Minister of Finance gave to his family members and friends in legal fees? If you turn to page 46 of the budget, Mr. Speaker, at 41(10), you will see that over the last 3 years the Prime Minister, as the Minister of Finance, has paid out a whopping \$14 million, and this is not monopoly money, by the way, this is real money, \$14,895,432.00 to his friends and family in legal fees. But that is only one line item, you know, \$14 million plus.

It does not end there. Get back. We are looking to pay \$300 million, Member. Where do you live? It doesn't end there. If you go down on the same page 46 to line item 1808, now somehow this found its way mysteriously into a Capital II project, legal fees you know, Capital II project. The Prime Minister as Minister of Finance paid out to his family and friends an additional \$12,719,926.00, bringing the grand total of this parallel underground operation to \$27 million, listen good, Members, \$27,615,358.00. You heard right; that is the magic number Members, that this Prime Minister has time and time again refused to disclose to the Belizean people. (Applause) Even though he was asked right here in this very House, all he said was that you were getting value for money.

That was all he could tell us. But it is \$27 million in 3 years for 1, 2, or 3 lawyers. Imagine that!

But that's not all, Mr. Speaker. I feel like I'm on a game show or something. That's not all because, even though the litigation to acquire BTL and BEL is supposedly at an end, your Prime Minister says it's at an end, the Prime Minister has in store for the upcoming budget, this very budget, an additional \$6 million, for this fiscal year to pay out to his special attorneys. And let me remind the Belizean people, Mr. Speaker, that if this figure, this \$27million plus the next \$6 million this figure does not even factor in Lady Lois. This is just since 2012. Remember now in the first term of this administration Lady Lois was the big winner. It is not \$5 million. I heard that it was close to \$13 million. So when it's all said and done, Members, this charade that we are taking part this is all nonsense. Your Prime Minister and his family are walking away with close to \$40 million in legal fees. (Applause) That is what they called it, legal fees. I am sure, Mr. Speaker, that many Belizeans are probably at home scratching their heads and wondering, what could these attorneys have possibly done to deserve \$27 millions in three years?

If you recall, Mr. Speaker, as with his previous budget speeches, the Prime Minister glorifies the BTL and BEL acquisitions as his crowning achievement in an attempt to try and create some sort of legacy for himself. But, Mr. Speaker, as each year passes by, whenever he mentions this supposed nationalization, his applause gets lower and lower as even his own people are now on to him. His own people are now realizing that this was all just one big family hustle, \$27 million for Lois, Denys and Naima, and the top job at BTL for his son, his tech savvy son; that's what he calls him, Anwar. How could the Prime Minister sleep at night knowing that he paid \$27 million in legal fees to his family when as a trained attorney he knew from the get go that he would have had to pay his good friend Lord Michael Ashcroft no matter how you twist and turn, Mr. Speaker, he knew you can't just take someone private property, he knew he would have had to pay for it. It was all a game, all a sham, all a charade. After demonizing this man for 7 long years, and after reaching the end of the legal road because it got all the way to the Caribbean Court of Justice. So these special attorneys collected at the Supreme, Court, they collected at the Court of Appeal and they collected at the Caribbean Court of Justice. And that is when the Prime Minister decided,(Alright, we've reached the end. I guess I can't make any more legal fees for my family. (That's right Leader, 2 times.) When he got to the end of the legal road, it is when, if you recall, he just jumped on a plane, went to Miami, hugged Ashcroft and said, "Oh, my good friend, I will give you whatever it is you want. I will give you \$167 million right now, and I will give you another \$200 million \$300 million or \$400 million whenever the arbitration court ruling comes back." He gave Ashcroft exactly what he wanted. So why do we have to pay \$27 million in legal fees? Does that make any sense to you all? Is it a percentage that they got? Is \$27 million a percentage of \$200 and something million or \$300 million that they will end up paying? Belizeans lost all around. We lost on the legal fees and we lost on the interest. Remember that \$52 million was for unnecessary interest because he wanted his family to make money going to the court instead. He could have avoided paying that \$52 million in interest. But no, my family has to eat, and they have to eat well. (Applause)

But what about the Belizean people, Mr. Speaker? Wasn't this nationalization supposed to be for the benefit of all Belizeans and not just Michael Ashcroft and the Barrows? If owning the phone company is supposed to help our

people, why are we paying the highest phone and Internet rates in the Caribbean? In this day and age, Mr. Speaker, why do we not have free Internet in all our schools? If this company is supposedly for Belizeans, Member for Port Loyola why 3 to 4 times per year BTL sponsors Jamaican artists you know to come here for one night perform once but yet they can't used any money to sponsor a studio for our local artists? (Applause) It is hundreds of thousands of dollars to bring in Jah Cure, and Tanya Stephens, and Junior Gang and what have you. Don't get me wrong I enjoy all those artists. But give me my Tanya Carter and Garifuna Collectives any day. (Applause) Now, Mr. Speaker, we are being told that BTL will now be paying a Chinese company \$40 million in LTE when, in fact, their competitors are only paying \$13 million. Do the mathematics. It is only \$13 million. So why is there such a disparity? It is \$40 million that BTL is paying for LTE. This is beyond bogus. This is getting ridiculous, Member.

But let's get back to the issue at hand. This seems to have awakened up your ants nest over there. You all are alive now? Do the mathematics for me please. It is \$40 million and \$30 million per month. Let me take the lead from my Leader. Who is making all these decisions supposedly in the name of the Belizean people, Mr. Speaker? If you recall, Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister said he put his son in charge of BTL because he was tech-savvy. Now I always meant, and you have to forgive me, Member, I always meant that tech stood for technology. But, if you ask normal Belizeans like Curtis Dale Swasey, what BTL did was that they take people's idea. (Applause) That is what the tech stands for. They take people's idea. They take people's concepts. If you ask the thousands of Belizean customers that used BTL, the prepaid customers, they only thing that this company is known for is to take your data and take your credit. Some people put in \$10 and make one phone call and their credit is gone. (Applause) And that is how you all say that BTL is for Belizean people. You all got some nerve you know. This is not tech-savvy, Mr. Speaker. This is called, *uno de tek Belizean peep le fe kunu munu*. So don't tell Belizeans, and if he was here I would address him, Mr. Prime Minister, that this company is for them. This company is for special Belizeans like your son, and you ex-wife, and your brother, Denys. You really should change the name from BTL to BPL. Anyone wants to know what that stands for? It is Barrow's Piñata Limited. That is what you all should change the name to, BPL (Applause) This thing even went to the Supreme Court, Mr. Speaker, and the Supreme Court Judge said that these sons of these top leaders of the UDP, do you know how he described them, Leader? Shady. He described those boys as shady. Imagine that! The judge said that that those boys are shady. In any other circumstance, Mr. Speaker, in any other company, the CEO and the Chairman of the Board, all of them would have been fired but not at BTL, not at Barrow Telemedia Limited. Instead what happened recently, the upper management right after this decision, they received big bonuses, hundreds of thousands of dollars in bonuses. Why do you think the staff of BTL was threatening to strike a few weeks ago? There has been no real change over at BTL for the workers, Mr. Speaker. All that this government has done was replace this demon, this white man oppressor that they referred to, with a Barrow oppressor. That is all that you all have done. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, the people of Belize want a full investigation into this company. They want to know the actual figures that "were spent and lost" in legal fees, and I put it in quotes. How much we've lost in all these bonuses paid out to Anwar and friends, all these Mek Mi Rich schemes? How much we have lost? The Belizean people want to feel like BTL is for them. Free up the Internet in the schools, man! Drop the phone and Internet rates! And I will use a term from the

Prime Minister, and for God's sake stop the thievery! Stop the corruption and stop the abuse at BTL once and for all! (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, in closing I want to show you just one more reason why it is that I cannot support this budget. If we look at the budget allocation, and it's a pity that you went before me. I would have wanted you to go after to explain this part for me. If you look at the budget allocation for the Ministry of Human Development, you will notice at page 128 at line 50, that it says grants. Now with every passing year I notice this section of the budget is getting even more and more vague as they go along because I checked last year's one it said, grants to individuals with disabilities. Are you familiar with that section? I will get there, man, wait. When you look at this first item under the grant, I seem to touch a nerve there again. You have to wait and listen, man. Just wait and you can talk after me if you want. Alright, this line item that says, and where are you going, man? Don't go anywhere. Grants to individuals with disabilities, of all the allocations in the budget, I find this particular one to be the most offensive, the most disrespectful, and the most insulting allocation. This government has chosen to exploit a very defenseless segment of our population, individuals with disabilities. Do you know how low you all stoop with this one here? Here at this line item the government is saying that over the last 4 years they have given out in excess, do all the mathematics again, of \$20 million in grants to individuals suffering with disabilities. Now I don't know if the Member for Port Loyola thinks that it is only his constituency that has individuals that are disabled, but I have come across hundreds of individuals with disabilities over the last year, and each time I meet them I ask them if anyone of them has ever received a grant from the Ministry of Human Development. And do you know what the answer is all the time, Member? The answer is no, not a penny! Mr. Speaker, I find this to be downright despicable.

Now I have my suspicions, Member, that this money went to vote buying. I have my suspicions, but I would want to give you a fair opportunity. No, man, I want you to answer this. If your government is truly committed to transparency and accountability or if any of you on that side of the House has a heart because this is really low, then you would take this opportunity to come clean to this nation and provide us with a proper accounting of how this \$20 million has been disbursed in the name of the disabled people of this country. (Applause) But until that time, and I won't hold my breath, Member, until that time, Mr. Speaker, for this and all the other bogus reasons, all the other bogus line items scattered across this budget, I simply cannot bring myself to support this budget. I thank you, Mr. Speaker. (Applause)

**HON. A. MARTINEZ (Minister of Human Development, Social Transformation and Poverty Alleviation):** Mr. Speaker, I just want to make a clarification because the Member was referring to page 128 that says grants.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Member, you have one minute.

**HON. A. MARTINEZ (Minister of Human Development, Social Transformation and Poverty Alleviation):** One minute, Sir, I want to make a point of clarification because he was pointing out as fact that in this book it has grants to individuals with disability, and that's not true. You mentioned that it is in line item 50 on page 128. It is in front of me here, Sir. So were you lying then? There is nothing in here with grants for people with disability, Sir. So I just wanted to clarify that.

**HON. M. HEREDIA JR. (Minister of Tourism and Civil Aviation):**

Mr. Speaker, I rise to give my contribution to the General Revenue Appropriation Bill for 2016/2017. First of all, let me applaud my people from Belize Rural South for having elected me for the fourth time as an Area Representative and two times in the local level as Mayor for San Pedro. But let me say that you know sometimes I feel disappointed when I hear some of the ridiculous things that are being said over there. I believe that our job is to try to serve as best as possible our constituency and I believe that that is the reason why in this last election I got the biggest margin ever in my political career because I serve my people. I serve my people well, and I believe that if you compare it, percentage wise, from the last election to this election I am the one that had the highest percentage probably between all my colleagues. I don't know from the other side but from my colleagues I believe that I got the highest percentage from the last election to this election. And I believe the reason why is because you serve well.

First of all, let me compliment the people from the Ministry of Finance who did an outstanding job in trying to make sure that we have a budget that will be in the interest of all Belizeans. I must say also that I have to applaud my Prime Minister as being a visionary and being one of the best leaders that this country has ever had. Probably one day one of the younger ones will be able to match that, but at this point I believe he is the best one. To the Member from Caribbean Shores, I must say that you seem to be a very good attorney, but I believe that before you speak about certain things you need to make sure that you get the facts from your dad. He knows exactly what happened in those days with what you were referring to. Do you remember Lufthansa? Lufthansa was probably one of the best things that could have happened to this country, and probably we would have had European flights coming now. But they took the Lufthansa contract and gave it to brother Billy and then that is why we ended up with this kind of mess. And do you know how much BAA gets out of that deal? It is \$50,000.00 per year. What a shame! That was your daddy's creation. So try to get the information from him because if I was to advise my son you know I would advise him wisely. Otherwise you might become the malignant tumor as your dad was. (Applause)

And then let me also say that in my constituency it is evident from the Petrocaribe Funds that much has been done and much more is coming. If anyone from the PUP wants me to walk them or ride them around the road that this Prime Minister has done for San Pedro, I couldn't even believe that that would happen so soon. Yet with the vision that he has we were able to go as far, I believe, we have about 12 miles, and it is going further to the Battle Jones Airstrip that we hope it will become the next international airport for private jets and private planes. That is what infrastructure brings. Infrastructure, like it or not, brings economic development. There is no country that doesn't have good infrastructure that will have economic benefits. Take, for instance, DR, (Dominican Republic). DR got, you know between DR, Jamaica and Nicaragua, almost \$12 billion out of the Petrocaribe. And DR spent millions of dollars into infrastructure connecting its five destinations into a circle that has seen DR increasing their tourism substantially.

And that is what will happen with the infrastructure that has been created by this administration. Sooner or later you will see the effects of this infrastructure. Already in that road in San Pedro I have seen cabanas being built on the side of that. We have seen other business people already putting businesses over there. That is what infrastructure does. It brings economics. So when we criticize these roundabouts you are talking about the wellbeing of people. Sooner



or later it will have economic impact. For instance, the Caracol archaeological site whenever that road is built you will see the economic impact that it has. Today we cannot market it the way we want because the infrastructure is so poor. When it rains, it is not accessible. So with the proper infrastructure you will see a big difference.

Now let me come to my Ministry. Mr. Speaker, in 2015, we saw the highest numbers in the tourism industry like never before. I believe 2015 has been our record year. And in the latter part of 2015, in November, we saw an increase of 33% in November, and in December we saw an increase of 22.5%. Then, in January of 2016, we have seen an increase of 24% from January of 2015. In February, we saw an increase of 18.4% over February of 2015; March has not yet been completed, but in the first two weeks of March we have seen a 13% increase over March of last year. I must say that because of that I must tell the Member from Fort George that that is the reason why we have seen that certain types not only of fish but of beef or other special cuts are being imported. We have to give our tourists and we have to give our guests what they want to eat. And for that same reason we have seen a huge number of fishermen diverting now into the tourism industry. Why? It is because it is now a lucrative industry. Fishermen have to work extremely hard. I was a fisherman myself for 30 years. So I know that area very well, and I know what it takes and what the poor people need to uplift themselves. Probably none of you over there have been through that hard physical work. So I know what the poor people need.

And let me say that I have to commend my Board of Directors from the BTB, and my Director. I have to commend the special people that are around me. I have to commend the private sector, our stakeholders who have been an integral part of this industry. Without them I believe that we wouldn't be where we are today. It is because of the humbleness of this Minister in not believing in power but believing in working together with private sector and working together with everyone that has to do with the cultural and aviation issues that we are where we are today.

In civil aviation, let me just say that we have practically refurbished almost all of our airstrips throughout this country, and we have built at least one new one. I can recall in the days of the PUP they used to call refurbishing before an election. Coroza which for many years they had three or up to four representatives from the PUP, they just used to patch it up and not thinking about the future of the tourism and not thinking about our people, but when you talk about making money, Member from Caribbean Shores, that is the way they used to do it. You find any type of project over there and a quarter of the money goes into the project and the rest goes into the pockets of those few chosen PUPs. That is the way the PUPs used to operate. We did Coroza at a cost of half of a million dollars. Today, if you go over there, the airstrip looks brand new. Eight years after and it is still brand new at a cost of half of a million dollars.

If you look at Placencia, again, it's the same thing, and we are looking into expanding Placencia shortly by putting lights over there so that the tourist industry can access the afterhours flights like Southwest and other airlines that are arriving on late flights. And if you look at Dangriga shortly before an election it was refurbish only that within a year it was practically gone. It costs over half of a million dollars. With this administration, the Dangriga Airstrip was refurbished with hot mix, not chip and seal, but hot mix with less than half of million dollars. Today we are expanding the Dangriga Airstrip to make it safer and favoured

because the tourism industry is about safety and service. And that is exactly what I am doing together with my team, giving people the best service, and for that reason we are seeing many, many, more tourists coming to this country.

I must also commend my airline development group for being able to lobby with other airlines and with existing airlines also so that we are able to attract more people and more tourists. I must say that during last year we were able to have Southwest which has really made a big difference in the tourism industry. Prices have gone down with many of the airlines, and Southwest has actually changed the nature of the airline business. Also we got COPA which is giving us now the South American market. South American market also caters to Europe which in return now you can come from Europe via COPA Airlines in Panama and arrive in Belize the same day which was something that you have never been able to do before. Mr. Speaker, we are also approaching other airlines, and we are hoping that before the ending of this year or probably at the ending of this year we will have WestJet coming directly from Canada. Never before have you seen so many airlines wanting to come or that are already coming over here. And hopefully in 2017 we will have JetBlue which is also another cost carrier that comes from the US, and we are looking also with Aero México from Mexico. Mexico is another good market, and I believe that with all the efforts and with all the work that this government has been doing I believe that we will have an extremely vibrant tourism industry.

Aviation, tourism and culture, they go hand in hand, and that is why Minister Aragon and myself have been working very closely to make sure that we have cultural tourism, and we are also looking at medical tourism. There are many types of tourism that we can attract to this country, and I believe that particularly, Mr. Speaker, we are supposed to encourage our local entrepreneurs to be able to invest in the tourism industry. We welcome the foreign investors, but we welcome also the local investors. And particularly I must commend, I said it last year and I must mention it today, I must commend Mr. Shawn Feinstein who has done an exceptional work in doing a resort north of San Pedro which is fantastic. You can compare it with the best of the best, and he is expanding already, non-stop, from one project to the other. It means to say that he is doing good, and they are creating a lot of jobs.

When we talk about job creation, I heard the other side saying that there is no job being created. But I can tell you that you can go around in all the tourist destinations and you can see development happening all around. You go in San Pedro, and numerous new resorts have been created. You go to Caye Caulker, and Caye Caulker, for the first time ever in my political career, I am seeing so many developments in tourism happening there. Plus, they have now such a wonderful beach that was created by the Belize Tourism Board because not only are we marketing but with prudence management we have been able to save and we are doing additional projects in the tourism destinations.

In the cruise tourism, talking about a port, I do agree with the Member from Caribbean Shores that we need a port. But we have to make sure that it is a sound investment. We have to make sure that it is in the guidelines of our government. There is no one that can come and railroad this government and want to have things done his way. There is a way to do it, and there is a right way to do it. I must mention that with the Carnival group they were granted an exclusive permit. Yet they turned around and gave Royal Caribbean an exclusive permit. Why in the world would good any government do this type of thing?

That will never happen under this administration. If we do things, we will do it right. And I agree that what they are saying about the Carnival is that they do have an exclusive contract that was given before Mr. Feinstein decided to take government to court for having this exclusivity. But what the court ruled is that you cannot have exclusivity and before that is over you are granted another exclusivity on top of that. That was what was ruled. So we have to be serious as a government if we want to attract serious companies.

And I can tell you that Harvest Caye when completed, it should be inaugurated I must say about the 15<sup>th</sup> November. That will be creating at least 500 new jobs in this country. And sometimes I am afraid that we might be going a little too fast because the tour guides that we have in San Pedro hopefully will be going to Placencia or to Harvest Caye because home is closer to them over there. The tour guides from the south will be doing better over there. Our archaeological sites, the craft people will be doing better, and the cultural people will be doing better. So the industry is moving, and we are creating jobs.

And, Mr. Speaker, at the borders which fall under the Ministry of Tourism, the Belize Border Management, I must also say that we have been doing exceptional improvements all over the borders. At the northern border, it is almost completed now and you will see an exceptional infrastructure at the borders. On the west, also, we have almost completed a new cargo building, and we have expanded on the surroundings also to give our tourists and our local people a better environment. And I must also say that during the times of the PUP the Border Management was a rocket. Time and time again they had to come to central government for payments to the \$18 million loan that was made to create the northern and the western borders. Gone are those days now because under this administration we generate sufficient income to be able to pay our debts, the \$18 million that was borrowed by the PUP and the little additional monies that we borrowed to do improvement. We have been doing self-sustainable with BMA, and that is the way we will continue so long as I am a Member of this government and so long as I am the Minister of Tourism and that is to show my humility and my honesty which I doubt anybody on that side can match my honesty and my humility.

In conclusion, let me say, Mr. Speaker, that I believe that this is a government that really believes in a pro-poor-government, and I believe that we have been serving the interest of the less fortunate very much. Otherwise we wouldn't have been returned to office again. And if we continue with this type of humility and kindness to our people we will be there for a fourth term. To conclude now, if we look at the dictionary and we look at the word arrogance, my good friend from Cayo South, you will see his picture in the dictionary when you see the word arrogance. (Applause) Mr. Speaker, I give my support to this budget. (Applause)

**HON. M. FINNEGAN (Minister of Housing and Urban Development):** Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the budget, Sir. Let me put it this way. I promise not to be here long, but I want to make my contribution to this very important matter which is the budget. Mr. Speaker, during the time of Jesus Christ the Pharisees were described as a social movement. People used to describe them as scholars. They were the learned ones. They enjoyed popular support; they believed in legalistic, and, Sir, often times they were vocal. They were experts in debates, just like the Member from Caribbean Shores. They were experts in the debates. In those days they were like lawyers. They were the

intellectual elite. They thought they were better than people, just like the Member from Caribbean Shores. As the Gospel of Matthew described them, Mr. Speaker, they were like whitewashed tombs, beautiful on the outside, but full of dead men's bones, Sir, just like the Member from Caribbean Shores and the others. The Pharisees, Mr. Speaker, it must be noted, that they were mostly bitterly people. They were bitter and deadly opponents of Jesus Christ and his teachings. They were so loved by God. But they turned out to be the most bitter opponents of Jesus Christ, Sir, and his message. Yet they wanted to enter the Kingdom of God, just like the Member from Caribbean Shores. (Applause)

When they go to church, Mr. Speaker, they don't sit to the back. The Pharisees, they sit in the front so that everyone could see them. They wear the best clothing, gold bracelet, thick and shiny. Their chains were not like my little one. Their chains were thick and juicy, Mr. Speaker, just like the Member for Caribbean Shores and the others across the aisle. (Applause) They were full of hate and deceit, Mr. Speaker. Jesus Christ, Mr. Speaker, had strong words of rebuke for the Pharisees. He spoke of the scribes and the Pharisees who sat sitting in the halls of justice encouraging their followers to practice what they tell them to do but not to follow what they do. Jesus went on to say that they preach but do not practice. They tied heavy burdens, hard to bear, and laid them on men's shoulders but they themselves do not move them with their fingers. Mr. Speaker, they are just like them across there. (Applause) In other words, Mr. Spekaer, if you interpret what was said back then in Jesus Christ's days and in the bible and how I described them just now, we in Belize would look at them as blue koncas, what they cannot eat they spoil.

Mr. Speaker, I listened a while ago to the Member from Caribbean Shores, and he did something I did not like. He started calling names and names of people's wife, etcetera. I don't want this to get out of hand. He is a young Member in this House. Stop calling the names of people's wives or ex-wives in parliament because when you have sash windows you do not throw stones, Sir. (Applause) A lot of names can be called. The Leader of the Opposition, just after accepting his post as the Leader of the Opposition, said that we must be friendly to one another, and we must discuss the issues. There must be no name calling, insinuations and aspersions on people's character and name. Please be very careful because we on this side can call a lot of names and say a lot of things. I will not go into that right now, Mr. Speaker. I will deal with the budget. As an old Parliamentarian and a senior man in this House, I think the only persons that are senior than me in this House are my good friend from Fort George Division and the Prime Minister. I think the Leader of the Opposition and I came into this Honourable House together. Am I correct? Alright! So we are second in line, and we must teach our young colleagues the right road and the right path.

Mr. Speaker, if you listen to the Pharisee across there from Caribbean Shores, (Applause) he cast aspersion on family members of the Prime Minister in connection with their legal profession, and he tried to paint a picture and gave the public an impression that these family members collected some \$40 million in terms of legal fees being paid out to them. Mr. Speaker, that is absolutely not true. That is an untruth, Mr. Speaker. He fabricated the notion and he used the figure that is in the book and he decided as the Pharisee, who will get \$5 million, who will get \$4 million, who will get \$3 million and who will get \$1 million. Mr. Speaker, that is not so. Those are monies that were allocated for legal contractions as far the government is concerned. All those monies are not monies for legal fees, Mr. Speaker, but he lied and tries to give the impression and cast aspersion

on my good friend, Denys Barrow, and his daughter who is my niece, Naima Barrow. I will not sit here in this House and sit idly by and sit quietly and allow him to do that. (Applause) I will cast no aspersions, Mr. Speaker, on that Pharisee, absolutely none. I will not be rude to him. I will not say anything negative, but I am asking him to be very, very careful because he will not like it. I am telling you. Listen to me careful. You know, Mr. Speaker, when they tell you that things can get nasty, please do not step out of your lane! Stay in your lane! (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, he went on, the Pharisee went on to try to debase, derogate, or I should say deprecate the Prime Minister's son. That is a new language. You must read. When you read, you will learn words. (Applause) Read and you will learn. Every week or every month I read 2 or 3 books you know. You get your education through reading. I did not go to school and sat down in front of the professor. I learn out here. I got my bachelor, master and PhD which came from out here. (Applause) All I have is a primary school certificate on my wall because out here when I earned my bachelor, and my Master and my PhD they didn't gave me a paper to show that i have it, but when you talk they know you got it. (Applause) School is Hard Knocks.

Mr. Speaker, yes, he tried to deprecate the Prime Minister's son who is the CEO at BTL. Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's son, Anwar Barrow, is not at BTL because he is the Prime Minister's son. He is at BTL because he is ably equipped to do the job. He is university trained. He has a degree. He has his own private business. He is an intelligent young man. He is a bright upcoming young man. BTL is running the way it should run on stream, going properly, and the Belizean public, as far as I am concerned, is embracing his management of BTL, Mr. Speaker. (Applause) But do you know what is the problem? They, the Pharisees across there, they have shares in the next telephone company and they want to see the BTL be destroyed and BTL go in the ground. If BTL go down in the ground, Mr. Speaker, then they will prosper and then they will make more money. But, as far as I am concerned, I give praises to the Prime Minister's son. I am appreciative of his efforts, appreciative of his talent, appreciative the way he is managing BTL, and, Mr. Speaker, I think all of us on this side should applaud him. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, furthermore with this BTL, I encourage all my friends to call me from a Digicell phone. Don't call me on any Smart phone. Digicell phone belongs to the Government and people of Belize. (Applause) When you buy a Digicell phone and you used that Digicell phone and participate with BTL, you are participating with your country, your government and yourself. (Applause) You are not to use another phone company that is owned by a white man who sends the money out there where they go. I am not casting any aspersion, but at the same time if you want to use the white man's phone I don't have any problem. You can use the phone because some people think that the white man is better than me, but they are not better than me. That is how the Pharisees used to think, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, now let's examine the Pharisee from the Caribbean Shores. Mr. Speaker, you see how dishonest he can be. I don't want to use the word liar like what the Honourable Member from Fort George said, but he went to the budget book, the Creole called it the big book and he turned to page 128, Mr. Speaker. He said that on page 128, and you can look at item 50, and that under item 50 you have \$20 million for individual persons with disability. Mr. Speaker, you know the reason why I am discussing this especially coming from the

Pharisee from the Caribbean Shores, Mr. Speaker, is that I was born with a disability, and I have overcome my disability to reach where I am. I really resent the Member from Caribbean Shores, that Pharisee because he used people with disability to advance his political agenda. (Applause) He tried to maliciously, thank you, Member from Port Loyola, maliciously incorporate people with disability and used them, Mr. Speaker, in order to forward his political agenda. How dishonest can people be! What a dishonest person he is! (Applause) The book is right here, and there is nothing about \$20 million in here you know, Mr. Speaker. there is only \$ 4 million which is to be split into individual grants, organizational grants, institutional grants, and care for wards of the state. There is nothing with disability here, Mr. Speaker. He actually came to this House, Mr. Speaker, and referred to page 128, item 50, and maliciously prepared to use people with disability to forward his PUP and his Caribbean Shores agenda, that Pharisee. (Applause) Mr. Speaker, what devious and pernicious and malicious Pharisee he is! (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, he went on to try and bring down BTL and how much money we will pay for BTL. (When I put my foot on the chair, please do not think that it is disrespect, Mr. Speaker. I have a little back problem as you all know, and sometimes I feel like it's causing me a strain. So when I put my foot up it gives me some sort of relief. But maybe it's because I think I'm still young and use my back too much.) (Applause) (But, Mr. Speaker, I hope no one misinterpret what I am saying because some people like to listen to your conversation and take your words and turn it to suit them. But please don't think of any rudeness about what I am saying. I know very well what I am talking about, and if you don't know please ask me. He tried to belittle and bring down BTL, Mr. Speaker, and he tried to bring down BTL to the ground. It was under his father's watch that they sold BTL to Prosser for \$60 million and then they bought it back for \$40 million. That Pharisee from Caribbean Shores should be the last person, Mr. Speaker, he should be the last person to talk about sell- -and- buy-it back.

But you know, Mr. Speaker, while we are on the topic of sell and buy it back, the Opposition has got to change its face; they have to renew their attack. The strategy that they are using is not working. I am very worried about the Opposition. If they are using a strategy and it is not working, they have got to shift course. They are beating the same thing over and over; they used the same thing for election, and at every election the people reject them. They were rejected at the town council elections. At the village council elections, they were rejected. At the national elections, they were again rejected, and at the by-elections they were rejected. Oh my goodness, shift your course! Mr. Speaker, they tried to shift course and they came to Belmopan. But when they came to Belmopan they decided they will take a UDP that the UDPs rejected and bring to Belmopan. What's his name? Patrick Andrews. But Patrick Andrews, and I told the Member from Fort George Division that they will not be able to handle him. I told him to just give him like 5 or 6 months, and they will be sorry that they allowed him to become a PUP because we knew and we had to get rid of him. (Applause)

He is a Pharisee too, Mr. Speaker. They are blue Koncas because what they cannot eat they spoil. Mr. Speaker, we had to get rid of him. Anyway he joined the PUP, and he followed Francis. All of a sudden Francis turned God for Patrick Andrews. But Johnny beat them well, and I clap and applaud him. When

the election was over, do you know what he did? He stole all the things from the PUP office and went with it. The Chairman of the PUP in Belmopan had to report him to the police here, and the police went to him and told him, "Mr. Andrews, please take back the stuff. Those things are for the PUP. They are not for you." And do you know what is the most shameful part of the thing, Mr. Speaker? He stole the things, and he had to take them back. (Applause) He stole the people's stuff, and he had to take it back. But I am telling you, my friends, if you all want to win an election, Andrews and those ones will never win an election in Belmopan for you all. They will never go to the people in Maya Mopan and Salvapan and hang out with them, or sit down with them, or dance with them and hold their hands like you and I. No, they think that they are better than people. They are like the Pharisees. Remember Jesus had to scold them and tell them about the way they were dressed and how they move around and think that they are better than people. Those people at Salvapan and Maya Mopan here in Belmopan will never vote for that Pharisee. He is like that one from Caribbean Shores. He is here by mistake because if the gentleman who ran against him had listened to me he would not have gotten here. But they didn't listen. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, I will show you how they behave now. My friend, the Member from Pickstock, who I love dearly and who is my friend and colleague, and the man that ran against him, Dr. Smith, I also love him dearly. Doctor Smith is my personal friend but he is a PUP. That is the only mistake that he has made. He is a PUP. So I cannot support him. But, as usual, I turned 66 years old on January 18. You were not here. I celebrated my 66<sup>th</sup> birthday. I have good PUP friends. I invited them to come to my house, Doctor Smith is one of them, and to share my 66 years with me. I told him and his brother Ralph, "Come and join me." Me and them are friends, and I don't hide my friends either, and I am not afraid to own up to my friends. My daughter published my party on Facebook with all my pictures for the world to see. One night I sat in my bed and I put on the television, and watched Krem news, and Krem news was showing my birthday party and the pictures were on the news. But just hearing the angle that they took, the news anchor said, "The one all the way to the back is Doctor Smith. That is Finnegan sitting down behind, and there is Dean Lindo there." Mr. Speaker, I didn't know you live in a country where all my friends have to UDP, not me. I have a lot of PUP friends that I like dearly, right across there right now. I don't see many of them at the moment but I see the Honourable Member from Orange Walk Central, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, who I sincerely like him. Are you going to get mad with me because I like Jonny Briceño? I have got a right to like him, and he likes me too. So what is wrong with that. (Applause) Mr. Speaker, you see the Member there from Cayo South, a lot of the people across here don't like him, most of them. But I don't care. I like him. I see him like a warrior like me because he will get up and fight and throw blows and jabs and punch. So what is wrong with that? Because we sit on different sides in the House and there are people across this side and people across that side, does that mean that we are to hate one another? There are good PUPs and there are good UDPs, and the ones you like are your friends and I don't choose my friends because of PUP or UDP.

