

BELIZE

No. 21/1/13

SENATE

Tuesday, 27th March 2018

10:12 A.M.

Pursuant to the direction of Mr. President, in writing, dated 23rd March 2018, the Senate met in the National Assembly Chamber in Belmopan on Tuesday, 27th March 2018, at 10:12 A.M.

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Members Present:

Senator, the Honourable Lee Mark Chang – President
Senator, the Honourable Godwin Hulse – Leader of Government Business
and Minister of Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, the Environment,
Sustainable Development and Immigration
Senator, the Honourable Dr. Carla Barnett – Vice-President and Minister of
State in the Ministry of Finance and Natural Resources
Senator, the Honourable Michael Peyrefitte – Attorney General
Senator, the Honourable Macario Coy Sr.
Senator, the Honourable Stephen Duncan
Senator, the Honourable Aldo Salazar
Senator, the Honourable Eamon Courtenay
Senator, the Honourable Valerie Woods
Senator, the Honourable Paul Thompson
Senator, the Honourable Markhelm Lizarraga
Senator, the Honourable Rev. Henry Brown – Temporary Senator
Senator, the Honourable Elena Smith
Senator, the Honourable Osmany Salas

Member Absent:

Senator, the Honourable Rev. Ashley Rocke

MR. PRESIDENT *in the Chair*.

PRAYERS *by Senator Rev. Henry Brown*.

OATH OF ALLEGIANCE OF A NEW SENATOR

MR. PRESIDENT: Mr. Clerk, please, kindly administer the Oath of Allegiance to the new Senator.

SENATOR REV. HENRY BROWN: I, Reverend Henry Brown, do swear that I will bear true faith and allegiance to Belize and will uphold the

Constitution and the law, and that I will conscientiously, impartially and to the best of my ability discharge my duties as a Senator and do right to all manner of people without fear or favour, affection or ill-will. So help me, God.

MR. PRESIDENT: Congratulations, Senator Brown, and welcome to today's Sitting.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

MR. PRESIDENT: Honourable Members, by letter dated 23rd March 2018, Cabinet's recommendation has been signified to the following:

1. General Revenue Appropriation (2018/2019) Bill, 2018;
2. Central Bank of Belize (Amendment) Bill, 2018;
3. Customs and Excise Duties (Amendment) Bill, 2018; and
4. Official Charities Fund Motion, 2018.

BILLS BROUGHT FROM THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SENATOR G. HULSE (Leader of Government Business and Minister Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, the Environment, Sustainable Development and Immigration): Good morning, Mr. President and colleagues. First of all, Mr. President, with your permission may I welcome Senator Henry Brown to this Argus Chamber. Mr. President, I rise to take charge of the following Bills:

1. General Revenue Appropriation (2018/2019) Bill, 2018;
2. Central Bank of Belize (Amendment) Bill, 2018;
3. Customs and Excise Duties (Amendment) Bill, 2018;
4. Immigration (Amendment) Bill, 2018;
5. Belizean Nationality (Amendment) Bill, 2018;
6. Passports (Amendment) Bill, 2018;
7. Firearms (Amendment) Bill, 2018;

8. Police (Amendment) Bill, 2018;
9. Crime Control and Criminal Justice (Amendment) Bill, 2018; and
10. Protection of Witnesses Bill, 2018.

Mr. President, in accordance with Standing Order No. 49 (1), I move that the Bills be taken through all their stages forthwith.

MR. PRESIDENT: Honourable Members, the question is that the Bills be taken through all their stages forthwith.

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

PAPERS

SENATOR G. HULSE (Leader of Government Business and Minister Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, the Environment, Sustainable Development and Immigration): Mr. President, I rise to lay on the Table, Sessional Papers No. 41/1/13 – Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for Fiscal Year 2018/2019.

MR. PRESIDENT: Honourable Members, that Paper is ordered to lie on the Table.

MOTION RELATING TO THE BUSINESS OR SITTINGS OF THE SENATE

SENATOR G. HULSE (Leader of Government Business and Minister Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, the Environment, Sustainable Development and Immigration): Mr. President, I move that at its rising today the Senate adjourn to a date to be fixed by the President.

MR. PRESIDENT: Honourable Members, the question is that, at its rising today, the Senate adjourn to a date to be fixed by the President.

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

PUBLIC BUSINESS

A. GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

I MOTION

1. Official Charities Fund Motion, 2018.

SENATOR G. HULSE (Leader of Government Business and Minister Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, the Environment, Sustainable Development and Immigration): Mr. President, I move that - **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 31st March, 2019, that can be found in Sessional Paper, or it is properly known as the Budget, page 247.

SENATOR M. LIZARRAGA: Good morning, Mr. President. Mr. President, just some quick comments. I notice that we have allocations under the Charities Fund for the National Sports Council of \$50,000, for the Belize City Center of \$25,000, which no longer exists; for the Belize District Sports Facilities and other Districts Sports Facilities. And I was wondering why is there a need to have these sporting facilities under the charities list when in fact if we go to page 114 of the Budget, we will see that there are already a substantive amount allocated under Sports Development in that ministry where it is claimed that statutory bodies will receive some \$2 million in grants. And where under Capital II Expenditures, the National Sports Council is slotted to receive some \$100,000 this fiscal year, when, in fact, it received \$88,000 last year. As well, there is a lighting project for Village Sport Facilities that is listed at \$45,000 this year. And I was just wondering, if we already have a ministry that has a department that's called Sport's Development, why again are we duplicating and taking sums from the already limited Charities Fund for sports in the country? Thanks.

MR. PRESIDENT: 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 31st March 2019.

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

II BILLS FOR SECOND READING

1. General Revenue Appropriation (2018/2019) Bill, 2018.

SENATOR G. HULSE (Leader of Government Business and Minister Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, the Environment, Sustainable Development and Immigration): Mr. President, I rise to move the second reading of a 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, 2019.

SENATOR M. LIZARRAGA: Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President and colleagues, let me confess that before I begin to debate on this budget, this has been one of the hardest, most difficult exercises for me. At this particular time in our country's history where it is all too evident, it is all too evident, the fruits that we are seeing of those trees that we have rooted in our society for way too long. Mr. President, this budget for us is yet another no consultation, burdensome, merciless, an uninspiring budget. It's another budget lacking totally in fiscal discipline and sustainability. It is yet another budget that is maintaining steadiness, yes, but in its size and the unquenchable appetite for taxes. It is yet another budget, Mr. President, that is consolidating our stability but as a debt-ridden state. It is yet another budget that is advancing growth, yes, but for those

that benefit from the continued borrowing and spending of a growing national debt. And this budget is nothing but a recommitment, an appalling threat for more of the same.

But before I begin, let me acknowledge that there will be those in this Honourable House today, who will lead the cheerleading. And I empathize and even sympathize with them. But, Mr. President, please allow me sometime first, to thank those dedicated in the Public Service. I would like to personally thank all of those people in the Public Service that took the time to call me, to give me direction, to point me in a certain direction, to highlight certain things. I would like to thank those in the Public Service that saw and took the time to spend on the importance of program budgeting. They provided the information, targets and results. Not all of them, some. But I would like to especially thank those that displayed discipline and good conscience when doing so. We also acknowledge those departments that took the effort to attempt to link their spending strategies by aligning them with our growth and sustainability strategies that we clearly outline in the growth and sustainability development strategy. But Mr. President, today we still see too many ministries that use the cut and paste method in their submissions. And frankly, this undermines the confidence of the vigilant and the concerned eye. We commend as well, and single out those departments that chose to highlight internal audits and list internal audits as part of their strategies, and those that prioritize training. But sadly, too many ministries and including the Ministry of the Public Service, sadly, choose to save.

In last year's budget through recklessly cutting staff training and the maintenance of buildings. Many ministries, Mr. President, showed no significant, if any savings, by cutting discretionary spending in telephone, electricity, fuel, motor vehicles, just to mention a few areas. We have seen the serious cost implications of government's poor asset maintenance track record. Can we not begin to see the short-sightedness, Mr. President, of this practice, and see the many, many negative impacts that this has had on our public buildings? We had to have a Civic Center Building totally destroyed. We had to have the Down-Town Commercial Center renovated. We have issues with our national referral hospital. We've seen the issues we've had with our hospital for the central region here in Belmopan. And I could go on, and on, and on. All because of a strategy not to invest in maintenance. I can even remember the maintenance concern some budgets ago, it could have been in the last budget, where I suggested that we try to allocate funds for maintenance upfront if we have to since we don't seem to have the money to do it out of our CAP II, or out of our recurrent. And I was schooled, I was schooled by the good Senator that said you cannot borrow for maintenance. But we cannot build if we cannot maintain. We can't continue to build and have our public buildings totally deteriorate and then we have to totally trash them in a few years. We need to start focusing on the protection, we have a fiduciary responsibility to protect the people's assets. We have an obligation to protect the people's assets.

Many ministries, Mr. President, and colleagues continue to ignore reporting obligations under Program Budgeting and still display little desire to truly challenge themselves or even to report, in many instances, on how they have spent the millions of dollars that we give them. Many critical ministries, critical ministries, report no achievements for the millions spent. And the targets that they display, to say the least, are very non- inspiring and insignificant. Many of them take no time to even display targets or goals. And this, Mr. President, 5 years into Program Budgeting, at least 5 years, we are now in this Program Budgeting exercise. And billions, and billions of dollars later, this is unacceptable, it's shameful, and it's disrespectful to the tax payers. And if I am allowed to paraphrase, somebody recently said, "It's dishonest and corrupt because you are

not delivering what you are paid to do.” But sadly, Mr. President, non-compliance is reflective and all too evident of this insolence that is allowed to prevail with too many in the service of our public purse.

Last year we had a series of consultations with the private sector leading up to budget time, Mr. President. And the private sector took the time to sit down and meet with government, came up with a whole host of strategies, and made 25 recommendations. This year there was no consultation. They made 25 recommendations last year on how to reduce leak in revenue, how to curb public spending, how to address economic growth, for the most part, none of it was adhere to or listened to. They didn’t take our advice. But they made a promise. They made a promise that they were going to try and cut expenses, recurrent expenses by 5%. Well sadly, we see that in last fiscal year we only had 2% reduction in recurrent expenses, and this is disappointing, given the promise that we had for government to attempt to cut 5%. And especially, Mr. President, in an environment of government’s insistence and the need to continue to increase taxes on the Belizean people, that only serves to make the cost of living more expensive and make us less competitive, not only at home, but less competitive abroad for our goods and services. Compounding this affront is that government had to borrow 55% more than budgeted for to balance last year’s budget; 55% more to balance their budget. And, it will do so again, and again, because if you look at the Program Budgeting that is before us today, balance budget is not in our future. It is not even on the horizon.

In this budget before us, and like previous budgets before it, we see organizations but especially individuals that continue to receive tens of millions of our tax dollars. And what some of it is for is anyone’s guess, including people in the Public Service were not able to tell me what a lot of those individual grants were for. And I am talking, if I am not mistaken, around \$170 odd million in grants. And I know a lot of it goes to teachers and other things but I am saying the individual grants. And this budget, like so many other, Mr. President, is maintaining its steadiness in wrong remedies. It’s consolidating it stability with more of the same. And the only growth that is being advanced is the growth of government, government is getting too big and too heavy. And there is nothing, as in so many other budgets before it, to advance collective growth of the private sector that I represent.

Mr. President, the BCCI requested that an economic analysis be done of this budget, as it has done in previous budgets. And it’s short to measure on the potential economic growth enhancement measures, the PGEMs. These are, I don’t want to get too technical, but these are measure basically that are guided by strategies identified in our growth and sustainability plan, our strategy. And it looked at things like, Mr. President, with your permission I will quote, “Lowering taxes, reduce your tape, reduce cost, time for business licensing procedures, improving innovation, reducing the skills mismatched, right, the provision of adequate financing to SMEs. And the 4 pillars it focus this analysis on was improve labour market, market function, reduce the informal sector, improve innovativeness, and deepening trade in integration.” These are all recommendation, Mr. President, by the way, by the World Bank as well.

Mr. President, there are several things that I am going to highlight from this. I am not going to go through the whole report and I will be more than willing to provide copies of this report to my colleagues, and I suspect that the Chamber is going to be publishing it on its website as well. But, first of all, Mr. President, it is that we continue to note that our GDP per capita has flat lined. We are not growing. Our economy is not growing. And government’s spending is growing faster than the economy is growing which is a recipe for disaster. That’s the first

thing. The second thing we continue to highlight is that we have a large informal sector in our country that needs to start to contribute to the tax base. We have identified this for many years and the government is fully aware of it. But yet the strategies that we see government employ is coming constantly after those that already pay, instead of trying to capture. The reports that I see indicate that we have an informal sector that could possibly be as high as 40% of GDP. Compound that with the fact that the businesses that we surveyed for this study as well has said that they are producing below capacity. Eighty percent of the respondents said that they were more concerned about taxes today. As far as capacity, 70% of those that we surveyed said that they were producing well below capacity. So, Mr. President, where do we go? Well, first of all, we recommend that among other things, besides cost cutting exercises that the government seriously need to undertake, is that the government needs to go after this informal sector to expand its own revenue base. Lowering the burden as well, on the other sectors that are already over-burdened.

Last fiscal year, I have to recall that government did tax revenue measures that was supposed to yield them some \$83 million. Remember all of those fuel taxes and the whole bunch of stuff. And in addition to that, they, last fiscal year, started charging GST on some 180 tariff lines that were zero rated before. They continue along that same trend. Again, taxing the easy targets. Instead though, what we see is that government this year, is proposing to raise an additional \$20 million according to the Prime Minister's Budget Speech. And we welcome the exception of government's position that was changed on GST. Thank you, Minister, in reference to rolling back that horrible decision to tax certain sectors of the productive sector. I wish we could get to convince them for more areas in the productive sector. Mr. President, at the end of the day what we came out with was that government clearly knows, okay, through reports that we repeatedly get from government themselves, who these evaders in the informal sector are, but they seem hesitant to take the appropriate measures, okay. It's like almost, Mr. President, we feel that our parent or the government is punishing the well-behaved children in our business family. It's almost like, (*if yu kyaant ketch Harry, yu ketch e shot.*) if you can't catch Harry, you catch his shirt. Are you familiar with that?

Mr. President, we see as well that government has decided to raise taxes when again, there are some \$60 million, in this same budget it identifies it, in taxes, right, over the last 2 years from 2 revenue collection departments. If he would have made serious efforts just to collect from those 2 departments, there would have been no need for tax increases. And we know that there are many other ministries with huge receivables. And we hear nothing of those, including receivables from the very Lands Department, huge receivables that we cannot collect. This aspect has been poorly addressed, Mr. President. So at the end of the day what the business community is saying that we also expect to see weak to moderate levels of private sector investment as a result of this backdrop. Mr. President, compounding that is that remember all those cash flow savings we realize through the blessing of benefiting from reduced market interest rates. All those gains have been eliminated by the constant borrowing desires that drive our bellicose and ill advice an unsustainable spending schemes. Gone! Because I will show you when I get into the real book, the meat of it, that this year we are spending more on interest payments than last year. So where did the savings go? If you claim that previous governments were borrowing at high commercial rates, 15%, 11% whatever it was, but now you are borrowing at 2%, then you would expect to see outpace for interest rate goes down, won't you? Not going up. It only lends to show that, in fact, we are borrowing more, and more, and more. And so we have to ask these dazzling and brilliant minds in government, when would you get it? You cannot tax an economy. You cannot tax a country into prosperity.

You can't. It's simply not possible. So this lends to the question, who is advising you?