Let me get back to my friend, the Honourable Wilfred Peter Elrington from Pickstock. Mr. Speaker, we have been trying our best to deal with the Guatemalan issue. I will come to the Pharisees in a little while on that. Mr. Speaker, we decided under the PUP, that we will join one another and we will approach this Guatemalan situation in unity in order to bring strength and so that we fight the Guatemalans together. This initiative came about by the PUP when

Manuel Esquivel was leader of our party and the now Prime Minister was Deputy Prime Minister. But, Mr. Speaker, when it suits the PUP and when we were going into the election last year, they forgot that we signed a unity bond. Now all of a sudden black Sedi, black Finnegan and black Barrow started to sell out the country to Guatemala. Now can you imagine me who can't even talk Spanish but I am selling out to Guatemala the country that I love because I heard the person that they put to run against me and who did so poorly said that a vote for Finnegan is a vote for Guatemala. Could you imagine, Mr. Speaker!

But, Mr. Speaker, what they did not know is that for 30 years a political party tried to convince the people of this country that George Price was selling out this country lock, stock, and barrel to Guatemala, and they used the Guatemalan issue for 30 years to try gain political power and to tarnish the image of George Price to get political power. And every election, when that political party run against Mr. Price and the PUP, every election they lost. The people did not buy it. It was a farfetched issue. How could a man, one man, as far as I am concerned, with all the intelligence in this country, sell out a country lock, stock, and barrel to the Guatemala? Maybe the Englishman was trying to make us believe so as well, but the people did not buy into it. Mr. Speaker, how history could repeat itself? The same PUP, 30 years or 40 years later, turned around and tried to use the same Guatemalan issue in order to reach political power, and the people rejected it again. The people are telling us politicians from that side and from this side, let us work in unity, let us approach this Guatemalan issue with sensible mind, and let us guide this country through muddy and rough waters and bring about a resolution to the Guatemalan dispute.” (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, in 1980, Philip Goldson told the then PUP Government, “You are rushing this country into independence, but while you are rushing this country into independence I want to sing a message to you, make sure that before you get independence have a sensible defense guarantee for this country. If you don't get a sensible defense guarantee for this country, the Guatemalans will bully us.” That is the word he used. “They will encroach on our borders until they devour us eventually.” They said to Philip Goldson, and don't say that I am anti-independence you know. I am just telling you all what happened with Philip Goldson and what transpired. They said to Philip Goldson, “Yes, we are getting independence from the British Government but the British Government is going to give us a defense guarantee.” When Goldson asked, “What kind of defense guarantee? “They said to Philip Goldson. “The defense guarantee will be for an appropriate period.” Philip Goldson then asked, “What is an appropriate period? “They refused to tell Goldson what was an appropriate period. Mr. Goldson said to them, “Be careful, and I am sounding a warning that when that appropriate period is over you will see the Guatemalans bullying us and encroaching on our borders.” And Phillip Goldson was right. He was prophetic, Mr. Speaker.

The appropriate period is over. The Guatemalans believe that they can do what they want with us. They want to bully us, Mr. Speaker, and I am afraid that eventually hostility will take place in that Sarstoon River and on our borders, and I pray to God that this government and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and our leaders in this House on both sides could guide this process that this country do not reach that stage.

Mr. Speaker, can you remember carefully when the British were here and the BDF used to be up and down the river. You did not hear about any Guatemalan boat or any Guatemalan soldier in the river because they knew the



British people were here. The British were a deterrent to them. So they didn't used to mess with this country when the British people were here. When the Guatemalans used to see the harrier jets from England flying over Belize and they see all of the harrier jets coming over and over the country of Belize, the Guatemalans used to hide in a corner. But they come up now like big fat dogs because they feel like we are defenseless. They feel like our military is weak and soft and I think they are misjudging us because our military is not weak and soft. But so they think, Mr. Speaker, and they think that they have a right to bully us and chance us, and they think they have a right to take advantage of us. But, Mr. Speaker, it will come a time when the people of Belize. We will stand up and fight like in 1798. (Applause) We will stand and fight. And when we stand and fight, Mr. Speaker, who have to die or go will have to die for your country. I will die for my country. (Applause) I barely could move, Mr. Speaker, but I will die for this country. This is the greatest country on the face of the earth. When God made this world and he set our ancestors on this part of the earth, he was thinking about me and you, Sir. (Applause) It was not about the Pharisees. I am prepared to fight, I am prepared to die for my country, and the Guatemalans must not take us lightly.

Now, Mr. Speaker, let's go to the ICJ. I was one of the Members on this side of the House who was concerned about the ICJ and was worried if the ICJ could work, and I had my reservations. But with all that has transpired and all the arguments which have been made, Mr. Speaker, I am now convinced that the ICJ is the place to take this matter. (Applause) And I will use all my influence to have this matter resolve by going to the ICJ, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, in winding up, I always try to see what the PUP did and whether they were right you know. And, Mr. Speaker, the PUP wants to tell this country, this is the impression they gave, that paraquat spraying of marijuana fields began under the Esquivel Administration. What an untruth! The Paraquat spraying of marijuana fields began under the PUP Administration, Mr. Speaker. Vernon Harrison Courtenay, now deceased, went to blows with the PUP when they began spraying Paraquat in this country. To give the people the impression that the spraying of Paraquat started under the Esquivel Administration, Mr. Speaker, is to tell an untruth.

Mr. Speaker, they gave the impression that the Esquivel Administration sold the southern part of the Newtown Barracks to the then Ramada Hotel.

**HON. J. BRICEÑO (Leader of the Opposition):** Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I'm sorry, but what does this have to do with the budget? You asked us to keep the debate based on the budget. The Member from Caribbean Shores was talking about budget.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Well, I allowed the Member from Stan Creek West to talk about a wide range of things.

**HON. J. BRICEÑO (Leader of the Opposition):** But this has nothing to do with the budget, man, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Yes, neither what he said, but I allowed him to have his say. You can't have it one way or the other, Member. He's winding up, man.

**HON. M. FINNEGAN (Minister of Housing and Urban Development):** He gave me a little ease just now because my foot was hurting just now. Mr. Speaker, my good friend from Stann Creek West opened up the room. When you tried to stop him at many instances, do you remember I tried to tell you, Mr. Speaker? Mr. Speaker, I told you that he was opening an ants nest and that when I start you will not stop me because you are giving him leverage. Give me my leverage now. What they didn't say, Mr. Speaker, was that the same PUP Government sold the northern end of the Newtown Barracks to the then Prime Minister's brother. Save the Barracks! But they didn't said to you that the middle section of the Newtown Barracks the Government of Belize developed it into one beautiful park, such a lovely idea, and the government was given no credit for the middle of the park. The PUP sold one end, and the UDP sold one end, and Darrell Bradley, a UDP, and the Belize City Council saved the middle of it, Mr. Speaker. But they didn't tell you that Bradley and the UDP saved the middle of it. They told you that he sold it. They told you that the UDP sold the southern end, but they didn't told you that the PUP sold the northern end. And they didn't told you that Bradley and the UDP saved the middle of it, and the BTL Park is the best thing that could have ever happened to Belize. I cannot believe that we have a park that is so lovely and so nice. (You don't live in Belize City, Johnny. I want you to see how much people go to that park. (Applause) Leader of the Opposition, to be truthful, when my foot is hurting in the night, and I take my walking stick because I walk with a walking stick, my daughter and my son take me in their car and say, "Daddy, let's go to the park to sit for a while." I would stretch out my feet. They would bring me a little beer or a soft drink, and we eat something out there, and I enjoy the park. While I am out there, I noticed that there are hundreds of Belizeans out there, and all the functions out there I attend. But when I attend functions now, Sir, I have to take my chair because I can't stand up anymore. So I go with my little chair and sit down. When I go to the MCC Grounds to watch the football games, poor me, I have to take my chair. I am getting old.)

Mr. Speaker, let me go on. I haven't heard about roundabouts so much in my life. Roundabouts, roundabouts, well, let me go to one place. Let me start at one spot. Mr. Speaker, if you go to San Ignacio, Cayo Central, Santa Elena, and San Ignacio, Cayo North, Mr. Speaker, you will believe that you are in a little part of Miami. I am telling you the God's truth. (Applause) When you go down to Joseph Andrews Drive and you peruse down Joseph Andrews, and you take all the streets, Teodocio, Ochoa Street, all the other streets down there and you are at Joseph Andrews, it looks like this Barrow Administration spent like \$10 million alone in San Ignacio. When you go to Cayo Central, Mr. Speaker, it's the same thing. (Landy, when you come off the roundabout and you go down that big street on your right hand side, what is the name of that street? I wonder if you understand what I am telling you.) (Applause) Loma Luz what a beautiful area! It is all because of the beloved United Democratic Party.

But, brother, hear I know that Andrews would never win anyway. You go to the back at Salvapan, what's the name of the other places there? They are Maya Mopan, and Las Flores, and those streets are much better than the streets in the Mesopotamia Division. I got mad at one point and I asked, "Prime Minister Barrow, what is going on? Will John and the others get all the money?" Then I began to get Amara and Euphrates. I got West Street, I got Plue Street, and George Street, but I had to go and fight for mines. When I went to Las Flores and when I went to Maya Mopan and Salvapan and I sat down there and when the votes came in, I knew the Member was going to win. Lord, a lot of money was spent at that

area. The place looked like a town. I am telling you the truth, Mr. Speaker. I am not exaggerating I am trying to be as honest and straightforward. The UDP has transformed the looks of this country. (Applause)

And then let me tell you something about my good friend, and I hate to go after what my friend from Cayo South, said. He said that we invested a hundred and odd million dollars in streets, roads and bridges and thirty odd million dollars a community assistance and some other item, he said, but did you heard what was his argument? None of the items that we invested money in brought back money back to the government. So because no money will come back to the government for the free roads and streets, according to his thinking, I know it does, but if it was not even so that no money will come back to the government because we fixed the streets and the bridges, does that mean that we are to live in a dilapidated country? Something is wrong with him. Because you give out social assistance, community assistance, Mother's Day cheers, Christmas cheers and other cheers to the poor of this countrywide and you spent X millions of dollars and there is no return, does that mean that you are not to give the poor people anything? My God something is wrong with their thinking. (Applause) Everything that you spent money on, does it means that you have to get money back on it? The world does not go like that, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, I am coming now to where they were trying to attack the Member from Orange Walk North, the Deputy Prime Minister. Under the Deputy Prime Minister's stewardship in Orange Walk, Mr. Speaker, this country hasn't given out so much land like this, and it was given out to the poor people of this country. You can ask every Area Representative that. (Applause) Mr. Speaker, I have got to applaud the Area Representative from Orange Walk North. The Member says he is leaving, and I am sorry he is leaving. But, Mr. Speaker, the amount of work that he has done for this party, for his other colleagues in the northern part of this country, and generally for the poor people, especially in my division, in terms of house lots and so on, I have got to congratulate you, Mr. Deputy Prime Minister. I will take off my hat to you. (Applause) We might not sing the same tune every time, but my friend; as far as I am concerned you are a dandy. So what is wrong with that? (Applause) And if the Deputy Prime Minister wants to go, well, then he is free to go. That is the Deputy Prime Minister's business. He might have gotten enough. After a while you get enough of this, you go and ask the Member for Fort George and you could ask me. You get enough. So what is wrong with that?

But, Mr. Speaker, to wrap up all my matter, I was going into more matters you know. But, Mr. Speaker, I was going into more matters, but when I tell you that my leg is hurting it is hurting. You see there is a disc in my back, and the disc is worn, and when they meet with one another there is no flesh between the disc. I am trying to teach you something because you might get there when you get older. It squeezes the nerve, and when it squeezes the nerve like it is doing right now it pinches you, and when it pinches it runs all the way to your leg and into your ankle and it squeezes your ankle, but I am a man. I can take a licking. (Applause) From since I was born I am taking a licking, Sir. (Applause)

See my friend here coming in, no one loves you more than me, and I say it publicly. Do you understand me? But you see people strive with politician. Some people want me to quarrel with Cordel Hyde. Why? It is because they benefit from the quarrel. They used whatever dispute we have in the House and the hatred for one another so that they can benefit off of it and make money off of it.

I am telling you all the truth, Members from across the other side. I don't not dislike none of you all. I think most of you all across there are good, decent people. That is from me. I do not care what the rest across here think. I am telling you how I think. And I will not quarrel with none of you. This is politics. You have a philosophy. I have a philosophy. You have a way how you want to move the country. I have got my own way how I want to move the country. And so what is wrong with that? Do you know how to solve that problem? You take it to the people of Belize and you ask the people of Belize, if they want to go the PUP way or they want to go your way. And let them decide. But I do not hate any of you. I think a lot of you are special people, especially you, Julius; you are very special to me. (Applause)

And you are a good man to me and the people of Mesopotamia Division, you, the Leader of the Opposition, you can use it for a political ad too. The Member from Orange Walk Central, you were good when you were the Minister of Natural Resources. You were good to the voters of the Mesopotamia Division. When I used to go to you and I go with my little file and my papers you scratched and signed them all. I got all my stuff for my people and I didn't had to come back. I sat down, wait, and I got them. I told my people that I could never forget that at one time I went to do a transaction at the Lands Department, but I left and went to do other business and I didn't left the amount of money that I was to pay at Lands. I think it was like \$300, \$400 or \$500 I had to pay. The same Johnny Briceño paid it for me. When I got back there, he said, "Mike, you owe me X amount of money because you didn't give me the complete amount". I gave him his money. I am glad you are the Leader of the Opposition. You have a kind and a good heart; you are a good human being. I am just mentioning these personal experiences that I had with you. I am giving you the experience based on what he has done for the poor, black people in my division, the Mestizo people in my division, the Mayan people in my division, the East Indian people in my division, and I applaud and thank you for what you have done. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, back to the budget, on that note I think others want to talk, and others want to make their contribution to this wonderful budget. Mr. Speaker, I had to take time out in order to bring my attention to the Pharisee from Caribbean Shores. Be careful how you walk! Be careful how you thread! Stop getting personal with people. And stop calling family member's name in this House and telling untruth on them and fabricating story. I don't think that is a right way to go as a young Member. That is a nasty way you are going, and there is a thing called tit for tat. *Knife whe stick sheep stick goat.* That is an old Creole saying. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, I now rest my case. I want to wish all my friends in this House a happy Easter. I want to congratulate the press for the good job they have done in covering the Sittings and the debates in this House of Representatives. When I say the press, I mean the total press, Channel 5, Channel 7, KREM News, Pastor Wade station. Every one of them I am congratulating. I think they are doing a wonderful job. Let me give you a story about the press before I go. If the press do something that you don't like, it doesn't mean that the press is bad, and you will vilify the press, and you will run down the press. We will not run down the media, man. We cannot afford to run down the media. The media must operate freely. The media must operate under a fair mind. The media must be free to criticize and critique any of us in this House, and the media must be free to critique our policies. The media must be free to critique how we handle the Guatemalan issue. It doesn't mean the media is against us, but that is their job,

and we must congratulate them. And whenever the media start to get personal any one of them starts to get personal I know when they are getting personal, and I will tell them when they are getting personal.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, I want to wish Brandon Cattouse, the cyclist, the best on Saturday. My heart and my family blood and the country are behind him. Mesopotamia is behind him, because that is the horse. I have put my money on, Mr. Speaker. My money is there and I want no return, I want as the return for the country of Belize a victory from Brandon Cattouse, Mr. Speaker. And on that note, Sir, can I sit down please?

**MR. SPEAKER:** Yes, you may.

**HON. M. FINNEGAN (Minister of Housing and Urban Development):** Thank you. (Applause)

**HON. J. MAI (Orange Walk South):** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to comment on the fiscal budget for 2016/2017. It is the fourth year, Mr. Speaker, that I have the privilege to stand in this Honourable House to represent the humble and hardworking people of the Orange Walk South Constituency. I must say, Mr. Speaker, that no amount of money, Petrocaribe or other, intimidation, threats or illegal transfers were able to challenge the will of the residents of Orange Walk South. And for that I am grateful and proud of them, and, therefore, I must carry out my duty for them.

As it is customary, Mr. Speaker, we in the PUP do not represent ourselves in this Honourable House. We represent the people, hence my remarks here today are based on the views and the intelligence gathered from the many stakeholders we met during the consultations. So I take this opportunity to also thank all the stakeholders who attended our consultation sessions.

The question that everyone asked is how will this budget affect our livelihood or living conditions? Will it be positive or negative? How will this budget affect our business? Will it grow or will it continue to shrink? The papaya people, Mr. Speaker, who lost employment are anxiously waiting to hear what is there in this budget that will signal the rebirth of a similar industry that will give them desperately needed employment and income. The cane farmers, Mr. Speaker, are hoping to hear that a program will be started regarding fresh injection of capital that will ensure that the industry will survive. The citrus growers are glued on to their radios in their orchards hoping and listening to the announcement that the Central Bank has approve their loan so that they can get paid and that monies will be available to replant the thousands of acres of orchards that are dying because of citrus greening disease. The shrimp producers, Mr. Speaker, are waiting for the announcement that the millions needed to start over has been approved or it has been sourced and that they will be fine in revitalizing their farms. Mr. Speaker, we will have to provide them with the sad news none of what they need, none of what could be expected from a caring government, will be heard today. There is nothing, nothing that has been contemplated in this budget for them.

The Prime Minister presented his budget entitled “Stability in Times of Change”. Some of the adjectives which the Prime Minister used to complement his budget are: bold, sterling stewardship, monumental advances, sturdy and stable, feast of progress. Mr. Speaker, these are all superlatives, just words of the highest order, but simply words. Let us, indeed, do the analysis, Mr. Speaker, to

see what this budget offers. Mr. Speaker, everyone has discussed the revenues, expenditures, deficit and amortization costs. What we do know, Mr. Speaker, is that the government will have to source BZ\$150 million to balance this budget. The recurrent expenditure, Mr. Speaker, is \$959 million. Total revenue is \$1.08 billion. This means, Mr. Speaker, that 88% of the total revenue collected goes towards maintaining the public service. And this has been growing, Mr. Speaker. Can you imagine that out of every dollar collected by GOB only \$0.12 goes towards projects and programs? This, Mr. Speaker, is totally unacceptable, and this is growing more and more as cronies are employed by the government on a monthly basis.

The business the private sector and agriculture sector are taxed boldly to maintain the public service. This, Mr. Speaker, cannot continue. The recurrent expenditure, as a rule of thumb, should never exceed 60% and should never grow by 10% annually, especially when our economy is barely growing by 1% to 2%. Where will the additional sums come from, Mr. Speaker, taxes, loans, begging from our friends? This is bad business, Mr. Speaker, and this is what this government does.

And this budget, Mr. Speaker, is indisputably proof of this very bad business approach. And then only 12% of total monies collected will be allocated for capital programs and projects. No wonder, Mr. Speaker, no wonder there is nothing for the cane farmer, nothing for the papaya, rice, sugar cane, citrus or shrimp producers in this budget not even after the corn producers lost \$30 million as a result of the drought. But, yes, Mr. Speaker, one day of rainfall in Belize City and all of a sudden there was a huge flood, and the government provides \$4.5 million in flood assistance. We still don't even know the value of damage caused by the one-day flood, but \$4.5 million was approved, and yet nothing for the farmers who lost \$30 million.

Mr. Speaker, this year is worse than previous years. Let me say why. If there are many public servants but no operation and capital resources, we will end up having many public servants with nothing to do. Extension officers will have no demonstration on experimental plots to do; they will have no training activities. The Customs Department will have no fuel and money to buy spare parts hence to patrol and do their job effectively. The Department of Environment will also be faced with the same restrictions, unable to get their badly needed equipment. Fisheries, Mr. Speaker, will be unable to get their equipment to patrol our waters and render technical assistance. Mr. Speaker, this will lead to a completely dysfunctional and unmotivated and already frustrated public sector. So, Mr. Speaker, we'll end up with many well-trained people in offices with not much to do.

Mr. Speaker, the debt forecast for 2017 is \$3.0 billion. That is equivalent to 81.4% of the GDP. This means, Mr. Speaker, that every man, woman and child in this country are saddled with a debt of \$8,244.50. Every family of 5 is saddled with a debt of \$41,222.00. What is bold about indebting the young and old people of this country? The sad part and the very sad part is that almost 50% of these people are already living in poverty, Mr. Speaker, and unable to feed themselves and their families, and yet they are indebted. The Prime Minister refers to this budget as a budget of "Stability in Times of Change." The Prime Minister refers to his actions, actions that many believed have sunk this country's economy, as sterling stewardship." He states that the economy is sturdy and stable when we have the highest percentage of GDP debt in Central America and the lowest GDP

growth in Central America. We have the highest percentage of GDP debt in Central America. El Salvador's and Nicaragua's debt are at 52% of their GDP compared to Belize's 81.4%. The lowest in the Central American region is our next door neighbour, Guatemala which stands at 25%.

And talking about GDP, Mr. Speaker, the countries with the highest debt are the countries with the lowest GDP growth. This clearly indicates that as our debt continues to grow, the country's economy continues to shrink, and our unemployment rate increases. Real incomes will decline, and our living standards will also decline. Jamaica and Barbados have the highest indebted rate in the Caribbean of 146% and 100%, respectively, but they also have the lowest GDP growth of 1.7% and 1.4%. But, Mr. Speaker, these two countries do not have the advantage that we in Belize have. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, as a country we are blessed. We have thousands of acres of arable land to put to production. Only 15% of our land is used productively annually. We have room to grow. All we need to do, Mr. Speaker, is to invest in the productive sector and we have space for that. And we need to manage our sector for high productivity and competitiveness. We have the best, hardworking farmers, we have knowledge, and we have the motivation, which are the building blocks for success.

The Central Bank, Mr. Speaker, indicated that GDP growth will remain the same, 1.5% to 2%. But why is this so? Why must this be for us in Belize when a recent IDB report indicates that the Central American Region should have growth of at least 4% to 5% due to the low cost of fuel experienced during 2015? So, Mr. Speaker, why is it that Belize's economy will continue to shrink when other countries near us will grow? What will this Government do to change the downward forecast? Mr. Speaker, clearly it is noted that as the agriculture productive sector reduces output, so does the economy contract. Our economy depends greatly on the significant contribution of agriculture in the primary and secondary sectors.

But the truth of the matter, Mr. Speaker, is that the health of the agriculture sector is in an awful, horrifying, and scary situation. Every single agro industry in this country is in chaos: papaya, corn, rice, sugar cane, citrus, and shrimp. Particularly, Mr. Speaker, sugar cane and citrus are in a situation which experts refer to as irreversible. Papaya is dead. So, Mr. Speaker, that is why I believe that there will be little or negative growth in 2017 in agriculture because agriculture is what drives this economy. But it needs not to be this way, Mr. Speaker. If we had only invested some and I say some, Mr. Speaker, of the millions squandered on roads and streets that are already breaking up today, had we invested some of these funds on agriculture, the picture today would have been totally different. Three hundred and twenty-five million dollars of Petrocaribe resources is said to have been invested in infrastructure. Do we know the exact figures, Mr. Speaker? Whatever the figure, that's an awful lot of money. How much good could that have done for Belize if we, Mr. Speaker, would have invested it with some business sense?

Today many of the roads are breaking up. I believe that, first, they will inaugurate the patched work, and thereafter they will inaugurate the roads. In Belize City, Mr. Speaker, the steel is shooting up already. In Orange Walk, major patched work is already underway, less than a year after the completion. Can you believe that, Mr. Speaker? On the San Antonio Road they have patched up two sections, and it is breaking up again. But not a penny, not a single penny went to

the agriculture sector. In the minds of many, that explains, Mr. Speaker, the high indebtedness and the marginal GDP rate and an agonizing agriculture sector.

Mr. Speaker, turning to the revenues and expenditures, I would like to address the budget for the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Sustainable Development. Before I address that, Mr. Speaker, I want to first make reference to the manifesto of the UDP for 2015. This I did, Mr. Speaker, to ascertain whether there is congruence and coherency between the political goals of this vision document and whether even incrementally, as would be expected, the budgetary allocations would achieve these goals. Regrettably, Mr. Speaker, when I examined the recurrent and capital expenditure allocations for agricultural it is immediately apparent that there is no resemblance, no correlation between the vision document of the UDP and what the budget can accomplish.

This agriculture section has been broken up, Mr. Speaker, into Agriculture research, extension service, and aquaculture, and cooperatives, forestry and fisheries. For recurrent, Mr. Speaker, for agriculture research, this is very interesting, the budget was increased from \$1.4 million to \$1.8 million. Capital II was decreased by 50% from \$2.5 million to \$1.2 million. This is absolutely, Mr. Speaker, unsustainable. You increase recurrent, it but you decrease Capital II. How is this possible, Mr. Speaker? How can the recurrent be more than Capital II? More is being spent on administration costs than on projects and programs. An important component, Mr. Speaker, like diversification, very important, \$50,000.00 has been allocated for that. Marketing, Mr. Speaker, agriculture marketing, \$50,000.00 is allocated. What can be achieved with that? In Capital III, Mr. Speaker, last year they wished for \$14 million, but they got \$6 million. This year the government is wishing for \$11 million, but because of the accompanying measure for sugar which will be losing money, I believe, they will be getting less than \$6 million.

A very important component, Mr. Speaker, is the national extension service which provides technical assistance to the farmers. Again, Mr. Speaker, this is extremely rare for this type of budget. The recurrent was increased from \$4.3 million to \$4.8 million, and the Capital II is only \$185,000.00. That is unbelievable, Mr. Speaker, \$4.8 million for recurrent and \$185,000.00 for capital investments. In Capital III thought there is an increase of \$3 million from \$339,000.00 to \$3.575 million. And it says that its investment, Mr. Speaker, in building resilience in youths at risk." I have no idea what that is.

The other sections, Mr. Speaker, fisheries and aquaculture do not even have Capital II and Capital III programs. So I don't comprehend how these departments will be able to carry out their jobs. This is evident, Mr. Speaker, that the ongoing under-performance of the Ministry of Agriculture is because of the chronically anemic allocation of resources. There is no way, Mr. Speaker, that the Ministry of Agriculture can function with this kind of budget. There is a serious disconnect between policy and the actual requirements of the sector which seems to be the result of low prioritizing, weak organization and insufficient commitment, especially with respect to the concerns and needs of the small agricultural producers.

It is time, Mr. Speaker, for the government to put the money where the mouth is. The supposed new approach to agricultural development proclaimed by the manifesto covers a range of areas which require dedicated attention and



resources. So, Mr. Speaker, persistent problems faced by the small farmers, especially access to cheap credit, continue to be subservient to the priorities of large corporate investors outside and within the agro-processing sectors. The UDP Government Manifesto, I should say, Mr. Speaker, because they are in government, promises a lot. They promised to introduce and promote contract farming; to transform the Belize Marketing and Development Corporation into a trading and marketing platform, blah, blah; to implement a new, innovative Agriculture Information System to provide data on planting, harvesting and market prices; to establish a Virtual Farmer Field School. Wow! It promised new Food Safety Regulations to define minimum standards for food production; to establish an Agriculture Station in Corozal. Well, I don't know when they will do that. It's not in the budget at all. It promised to commence a sheep sweep for certified exportation. They are finished with cattle. So they are going into a sheep sweep. It promised an expansion of a coconut industry up to 1,500 acres. It's an excellent idea, brilliant idea but there is nothing in the budget, Minister, nothing, only words and promises. It is a brilliant idea but nothing behind it; it promised to develop a "free range" poultry industry under bio secure conditions. I don't know what that is.

A specific line in the manifesto sets out the intention to develop a special financing program through DFC and the National Bank for small businesses and small farmers. Once again, Mr. Speaker, it is brilliant idea badly needed. But what is its status? There is no such thing, no such allocation or mention in the budget. And, if so, who will the beneficiaries be? And what fair system of selection is planned to prevent the political grabbing's? Where is that in this budget? It's a brilliant idea, loans for small farmers. Mr. Speaker, there is more in the manifesto which I do not care to mention. It will never be absorbed into the agriculture budget.

Mr. Speaker, the driving force behind the Belizean economy is domestic exports, which are primarily agriculture and fisheries: These generated altogether, Mr. Speaker, \$509,373,000.00; sugar and molasses, Mr. Speaker, \$141.5 millions; banana \$98.38 million; citrus \$69.3 million; marine \$80 million; petroleum \$36.3 million; papaya \$13 million; and other non-traditional export, Mr. Speaker, \$70 million. Today, Mr. Speaker, almost all of these subsectors that drive the economy are undergoing serious problems.

The sugar industry generated the largest amount of foreign exchange earnings in 2015, 28% of the foreign exchange earnings. However, the industry is in serious problems. And experts feel that, if changes do not occur, the industry is likely to collapse. The main problems, Mr. Speaker, and we've spoken about them so many times. The mill, and the fundamental problem, Mr. Speaker, is that the mill is unable to absorb the sugar cane in the field. There is too much sugarcane. But why, Mr. Speaker? The second problem, Mr. Speaker, is the low price at this time to farmers. And the third is the high cost of production we have, not only in the field but in milling and transportation all the way up to Europe.

The mill last year, Mr. Speaker, processed 1.167 million tons, but 320,000 tons remained unharvested in the field that could not be absorbed by the mill. Those were losses to the cane farmer. That's 27% of the production that remained in the field. The mill, Mr. Speaker, should be doing 7,000 tons in 24 hours consistently. It has not been doing that consistently. And this leads to poor quality. The mill will only do 1.16 million tons, but there is 1.5 to 1.7 million

tons. The industry will never function like that. Mr. Speaker, these are losses to farmers when the price is already at its lowest in 15 years. Mr. Speaker, the low price of sugar cane this year is at \$ 45.25 per/ ton but upon delivery you get paid \$36.65 the balance of \$8.60 will be split between two other payments, the 5<sup>th</sup> week after the crop is over and the first week in November. The \$8.60 will be split between those two dates, Mr. Speaker. With that \$36.65, Mr. Speaker, the farmers are unable to meet their harvesting expenses.

We have been informed, Mr. Speaker, that while the estimates for sugar cane is \$45.25 we have been informed that Santander is marketing sugar to the EU Market through a company by the name of Czarnikow, of Polish origin, marketing the ton of sugar for \$881.00 per metric ton. This is very good information. ASR, based on its estimates, is marketing through its subsidiary Tate and Lyle at \$757 tons, Member for Corozal North. That is a difference, Mr. Speaker, of \$123.74 less. If the farmers in Orange Walk and Corozal were receiving this price, it would translate to approximately \$5.00 per ton more. But you see, Mr. Speaker, we don't know how our sugar is being marketed. We don't know to who, when they sell and what price arrangements we are under. We just have to take what they tell us, but on the same European market. We are forced, Mr. Speaker, to just take what is given to us. That is why, Mr. Speaker, Member for Orange Walk North and Corozal North, it is important that a functioning marketing committee include the farmers, and it must be legislated. That has to occur if our industry is to survive.

Mr. Speaker, the case 1, a farmer of 100 Tons receives on a Friday morning \$3,665.00. That's what he collects at the bank. When he receives his cheque, Mr. Speaker, when the bank removes the \$10.00 per ton, and 80% of the farmers, Mr. Speaker, owe the banks at an average of \$10.00. When the bank removes their charges, Mr. Speaker, the farmer owes \$335.00 for those 100 tons. He has to find that money to pay the harvest, and these are already poor farmers, and this is empirical data Member for Orange Walk North. It is not cooked up it is what farmers are living today. So the farmer has to go out and borrow money from somebody so he can pay for the harvest. To our brothers in Corozal, it is even worse because where I am we pay \$27.00 per transport. But where my friend from Corozal North is they are paying \$32.00 per ton. If you are paying for your loader and your truck, they are taking \$15.00 out of 100 tons. You have a negative of \$1,000. There is no way, Mr. Speaker, no way on earth that the industry will survive at these prices. And there is the constant hammering of the cane farmers that they you have to be more efficient, you have to produce more with less, you have to increase your productivity to 70 tons per acre. Mr. Speaker, if they can't grind my 25 tons per acre, how will they grind 75 tons per acre? That is nonsense, and it's an excuse to put the blame on the farmers.

But let us look at the cost of ASR, Members for Orange Walk North and Corozal North. Local handling, alone ASR's cost is \$10.7219 million in local handling. Ocean freight is \$10.7216 million. Local handling is more expensive than ocean freight. That is madness. Other expenses include is \$4.35 million. Of that only \$1.2 million goes to the sugar Industry Development Fund \$1.2 million. So they can't say the money goes to the sugar industry. The way that sugar is transported is by river, old and antiquated mode of transportation. But it is not expensive you know. The problem, Mr. Speaker, is that the barges and boats are owned by a company of ASR. So after they charge now the \$25 million off the top they say that this is the cost of overseas and local handling, and they go into

the barrel further and take away now 35% and say, "This is my share now," and whatever remains in the sack, Mr. Speaker, is for the poor 5,000 farmers that have to be spread across the two. This is unbelievable, Mr. Speaker. I have said that if you cannot do the handling for cheaper put it out to tender. Let people apply for this job. Maybe they can do it cheaper but at \$10.179 million.(Applause)

Our new found friends from Santander are transporting by road to Big Creek. So you see, Mr. Speaker, they can't hide information from us easily because we have another company who is doing the same thing and cheaper. Mr. Speaker, it is costing ASR sales because of those figures. It is costing us \$21 per ton of sugar cane. They are paying us \$45.25, but their cost is \$21.05 per ton. That is 47% of what they are paying me. That is madness! No wonder, Mr. Speaker, the industry will not survive like that. It cannot survive like that. The total income from sugar cane, Mr. Speaker, estimated right now, and this comes off of the estimates from ASR, the total income from sugar is \$111 million. You take away the \$25 million that they say is for the expenses, and what you are left with is the net strip value of sugar that is the fancy word they used. net strip value of sugar. And when that remains now, the \$85 million at this stage here they take off the 35% again say, "This is for me" and what is left in the bottom of the barrel is for you and the 5,000 cane farmers. Mr. Speaker, there is no way the industry could survive like that.

The accusations of inefficiency have always been against the cane farmer. We have climbed from 15 tons to 20 tons per acre. We have improved the quality so much so that they can't even mill a cane. We have so much sugar. We have become victims of our own success, but they have never, Members, never, Mr. Speaker, made a genuine attempt to address those high costs of local handling, never. Whenever a discussion comes and you will be witnessed to this, Member for Orange Walk North, they always skip around it and mention, "Yes, yes, we are working on it." But they have ever never done a genuine or ever taken a genuine interest in trying to cut those costs. Mr. Speaker, it is simply because it's not in their interest. They owned everything. It's like a guayabera. I think it is Belize Storage Company that owns the barge. That is one pocket. Tate and Lyle is the other pocket CGP is the other pocket. But they are all one guayabera. We can't continue like this, Mr. Speaker. For 40 years, man, do you know how much they said they have charged for 40 years they have handled at that price. I took a video of the barge the other day, Mr. Speaker. I was at the restaurant by the riverside there and I saw the barge coming in. I said, "This is a wonderful opportunity to take a video of this." There were two men on a boat. They were hauling 4 barges, Member for Corozal North, 4 barges, and each one, I think is like 300 tons, and only 2 men. I have a friend in Orange Walk who transported log from Hill Bank all the way to Orange Walk for years, like 500 to 1,000 logs. That was only 1 drum of diesel and 2 men and 2 bottle of rum. That was it. How could this cost \$10.179 million? This has to be addressed, man.

Mr. Speaker, our friends at Santander shared some very important information. They are telling us that 70% of the cost of producing sugar, not sugar cane, 70% is in the field. That means that 30% is from the mill and transportation. But when we do the numbers, Mr. Speaker, when you look at the figures, Mr. Speaker, \$.26 per pound is what it cost to produce sugar. But 70% of that is in the field. So for the remaining \$.74 cents is what is left for processing and shipping. But ASRs handling alone local handling and overseas shipping alone, not milling, is \$.08. It is more than what it cost to mill, handle and ship.

This is crazy, man. This can't continue. These prices, Mr. Speaker, are killing. And the worse and saddest part about this, Mr. Speaker, is that these people have 20 years of tax exemption. Do you remember, Minister? This House approved 20 years of tax exemptions on everything. This is a rip-off to the poor farmer, man.

Mr. Speaker, a next important thing is that the ocean freight and the local handling are considered fixed costs. That doesn't change if the price of sugar goes down you know. That remains the same. It doesn't change. If the price of sugar goes down, they are still charging the \$25 million. They are still charging the \$7.5 million. That doesn't go down. How can the farmer be left to feel the full blunt of the low prices? That is unacceptable, Mr. Speaker. How can the government allow this to continue to happen? That is why this industry cannot survive. It needs the timely intervention of government. Legislation has to be amended to deal with this, if that industry is to survive.

There are some people in the Ministry of Agriculture that believe that there is no space for small farmers you know, either in the sugar industry or in the citrus industry. That's a very weak analysis. And do you know why we have so much cane, Mr. Speaker? it is because we believe in false promises, and the Member for Corozal North will agree with me. When ASR came to Belize, they promised us that the mill would do 1.5 to 2 million tons. They promised \$15 more per ton. Do you remember that? I was in the meeting when they said it. They jumped up and roll over and all of that. They promised a modern extension service, loans at affordable rates, and mechanization for farmers. None of that we get, Mr. Speaker. On the contrary the price has gone down so much so that we can't even pay the harvest. I am sorry for my friend from Belize Rural North, my friend, brother Cas. He left tilapia and went to deal with cane. He doesn't know what he went to do. He really messed up. And, as a result of this, Mr. Speaker, everyone went to plant more cane. Everyone rushed to plant cane. They run to the Belize Bank and borrowed money at the commercial rates, of course, and plant everything in cane. Then when you plant the cane, Mr. Speaker, the mill can't absorb it. What a shame! Mr. Speaker, the farmers have to do better there is no two ways about that. But ASR must do its fair share they have to come clean. They have to lower that cost of handling. We can't continue like that, Mr. Speaker. Nothing else will work, Mr. Speaker, if the mill does not absorb or mill the cane out there, nothing else. That is fundamental for the industry to survive.

Mr. Speaker, the accompanying measures for sugar is very important. Seventy-four point four million Euros, at the time about \$120 million, was granted to our country so that our farmers could compete, improve physical institutions and infrastructure and so that they could diversify, Mr. Speaker. Today, Mr. Speaker, the financing agreement of 2008, from Orange Walk to Progresso Road, Mr. Speaker, 16 miles value a contract of \$12.6 million. That, Mr. Speaker, has been lost; \$10 million of that has been lost. It won't be done. The San Pedro Remate Road, it is 9.6 miles. It is right in front of your, house Member for Orange Walk North. That has been lost. The Sugar Cane Replanting Program under the financing agreement of 2010, again, is at serious risk of losing that money too. We would lose approximately \$8 million there. But how, Mr. Speaker, how could we be losing \$26 million of free grant money at the time when the industry desperately needs this money? How could we lose this money? This is madness on top of madness. Free money! But the explanation, Mr. Speaker, this is the National Authorizing Office which is under the government Ministry. Thousands of cane farmers, Mr. Speaker, and other beneficiaries lost

this opportunity but only one explanation, Mr. Speaker, gross incompetence and inefficiency! Do you know what kind of highway would have done in front of your house, Member? Tourism in the Progresso area would have been expanded. But, Mr. Speaker, the truth is that they were busy entrenched in spending easy Petrocaribe money that they never bothered to follow the EU procedures and satisfy the EU standards and criteria within the required timeframe. That was it. (Applause) The Government failed to meet the conditions of the financing agreements, Mr. Speaker, that is the only explanation.

Mr. Speaker, coming to citrus, again, today we have the lowest production in 20 years, 4.69 million boxes, the lowest earning of \$69.32 million. Mr. Speaker, the 2 main causes we all know what they are:

1. The infighting and legal battles; and
2. The incidence and impact of the ravaging citrus greening disease.

The CGA has been struggling, Mr. Speaker, with citrus greening. With limited resources, they have made significant investments in human resources that have prepared them better to understand the disease. They have invested significantly in training, nursery installations and research. The important note, Mr. Speaker, is that CGA has one of the largest protecting nurseries in the region and a worldwide recognized research institution. For that we must give them the credit, Mr. Speaker. However, Mr. Speaker, the production continues to decline, and experts also claim that the industry cannot recover unless there is massive injection of fresh capital.

Mr. Speaker, the government has invested very little in the citrus industry, since the diagnosis of citrus greening in Belize. Only our regional partners have come to our assistance: Mexico through OIRSA, \$50,000.00, again, US \$700,000.00 and another US\$300,000.00, and thereafter, Mr. Speaker, US \$430,000.00 through the Food Agriculture Organization of which CGA had to provide the counter financing. The Government, Mr. Speaker, at the time was to allocate \$500,000.00, but that never materialized. Mr. Speaker, The coordination and management of citrus greening is left solely in the hands of small growers. That cannot be. If this battle is to be won, Mr. Speaker, it must be with the participation of all stakeholders, all farmers, big and small. The recommendations and decisions, Mr. Speaker, of the national task force should be followed. The Statutory Instrument must have clear provisions to deal appropriately with the old, infected and abandoned trees and orchards. The protocol must be clear and must be followed again, by all small farmers and big farmers. Mr. Speaker, BAHA has a very critical role to play. They have the best trained experts in animal and plant health, but they must be allowed to do their job.

To add to the conditions of the farmers, Mr. Speaker, in the south Central Bank delayed approval of a loan of \$10 million to Heritage Bank so that CPBL can in turn pay the growers. The drama took three months. Mr. Speaker, it is not a matter of CPBL not having security. The citrus industry has liabilities of up to \$99 million, but it still has access to credit. As the Prime Minister rightly said, it's a bridge financing that occurs every year. The problems of the Governor of Central Bank and the problems of the Chairman of CPBL is not a problem of the growers. While the stakeholders, farmers and employees are struggling to survive, to pay their bills, Mr. Speaker, the Governor of the Central Bank lives in comfort you know. This is unfair. It is unacceptable. And for this, Mr. Speaker, I will

acknowledge the Prime Minister for intervening, although three months after. But he intervened, and I must thank the Chairman of CPBL for his hard work and resilience. Payments, I understand, are being made at this time, and, as for the Governor of Central Bank, Mr. Speaker, he needs to roll. You can't hold farmers at ransom because of your nonsense, man. (Applause) It is absolutely necessary for a fresh injection of capital into the citrus industry, Mr. Speaker. CREI must be allocated, and Member for Orange Walk North, you need to fight for this. CREI must be allocated at least \$750,000.00 per year so that they can continue to do the necessary research for this disease, not only for greening but we have leprosis now, and we have other diseases coming, but we must prepare these research institutions.

Mr. Speaker, the very important thing is the Statutory Instrument it must also be very clear. If the provisions have to be reviewed, then let it be done. But we must deal with the old abandoned orchards that are only the environment for the disease to grow. We must deal with that, and the protocols must be clearly stated in the Statutory Instrument, and it must be implemented. And, Mr. Speaker, I want to remind the Prime Minister to please at least pay the \$60,000.00 that they owe CGA, man. They owned \$160,000.00 because of the nurseries and the plant that they destroyed, but they have only paid \$100,000.00, Member. So at least let them pay CREI their \$60,000.00 that they owed to them. It is unfair. They are broke. They are cash-strapped.

Mr. Speaker, we all know the story about Fruta Bomba, \$80 million in five years. This year, Mr. Speaker, they generated \$13 million in foreign exchange. But now, it is no more operational. The relevant department, Mr. Speaker, took so long to approve the perforation of wells. In particular there is a case, Mr. Speaker, where approval for one well took six months. How could this be? Which company wants to work in a country like that? How could the government department be so inefficient and neglectful and fail to understand the importance of such an investment? How could anybody allow this to happen? The most difficult thing is, Mr. Speaker, to attract investment into your country. Once you have them here you don't let them go. You marry them and let them invest more. How could this have happened Mr. Speaker, these companies have what you call calendarized production. I've been to their operations in Homestead Florida. These people have a calendar that they say, "I, Boston, 5 containers will be unloaded on such a date." That means you have to program. I can't wait for the guy to come and tell me one month after that he will approve the perforation of the well and then come back 2 weeks after to test the water if it is good for irrigation. That is nonsense. That is a part of the problem that killed this industry. Ninety percent today of all the workers are gone. It's not 6 months. They are gone. There are 250 persons unemployed, that is, 250 families, my friends, who have kids in high school and UB, who have their mortgages to pay. This is a very sad story, Mr. Speaker.

I remember Mr. Speaker, when the employees of the departing FirstCaribbean Bank suddenly found themselves without employment. Do you remember that, Mr. Speaker? There were concerns raised in all quarters, and that is justifiably so. Options were readily explored to find appropriate placements. I wish, Mr. Speaker, that the same could be done for the ex-employees of Fruta Bomba. They too are Belizeans you know. They are our brothers and sisters, not only the people that work in banks and that wear neckties.

Mr. Speaker, I want to almost conclude with a very important thing and that is the issue of rice, Mr. Speaker. The recent problem with rice was not a new one. It was just handled wrongly. If Belize concludes that the importation of rice from Guyana will cause a threat of serious injury to our rice industry, Belize being one of at the least developed country could impose restrictions in respect to such product. As members of the Caribbean Community, Mr. Speaker, both Guyana and Belize are signatories to the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas. And Belize being an LDC can therefore make use of appropriate mechanisms to safeguard the industries in our territories. This is from Chapter 7, Articles 150 and 92 of the Treaty of Chaguaramas. So this Jack Charles thing, Mr. Speaker, would have been squashed like that. All Belize needed to do is to prove that this imported rice from Guyana will cause damage to our rice industry. And under that provision, Mr. Speaker, Belize could have implemented the restrictions until COTED, the Council for Trade and Economic Development, makes a final ruling. So all this thing that the farmers had to run to get a very prominent attorney and spend thousands and thousands of dollars was totally uncalled for and unnecessary. It only add more to the cost of producing rice. So, Mr. Speaker, I want to end that part on rice.

Belize Agriculture Health Authority (BAHA), Mr. Speaker, is a very important institution in this country. It is the frontline of defense for animal and plant health. But they too have their problems, Mr. Speaker, and I have reserved two minutes for them. BAHA continues to receive every year a small budget of \$1.2 million for 16 years. This is so in spite of the fact that level of subvention does not even cater adequately to the ever increasing mandate that every day we have new diseases, Mr. Speaker, such as avian influenza, shrimp diseases, the medfly and rabies, and we were talking about citrus greening and leprosis now. Mr. Speaker, BAHA, the demand for technical expertise is growing more and more every day. That must be improved, Mr. Speaker.

There is also some governance problems, Mr. Speaker. The leadership issues need to be addressed and urgently. The Chairman of the Board, Mr. Speaker, should not be the CEO of the Ministry of Agriculture. That is a direct conflict of interest. He being at the Board of BAHA may have to rule on a decision that may not be popular with the Ministry of Agriculture. That position of Chairman should be held by someone from the private sector. (Applause) They must call meetings, Mr. Speaker. Last year 2 meetings were what the Board of Directors called. That's what the person can remember. There were only 2 to 3 meetings the most. So important decisions are being made by 2 persons, the Chairman of the Board and the Managing Director, both of whom are not technical people. They are putting at risk the plant and animal health of this country, and that cannot continue.

Mr. Speaker, BAHA's staff is still operating with the same remuneration package after 16 years of operation. There is no pension plan in place. There is no collective bargaining agreement, and there is no staff developmental plan. At least the guys from Karl Heusner Memorial Hospital got something. BAHA don't get any raise. You can't operate in an environment like that. There is no incentive, and this is a very important institution. This is the Karl Heusner for the animal and plant health Minister. The staff has not benefited for 15 years. The past salary adjustments they only watch it on the news, Minister. They don't get any salary adjustments. And, Minister, and, Mr. Speaker, the hiring of politically well-connected but incompetent staffers is a threat to the effectiveness and

survival of BAHA. You don't put a general practitioner to do a surgery. So, Mr. Speaker, that has to stop.

Mr. Speaker, I want to end my presentation by saying that the agriculture sector is in serious crisis. It is time, Mr. Speaker, it is time for the government to call for a full comprehensive assessment by an expert group both from the private sector and the public sector to develop, Mr. Speaker, an urgent rescue plan for the agriculture sector. You on that side do not know everything, and we on this side it's the same. But, if we pull our intellectual resources together, Mr. Speaker, much can be achieved.

Mr. Speaker, we in this Honorable House should know that a country like Belize with abundant God-given natural and human resources must be able to feed itself. Otherwise it cannot be stable, prosperous or sustainable. In every budget of the government, if we are serious about including the rural households and communities in nation building, we always need to invest in aggressive policies/programs to increase yields, profits and competitiveness, Mr. Speaker, the strategic driving factors of agriculture. We in the PUP, Mr. Speaker, are always ready to cooperate and to work with this Government on these strategic priorities. We are convinced that these strategies will energize and transform our agriculture sector towards a better future, Mr. Speaker, for all our rural communities. Mr. Speaker, until these changes are made, I cannot support this budget. But thank you, Mr. Speaker, for listening, and God bless everyone, our farmers, our producers in rural communities. And I hope that you all have a safe and happy Easter. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. (Applause)

**HON. G. VEGA (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries, Forestry, the Environment and Sustainable Development):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to support the General Revenue Appropriation Bill for Fiscal Year 2016/17. Stability in a time of change is, indeed, a very apt title for the Prime Minister's speech when he presented this budget, especially as it characterizes the achievements of my Ministry.

The agriculture and food sector is undergoing tremendous change, change that requires appropriate responses from a government known for tackling the difficult issues head on a government that intervenes strategically to assist the productive sector a government that ensures decisions are taken in consultation with stakeholders a government whose actions engenders confidence in the sector even when they face tremendous challenges. The now closing fiscal year presented several challenges but equally some very notable milestones in agriculture and food production. This government our government, provided the appropriate responses and will continue to do so as we further consolidate the sector. Agricultural reform is a continuous and extremely difficult process. Every developed country made sure they kept their lavish farm subsidy programmes when they wrote the global trade rules. This was done specifically to ensure they have a secure food supply and it was the only way they could implement trade but avoid deep agricultural reforms. Some believe we should do the same. The reality is that the rules no longer allow for increasing subsidies, but more importantly, our economies simply cannot afford to maintain them.

Mr. Speaker, the World Trade Organisation and the new Global Trade Order came into effect in 1995. The following year in 1996 the European Union published a Green Paper, outlining their vision for reform of relations with us, the ACP countries. That was twenty years ago. What followed has been reforms of



access to their markets for every product and of particular interest to us, sugar, bananas, fisheries and rice. They removed price guarantees and are now allowing more imports from other countries. Their market, which for sugar and bananas is our main market, is becoming increasingly competitive, and, if you look at the Caribbean, many countries have stopped exporting these products to Europe.

Mr. Speaker, I present this background detail to put our current challenges into perspective. The northern sugar sector has had a 20-year lead to prepare for increased competition. And, like the Representative for Orange Walk South, I am too very concerned but we have to be real, and we have to be open, sincere and truthful, especially to our farmers.

The EU has provided grant funding to assist. Farmers received over \$40 million from fair trade premiums. The Government of Belize continues to assist annually with fuel tax discounts, vehicle and equipment license rebates, subventions to various arms of the industry, and this year consumers began paying an increased price for sugar that is more reflective of prevailing market conditions.

Mr. Speaker, I believe the northern sugar industry has historically received the most help of any other agriculture industry in this country. The reality of market reform is now hitting us hard. Those on the other side of the aisle did considerable damage to the industry by misleading and manipulating farmers for their own narrow political agenda. In addition to the external market conditions, we have cumulative effect of two delayed crops, again, just maliciously. This is impacting quality and thereby income to the farmers. This government took some controversial decisions to help return the industry to a path of long-term viability and the numbers confirmed this. In 2008 the earnings from the sugar industry stood at \$74.2 million. In 2014, we had an increase to \$116 million. We are confident that the industry can survive and even thrive under the new market conditions. This will require a redoubling of efforts to consolidate sugar cane production, milling and export. This government remains committed and will continue to work closely with all stakeholders of the northern sugar industry to secure their long-term socio-economic viability, whether as individuals they choose sugar cane or other activities.

Mr. Speaker, like the Member for Orange Walk South, I am too concerned about the stand-over cane, the over production, but I want to remind him also that it was the Sugar Act of 2001, that the then PUP introduced, that once again allowed BSI to start delivering sugar. I just want to remind everyone that it was your party who did that, and we need the people to know that. We want to put everything on the table, and that is the only way we will move the industry forward.

Mr. Speaker, earlier this month Santander Sugar produced its first batch of raw sugar at its plant just north of Belmopan. This marks a milestone for the company and for Belize as once again, we have a second mill operating in the country. This investment, for those that think that nothing positive is happening in Belize, this investment alone is more than US\$125 million. The Cayo District now joins Corozal, Orange Walk and the Belize Districts as sugar cane producers. This investment is very different from the traditional industry and they have introduced many technologies that we should adopt as best practices. Again, the Area Representative mentioned that we must ensure that we cut down on expenses, and those are techniques that maybe we ought to follow and adopt in the north. I must congratulate Jose Rodriguez and his team for this sterling

achievement, and we look forward to continue working closely with them as they transition to full sugar production and begin supplying electricity to the national grid.

Mr. Speaker, we have not heard much discussion about liberalization of the EU market for bananas, but on January 1, 2019, the MFN Tariff for bananas will fall to \$114 Euros per ton. A year later, for some of our strongest competitors that have negotiated free trade agreements with the EU, it will fall to \$75 Euro per ton. But, again, Mr. Speaker, this government has no control over that. We enjoy duty free access, but this reduction of preference means our production will face unprecedented competition. The EU marketers are already adjusting in anticipation of market challenges, and we stand ready to reasonably assist our producers.

Mr. Speaker, much has been said about the loss of market access by Meridian Banana Farms and the resulting of losses of jobs. The Opposition continues to recklessly suggest that government should do more. The reality is that government intervened when this situation first arose, and this resulted in the transition from Mayan King to Meridian. It later became clear that the undertakings given by the principals of Meridian were not sufficient to satisfy Fyffes, a multinational company that also operates within and is subject to US jurisdiction. At this point, Meridian's difficulties can only be resolved by Meridian and the membership of the Banana Growers Association. Of course, the government would want the farm to recommence operations, but this decision is totally outside the powers of the government.

Mr. Speaker, the numbers show that the banana industry has recorded tremendous expansion under this government. In 2008, earnings stood at \$58.2 million, and 2014, it stood at \$91.1 million. I think you quoted the \$91.1 million, but you did not quote what it stood at 2008, and we want to make clear comparisons.

Mr. Speaker, the citrus industry has been quietly undergoing its own reform. The processor has consolidated the majority of its operation in one factory. The CGA is now one of the largest producers of certified citrus plants, and we have relative peace in that industry. During this fiscal cycle we will amend the Citrus Act which will include new arrangements for funding the cross cutting issues such as plant health. The Ministry continues to work closely with the Taiwanese Government in programs to combat citrus greening, and we are exploring other avenues for assistance to the industry.

Mr. Speaker, agriculture, fisheries and food production on average generate in excess of BZ\$600 million annually. Severe climatic conditions, first, drought, then excessive rains caused a decline in output of most crops. This is the new reality of a changing climate and weather patterns. To help address the impact, last year this government started granting duty and tax waivers on the importation of irrigation systems. Several enterprises utilized this facility, and we are now working on a permanent solution. The government's development bank, DFC, responded with a program to suspend loan payment and restructure loans to accommodate farmers' losses. The Ministry has perfected the design of a cost effective covered structure and these so-called tropical greenhouse complete with fertigation systems are being deployed. We are finalizing a program for the development and financing of this and other climate smart technologies to small scale producers, and this will be implemented during the new fiscal year. This budget also supports ongoing programs to expand production of high quality open

pollinated seeds especially for small farmers. In this fiscal cycle, we produced 20,000 pounds of corn seed, 5,000 pounds of black beans seed and 10,000 pounds of rice seed. This is an innovative program utilizing the farmer field school method of practical training. It reduces the need to import hybrid seeds, and, through a system of quality management, we will ensure high germination rates are maintained.

Mr. Speaker, government is also paying keen attention to diversification through improvement of existing production, with emphasis on onions, honey, sheep and coconut. We are implementing projects funded by the FAO, the EU, Mexico, Taiwan and the Government of Belize aimed at maximizing production and improving the value chain of these products. Mr. Speaker, our mantra at the Ministry is that agriculture is a business, and it requires quality, consistency of supply and competitive pricing. Our government is working hard and investing wisely with the resources we have to achieve good results.

The success of the cattle sweep and its direct result in increased prices paid to farmers is one such example. Prices almost tripled as Belize became known as a source of animals with a traceability system and zero or very low prevalence of notifiable diseases. Blue Creek in the Orange Walk District is leading the country, and they have completed all 5 sweeps by financing the last two sweeps on their own. We are working with the Livestock Producers Association to help secure funding, but, as was agreed when the first sweep commenced, the industry would need to take lead in funding sweeps four and five. We hope to replicate the success of cattle in the sheep sector and thereby placing that industry on a foundation to be export ready.

Mr. Speaker, two weeks ago I had the opportunity to personally raise with the Mexican Secretary for Agriculture the need to remove the tariff on Belizean cattle exported to Mexico. This tariff price difference is what drives the trade through Guatemala. We both agreed that this is not serving the Belizean producers or Mexican consumers any good. The secretary agreed to raise this as a priority within his government with a view to its removal. That's the type of work we do in our Ministry.

Practical approaches to resolve trade barriers are necessary. We have recorded success with Guatemala and now working to remove barriers in Mexico and El Salvador. These are the actions that provide confidence to our private sector. We are providing the environment for them to conduct business. The reverse is also necessary, as was demonstrated in the domestic dispute over rice importation. We are a very open economy, and our imports are far greater than exports. However, when sectors that underpin our food security, our socio-economic stability are threatened by unfair competition or present a potential agriculture health risk, we must act decisively. And such was the case of rice.

Mr. Speaker, capture fisheries, lobster and conch continue to be the main export commodities. The total value of the marine capture fisheries exports increased by 17.9% from \$27.4 million in 2014 to \$32.3 million in 2015. The sector continues to provide direct employment to approximately 3,000 fishers with a total of 15,000 Belizeans directly depending on the sector for their livelihood.

The Ministry approved the soft implementation of the Managed Access Program which is a rights-based fisheries management tool. This is aimed at improving fisheries management through increased fishers participation in the

decision-making process, increased compliance with Fisheries regulations and reporting of catch data and increased fisheries enforcement and improvements in fisheries stock. With the assistance of the Wildlife Conservation Society, a vessel monitoring system is being tested as a pilot project on which a full system can be built. We believe a system covering our entire marine fleet would enhance safety at the sea for all, in addition to the obvious benefit of managing the fishing fleet. This would also allow us to better prevent illegal fishing in our territorial waters.

Mr. Speaker, in managing our fishing stocks, we must provide land based options for stakeholders to supplement of replaced income from fishing. An alternative livelihood component for 13 coastal fishing communities is being implemented under the Marine Conservation Climate Adaptation Project (MCCAP) to the sum of US\$2.5 million. This project is expected to provide complementary funding support and alternative livelihood opportunities for those fishers engaged in traditional fishing.

Mr. Speaker, a month ago the Integrated Coastal Zone Management plan was launched after it was first, required by law, discussed and debated for almost two decades. The use, conservation and sustainability of coastal and marine resources require much more than government's intervention for it to be totally successfully. Key stakeholders include the conservation and scientific community with their specific expertise adding value to the joint effort. We must urge them to remain true to their cause and, in a few cases, go beyond glitzy advertising or shock value public relation, to truly invest financial resources in helping the people and Government of Belize achieve this very delicate balance of human development. We urge them to join us as we push for increased cooperation from neighbouring countries, in particular Guatemala and Honduras, as we all know the true depth of the issues to be resolved.

Mr. Speaker, the health and safety of our food chain is of particular interest to our government. During this fiscal year the IDB project supporting improvements in lab facilities and other capacities at BAHA came to an end. We have already signed and are preparing to implement a follow-up programme aimed at improving food safety. We are working very closely with the Belize Bureau of Standards and relevant stakeholders to implement mandatory standards and packaging for basic commodities. Rice was the first. Sugar and other grains and pulses will follow.