Mr. President, as our beloved Belizean people continue to suffer because of this curse of crime the question we ask is, where in this budget do we have allocations for fighting and ending corruption, thus impacting sustainably crime and poverty? It is so sad, Mr. President, to see that this government has morphed from its original promise and mandate. The majority in government fail to make or even acknowledge the connection between government stated new focus that is poverty alleviation, and its original unfulfilled promise of ending corruption with that machete. But speaking of machetes, I congratulate the President of the BNTU, on her gift of that new machete that she got. I am happy to see the support she enjoys when publicly standing up for so many of our commendable and patriotic teachers. And I would like to acknowledge as well, our Envoy for Women and Children who attended your function and supported your cause, and made the call as well with the teachers for the violence to end and, for us to have counseling and counselors in our schools. I congratulate the Envoy. (Applause) Their courage in addressing the needs of our country is admirable and commendable. And long may you, Madam President, and the BNTU, yield that machete. (Applause)

But let me congratulate as well, the BCCI for its long-standing position on this as well, and our President. And, Mr. President, with your permission allow me to quote from a presentation that he made at the Expo this year. This year where he said, and I am going to quote him right now, let me quote him. But basically, Mr. President, there was a continued call for an end to corruption and a continued call for the restructured pack. But let me quote. This was in September 2016, it said, "The BCCI was launching its anticorruption campaign and had written to Prime Minister Borrow, asking the GOB to sign and ratify the United Nations Convention Against Corruption," and this was after lengthy discussions with our partners. And he says that, "After lengthy discussions careful planning and with the convictions that the state of corruption in Belize has reached epidemic proportions." Epidemic proportions. The Chamber and other social partners and I quote, "Felt that those with the responsibility, those with the authority and the opportunity to address the scourge was unwilling, incapable, and even involved or otherwise compromised." It continues to say that, "This corruption and all its related costs hinders and even reverses the growth and development of Belize." And, Mr. President, he finished his presentation by saying that, "The short story of our young nation is full of long chapters of shame, corruption, deceit, greed and impunity." "It is sad," he said, Mr. President, and I quote, "When the measure of good governance proclaims not the quality of our achievements, but rather the comparative level of corruption." Mr. President, it was shameful, shameful for this nation to listen to the circus that took place in this Honourable House during the debate. It was shameful! And that is what we do, the measure of our governance is not on the quality of our achievements but rather on the comparative level of corruption. Mr. President, the President of the BCCI closed by saying, "Imagine for a moment," and I quote, "carefully selected leaders pursuing broad based strategic national development goals supported by strong and independent checks and balances. I can assure you that in such an environment, Belize and the private sector would flourish and bloom. A fitting place to call home."

Mr. President, but let me quote from Pope Francis as well. I was telling one of my colleagues this morning that I did not realize that the Pope, the UN Secretary General, and our own Foreign Minister, had shared things in common. As I will explain. Pope Francis recently said as he called us to action, action, and I quote, "Corruption is not countered with silence. We will speak out about it,

denounce its evils and try to understand it so as to show our resolve to make mercy reign over meanness.” He said, “Corruption feeds the culture of death.” And debt, I would add, “Corruption is at the root of slavery, unemployment and a disregard for nature and the common good.” Mr. President, slavery is defined as being submissive to a dominating influence or compliance to a governing power. Well, many of our citizens today, including the private sector that I represent, my brothers and sisters, we feel enslaved because we are forced to labour, and forced into paying 30% of our collective earnings as a country to our government in taxes. When, in fact, we are in an environment where most of us are struggling to stay alive on a daily basis, or to even make single digit returns on our hard work and investments. The Pope goes on to say that, “Corruption is a process of death that feeds the culture of death because the thirst for power and position knows no limits.” Mr. President, today Belize is living in a culture of debt, and it is evident, what is the root of that debt.

Now we hear, Mr. President, much of government’s growth and sustainability development plan. And this budget, as you know, should be fully reflective of this plan. But the United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, in speaking on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development said, “Our plan to end poverty and ensure lives of dignity for all recognizes the need to fight corruption. Corruption has disastrous impacts on development when funds are instead diverted into the hands of criminals or dishonest officials. Corruption exacerbates violence and insecurity.” This sounds familiar. Does this sound familiar to us? He goes on to say, Mr. President, “It can also lead to dissatisfaction with public institutions, dissolution with government in general and spirals of anger and unrest.” Does this sound familiar?

Mr. President, finally let me end this segment by paraphrasing a very senior Member of Cabinet, who in this very Parliament, a few days ago, admitted that crime is caused by corruption. And that there is a direct correlation between the two. Yet, Mr. President, as I will show, we see no allocations, no mention even of a commitment to UNCAC in this budget anywhere. Not as a goal, not as a target, not now, or not projected into the years ahead. The only person that in this budget used the word UNCAC was the Auditor General, once. Not even in the Attorney General’s budget, targets, goals, KPIs, was the mention of UNCAC. Mr. President, but crime and corruption also undermines the business confidence.

I listened to the newly appointed Commander for the Belize City Zone, and I am going to speak about that later. And he mentioned it in a morning talk show on Channel 5. He said something to the effect and I will paraphrase him, that he is saddened that when he goes down Albert Street in the night he sees everyone locked up and everyone closed down. So it affects business. If businesses are affected we cannot pay the taxes that this government needs to operate and function. We need to spur business confidence, foreign direct investment, and consumer confidence. We need to inspire investments and consumer spending. And that spending, unfortunately, more and more we see is diverted from our country to our neighbors.

Mr. President, you know that there are war zones in this world, and I have used this before in this House, with a lower per capita murder rate than in Belize City, than those few square miles that me and you, you know live in. Yet sadly, while we are sending disproportionate amounts of people and representation to this Parliament, we have not benefitted from that representation. As statistics continue to display the inequality we live in, the enslavement and dependency culture that still prevails in that area that I live in. Mr. President, somebody said, and allow me to quote, “Politics is the art of looking for trouble, finding it, misdiagnosing it, and then misapplying the wrong remedies.” Well, Mr. President,

we are living today and seeing that this is true, especially when one looks at the fiscal strategy statement. One can see, of course, that it was drafted to appear to acknowledge many of our fiscal infirmities. It confirms the many wrong things in our fiscal house and confesses even our dire financial roles. Yet, Mr. President, this fiscal strategy statement is lacking in strategy in policy direction to truly grow the economy in partnership with the private sector, and one is left only to accept the reality that government sees, they only see the private sector, and by extension, the citizens of this country has continued targets for more bloodletting.

Let me refer now to the Fiscal Strategy Summary. And if we look they identified 8 points, Mr. President, briefly. Number one, they talked about increasing GDP revenue, okay. And they talked about collecting more taxes by making the system fairer, simplifying and broadening the tax basis and eliminating exemptions. But nowhere, nowhere does it talk, except in page 10, I think, it briefly mentions lowering taxes as well. Because they realize that as you continue to take in more taxes and broaden the base that you have to lower the rates. But this strategy does not talk about lowering the rates, it talks about increasing taxes. If you look at point number two, point number three, point number four, number five, okay. Let's look at point number four. What does point number four says, that government is going to maintain its capital spending at 5% of GDP. This is no matter what, you know, we will continue to spend 5% of our money on capital projects. It didn't say we are going to continue to spend 5% of our money on the maintenance of public buildings. It says we are going to continue to build more at the tune of 5% cost of our budget. That's what it says. A minimum of 5%. That's what it promises, more of the same, big capital projects, and nothing for maintenance. But I will show you, I will show you when we get to the big book. It continues to promise that it's going to maintain and hold the fiscal deficit to 1.5% of GDP. It has never been able to do so, more promises. And we only mentioned, point number eight by the way, the last point, it says, structural reforms to make the economy more productive and competitive by removing trade barriers, monopolies and infrastructural bottle necks. This includes creating a simpler and fairer tax system and encouraging private credit. That's it. That's the strategy. This is the message and this is the message that should inspire hope. And this is designed to boost investor confidence and grow our economy? This is it? And certainly when you look at the big book, there is nothing in there to match this, or to say, or to expound. But yet they acknowledge that in recent years we've seen a slowing down in real economic output, flat tax revenues and a growing deficit. They acknowledge all the ills you know. They acknowledge all the ills. It's almost as if they wrote this for, I don't know how they wrote this, for World Bank, IMF, bondholders, somebody to convince them that things are bad, we need to address it, but then they don't address it.

Mr. President, I am going to highlight now some issues from the big book with your permission. Let us look at the summary of recurrent and capital budget. Mr. President, I would like to highlight the line that says financing. And that is the amount of money we have to borrow every year to meet our budget and pay our bills, okay. And look at it, as financing needs as a percentage of budgeted amounts. You see, Mr. President, we have a history of over estimating income and we suffer, especially, chronically from under estimating expenses. And in the words of our own Financial Secretary, if we continue on this path, we will crash. Because, Mr. President, we continue to spend more than we earn. And let me give you some examples, Mr. President. When the budget for 2015/2016 was presented, it estimated that we would borrow \$173.9 million to balance our budget. Well you know what, Mr. President, we came in at \$331 million, 90% more than we budgeted for, 2015/2016. In 2016/2017, we projected we would borrow \$149 million to pay our Bills. We ended up borrowing \$239 million, 60% more. And in this last fiscal year we projected that we are going to borrow \$81

million to balance our budget. We ended up borrowing \$126 million, or it is projected that we will borrow \$126 million, 55% more. Is this fiscal prudence? Is this sound fiscal policy? Is this sound budgeting? Now I can understand 5% here or there, 10% even if we have a calamity. Ninety percent, 60%, 55%, you and I can't live like this. Only government that has the right to tax can do this, and can afford to do this. Mercilessly they do this. While the business community and the citizens of this country suffer because we have to pay taxes and we have to buy, those are the two certainties they say, right?

It is a shame that we don't even have the money to fix the lights in this place because I am having trouble reading these small numbers, but I will try. Pardon me, Mr. President, because I am getting old. I just got new glasses, trust me, but you know, we need to have light as well, Madam Senator. Let me clean my glasses and try again. Thank you, Mr. President, I will appreciate it. Mr. President, I will go down the line quickly highlighting some deficiencies, I think, in the strategies that we've employed. Let's look at taxes on property, land tax. You know, much to the disgust of some of my colleagues, I had questioned the tax bid that we gave on people that I call the speculation land tax. That gave reprieve to those who were not developing their land. You will remember that last year I think. But based on the information that I got, Mr. President, we have some 2 million acres in private hands. Based on information I got as well, it says that 1% of the population owns 80% of the land. Well, Mr. President, if we see that we have 2 million acres of land and we are only collecting in tax revenue \$6 million, it's about \$3.00 per acre roughly. Actually, we even collected less than the year 2016/2017, and I wonder why? Why are we collecting less on land taxes than the previous fiscal year? Was it this tax break? Was this the impact of the tax break? I don't know. An example of this over estimating of revenues and where we continue to think we can take blood out of stone, while people are broke and are not consuming, is the import duty id underperformed by 25%, some \$34 million less. And also, goods in transit went down by 19%. And the Environmental Tax underperformed by 12%, right. And we questioned in last year's budget how government was so generous with its assumptions and we cautioned them. We tell them how they are planning to collect more taxes and things are hard out here. It is right here. But this year there is no budget for consultation you know. Consultation is finish. Consultation with the private sector is finished and I will touch that in here too. Meetings with the Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry, zero. Even though the budget in that office has gone up, and I am happy for that, and I will mention that too.

The Prime Minister describes the \$16 million drop in performance of taxes as sharply, well, if \$16 million is a sharp drop, when you look at what is estimated, what government is expected to spend this year, over last year, Mr. President, from \$1,010,000,000 to \$1,051,000,000, that is about \$40 million, then what is that? It has to be bigger than a sharp increase. It's a humongous increase in taxes, giving the performance, the poor performance of last year. But let's look, Mr. President, at something like the Belize Broadcasting Authority. And this one puzzles me because if we go to page 53 of the budget, as well, I am asking you now to look at page 17 and page 53, you see the Belize Broadcasting Authority has 5 entities it purports it has to look at and give license to. And it claims its annual revenues from licenses, \$256,000. So that would work to about \$50,000 per license, and it has 3 people in its office. But the \$200,000 question is that when you look under the proposed recurrent revenue on page 17, line 10517, it shows the Belize Broadcasting Authority collecting \$52,000 in revenue.

MR. PRESIDENT: Senator Lizarraga, we'll do an extension for you, a one-time extension of 15 minutes so you can finish up. You have already been entertaining for 45 minutes.

SENATOR M. LIZARRAGA: Mr. President, I didn't know time goes by so fast.

MR. PRESIDENT: Yes it did.

SENATOR M. LIZARRAGA: And I beg your indulgence but I have a lot more to do.

MR. PRESIDENT: We have 9 more items to deal with including the budget.

SENATOR M. LIZARRAGA: I plan on being here until midnight, Mr. President.

MR. PRESIDENT: Fifteen more minutes, Senator. Thank you.

SENATOR M. LIZARRAGA: Mr. President, so what happened to the \$200,000? Why is it not reported? Mr. President, let's look at page 126. And this is a project that I am particularly pleased to see, really. It one of them that I call bang-for-buck projects on a win-win because this is the aquaculture department we have. Minister is this under your portfolio? Because they don't just give you a fish, they don't give you a fish, they sell you the fish and they teach you how to fish. It is a beautiful little project. But, Mr. President, again, their report income from this as \$561,000, but if we go back to page 18 of the budget, right, we don't see it, we don't find it. So I don't know where it is reported under income and revenues for that Ministry. Two areas, why, Mr. President, we question things in this big book?

Mr. President, I want now to touch on dividends because a big part of government's justification for the investing in BTL and BEL, were the dividends that it was going to give the Belizean people. We have heard the Prime Minister state that BTL has a value of \$1billion now. He didn't say how much BEL is valued at. But, Mr. President, we see that dividends from those two entities is just \$11 million and projected to continue more or less the same. We had made a presentation on this already. At that rate, we will never pay for those companies. Never, ever, ever.

Let's look at tourism, Belize Tourism Board. We keep hearing that tourism arrivals are going up. The tourism sector is doing well. Tourism is bountiful. But yet the projected outturn from tourism, did not even make the budget. They budgeted and they come in under an environment where we are being told that tourism is growing. The numbers are out, \$2 million, that's all we get from the tourism board. Now, let us look at other transfers from PACT, for the Public Utilities Commission, PUC, some of us are familiar with it and others. Where we approved income for \$14 million from these, and you know how much we got, Mr. President, from PACT and the PUC, \$2 million. I wonder why? One has to question why. How can you estimate \$14 million for an income from the PUC and PACT, and others and only collect \$2 million? How? It baffles me, Mr. President, alright. And even the Central Bank underperformed. You see, Mr. President, there are so many things wrong with this budget. So many things wrong with this budget. It offers no stability, no vibrancy. None at all. Again we ask, who is advising you?

Mr. President, remember I told you about the borrowings. How much over borrowings we made, well let me tell you about the expenses now. And I have gone back all the way to 2012/2013 to make my point. Because we spent over the

previous years, the numbers I am going to give is our spending over the previous years. In 2013/2014, we spent 10% more than we did in 2012/2013. In 2015/2016, we spent 7½% more than 2013/2014. In 2016/2017, 14% more than the previous year. And so, in 2017/2018, 8% more. This year that's coming we project to spend 4% more than the year before. And yet last year we only manage to cut 2%. And I wish I had the time to show you where the majority of those cuts are coming from. I hinted at it already, that a lot of it is coming from maintenance and training. But where we did not save and where they continue to tell us that we are going to save is the size of government. The size of government has gone up by 7%. We have hired almost 1,000 more public officers. Government continues to get too big. In the absence of an audit to see what we are really getting from these departments, in an absence of meaningful goals and targets, we see government just growing, and growing, and growing. Shouldn't we strive, Mr. President, for less persons in the Public Service but better resource, and better motivated? We have so many right now in the Public Service and many of them tell me that they do not have resources at all to do their jobs effectively, so why have more people?