Mr. Speaker, even the most developed economies with cutting edge scientific institutions cannot prevent the spread of animal and plant health pest and diseases. These challenges have multiplied with the changing climate. Unfortunately, avian influenza impacted poultry, and a vibriosis is now impacting shrimp. In close collaboration with the producers and regional partners, we successfully contained and eradicated the avian influenza outbreak in Western Belize. We must be very proud for very few countries can claim this level of success, and it is due to rapid, targeted intervention.

We have employed similar methods with the shrimp stakeholders. However, we have experienced some delays due to the broodstock performance. This industry is employing global best practices with full support of BAHA and the Ministry. We are all confident that a stronger, more resilient shrimp industry will emerge as they invest in the best practices to sustain their business. We must recall that, just prior to this outbreak, the industry obtained Aquaculture Stewardship Council certification for 95% of its production. This underscores that

they are leaders in sustainable development, minimizing environmental impact while maximizing marketability and profitability.

Mr. Speaker, we established an Outreach Station and Agriculture Inspection Point near Jalacte village in the Toledo District. From the development perspective, the Outreach Station is to provide direct assistance to farmers to help them improve yields and postharvest handling and introduce better farming practices to lessen environmental impact. A school garden/school feeding program is also being implemented to help introduce a more diversified diet and help combat childhood malnutrition. In April, we will formally sign a programme with the Mexican Government and the FAO to help fund the work we have already started. A month ago I had the privilege to formally open our first garden and dining hall project at the Pueblo Viejo Roman Catholic Primary School. The positive impact this modest investment will have on the school children and the genuine partnership with the community that help build the facility makes it a very worthwhile venture. From the agriculture health perspective, it was very urgent for BAHA to establish a permanent inspection point as there is a rapidly expanding informal cross-border trade in that area. You will recall that the 2013 medfly infestation that caused the south to be quarantined originated from that area. This caused losses to farmers as they could not move their produce out of the south.

Mr. Speaker, we have encountered some resistance to our presence in the area. We believe the objections have more to do with the curtailing of illegal activities than with the purported infringement of indigenous rights. There is a particular village where the agitation comes from a naturalized Belizean of Guatemalan origin, who serves as a community leader. Mr. Speaker, I believe it is more than time and we must all learn to put the interest of Belize first.

Mr. Speaker, in wrapping up, let me reiterate my support for the General Revenue Appropriation Bill for Fiscal Year 2016/2017. It provides the base on which we operate, and let me assure you that my Ministry will continue to manage its resources carefully to deliver the required services to the farmers, fisher folks and the timber industry. Of course, we know that, while we are users of the resources, we are all custodians of our rural landscape and marine resource, and, therefore, sustainability is given as much prominence as profitability.

Mr. Speaker, the farmers are the true custodians of our rural livelihood. We must maintain a vibrant rural economy, otherwise the problems of urbanization will multiply. While I spoke earlier of the tremendous assistance provided to cane farmers, these are not unreasonable. Please remember it's not unreasonable, nor do they match up to other sectors that operate in a virtual tax-free environment and are further endowed to keep and reinvest taxes they pay. Mr. Speaker, I will reiterate that the agriculture and food sector generates over \$600 million annually; we are self-sufficient in many basic commodities. And remember a dollar earned by this sector remains at home, and the multiplier effect of this is far more meaningful than a dollar earned but parked in a foreign account.

Mr. Speaker, I want to tell some of my colleagues on the other side that when they speak it sounds like we are really doomed. I want to inform them that the people have confidence in this Government. Foreign investment is coming to this country like never before. Mr. Speaker, we have the Cayo Grain and Agro Supply Limited, and I think the Member for Cayo North East knows exactly what I'm talking about, a new company just harvested last year over 4,000 metric tons

of corn. It's a new company. That shows that there is confidence in this government.

We have Quality Chicken which is located in Spanish Lookout investing millions of dollars in expansion. But more than just expansion they are investing to ensure that they get HACCP certification so that they can export to other countries. Mr. Speaker, as we speak, there is a young company, owners from Canada, in Toledo who are investing once again, investing in yellow ginger millions of dollars, and they already have the market for that product.

Mr. Speaker, in just about a month's time, we will be inaugurating a calf farm for the first time in Belize, and it should be one of the best in Central America where they will be producing young calves for sale to other farmers. Mr. Speaker, this is what our Ministry is doing ensuring that we create a market, ensuring that we create confidence. And I would like to ask, especially the Members for Orange Walk Central and Orange Walk South, don't stage the farmers for political reasons and undermine the sector. It looks bad, and it affects us negatively. It affects everyone. If you want to work, let's work together for the benefit of every single Belizean. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to wish everyone a happy and safe Easter. I also, Mr. Speaker, would like to ask permission to say a few words to the people in Orange Walk North. I know some of them are saddened by my decision. Some of them understand, but I want to tell the people of Orange Walk North that I am not abandoning them. I will be working for them for the next 4 years or the rest of this term, and I will do as much as I've done in the past 8 years. I will ensure that the school in San Luis is built, and I will continue lobbying for a water system for San Pablo, continue lobbying for a school in San Cruz, and I will do everything within my power to ensure that Orange Walk North never again makes that mistake of electing a PUP Representative. (Applause)

**HON. F. MENA (Minister of State in the Ministry of the Public Service, Energy and Public Utilities):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to support the General Revenue Appropriation Bill for Fiscal Year 2016/2017. But before I get started I need a couple of seconds to address the presentation made by the Eurocentric pastor whose obvious skin color seems like his entitlement to ethnocentrism. Garifuna spirituality is what it is. It is Garifuna spirituality. It is part and parcel of a rich heritage called Garifuna Dugu. Much of the black and indigenous cultural practices were destroyed by the forceful introduction of those Eurocentric beliefs as early as the fifteen century. Those days are gone, Mr. Speaker. The pastor's utterances are obvious signs of the time. If you can't respect a great people and culture and country, then there are daily flights out of Belize on a regular basis. (Applause) We are a people of faith, courage, and resilience, and we normally say, "God in front of us and we follow".

Mr. Speaker, I want to make a quick reflection before I get into the meat of my presentation on a couple of matters discussed yesterday by the Honourable Member from Toledo East, three matters in particular. One, he called out the Ministry of National Security for apparently selecting police officers. When utterances like these are done in this Honourable House, it brings some unnecessary and undo pressure on representatives. The selection process comes in four phases. One, there is the academic aspect in which the candidate must pass at least with a C or above. And then there are other tests that need to be taken which include a physical, some running and so, a medical, and that is straightforward, and, of course, the vetting. The vetting is when they will find out your association

and whether you were involved in any criminal activity, if there were any. And so it is not fair to call out on such a matter.

Secondly, my dear colleague from the south from Toledo East made mention again, and he complained about the work happening on the Hummingbird Highway, no reflectors, no lines. Well, we want to do that first, put reflectors and lines, and then do the resurface second. I feel like that would be an Alan Batten move. It is a work in progress, and safety is at the top of the priority. So, my dear colleague, it is a work in progress.

Thirdly, there has been a number of presentations and representations on the decline in the production of citrus, and it looks like it is Mr. Barrow who is causing it. Mr. Speaker, as mentioned by my colleague from Orange Walk South, and he made it clear, and I congratulate him, that is being caused by the greening. It is not by Mr. Barrow. When the quarrel started in the citrus industry in about 2006/2007 or so, there was no replanting being done. The association at that time, it had BAHA to shut down all the nurseries because of the disease as the research showed that planting had come under screen houses. For three years there were no nursery plants to feed the groves. And these groves, certainly they have an attrition rate. The year of no replanting, diseases, and the attrition rate saw a decline in the production from its peak in 2007 which was approximately 7.5 million to 8 million boxes to about 3.9 million boxes which represents just about a 51% decline. But this is not unique to Belize. The United States had at its peak 265 million boxes and to current 69 million boxes in its production which shows a 74% decrease in production. Brazil in the south, production was 570 million boxes to now, because of the greening, 290 million boxes which shows a 49% decrease in production. And then I want to pick in the Caribbean Jamaica which at its height had 2.5 million boxes being produced, and it's now at 1 million boxes which is approximately 60% decline.

The cost of growing citrus has increased because of greening. Screen houses, the plants produced in these screen houses cost twice or three times as much, and now you need to use folio and all of that stuff. So the cost of producing has certainly increased. But it is important to note that what CPBL is doing, and rather than crying over it they are making some great advancement in addressing the issue. A consultant has been hired to do an analysis, look at the status of the acreage and the expansion possibilities, and, of course, to set goals to reach those original baselines or better. They have and, as mentioned by my colleague from Orange Walk South and, of course, by the Deputy Prime Minister, they've consolidated the plants to decrease the cost of production. So for all our information the sky is not falling down with respect to the citrus industry. Mr. Speaker, in this Lenten season, the special time of the year, when we are about to celebrate the miracle of the risen Christ, I want to wish all my people a very happy and blessed Easter.

Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has presented a budget which keeps our public finances sturdy and our forward momentum steady. The budget is bold but targeted, the investment strategic and sustainable. Mr. Speaker, we are at a critical time in about 35 years of history of our beloved Belize. There are changes all around us, in the United States, in Europe, in the Middle East, in Latin America, in international banking and global economy. But in a time of change under the visionary leadership of the Right Honourable Dean Oliver Barrow we have come a very long way. (Applause) Mr. Speaker, in a time of change this budget provides

the stability we need to sustain the victories of the last eight years and cement the astonishing progress for our future and the future of our children. The budget, Mr. Speaker, recognizes the challenges that face Belize and our sister nations in the region. But this administration has never allowed itself to be blinded by challenges, Mr. Speaker. This administration is characterized by its extraordinary vision, and always, Mr. Speaker, we look for the opportunities for our people. In steady pursuit of our Horizon 2030 vision and with the adoption of the International 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the budget outlines a common transformative vision, a vision based on solidarity, accountability and shared responsibility, a vision that guides Government, civil society and private sector and all our partners, Mr. Speaker. This budget, Mr. Speaker, when you broke it down it is all about people and development. It is all about working together to eradicate poverty, to promote a better Belize, a better world, Mr. Speaker, for all of us.

The budget supports actions that advance the five Ps, definitely Papa not involved: people, planet, peace, prosperity and partnership. (Applause) This administration believes in participatory and accountable public institutions, including a professional, ethical and responsible and responsive public service. This budget supports a strategy that focuses on quality improvement, on innovation, on training and on career development pathways within the public sector. Indulge me for a moment, as I take this opportunity to applaud all the hardworking public officers, and even as I applaud and thank them, to encourage them to do even more, to seek ways to make the experience of our customers even better. We love our country, Mr. Speaker, and we can always do even more to show some love to our Belizean people when they come to access our services. All Government officials are there to provide services, services to citizens who have a right to know that the public officers are performing well, cost effectively, honestly and ethically.

Now, of course, Mr. Speaker, we will be encouraging our managers to show the same love to our own hardworking public officers. Nobody, Mr. Speaker, can deny the love this administration has shown for our public officers and teachers. Unprecedented in the region, even with the fiscal challenges we face, this Government would have given its employees a 25% raise over the three years. As the Prime Minister said in the presentation, that we are able to do this at a time of fiscal consolidation is nothing short of remarkable. (Applause) But with the help of our managers we can do even more, Mr. Speaker. We can listen to the ideas coming from our own officers, innovate with IT solutions where appropriate, and review and improve the service processes we use to make our work not only more efficient and effective but more pleasant for both our officers and our customers, building innovation in government to help meet performance expectation, perceptions of confidence and competence, and to rebuild a sense of security and reliability in public institutions. This will become our mantra, Mr. Speaker, and this budget supports that strategic vision.

Back again to the five Ps, Mr. Speaker, people, planet, peace, prosperity and partnership. Our efforts towards the development of sustainable renewable energy are amongst the most advanced in the region. The focus remains on how we can help our people prosper and how we can achieve the harmony with our planet, especially with the jewel in its crown, our beloved Belize. Universal access to electricity, removal of dependency on imported fossil fuel, optimum standard for efficient electrical appliances and building are just a few lofty, yet,



achievable objectives which we have set ourselves. The dedication and commitment of our staff in a small energy directorate and, of course, this Government have forwarded some significant moves and significant fundings from our friends in the European Union, the Global Environment Fund called GEF and World Bank from Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Switzerland and from the Organization of American States, a continued vote of confidence from international community for our efforts, and I want to take this opportunity to thank them all.

In the next month, I should say, we will be investing some \$400,000 to a microgrid project to provide electricity to La Gracia. La Gracia is a village off the grid, and so we have embarked in this project. The consultation happened about two weeks ago, and we are doing this off-grid solar project in La Gracia. We will be placing solar powered street lights gifted by Taiwan and evaluating their efficiency and effectiveness while we begin the implementation of the multimillion dollar grant from GEF and the World Bank focusing on grid resilience, biomass opportunities, and capacity building.

Mr. Speaker, even as we offer our prayers and our most heartfelt sympathies to those affected by the horrific incidents in Brussels this week, we offer our thanks and appreciation to the people of the European Union for a grant of some \$30 million to support energy efficiency and universal access to electricity for all Belizeans. Truly our thoughts and prayers are with the people of Brussels and with our friends in the EU at this time, Mr. Speaker. We know that a country that harnesses the power of clean renewable energy will lead the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. We firmly believe and uphold that notion in conformity with, of course, our belief and in line with the goals and objectives set by CAP. 21.

Mr. Speaker, to the south, a new vision is rising in the south, a vision that recognizes the need for greater investment in the south while also recognizing the need for us to work together, to build each other up and not to drag each other down. A new vision is rising in the south that sees opportunities where others see challenges, that sees potential where others see problems. A new vision is rising, Mr. Speaker, it is the vision of the hardworking industrious people of the south. In my area, the average high-school graduate has about 8 CXC's, yet, in excess of 12 years to 15 years or so a minute portion enters the workforce. It is sad that more often than not we are branded and given a bad rap because of where we come from. Under this Government we are ensuring that that won't happen. (Applause) This administration is taking on those challenges head on. It is a vision, Mr. Speaker, where each of us extend a hand of friendship and brotherhood to each other, where our local leaders embrace change, and in doing so ensure a social and economic development of a our cultural heartland.

I am proud to represent the most beautiful constituency of our beloved country, Mr. Speaker, (Applause) the cultural capital and its neighboring villages: Hope Creek and Sarawee. Now is the time for the south, Mr. Speaker, already we have seen advancement, the Carl Ramos Stadium, which is the best in the country. (Applause) The multipurpose stadium is well on the way, which had been promised years ago. It is well on the way and, of course, for those of you who have visited recently, there are the streets and roads, and the drains, and we continue with our scholarships, and, of course, there is the Hummingbird Highway. The paving of the Coastal Highway is in plan to increase the activity in the south and to realize the objectives of the tourism master plan for the south,

particularly Dangriga. While in 2002, the Commerce Bight Pier and by extension Dangriga, was stifled, all hands are on deck now (You understand. You are with me). All hands are on deck now for its revival. We need it. The start of the pantry program, we are adamant, and it's going to go on. As much as is being done, I do understand that much is expected. The demand for more also increases. I believe only a few things are impossible when we put hands and hearts in harmony.

I want to say a special thanks to my family and friends all the time for supporting. (Applause) We need to continue to embrace each other on this journey, the journey of sustainable development and stability in a time of change. I salute the young people who normally support me and, of course, my wife and daughter for their unwavering support, (Applause) and the people of Dangriga, Sarawee and Hope Creek and, in closing, my dear brother. Mr. Speaker, I want to wish you and your family, my colleagues here in this Honourable House, and, of course, the great and sweet people of Dangriga, Hope Creek and Sarawee, the hardworking public officers and the people of Belize, a safe and blessed Easter. With that, I stand firm and support this budget. (Applause)

**HON. O. HABET (Cayo North East):** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to make my contribution to the debate on the General Revenue Appropriation Bill, 2016/2017. But before I go there, Mr. Speaker, a few of my colleagues on this side of the House were pondering on what has led the other side to be so infatuated with this issue of roundabouts. And I can recall, Mr. Speaker, that it was one Member from that side who a few years ago said that he was turning his Ministry 360 degrees. So there you go.

Mr. Speaker, it has been customary for the government side to romanticize and indulge in the many faucets of the 1998 to 2008 PUP Administration. And I say this because there has been so much repetition for the last 8 years, and it continues, especially, Mr. Speaker, the issue of the so-called super bond. So fine has been the indoctrination by repetition that some people, indeed, believe that all the \$1.9 million in debt left at the end of 2008 was all incurred by one administration. This, Mr. Speaker, is liken to deception for the debt was an accumulation of debt from 1981 to 2008, a period of 27 years. Today it is a banality like that of most sitcoms. Mr. Speaker, we now see as quoted from the budget speech a total debt of \$2.85 billion which is an increase of \$950 million incurred by this administration in just 8 years. And it is not done yet.

As my friend from Lake Independence mentioned yesterday, the people of Belize really cannot exercise the buyer's remorse and change what they did on November 4, 2015, as they please. Mr. Speaker, those figures tell us that the PUP/UDP Administrations of 1981 to 2008 accumulated loans of an average of \$70.3 million per year, but the UDP during their 8 years had an average of \$112 million per year. We will all recall the floating of the near \$1-billion bond by the PUP Administration to effectively build back this country after the devastating effects of those major hurricanes. I recall Mitch, Keith, Iris and Chantal, that all occurred between 1998 and 2001. In emergency, my understanding was that there was not time to negotiate concessionary loan terms. These were times of emergency, of adversity; we needed to reconstruct the banana industry, the citrus industry, the tourism industry and other sectors across this country. I was the Mayor of the twin towns between 2002/2003, and I recall going to Toledo to help out my team in the reconstruction efforts. There was not, Mr. Speaker, one single electrical pole standing from Silk Grass to Punta Gorda. So, Mr. Speaker, let's start hearing from the government some things with originality, not banality. I do not know, Mr.

Speaker, what the explanation to the people of Belize will be when this administration leaves office of the mega bond that the people will be saddled with for many years to come.

Mr. Speaker, I turn to my address on the debate. Mr. Speaker, the Belizean people have once again been cheated from the opportunity of a pre-budget statement or fiscal strategy paper, one which provides the public with a way of understanding the link between policies and budget allocations, describes the government's basic assumptions about broad, domestic and external macro-economic indicators over the medium term, states explicitly the government's long-term economic and fiscal policy objectives and the government's economic and fiscal policy intentions for the forthcoming budget, and as some international organizations recommend, at least the following 2 fiscal years: One, that should highlight the broad policy strategy envisaged for different sectors; providing an initial perspective on how different sectors will fare in terms of budget allocations and how these allocations might be influenced by any new policy initiatives. This would provide the public, Mr. Speaker, and the legislature adequate time to peruse and prepare for an adequate budget debate. For instance, it would allow for deviations at the time of the formal presentation of the budget proposal to reflect principally any important exogenous developments or new policies that emerge since the pre-budget statement was issued and not as has customarily been done along with the budget proposal proper.

Mr. Speaker, my colleagues have already spoken to the many concerns on the various sectors of the budget proposal. However, it would be remiss of me not to address the following key issues and concerns. Firstly, Mr. Speaker, the budget speaks of an increase in revenue of \$50 million as a direct import duty tax on fuel. According to the Prime Minister's budget speech, he states that the Belizean people will enjoy windfall savings of \$163 million due to the fall in international fuel prices, and accordingly the \$50-million taxation is justified because the Belizean people will keep over \$100 million of the windfall savings. Mr. Speaker, the productive sector will grossly be affected by this taxation. While other countries are taking advantage of this low fuel price to lower production, manufacturing and transportation costs, our productive, manufacturing and processing sectors will live to see a stronger competition for their products, especially with countries trading similar products and thus be at a disadvantage with their trading partners. This phenomenon, Mr. Speaker, is likened to competing against subsidized products, a situation that gives competitors an unfair trade advantage.

Mr. Speaker, the budget proposed figures, \$13.8 million increase over the 2015/2016 outturn. It has now been some 7 years since GST has been removed from imported processed meats but added to imported inputs for domestic processed products. Imagine, imported corn beef, potted meat, chicken sausage and other imported meat products adulterated with preservatives that are either addictive and are potential carcinogenic are free of GST and have a price advantage over our locally produced meats. Dr. Marvin Manzanero was on the radio this morning, and he referred to fresh, good quality food for healthy living and for reducing the cost of health spending. The lesser the domestically produced meats sold, the lesser livestock are sold by our producers. Mr. Speaker, the processing sector would like to see some amendment to the GST Act to reflect the changes in ratings of the imported processed products, that is, if it will not be removed from the inputs for domestic production then to be added to imported processed products. Mr. Speaker, I know that you and other Members in this

legislature will agree with me that a Running W, a Mc Kesey, a Smiling Meats, a Rainland Ham is much better and nicer than any imported ham.

I note, Mr. Speaker, on the revenue side emanating from the Ministry of Lands, that income from land tax is only \$5.6 million while rent of national lands is a mere \$1.6 million. If this government would lift the freeze they established on lands immediately after the 2008 elections, perhaps revenues would increase immediately as there are thousands of people who owe rent on leases and tax on titled lands but who cannot pay because the government will not take their monies as the response is always that their file is still on hold. Mr. Speaker, this is spiteful and downright political because what has happened is that land rent from leases is not collected so that, when leases expire, the Ministry does not renew those leases, giving the excuse that the rent was not paid. This way the land is cancelled and sold or given away to UDP cronies. Mr. Speaker, this kind of policy is nefarious. It is not conducive to development, and it is a definite contributor to the increase in poverty as poor people cannot get to lease and less so own their lands. It is my understanding that the current Minister of Lands is doing some positive changes to his Ministry and has started with some corrupt personnel. I pray that the major change is in policy. (Applause)

I turn, Mr. Speaker, to the Ministry of Public Utilities whose entire Ministry budget shows an increase of \$22 million from the 2015/2016 budget allocation. But, as my colleague from Toledo East pointed out yesterday, there is zero dollars allocated for rural electrification. It is the year 2016, and we have so many communities without electricity. In my constituency, there are 4 new areas of Santa Familia Village without electricity, and then in Los Tambos Village, there is no electrification. Mr. Speaker, my constituents want to understand how it is that, when we the people own the utility company but yet homeowners ready to get electricity connection from BEL are told that they need to pay the costs of poles, of wire and transformers. Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, while I sat here at the debate I received a text message from people in San Jorge, which is the outskirts of Santa Familia Village. The complaint was that they did not have a drop of water for the past 2 weeks. Mr. Speaker, can you imagine living in these communities without water when last week alone there were record March temperatures ranging between 95 degrees to 102 degrees? And, Mr. Speaker, the problem did not start two weeks ago but rather started some seven years ago. I believe, Mr. Speaker, that this proposed budget should reflect solutions to these anomalies. I am glad to hear that the Member for Dangriga mentioned that they are getting a grant and that an electrification project will be out there for La Gracia Village.

In regards to the Ministry of Works, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Cayo Central spoke on infrastructure improvement projects. In Cayo North East, the people are still awaiting the \$6 million plus expenditures that would have brought about unprecedented development. The conditions of the main village roads and the former roads are in a deplorable state. How are we assisting production and improving our economy when producers can hardly access their farms and much worse cannot take out their produce at harvest time? Was this all a hoax and a profound political immorality? Was the intention only to get the people to forget the wicked actions of the infamous Elvin Penner? (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, we were entertained yesterday by the Minister of Education and Sports' long and winded self-praises. He boasted about the increase in budget

allocation to his Ministry. He also boasted about the construction of sporting facilities in various parts of the country. Mr. Speaker, it is expected for the tutor to toot his own flute. I also applaud the much deserved salary increase for teachers and other public officers, but also remind the good Honourable Minister about the promise of the construction of a new school for Duck Run 2 some 3 years ago. Mr. Speaker, you would have to see the videos to believe it, but every time there is a hard rain the children have to lift their legs off the floor or climb on to their chairs because water flows into the classroom, wetting and soaking everything in its path. This school too was a promise of a don't-support-the-Penner-recalled scam. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, one area that has to be given particular attention with the monies allocated to the Ministry is the area of skills training. And I know that the Belize Chamber of Commerce would agree with me that it has to be market-driven skills training. Foreign investors are looking to invest their monies in countries with a high percentage of highly qualified skilled workers. In this regard, there is a need for ITVET costs to be reduced from those \$1,200 per year tuition. These fees are similar to the higher cost academic institutions and are a deterrent to enrollment and to the further education of our young people with vocational aptitudes. I believe, Mr. Speaker, from what I have heard on media appearances that the ITVET in Orange Walk Town is going in the right direction. Perhaps the others should follow.

Speaking about sports, Mr. Speaker, the Member from Collet and the Member from Orange Walk East spoke about these facilities, but the quality of work on the Victor Galvez stadium in Cayo North is truly not a reflection of the millions of Petrocaribe dollars spent. Mr. Speaker, imagine a football pitch with a 15-degree slope or gradient, a facility where some people say \$4.5 million was spent and does not house a public bathroom facility. The Falcon field basketball court is a joke. For \$1 million the people of Cayo North East were treated to a dry-weather court, one that floods on rainy days and faces the brunt of the sun in the morning and again in the afternoon, \$1 million. And they put the bleachers after the building was constructed. They put it outside. And the basketball rims, they didn't even have the decency to put flexible rims. They placed those stiff, old-time rims that in the first week they were broken down. And these, Mr. Speaker, all these are because of poor insight, because of poor engineering, no consultation with the athletes, and because of the hustle, and I am not talking about the hustle, the dance, you know, Mr. Speaker, because there is a dance called the hustle. This was the hustle, and then the rock and roll to the bank. Mr. Speaker, with the new increase allocation for sports and culture, I remind the Ministers that the twin towns, the second largest municipality in the country does not have a fully covered facility for sports, arts and culture. Yet, Mr. Speaker, our district contributes largely to tourism, to agriculture, to manufacturing, and the only contributor of revenues from petroleum. This budget, Mr. Speaker, should consider the Cayo District more favorably.

I turn, Mr. Speaker, to the area of agriculture. Let me address the allocation of funding in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Forestry, the Environment and Sustainable Development. I will be speaking in favor of the Minister of Agriculture. At a recent meeting of the livestock producers, a Ministry official reported that the agricultural output in 2015 is an estimated \$648 million. The Minister said \$600 million. This figure would represent 18.2% of 2015 GDP. Yet, the budget allocation for agriculture is \$18 million or a mere 2% of budget

expenditures. If we include projects under Capital II and Capital III expenditures, and note that the Ministry includes forestry, environment, sustainable development and cooperatives, yet, the total amounts to \$38.8 million and still is only 3.3% of budget. This type of budget allocation, Mr. Speaker, does not bode well with the productive sector as it clearly indicates government's priorities, the priorities not being in agriculture and the lack of commitment to this sector, a sector that provides a large chunk of GDP, employment, contributes largely to an attempt to balance trade and most importantly the food security of our nation.

I note, Mr. Speaker, the financial assistance to small farmers of zero dollars, zero for the cattle sweep program, agro-marketing development of \$50,000 and national livestock program, \$50,000 nationally for national livestock development. How will you develop an industry like that? A couple million of dollars, of course, these budgetary allocations are a clear indication of the government's relegation of agriculture to the bottom of the priority list in our country. The cattle industry, Mr. Speaker, may soon be joining citrus, sugar and other commodities in losses, as in the past six months it has seen a drop in 30% in the price of cattle. Just a few months ago the government was asking producers to lower the price of cattle because the price was too high. Imagine you would tell the buyers, "Don't pay me \$3 a pound, and just give me \$2." Luckily the producers were smarter because the forces of free enterprise will dictate the price. The cattle industry will also have to bear the cost of a 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> sweep for tuberculosis and brucellosis in order to be recognized free of these diseases by the World Organization for Animal Health, the OIE, and for it to potentially trade with Mexico.

Additionally, the loss of traditional and non-traditional commodities can be potentially alleviated with diversification, diversification to production of small ruminants which has a tremendous market in the Caribbean and Mexico and makes inclusion of the small farmers. Yet in Belize, Mr. Speaker, \$50,000 is allocated at the national level for national livestock development. I know that there is a program for sheep production that is sponsored by the Taiwanese, but where is government's input?

Cooperatives, Mr. Speaker, gets an allocation of \$989,000 of which \$964,000 or 97.5% is for recurrent expenditures and only \$25,000 in Capital II expenditures. Cooperatives are accordingly a dying concept in Belize. There is no interest in small farmer and producer organizations for promoting collaborative production, marketing and trade.

Mr. Speaker, I will also address the issue of BAHA. The Belize Agricultural Authority was modeled off the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. BAHA became the envy of Caribbean and Central American agricultural authorities, so much so that there was the proposal for a National Agricultural Health and Food Safety Authority, NAHFSA, in each Caribbean state and a regional authority for the region. BAHA, as an institution, and its superbly qualified personnel were highly recognized internationally. However, as of late, there is a lot to be desired. Personnel are disillusioned, especially with the little government allocation given to run the institution. The public is concerned that BAHA has to rely heavily on revenues from fees charged for services. It is as if they are working on commission. However, a high percentage of the services are for public good which should be borne by the government. BAHA cannot continue to operate where fees become a deterrent to production and trade. It is

highly recommended that monies be adequately allocated for the BAHA to be able to provide the public good services and to reacquire, once again, the high recognition, domestically and internationally. The latter, Mr. Speaker, will also be aided by deep politicizing the institution, as mentioned by my colleague from Orange Walk South.

Mr. Speaker, I mention this politicization because the Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry 4 years ago was given the opportunity to name a person on the Board of Directors of BAHA. They called on me and asked me to represent them. And low and behold, Mr. Speaker, they, recognizing my experience, my education in the field, asked me to participate, but BAHA and its politics refused. And so not only was I refused to participate as a board member, but they did not give the BCCI an opportunity to name someone else, so vindictive they were.

The current allocation demonstrates government's inability to see the consequences of our losses, its lack of care for seeking alternatives to the loss of crops, professional agricultural health services and for the new opportunities that could be available to producers. Mr. Speaker, rather than spending frugally in this very important sector, we would like to see some of the unstinting spending as stated in the budget speech as is done for education, healthcare and security that should be done for the agriculture sector that truly provides for the livelihood of the people. But can all this be just a reaction to the lack of a national agricultural policy? We understand that the formulation of an agricultural policy was commissioned last year. Imagine, Mr. Speaker, a policy commissioned for agriculture last year, 7 years after taking office, yet that policy formulated by the hired consultant was rejected. And to date there is still no national agricultural policy, at least not a written one. So I ask, Mr. Speaker, what guides this most important Ministry?

Mr. Speaker, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, FAO, named the year 2014 the international year of the small farmer or small producer. Belize lived the entire year and the next with no program in place to help and uplift this sector of our population, while our neighbors capitalized on the available opportunities, namely Costa Rica and Dominican Republic regionally, and Ecuador, Colombia and Brazil extra regionally, all who have invested in expanding production of a crop for small producers, namely cocoa. According to the International Cocoa Organization's projections, there will be a 70,000 ton cacao shortage in 2014. The ICCO states that demand for cocoa is predicted to rise by 30% by the year 2020. But without empowering and investing in small scale farmers the industry will struggle to provide sufficient supply. Steady growth over the last 100 years has transformed the chocolate confectionery market into an \$80-billion-a-year global industry. But now, with demand forecast to outstrip supply, a crisis is looming for the industry. Why then, Mr. Speaker, hasn't Belize taken advantage of this golden opportunity? The ICCO daily price on March 15, 2016, was US\$3,111 per ton. Yet, agriculture diversification is allocated \$50,000. So all these farmers that are losing on sugar cane, the papaya and in other crops, why don't we diversify? Our Members said that they are now looking to plant some coffee and also some yellow ginger. I applaud that move, Mr. Speaker. We could have our small landholders making some money, feeding their families and growing this economy.

I turn now, Mr. Speaker, to an issue that should be of concern both to the Ministry of Health and to the Ministry of Tourism, but for us on a national level.

And I take this time to address a specific concern in health as it relates to tourism. It is apparent that much emphasis is being given to the services sector and maybe rightly so. But we must heed the warning that lurks around us. The Business Monitor International, BMI, reported its view that “The Zika virus would dampen tourist arrivals in the Caribbean. Slower and lesser arrivals will create headwinds to overall economic expansion.” The Center for Disease Control, CDC, has issued an alert to pregnant women and those planning to become pregnant not to visit countries where Zika virus transmission is ongoing. And the World Health Organization, WHO, predicts that the virus will spread to all countries in the Americas, except to Canada and Chile by the end of 2016. All this is after the Caribbean Tourism Organization, CTO, has declared the year 2016 as the year of romance in the Caribbean. I hope, Mr. Speaker, that the Ministry of Health’s budget of \$6 million increase will take into consideration increased expenditure on health services, prevention, and, along with the Ministry of Tourism, on marketing as the other countries in the Caribbean have endeavored to do. Failure to do the latter can be of great consequence to our tourism sector and will not “drive the economy”, as stated in the budget speech. Additionally, we can potentially face a larger budget deficit than anticipated due to a much reduced expected budget revenue from the tourism sector. Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, I heard on the news the CEO in the Ministry of Health report that four samples sent for analysis returned negative for Zika. He also reported that even dengue is on a downward turn probably due to collaborative efforts for control of the vector along with the municipal governments. Excellent! This is what I am talking about, a report like what the CEO did. Now we need to put this on the Internet, on the WHO, on the CDC, and PAHO websites. I don’t believe we have to bad-mouth our sister tourist destinations affected by Zika, but we can do our positive marketing for Belize, Honourable Member from Mesopotamia.

Speaking about health, Mr. Speaker, the capital allocation in this budget for this particular Ministry is \$2.8 million. There is no indication of the allocation for the San Ignacio Community Hospital. This is a hospital situated in the capital town of the largest district and with the second largest urban population, one that services some 22 villages and communities in 4 constituencies in the district. And the Member from Cayo North is here, and he is one of them. This hospital is in dire need of an exclusive male and female ward, a children’s ward, and an operating theater or surgical ward. Mr. Speaker, this hospital has an esplanade that serves as a parking lot in front of the hospital that emanates dust clouds that ends up in the hospital proper every time a vehicle delivers its clients to the hospital and is an enlarged pool of mud and water during the rainy season. This esplanade needs to be concreted or paved. We cannot have a hospital providing health services when there are potentially, daily airborne pathogens flying directly into the hospital. Additionally, Mr. Speaker, as mentioned on a previous House meeting, there are no lights approaching or leaving the hospital to the main road and for more than 300 yards beyond the hospital junction. The people of the twin towns and surrounding towns and communities would like to see some monies allocated to the above-mentioned hospital for the stated physical structures and services. And, indeed, I hope that my colleague from Cayo North, he is my cousin you know, we are first cousins. Oh, we are not first cousins, but we share a 25% relationship to a common ancestor.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I urge our government to heed to the UNDP’s recommendation of the Montevideo New York summit on February 20, 2015, that states that economic growth alone will not reduce poverty and inequality in Latin



America and the Caribbean. They recommend for a year 2016 of multi dimensional progress, of well-being beyond income, stating that it is essential to focus on exclusion, discrimination, and vulnerabilities that still limit people's opportunities. UNDP states that people's and household's capabilities and assets such as the level of education, owning a home, access to social protection and other cushions are crucial to prevent people from falling back into poverty. Our budget, Mr. Speaker, should reflect policies that accentuate the above UNDP recommendations or the supposed stability might just be stagnation. The final allocations in this budget proposal, in my view, only partially address fundamental needs of our country. Allocations are skewed away from areas and sectors that not only contribute largely to the economy of our country but that in reality have our country afloat and have our people putting food on their table. Failing to consider and make the changes suggested, Mr. Speaker, I cannot support this proposed impalpable budget. Let me take this opportunity, Mr. Speaker, like other Members have done, to wish you and other Members of the House and at large the people of Belize a happy and safe Easter holidays. I thank you. (Applause)

**HON. H. PATT (Minister of Labour, Local Government and Rural Development):** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and certainly I won't take that long nor will I be lying to the Belizean people, right Dr. Figueroa. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the General Revenue Appropriation Bill, 2016.

I am happy to say, Mr. Speaker, that the budgetary proposals submitted by my Ministry have been approved for inclusion in the 2016/2017 budget. Mr. Speaker, this is a clear indication of the support and commitment of my government to labour, local government and rural development. The allocation to my Ministry will enable the Labour Department to continue playing its role in fostering close and cordial relations with our employers' and workers' representatives to improve labour administration, labour market governance and the industrial relations in our country. This budget, Mr. Speaker, is also a positive indication that my Ministry will continue to provide local government support through advice and training for the smooth and effective running of councils with the aim of building capacities to the level where they can take decisions that will positively affect the lives of our citizens with as little reliance on Central Government and my Ministry as possible.

Mr. Speaker, we recently celebrated a milestone victory at the polls during the recent General Elections. Our municipal and local governance bodies are optimistic and anticipating the continued excellent support rendered by my government for the efficient and effective administration of their municipalities and communities. This budget will enable us to disburse the support that supplements their operating costs and projects.

I am pleased to say that the budget allocation to Labour will have a tremendous impact on the functions of the Department and will help in achieving its mandate in important areas of child labour, employment services, and the reactivation of the Labour Advisory Board, the Tripartite Body and the National Child Labour Committee. We will also continue to conduct several employers, workers and trade union member conferences and training workshops. We will continue the tradition of conducting tripartite training sessions to educate workers and employers of their rights and responsibilities under the labour legislation, promoting policies and international best practices, particularly on mediation and

conciliation methodologies.

Mr. Speaker, tremendous work at the Labour Advisory Board level has been conducted. This includes a review of our labour laws to identify those provisions that are considered most critical to the welfare of workers and employers. Several of these provisions are in need of amendment in order for the parties to derive fairer treatment from their employment relationships. These, Mr. Speaker, are just some initial steps taken towards a broader, more comprehensive revision and modernization of our labour laws, to bring them in line with existing ILO Conventions and the CARICOM model laws. We recognize and are committed to the ILO Decent Work Agenda of employment promotion, rights at work, social protection and social dialogue, which underpins Belize's national development goals. In keeping with this, my Ministry is bound to:

- (1) establish a modern set of labour legislation that will be in line with International Labour Standards and CARICOM Model Labour Law;
- (2) establish a National Labour Market Information System in collaboration with our social partners;
- (3) collaborate with our social partners and maintain a sound industrial relation climate with them;
- (4) foster cohesion and implementation in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (ITVET) through the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour, to improve the skills and employability of our women and youths; and
- (5) enact and enforce legislation for the elimination of the worst forms of child labour.

Mr. Speaker, I am also extremely pleased today to reaffirm my Government's support through this budget to the local governments across this country. My Ministry in partnership with the Belize Mayors Association has embarked on an initiative to conduct trainings for the councils to improve local governance and administration, including the enhancement of local revenue collection. Some of the training planned for this year include:

- (1) resolution drafting;
- (2) making regulations and by-laws;
- (3) traffic management;

- (4) valuation and training; and
- (5) accounting procedures. To complement this institutional strengthening effort, we encourage councils to improve relationships with their employees, to build even greater teamwork and to encourage increased participation from citizens in the development and implementation of municipal development plans.

Mr. Speaker, my Ministry enjoys an excellent working relationship with all councils, and we look forward to continue working with them. This year we will provide the same level of support as last year as a total of \$4,335,020 has been allocated for the annual subvention with an additional \$185,000 earmarked to assist with the accounting systems for councils. Mr. Speaker, also included in this budget is a capital allocation of \$100,000 to assist our municipalities. There is a recurrent allocation of \$187,800 to meet the stipends of village councils' chairpersons and first and second Alcaldes. There is also an additional \$125,000 as contribution to village councils under capital expenditures. Last year this was used to donate materials and supplies to villages and water systems, including weed whackers, riding mowers, submersible water pumps, and electrical materials. The Mayors Association will receive its annual support of \$24,000, and NAVCOs will receive a \$35,000 contribution. Also, the DAVCOs will be receiving subventions to the tune of \$53,400 while village councils will continue to receive approximately \$500,000 per annum from liquor licensing fees.

We are committed to the local authorities, and we continue to assist them where we can. However, there is only so much that we can do, and municipal councils need to maximize on their collections from the revenue streams available to them. Councils need to be organized and efficient in ensuring that they collect the taxes and fees which citizens are obliged to pay for the services provided to them. Elected officials must devote their time and energies to the policy and planning function while employees of the municipalities execute these policies and plans with the proficiency that we know they are capable of. Mr. Speaker, the design of the system may not be perfect, but it can work. The people elected leaders whom they believe are best able to run their municipal affairs. Therefore, elected Members must respect each other, the employees, the policies and procedures and the citizenry as a whole. As we work towards strengthening our governance and management systems, my challenge to councils is to put personalities aside and to work for the benefit of the municipalities. The Belizean people want honesty, transparency, accountability and teamwork in the operations of their councils.

We have taken steps to institute reform in local government. We are about to seek national approval for implementing some of the policy instructions in the National Policy on Local Governance in Belize that was approved by Cabinet in August 2009. The central goal of the National Policy on Local Governance is to give better guidance and direction to the systems and practices of local governance in Belize towards greater equity, efficiency, effectiveness, and transparency in the delivery of local government services to the people in rural and urban communities. Mr. Speaker, the following Bills are in their final stages

of preparation:

- (1) Draft Municipal Bill which is the merging of the 3 existing local government Acts, and updating it with best practices;
- (2) Draft Village Councils Bill which is the updating of the legislation to include best practices; and
- (3) Draft Alcalde Jurisdiction Bill. This is a new Bill, Mr. Speaker, which has been developed in consultation with the Toledo Alcades Association.

My Ministry is also working in collaboration with the Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Mayors Association, the Central Building Authority and the Office of the Prime Minister to update the Belize Building Act and to amend the Trade Licensing Act to make assessments more transparent and predictable. These two initiatives, Mr. Speaker, are being supported by the CARILED Project and will be instrumental in improving the “ease of doing business in Belize”.

Other proposed legislative changes, Mr. Speaker, include the amendment to the Liquor Licensing Act, amendment to the Standing Orders Regulations for all councils, and amendment to the Accounting Regulations for all councils. Additionally, Mr. Speaker, we are engaged with the Traffic Department, the Road Safety project and other stakeholders to update and improve traffic management in the country. Both the Safe Drivers’ and the Enforcement manuals are well advanced, and sustainable effort should see the approval and usage of both in this fiscal year.

Mr. Speaker, the \$30-million Municipal Development Project, which saw unprecedented infrastructure works carried out in every municipality of this country, is just about to be completed. This project is funded by the World Bank, and implemented through SIF. There was also a soft side to the project which saw the development of a maintenance schedule tool, the development and adoption of municipal development plans, conduct of revenue enhancement studies and provisions of various trainings, including human resources management and accounting.

We just completed a tour to every municipality to acknowledge their efforts in making their municipalities child friendly. This is a project that will create awareness for public participation in activities involving local authorities, children and citizens thus allowing children to have the opportunity to influence the decisions that affect their lives within their municipality.

Regarding the Canadian sponsored Caribbean Local Economic Development (CARILED) Project, the BTL Park Renovation has proven to be a success, and we now have approval for an Arts and Craft Market on North Park Street in Belize City. In Belmopan, a Young Barber’s Training Program has also proven to be successful as 25 of 43 participants graduated and are now using their new skills to generate revenue and focus their lives. Belmopan has also been

approved for a project in the Independence Park that should spur economic activity in similar fashion as the rejuvenated BTL Park in Belize City. In San Ignacio, nine women from the Kontiki area formed a crocheting group and are now making and selling their craft. This is directly addressing the need for employment and economic self-sufficiency for these marginalized women. Also in San Ignacio, Mr. Speaker, the project improved the facilities and infrastructure of the market to provide a higher quality environment to attract more visitors and to expand the site to provide space for more food vendors, craft producers and other retailers.

Last but not least, Mr. Speaker, under rural Development, the Ministry is also responsible for 194 villages and 115 rudimentary water systems serving 132 villages. As we forge ahead in improving rural water supply, the Ministry has engaged its partners to undertake the following projects:

- (1) Six (6) water systems connected to BEL's main grid thus eliminating the reliance on electricity from generators;
- (2) wells in the communities of San Vicente, Billy White and San Pablo were rehabilitated;
- (3) sixty-four (64) households of Freetown Sibun and Gracie Rock were provided with rain water harvesting treatment systems including 5,000-litres vats with vat stands and guttering;
- (4) Los Tambos received a 20,000 gallon ground storage tank that will store water during the dry season;
- (5) Otoxha, Mafredi and San Vicente also received 10,000 litres of storage tanks; and
- (6) Guinea Grass, Patchakan, Bullet Tree and Midway Villages all benefitted to the tune of \$150,000 in water expansion projects. Mr. Speaker, in addition to this, we trained 101 water boards in their roles and responsibilities on the basis of accountability. We also trained 94 persons from 38 water boards in the basic electrical components of rudimentary water systems and developed a manual for this activity for future training.

Mr. Speaker, this is a government that cares, invests in its people, and so my Government has invested and continues to invest heavily in the provision of reliable, potable water for the rural communities of this country, in training and skills development for those who administer our municipalities, in economic livelihood programs for the residents of our municipalities, in safe child friendly communities, and in a labour environment that promotes fair and equal treatment for all. These are the actions of a government that truly cares for its people.

And so I close by reaffirming my Ministry's commitment to work in partnership with the private sector and employees' representative bodies, all village and municipal councils and all the water boards. I wish them every success in their work.

But, Mr. Speaker, before closing my intervention for this debate allow me to clarify, if I may, certain points that have been brought up by the Members on the other side. I think it was this morning that the Member for Cayo South brought up two issues with reference to two particular villages affecting his constituency, one being the village of Valley of Peace, Mr. Speaker. Let me clarify that the chairman of that village has been getting his stipends. As a matter of fact, I just checked this morning and deposits have been made to his Atlantic Bank account, and those payments are up to date. And contrary to what the Member was alleging, no records have been lost nor has ever such a thing happened. I need to explain to the country that there is a policy in the Ministry that, when the village councils request for funding for particular projects or for expenses that they may have incurred, the Ministry normally requires for there to be accountability. In the event that a particular village council cannot provide proof it has spent the money in a way that it had requested it for, then the Ministry would scrutinize any further funding to that particular village council. And so this has been the challenges that we have been facing throughout the 194 villages that we have in the country.

In reference to Armenia, and I would suggest to the Member for Cayo South to do some fact checks before coming here and making a rumbling and making big issues out of things that are really not necessary to bring about. The situation with Armenia is the following, Mr. Speaker. Armenia is a village where we have had a difficulty in trying to get sustainable and reliable source of water for the use of the community. The UN standard for water supply requires that each household be guaranteed 35 gallons of water per day. This in arithmetic would require a well that can yield 70 gallons of water per minute. In Armenia, like the general situation in the south is, we have had very difficult times in trying to access water. As a matter of fact, we have drilled four wells, each at a cost of \$40,000, and up to date we have only gotten one well which yields 60 gallons of water per minute which is slightly below under the threshold. Yet, the Ministry is going to invest \$400,000 in commissioning a new powerhouse and running the pipelines. But let me advise the Member and the residents of Armenia that, with a well practically yielding 60 gallons of water per minute, the sustainability of water supply for that particular community is not guaranteed, and we don't want to run the risk of having the community, especially in times where we have severe drought, or to affect the supply of water to these families, and, as such, the Ministry has engaged BWS, the water company, in the provision of water and the running of pipelines from Belmopan to Armenia. This is just a work that we are doing, and we are doing this to make sure that the residents of Armenia have a sustainable supply of water.

Likewise in Toledo in the village of Santa Ana we had just recently inaugurated a water tank. In the village of Pueblo Viejo, after having drilled four wells, we finally got a well that is yielding us 78 gallons per minute and which under the UN standards will clearly suffice for the needs of Pueblo Viejo. We have found reliable source of water in the villages of Conejo and Aguacate in the Toledo District, and just lately we have started the works in Maskall Village. Mr. Speaker, I am proud to stand here today and say that Belize as a region is the lead in terms of providing potable water to its residents. As we speak today, beyond

85% of Belizeans are getting access to potable water. And, as we aim to the 100 earmark, we are sure that by the end of this year over 90% of Belizeans will have access to potable water. This is a milestone in the achievement, Mr. Speaker, and, as a country, we must be proud of the work that has been done by the staff in the Ministry of Rural Development.

Now, Mr. Speaker, before closing I would like to take this time to thank my beautiful people of Corozal North for giving me the second time to represent them, and I will do so tirelessly. And I will do my best to provide the necessary services to take care of the needs and wants of my people in Corozal North. And so, Mr. Speaker, I want to wish you, to wish the people in this House, to wish all Belizeans, a blessed, a joyful, but more importantly a safe Easter to all of you. Thank you very much, and may the good Lord bless you all. (Applause)

**HON. P. MARIN (Minister of Health):** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to support the General Revenue Appropriation Bill for Fiscal Year 2016/2017. Mr. Speaker, throughout the country our people continue to show their confidence in the public health system. More patients are now being attended at every level than ever before. More complex cases are seen with outstanding results. Meanwhile our health promotion and disease prevention efforts continue to expand and to see positive results. We are training more doctors, nurses and other healthcare providers than ever before. This budget, Mr. Speaker, supports this continued effort and provides that stable platform to continue to build upon, as our dedicated healthcare providers address an ever changing healthcare environment, dealing with challenges from Ebola to Zika virus, challenges, Mr. Speaker, which were not even considered a few years ago. The health of our people is a priority for this administration, Mr. Speaker. This is reflected in another increase in our budgetary allocation. This administration always puts our people first, Mr. Speaker. When we invest in our national health system, we invest in our people and in our country. A healthy population supports that stable, steady development which has characterized the last 8 years of this administration guided by the vision of the Right Honourable Dean Borrow.

Mr. Speaker, I want to make it clear that what I speak about today, what I share with your esteemed colleagues in this Honourable House, is based on careful planning and prioritization led by our excellent team of healthcare specialists at the Ministry. Our National Health Sector Strategic Plan 2014/ 2024 carefully outlines the path ahead, the priority areas of action and investment, and builds the strategic partnership, maximizing the strength of each alliance. Even as we are faced with sudden emergency diseases and challenges with Ebola in 2014, Chikungunya, as we know it, ChikV, in 2015 and now Zika, my Ministry has strategically focused on intervention from a systematic perspective that allows us to be better positioned to address this in a quick and effective manner.

In embracing the constantly changing environment, Mr. Speaker, we ensure the continued stability of our system. This budget, Mr. Speaker, supports further expansion in our national health system. We are upgrading the polyclinics in Independence and the health centers in Bella Vista. We are expanding laboratories and immediate services in both facilities to serve that growing population and investing some \$2 million of grant funding for this purpose. Working with our partners, we will invest additional million dollars of grant funds again, Mr. Speaker, to improve water and sanitation facilities for schools, to help keep our children healthy. Mr. Speaker, this year with the support of the Social

Investment Fund, the Ministry of Health will upgrade the San Narciso Health Center to a full polyclinic. Sarteneja will get a brand new health center and Chunox a new polyclinic. San Pedro, Cristo Rey and San Antonio, Cayo will each get a new health center. All of this, Mr. Speaker, in preparation for the continued roll-out, the steady and sustainable roll out, Mr. Speaker, of the National Health Insurance program. In addition, Mr. Speaker, Corozal will inaugurate its state-of-the-art polyclinic, as we continue to build a solid foundation of primary healthcare service for all Belizeans. Here in our capital city of Belmopan, a grant of some \$27 million from the European Union is committed to the construction of a much needed 50-bed-energy-efficient wing at the Western Regional Hospital. Baseline assessment has been initiated. The process has started, and we should be seeing ground breaking by next year.

Mr. Speaker, healthcare services, a human resource intensive, my Ministry has negotiated scholarship opportunities with El Salvador, Cuba, Taiwan and others, based on priority needs indicated by our technical team. We will, of course, continue to offer nursing scholarships through UB, and we are investing additional sums in training for rural health nurses. And to the Leader of the Opposition or to any of the Members of that group, our doors in the Ministry of Health are always open for you to come and ask in order to be enlightened of what we at the Ministry of Health are doing. As pertaining to mental health, we are presently working with UB to initiate training of a needed cadre of psychiatric nurse practitioners. We are presently in the process of purchasing a van that allows our mental health team to conduct more field visits and community outreach. Thanks to our partners from the United Kingdom for their donation.

We are also working with our colleagues from the Ministry of Human Development to invest strengthening our capacity at Palm Center as well as seeking partnership with the private sector. Mr. Speaker, we will invest more in quality medical supplies to keep pace with the increased demand on the public system while streamlining the supply change management process, and by the end of this year our National Drug Registry will be in place. And we have just purchase our own minilab so rapid testing can be done.

Mr. Speaker, in the coming year the Ministry of Health in partnership with the Social Security Board will be introducing the HPV, human Papilloma virus vaccine, as a proven intervention in the prevention of cervical cancer in women. We have arrive at this point after multiple consultations with our social partners in order to establish buy in and support. Mr. Speaker, no women should suffer from the deadly, yet preventable cancer. Through this program we will make sure that none of them die. Mr. Speaker, we will launch a national wide disease prevention and health promotion campaign. With support from international organizations like PAHO and the Caribbean Health Collision Partnership, we will develop a national chronic and non-communicable disease marketing strategy. This will be a long-term strategy to address the ever growing epidemic of diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular disease and cancers that are the major causes of death in our country. It is a difficult undertaking since it focuses in changing lifestyles and improving nutrition, and we will only see effects over the long term, but we are determined to take this on with the assistance and support of our other social partners.



We have signed an agreement with Merida, Mr. Speaker, to ensure access to cancer treatment for our children with funds generously donated by the Social Security Board, being challenge through the Belize Cancer Society, while we continue to develop treatment options at home through support with the new Pediatric and Neonatal Intensive Care Units at the KHMH and through the efforts of the Belize Cancer Center in Dangriga. Also, Mr. Speaker, I just want to remind the Representative from Lake Independence that on September of last year our Prime Minister waived all bills owed from that date downward, not only from KHMH but all other government hospitals around the country at a sum of over \$10 million. (Applause)

We have extended opening hours in our clinics around the country, especially Benque and San Pedro. We continue to strengthen ties with Quintana Roo and with Venezuela. And, again, for the Leader of the Opposition, you spoke of maternal and child care that we are not doing anything. Let me tell you that we have qualified for a further \$1.5 million in grant funding through the Mesoamerica project focusing on maternal and child health care services. More clinics will receive mobile ultrasound units, and seven ultrasound machines were just purchased.

Now, for my friend from Cayo South, he spoke about vector control and what we are not doing in the Ministry of Health. Here I have the evidence of how our Ministry is doing. And also the Member from Cayo North East mentioned about Zika and 2017, and that it can affect us in tourism, and that we are not seeing anything. It is them, Mr. Speaker, that when they go to the media, when they come to the House, they lie about what we are doing in the Ministry. It will affect us. That's why I mentioned in my previous part that they can come to my Ministry. My doors are opened, and they will know exactly what we are doing. In malaria, we can show that we have decreased 99% of the cases in malaria, about to eradicate malaria in Belize from 1,486 cases now to 13 cases at the present moment. This is showing that our vector control is working. (Applause) What this does to our country, Mr. Speaker, is that this helps us with grant funding for us to be able to work harder in the country of Belize. And just last year in 2015 we got a grant of US\$200,000. And this year in 2016 we are going to get US\$600,000 for malaria again. Once we work with malaria that means we are working with every vector that is in the country which would be for malaria, dengue, ChickV and Zika. This is just part of it. Last year in 2014/2015, because our people are working so hard, the community outside and the groups like the EU Global Funds, they granted us another \$2 million for Belize. This helped us to train our staff, for us to be able to buy more vehicles, and this is the first time that we have bought two vehicles for vector control only in every district, not including the Belize District which they got 4 vehicles for Belize City only. And that is why, Mr. Speaker, we can brag and the Ministry of Health can brag that we are zero Zika virus here in Belize City. (Applause)

And just to bring some highlights of what has happened in the Ministry of Health, I think you all can remember when H1N1 was in Mexico City. Belize City also maintained a zero H1N1 at that time. (Applause) Again, with ChikV or Chikungunya, we only have 8 cases in Belize. That means our people are working, and we have to give credit to the Ministry of Health, to the healthcare providers, to vector control of all the amazing work that they are doing day and night for the people of Belize. (Applause) And we don't hide numbers. Our numbers are there in the Ministry for them to see, and I will tell them. Dengue in 2015, we had 679 cases, but look at the cases outside of the country of Belize;

ChikV, as I mention before, 8 cases; Zika, as I mentioned, zero cases; and malaria 13 cases. We are working. Thanks again to the Ministry of Health and the healthcare providers, and I will ask the crowd to give them a round of applause, if we could, because they are working hard for the people of Belize. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, over the past years we have implemented many good programs. We are also posed to move ahead with other projects and programs geared at improving the health and wellbeing of our people, but this in no way means that we don't recognize and acknowledge the many challenges that still exist. Mr. Speaker, this is no easy task, but my administration is up to the challenge. We are committed that each and every one within the Ministry of Health is hold true to the core values of responsibility, accountability, respect, people-centered services and servant leadership. This I pledge to the people of this beautiful country of Belize.

Mr. Speaker, it is a matter of great pride to me that the good people of Corozal Bay have seen fit to return me to this Honourable House for a third consecutive term. Once again, I pledge my undying commitment to my constituency. I am pleased to have been able to fulfill my promises to my people. The outstanding operating theater suite now provides quality care to the people of Corozal. The almost completed polyclinic is already providing services under the NHI program and the upgrades to all other parts of the hospital, the improvements to the streets and drains of our beloved town, the scholarship opportunities provided to our brothers and sisters and the renewal of hope to all our people. And also, Mr. Speaker, we haven't forgotten Punta Gorda, and we haven't forgotten San Pedro. With the help of Minister Heredia, we have already located the land, which part we are going to do a hospital in San Pedro. In Punta Gorda, we are trying to find a location for us to build a hospital there. We are already working with the Mexicans to look at the plans and to get plans for us to start because we know that we need to do both hospitals, one in San Pedro and one in Punta Gorda.

Mr. Speaker, as we approach Holy Week, allow me finally to wish Belizeans but especially my brothers and sisters in Corozal Bay and all our dedicated healthcare providers around the country, a very happy, healthy and blessed Easter week. I support this budget, Mr. Speaker.

**HON. O. REQUENA (Toledo West):** I thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Will you go 10 minutes too? Will you follow the Minister?

**HON O. REQUEÑA (Toledo West):** I'll try to be brief, Mr. Speaker, in the interest of time. Mr. Speaker, it was good to hear the Honourable Member from Corozal Bay commit to that hospital in Punta Gorda. That is good because, indeed, we do need that hospital in Punta Gorda. (Applause) It was interesting to listen to his presentation on the figures on the different vector diseases, and I just want to ask the Dr. from Corozal South West, I hope you approve of that report, Doctor.

Mr. Speaker, before going into my presentation, I want to just rebut a few remarks that were made during the course of yesterday and today by some Members of the other side. And I particularly want to refer to the Member from

Cayo Central. He spoke at length about, you know, all the money that was spent on the Punta Gorda market, but the records are there, Mr. Speaker, that the Punta Gorda market was funded by the European Union. So I am wondering whether the EU Ambassador must have been laughing yesterday when she heard him making that presentation and speaking about money being used from the Ministry of Works for that market because that was totally funded by the European Union.

With regards to the Member from Albert, she spoke about or she made comparisons in terms of constituencies being the same. I want to say that I totally disagree with her. She is able to walk, I believe, her constituency in maybe 2 hours to 3 hours. I have 28 villages, and I need to cover a span of about 75 miles. So there is absolutely no way that you can compare Belize City constituencies to us in the south. Yet, they get everything. That is so true.

The other Member is the Member from Dangriga. It was interesting to hear him speak about universal electricity and the fact that he wants to fight for the south. Well, I want to tell him that that is good. We welcome that. And I want to ask him to do his part since he sits in Cabinet to fight for us and to fight for the rest of the south to make sure we get electricity. (Applause) That is what he has to do. This is beyond just discourse, Mr. Speaker. It has to be a matter of commitment and action. It can't be only cheap discourse.

But, Mr. Speaker, having said that, kindly allow me to speak and make my contribution to the General Appropriation Bill, 2016/2017, that was laid before this Honourable House by the Honourable Prime Minister. Mr. Speaker, before going into that, kindly allow me also to thank the people of my constituency, Toledo West, for once again returning me back to this Honourable House. It is a duty and a responsibility that I am humbled to take on. And I want to assure the people of my constituency that I will represent their issues, their concerns and their aspirations to the best of my ability in this Honourable House. So once again I thank them. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, in reviewing the budget for this fiscal year, Mr. Speaker, I really had difficulty finding what is it that this Government is presenting to the Belizean people. It is evident that, after 8 years of UDP Government, the UDP has finally come to grip, Mr. Speaker, with the bare reality and truth that departing the squandering of public finances is over, and it is now hard time, it is time to tax the Belizean people. And I will tell you why. When the Prime Minister comes to this Honourable House and speaks about raising \$50 million plus on the backs of the Belizean people, I say it is a shame after spending in 2 years \$325 million of Petrocaribe money. There was no need to come back and tax the people of this country, Mr. Speaker. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, what we have seen is that over the last 8 years, yes, a small group of elite politicians have become wealthy. They have amassed the wealth, of course, in many instances under questionable circumstances, Mr. Speaker. But the vast majority of our people in this country are living in abject poverty, Mr. Speaker. That is the reality. So what is there to boast? What is there that is bold and stable about this budget, Mr. Speaker, when our people continue to live in abject poverty? The reality, Mr. Speaker, is that many of our people don't know where the next meal will come from. Ask the Honourable Member from Port Loyola, and ask the Honourable Members from Mesopotamia and Collet and many of the other constituencies. They don't know where the next meal will come

from, Mr. Speaker. That is the truth, Mr. Speaker. Many of them do not know how they are going to meet their school bills. Many of them don't know how they are going to meet the huge medical bills because the truth of the matter, and we heard it yesterday, Mr. Speaker, that over 175,000 people of this country are living under \$10 a day. Now you tell me, under \$10 a day, Mr. Speaker, how can they pay for the goods and services that they need to live a decent life, Mr. Speaker? That is what this budget should be addressing, Mr. Speaker. Talking about bold and stability, that is what they should be talking about, Mr. Speaker. The truth of the matter is that our people are today, the vast majority of our people are living from hand to mouth, Mr. Speaker. There is no opportunity for them to save anything for the rainy day. That is the reality. So all of us can come here as Members of this Honourable House. We can speak about the numbers and brag about GDP and everything else. Bottom line is that people want to know that their living standards have improved, that they can have a little money to meet the needs and services when the need arises, Mr. Speaker. That is what matters to them, that they have money in their pockets. That is what matters to them, Mr. Speaker. So, Mr. Speaker, this Government has finally realized that their path of unsustainable spending has finally come to rest. The chickens have come home to roost, Mr. Speaker.