You know what, let me deal with this. Let me move to the Ministry of the Attorney General. I was hoping to deal with it for last, or way at the end, but let me deal with it now. I hope today, the Attorney General will tell us what it is that he does for us, okay. What he has done and what he will do to improve in his Ministry because this is a Ministry that is supposed to be, and is supposed to provide exemplary legal services to the government and people of Belize. Yet we spend on legal fees more than his entire Ministry. I am not saying that you spend it, I said we. We as a country spend more than your budget on legal advice. But isn't that what you are supposed to do? The Attorney General's Ministry will provide quality and innovative legal services to the government and people of Belize, and will contribute to its development. But you see, if you go back to page 87 of the budget, right, it seems that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Home Affairs is doing the same thing, so maybe that's why he have this problem because two Ministries, if you look under the strategic priorities of this Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Home Affairs it says, "provide advice on Bills and legislation, provide advice for the ministries and departments on legal questions affecting the business of government, undertake continuous and law revision and reform, draft subsidiary legislation, ministerial orders and gazette notices, and implement legislative programs for the year." I thought that was what the Ministry of the Attorney General was supposed to do. Well obviously, they are not doing their jobs because we need to get it all over the place. So again, Mr. President, why is the Ministry of Finance, on page 57, spending \$6.4 million this year, for legal advice?

Mr. President, let me go to the Office of the Prime Minister and specifically the Office of Strategic Management. Again, there is no information provided as to what they will do with the spending of their money. None! They didn't even take the opportunity provided to them. Look at one of their targets. Remember I talked about targets that are so low, and that they even challenged themselves. Look at the last target for that department, cost of administration as a percentage of the Ministry's budget. Now that is just a simple division. Well I did it for them, 2017 was 64%, 2018/2019 is 57%. Take the amount of money that they give you and divide it by the total amount. Simple! These are the targets that they can't meet you know.

Mr. President, let's look at this Belize Restore Social Assistance. Where remember, this we have highlighted that this is one of our areas now, we are focusing on social assistance. Where we spent in this budget 22 times more just on foreign travel than we spent on Restore Belize Social Assistance. And we spent 13 times more on the page just next below, Government Information Services. So

we are more interested in propaganda and travelling than really restoring Belize with social assistance. They as well can't tell us their own targets, the number of youths that were assisted by the spending of these monies. They can't tell us. They can't tell us the number of children in school feeding programs, 0, 0, 0, 0. They can't tell us the percentage of assisted youths who successfully completed school, high school, compared to those that haven't received assistance. There's no way to measure if this spending has been effective. They can't tell us the percentage of assisted youths that can further their studies and the arrest rate for gang-related offenses for youths who have not received assistance. They can't tell us the impact of these programs. They can't tell us if we are getting bang for our buck in these spending, and this continues throughout this entire book. And I am sure my colleagues are going to touch on it, on other areas.

Let's look at the Private Sector Investment Program, Mr. President. Where last year their budget was \$43,000. This year, thankfully they've increased their budget to \$374,000 and they've gone from 2 employees. I don't know which 2 employees was making \$2,000, but anyhow, for 4 employees now that make \$176,000. But yet when you look at their output indicators, meetings with the Chamber of Commerce and businesses is listed as one of their output indicators. This is the measurement that they are going to use now to tell you what they achieve after the spending. None! They don't plan to have any meetings apparently.

MR. PRESIDENT: Excuse me, Senator Lizarraga, you have a couple minutes to finish wrap up, please. It's been over an hour now. Thank you.

SENATOR M. LIZARRAGA: Mr. President, in the past we were allowed to have persons yield time, some of their time. Is that allowed?

MR. PRESIDENT: I have already given time and there is no Standing Orders that other persons, or other Senators can give time.

SENATOR M. LIZARRAGA: I am saying in that past, precedence was set.

MR. PRESIDENT: I have already given you an extension already. And I have made mention, stick to the budget and continue.

SENATOR M. LIZARRAGA: I am sticking to the budget, please.

MR. PRESIDENT: I am not saying you are not, you know. Just continue and wrap up your presentation please.

SENATOR M. LIZARRAGA: Mr. President, let me wrap up. Let me wrap up by highlighting points raised from a recent morning talk show on LoveFM, featuring an economist, two economist and a past President of the Chamber of Commerce, somebody that sits on the Economic Development Council. And let me just raise some of the points that were mentioned in this show. Revenue projections continue to be unrealistic, they are optimistic and inflated. They do not take into account the reality on the ground, our economic climate, "*tings haad out ya!*" The Public Sector continue to drown out the private sector. We are a nation drowning in debt and we need to grow the economy to address the debt. That's the only way you can't borrow yourself out of it. We need to reduce the size of government. Government is too large. We can't afford so much waste in government, or corruption in government. We need to come up with meaningful ways to work with the private sector, not to chastise them or make it personal, but to really sit down and work with them so that you could empower them, and so that they can really take up the role that they should play

providing enough revenue for this government to fulfil its minimum obligations. And we have to start at the top, we have too many ministries, ministries that doesn't have any program money but yet they have a lot of staff, put the ministry smaller and reduce the sizes; we have to start at the top. Mr. President, we need to stop these misguided policies and we need to bring people to the table with civilized debate. We can become good examples of this nation, Mr. President. We need for people to stop looking at the discussion and the debate in this House with disgust and scorn, but they need to look at us instead, that it is some place that they can learn. And we have an obligation, Mr. President, as well for this budget to provide for those that cannot work, that truly cannot work. We owe them more than lip service because in this budget, most of those programs aim at poverty alleviation and the social ills in our society have been cut. And it is only then when we find solutions to lift all our poor people out of poverty, Mr. President, that we will begin to prosper and the private sector will begin to prosper because when they succeed, we succeed, when they succeed, the whole country succeeds. Thank you, Mr. President.

SENATOR E. COURTENAY: Thank you, very much, Mr. President. Mr. President, I rise to make my contribution on the General Revenue Appropriation Bill for 2018/2019. And once again, we say, here we go again! We have come to this Honourable Senate to debate what is supposed to be government's budget, Mr. President, for the Fiscal Year 2018/2019. We are supposed to cast a critical eye over the estimates of revenue and expenditure for the forth coming fiscal year. And at the same time, Mr. President, we are called to examine the revised estimate, the outturn for 2017/2018. Once again, it has become the hallmark of this UDP Administration. What we have is nothing more than a cocktail of *Barrownomics*. A visionless budget, Mr. President. Misleading figures, unsatisfactory program budgeting, and once again, we have a budget that is lacking in transparency and accountability.

Mr. President, we have to put this budget in a context. The first thing to recall is Statutory Instrument No. 25 of 2017, which is called the Fiscal Policy Budget Proposals and Fiscal Strategy Statement and Reports Order 2017. That Order was signed by the Honourable Prime Minister on the 9th March 2017. That was his compact, his agreement with the bondholders, because the government could not be trusted, Mr. President, the bondholders demanded control of fiscal policy for this country. And this government surrendered that control to the bondholders, that was unfortunate, Mr. President. The session by the government of control of fiscal policy to foreigners is no different from when a country is forced into a standby arrangement with the IMF, this time it is to the bondholders. The first thing that the bondholders demanded was that the government must, still under the Statutory Instrument, it must, it has no choice but to present a budget with a primary surplus of 2% for the next three fiscal years. Mr. President, we all want a primary surplus. What we cannot accept is for the bondholders to dictate to us what the primary surplus should be, or at least, a minimal. What we have before us today, on paper, but not in reality is a proposal for a primary surplus of 2.22%. And it is noteworthy, Mr. President, that for the last fiscal year, the budget proposed a primary surplus of 3.14%, but actually achieved only a surplus of 1.82%. But, Mr. President, we have to look critically at this proposed 2.22% primary surplus because it is a fiction. It is the product of voodoo accounting. According to the Prime Minister, \$208 million, and I quote, "were not factored into the computations of the primary and over-all balances." According to the Prime Minister, some IMF Regulation says that they can do this. And I am sure Senator Barnett is going to identify it for us because we couldn't find it.

SENATOR DR. C. BARNETT: In the Government Financial Statistics Handbook.

SENATOR E. COURTENAY: In the Government Financial, what is the name?

SENATOR DR. C. BARNETT: In the GFS Handbook.

SENATOR E. COURTENAY: You will quote it for us and help us. What we have in truth, Mr. President, is that this expenditure was incurred in the current fiscal year. And if it is brought to account the overall deficit will jump to \$245 million or 6.5% of GDP. That, Mr. President, and Members of this Honourable Senate, is the true position, and it is wrong we say, to have below the line accounting in order to pretend that you are reaching the targets that you are required to make by the bondholders. But, Mr. President, and Members of the Senate, not only do we have the situation where the bondholders decide and determine what happens with our primary surplus. Our concern when we look at the figures in this budget are the same as they were last year. And we are required, Mr. President, when we have a budget that is riddled with questionable figures, some of which have been pointed out by Senator Lizarraga already, and I am sure during the course of the day more are going to be identified.

We have to be critical, Mr. President, because we are faced with unconstitutionality and illegality. Section 120, subsection 2(b) of the Constitution mandates that the Auditor General must audit all accounts of the government, the courts, the Belize Advisory Council, and all Commissions established by the Constitution. Importantly the annual audit by the Auditor General is to be presented to the National Assembly. Mr. President, you will be aware that no such audit has been presented for years. In fact, the last annual audit that has been made available by the Auditor General is for the Fiscal Year 2011/2012. Five years and no audit, Mr. President. According to the Constitution the purpose of these audits is for the Auditor General to satisfy herself that the expenditure confirms to the authority that governs it. In order for us, in discharging our oversight responsibility, we are to be assisted by an audit by the Auditor General because that audit is what looks at the actual expenditure by the government and she must be satisfied whether or not they have confirmed to the authority that govern it. In the absence of such audits, Mr. President, we cannot be satisfied that the revised estimates that are presented in the budget book are, in fact, accurate. As Senator Lizarraga pointed out, and I endorse it, our concern is heightened by what must be inaccuracies, must be misstatements in the budget book. It is also heightened by the significant revisions between what was budgeted and what is now the revised outturn for 2017/2018. Admittedly the revisions were not as dramatic as they were in the past. But we will highlight some of the errors, Mr. President, because now more than ever, we need the audits by the Auditor General. Mr. President, it is possible that there is an explanation as to why the Auditor General has been unable to present a mandatory audit of government's accounts.

When we look at the estimates on page 46, Mr. President, estimates for 2018/2019, to our amazement, there is going to be a reduction, a reduction in the staff of the Auditor General from 47 to 44. Why, Mr. President? Is it because of the audit that expose the corruption in Immigration? But what is worst, when one looks at the budget book, the Auditor General says that she performed 40 audits in 2017/2018. She made 30 recommendations. But you know, Mr. President, only 5 of the 30 recommendations have been implemented. Government accounts audited, 30 recommendations made, only 5 implemented. The budget book goes further to point out that 3 ministries have refused to comply with the regulations. Mr. President, we call on the Auditor General to make available to the National Assembly those audits, those recommendations, and those ministries that have

refused to implement her recommendations.

Earlier this year, Mr. President, we called attention to the failure by government to comply with their mandatory fiscal transparency and responsibility regulations 2010. Impartial, and I underscore partial discharge of its responsibility because one of the commitments made to the bondholders in the March 2017 Statutory Instrument was that the mid-year review was going to be presented, the Financial Secretary came and told us that it had not been prepared and he promised us what is at the back of the budget speech. But the news, Mr. President, in the Fiscal Transparency and Responsibility Regulations is not good. The Fiscal Strategy Statement for 2018/2019, makes it clear, Mr. President, and this is what is important. There will be further tax increases in 2018 and 2019. And our analysis reveals, Mr. President, that during the course of this very fiscal year coming 2018/2019 government will have to come back to Parliament with additional measures in order to try to meet its expenditure. It should treat from its wrong-headed proposal to impose GST on land clearing, crop dusting and harvesting will require further tax measures. And there is the very intriguing proposal, Mr. President, of government now submitting its contracts, its imports and its purchases to GST, and when one ask why, we find out two things. This is a disguised budget cutting exercise we are told. What is supposed to happen is that all government departments will now pay the GST but then Ministry of Finance will not refund them for the GST that they have paid and thereby cut the amount of money they have to spend. The net effect, however, the net effect according to the Ministry of Finance is going to be negligible on the budget. In the Fiscal Strategy, Mr. President, the government notes that it will only have 5% to 10% of its expenditure to promote growth and development. But at the same time, the government recognizes that the economy has slowed dramatically to less than 1% growth. According to the Fiscal Strategy, there is a need to run a primary surplus of more than 2% in order to reduce debt to GDP from just about 100% to about 80% in the next 5 years.

But, Mr. President, in recent years, as the fiscal strategy statement admits, the government has been unable to reach this target. And according to its fiscal strategy, it describes its fiscal position as “fragile”. It goes further and says, “Without a primary surplus of more than 2% per annum, we will be thrown off the path of sustainable debt levels.” In short, Mr. President, we are facing a fiscal crisis. And those who have drank the red Kool-Aid will say it is PUP fault. That is what we will hear shortly. While we on this side say it is time to man up UDP, time to man up! And I will take the liberty of quoting, Mr. President, with your kind permission, from a letter, you know, what letter, a letter from Reverend Lance Lewis. You are calling the man God? Listen carefully, 21st March 2018, “Prime Minister, you and your government have been at the helm of Belize for 10 years now. The responsibility for corruption, mismanagement, police corruption, and Belize’s economic situation rest fully on your shoulders. Our percentage of debt to GDP has jumped 30% under your ten years of leadership. We say that not to throw stones of blame, but to assign the responsibility of leadership.” Those are the words of the church. I will say it again. I want to hear the response. Do you want me to read it again? I will await Senator Brown’s presentation. Mr. President, we say, the government must accept responsibility for the present state of affairs because unless it does so, unless it does so, we cannot be lead out of the economic darkness.

Let us take a closer look against that background, Mr. President, at the budget, because again, as quite rightly pointed out by Senator Lizarraga, we have, yet again, a budget that misses its targets. We have a story of setting targets and missing them. Why are these projections unrealistic? Why is there a need every year for this significant revision of the estimates? Income and business tax

underperformed by \$4 million. Revenue from international trade also was off by \$44 million. Import duties alone was \$34 million less than budgeted. Taxes on goods and services were off by \$17 million with GST alone missing its target by some \$17 million. This, Mr. President, reflects a sick economy. One would have expected against that background a budget that was designed, a budget that was prepared with the hope of stimulating economic growth and therefore, having higher revenues, but no, we do not have a budget that has responded to the challenges we face. What we have, Mr. President, is a budget that has no plan, no vision to lead us out of this dismal state of affairs. Without the growth, without real economic growth, Mr. President it is amazing. It tests credulity for the budget to propose that there will be an additional \$10 million collected in income and business tax. It is hoped that an additional \$10 million will be collected on international trade. And, to go further, the government is expecting to collect an additional \$34 million in GST. Mr. President, Honourable Members, our concern is whether it is realistic in the current economic climate to put these as our estimates. We are coming out of a year where the targets were set and missed, and we are still being optimistic that we are going to recover more than we actually collected in the current fiscal year. Mr. President, colleagues, we say again, supplementaries are coming.

More than 40% of Belizeans are living in poverty notwithstanding the hundreds of millions of Petrocaribe Funds. We are being taxed upwards of 25% of our national income, which is an unsustainable level and is higher than most countries around us. In fact, most developing countries, a debt to GDP of just about 100% and we have real risk of continuing deficits instead of surpluses. This is in a context of less than 1% growth. What is government's answer to this crisis? An uninspiring budget. A budget lacking in vision. No new ideas, just more of the same. More taxes and more hard time. You know, Mr. President, the result of last year's budget should have demonstrated that more taxation is not the answer. As has been said, you cannot tax your way to prosperity. One has to ask one self, which UDP genius came up with the idea of taxing data in a new economy? It must be the same expert who advised the UDP Government to tax the nascent business processing outsourcing sector. These are the areas in our economy, Mr. President, that should be as efficient as possible. They underpin the foundation of a new Belizean economy. They underpin the growth that we all desire. The Prime Minister himself acknowledge that people have moved from voice to data. And so what do we do? Tax data, the data that will drive the businesses; the data that will drive investment. We say these measures are ill-conceived, Mr. President. But they are designed to raise \$20.5 million dollars. And as we said last year, we repeat again, Mr. President, \$32 million in income and business tax are outstanding for more than 2 years. Twenty-seven point five million is outstanding in GST for more than 2 years.