What was the New Year's gift for Belizeans? Now I find this very ironic, Mr. Speaker. We went to General Elections in November, under the message, the mantra of the UDP, "The Best is yet to come". But, Mr. Speaker, what was the New Year's gift that Belizeans across this country were hit with? It was 50% increase in the price of sugar. (Applause) Now I am going to tell you who use sugar, Mr. Speaker, the poor people of his country. And I know that I will get in trouble with my friends from the north. But the reality is, Mr. Speaker, that a 50% increase makes it difficult for our people, Mr. Speaker, makes it difficult for them.

The other thing, Mr. Speaker, has to do with the fact that an increase in fuel immediately hit Belizeans across this country. That is the gift that Belizeans have gotten. Mr. Speaker, in his budget speech, and, Mr. Speaker, I am certain that you are in control of this session, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** It happens on both sides. Just relax and go ahead, man.

**HON. O REQUEÑA (Toledo West):** No, no, but I cannot.

**MR. SPEAKER:** You guys talk too, Mr. Leader of the Opposition. When they are talking, you are shouting too. Members, give us a little break or else we are not going home today.

**HON O. REQUENA (Toledo West):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister in his budget speech confirm what all Belizeans knew already, that all the major export commodities of this country are on the decline, Mr. Speaker. Citrus has gone from 7 million boxes per year to less than 5 million boxes and on the decline, of course, all affected by citrus greening. As we speak, Mr. Speaker, there are still problems with farmers being paid. I was happy to hear that they are trying to resolve it. But those are the issues affecting the industry. With the death of the papaya industry, Fruta Bomba, in the north, Mr. Speaker, can you imagine, over 250 employees are fired and they are without a job. How are they going to feed their families? How are they going to pay for their loans that they owe at the banks and the credit unions? How will they take care of the other bills, the

medical bills that they have? Mr. Speaker, it is clear that a significant investment like this, you know, the Government did not care, and they simply allowed it to go. I say it is a shame because first and foremost is to protect whatever investments we have so that our people can be gainfully employed and that they can earn a decent wage and live a decent life, Mr. Speaker. That is what they should be doing. (Applause)

It is no different, Mr. Speaker, in the south. I listened to the Minister of Agriculture, the Honourable Member from Orange Walk North, I heard him mentioned about the issues of Meridian Company and so on. Man, over a thousand workers lost their jobs. The shrimp industry is in critical problems, Mr. Speaker. Yes, it is all because of disease, but what has the Government done to support those investors? That is the point. We spent \$325 million, but what did we put in there to support that private sector that gainfully employs our people, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker, according to the Statistical Institute of Belize report, domestic exports for 2015 totaled \$535.3 million. That was down by 12.9% or \$79.1 million from the \$614.4 million in the previous year. Mr. Speaker, the picture is gloomy. There is nothing that is bold and stable. Mr. Speaker, the future of Belize's economy is not looking well. What makes it worse is that this UDP Government is asleep at the wheel. For the last 8 years under their watch, agriculture, one of the main pillars of Belize's economy, Mr. Speaker, has regressed under this UDP. We have gone backwards, Mr. Speaker, with no clear vision, goals and policies to maximize our God given resources, our land and people, to make Belize a truly productive and competitive nation, where we can feed our people at a lower cost and maximize our export earning potential. Mr. Speaker, that is what we should be worried about, not promoting ramen and unhealthy foods. We should be planting and ensuring that we have enough good and healthy food to feed our people. That is what we should be looking about. And, therefore, that is going to reduce the health cost of dealing with those communicable diseases such as diabetes and other related diseases. (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, in December of 2015, this Honourable House approved \$44.4 million. All of this, Mr. Speaker, was spent between October and early November to buy the election. That is a fact, Mr. Speaker. In that supplementary budget of \$44.4 million, Mr. Speaker, it is a shame and it is a disgrace that the Government only allocated \$20,000 out of \$44.4 million for agriculture, when the northern part of this country had just suffered losses of \$30 million. What a shame! You talk about boldness and stability, check your change. (Applause) But, Mr. Speaker, it doesn't surprise me. It disappoints me, but it doesn't surprise me because this is typical UDP behavior. This is what characterizes them. They are not bothered about the hard earned investments of the farmers. They are not bothered about all the commitments these farmers had to the financial institutions, whether they owe to the credit unions or the banks. They could be less bothered. Their answer to meeting the local demands for vegetables, Mr. Speaker, is to issue special permits to friends and cronies to import vegetables. And I wish that the Member for Orange Walk North was here. The poor farmers of San Carlos can only watch their hard earned investments and work perish in the fields, Mr. Speaker. Now can you imagine that? What a cold and callous Government in the UDP we have! And I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, what makes it worse is that the man in charge of the wheel of agriculture, when he was confronted by the media to speak on the issue of those special permits, do you know what the man told the

media? He said to the media, “I don’t have to answer that. I just won another third term”. Typical arrogant UDP behavior, Mr. Speaker, that is how they behave. It is a shame! But you know, Mr. Speaker, the world is round. And I will tell you why I say the world is round. Sometimes we have to be careful because our words can come back to haunt us. He was just bragging and beating his chest that he had just won another third term. And he spoke earlier, how ironic, about confidence, but he is the very same one who only after 4 months has now decided to leave and abandon the sinking ship. (Applause) Mr. Speaker, the dolly house is crumbling, and it was pathetic to listen to senior Members of that side publicly tongue-lash him and say, “You know what, well, we can’t stop him, and if he wants to go then he can go.” How pathetic, Mr. Speaker, but that is their internal matters.

In reviewing the budget, Mr. Speaker, as of 2015, the external public debt stood at \$2.35 billion or 66% of the estimated GDP. Domestic debt, Mr. Speaker, was at \$0.494 billion or 13% of the estimated GDP. The total public external debt and domestic debt combined, as of 2015, Mr. Speaker, stood at 79% of GDP and has now increased. And I will tell you why I say that. It is because for 2015/2016 government is projecting another \$183.1 million or 6.9% additional debt, Mr. Speaker. The total projected debt at the end of 2016 is going to be \$2.85 billion. And the Prime Minister went further and said that he is going to borrow another \$0.718 billion for BTL payments and international arbitral awards. Mr. Speaker, this is going to balloon our total debt to over \$3 billion. Mr. Speaker, in examining the budget it is evident that there has been a reduction in the total expenditure and a reduction in capital expenditure. What this confirms, Mr. Speaker, is that Government is cutting down on the expenses. Why? It is because they are realizing that they are now broke. The question is, why at this point? The population is growing. The demand for goods and services is increasing, Mr. Speaker. There is need for more water systems, need for more electricity, need for better roads, Mr. Speaker. So how can you reduce your capital expenditure, Mr. Speaker? But what it does, Mr. Speaker, is, as I said earlier, it confirms the point that the government is broke.

I want to spend a little time, Mr. Speaker, on that \$50 million on fuel. The productive sector of this country is feeling the brunt of this. They are the ones who are going to feel it. You have the bus industry, the bus operators, man, particularly the small bus operators, the citrus industry, the banana industry, the sugar cane industry, the shrimp industry, tour operators, Mr. Speaker, fishermen, my friend from Belize Rural South, these are the people who make their living using fuel. So every time they have to go to the gas station their profit margin reduces, man. It went up by 21 cents last night. This is the point, Mr. Speaker, that our productive sector should receive the incentives because whilst only in Belize the price of fuel continues to remain so high, worldwide the price of fuel on the world market has decreased significantly, Mr. Speaker. How ironic! But yet that side of the House under the captain ship of the Prime Minister says, “The best is yet to come.” Well, Belizeans, I hope you recognize Belizeans, and I know they know that Belizean were hoodwinked by that other side of the House, Mr. Speaker. (Applause) That is what happened. They were hoodwinked.

Mr. Speaker, we must not forget that in 2 years that UDP side of the House spent \$325 million in Petrocaribe money. I live in Toledo West, Mr. Speaker, and really and truly the people of my constituency are disappointed. The people of my constituency are saying how unfair it is that we are not getting our fair share of the Petrocaribe. Mr. Speaker, that is the concern. We are not against it. We have

gone on record. But what we want is that we want equity in the distribution of the resources of this country. This year they are making allocations to pay Petrocaribe, and it is not just one certain section of this country that will pay, but every single Belizean from San Vicente to Dolores to Mabilha to Sarteneja to Benque Viejo will have to pay, Mr. Speaker. That is the reality. So my constituents are saying, how is it that government can spend \$111.1 million on roads, streets and highway construction. We did not feel the Petrocaribe.

Mr. Speaker, housing, \$2.3 million, I don't know, but our people in Toledo West did not feel the Petrocaribe in housing. The only thing that the people of Toledo West know is that the former candidate, who I beat 2 times now, has all the materials stored in his father's house. Somebody just texted me right now and said to make sure I mention that. He has all the materials stored in his daddy's house; and that's why they didn't vote for him. The people of Toledo West know. They want to make sure, Mr. Speaker, that they receive their benefits as well.

Mr. Speaker, social support and community assistance for both fiscal periods was \$30 million. What community assistance did my people in Toledo West get? What community assistance? Shame on them! Assistance for floods in 2015 was for \$1.9 million. Mr. Speaker, I will tell you that we have suffered major floods in Golden Stream, in Blue Creek and in Jordan. And I am going to be fair here. I want to thank the former Minister of NEMO, and I also want to recognize, Mr. Speaker, the new Minister of NEMO because he was down there visiting with us. (Applause) And I want to tell you, the former Minister, we were able to relocate the people in Jordan. That has been the only thing that I can say that there was tangible things to show in terms of you helping our people. But the other communities: Golden Stream, Blue Creek, Aguacate, they received zero, man. These people have lost their corn, their rice, their pigs, and their chickens, and they did not get any help. All were promises of giving them seeds, or we will help you with this, or we will help you with that, but it has not come to fruition. So I have every confidence, Mr. Speaker, that with you being at the helm now I will be able to count on your support. (Applause)

Now, Mr. Speaker, in the interest of time, I will skip a few things, and I'll move on. But I want to go directly to the Ministries of Labour, Local Government and Rural Development on page 180. The total budget ceiling, Mr. Speaker, for 2015/2016 was \$11,177,441. For 2016/2017, it is \$10,886,000, a reduction of \$291,000 or a 2.6% cut. That is the reality. So that was for labour. Local government, Mr. Speaker, for 2015/2016, it was \$6.7 million. For 2016/2017, it is \$5.2 million, a reduction \$1.5 million or 22.5%. That is for local government. And I just heard the Member from Corozal North bragging there. That was an actual cut, reduction. The figures are here, and they don't lie. They are right here, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, grants to municipalities, and this one is interesting. I want those municipalities to listen. Grants to municipalities for 2015/2016, it was \$5.9 million. For 2016/2017, it is \$4.5 million, a reduction \$1.4 million or a 24.2% decrease. Do you know why, Mr. Speaker, there is no election day? We know that that is the reality.

Man, the town infrastructure, and I represent Toledo West, but that is still part of Toledo. And I want to reiterate the point that the Member for Toledo East made yesterday, I want you to go in there and see. What is the excuse? When we had a PUP Town Council they said, "Oh, it is a PUP Town Council. So we can't work with them". Man, the people said, "Let us vote in a UDP Town Council."

They have a UDP town council, none other than the deputy chair of the UDP. Man, and it makes me wonder, how on earth she is not able to get the support from her Prime Minister and her party? I want you to look at the conditions of the streets in Punta Gorda. Man, you drive for a mile an hour, Mr. Speaker. It is terrible. So can you see these grants here? It simply means that there are going to be less goods and services for the people of our municipalities. Mr. Speaker, I peruse this budget very meticulously, and I could not locate a single allocation for rural water and sanitation expansion. I did not see any. I am wondering why. There is obviously no doubt that there is need to drill new wells, Mr. Speaker. And I want to commend the Honourable Member from Corozal North. I want to thank him. (Applause) I heard that Pueblo Viejo is getting water. That is good because the people of Pueblo Viejo have suffered for too long. For four years under this UDP Government, they have been drinking muddy water. So finally it is coming. That is good.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Finance, Public Service and Public Utilities on page 45, I did not see anything for utilities, for water and electricity expansion. Line item, Mr. Speaker, 375, infrastructure projects, formerly community projects, only \$750,000 is allocated, down significantly. When you look at line item 939, EU rural electrification, counterpart funding it is zero, Mr. Speaker. Line item 762, rural electrification it is zero. Line item 1624, National Health Insurance, I am wondering how they will fund that, only \$200,000 is allocated. But yet, we heard that health is a national priority, according to the Prime Minister only \$200,000 is what is allocated. Oh, Dr. Campos didn't approve that. Alright, good!

Continuing, Mr. Speaker, legal and professional fees, this one burnt me because we heard the Member from Caribbean Shores give a detailed of the amount of money that has been spent. But for this fiscal year, Mr. Speaker, that we are debating, page 46, line item 10, \$5 million is allocated under that one. Then you have another line item for another million dollar. That is line item 1806. That is already \$6 million. And then there is another line item for \$188,000. So legal fees you are talking about \$6,188,000. Now can you imagine, Mr. Speaker? Now I recognize, and please, I recognize that government has certain obligations. But, man, how can you justify spending so much money, Mr. Speaker, when my people in my constituency, the students, when it rains, Mr. Minister of Education, they cannot even get out of San Vicente or the bus cannot reach San Vicente. When you go to Dolores, the bus can't reach Dolores. Man, just fix the road. But you can take \$6 million and put it into legal fees. I say that that is totally unacceptable, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, for health, I looked at health, and, yes, there was an increase, and that is good. But, when you look at it, what is interesting, and this is on page 66, line item 48. And maybe the Member from Corozal Bay can tell us. What was interesting is that they are allocating under expenditure, Mr. Speaker, \$19,888,386 for contracts and consultancies. Let me repeat that, line item 48, page 66, they are allocating \$19,888,386 for contracts and consultancies. The question is, what contracts and consultancies, Mr. Speaker? This represents, Mr. Speaker, and I make sure I do my homework you know because I want to come here prepared. I want to come here prepared. This represents a total of 16.09% of the total health budget. It is very interesting, Mr. Speaker. We want to know, and I hope that it is not those shady contracts whereby you are buying x-ray machines at exorbitant prices because we know about those ones at K.H.M.H. Mr. Speaker, health is a priority the Prime Minister says, a budget that is bold and stable but K.H.M.H.,



line item 7, 2015/2016 budget, \$24,759,973 was allocated. This year K.H.M.H. is only getting \$23,511,000, a cut of \$1.2 million or 5.04%, Mr. Speaker. See that, it is a significant cut, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I guess that tells us why new fees have now been added when people go to K.H.M.H. for services. And we recognize, Mr. Speaker, that you know services have a cost, but the reality is, Mr. Speaker, and this is where I am worried about, there are many people in this country who cannot afford those basic fees, and we cannot deny them access to basic health services because they cannot meet their fees. (Applause) So that is where Government has a social responsibility and obligation, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little bit about this also, and I am coming to that. One of the things that really hurts our people in Toledo and the south, but more so in Toledo, the area that the Honourable Member from Toledo East and I represent, is the high cost of traveling when these poor people get sick. Man, you have poor people from Poite, from Mabilha, you know from all these places, Santa Ana, Crique Sarco, San Vicente; man, it is pathetic. These poor people when they are sick they have to ship them in an ambulance all the way to Southern Region Hospital. If they can't be attended there, they have to send them to Belize City. Man, there is a high cost incurred. Many of these people cannot find the money to travel. So the Ministry of Health has a moral responsibility to make sure that they provide the basic health services. What does it take? Mr. Speaker, out of the \$6 billion for legal fees, they could have taken a million dollars and pay at least 2 specialists or 3 specialists to be stationed in Punta Gorda. (Applause) That is where it would have benefitted the people. You see what I mean.

But where are the priorities, Mr. Speaker? You see the problem is that, while many of these politicians who talk big on that other side, while they are sleeping in their fancy rooms and beds, air-conditioned, my poor people are suffering out there. And I am there with them either getting them out sick or taking them to the hospital or transporting their dead body back to where they live. That is the reality, and that is why I feel it, man. It is the shoe that pinches that make you cry, and that is the reality.

Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the Member for Corozal Bay, the people of Toledo West, particularly the residents of San Antonio, are asking, why is it that the ambulance that was assigned for San Antonio was taken away from them and brought to Dangriga? And the Minister of Health went on record saying that those ambulances were for those areas. Low and behold a couple weeks after that they took the ambulance to Dangriga. That is totally unacceptable, and my constituents are asking that they return back the ambulance to San Antonio, Mr. Speaker. (Applause) Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the Ministry of Health and K.H.M.H. No, I want to commend you on a positive note. I just saw that there are now the services of a diabetologist at the K.H.M.H., and that is welcome news because we have a lot of people in this country who are suffering from diabetes, Mr. Speaker, and they need those services. But I want to say that whilst I commend you on that we need to go further. We need to make sure that, and we have many people who are suffering from severe renal failure due to diabetes. Many of them cannot afford dialysis, so they die. Why is it that we can't take another million dollar or \$2 million from the legal and professional fees and set up a dialysis system in place so that our people can access that. (Applause) That is what is going to make a difference for our people. Not all the fancy talk about boldness and stability. Put your money where your mouth is. That is what we

want.

Mr. Speaker, now let me go to the mother of them all. As I listened here to the Member from Belmopan, he bragged along with his colleagues \$4 million for Isidoro Beaton Stadium, \$13 million for a roundabout, but we have a crumbling Belmopan Hospital that is rat infested, Mr. Speaker. (Applause) That is the mother of them all. Where are our priorities, Mr. Speaker? Yes, and I have to bring it back. Man, we are debating the budget, Member. This is directly linked to the budget, Mr. Member. Now, Mr. Speaker, can you imagine? This is like, if I am living in my house, Mr. Speaker, and I cannot even buy rice and flour, but my wife says to me, “Oh, you know what, I need a fancy television, and I need a big refrigerator.” And I decide, “Alright, I am going to buy the television and the refrigerator,” but the next day I cannot even buy flour and rice to feed my children. That is the contrast that we are seeing here. But what it brings out to light is that there is clearly no clear plan as to how we want to address the health issues of this country. That is what I am concerned about. And do you know why it hurts me and burns me? It is because just last year, Mr. Speaker, and I know the Member from Collet doesn’t want to hear this, but just last year we had 2 of my constituents die at the Belmopan Hospital, the lady Sanchez and the lady Cal, may they rest in peace, from San Antonio and Big Falls, respectively. And I will tell you that Government is going to face another lawsuit regarding those incidents. Come on, what is more important? Is it a roundabout for \$13 million or we build a hospital for our people so that we can take care of our people? Where are the priorities, Mr. Speaker? (Applause)

Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, line item 040, oversees representation, Mr. Speaker, for 2015/2016, it was \$13.7 million. Now you would think that in a time of belt-tightening, in a time of where you are taxing the Belizean man and woman \$50 million more, you would think that they would cut on oversees representation. Well, it is totally the opposite, Mr. Speaker. Do you know what, Mr. Speaker? For this year they are allocating \$15,487,981, an increase of \$1.764 million, Mr. Speaker, or 11.39% increase. Do you hear that, Mr. Speaker? It is 11.39% increase. Maybe that is to accommodate the former Minister from Albert and the other member from the City Council, but come on. If we can’t meet our basic health services, we can’t fix our roads, then you are going to take this money and put it on that. What are we getting back? Please, Mr. Speaker!

Now, Mr. Speaker, turning to my constituency, as I said, Mr. Speaker, I still want to ask for the government to please take into consideration that we still have communities without water, Jalacte. And I know that they are talking about getting water to Pueblo. That is good, but we need water in Jalacte, Santa Elena, Crique Jute, Mafredi and Mabilha. These villages still don’t have running water in 2016, Mr. Speaker. Since I am on water, it is a pity that the Member responsible for water systems is not here, the Member from Corozal North. But I want to say that I also have a concern, Mr. Speaker, with regards to the composition of water boards. We have some water boards there, and I am going to call this one out, in San Felipe. They have been there for years without any accountability to the community. And, Mr. Member for Corozal North, Minister responsible for water systems, I don’t know how true this is, but what they are going around telling the people is that, “Oh, you know what? We don’t really have to account to the community. We have to account to the Ministry only.” But that is a serious concern, and the people of these communities are saying the water system belongs

to them, and they have a right to know what monies are being earned, what is being spent, and what is being saved. So I want you to please look into that, Mr. Minister. That is a serious concern because that is what they are being told, that they don't have to report to the community. I know because I used to be a former Chairman of the water board in my community. I used to present quarterly reports to the community, and that should be the practice.

Mr. Speaker, roads are in urgent need of repair. And I want to put this to rest because every time I raise this matter here you hear the Member from Collet and the others say, "Oh, you just got a new highway." Well, let me school them once and for all, Mr. Speaker. Toledo West is spread out apart, Mr. Speaker. The highway, yes, we welcome it. It is benefiting, but it is only benefiting 5 communities. Man, we have a total of 53 villages in Toledo. So don't come to tell me that. So it is what they want to do, Mr. Speaker. No, I am saying it is all combined. In my community, I have 28 villages. So 28 minus 5 still leaves you with 23 other villages that still don't have access to the highway. So, please, Mr. Member, be schooled once and for all. (Applause) And let me tell you, and I don't want to be a bit unkind to you, but for someone who is aspiring to that high position, I think, it would be good to listen and learn. (Applause)

So, Mr. Speaker, roads, I still have 23 other villages that are not connected by the new highway. So those roads are in serious urgent repair. I listened to the Member from Cayo Central, the Minister responsible for works, went on yesterday talking, I don't know, I think, a bunch of "I don't know what". Man, please! Mr. Speaker, I want to tell them that San Vicente road is in urgent need just like San Benito Poite, Mabilha, Santa Teresa, Aguacate, San Felipe, Laguna, San Marcos, and the San Jose bypass. These roads are in urgent need of repair, Mr. Speaker. And I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, it is a shame you know. I look at the budget, and, Mr. Speaker, I know that the people in my constituency know that what I am saying here is nothing but the truth. So I will speak for them, Mr. Speaker. I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, it is a shame, and I don't want to throw the blame on the public officers responsible for the Ministry of Works because I will tell you that when I call the person in charge in Punta Gorda he tries to accommodate and assist where he can. But the reality is that they are working with zero, and zero from zero is zero. They don't have anything, Mr. Speaker. I called them last week to grade the Blue Creek road. The man told me, "The grader is broken. The loader is broken. The bulldozer is broken. The bush hog is broken." That is the reality.

Now let me tell you. Mr. Speaker, if I am allowed, and I want to go on record because the Member from Corozal North, let me also school you a little. Mr. Speaker, we are on record, 1998 to 2008, under the leadership of the Honourable Said Musa, Mike Espat and the late Honourable Marcial Mes, \$10 million was invested in new equipment for Toledo, Mr. Speaker, two new road units. And I will tell you that it was two new road units. What is left today, Mr. Speaker, is only the shell. So, Mr. Speaker, how could they work with that?

**MR. SPEAKER:** One second, Member, it is a sign of respect and love they have for you, you know.

**HON. O. REQUEÑA (Toledo West):** No, it's not. I disagree with you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** People don't an stone empty mango tree. Remember that. You are doing well. Go ahead.

**HON. O. REQUEÑA (Toledo West):** Well, Mr. Speaker, let me tell you that it is a shame that Government did not see it fit, under the leadership of the Honourable Prime Minister, to take \$10 million and buy some new equipment for Toledo so that we can fix our roads. That is what is a priority, Mr. Speaker, not legal fees, not increasing the budget for oversees representation. Please! Mr. Speaker, electricity, there is, as I said earlier, absolutely nothing in the budget for electricity expansion and new connections. Mr. Speaker, Medina Bank needs electricity as well as Indian Creek, Golden Stream, Santa Teresa, San Jose, Santa Cruz, alright, Jalacte, and San Jose. Those are the communities that need electricity, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, let me go to the rural areas. The last village council election, and I want to know how they will hoodwink the people again. They came around during the last village council election and told the people, "We are awashed in millions of dollars, vote for the UDP, and we will help your village council". Do you remember that famous speech in Cayo North East when they had that huge Penner scandal? Do you remember that? The Prime Minister went into Cayo North East and asked, "Do you want a bridge? We will build the bridge." But they said, "We don't have a river." He said, "We will make a river for you if you want because we have millions of dollars." That's what they said. They were awashed in millions of dollars. But, Mr. Speaker, the chickens have now come to roost. They voted some UDP village councils, and they have not gotten any support Mr. Member responsible for village councils.

Now what the poor people of my constituency want, Mr. Speaker, is that they want to know that they receive a fair share. And, no, I don't care. The Guardian can say that tomorrow, if they want, because that is what they said a couple years ago that the Member from Toledo West wants the entire budget. I am not asking for the entire budget. But what I am fighting for is that I want equity. I want to make sure that my people get their fair share.

And I still want to add this. The Member from Collet, it is a pity he is not here, but you know his student who he is tutoring, the Honourable Senator, who is the UDP Representative in Toledo, Senator Coy, he went on record, Mr. Speaker, in an interview, and he said, "You know what, Toledo is not forgotten. Toledo is getting his fair share." Well, I am wondering which Toledo. And earlier he was here. I don't know if he is listening to me. But, please, I want to tell him. I want to tell that Honourable Senator that he has a duty. He is duty-bound to also fight for the people of Toledo. It is not only about coming to grandstand here. It is also about fighting. And the true test is when you can walk and sit down with your people and fight for them. That is where the truth test of leadership is going to be, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, I also want to say, speaking about rural areas, Corazon Technical High School, and the Minister of Education was just bragging, they are without internet. That is where the Senator is principal of that school. It amazes me and it puzzles me how he, having the connection with the Minister of Education and being a representative for the government on the Senate side, cannot fight to get basic internet at his high school. His teachers have to be going all the way to Sunday Wood to go and check the CXC results. Man, I just get the

text here. Man, this is not a made-up story. The Speaker just said it, you don't stone an empty mango tree, and that is what it's burning you all. (Applause)

Education, Mr. Speaker, I do not see in this budget, and I heard the Minister of Education saying that they are going to build additional schools, and we welcome that. But San Pedro Colombia is in urgent need of school expansion. Silver Creek R.C. School also in need. San Felipe Government School is also in need of expansion, urgent expansion to accommodate these students. The other one has to do with, Mr. Speaker, and I really want to speak to this one, the point of our preschool teachers. Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Education has a policy to expand access to education beginning all the way from preschool. And over the years both under the PUP and UDP, and, in fact, we started it under the leadership of the Honourable Francis Fonseca, the whole issue of access to preschool education. And teachers have worked very hard, Mr. Speaker, to teach in the preschools. But do you know what? There is a serious issue they are having problems with right now. Many of these teachers are uncertain whether their years of services at the preschool level, and we are talking not private preschool, we are talking about preschools that are attached to government-aided schools. Their services are now coming into question. We just recently had a teacher who retired from a particular school, and after 9 years of services at the preschool level they are telling this teacher that she is not going to get any benefits. Teachers, and I am saying we want clarification on this matter. We want clarification on this matter because teachers do not go into preschool by choice, many of them. They are assigned by their principals. And, in the case of where we have preschools, it is not a matter of choice; it is a policy of the Ministry of Education. So, Mr. Minister of Education, our teachers want to know once and for all whether once they are attached to a government-aided school whether they are going to get their pension benefits, be it gratuity or their pension benefits.

Mr. Speaker, in winding up, I want to say that I also looked at our youth and our women in the south and I do not see in this budget, Mr. Speaker, any support for women and our young people. There is urgent need, Mr. Speaker, to provide more sporting facilities for the rural area. Don't tell me about a sporting facility in the town or in the city. We need sporting facilities in our rural areas. And we are not asking for anything big. We want a football field. We want some equipment. We also want to make sure that there are opportunities for our young people to be able to participate in entrepreneurial activities, Mr. Speaker, because we have hundreds of young people who are graduating from sixth form, from high school, and they do not have access to opportunities, Mr. Speaker. So that is what we are fighting for.

Lastly, I want to continue to lobby for our Alcaldes and our chairmen. They need to see an increase in their stipend that they are getting because these people do significant work, Mr. Speaker. I also want to add to that list the community nurse's aide, Mr. Minister of Health. We need to treat them better, man. Many of these people, particularly in the rural areas, 1 o'clock and 2 o'clock, they are going out there to help our people. We need to take that into account, Mr. Minister of Health.

Mr. Speaker, in winding up, I recognize that, you know, it is always a challenge to meet the needs and the requests of our people in this country. I also recognize that the issue of resources is a challenge, but what our people are asking for is that they want to be given fair consideration in how our country's resources

are used. Mr. Speaker, all of us are Belizeans, regardless of our ethnicity, whether we are Maya, whether we are Mestizo, or Creole, whether we are East Indian or Garifuna or whatever. We are Belizeans, and we are deserving of a fair share of our country's wealth. That is what I am fighting for, Mr. Speaker. And, having said that, I do not see at this particular time those issues being represented, particularly for my constituency, and on that note I cannot support this budget, Mr. Speaker. I thank you. (Applause)

**HON. E. CASTRO (Minister of State in the Ministry of Transport and NEMO):** Mr. Speaker, I too rise to give my full support for the 2016/2017 budget. But, Mr. Speaker, listening to my colleague from Toledo West, you did a very good job. I almost think I score him higher than the Leader of the Opposition because apparently he went through the budget line by line. And, if you leave the Member from Toledo West, he would want nothing less than the entire budget for Toledo West. (Applause) There is nothing wrong with that, Member. However, this country is comprised of 31 other constituencies. So I would like for you to be considerate to us, the other rural constituencies, such as Belize Rural North, who also has some 27 villages. If everything goes to Toledo West, then Bomba would still be in a critical situation. It is impossible for the people of Bomba in my constituency to get out. On that note, Mr. Speaker, Bomba will finally be able to come out in times of disaster or floods. I can feel his pain as a Rural Representative. He speaks how he sees it. He speaks how he feels. I too am from Belize Rural North, but I am telling you that this budget will look after the people of Bomba, will also look after the people of Maskall and the entire Old Road. There are 192 villages in the rural constituencies around this country. I am tasked for the third time in a row after going to the polls and being elected as the rural Area Representative for Belize Rural North. So I represent those communities in Belize Rural North.