According to the budget book, 610 tax payers owe GST for more than 2 years. Income and Business Tax arrears and GST arrears for more than 2 years total \$60 million. If 1/3 of that is collected, there would have been no need for the additional and new tax measures. Last year we heard the same incantation that we have in this budget. We are going to do better with collection. But the figures are still there. What is required, Mr. President, is some specific legislative initiatives that will ensure that these amounts of monies, \$60 million are paid. We said it last year and we say it again, let's just collect the arrears before we come with new taxes. I said again, last year, Mr. President, that we are taxing the wrong persons. We can move away from taxing the productive sector. I used the example last year, I will use it again, Immigration, according to the budget book in 2017/2018, \$11 million was collected; 2,500 passports were issued, \$1.3 million collected; that's about \$520.00 each. If we increase that to \$750.00 that will yield about \$1.875 million. Eight hundred persons were granted nationality, 800. How much

revenue? It was \$64,000, that's about \$800 per nationality. If we double that, we get \$1.2 million. Visas and permits yielded \$8 million in revenue, an average price of \$166,000 each. Again, Mr. President, why can't we increase this to say \$2,500 thereby yielding \$12 million in revenue? If we look at Immigration alone and the evidence from the Senate Inquiry shows that people are prepared to pay more than we are actually charging for these services. We can collect an addition \$4 to \$5million without burdening the private sector directly.

In his budget speech, the Prime Minister spoke triumphantly about the UDP decade. In his reality it has been a decade of "Unrelenting advances towards an egalitarian promise land for our citizenry." But let's take a quick look at the UDP decade, Mr. President. Imports in 2007, was \$1.08 billion; in 2017, \$1.698 billion or an increase of 57%; the 2007 trade deficit, \$517 million; 2017, \$782 million, an increase of 51%; external debt for 2007, was \$1.945 billion; 2017, \$2.511 billion, an increase of 30%; domestic debt 2007, was \$321.8 million, 2017, \$1.026 billion, 218% increase; debt to GDP ratio, was 75% in 2007, and in 2017 just under 100%, an increase of 33.3%; unemployment was at 8.5% in 2007, 9.3% in 2017. Each of these 6 indicators have worsened significantly. That is the characterization, description and record of the UDP decade, Mr. President.

MR. PRESIDENT: Senator Hulse, one second, Senator Salazar, we are not reading the question.

SENATOR G. HULSE (Leader of Government Business and Minister Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, the Environment, Sustainable Development and Immigration): Mr. President, in accordance with Standing Order 10 (8), I move that the proceedings on the order paper may be entered upon and proceeded with at this day's Sitting at any hour though opposed.

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

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

Senator Courtenay, please continue.

SENATOR E. COURTENAY: Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, I draw attention to the worsening position of Belize and our economy. To make the point that the rhetorical flourishes and the political PR is one thing, but we are debating a budget that must be grounded in reality. And unless we take an honest look at what has happened to us over the last ten years, I say again, we will not be led out of the darkness in which we are economically. Let us take a look, Mr. President, at the investment in the country, and one, because one heard the Prime Minister extort the virtues of the supposed new investments, Fyffes, Sumitomo bought out an old banana farm, new investment, Four Seasons new investment. No one decries that. That is necessary but it is not enough. We attempted to find out what the Ministry of Economic Development and Investment was doing in the last fiscal year. So when we take a look, Mr. President, at page 191 of the budget book, Mr. President, page 191 must have been prepared somewhere in the Disney Corporation. Its fantasy land, fantasy. Mr. President, take a look at what they want us to believe. Investment promotion and generation, the number of foreign direct investment agreements concluded, for 2016/2017 it was 13; for 2017/2018 it was 13; for 2017/2018 revised it was 13; for 2018/2019 it is 13; for 2019/2020 it is 13. It is 13, 13, 13, 13, 13, is this boledo? The value of investment deals, \$52,250,000; \$52,250,000; \$52,250,00; \$52,250,000; \$52,250,000, every year

from 2016 to 2021, the amount of the investment is going to be the same. And it continues, the number of investments under the EPZ concession, \$187,475,192.00 for each year, the same thing.

Mr. President, Members, there is no need to go through all of them. The long and short of it is the following. In order for us to address the significant debt problem that we are facing, we need to attract foreign direct investment and we need to encourage local investment. And when we do not get the correct picture from the Ministry that is driving that process, we have to call into question the intention of the government in presenting statistics like this. It is cut and paste. It was the same thing last year. We pointed to it last year, and we get it again this year. Mr. President, the Ministry of Economic Development and Investment must report frankly and honestly to this National Assembly. Which brings us, Mr. President, before I move off from investment to the Civic Center, up to today, despite repeated request, the last time the Attorney General said just ask, repeated request to Belize Infrastructure Limited, repeated request to the Ministry of Finance, we have been unable to get a copy of the agreement. The Attorney General is saying that we should ask him, the Financial Secretary should ask you because the Financial Secretary says he doesn't have a copy, he wants one. We have been publicly told, Mr. President, that there is a guarantee. We have asked for the guarantee, we cannot get a copy of the guarantee. But the Financial Secretary says there is no guarantee. So what is the true picture? What is the arrangement? What is the deal? Mr. President, that facility has cost tens of millions of dollars, and the Belizean people are entitled to know the arrangement that has been entered into, for the management of that facility, and we want that information and we will continue until we get it.

I will not, Mr. President, go through the details of the situation that we are facing with crime. The recent change in leadership, the shuffling around of the same players at the high command of the Police and at the level of the Ministry is not an answer. And last night, and the days of last week show us that there is a lack of confidence in the Police Department. A lack of confidence in the political leadership in the Ministry of National Security. It calls, Mr. President, for a national effort to arrest the crime wave that is besetting this country. But we, once again, Mr. President, have to take a serious look at what it is the government is proposing. Mr. President, let's go to page 95 of the budget book. Page 95, Community Police Services and Crime Prevention. So now we are talking of the monies that are to be made available, the resources that are to be made available for crime prevention. Revised Estimates for 2017/2018, was \$48.3 million. What is being proposed for 2018/2019, is \$44.192 million. A reduction of over \$3 million, Mr. President. You see that, Mr. President, a reduction. But when we go down below and we see the staffing for 2017/2018 is 36 Managerial Executive, 36 for the upcoming fiscal year; Technical Front Line Service is 1,093, for the fiscal year that is coming that is going to increase to 1,597, nearly 500. But yet, personal emoluments goes from \$48 million to \$44 million. Mr. President, I do not understand how that will be done. Let's go further. On page 97, Criminal Investigation, to investigate crime and new scientific evidence for effective prosecution of offenders. The Revised Estimates, \$7.3 million. Crime situation has worsened, Mr. President, but we are proposing to reduce the amount of money allocated under this heading to \$6.9 million. But again, when you jump down and you look at the staffing, the staffing moves from 222 and increases to 228, on less Personal Emoluments. Mr. President, something is wrong. When you look at the figures below, number of arrest in 2017/2018 was 433; for 2017/2018 was 1,802; for 2018/2019 is 1,802; for 2019/2020 is 1,802; for 2020/2021 is 1,802. Everything is just replicated year after year. The number of convictions 1,802, 1,802, 1,802. So, for every arrest of 1,802 you know how much we have, convictions, 1,802. Please, Mr. President, let's get serious.

Mr. President, finally, on page 98, we have yet again the same mystery. Personal Emoluments moving from \$10.3 million to \$9.7 million. But the staffing increasing from 357 to 372. I highlight these figures, Mr. President, simply to make the point that we cannot take the government serious when they come with a budget like this especially in light of what happened this weekend in Ghost Town. Are we serious? Are we to believe these numbers? Mr. President, I know you are looking at the clock, so I have a few areas that I need to touch. I repeat, the fight against crime is a national issue. The Leader of the Opposition said, again, we on this side are ready to work alongside the government and the civic and social partners in addressing this problem. We need to do so, Mr. President, but in the context of real figures. We need to do so, Mr. President, in the context of a significant increase in resources in order to fight crime. Fight it smart with new and different leadership, Mr. President.

In approximately three weeks Guatemala is going to hold its referendum on whether to submit the territorial dispute to the ICJ. This government, the United Democratic Party has said that it intends to hold a referendum in Belize towards the end of 2018, at the latest the first quarter of 2019. It is acknowledged that there must be a massive education campaign to prepare Belizeans to make this defining decision. But, Mr. President, low and behold, on page 232 of the budget book, \$40,000 is all that is being budgeted for the education campaign for the ICJ. Are we serious? We on this side will not support any education campaign with a budget of \$40,000, Mr. President. That must be a joke. We have a Joint Commission, Mr. President, established and re-energized between Belize and Guatemala that is designed to advance and implement the 13 Agreements that were signed at the Placencia Summit. Not a dollar is in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs budget to address that Commission. That brings me, Mr. President, to the re-registration exercise which must be conducted. The government has committed to doing it, and, if I recall the Prime Minister, he put it off, he differed it because it was going to cost \$20 million. At page 238 of the budget book, \$8 million is all that is budgeted for re-registration, Mr. President. We call on the government to ensure that adequate resources are made available for the re-registration exercise and that it be allocated fairly. Mr. President, these are issues, re-registration, ICJ education campaign for which we have got to make sure that all resources required are made available. They are at the heart and foundation of our country.

In concluding, Mr. President, I recall a time when we were in government, when we faced difficult times, and, Mr. President, Senator Barnett for example, was one of those who was a part of the team back then. We, Mr. President, did not run from our responsibility. We recognized the difficulties that the country faced and we devised plans and strategies that turned the ship of state away from perilous waters. The current difficult times that we are facing call for visionary plans, strategic plans, Mr. President, and a national consensus, consultation agreement on the way forward, Mr. President. Regrettably the budget for Fiscal Year 2018/2019, does not inspire any confidence, does not reflect any vision. Indeed, Mr. President, the only hope that is on the horizon for Belizeans is that the red clouds are fading and the blue start is rising. Thank you very much, Mr. President. (Applause)

SENATOR O. SALAS: Yes, Mr. President, thank you very much. I rise to make my contributions to the budget debate. I want to start, first, Mr. President, to share some of my views on the crime issue. It has a direct bearing on this budget and I will also go into that section on crime prevention and the police, and parse the budget and see what that is doing for us. But two days ago was a horrific murder that hit very close to home. The brother of a colleague of mine, a close friend of mine, the brother of Reynaldo Guerrero, BTIA President, but Mario was

killed in the most vicious way. I extend my sincere condolences to the Guerrero family. That showed me, that demonstrated that none of us are immune from the crime wave that has beset our old capital and our country by extension. And yesterday morning we woke up to the scenes of chaos that erupted in the Mayflower Street area. Our old capital is in a crisis of horrendous proportions, and our police seem ill-prepared to deal with this crisis, right. They certainly cannot do it alone. I need to mention that it is wrong, it is illegal for citizens to be brandishing and discharging fire arms in public. Even if these are licensed and we are all pretty sure that those fire arms were certainly not licensed which made it doubly bad. But, Mr. President, our military tactics will only serve to make matters worse. It seems that we have forgotten the warnings and the recommendations of Dr. Herbert Gayle and his team of 8 years ago. Dr. Gayle, who I understand is in the country as we speak, he made some presentations yesterday. Allow me, Mr. President, to read a short paragraph from Dr. Gayle's Report, which, although written 8 years ago could very well have been written yesterday. And I quote, "The Belizean Police by nature of the paramilitary model will never gain the trust of the youth. The method of being military and police concurrently is backward. Our police officers walking around brandishing hand guns and high-powered rifles indicate to children that there is no certainty that they can rely on the police. They look like gang members themselves. This problem moves from imagery to reality as children see them operating like gangs, shooting indiscriminately in poor urban communities." I'll share, Mr. President, that last week I had the opportunity to participate in a discussion with Members of the Police High Command, and they admitted, they admitted that they need to go back to the recommendations and observations of the Gayle Report and other such reports that are still valid. They need to go back and review them. And I strongly encourage them last week, and I encourage them this week to do so. We don't have the time nor the resources to reinvent the wheel.

Our government in this national budget, the budget book, proposes to invest, as has been pointed out, \$52 million, which is almost 5% of our national budget to Community Police Services and Crime Prevention. The tactics of the GSU forces and other camouflage units who carry high powered rifles, in my view, are completely undermining what community policing is trying to achieve, which is to work in partnership with all communities to help prevent and reduce crime. Just yesterday, Senior Superintendent Howell Gillette said, on a talk show yesterday morning, "People in Belize City are afraid of the police." That is what he said. If our police do not change their tactics, community policing efforts will be a dismal failure. Even if we add, and I think you said 500 new police officers to the department, as indicated on page 95 of the budget. I will come back to that figure later. There were 142 murders in our country last year, which amounted to a rate of approximately 40 per 100,000. That rate exceeded every country in Latin America and the Caribbean, except for 4, Jamaica, Honduras, El Salvador and Venezuela. This first quarter alone, and we still have a few more days to go, there has been, if my information is correct, 40 murders, that's already close to 11 per 100,000 in three months; that already puts us higher than the homicide rates of Nicaragua, Panama, Costa Rica, Bolivia and 6 other South American countries for all of 2017. So let me repeat that statistic, that figure. We are just three months into this new year, yet our homicide rate already exceeds the 2017 homicide rates of at least 10 countries in our region, Latin America and Caribbean region. If that doesn't give us pause, nothing will. We have to ask ourselves, is our budget preparing us to combat the crime problem in a smart, strategic and inclusive way?

As I start parsing the budget, I want to reiterate, let me say again that we cannot and should not expect our Police Department to solve the crime problem alone. The Gayle Report for instance, and I'll keep coming back to this a couple times, recommended that the Ministry of Human Development and the Ministry

of Education should work together to, and I quote, “To effect education and action oriented programs so families can begin to restructure to match economic and social realities.” I will come back to this again in a bit. But back to the Police Department, and if we turn to page 92 under Police Strategic Management and Administration. Of the \$3.2 million budgeted for this, 95% is for Recurrent Expenditure of which 57% goes to salaries. Only \$29,000, a little bit more than that or less than 1% is assigned to training. Less than \$30,000 for this section. I am not surprised at this extremely low figure, because the budget does not even include training for police of all ranks as it did last year and even then the budget was significantly lower. Our police obviously need constant professional training to enable them to be more effective in working in partnership with our communities to reduce crime. But it could be that the plan is to do all training through our National Training Academy, our National Police Training Academy. As we could look at that on page 94, \$1.3 million was budgeted to that Police Training Academy with 73% going to salaries. Only \$205,000 or 18% of that budget was assigned for training, materials and supplies, which is itself a 44% increase over last year. It might sound substantial, Mr. President, but that is just \$71,000 more. So it eludes me how with that kind of trading budget for our National Police Training Academy we are able to create a strong, disciplined, well-trained and professional Police unit with such meagre training resources.

On page 95, and now I come to Community Police Services and Crime Prevention. As I mentioned earlier, \$52 million budgeted for this with 85% going to salaries. And I also noted, as my colleague on the other side pointed out, that there seems to be a plan to increase staffing, recruits by 500, yet the budget dropped by \$4 million. I can't understand it as well, I just cannot. One hundred and twenty-four thousand is assigned to training which, although 51% increase, is just \$42,000 more. On page 97, Criminal Investigation, just under \$10 million budgeted for that of which 73% goes to salaries, 1% of that budget is budgeted for training. I want to share some statistics on murder conviction rate. I think we only have complete data for 2016, so I will refer to 2016 data. There were 105 homicide in 2016, 25 murder cases went to trial, 6 persons were found guilty of murder; 4 were found guilty of manslaughter; 14 were found not guilty; there was 1 that was a hung jury. So of the number of homicide in 2016, how many went to trial, 17%. And the conviction rate, 7%. Like according to the budget, there were 9,065 crimes of which 2,137 according to the Commissioner of Police were major crimes in 2016. That means that almost 50% of crimes were unsolved, almost 2 of every 5 crimes that were reported.

So again I come back to the question, with such a meagre training budget, how can we expect our Criminal Investigation Officers to improve their skills in crime investigation and the use of scientific evidence for effective prosecution of offenders? I decided to pool all the training money in the Police Department and it amounted to about \$500,000. If we pool all of them from all the sections, about half of a million dollars. I have to ask, if it wouldn't be more effective and efficient and a more strategic use of those limited resources, if we assigned a training money to our National Police Training Academy and give them more resources to use. After all, it is that academy that is charged with providing refresher courses and specialized courses to police officers of all ranks, as well as training for recruits. We have to approach training in a more modernized and specialized approach so that in the words of Dr. Gayle and his team, we can create a professional police unit through a revolution in recruitment and training. At the very least, as suggested in the Gayle Report, training for new entrance should include, and I quote, “basic fitness training, first aid, officer safety, detection of danger and body reading, community policing,” You have to be trained to be effective at community policing. Just calling it that does not make it community policing, “crime legislation, social work, research skills, psychology.” Did I say social work? “Equivalent to, at least, a certificate. With physical and fire arm

training to these basic course, it should take, at least, 9 months is the recommendation. Each recruit would have to pass a psychometric evaluation and their level examination, police ought to have continuation training. This must be compulsory and shall be used as part of an officer's assessment for promotion. This can be in the area of intelligent or more efficient methods of policing."

Mr. President, allow me to make some remarks here about the level of discourse that we saw in the House of Representatives last week. I think my colleague, Senator Lizarraga referred to some of that. These are the people that we elect, these are the people that should be setting the example. (Applause) But we were treated to an embarrassing display of immaturity, displayed by many Members of Parliament from both sides of the aisle. And these are the people who should be setting the example as I said, these are the people elected to serve us. But, yes, some of the most veteran of Parliamentarians demonstrated a complete disdain for the rule of order, gross disrespect for women, an acrimonious partisanship that is unhealthy for our nation has been unhealthy for our nation for so long. (Applause) The budget debate last week highlighted two scenarios that could not be more different. One, if we believe the government, there is nothing but good times ahead albeit it a long and rocky road. If we believe the Opposition on the other hand, its doom and gloom. Unless there is regime change. I am not even sure if I should refer to what happened last week as a debate. As usual, the Lower Chamber delivered its usual spectacle, featuring visceral personal attacks hurled across both sides, and chest pounding about achievement, achievement that should be, what you delivered. And that the country can only be saved if it is the UDP in power or the PUP in power. Up to now, it still seems that only in this Upper Chamber we can expect more mature and robust debate. (Applause) And the personal attacks are very limited. And, you know colleagues, I ask that we continue not disappointing the Belizean people in the way we conduct our affairs in this Upper Chamber. (Applause)

I want to go back briefly to where I ended to almost to the day a year ago, when we debated the last budget. But before I do so I want to highlight some important developments that we should all be happy about, some positive points that originally I wanted to start with before all the madness that occurred over the weekend. The government, but also civil society organizations fought long and hard for some of these achievements. We should all be happy and we should all be proud about the passage of the Petroleum Operations, Maritime Zone Moratorium Act, otherwise known as the Offshore Oil Moratorium. The recent establishment or endorsement by Cabinet of the Northeaster Biological Corridor in an area of the country that has experienced large scale clearance of our forests, unprecedented. This Northeastern Corridor is saving the very little that remains in that area and I congratulate the government, the NGOs, and other stakeholders for working together to make this happen. There is more work that needs to be done but it's an excellent start. The recent announcement supported by Cabinet that single use plastic bags, and styrofoam, and plastic food utensils will be phased out by April of next year. This is why I have my biodegradable cup here today, and I note my colleagues here have as well. (Applause) Belize is now a leader in the region in efforts to eliminate these products that are very bad for our health and the planet. We now need to zero-rate all biodegradable packaging materials and also encourage the manufacturing of these materials, made from bagasse for instance, in Belize. I take this opportunity, Mr. President, to applaud the vision of two Belizean companies that for a combined 15 years have led the charge to introduce such materials in our country, eco-friendly solutions and added touch. And I look forward to them investing even more in what will be new business opportunity.

We are also very pleased in the announcement that finally the re-

registration of electors exercise will take place this year, along with redistricting, which is a requirement of our Constitution, and has been due for almost 21 years. Overdue I should say. Our Constitution does not only give us the right to vote but that we are ensured fair elections. This means that the re-districting process should ensure that we achieve better representation. We need electoral divisions, Mr. President, as our Constitution says, “As merely as may be an equal number of persons eligible to vote.” The Constitution requires that. We don’t need more electoral divisions. In fact, we might need less. It might not be farfetched to go back to the 28 electoral divisions that we used to have and cut down on the number of Belize City electoral division for starters. I’ll come back to Election and Boundaries Department in a few minutes. There are other achievements, these and other achievement show that when we work together, when we pressure enough, we can achieve some very good things.

So going back to the, as we call it the big book, I commented last year that many in our NGO community were of the opinion that the poor state of our economy is as a result of several reasons; principal among them is corruption, economic planning, the way we manage our public funds, the crushing external debt, lack of a vision and strategy for the sustainable development of Belize. And I listed back then some of these top priorities, and I won’t go through all of that again but just to highlight a couple. We pointed out that government needs to demonstrate fiscal discipline by reducing borrowing and when borrowing is deemed necessary, restricting it to mostly loans with concessionary conditionality, a better mix in terms of investment priorities, place more emphasis on developing the productive sector, enhancing human capital versus investing only on physical infrastructure projects. We also pointed out that corruption needs to be continuously tackled. That we need to revise our tax policies for large cooperation so that they can start paying their fair share of taxes, and a number of others.

So this brings me to the fiscal strategy statement for this new fiscal year that’s coming. As has been pointed out as required by our Fiscal Transparency and Responsibility Regulations of 2010, such as statement for each fiscal year must be laid before the National Assembly for consideration and debate. I thank my colleague on the other side, Senator Courtenay for pointing out this legal obligation at our January 19th Sitting, and I also thank our Financial Secretary and Minister of Finance for delivering and that is why we have this now. My spirit I must say, were partially lifted when I went through that report. Because, in my view, it aimed to address some of what we listed last year, as top priorities to confront our fiscal challenges and to boost the state of our economy. However, Mr. President, the proposed budget for this new fiscal year does not lift my hopes. There are several areas in the budget that are inconsistent with the Fiscal Strategy Statement. Let’s examine some of what the Prime Minister was referring to when he referred to our rigid structure of public spending and the constantly shrinking fiscal policy space. And as can be seen in the Fiscal Strategy Statement, 60% of government revenue are taken up by salaries, pensions and subsidies, 20% are taken up for supplies, materials and utilities, right, Madam President. These are much needed items at our regulatory and line agencies desperately need to perform their functions well. Ten percent are absorb by interests payments leaving 10% or less for expenditures. And quoting from the Fiscal Strategy Statement, “that 10% is to promote growth and development, in particular capital spending.” I ask, can our countries economy grow? Can we see much needed development? The type of development that lifts our people out of poverty rather than just create a system of handouts for political gain, when less than 10% of our revenues goes towards growth and development. That’s roughly about \$100 million, a little more. The answer, I feel, is it depends. It depends how that money is invested. It depends how we focus on healthcare, agriculture, environmental management, tourism and crime prevention, human development, social transformation, poverty

alleviation.

Briefly I look at health, which we have on page 79. Recurrent Expenditure remained at 97% of the total budget indicating that only 3% was allocated to new CAP II and CAP III Projects. New Projects. While it is noted that contracts and consultancy has \$20.1 million, there is no indication that these contracts continue on ongoing development projects that will augment the services of the Ministry of Health or the health sector after completion. Of the \$20.1 million, \$18.7 million is allocated to strategic management and administration. But only \$1.4 million allocated to medicine and technology, primary care, hospital and community base services. It will be difficult then, in my view, to achieve the strategic goals of improving service delivery, health information systems, medical technologies, sustainable financing leadership and governance in the health sector, when the majority of the funds are being allocated to administration and so much less to outreach services and support. The district and regional hospital deserve an increase in funding in the areas of human resources and medical supplies to improve the quality of services and by extension the quality of life, thus reducing the constraint on the national referral hospital.

Briefly I want to look at Agriculture which starts at page 121, Madam President. According to contrary indicators for 2017, Belize's export value was just under \$458 million, while import was just under \$849 million. A negative trade balance of \$391 million. This means that a serious attempt needs to be made to reduce imports, to substitute import products, and to promote exports. While there is an increase in budget allocation for Agriculture Research and Development from almost \$6 million to almost \$10 million, this is way below the almost \$27 million that was budgeted for 2015/2016. Only what I consider a meagre \$140,000 was budgeted for agricultural diversification, and only \$35,000 is budgeted for agro marketing development. Again, I need to ask, how can it be expected that the development of new products will be catalyzed, will be promoted for the local and export market with that kind of budget? How can it be expected that new markets will be developed for the producers with this kind of budget? It is clear that as a country we must invest in areas to promote product development, export, marketing development and import substitution.

Moving on to Environmental Management on page 137, and when I refer to environmental management, Madam President, I am referring to DOE, Forestry, Fisheries, Climate Change and Sustainable Development. As on page 137 and the following page shows not only for this year coming up but previous years, the budget for that department has always not been enough to do what the Environmental Protection Act gives responsibility to that department for. So for years now, 85%, and I pointed this out last year, 85% of that budget goes to salaries alone, which is a mere 15% to support operational activities. And my understanding is that that money is distributed on a monthly basis. I understand. I've been made to understand that the strategy that that department uses is to wait 6 months for the operational funding to add up over 6 months, so that then they have some money to talk about to conduct their planned activities, staffing. I have been one of those pointing out that a couple more specialist are needed at that department. An Environmental Economist for example, and IT Expert. I was able to determine that that department has been making such a request for the last 2 years, they've not been receiving it. The budget refers to an increase of 64 staff, but only an increase of \$27,000 in the salary budget, which I understand is barely enough for an Environmental Technician at pay scale 9. I consider that a joke, really. CAP II has \$100,000 which I'm sure the department has found creative ways to make sure that that supports their activities. If we are serious about the Department of the Environment being allowed to fully perform their functions,

their very important functions, to monitor the developments taking place across our country, to ensure that we don't kill the golden goose, then we need to reflect such commitment in the salaries budgeted for that department.

On page 130, brief comments on the Forest Department budget, it actually reduced by a little bit. And I, I want to point out something that caught my attention on page 18 of the big book, the recurrent revenue estimates, where under Revenue Producing Operation for Forestry Department, it has it at 0. It was zero the year before, zero the year before that. And from what I have been able to determine, over \$900,000 of Forestry related revenue was collected last year and hundreds of thousands are collected every year. I'm wondering, is it just an oversight? But could it have been an oversight for 3 straight years? It really makes me question why that hasn't been put in there. And showing zero in projected revenue for that department puts the Forest Department in a very difficult position to try and justify an increase in their working budget, in their operating budget. You know, I don't need to say, I am sure all of us understand that this department is in charge of looking after our vast forest resources that forms the basis of different sectors of our economy, and our tourism industry. So that department has a lot to do, a lot on its plate and should receive some more increases to their budget so that they could do an even more effective job.

The Fisheries Department budget we see on page 132 onwards, is seeing a slight increase, it's basically the same level. Their fuel budget is just under \$200,000. But that still below the 2016/2017 budget, you know, and I dare say that that represents a huge limitation to that department in managing the fisheries resources across our vast marine territory adequately.

The last section in this Ministry is Climate Change and Sustainable Development. Only \$182,000 was budgeted for that, a reduction over last year. There are several studies, several studies that indicate that climate change is real, not only real but that Belize as a coastal nation is already being affected by climate change. Vulnerability studies have been conducted for the tourism sector. Climate Change Vulnerability Studies also for the agriculture sector and others, they indicate that the impacts to Belize, include flooding, drought, damage to infrastructure, damage to property, loss of investment. We all know about all the troubles of Monkey River suffering from coastal erosion for years. There are other serious climate change impacts but these must be seriously considered. There is a lot of funding out there for addressing climate change issues despite the withdrawal of the United States from the Paris Agreement. However, we must demonstrate that we are serious about dealing with Climate Change. A reduction in budget for climate change is definitely not a signal that we are serious about addressing our climate change challenges. We should provide more investments, not less for our climate change office with equipment and qualified personnel to strengthen our resilience to climate change, and our capacity to ensure that the impacts of climate change are monitored and adequately addressed, and to attract additional funding of which there is a lot out there. I'll make 2 recommendations: Move the designated national authority from where it is now to the Ministry of Forest, Fisheries, Environment, and Sustainable Development, which would be willing and more incentivized to actively seek climate change funding. And as I said, I will say it again, of which there is a whole lot out there. And ensure that that office has capable and experienced directorship.

Madam President, this now takes me to the Ministry of Human Development, Social Transformation and Poverty Alleviation, that starts at page 149. Let me just read what the mission of the Ministry is. To facilitate development and to implement programs that promote social justice and equity, enabling people to be self-sufficient, responsible and productive citizens.

Laudable mission. None of us will oppose that mission. But when we look at Strategic Management and Administration on page 149 and 150, \$11 million budgeted for that. Under CAP II Expenditure, I point out what was budgeted for anti-human trafficking, about \$200,000, in my view, an insanely low amount. I really cannot comprehend, Madam President, how this will help us to improve our standing, when the US State Department releases its next trafficking in person's report, I think we have been listed as a tier three country for going to a couple years now, if I am not mistaken. One of the very few, if not the only Central American country in that ignominious group, I hope I pronounced that word right. Only Suriname and Haiti in the Caribbean are in that group along with us. We need to do more, in my opinion, Madam President, to meet the minimum standard for elimination of trafficking and show that we are making significant efforts to do so. It was encouraging when our Attorney General, my colleague, and the Minister of Human Development visited their US counterparts and reported that we will strengthen our efforts to address human trafficking and prosecute offenders. Our budget needs to reflect that effort.

I jump to grants given to organizations and institutions under the human services section and which amount to \$106,000. I note that 44% of the budget for the ministry's Strategic Management and Administration around just under \$2 million is assigned to grants to organizations and institutions. So this puts the total grants budget for such institutions to about \$2 million to partner with many organizations that are represented by the network that I represent, NGOs such as Haven House, BCVI, Hand in Hand Ministries, Help Age among others. These NGOs provide direct services to underserved and vulnerable population. So there is alignment with the ministry's mandate, NGOs have learned how to stretch the dollar. We do so much with limited resources. And we therefore encourage the Ministry of Human Development if they have not yet done so, to develop a strategic plan of action along with these NGOs, to ensure that even more can be delivered with this limited amount of money, to the poor and needy. The ones that need it the most.