We have a lovely highway from Sandhill almost, I think, it's a little past Lucky Strike, going towards Kings College. I listen to many Members on the other side criticizing the budget, especially as it relates to infrastructural development. I would like to tell you that no country in the world can develop without properly investing in its infrastructure. How will the tourists and our Belizean people taking tourists to Altun Ha reach to Altun Ha if the road wasn't paved? Do you know what they used to do? Most people when you give them a ride to take some people to Altun Ha, if you have a small car or a small van, you try to talk them out of going to Altun Ha because the road was damn bad. They would say, "Boy, tell the tourist, you know there is something other than Altun Ha. We can go to the zoo. We can go to do cave tubing, and all that sort of stuff." Now it is lovely driving to Altun Ha which is a lovely Mayan temple in our constituency there in the Belize Rural North area. That was only possible because of the infrastructural development that took place in my constituency. Over 50,000 visitors, that is beautiful!

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to talk about the new road going from Bermuda Landing to Lemonal to reach Lamanai. Many times I will show up at the House debate, especially around budget time, and we spoke about the infrastructure development from Bermuda Landing, Isabella to Lemonal. Now the road is nice and beautiful. You will be able to now visit Lamanai through this corridor. There are some other developments, and I can stay here and beg for Flowers Bank. I know Mr. Brackett, the Chairman of Flowers Bank, will say, you know what, if it wasn't for the 17 brave gentlemen that left from Flowers Bank to

go and vote in Belize City, maybe none of us would be here. So Mr. Brackett would also like to see the Flowers Bank road paved, one of the oldest community in the Belize District. But we cannot get everything. We are not greedy like the Member from Toledo West who would like to pave all the streets in the south and have all the villages with water and electricity. When he gets the chance to come on this side of the House, he will learn hard and fast that you cannot get everything you want in one single budget.

So, Mr. Speaker, I don't plan to stay here long like the Member from Toledo West or some of my other colleagues from the other side nor this side. But I would like to congratulate the people of the beautiful constituency of Belize Rural North. This is my third time here, Member for Lake Independence. So I love them dearly, and I would like to say that, Mr. Speaker, Belize Rural North supports this budget, despite the naysayers on the other side. We have a very good budget. We know that we cannot build all the roads. We cannot provide all the water for all the constituency in one budget. So, please, man, let us be civil, and let us take one step at a time. You know that the baby didn't just born today and walk tomorrow. Everything takes time. The budget process is similar to that. We need to make sure that we deliver the goods and services to our people in a timely manner. There is no government that will be able to give you everything that you want in one single budget. Sometimes it takes two, three, four budgets before you might be able to get your water or your road fixed. What you need to do as the Area Representative like myself, be consistent, one drop by one drop, and you know what, we will continue to provide water.

When I took over Belize Rural North constituency in 2008, there were only five villages that had water, five out of twenty-seven. Now we can boast because we are consistent and we try each year to make sure that we fight for tangible things, things that are within the budget. Now only Bomba, Boston and May Pen are left, Mr. Speaker. Everybody in the Belize River Valley can now take a shower and can bathe when they feel like as long as they want. If you ask Mr. Broaster, he will tell you that the pressure is bursting the pipes at Double Head. It is because we are providing the good and services to the people in the Belize River Valley. We are also providing water, as we speak, to Gardenia and Biscayne. On that main between Sandhill and Orange Walk, two beautiful places, it has no water. They are getting their water now, thanks to this Government. And because we are consistent the best is yet to come. We are here. The best is here. Gardenia and Biscayne are getting their water. The beautiful village of Maskall is getting its water. As we speak, they are building the reservoir in Maskall. So "Clear the Land" will be able to jump in that shower and bathe as long he wants. I must give thanks, and I am giving thanks to my neighbour, Ms. Nora. If it wasn't for my neighbour I couldn't bathe to come to House meetings because the water system that we have is from way back in 1985. It has become obsolete. And now thanks to the Government and people of Belize water is here in Maskall. So the best is here.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to wish the entire country and all my cycling fans a save and enjoyable Holy Saturday. And I hope and I know that a Belizean will win. Next year I'll go and ride my bike from Belize to Cayo. Thank you very much and may God bless each and every one of you, and may we have a wonderful and safe Easter. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. (Applause)

**HON. DR. A. CAMPOS (Minister of State in the Ministry of Health):**

Mr. Speaker, I rise to offer my contribution and support to this General Revenue and Appropriation Bill, 2016/2017. But before doing that, Mr. Speaker, let me take this wonderful opportunity to thank God, our grand architect, and the good and humble people of Corozal South West for giving me the opportunity to represent them in this Honourable House. Without them, I am nothing.

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member for Toledo West attacked the Ministry of Health. Well, let me tell him something that we are getting two ambulances. We have ordered two ambulances, and one of them is for San Antonio village. Two, he also talked about dialysis. We in the Ministry of Health just don't see end-stage treatment. We have to attack even prevention. And we know that prevention is better than cure. A million dollars for dialysis is just a curative part where we give patients only quality of life because it is an end-stage treatment. Whenever we don't have that million dollar in the budget, we do try to have a partner to help us in attacking these diseases, and we have one of our best partners, which is Taiwan, the Republic of China (Taiwan). They are not giving us one million dollar. They are giving us \$2 million for the project to support end-stage treatment in kidney disease, not only end-stage treatment but prevention as well. So it's not that we do not put it in the budget. It is that we are seeing these problems out there, and we are doing everything we can for our Belizean people. He spoke about K.H.M.H., and that we only allocated certain million dollars. Remember that K.H.M.H. is a statutory body. They are an authority. They send their budget to us, and the people from the Ministry of Finance do the budget, and they give them that. So then K.H.M.H. is the one that sit down in its Board of Directors, and they are the ones that decided that they are going to charge the \$25. It is not just the Ministry of Health.

In the preventive part, he asked about the numbers of zika and chikungunya and dengue. Well, I can tell him that we are doing our part in what is prevention. And prevention is not just having two vehicles for each district, going house-to-house thermal fogging. It is also about our vector control doing campaigning from house to house and educating our people of the habitats of the vectors that transmit these disease. We have done even cleanup campaigns in all the villages. And that is why we have that zero-zika occurrence here in Belize.

Mr. Speaker, I beg your indulgence to grant me permission to refer to my notes. Mr. Speaker, let me take this golden opportunity, again, to salute our hardworking *cañeros* and *cañeras* in the sugar belt of northern Belize. Mr. Speaker, as everyone is fully aware by now, the sugar industry is facing serious challenges due to declining sugar prices in the international markets. This, Mr. Speaker, the *cañeros* and *cañeras* do not have control over, but, despite the challenges, I am proud and I join the cane farmers in celebrating that to date most half of the total production estimates for the present sugar crop has been delivered to the sugar factory. Mr. Speaker, I have to express my appreciation and thankfulness to our Right Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Dean Oliver Barrow, for his continued support to the sugar industry. He has contributed every year with the rehabilitation of sugar roads. And, Mr. Speaker, you may not be aware, but at present our cane farmers are receiving a \$3.55-fuel subsidy per gallon of fuel in order to carry on their daily activities in the sugar industry. (Applause) Mr. Speaker, this is unprecedented in the history of the sugar industry. This translated into dollars and cents means that farmers are paying something



like \$4 a gallon for fuel. Mr. Speaker, this is just one way of how supportive and caring this UDP Government has been to our cane farmers. This UDP Government, Mr. Speaker, understands the hardship that our farmers in the sugar belt are presently undergoing, and we will continue to assist the cane farmers. Mr. Speaker, the European Union has been a good partner to our Government and people of northern Belize through the accompanying measures of sugar. I have been informed, and Minister Montero yesterday confirmed it, that \$1 million has been approved in order for the Ministry of Works to purchase much needed equipment to be stationed in the north in order to carry sugar roads rehabilitation during the course of the sugar crop. This, Mr. Speaker, is welcomed news to our cane farmers in the sugar belt.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank all the hardworking village councils, especially the village chairmen and chair ladies who work on a daily basis without a salary for the benefit of their community. With this said, this year the village council of Conception village started the construction of a much-needed village park, something that they told their villagers they were going to construct. They along with the villagers and donors, people like Mr. Rudy Morales from Morales Transport, myself and others, we will almost complete this project. And this is something that is not government-funded like you said, but this is the willpower of the villagers trying to do something for their community and not just criticizing the government that they do nothing. Villagers do their own share as well.

In Libertad village, Mr. Speaker, we are working hard and hand in hand with Minister Hugo Patt of the Ministry of Rural Development to get the much-needed pump and pump house to improve the water system of Libertad and Concepcion villages. Mr. Speaker, with the provision of access to potable water for improved quality of life, the residents of San Victor village will have a new water tank and pump house, a project funded by the CDB under the SIF Basic Needs Trust Fund in the tune of BZ\$473,448.50. This project is to commence in April 2016 and should be completed by December 2016.

Mr. Speaker, talks have also been started for the construction and rehabilitation of the San Narciso and Libertad police stations funded by the Central American Bank for Economic Integration, CABEL, under the Ministry of National Security is Belize Integral Security Program. This, Mr. Speaker, is only the tip of the iceberg of what this UDP Government is doing for our people.

Mr. Speaker, my esteemed colleague, the Minister of Health, Honourable Pablo Marin, has very clearly spelt out the many things yet to come for our Ministry. However, I would like to take this opportunity to address the issues of the National Health Insurance. I heard the Leader of the Opposition in his presentation state that they would roll out NHI. For this, I applaud him. Yet, at the same time I tremble at the memories of the past PUP Administration when the then Leader and Prime Minister and now Member of Fort George promised to roll out NHI and almost succeeded. Remember he hurriedly pushed through the signing of contracts for medical providers across the country before elections, hoping that this would fool people into voting for the PUP, but he was going to do it without thought or discussion about how to finance it. At least he did not tell anyone but everyone knew that he was going to bankroll this venture at the expense of the Social Security Board funds. If he had been successful, Belize

would have suffered the same faith as many of the Social Security institutions in the region, going into deficit and throwing away the future of pensioners and contributors to the Social Security scheme. Mr. Speaker, we do things differently. Presently we have before us a policy paper that was developed with the assistance of the World Bank, looking at the technical and financial options that Belize can possibly adapt to fund and roll out the NHI scheme. We do things in a responsible and well thought out manner, without putting into jeopardy our financial stability and the stability of our valued social institutions. After our technical people have reviewed and discussed these options properly, we will come before Cabinet to make a decision.

Corozal will inaugurate a modern polyclinic as part of the National Health Insurance rollout in the north. In the mean time, services are being improved as we engage the medical personnel with the support of a team from Belize City to address the gaps and weaknesses in the service delivery of the system. We expect improvements in a gradual basis. Also, with the support of the Social Investment Fund, the Ministry of Health will embark on the construction of the San Narciso health polyclinic at a cost of \$1 million. Not only San Narciso will have this investment, but, yes, Member for Corozal South East, we will have a polyclinic in Chunox and a health center in Sarteneja along with San Pedro and Cristo Rey. (Applause) These projects are well underway and should commence within the next few months. This, Mr. Speaker, shows the dedication and love this government has for our Belizean people. Without health, we will not move forward as a nation. Mr. Speaker, after building these health facilities, we will gradually roll out the NHI scheme to them and then move to the west of our country.

Mr. Speaker, I am a newly elected representative for the reigning UDP Government. These are exciting times with much more to come. I look forward to supporting my government and people in the mission to improve the lives of everyone: mothers, fathers, children, men, women, PUPs, UDPs, and other parties. Together, with the commitment of the substantive Minister of Health, we have sworn to take the Ministry of Health to new heights for the benefit of our Belizean people. Even though we would like more money allocated to the Ministry of Health, I am satisfied with what we have received. Once again I thank the beautiful people of Corozal South West from Estrella, Libertad, Concepcion, Luisville, San Roman, Santa Clara, San Narciso, San Victor, and Buena Vista. I have all of you in my heart, and I will work hard this next 5 years so that you have me in yours. I would like to wish everyone, all our Belizeans citizens, a very safe and happy Easter. Thank you. (Applause)

**HON. F. MARIN (Corozal South East):** Mr. Speaker, I must say you know, I think, after 8 budgets, finally we have someone who is competent to talk about health. And actually, I mean, I respect your speech, Member for Corozal South West. Your speech, keep it up, and let us be proud.

Mr. Speaker, I want to make my presentation on this year's budget. And, Mr. Speaker, one of the main things I want to start off with is that, well being that I am the last one on this side to speak and my colleagues have all analyzed it, but there is one factor that I do believe requires some looking at. Mr. Speaker, they do need to be looked at especially the section of the document reviewed, the Economy 2015, where we see various numbers thrown at the reader. In that, Mr.

Speaker, on page 15 of this document, this particular one, the Review of the Economy Part, one can see that the population grew in 2013 by 2.6%, by 2.6% in 2014, and by 2.79% in 2015. That is an average over those three years of 2.66% per year of population growth. Mr. Speaker, according to these numbers, again, the economy grew in 2013 by 1.3%, 4.1% in 2014, that sounds strange, but I will work with the number, and 1.4% in 2014. Again, that is for an average of 2.26% growth in the economy, according to this document. Mr. Speaker, utilizing these three years, the population outgrew the economy by an average of 4%. The point being, Mr. Speaker, there is just no way that unemployment can be decreased in an economy that grows slower than its population. Something is seriously wrong when people are supposedly saying unemployment has gone down, in particular, Mr. Speaker, when we know, at least from the Corozal District, the papaya industry has closed down, the Corozal Free Zone we all know is in the news, pretty much stagnated, their banks accounts are being frozen, and as well how the sugar industry is, I don't even know if I want to call it sugar industry, the BSI/ASR industry. In light of these three factors, after wining in this historic third term, in the UDP historic third term, this UDP Government has left Corozal and Belize on a whole in shambles. This boast of the lowest unemployment, Mr. Speaker, just cannot be true.

But there is also another aspect that I want to refer to, Mr. Speaker, again, utilizing the same numbers presented by the government. The population, using the Prime Minister's numbers, we have calculated the numbers where the Belizean population will be worse off at the end of this parliamentary term if we get an economy of \$4 billion. Clearly, we need to get it much bigger, but using the numbers as presented, Mr. Speaker, at \$4 billion you will see it right now. When one forecast the population growth to 2020, we see a forecasted population growth to reach 419,900 people. Again, this is using the same numbers and extrapolating it up to 2020. Of course, using basic division to get the forecasted per capita GDP in 2020, the forecasted GDP would tally to be \$9,524.71. Now compare that to this year's GDP, again, as presented in this book, of \$9,657.60. This year beats out the forecasted per capita GDP by \$132.89. If we are to adjust for inflation, it would look worse. Basically what I am saying, Mr. Speaker, is that we have basically what, four more years of the same, as presented by the numbers from this government. It will be four more years of the same with a population growth that is steady, and, if we only reach that \$4 billion economy, our per capita GDP will not grow. It will get smaller. Mr. Speaker, we all know, all the economists know that at the very least from the beginning one has to start somewhere. We must increase at least the per capita GDP because it gives the government room to maneuver to be able to provide other programs. So, Mr. Speaker, this is not just basic cheap rhetoric. This is just a basic analysis of the numbers as presented, and the outcome is that Belizeans, as a whole have no higher possibilities to imagine other than the Government will come back with future budgets, with worse unexpected news, and attempt to pretty it up in fancy language.

I heard the Member for Education, my colleague from Collet, commented that 8 cents of every dollar of this budget is spent in education. Basically what will happen, Mr. Speaker, is that in 2020, again, 8 cents will still be in the budget of education just from this forecasted numbers, Mr. Speaker. In other words, there will be nothing new, no new initiatives, Member from Belize Rural South. Well, at least you are growing yours. Is that right?

Turning to unemployment, Mr. Speaker, what can one say? Especially as a Member of this House, who is but one of four from the Corozal District, Mr. Speaker, it seems that my other three colleagues are not able to stand up in Cabinet when these big decisions are made. I have read this speech, Mr. Speaker, and in the 24 pages of this budget presentation not even once will you find the word "Corozal" in it. I know, Mr. Speaker, because I have read this several times. I can't find it. I heard them mentioned just now about polyclinics and all of that. I mean those are pipedreams. Sartenaja already has a clinic. What will you do? Will you come and paint it and say you built a new one? Chunox already has one. What will you do? Will you paint it over? Member for Corozal South West, please school this man because I know you would never make that mistake. Explain it to that man because he doesn't understand. The absence of mentioning the Corozal District, Mr. Speaker, instantly tells us that there is nothing there for the Belizeans residing and making a living in Corozal. Back to unemployment, how can it decrease when Fruta Bomba has just closed down, leaving 250 workers unemployed? The sugar industry is experiencing one of the lowest first payments to date, and that affects the employment of cane cutters and other people who are related in the industry. And, of course, again, I just referred to the free zone with their bank accounts being frozen. Business cannot be conducted in this district, Mr. Speaker. Of course, there is no new initiative at all mentioned for this industry. I hear it only from these guys, but it is not in the budget, neither in this one nor in the bigger one.

So, Mr. Speaker, referring again to the Review of the Economy, as if to hide the shame that there is only a reference to the drop in papaya, now we know that the whole industry has closed down. In light of the fact, Mr. Speaker, that from the low expectation that the government expects from their forecasted fall of per capita GDP, one would at least expect the government to make all attempts to keep current industries that we have alive. The government refers to the great recession of western economies. And, I believe, one of my colleagues highlighted it earlier where at least the industries we have we have to keep. Things are rough. We know that. Life is hard. There is a recession. So the industries we have we must keep.

We should have done something to have been able to keep Fruta Bomba operating. From what I have gathered in consulting with those who were close to it, they have an EPZ status under the Belize Fruit Packers, and there were many restrictions placed upon them to import necessary items for the operations as they used to do. Representatives of the company even came to Belize this year to meet with the government to help resolve the situation, and they got no positive response, even though the company, Mr. Speaker, was already experiencing problems due to malaria and mealy bugs that were affecting their production. In addition, there was the untimely response for the approval of wells, Mr. Speaker. All agriculturalists will tell you that the timing is important for planting schedules, and since they were getting sluggish response they were not able to plant to achieve maximum production. All one would ask is for a government, in light of the turbulent times, to be sensitive in dealing with the private enterprise. Unfortunately, due to the slow response time and difficulties in importation experienced by this company, they ultimately closed down. There are no alternatives for these workers to go, Mr. Speaker. I know because they constantly come to me to see if I can help. And that was one of the places I used to send them to work, Fruta Bomba, or I would tell them to go to the Free Zone and try to

hustle a job there, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, in reviewing the numbers presented in the Ministry of National Security, a few things come to mind. As a background, our nation has the dubious distinction of one of the highest murder rate in the world, and weekly in the news we get distressing reports of gang murders. It seems that there are elements in our society that feel free to wantonly take justice into their own hands. They act with impunity delivering their own form of justice. This certainly does not bode well for our society. So when one turns to the budget numbers the first thing that pops out is that in Capital III there is nothing in the budget, Mr. Speaker. When you check the document, there is nothing located for in Capital III. This can be located on page 199, and there is nothing in Capital III, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the last time that Capital III held anything for national security was in the fiscal year 2013/2014.

Turning to page 194, Mr. Speaker, where one can locate the Capital II spending and the outturn for national security in this over \$1-billion budget, Mr. Speaker, the figure overall is only \$2.3 million of spending in this very important Ministry. One can even tell, Mr. Speaker, that whomever submitted these numbers seem not to have been bothered to going into any detail about these numbers because all they have done in the columns for the next forecasted 2 fiscal years is just basically extended it to the end. So somebody, I guess, got lazy and just fixed it over. Surely, Mr. Minister, you can tell them to put more details in your future planning of this. None of these numbers show any new initiative in this Ministry, and it is especially concerning because of all that is happening in our borders currently. One would have expected some bold new initiative to boost up our BDF to be able to better hold their own, especially in the Sarstoon River. Mr. Speaker, there is nothing in there for that.

And I just want to make one clear thing, Mr. Speaker. I personally know Sarstoon River. I have been there. I have had to patrol there in my time. I didn't take a video camera to go and have everybody see me going there. But, Mr. Speaker, we have to be very careful in distinguishing between what will be a diplomatic solution versus military operations. Our soldiers, and up to now I have been proud to have been part of that organization, and I am proud of them up to today. Our soldiers, Mr. Speaker, are trained not to back down. And, if that situation escalates, we may see a situation that none of us will be pleased to have to deal with. Like I'm telling you, I didn't take any video camera out there. I went out there with my own weapon. The Prime Minister can say that. You know that, sir. It was under your time.

Mr. Speaker, one does not even see the accounting or note referencing for the helicopters that are supposed to come on stream. I heard about it, but I didn't see anything about it in the budget. However, Mr. Speaker, in the recurrent budget for defense, one notes that a line item has been added for the maintenance of the helicopters. That is what I found. This amount is \$150,000 annually, and it has been extended as a forward estimate for the next 2 fiscal years. Again, the concern here is that this is not even half to cover for the maintenance of this very delicate equipment. Without getting into too much details, Mr. Speaker, the BDF does have concerns in being able to properly service and maintain these helicopters when they are to come on stream. Mr. Speaker, the issue is not getting helicopters. The issue is the maintenance of these. (I didn't see it. Show it to me. I listened to you. It is not there in the numbers.)

Tellingly in this numbers, Mr. Speaker, is the line item, and explain this one, Mr. Minister, in the line item of the purchase of a computer on page 155. The cost of this computer last year was \$22,484, and, for the next three years, this annual purchase will be forecasted for \$42,945. This must be one computer you guys are purchasing, one computer, because this is the line item, purchase of a computer. This computer will cost 42,000 and change dollars. Maybe it will even make coffee, I don't know, but come one, something is wrong with those numbers there.

Another line item that perhaps will require a simple explanation, but was not forthcoming in my preparation, was for national security and intelligence, where there is need for animal feed. In national security and intelligence, we need animal feed. Yes, animal feed in our intelligence network, and the recurrent expenditure for the last fiscal year was \$8,262, and for this year it has now become \$11,680, and, like I said earlier, they just forecasted it forward wantonly. This behooves me, Mr. Speaker, because I do hope that from the purchase of this animal feed we will be able to get some valuable intelligence in our security from this ever so-important line item in national security.

One final point on the line items, Mr. Speaker, and this was taken out by those from the sectors that we consulted. The resources allocated for operating costs which include fuel are critically low, and it limits our security forces to properly patrol our borders and stem the tide of illegal incursions. For example, 11% of the budget for fisheries, resource and management are assign to operating costs, and that includes the fuel; 7% for forestry resource management, 10% for the environmental management, 7% of the budget for defense which is the BDF, and that includes the operating costs, including the fuel, and 11% of the budget for maritime security which is the Coast Guard, are assigned to operating costs. It is for these reasons, Mr. Speaker, that we have some NGOs that attempt to fill the gaps where these security forces cannot meet. We have got to have a serious rethink of how we allocate our resources on a whole in this very important Ministry, in particular on our border side.

Mr. Speaker, turning to the Ministry of Natural Resources, and, of course, it doesn't go without any notice that we no longer have the same Minister as before, and we also notice the reaction of him for the past couple of months now. So certainly we want to wonder what is going on. He never thanked the Prime Minister. But, Mr. Speaker, we still have to look at the numbers of the past performance and the forecast that the government has for this Ministry. In Capital II, page 113, what immediately jumps out, Mr. Speaker, is the difference by almost double the amount budgeted for surveys and mapping for the year 2015/2016, from \$300,000 to a revised estimate of \$708,815. This perhaps, Mr. Speaker, is due to having been an election year and that maybe the Ministry went into overtime in trying to get out as much surveys and maps for the cronies. The reason I say this, Mr. Speaker, is that year in year out in Capital II there has always been an underspending of the monies allocated, and I've always pointed it out in my time for presentation that Capital II has always been underspended, except for the past year when it more than doubled the budget. Of course, Mr. Speaker, for this current fiscal year, the budgeted estimates have reverted back to \$300,000. I guess there is no election in the near horizon. So they went back to the normal. Usually Capital II monies in the Ministry are underutilized, and for other line items the usual occur. For land administration, the budget was

\$100,000, but actual spending was only \$69,000 and change. Land policy development, the budget was \$65,000 but actual spending was only \$27,000 and change. Overall, Mr. Speaker, Capital II was budgeted for \$581,660, and they spent \$872,476, which is an anomaly after studying this budget for the past 8 years. And, when one looks at the now proposed budget for Capital II, again, it has fallen back right to \$516,659 within what you would call the normal range. A lot of strange occurrences, Mr. Speaker, are happening in this land management and administration.

With regards to Capital III there is not much to be said, Mr. Speaker, since there are no monies budgeted since 2014/2015, none for this year and none forecasted up to the years 2018/2019. It certainly shows that there are no new initiatives. The Government has no interest in pursuing no new initiative in this very important Ministry of land management and administration. Reviewing the budget, Mr. Speaker, reveals to one and all why Belizeans are having a hard time getting timely access to this all-important Ministry and as well getting timely results. Remember, Mr. Speaker, a country, as ours, with such great natural resources as land can be greatly benefitted if Belizeans can have quick access to their land titles, transfers, purchases, et al. And it will also benefit the Belizean economy. However, in the long titling project, all that is budgeted is Capital II for \$50,000. How can we progress this way, Mr. Speaker? As I mentioned a couple budgets ago, *no hay hombres sin tierra, ni tierras sin hombre*. Mr. Speaker, translated that means that there are no men without land and no land without men. We need to have some real access to land, Mr. Speaker, if our country, our nation, is to develop.

Mr. Speaker, as mentioned before, nowhere in this budget is the Corozal District mentioned. Even worse, I was unable to find any project for Corozal South East. They came with fancy words, but it is not in here. The beautiful people of this division still return the PUP Area Representative in the last election despite all the shenanigans, (Applause) despite the extent the government went to change that, but that didn't happen.

Mr. Speaker, in the Ministry of Works, there exists no road project for the Corozal South East area. And this is annoying, Mr. Speaker, when I have just received in my possession a huge, significant amount of payment vouchers for a lot of works being done. These details will be coming out. Don't worry. None of it is for the Corozal South East area, Mr. Speaker. And all of this payment was done in the month of January. I didn't even had time to tally it. It is about 50 different payments, just in January for one Imer Hernandez, Development Company Limited, Mr. Speaker. Again, remember last year, Mr. Speaker, the road project from Buena Vista to Caledonia was cancelled and nothing has been put in place. And now that the cane *zafra* is going on the roads in Caledonia are in bad shape, Mr. Speaker, and in urgent need of repairs. For the village of San Joaquin, Mr. Speaker, for the past 8 years not one grader, dump truck or backhoe has entered this village. This village is in dire need of road works and as well some drainage works that were highlighted in the flooding last year. Yes, Mr. Speaker, we also had flooding in our area and we did not get the relief that the Government Representatives lavished upon their own constituencies before the election.

In Calcutta, Mr. Speaker, the government school needs some urgent repairs, and none again is forthcoming in this budget. I urge the Government to please pay attention as this is critical for our young students who attend daily. As an aside, Mr. Speaker, I have regularly been invited by the schools there to listen

to their debates where they discuss different topics. You know one of the topics was, "Are you a product of where you were born?" And there is the for and the against. And I was pleasantly surprised at the level of this debate. I was pleasantly surprised at the details in the preparation of these young people, how they prepared for both sides. One goes in with preconceptions, and these young people are teaching us how they prepare and debate, Mr. Speaker. You would be very proud of them. So I ask that the government please pay attention to these schools and help them develop.

For Ranchito, Mr. Speaker, what they need, especially since there is a new Minister of Natural Resources, is for him to now release the land titles of properties that were unjustifiably frozen by the previous Minister. These citizens want to build their homes. Along with this, what is also needed is an expansion of electricity along with water access. So I'll be checking with my colleague from Corozal North about that.

In Copper Bank, during the election they started works to build a dumpsite that since then has not been completed. It needs to be finalized. Don't just heat up the people. I know they rejected you all, but please finish the project for the dumpsite. As well a water system is needed there, Member for Corozal North.

For Progreso, Mr. Speaker, year in year out it is almost like a song. I keep mentioning the San Estevan/Progreso road. And I don't want to take something serious and laugh, but this is the most surveyed road in the whole country. You go there right now, maybe it is a little dark, but you will still find surveyors out there surveying this road. And nothing has happened because this government cancelled it. Again, Mr. Speaker, the village is also expanding, and, again, the Government needs to expand electricity access. Remember we own BEL. Please let us use it for our benefit.

In Chunox, Mr. Speaker, it already has a clinic. You just need to load it up, but there is no problem, we won't reject what you are offering. But what I want to say, Mr. Speaker, is that the Adventist school at the back of the village still cannot get electricity access, in spite of there being a strong UDP village council. And, again, because we own BEL, I urge the government to act quickly to assist this school with electricity, Mr. Speaker.

And, finally, Sarteneja, some of my colleagues love to spend their vacation over there. The streets of that village need works. It also needs proper drainage. Mr. Speaker, again, Sarteneja was affected by the flooding of last year, and I'm certain that we never did get anything out of that 4 point whatever million dollars for flood relief. In spite of that, we were still successful, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, we cannot forget the 2 ferries in my area. The traffic has increased in the area, and the schedule of maintenance needs to be ramped up, Mr. Speaker. Of course, one must remember, Mr. Speaker, my area is severely affected, especially with the closing of Fruta Bomba that is located in San Joaquin itself, the poor state of the sugar industry and the sluggish free zone. We cannot forget as well, Mr. Speaker, that this also occurred after the closing a couple years ago of the Golden Princess Casino that had already released some workers. No wonder my area, and the district on a whole, is one of the poorest areas of the nation.



In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, in seeing the numbers that the government forecast, the even lower GDP at the end of their parliamentary term, and seeing no new initiative, it brings to me in mind the parable in the gospel of St. Matthew. Member for Mesopotamia, I read that gospel too. It is one of my favorites, the parable in the gospel of Matthew, where we read about the master with the three workers he entrusted money too when he embarked upon his journey. Paraphrasing in the interest of time, the essence is the same, and it can be looked up in this gospel, Chapter 25:14-30, Member. In the parable, each worker was entrusted with money, and each gave different returns. One of them who was afraid to lose the money just buried it and returned the same money. Jump to today's Belizean economy and the presentation in this budget, the same thing is occurring, Mr. Speaker. The same thing is occurring in that this money is being hidden, and it is just being taken out to give back the same. We need to unleash the economic potential of Belize, Mr. Speaker, and this budget does not do it. And remember we also just benefitted from Petrocaribe. Well, it was not us. Only some people benefitted from Petrocaribe. And, I believe, Mr. Speaker, just as in the Gospel how the master punished that servant so will this government, Mr. Speaker.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, after my criticism, I want to thank my friend from Belize Rural South for supporting the Sarteneja Easter Regatta. Thank you very much for the support and also to the Member for Mesopotamia for liaising with me. And I want to wish everybody a happy and beautiful Easter, Mr. Speaker, in particular the most beautiful people in Belize, the Corozal South East ones. That area, Mr. Speaker, is also going to be celebrating Easter in Copper Bank, in Chunox, in Progresso and in Sarteneja. Mr. Speaker, you guys should come and support our Belizean economy. I cannot support this budget. Thank you very much. (Applause)

**RT. HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Public Service, Energy and Public Utilities):** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now the Leader of the Opposition made a suggestion. I have one of my own to offer. Why don't we agree to change the Standing Orders so that we might limit speeches to an hour? Mr. Speaker, it is ridiculous the way we go on and on and on both sides, and I will plea guilty as well. The Prime Minister from St Lucia, Kenny Anthony, was telling me that is exactly what they did in his country, and I would wish that we would reflect on that. (Don't look at me like that, Member from Toledo West. Do you think you can keep it to an hour? Oh, that is if we move you to the front permanently.)