Madam President, I want to use my remaining time to talk about a Sustainable Development Goal of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. One of them that is of major interest to the NGO community. Sustainable Development Goal number 16, which is to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. I have already made some comments on a few of the targets that this sustainable development goal is trying to achieve. I'll touch on some other important targets. One, substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms. Develop effective accountable and transparent institutions at all levels and ensure public access to information. It has been 15 months since Belize signed onto the United Nation Convention Against Corruption. And while activities to prepare our country to implement that convention, gone after a good start in 2017, I fear that we may be losing some momentum. With the support of UNDP, we have made some important achievements. UNCAC implementation review mechanism training and exchange where we visited Jamaica to see what they are doing; select the countries that will conduct the independent review of Belize; submit our comprehensive assessment check list to the UNCAC Secretariat which was done at the end of September last year. We have developed an Advocacy Strategy for UNCAC which we now need to start implementing this year, the CARSI Funding through US Embassy should help in that area. Education awareness activities that we must continue. A study of the gender impacts of corruption was done last year. And we also had a national symposium on corruption.

The next very important step is for Haiti and Tuvalu to visit us to conduct

an independent review of the self-assessment that was prepared by our focal point, the Attorney General's Ministry. The UNCAC focal point. This visit was originally scheduled for last month, for reasons beyond Belize's control, one of the country was not able to make it and we determined, it was determined that that independent review would be postponed to June or July of this year. I need to comment that while three or four months delay is not unprecedented, I repeat again, I fear that if we wait until then we will be losing some of the steam that had started to build up. Some of our stakeholders and partners may lose some interest, I hope not. And I am really hoping too, my involvement along with my colleague, the Attorney General and the UNCAC project where we can still find ways to make this visit happen sooner rather than later, you know, God forbid there is another reason for another postponement.

Madam President, very briefly I want to refer to this survey on Gender Impacts of Corruption and I want to very quickly refer to some of the results of that survey. It's important to note because it will give us a sense of the challenges we face and that has a direct bearing on this national budget. Fifty percent of male and female respondents were of the opinion that the level of corruption in the Public Service Sector in Belize is very high. Persons in the lowest income bracket that were surveyed, less than \$20,000 per year, are affected by corruption the most. The two Public Service Agencies where people experienced the most difficulties were Health and Lands Department. More than 80% of the survey respondents stated, when asked what measure do you take, or have you taken to deal with the difficulties you encounter at these Public Service Agencies? And their response was, 'pay money to the public officer'. When the survey respondents were asked, how do you cope with corruption, 50% said we accept the situation, we cannot change it. We accept it and we find ways to deal with it. So what this really means is that the ones that are paying more, the ones that are losing the most are the poorest among us, not the richest. The middle income, the higher-level income folks have the resources to get help from an attorney, from a customs broker and so on. There are at least 5 government institutions that, if they had sufficient resources and the right leadership and allowed to do their jobs could go a long way in curbing corruption in the Public Service. (Applause) I'll be the first one to say that we also need to curb corruption in the private sector, but right now we are talking about the Public Service and our national budget.

So let's consider these five government institutions. The Integrity Commission, the Office of the Ombudsman, the Office of the Contractor General, the Office of the Auditor General, and the Attorney General's Ministry. We've heard brief comments from the Integrity Commission on page 39, just over \$210,000 was budgeted for that Commission with $\frac{3}{4}$ going for salaries. Which I assume includes allowances to the Commissioners. That Commission has, to the 2 staff members, alright. The Commission has only 2 staff members, yes, that provide administrative support, yet that Commission is expected to receive, examine, and publish declarations of persons in public life. Who are these people? Members of the National Assembly, including Members of the House including the Speaker, Members of the Senate including our President, Members of City Councils and Town Councils. That's already 113 persons in public life and more that serve the year before. According to the budget book, the total is about 170 persons. But last year, Madam President, only 76 declarations were received according to the budget book by the Commission. That's means 55% of persons in public life did not submit their financial declarations. Of the 76 that were received, only 28 or 37% were examined by the Commission. I am not surprised, with the limited staff support that they have, the chronic staff shortage. To ensure that that very important Commission can perform its functions we need to do what the parent Act for that Commission states. At the very least, we need to hire an In-house Legal Advisor, a Special Forensic Investigator who is highly skilled

and experienced to conduct investigations on financial crimes. This is mandate by the Prevention of Corruption Act. We will start seeing progress when persons in public life who failed to submit their declarations or cannot reasonably explain significant increases in their assets, what we also call illicit enrichment are reported, not only their names, but with all supporting documents to the Director of Public Prosecutions for further action. My final comment on the Integrity Commission is that I look forward to their first report. I think they have until the end of this month to send that to the National Assembly if it has not yet been submitted.

Some comments on the Ombudsman Office at page 40.

MADAM PRESIDENT: Just a minute, Senator Salas. You have run out of time. If you are asking for additional time you need to ask.

SENATOR O. SALAS: I would like some more time, yes.

MADAM PRESIDENT: Yes, you have ten minutes.

SENATOR O. SALAS: Ten minutes, okay. The Ombudsman, I will try to cover my remaining in that time. Look, I will not dwell much on the Ombudsman Office because I must commend them. They have, if I am not mistaken, 17 Annual Reports posted on their website for the last 17 years. I commend them for that. I had some more to say on that but I will leave that for now because I need some of my time to talk about the Office of the Contractor General which is at page 41, \$212,000 was budgeted for that with 82% going for Salaries. To me this is one of the saddest jokes we have in our national budget. And it's been the same for past years. Their job is to monitor the award implementation and termination of public contracts and investigate irregularities and mismanagement. But yet, a Contractor General, of course, we don't have one right now and one technical staff member, how can they do their job? The joke really is on us, I think, in that the previous Contractor General was allowed to continue in office while not submitting any annual reports. And yet in the budget it estimates that a 1,000 public contracts will be reviewed in the new fiscal year. And just one contract was investigated and only 30 minutes to a day given for that investigation. That is not meant to be a desk-bound job. Investigate means go in the field, see how the contracts are being implemented, see if we are getting value for our money. We need to appoint a suitable person who will not bow down to political pressure to fill that post. And I look forward to the day when a Motion is proposed to appoint somebody that fits that criteria.

Very brief because it's been mentioned, report on the Auditor General's Office. I understand that the 2012/2013 Report is currently being worked on. I really wondered why are we so far behind and my understanding is that it is not all their fault. They depend on data being submitted to them from our Treasury amongst other places, and it seems that they have not been getting this. Our Constitution, Madam President, empowers this Senate to receive, review and report on annual reports, and other reports of not only the Auditor General, but also the Contractor General, and the Ombudsman and to institute and conduct inquiry, investigations and hearings. We are empower to require the attendance of these esteemed right officers, and I will look forward to us ensuring that this occurs in the new fiscal year.

Very briefly, a few questions for the Attorney General's Ministry. Where, I notice that close to \$1.3 million has been spent over the last 3 years for the Mayan Land Rights Commission, \$.5 million budgeted for the new fiscal year. I would like to know how that money has been spent, on what activities? I would like to

know if we are looking at best practices that have worked elsewhere in other countries? And I also had a similar question, as my colleague Senator Lizarraga, why don't we have a mention of UNCAC in the budget for the Attorney General's Ministry? I want to congratulate the Attorney General's Ministry on something I am very pleased about, that they collaborate with CITO to set up an electronic library system during this new fiscal year. This is consistent and in line with us working towards open government. Open government where citizens have the right and the opportunity to access documents and proceedings of the government to allow for effective public oversight. So I really hope that by the time we are here next year, we will have our laws online to the day, and we can also access public contracts and other laws and regulations.

Election and Boundaries very brief, Madam President, because some other colleagues have touch in this briefly. Again I am happy that re-registration is to occur. I would like to point out the importance of this re-registration that we need to reduce the large gaps. It's been a bloated system. The gap was 3.5 to 1 in 1998; 4.3 to 1 in 2003 with 29 electoral divisions. Last year, the estimated gap was among 31 electoral divisions was 3 to 1. Fort George on one end of the spectrum, Belmopan on the other end. So re-districting needs to be carried out, right after the re-registration exercise has been completed in order to clean the voters list. It is important that we determine elector's residence by a competent legal authority. If this determination of residence is not carried out, the system will rapidly become bloated again. And what, 8 million plus will really have not been well spent. I'll rush through my final comments. We have had 2 electoral management bodies in this country, separate and apart from each other. And there is a lot of grey area as to what their functions are. Our Constitution seems to give a lot of authority to the Commission, Election and Boundaries Commission. But then section 88 (14) of the Constitution gives power to the Representation of the People's Act, under which the department is established. So in the never ending process to improve governance, we will need to pursue legal reform to establish one independent electoral management body with staff. And in the meantime, it is important to clarify which of the two bodies is responsible for re-registration and re-districting.

My final comment as I move to wrap up, Madam President, I need to point out something that I consider to be, that or me is a major concern. The role of this Senate, for about 15 months now, it has been a 13-Member body. I ask here, do our decisions matter? Do we provide the check and balance that many citizens, the teachers, the business community were hoping for? Do we have the power to not only approve legislation but also to block it or slow it down when the majority deems it necessary? Or as some of my colleagues on the government side have said, if we want to pass laws then we must run for office. These are important questions, Madam President, and we have only danced around them. Yes, colleague, my Attorney General said that, thank you. It was victory of sorts, I must point out, when the Motion to Re-appoint the Contractor General was pulled, when it was obvious that the majority in this Upper Chamber were going to oppose the Re-appointment. However last year we voted down a money Bill and days later the Bill was taken for the Governor General's assent. I have received legal advice, Madam President, that at least a month should have been given before that happened. The answer is that this Senate does have ample power. While we cannot block legislation, we can, and at times, should slow it down when necessary to give opportunity for further debate and improvement of legislation. What is wrong about that? We have to work together. We have to put partisanship aside, I know it's hard but we must try to improve the quality of our legislative functions. We do not have to run for office to pass laws or to slow them down so we can improve them. Madam President, many in our NGO Community remain concerned about our crushing debt, the continued corruption. And we look

forward to a better location and management of our public funds. A concerted and sustained effort to turn the tide against corruption and implementation of a strategy for sustainable development of Belize. I know that this is a very tall order, Madam President, given the tremendous external debt and the debt servicing from which we will not escape soon enough. As well as the soaring homicide rates that sometimes makes me wonder if parts of our old capital has become an urban war zone.

I conclude, as I did last year, reminding us again, about the urgent need for unity bipartisanship, multi-partisanship which has never before been more pressing. And I repeat our call as I conclude, Madam President, for greater transparency, good legislation, leadership and partnerships. So, Madam President, thank you very much for allowing me time to share my comments on this national budget.

SENATOR M. PEYREFITTE: Much obliged, Madam President. I think the Attorney General's Ministry has been attacked enough so far, Madam President. I was going to wait but I think I need to try at least cut it in half. Madam President, as far as the law is concerned, my learned friend Senator Salas asked if, he made bold statement that you shouldn't have to run for office to change the laws. Well, as Pastor has come back, the Pastor can testify, it sounds very much like those people who say they want to go to heaven but they don't want to die. If you want to be empowered by the people to pass laws, then that is, indeed, what you should do. Madam President, as is convention, those Senators who are Ministers will variably give reports on their ministries and how it is affected by budget, which would require me, Madam President, to do extensive reading. And so, unlike some Senators, I would do the proper thing and ask for permission. Under Standing Order 33(6), I crave your leave to read my report from my Ministry, but I can assure you, Madam President, that when I speak to Senators Courtenay and Lizarraga, I won't need any notes.

Madam President, despite what Senator Lizarraga said, the Attorney General's Ministry accomplished many things during the last financial year, and perhaps the most significant of these has been the filling of key positions within the Ministry. The expectations on responsibilities of this Ministry are high, onerous, and requires careful management. So, unlike Senator Lizarraga and he will run in now and jump up and say he didn't use the word, but anybody who was listening, anybody with ears and hearing, and everybody looking through the cameras that he likes to look at when he is giving his speech, heard him loud and clear, that he is calling for retrenchment of public officers. Well, unlike Senator Lizarraga, the Attorney General's Ministry is looking to improve and increase the personnel within that Ministry. If you notice, Madam President, under the budget estimates we've increased our professional staff from 18 to 24. A 30% increase we've brought in, an Assistant Solicitor General for International Legal Affairs, we've brought in Assistant Solicitor General for Legal Drafting, among other personnel to fill the Ministry. Madam President, the Attorney General's Ministry, and I take great offense to Senator Lizarraga's pronouncements or questions as to what is it exactly that we do. He seems almost perplex that the Attorney General's Ministry even exist. Wondering, what is our purpose; well, Madam President, he wouldn't last a day in my job. All we do is write and see to it that all legislation is passed for the country. Both acts as Statutory Instruments, we provide all the legal advice to all the ministries within the government. We provide legal advice and exchange of statutes and information through our ILA. We deal with Justices of the Peace. We sit on the National Security Council. We sit on the Sub-Committee for Trade. We do, Madam President, a lot of work in the Attorney General's Ministry, and Senator Lizarraga owes the good people of the Attorney General's Ministry an apology.

MR. PRESIDENT: Please continue, Senator Peyrefitte.

SENATOR M. PEYREFITTE: Much obliged, Mr. President. I get angrier when I see you, you know, Mr. President, so please forgive me.

MR. PRESIDENT: Are you asking me to leave, Senator Peyrefitte? I will happily do so, I can take another break.

SENATOR M. PEYREFITTE: Mr. President, Senator Salas asked about the Maya Land Rights Commission and he sees the \$500,000 allocation for that part of what we do. Mr. President, Senator Salas just needs to ask me, as he always does, as you always do, good Senator. When you have a question you ask me, have I ever refused you an answer? So why is it that you asked that question here? Why is it that you want to know what we do with that \$500,000? You are welcome to look at it. You are welcome to get the information on it. This government, this Attorney General does not hide information and you know that. We have always provided information to any and everybody who wants it. Even to Senator Lizarraga and he claims we don't do anything.

Mr. President, no system, no matter how willing the people are, can operate without the right level of financial, human, physical, and technical resources. The ambition of the ministries are being articulated through the ongoing strategic planning exercise which is long overdue. Thus far, the ministry has settled on the following vision and mission statement. Our mandate is wide and far reaching. Just like me, Mr. President, wide and far reaching. We do a lot of work. We have been developing the ministry to ensure that the ministry continues to play an essential role within the government. Everything seems to be a legal issue, and like some lords and lieges we cannot afford to pay people \$1,000 per hour. So we, Mr. President, within our ministry, we have to ensure that we have the right people who are dedicated to the cause and to ensure that they subject themselves to our vision. And our vision is simple, it is to provide legal exemplary services to the government and people of Belize. That's the vision of the Attorney General's Ministry. And our mission, Mr. President, is to provide quality and innovative legal services to the government and people of Belize that will contribute to the sustainable development of Belize. Mr. President, our successes and our failures can have significant consequences. There is a general public misconception that the AG's Ministry deals with only court matters. Maybe this is Senator Lizarraga's misinformation. We are responsible for court matters, as well as legal affairs in general. This includes overseeing the Family Court, the Vital Statistics Unit, and I think Vital Stats alone would drive Senator Lizarraga crazy. Belize Intellectual Property Organization, the Company's Registry and various legal projects with stakeholders. The major projects for the next fiscal year which have been identified and approved for funding are, the law revision project, the Substantive Laws of Belize were revised up to December 31st, 2011, when I became Attorney General.

It is clear therefore that as at January 2018, the volumes of Substantive Laws are in need of effective updating. I have pledged publicly, as well personally to Senators Salas and Lizarraga that one of my major goals, as Attorney General, is to ensure that any citizen of this country with Wi-Fi access, can go to a computer, punch in information and get the most updated law that exist on the subject that they are interested in. That is still my goal. That is still my objective. And the Law Revision Project is to ensure that the Attorney General's Ministry accomplishes just that. Updating the laws of Belize as those of any other state is a process that requires meticulous attention to detail, but is essential to facilitate knowledge of the law and access to justice in real terms. And then the steps

involved are, the collection and compilation of material to be consolidated; the preparation of consolidated material, that is the physical cutting and pasting from pages of existing laws that have introduced amendments. For some laws, the people who have the hard copies, you have to actually send to people who have purchased these laws, the amendments passed in this Honourable House and Senate, and signed by the Governor General. We have to produce working copies of the updated pages for digitization, which as I said earlier, is the goal and the movement forward. We have to compile information for the consolidated index of laws. It may seem simple, Mr. President, but it is anything but simple, it is not simple and it is not cheap. We need to produce the consolidated index with the new revised edition. We need to prepare all the relevant Statutory Instruments required to bring the revised edition into force. This updating is particularly required on account of several changes that have been made since 2011 with the enactment of over 150 Acts. Over 150 new pieces of legislation. And some Senators are questioning what we do at the Attorney General's Ministry. An 8-month project has just begun involving staff of the AG's Ministry, the outcome of which is to be the preparation of the 2018 revised edition of the Substantive Laws of Belize in digital and paper format. So if you live in the digital world or you are an old timer like me, you will have that updated version for 2018, in 2018. That's what my people are promising me; that's what we are doing at the AG's Ministry, Senator Lizarraga. We don't cry, we work.

The Belize Law Making Forum 2018, sound policy for better law. The AG's Ministry is in conjunction with the Office of the Prime Minister will be leading on this training activity. Public Servants, it's a public sector wide capacity building program to take place in April of 2018, next month. The learning objectives of the forum include providing the targeted participants with a greater understanding of: one, the legislative process and the importance of thoroughly develop policy for good law; guidelines for white papers, legislative drafting, instructions, Cabinet Memoranda for proposed legislation and other relevant documents to facilitate the drafting of legislation. Many ministries, Mr. President, they want to pass a law, we find out that an enormous amount of time we spent by those ministries appointing certain people to give our ministry, the AG's Ministry an idea of the changes they want to make. We have to set up meetings, we have to set up time to ensure that we can coordinate and write the law that is in the best interest of the problems we are facing. We have found that that takes too much time. And so what we are going to do now, starting April of 2018, with this training, we are going to be training public servants how to draft properly, the problem they are facing, the law that they want to accomplish, what the law is to accomplish, and how they want us to address it and prepare it. So that by the time it reaches the AG's Ministry, then it is for us to just deal with the final product itself. This has become necessary given the onslaught of request from the AG's Ministry, and it will increase and increase. But we are not here crying because of budgetary restraints, because all of us can cry. I would love to ask Senator Courtenay if he would leave his jobs now, and return to my job for \$5,000 per month. I would love to ask him if he would be willing to serve in my capacity again. The answer would be no.

Mr. President, given that public sector wide consultation, there will also be a framework for a systematic annual legislative program for Belize. Also there will be guidelines on how to improve pre-parliamentary and parliamentary scrutiny of Bills. So what we hope to do is to get to that digitized form that for Senators who claim to not know what the Bills were 1 week before they came here, we can forward it to you, for your input. I wonder how much of you actually will do that, because then once you get that, or you support that, then you will have nothing to complain about and that is what you want to do some of the times, just complain. The opportunities afforded by the forum are expected to be a

continuation of the AGM's effort to improve disengagement with policy makers who shape the legal and regulatory framework for Belize in the context of Horizon 2030. There is much work to be done in this regard, Mr. President. It must nevertheless be noted that the AG's Ministry's own capacity improvements are facilitated with development of legislation that resulted in the passage by the National Assembly and consequent enactment during 2017 of a very respectable 54 Acts. On a very wide range of subject areas, this is in addition to the numerous Statutory Instruments prepared and published. Senator Lizarraga would like to fire my people from the AG's Ministry, but I am here to tell him that not only would they not be fired, we are looking to improve and increase those people who work at the AG's Ministry because the work is only increasing day by day, Mr. President. It seems like the campaign slogan has reversed. The PUP used to say, 'UDP fire and PUP hire', it seems like they are now back tracking on their own campaign slogan. It seems now that the PUP wants to fire.

The Toledo Maya Land Rights Commission, where did he go? The Commission is tasked with implementing the consent order in the CCJ case between the 23 Mayan villages, their leaders and the Attorney General. The overarching goal of the Consent Order is the adoption of the affirmative measures to protect the rights of the Mayas that arise from Maya customary land tenure. The government of Belize is committed to develop the legislative, administrative means and to protect the rights of the Maya people of southern Belize. The Maya people are a people that are beauty, wonder, color, soul, and knowledge. Am I right, brother Senator? To the fabric of the jewel we call home. In 2018, the Government of Belize aims to endorse the work plan that would chart in detail. You see, there is a work plan you know, Mr. President. So all Senator Salas had to do was to just ask me. We would even show him the work plan. We will show him what the consultants have done. We will show him the work that we have done. And we could even invite him to do some work if he really wants to see work being done, the way it should be done come to Attorney General's Ministry. This is no easy task, and the strong foundation the Commission has established ensuring that they consult with those who may be affected by the Consent Order, and for remaining cognizant of the Belize Constitution remains central to a successful outcome. You see, Mr. President, it's a balancing act, we must recognize the history and importance of the Maya people. And I have spoken to their leaders, I have gotten them to understand if some of them probably don't accept as yet, but they understand that those rights cannot affect the constitutional authority of the Government of Belize. And while the Mayas are important people, all Belizeans are important under the Constitution and we must strike that balance when dealing with the Mayas and when dealing with their community, whenever the AG's Ministry is involved.

There are other projects worthy of mention, Mr. President. Although there is beneficiary, they are not the beneficiaries of any budgetary allocations. You know, I don't know why that song is stuck in my mind you know, Mr. President. I don't know if Senator Lizarraga is a music listener, but all day I listened to that song called, 'Warriors don't cry', from Beres Hammond. I am not sure we don't cry. There are many things that we do that we don't have the money for, but we don't cry and complain, we try and find the money. We try and source funds from our bilateral partners, Senator Salas just spoke earlier about UNCAC and some CARSI Funds that were sourced from the USA. We plan to source some more. We have friends in the International Community, and wherever our budgets are short, we have to make sure that we do our best to try and bridge that budget. I mean, if they really care you know, Mr. President. All the millions that are made in the meat business could take some of that and donate it to the Attorney General's Ministry, we will gladly accept that donation. For UNCAC for example, the Government of Belize acceded to the United Nations Convention Against

Corruption in December 2016, since then the government has worked arduously to fulfill its obligation under the Convention. And one such obligation is the UNCAC Project.

Now, Mr. President, let me thank the hardworking people. Let me thank, especially Crown Counsel Odwin Trenton, who has worked so hard on the UNCAC Project for no additional money, no additional funds. Our people are dedicated to what we do and to our cause. And to this day, despite the naysayers, despite the haters, when it comes to UNCAC, Belize is up to date and far more advance than most countries who have ever signed on to this program. (Applause) We finished our self-assessment in time. We have done everything that has been required of us and, we were ready and waiting for the country visit that was postponed in March. Members of Cabinet can tell you, we went there, I expressed to the Members of Cabinet the need to be available, the need to be there and to give the people of Tuvalu and Haiti all the information that they needed. The Ministers ensured that everybody was ready. And to be fair to Senator Salas, and it's very rare when they are fair you know, Mr. President, he did acknowledge that it was beyond our control. We don't control what happens with UNCAC to that extent. It is a program that is set. And let me clear the air on that issue, Mr. President, since it seems that you are not allowed to totally talk about the budget, you can talk about corruption, and you can talk about this, anything except the budget. So let me clear something when it comes to UNCAC. Mr. President, when you are being assessed for UNCAC, there is a draw like lottery, like boledo, as to which two countries will assess you. Belize has no say over who gets to assess Belize. So when I hear utter, I have to count from 1 to 10 you know, Mr. President. When I hear utter foolishness about, oh, the Attorney General know why he picked Haiti, or why would you pick Tuvalu, man that is utter ignorance and stupidity. How can you claim that that is the case when clearly there is a procedure? These two countries were picked, and since all the previous Speakers before me, were allowed to speak extensively on corruption, let me just say that one part, on my behalf, that the rule is for UNCAC that one assessor must be as close geographically to Belize as possible. The first thing that comes to mind is CARICOM. So all the CARICOM and Central American countries are put in a barrel and one is picked, and Haiti was randomly picked. Belize did not choose Haiti. The other country is to be chosen from as far as possible from your territory. So Belize given where we are, there was a draw from the Pacific and those other areas and Tuvalu was chosen by random draw. The PUP needs to stop spreading false information. We don't pick the country that assess us. And the last report from the UNODC clearly shows that Belize is up to date and we have been applauded for the work we have done so far with UNCAC. So don't come here and talk about there is no work on UNCAC, there is no funding for UNCAC. Is that all that is in the Oppositions mind, just funding, funding, funding, funding? Not everything requires funding. It just requires a little bit of pride and the willingness to work. Not everything is a hustle. Not everything requires a line item budget, some things you just do because you should do. We signed onto UNCAC and we are doing it. When the budget needs to come the Minister of Finance will provide it, but at this time we don't need any.

Mr. President, the government has partnered with the United Nations Development Program, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime and various stakeholders such as the Ministry of Human Development, Ministry of Economic Development, the Financial Intelligence Unit, the Belize Chamber of Commerce, where is he? The Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Belize NGO Network, every month we have a project board meeting for UNCAC, and every month the Chamber of Commerce is there, the Opposition PUP is there, the NGO community is there. So if there are any questions about UNCAC and what UNCAC is doing, they are there, they know because they are a part of the

decision making process. So, why all this grandstanding and the questions about UNCAC? These people know what's going on with UNCAC. The churches as well, and we oversee and implement the work of the Secretariat through a project board. The AG's Office houses the Secretariat for UNCAC, Mr. President. The work of the Secretariat this year included the completion of the UNCAC self-assessment; South-south consultation exchanges; anti-corruption training courses and events; key anti-corruption efforts such as outreaches to schools, public forums, and community sensitization workshops; and notwithstanding our efforts, we also recognize the role the Judiciary plays in the anti-corruption efforts. It is the key organism for dispersing justice, and we call on them to continually work in this respect. And due consideration is always given through the Justice System to those who are underprivileged and poor. We look forward, Mr. President, to continue this work for 2018, and for stamping out corruption on all tiers of society. That is what we do, that is what we have done.

The MESICIC Project, how many things we do at the AG's Ministry, I need to ask for a raise of pay, Mr. President. The MESICIC Project, it is an intergovernmental body established within the framework of the OAS to support state parties in the implementation of the Inter-American Convention Against Corruption. So it's not just UNCAC, running parallel to UNCAC is MESICIC. It's another project that requires us to do additional reporting, additional assistance, and additional oversight is done on Belize. The AG's Ministry, the AG's Ministry again, it is the central authority for MESICIC. It continues to gather pertinent information on our progress in successful efforts to prevent, detect, polish and eradicate corruption in all aspects of our society. So it seems to be a rallying cry, Mr. President. You can't find anything essential about the budget to criticize so you have jump on corruption, and crime, and all these things, the subjects of which are important, but if you have evidence of specific corruption, then don't yell it, bring it to me, I've told you all already, I am the Attorney General of Belize, if you have evidence bring it. Nobody has brought anything to me. Mr. President, the MISICIC is now in its 5th round of review, which refers to topics of instructions to government personnel to ensure proper understanding of their responsibilities and the ethical rules governing their activities. And to study and the study of further preventative measure that take into account the relationship between equitable compensation and probity in public services.

Mr. President, the items that were not approved, there are items you know. There were items that we proposed for the AG's Ministry that were not approved, but not everybody can get everything that they want. I mean, didn't the PUP learned that in their growth economic years? When you try to do that you win yourself into trouble. There were several things that were not approved for the AG's Ministry because we appreciate the need for a balanced budget. I have made it no secret to the government that, for example, if you look at the budget, no money is given for the improvement of the physical resources of the building, no money. Now, it is no secret that the standard of accommodation of the Ministry in Belmopan is below par. It is an overcrowded, ill-equipped and moldy building, and we need to move out of that building. So, am I going to bash the government for not providing the resources that I want to put a building? Am I going to come here and say, oh, you see what happened in Ghost Town last weekend, that is why we can't finance an Attorney General's building. I mean, those silly connections that people make with a budget, the monies are not available to do everything that we need to do. It is up to the Minister to take initiative and try to ensure that we can get what the ministries need. Nothing in law prevented me from writing to RECONDEV in Belmopan and say we need a piece of land. So that's what I did. I wrote to RECONDEV and I begged them for a 2-acre piece of land anywhere in Belmopan to put a proper building, with proper parking. It's not provided for in the budget, but that is why they appointed you to be a leader in government to

take initiative. We have bilateral relationships, we have all types of relationships that I must can go to for funding. Man, Senator Courtenay with the nice legal fees he make won't miss a US\$100,000, don't you think so, Senator Thompson? He must can donate that to our building where his people can come and do research and meet with the different members from government in cases because it looks like we will fight forever. So it is up to me if the government or the people can't afford to pay for a building, it is up to me to take the initiative to try and find them a building. That's my job. Don't come and just bash the budget for the sake of bashing the budget because no, only this goes to this, only this goes to this. Of course, money is necessary, but the initiative and hard work sometimes is more important than just having ready cash to spend. I know that's difficult for the PUP to understand you know, Mr. President, it's difficult for them to understand that, but that is the reality of life. Mr. President, I will continue to do what I do in my ministry, and like I said, I challenge Senator Salas or Senator Lizarraga to sit in my chair for one day, no, for one hour, and see how long they will survive with the amount of information that we are required to provide.

Mr. President, the Attorney General's Ministry did not get all it wanted in this budget but the Attorney General's Ministry is comprised of warriors who don't cry. We continue to work. We continue to ensure that the people of Belize will get the services that they need to get from their Attorney General, I will continue to do that as long as I am Attorney General, Mr. President; and I whole heartedly support this budget. Thank you, Sir. (Applause)

SENATOR M. COY SR.: Good afternoon, Mr. President. Mr. President, before I begin, first of all I want to thank the Almighty God for giving me another year of life because without him I probably wouldn't be here today. So I want to thank him for all the praises he gives to me for this wonderful day today. But, Mr. President, as we listen to our Honourable Colleagues talking across and debating about the General Revenue Appropriation (2018/2019) Bill 2018. Mr. President, I listened keenly as to what is being said. Senator Lizarraga described it as a dishonest and corrupt budget, he said millions of dollars is being spent and without any proper management, nothing to show for. Really *amigo*? My Honourable *amigo*, really, really? Where are you living? Get up! Wake up! You need to wake up! Senator Courtenay talked about investments and infrastructure, well, I feel like I am going to be in the classroom in just a matter of minutes, that I will need to remind them, and, of course, to inform the Belizean people about investment and infrastructures that we are all doing across this nation under this United Democratic Party Administration. Senator Salas spoke about crime, which is indeed deep in my heart but, Mr. President, the way to go to this particular issue of crime, this is based on my own personal opinion. We can come here and bash and mash, and whatever we want to say. But, Mr. President, to be honest, we need to return and to repent to God. If we do not, we are nobody without him. I am not a Pastor here, and, please, I am begging, I am not. I am just a true catholic and I practice these. Mr. President, I feel that we are turning away from him. How many of us out there, in our beautiful zone or location, wherever we are located right across the nation are still teaching our kids, our sons/daughters of going to church, and the importance of church, the importance of listening and participating in these activities? How many of our children are still saying good morning, good afternoon, good evening to elders when they pass them on the street? How many of us are still trying to do all that we can, so that at the end of the day our children would be productive citizens? Christ himself said you know, Mr. President, that if my people fail to listen to me, I will also fail to listen to them. So, Mr. President, I want to say this, are we our neighbors, brothers and guardian angels? Do we look after them? Do we protect them? Do we share with them? Where are the traditional ways? I remember growing up in the village, because I am a village boy, Mr. President, I grew up in the village. I am not from the city. I remember

back in the days when my mother used to cook beans, we used to share it right across the village. We would go and give a little bit here and there, are we still doing that? We forget that, and that is why we need to start everything from the home. Charity begins at home, Mr. President. (Applause) We cannot blame the government for this. We cannot blame that one for that, it all starts at home.