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, I hope my proposal will fair better than the proposal made by the Leader of the Opposition because he started off very well. And he said that he, for his own part and as well in consequence of what the people said when he held his consultations, wished to suggest that we behave in this House with decorum, that we draw a line under the past, and we leave off the name-calling and the insults trading. Well, the proposal didn't go very far. I wasn't here, but the reports as to the behavior of your Member for Caribbean Shores and your Member for Cayo South, my reports suggest that they obviously paid absolutely no heed to your injunction and that they conducted themselves in a way which we regret and which, Mr. Speaker, I certainly have to answer. I was hoping like you, we could draw a line under the past, you know, but I will be very restrained in what I say. And I will direct my remarks to the two of them because, as I've said, both the Member for Caribbean Shores and the Member for Cayo

South were rude and personal and offensive. I heard when the Member for Mesopotamia, the Minister of Housing, was remonstrating with the young Member from Caribbean Shores, and I thought what the Minister of Housing said was extremely timely. I will only add this. I personally was not surprised because, to paraphrase Immanuel Kant, “Out of the crooked timber from which he comes, no straight thing was ever made”. (Applause) Mr. Speaker, this is in obvious contrast to my own family, you know, none of whom was ever accused, not by any Auditor General, not by any police, and certainly not by the people, of fraud, conversion or stealing. And, for sure, no child of mine will ever have to suffer the ignominy of their father being described by the highest court in the land as “a malignant tumor”. (Applause) And so, Mr. Speaker, I tell the Member for Caribbean Shores, once and for all, find somewhere other than this Honourable House to deal with your daddy issues and find some means other than our debates to expiate the shame of your inheritance.

The Minister for Mesopotamia’s warnings apply equally to that other vulgarian, the Member for Cayo South. His definition of small “B” barrow taken from Old English was first employed by Glenn Godfrey at the Belize Times. Do you remember Mr. Godfrey come with that? Now the Member for Cayo South does resemble Mr. Godfrey in a number of unwholesome ways, but Glenn at least had facility with language, some style, some width. The Member for Cayo South’s crudity is unredeemed, in other words, Mr. Speaker, not even lipstick on that pig. His crassness is unrelieved, and so I certainly had come to expect nothing but utter, ugly, boorishness from this money-grubbing parvenu whom even those in his own party find distasteful. As to castration, maybe he should inquire from some of those sitting not too far from him whether castration is not the cause of a certain wandering abroad from his distaff side. If I seem to be talking in riddles, Mr. Speaker, it is because some art of concealment, camouflage, is necessary if I am to comport with the rules of the House and public boundaries. But slow though he is he will figure it out, and that’s all that I require.

Now, Mr. Speaker, as to the budget itself, I wish to thank all for their contributions and single out, of course, the public officers, including those at the Ministry of Finance. Now among the half-truths, untruths, falsifications and misrepresentations from the Opposition, one stood out; that was the charge that the Petrocaribe projects being implemented by BIL had contracts awarded on the basis of cronyism. Mr. Speaker, that’s why we put representatives of the National Trade Union Congress of Belize and the Chamber of Commerce on the BIL Board of Directors, to make absolutely sure of transparency, to guard completely against any possibility of HP, as your station likes to call it, hanky-panky. And those representatives will tell you that all these contracts were awarded on the basis of fair and open bidding. You talked about the Civic Center. The outfit that won went up against Kee-Chanona from Trinidad and Tobago, first-class regional reputation, and the local outfit that won, which is a partnership, came in some \$6 million under Kee-Chanona. That’s why they won the contract, and, as you can see, work has already started and is proceeding apace. But, Mr. Speaker, Petrocaribe/BIL, the government’s fantastic public works program, this has so upended those on the other side that they’re going bonkers, to the extent now where they will indict the social partners because, if hanky-panky there was, the social partners would have had to be a part of it. It is just completely nonsensical. It is a classic case of sour grapes. There is no doubt, indeed, there is none, that the phenomenal spending, the giant investments that this government made in country and people, in fact, helped to propel us to this historic third term. But don’t make

it stick in your cross so much. You all only have four and a half years to wait.  
(Applause)

Now, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition, apart from that damp squib with respect to his proposal for civility, you know he put me in mind of the aphorism that Mark Twain attributed to Benjamin Disraeli. According to Twain, it can't be found nowhere in Disraeli's published writings, but, according to Twain, Disraeli said, "There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, and statistics." Well, Mr. Speaker, in his perambulation because he was all over the place, the Leader of the Opposition's claimed data fell into all three of Disraeli's categories. For example, he talked about what the average earnings in this country is, but he offered no source or authority for the figure he gave. Likewise he said he had embarked on some sort of tax per dollar calculation for people's earnings, but, in coming up with the number and in telling us so he did so, he used such outrageous sleight of hand that is required a scolding from the Minister of National Security, who is the only true economist in this House.

It was not surprising then, Mr. Speaker, that when it came to our Statistical Institute of Belize the Leader of the Opposition cited them and their data with approval when it suited him. For example, the GDP growth, last two quarters, he was quick to say, "This is what the SIB said, and they obviously are right." He used that to decide, to determine, fine economist that he is, that we are in a recession. But when it came to the unemployment figure, similarly given and documented by the Statistical Institute of Belize, and they've been doing this every time they put out their bulletin. So it's been consistent. When it came to the fact that they confirmed that unemployment now is the lowest it has been in a decade, that doesn't suit the Leader of the Opposition. So he quarrels with it. The last man who spoke, the Member for Corozal South East, similarly did the same thing. But I suppose, Mr. Speaker, to some extent it is rationale that they should quarrel with that because how else, except by charging that the professionals at the SIB are, in fact, guilty of fraud. How else can they explain that, despite their litany of woes, despite their insistence that every business pretty much, practical in this country is going belly up? How can they explain the fact that joblessness is going down?

Again, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition had in seeking to manipulate things, had the effrontery, the nerve, the gall, the temerity to talk about debt and to say, by way of complaint, that the debt to GDP ratio under the UDP is now almost 80%, neglecting to say that when they left office it was 92%. We took it down. Is it going up again? But it is going up again, Mr. Speaker, because of the borrowings from Petrocaribe. I hope the true economist in the House will perhaps invite him for some sort of a private session and explain to him the simple fact that, if you can borrow on concessionary terms, if you can borrow on super concessionary terms, I don't know of any other arrangement, any other international facility, where you can get 1% money over 25 years. I cited for them one time an article in the Financial Times that made the point that borrowing in those terms is almost like a gift. So, while in terms of the statistics, it does take up your debt to GDP ratio. If I could continue to borrow like that forever, I would borrow like that forever. So please, Mr. Leader of the Opposition, you really need to be extremely careful when you talk about debt and debt under the UDP in an accusatory manner. Remember that the contrasts between the terms on which we borrow and the terms on which you borrow are apart. There is also the fact that when we borrow the people can see how every last penny of what we borrow is

being spent because it is just not BIL, you know, every contract given that was funded with Petrocaribe money went to the Contractor General. There was never any single-issue type of thing. So, when you talk about debt, the UDP record is an exemplary one going back from the days of Prime Minister, Honourable Manuel Esquivel, and, I repeat, Mr. Speaker, if you, any country can borrow on terms such as the terms offered by Petrocaribe, that country and its government would be a fool not to take advantage of those sorts of terms for as long as they possibly can.

And then, on this question of debt, the Leader of the Opposition also had the nerve to say, in effect, watch what will catch us when the step up for the super bond overtakes us and when an year or so later we have to start paying back the principal on the super bond. Well, whose super bond is it? Who contracted that super bond, putting together, trying to consolidate all the serial disgraces that formed part of the fabric of their borrowing pattern? Where did they used to go? How did they used to call it? Salomon Smith and Barney and when they were going to Bear Stearns, when they were going to the Bank of New York, when they go to KC Banks, some names nobody has ever heard, and they borrowed at 13%. They went to IBOM, whether I boom you, International Bank of Miami. And then they had to put all of that together in this super bond and so much of what had been borrowed as was documented by the very same Bear Stearns whose has gone belly-up as we all know. I recollected as US\$200 million, Bear Stearns said, had gone missing from what they borrowed. Don't talk to us about debt, Sir. Don't talk to us about debt. You invite us to pour scorn on you.

Mr. Speaker, they talked about what is happening in the agro productive sector. Again, I hope that the Leader of the Opposition in his readings will come to the recognition that commodities are always cyclical. That's why you talk about, when there are times like this, using countercyclical measures. Commodities are cyclical. They are vulnerable. They are cyclical. They will go up, and they will come down. We are at a point in the cycle now where the vulnerability of our commodities sector has been shown up, but as a consequence of what, disease, and all sorts of reasons beyond our control. But we know, Mr. Speaker, that there is sure to be a recovery, there is sure to be a rebound, and in the meantime the government stands ready to do and is doing all that it can to help the sector through the current problems.

They forget that they mentioned citrus. The Member for Stann Creek West read a long exegesis on citrus. They forget that it was those same citrus people who stood up one after the other at the Biltmore Hotel before an election to praise this government, for having bailed the citrus industry. (Applause) They forget that it was this government that basically, they say that we did it by, according to them, destroying the BSFA. Well, that is your judgment. The fact is though that it was as a consequence of the actions of this Government that we were able to have a sugar crop. (Applause) And you talkED about taxation. You know the technicians, in terms of this budget, wanted to do all sortS of things with GST, including moving from exempt to fully taxable. But we in Cabinet knew that that change would fall particularly hard on the agricultural producers in this country, and so we said no. And we will continue to say no. So that even in consequence of the way the GST and the tax regime operates we are helping the commodity sector in this country. (Applause) But what kind of foolishness is the Member for Corozal South East talking about papayas and the people had an EPZ but couldn't import their machinery duty free? Man, again, isn't that what an EPZ is about?

You don't even have to check with customs. You just wave your certificate, and you are gone clear.

So, Mr. Speaker, let me conclude, we've been here far too long, by saying just this much more. Leader of the Opposition harped on the fact that we are estimating GDP growth for the next year at about 1.5%. He told us, again, falling afoul of Disraeli, that, according to CDB, the regional growth average that they are forecasting is 4%. Well, that is the middle category of Disraeli. That is a damned lie. CDB said no such thing. Well, I thought you said CDB. I'm sure I heard CDB. Well, let me tell you about CDB, then maybe the IDB needs to talk to CDB, because, in fact, at a press conference where our local media was present in Barbados CDB said that they estimate GDP growth for Belize in the upcoming year to be coming in at 2.7%. My technical people are conservative. I wasn't going to quarrel with them, and so when they said 1.5% I allowed that to go by. But certainly with respect to CDB, the premier economist in this region, they forecast Belize's GDP growth at 2.7%, and they made it plain that that was distinctly better than the regional average. (Applause)

So, Mr. Speaker, I sit now by repeating, this is a budget providing for stability and continuity in the middle of changing circumstances. We have every confidence that the productive sector, the agro-productive sector, the commodity sector, will be covered and rebound. In the meantime, we are going full tilt behind services, including tourism which has taken off in a way that is unprecedented. We know that, after and immediately following upon this period of stability, Belize under the United Democratic Party will again see expansion like it has never seen before. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. (Applause)

**MR. SPEAKER:** Honourable Members, the question is that the Bill for an Act to appropriate certain sums of money for the use of the Public Service of Belize for the financial year ending March 31, 2017, be read a second time.

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

Bill read a second time.

## **I COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY**

**MR. SPEAKER:** Honourable Members, the House will now resolve into a Committee of Supply under the Chairmanship of the Right Honourable Prime Minister as Minister of Finance. In accordance with Standing Order 65, the deliberations of this Committee shall not take place in public. I must therefore ask the visitors in the galleries to kindly leave at this point. You may, of course, return after the Committee of Supply has concluded its business.

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

MR. SPEAKER left the Chair.

[In the Committee]

**The Right Honourable Dean Barrow (Minister of Finance, Public Service,**

**Energy and Public Utilities) in the Chair.****1. General Revenue Appropriation (2016/2017) Bill, 2016.**

Schedule agreed to as follows:

**HEAD OF EXPENDITURE**

<b>RECURRENT 2016/2017</b>	<b>(PART</b>	<b>PROPOSED ESTIMATES 1)</b>
		<b>BZ</b>
11017-11021 442,569	11 Office of the Governor-General	
12017-12138	12 Judiciary	9,851,008
13017-13048 2,671,213	13 Legislature	
15017-15021 2,294,836	15 Director of Public Prosecutions	
16017-16028 2,506,783	16 Auditor General	
17017- 17078, 25021, 31048	17 Office of the Prime Minister	
		5,592,146
14017-14148, 18017-18465, 283,697,964	18 Ministries of Finance, Public Service, Energy and Public Utilities	
36028, 36017		
19017-19298, 123,597,917	19 Ministry of Health	
30241		
20017-20199	20 Ministry of Foreign Affairs	18,815,708
14058-21017- 258,004,099	21 Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth, and Sports	
21776, 25028, 25051-25071, 36038		
22017-22158, 28017, 22131, 18,691,064	22 Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries Forestry, the Environment and Sustainable Development	
23178-23338		
23017-23166, 23348- 23378 26711, 30258 30446	23 Ministry of Natural Resources and Immigration	15,231,717
25017, 25041 2,151,040	25 Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation	
25081, 27017- 27161, 27181- 27241, 30451	27 Ministries of Human Development, Social Transformation and Poverty Alleviation	16,865,958
17028, 26031, 32,004,124	29 Ministry of Works, Transport and	
29017-29198,	National Emergency Management	

33091-33146, 33157-33228 30021-30498, 139,502,100 33021 31017-31031 4,400,143 23308, 24017 11,001,779 24038, 28048 33017, 33051 18448, 34048, 10,032,719 34081, 35017, 35037	30 31 32 33 35	Ministry of Nationality Security Attorney General's Ministry Ministry of Economic Development, Petroleum, Investment, Trade & Commerce Ministry of Housing and Urban Development Ministry of Labour, Local Government, Rural Development	
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**TOTAL RECURRENT (PART 1)****959,192,896****CAPITAL II (PART 11)****PROPOSED  
ESTIMATES  
2016/2017****BZ**

40,000	11	Office of the Governor-General	
52,760	12	Judiciary	
	13	Legislature	13,000
15		Director of Public Prosecutions	40,000
	16	Auditor General	40,000
	17	Office of the Prime Minister	67,000
	18	Ministry of Finance, Public Service, Energy and Public Utilities	32,146,556
	19.	Ministry of Health	2,652,957
	20.	Ministry of Foreign Affairs Foreign Affairs	77,000
	21	Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sports	4,764,860
	22	Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Forestry, the Environment and Sustainable Development	2,378,483
	23	Minister of Natural Resources and Immigration	11,718,659
	25	Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation	1,254,000
	27	Ministry of Human Development, Social Transformation and Poverty Alleviation	8,130,107
	29	Ministry of Works, Transport and National	22,562,532
2,372,945	30	Ministry of National Security	
	31	Attorney General's Ministry	652,410
	32	Ministry of Economic Development, Social Transportation and Poverty Alleviation	
3,279,042	33	Ministry of Housing and Urban Development	

356,000		
35	Ministry of Labour, Local Government and Rural Development	833,465

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<b>TOTAL CAPITAL II (PART II)</b>	<b>93,431,776</b>
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	<b>PROPOSED ESTIMATES 2016/2017</b>
<b>CAPITAL III (PART 111)</b>	<b>2016/2017</b>

		<b>BZ</b>
12	Judiciary	
	150,000	
18	Ministry of Finance, Public Service, Energy and Public Utilities	
	7,040,500	
19.	Ministry of Health	175,468
20	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	
	2,800,000	
21	Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sports	
	12,900,000	
22	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Sustainable Development	
	17,500,000	
23.	Minister of Natural Resources and Immigration	588,861
25	Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation	
	5,200,000	
27	Ministry of Human Development, Social Transformation and Poverty Alleviation	
	4,283,000	
29	Ministry of Works, Transport and National	
	28,000,000	
32	Ministry of Economic Development, Petroleum, Investment, Trade and Commerce	
	17,334,800	
	<b>TOTAL CAPITAL III (PART 111)</b>	<b>95,972,929</b>

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**CAPITAL TRANSFERS AND NET LENDING (PART IV)**

		<b>BZ</b>
18	Ministry of Finance	
	2,506,747	
	<b>TOTAL CAPITAL TRANSFER AND NET LENDING (PART IV)</b>	<b>2,506,747</b>

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**AMORTIZATION (PART V)**

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18	Ministry	of	Finance
<u>86,854,688</u>	TOTAL AMORTIZATION (PART V)		<u>86,854,688</u>
GRAND TOTAL			1,237,959,036

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Clauses 1 to 3 agreed to.

Bill to be reported back to the House without amendment.

**2. Official Charities Fund Motion, 2016.**

**The Right Honourable Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Public Service, Energy and Public Utilities moved:**

BE IT RESOLVED THAT this House approves the expenditure of \$2,352,589 from the Official Charities Fund as detailed in Appendix A of the Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017.

Question put and agreed to.

The Chairman left the Chair.

MR. SPEAKER in the Chair.

**REPORT AND THIRD READING OF GENERAL REVENUE  
APPROPRIATION (2016/2017) BILL, 2016**

**1. General Revenue Appropriation (2016/2017) Bill, 2016.**

**RT. HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Public Service, Energy and Public Utilities):** Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply has considered the General Revenue Appropriation (2016/2017) Bill, 2016, and passed it without amendment.

I now move the third reading of that Bill.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Honourable Members, the question is that the Bill for an Act to appropriate certain sums of money for the use of the Public Service of Belize for the financial year ending March 31, 2017, be read a third time.

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

Bill read a third time.

**II MOTION**

**1. Official Charities Fund Motion, 2016.**

**RT. HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance,**

**Public Service, Energy and Public Utilities):** Mr. Speaker, I move, BE IT RESOLVED THAT this House approves the expenditure of \$2,352,589 from the Official Charities Fund as detailed in Appendix A of the Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Honourable Members, the question is, BE IT RESOLVED THAT this House approves the expenditure of \$2,352,589 from the Official Charities Fund as detailed in Appendix A of the Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2017.

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

### III **BILLS FOR SECOND READING**

#### 1. **Customs and Excise Duties (Amendment) Bill, 2016.**

**RT. HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Public Service, Energy and Public Utilities):** Mr. Speaker, I move the second reading of a Bill for an Act to amend the Customs and Excise Duties Act, Chapter 48 of the Substantive Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2000; to provide for the removal of revenue replacement duty on Caricom goods; to increase the scope of goods subject to excise duty; and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Honourable Members, the question is that the Bill for an Act to amend the Customs and Excise Duties Act, Chapter 48 of the Substantive Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2000; to provide for the removal of revenue replacement duty on Caricom goods; to increase the scope of goods subject to excise duty; and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto, be read a second time.

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

Bill read a second time.

#### 2. **Brewery (Amendment) Bill, 2016.**

**RT. HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Public Service, Energy and Public Utilities):** Mr. Speaker, I moved the second reading of a Bill for an Act to amend the Brewery Act, Chapter 286 of the Substantive Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2000; to provide for the duty payable on local beer to be the same as that of other CARICOM countries; and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

**HON. J. BRICEÑO (Leader of the Opposition):** On this amendment, Prime Minister, will it in anyway negatively affect the local industry, the local brewery?

**RT. HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Public Service, Energy and Public Utilities):** No, Sir.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Honourable Members, the question is that the Bill for an Act to amend the Brewery Act, Chapter 286 of the Substantive Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2000; to provide for the duty payable on local beer to be the same as that of other CARICOM countries; and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto, be read a second time.

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

Bill read a second time.

### **3. Belizean Nationality (Amendment) Bill, 2016.**

**RT. HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Public Service, Energy and Public Utilities):** Mr. Speaker, I move the second reading of a Bill for an Act to amend the Belizean Nationality Act, Chapter 161 of the Substantive Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2011; to make provision, in the interest of administrative and operational efficiency, for the responsible Minister to delegate certain functions to any Minister of State appointed to assist the Minister; and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

**HON. J. BRICEÑO (Leader of the Opposition):** I will be very short as I know it's very late. But I notice your Deputy Prime Minister didn't stay. The man didn't even stay to cheer and clap for you for the budget. But on another matter, on a serious note, Mr. Speaker, on the amendment to this Bill, I just want to caution as we know what happened the last time under the former Minister of State, Honourable Penner, and I just want to mention to the Minister of State that great responsibility is going to be entrusted in her hands, and, as such, a lot will be expected from her. But, secondly, I don't know if she is realizing now that she is going to be doing the work of the Minister. I wonder if they will give her the salary of the Minister. You might as well make her the Minister of Immigration, Prime Minister. But we don't object to this and to the rest of the other amendments. So we can go home early.

**RT. HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Public Service, Energy and Public Utilities):** Leader, I don't tell you how to run your show you know. I see you have men that didn't win anything who come right up beside you like they are the chief. I don't have anything to say about that you know. So don't tell us how to run our show. I move the second reading of the Bill, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Honourable Members, the question is that the Bill for an Act to amend the Belizean Nationality Act, Chapter 161 of the Substantive Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2011; to make provision, in the interest of administrative and operational efficiency, for the responsible Minister to delegate certain functions to any Minister of State appointed to assist the Minister; and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto, be read a second time.

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

Bill read a second time.

**4. Immigration Nationality (Amendment) Bill, 2016.**

**RT. HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Public Service, Energy and Public Utilities):** Mr. Speaker, I move the second reading of a Bill for an Act to amend the Immigration Act, Chapter 156 of the Substantive Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2011; to make provision in the interest of administrative and operational efficiency, for the responsible Minister to delegate certain functions to any Minister of State appointed to assist the Minister; and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Honourable Members, the question is that the Bill for an Act to amend the Immigration Act, Chapter 156 of the Substantive Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2011; to make provision in the interest of administrative and operational efficiency, for the responsible Minister to delegate certain functions to any Minister of State appointed to assist the Minister; and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto, be read a second time.

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

Bill read a second time.

**5. Passports (Amendment) Bill, 2016.**

**RT. HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Public Service, Energy and Public Utilities):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to move the second reading of a Bill for an Act to amend the Passports Act, Chapter 164 of the Substantive Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2011; to make provision in the interest of administrative and operational efficiency, for the responsible Minister to delegate certain functions to any Minister of State appointed to assist the Minister; and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Honourable Members, the question is that the Bill for an Act to amend the Passports Act, Chapter 164 of the Substantive Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2011; to make provision in the interest of administrative and operational efficiency, for the responsible Minister to delegate certain functions to any Minister of State appointed to assist the Minister; and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto, be read a second time.

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

Bill read a second time.

**6. Refugees (Amendment) Bill, 2016.**

**RT. HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Public Service, Energy and Public Utilities):** Mr. Speaker, I move the second reading of a Bill for an Act to amend the Refugees Act, Chapter 165 of the

Substantive Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2011; to make provision in the interest of administrative and operational efficiency, for the responsible Minister to delegate certain functions to any Minister of State appointed to assist the Minister; and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Honourable Members, the question is that the Bill for an Act to amend the Refugees Act, Chapter 165 of the Substantive Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2011; to make provision in the interest of administrative and operational efficiency, for the responsible Minister to delegate certain functions to any Minister of State appointed to assist the Minister; and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto, be read a second time.

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

Bill read a second time.

7. **Caribbean Community (Free Movement of Skilled Persons) (Amendment) Bill, 2016.**

**RT. HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Public Service, Energy and Public Utilities):** Mr. Speaker, I move the second reading of a Bill for an Act to amend the Caribbean Community (Free Movement of Skilled Persons) Act, Chapter 17:02 of the Substantive Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2011; to make provision in the interest of administrative and operational efficiency, for the responsible Minister to delegate certain functions to any Minister of State appointed to assist the Minister; and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Honourable Members, the question is that the Bill for an Act to amend the Caribbean Community (Free Movement of Skilled Persons) Act, Chapter 17:02 of the Substantive Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2011; to make provision in the interest of administrative and operational efficiency, for the responsible Minister to delegate certain functions to any Minister of State appointed to assist the Minister; and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto, be read a second time.

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

Bill read a second time.

#### **IV COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE HOUSE ON BILLS**

**MR. SPEAKER:** Honourable Members, the House will now resolve into a Committee of the whole House to consider the Bills that were read a second time.

I would like to ask the public in the galleries to kindly and return after this portion of the Sitting.

MR. SPEAKER left the chair.

[In the Committee]

The Deputy Speaker in the Chair.

**1. Customs and Excise Duties (Amendment) Bill, 2016.**

Clauses 1 to 5 agreed to.

The Schedule agreed to.

Bill to be reported back to the House without amendment.

**2. Brewery (Amendment) Bill, 2016.**

Clauses 1 and 2 agreed to.

Bill to be reported back to the House without amendment.

**3. Belizean Nationality (Amendment) Bill, 2016.**

Clauses 1 and 2 agreed to.

Bill to be reported back to the House without amendment.

**4. Immigration (Amendment) Bill, 2016.**

Clauses 1 and 2 agreed to.

Bill to be reported back to the House without amendment.

**5. Passports (Amendment) Bill, 2016.**

Clauses 1 and 2 agreed to.

Bill to be reported back to the House without amendment.

**6. Refugees (Amendment) Bill, 2016.**

Clauses 1 and 2 agreed to.

Bill to be reported back to the House without amendment.

**7. Caribbean Community (Free Movement of Skilled Persons) (Amendment) Bill, 2016.**

Clauses 1 and 2 agreed to.

Bill to be reported back to the House without amendment.

MR. SPEAKER in the Chair.

## V BILLS FOR THIRD READING

### 1. Customs and Excise Duties (Amendment) Bill, 2016.

**RT. HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Public Service, Energy and Public Utilities):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to report that the Committee of the whole House has considered the Customs and Excise Duties (Amendment) Bill, 2016, and passed it without amendment.

I now move the third reading of that Bill.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Honourable Members, the question is that the Bill for an Act to amend the Customs and Excise Duties Act, Chapter 48 of the Substantive Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2000; to provide for the removal of revenue replacement duty on Caricom goods; to increase the scope of goods subject to excise duty; and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto, be read a third time.

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

Bill read a third time.

### 2. Brewery (Amendment) Bill, 2016.

**RT. HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Public Service, Energy and Public Utilities):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to report that the Committee of the whole House has considered the Brewery (Amendment) Bill, 2016, and passed it without amendment.

I now move the third reading of that Bill.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Honourable Members, the question is that the Bill for an Act to amend the Brewery Act, Chapter 286 of the Substantive Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2000; to provide for the duty payable on local beer to be the same as that of other Caricom countries; and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto, be read a third time.

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

Bill read a third time.

### 3. Belizean Nationality (Amendment) Bill, 2016.

**RT. HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Public Service, Energy and Public Utilities):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to report that the Committee of the whole House has considered the Belizean Nationality (Amendment) Bill, 2016, and passed it without amendment.

I now move the third reading of that Bill.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Honourable Members, the question is that the Bill for an Act to amend the Belizean Nationality Act, Chapter 161 of the Substantive Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2011; to make provision, in the interest of administrative and operational efficiency, for the responsible Minister to delegate certain functions to any Minister of State appointed to assist the Minister; and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto, be read a third time.

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

Bill read a third time.

#### **4. Immigration (Amendment) Bill, 2016.**

**RT. HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Public Service, Energy and Public Utilities):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to report that the Committee of the whole House has considered the Immigration (Amendment) Bill, 2016, and passed it without amendment.

I now move the third reading of that Bill.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Honourable Members, the question is that the Bill for an Act to amend the Immigration Act, Chapter 156 of the Substantive Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2011; to make provision in the interest of administrative and operational efficiency, for the responsible Minister to delegate certain functions to any Minister of State appointed to assist the Minister; and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto, be read a third time.

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

Bill read a third time.

#### **5. Passports (Amendment) Bill, 2016.**

**RT. HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Public Service, Energy and Public Utilities):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to report that the Committee of the whole House has considered the Passports (Amendment) Bill, 2016, and passed it without amendment.

I now move the third reading of that Bill.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Honourable Members, the question is that the Bill for an Act to amend the Passports Act, Chapter 164 of the Substantive Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2011; to make provision in the interest of administrative and operational efficiency, for the responsible Minister to delegate certain functions to any Minister of State appointed to assist the Minister; and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto, be read a third time.

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



Bill read a third time.

**6. Refugees (Amendment) Bill, 2016.**

**RT. HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Public Service, Energy and Public Utilities):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to report that the Committee of the whole House has considered the Refugees (Amendment) Bill, 2016, and passed it without amendment.

I now move the third reading of that Bill.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Honourable Members, the question is that the Bill for an Act to amend the Refugees Act, Chapter 165 of the Substantive Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2011; to make provision in the interest of administrative and operational efficiency, for the responsible Minister to delegate certain functions to any Minister of State appointed to assist the Minister; and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto, be read a third time.

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

Bill read a third time.

**7. Caribbean Community (Free Movement of Skilled Persons) (Amendment) Bill, 2016.**

**RT. HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Public Service, Energy and Public Utilities):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to report that the Committee of the whole House has considered the Caribbean Community (Free Movement of Skilled Persons (Amendment) Bill, 2016, and passed it without amendment.

I now move the third reading of that Bill.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Honourable Members, the question is that the Bill for an Act to amend the Caribbean Community (Free Movement of Skilled Persons) Act, Chapter 17:02 of the Substantive Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2011; to make provision in the interest of administrative and operational efficiency, for the responsible Minister to delegate certain functions to any Minister of State appointed to assist the Minister; and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto, be read a third time.

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

Bill read a third time.

**ADJOURNMENT**

**RT. HON. D. BARROW (Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Public Service, Energy and Public Utilities):** Mr. Speaker, in moving the adjournment, please allow me to wish you, Members on both sides of the House,

and, of course, the wider Belizean public a Happy Easter.

The Minister of National Security reported earlier that the usual changeover to Cadenas was completed yesterday without incident. Mr. Leader of the Opposition, I just learned from the Minister today, and I think that is a cause for some satisfaction and relief. We hope that diplomacy will continue to hold. You know the role you have played in assisting with that diplomacy, Mr. Speaker, and I believe that it is a basis on which we can go into Easter with some quiet of mind. The peace that's prevailing at least for now, and we hope it will continue on the Sarstoon, let us all hope that that peace is in fact, what will reign throughout the entire country during the Easter holidays. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. (Applause)

**MR. SPEAKER:** Honourable Members, the question is that the House do now adjourn.

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

The House now stands adjourned.

The House adjourned at 8:36 PM. to a date to be fixed by the Speaker.

Speaker.

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