Mr. President, secondly, I want to welcome Senator Brown. Sir, I know that you are the Senator for the church and probably you need to, maybe probably you would add to that. As I said, I am a real catholic individual, and I believe in Christ who died on the cross. In fact, it's the Holy Week, so I will give all maximum respect to Christ. And we should all think of him, of course. And, Mr. President, I welcome Senator Brown.

Mr. President, the main purpose and goal of my contribution today is to highlight what has been accomplished within the Toledo District. And I want to salute my residents of the Toledo District. And, of course, I want to salute particularly my beautiful village of Silver Creek and especially since it's located in the Toledo West constituency, Mr. President. And so by then this accomplish within the Toledo District by this present administration over the fiscal year, which is now ending, and, of course, to highlight further progress that will happen to further develop the Toledo District in the upcoming fiscal year with the monies budgeted that is in front of us, by our Right Honourable Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Dean Oliver Barrow.

Mr. President, with your indulgence, I want to make some response. I want to make it clear. I want to inform the nation, I want to inform particularly, our residents, in the last Sitting of the House of Representatives, I understand our Area Representative, from Toledo West jumping up in the House, beating his chest, and saying nothing has happened in Toledo West, nothing has happened in Toledo East, nothing has happened in the Toledo District. But, Mr. President, I made a summary today, when I came to this Honourable Chamber today, in fact, when I was sitting down here, a number of things that has happened and will continue to happen in our own beautiful District of Toledo. And, of course, Mr. President, we need to be real. We need to stop play petty politics. We need to be real, when things are out there we need to inform the people. If you do good my brother, you did good, you cannot jealous anybody for doing good. You do good, you do good. So, Mr. President, when they come to this House during the budget debate, and on any occasion when they come, they jump up and they speak as if the government is doing absolutely nothing for the people of Toledo. The truth, Mr. President, and I invite you, Mr. President, to come to Toledo, and it's that of us in this Honourable House can get up at any time and point to a long list that we would like to see happen in our districts, our constituency, but that does not mean that a lot has not been done already.

A number of things have happened. You see, Mr. President, we are a developing country. Toledo is a developing district, it is one of the most natural, beautiful, with perhaps the most potential district in the entire nation. Come join us in Toledo, I invite you. In fact, I invite my Honourable Colleagues to come.

In fact, in most developed countries there is always a lot that needs to be done. In some instances, there is a lot that needs to be undone. So, Mr. President, probably they believe that we do not have a UDP Area Representative in Toledo, so they will come insist on and jump up. But since my fellow Parliamentarians are from a part of this country and seeing the glass half empty, rather full I should say. So today, because I have a special love for my people of the Toledo District, let me try to pick the slacks and enlighten them, and this Honourable House on a few countless positive things that has happened in Toledo District lately, I want to say

thanks to the Right Honourable Prime Minister and his Administration for the things that he will continue to do in the Toledo District, Mr. President. So when we talk about, yes, we talk about infrastructure, where is the note, investment and infrastructure, well, let me remind this Honourable Chamber and the Honourable House, that the infrastructure, first of all, it was the United Democratic Party that has completed the paving of the Southern Highway, finish the portion between Golden Stream and Big Falls which we did not forget when the PUP were in power they did absolutely nothing to this. Nothing, Mr. President, nothing to show. They gave us zero. Not even a pebble they put on the street there. Don't forget that it was the UDP that started the paving of the Southern Highway during 1993 to 1998. When they left only that last 9 mile between Golden Stream and Big Falls, 10 years later we returned back in 2008, and we completed it. Now you can drive right across, it will take you just hours to reach to Punta Gorda. Back in the days, when I was a small boy, we used to camp. We used to take weeks to come to Belize City. We used to take almost months. (Applause) Especially when it would flood back in those Areas, Mr. President. So this government built and pave the new link, the Pan American Highway through Jalacte Village, you can drive right through cross to Jalacte right now, it is a beautiful highway. Spanking new, we did it. This administration did it. As we speak, Mr. President, work is about to resume on the bypass. So when the Honourable Area Representative come from the Toledo West and start to jump up, saying that nothing has been done on the bypass, we already build it. The highway that links up Santa Cruz and San Jose, and it will shortly be joining up San Jose for an hour and a half drive through Crique Jute, La Lum Cah and so, we will have the bypass, in fact, work begins already at the bypass, Mr. President. (Applause)

Mr. President, we need to be real. The Ministry of Works just upgraded the road from Mafredi all the way to Dolores. I travel those roads. I ride my bicycle on those roads. I walk it sometimes. We did it. The Ministry of Works completed the road, because they want to talk about upgrading and infrastructure, here it is you know. The Ministry of Works upgraded the road from San Felipe all the way to Crique Sarco, Mr. President. I work in those areas. Those are my neighborhoods, right. The Ministry of Works upgraded the road from San Felipe all the way to Barranco. Come to Barranco, beautiful area, beautiful people of Barranco where I grew up most of my life. My wife is there and she witness that with me. The Ministry of Works completed the upgrading of the road from Mafredi all the way to Aguacate. In fact, we were there for the Maya day this Sunday, here, all the way. We did it, Mr. President. New bridge, don't let us forget Crique Sarco, one of the village that you have to pass by dory to reach to the village. Now we construct a new iron bridge in Crique Sarco where the people of Crique Sarco can go over the bridge and live in their areas, Mr. President. So the PUP did absolutely nothing to this, now that we are in government we completed it. So when they come in this Honourable House, in this Chamber, and they say that nothing is happening, this is the fact; this is real. We walk the street. We walk every day. We are meet people on the ground. We say good morning, good evening, we are going to church.

Mr. President, we are expanding the area of Punta Gorda Town called Indian Ville, beautiful Indian Ville, with beautiful people of Indian Ville. We upgraded a number of streets included the construction repair of wooden bridge. New roads to Punta Gorda and the BDF camp. Come, Mr. President, and see it for yourself so that you believe. Streets were recently upgraded in Punta Gorda Town, just recent, and not because of elections. It is because we continue to believe in the people of the South and they deserve nothing but the best, Mr. President. (Applause) We upgraded Morgan Street, Cayo Street, Bullywood Street, Cherries Street, Craboo Street, Bribri Steet, Sunflower Street, Emory Extension Street, Trumpet Street, Tambran Street, Cohune Palm Street, Lily Street, all of these 12

streets were upgraded in Indian Ville, Mr. President. I walk that areas. Those are my zone. I lived there, my Honourable Colleague. Bridges built and repairs were done on Bribri Street and Sunflower Street. Eldridge Ville, Papisho Road upgraded, Boom Creek Road where they always come and say that oh, you cannot go to Boom Creek or you can't reach Boom Creek, we upgraded Boom Creek, that's back leading up to the Moho River where my grandfather and my father and I used to go and ketch fish, Mr. President. Monkey River upgrading will commence soon. And they come up and jump up and say nothing is happening. I like when the Honourable Senator talk about the infrastructures and upgrading of infrastructures and investment.

Water, Mr. President, the Pueblo Viejo water system is expanded and equipped with a generator. The Honourable Erwin Contreras and I were out there. In fact, we invited the PUP Area Representative, the Honourable Oscar Requena. He was a no show. He did not show up. He denied the invitation. So he will come here now and say that nothing is happening in those zones. In Santa Ana, a brand new water system. We invited the Honourable Toledo East Area Representative, the Honourable Michael Espat, he was a no show. They are taking us for *papisho*. That is how they take the Belizean people here. But I want to inform them that that is not the case. We the Belizean people, especially in the south, we are smarter people. The Belizean people are smarter people, Mr. President. The Yo Creek has a brand new water system, we equipped it with solar and generator. We invited them and it was a no show again. In Aguacate we upgraded the water system, and the Santa Elena and Crique Jute water system is in the pipe line. We are going to do ground breaking ceremony pretty soon, and I invite you, Mr. President, to come and join us. I'll be there. Mabilha, in fact, Graham Creek, where myself and the Honourable Hugo Patt walked all the way to Graham Creek, about 4 or 5 of us, all the way down. We walked that, Mr. President, and now we are going to upgrade it, with hand pump water system in these zones. Water pump, Mr. President.

Electricity expansion, where they said nothing happens about electricity. I have the facts, Mr. President. San Miguel expansion coming on stream right away. In fact, I had met with them last week, Mr. President. I had a meeting that the expansion of electricity will happen. Indian Creek, Golden Stream, Medina Bank assessment has already been conducted for electricity expansion. In fact, we are yet considering if it is the solar or electricity expansion to the line that will happen. And the Minister, the Honourable Frank Papa Mena can attest to this. I was in attendance, Mr. President. So we will not come here and want to be empty drums and make the most noise, we are not, we are a government full of work. Bella Vista Electricity Expansion completed under this administration. Trio Electricity Expansion completed. Those are in northern Toledo District. Bladden Electricity Expansion to the banana farm completed under this administration. Midway Village Electricity Expansion post has been planted and is still in progress. Laguna, Big Falls, we have already planted posts and the works continues there. Indian Ville area and VOA area for Punta Gorda Town just received electricity expansion. And over 350 street lights were installed. Do your homework! This is what we what we give you, this is the real thing. This is when you are on the ground. This is when you are meeting your people. This is when you are crying with them in their homes. This is what they are doing, we are sharing the joys with them. This is what your Senator do in the South there, Mr. President. This is who I am. This is what I believe. I take my work serious and I take my responsibility very seriously.

Monkey River, even as we speak, BEL is getting ready to install 20 new street lights paid by the Government of Belize for Monkey River. More than 500 solar lamps, in fact, I was to bring one today so that I could have given an

example of the solar light that we distributed which the Honourable Toledo West Area Representative did not know about it. We gave it out. In fact, we invited them to anything we do there, we don't hide it, we invite them, they are no show at all. We gave it to Golden Stream, Medina Bank, Tambrand, Crique Jute, Nah Lum Cah, Santa Elena, again, we distributed this with the Honourable Minister of Rural Development.

Mr. President, telecommunication, they quickly cry and talk about Corazon where I work, they talk about that, fine. I have 45 minutes, right, 75, plus 15? Forty five, and just 15?

MR. PRESIDENT: You have more than enough time. Just take your time.

SENATOR M. COY SR.: I am ready to go up to 1 o'clock, 2 o'clock tonight, that's what my Honourable Colleague said. I am going to do it then, right. Big Falls, we had a BTL tower installed under this administration. San Antonio upgraded. Now people from San Antonio can call from their homes. In fact, they can call to the United States. There was one individual or social media saying that they want to thank this government because it's been year that they had forgotten San Antonio. Now they say that it is just one call from Texas all the way to San Antonio where you can make call and be on a direct call, right. Eldridge Ville, new BTL tower completed. Emory Grove new BTL tower completed. Bella Vista, new BTL tower completed. Pueblo Viejo, Indian Creek, Corazon Creek Technical High School, all of this are plan in progress. The BTL representatives, the personnel from BTL are consulting just like how they consulted with the people of Bella Vista, San Antonio, Big Falls, Emory Grove when they install these, they are consulting these people now. It won't take anything, Mr. President, you don't take one minute or one day to do something like this. Mr. President, come on, this is what we are doing under this administration. So when we come to this Honourable House to say that nothing is happening in Toledo, I invite you, and invite my entire Honourable Colleagues to come and take a look with me. See what is happening there.

San Antonio, Pueblo Viejo, Santa Teresa, renovation will soon commence and we will equip this with labs, Mr. President. Santa Cruz Health Clinic, and I was surprised, I had to laugh when the Honourable Area Representative, I think, from Toledo West mentioned again that he was not aware that there was a health clinic that was renovated with the assistance of Rotary Club in Santa Cruz Village, he didn't knew, right, I tell him, walk the area my brother. Bella Vista expansion, there is a big expansion as you reach to Bella Vista on your right-hand side driving towards Punta Gorda, you will see that there is an expansion of a 24/7 hospital. We are doing the expansion of this Hospital under this current government administration. The beautiful Independence Village, the villages in the Stann Creek District, poly clinic, we are installing 24/7 as well, we are expanding it and this is near to Bella Vista, Toledo, so therefore it will benefit the people of Bella Vista, Trio and Bladden, and all those 5 villages there as well, Mr. President.

Education, schools, they talk about education. They don't see what is happening in education, really? Where is my President? She went out. Alright, that's my President there. In fact, I invited her a number of time to come to Corazon Creek Technical High School, one of the brand new high school that we have there built by this current government. And yet, Mr. President, we are going to build another 12 new classrooms that will be constructed by SIF. And then we will have a tower there soon and with internet. When they were in government, what did they do, nothing! We took *bukut* in those areas. *Bukut*, sorry to say it that way, Mr. President. I beg for your indulgence. They did nothing. But they will

come into this Honourable House and complain. Man, back in the days when I was going to school, Mr. President, that is where I was born, San Benito Poite you know, from San Benito Poite where I lived. I am from there, I used to walk for miles, in fact, I was afraid, in fact, back in the days my father would give me a machete to have with me if in case a jaguar would attack me I could chop its head. I was a brave young man fighting for my own education. In the evening I would hold my little costal and go and sell bread so that I could help myself to get an education. Thank God. (Applause) Under this now with Trio Government School, we don't thief, brother. They never taught me how to thief. We work hard for what we have in life. Trio Government School, 6 new classrooms and an Administration Office, plus a brand-new preschool built and completed under this administration. Pueblo Viejo, a brand new technical high school is coming up pretty soon. Bella Vista Primary School is being renovated with a new bathroom and serves over 900 students, it also serves as a hurricane shelter. San Isidro Government School coming up pretty soon, Mr. President. In fact, we just recently build one out there. Santa Elena, a new cafeteria feeding program in Santa Elena Village. Santa Cruz, the new feeding program. San Antonio, the new feeding program. Pueblo Viejo, the new feeding program. I recalled an incident that happened where the Honourable Deputy Prime Minister, and our Honourable Colleague here, the Honourable Senator Hulse, when they were going to Punta Gorda to inaugurate all of these things when the incident happened in Placencia. So I am not talking anything out of the way here, I have proof of what I am talking about. It happened to be that they couldn't make it but I was there, Mr. President. So when they come here and say that nothing is happening for education, no, there were no show.

There were school subsidy was automatically given to all high school students that graduated from Standard VI. CXC fees were paid for 6 CXC subjects by the Government of Belize. Where was that when I was going to school? (Applause) I recall, I could only afford take the Mathematics and English CXC. And still, I'm here today, Mr. President, back in the days it was a struggle. Now, today, students, you see a number of students sitting this national exam, or international exam as you would say.

Community Centers and hurricane shelters, San Jose Community Center was upgraded and this was lobbied by the Honourable John Saldivar and the community of San Jose. The NEMO, Emergency Operation Center Disaster Warehouse built by the US Government and furnished by the Government of Belize, right there as you reach in Machaca, right around as you enter Laguna Junction on your right hand side going to Punta Gorda Town. Many schools and community centers renovated throughout Toledo to make them adequate for a hurricane shelter, Mr. President. So when they come to this Honourable Chamber, especially them when they jump up and say nothing is happening, God have mercy, have mercy on those two.

NEMO Flood Irrigation, Punta Gorda, Indian Ville Area, Magoon Area, Hope Ville, Cattle Landing, Jacinto Ville, San Juan, Cow Pen, Red Bank and in the Stann Creek District. Farmers Assistance, livelihood support, in fact, in this time around in February, Mr. President, nobody expects it but that's how God works sometimes, that's how, you cannot stop God from how he works. There was a flooding on seasonal excessive rains and flooding in February and damaged assessment was conducted. We are still on the pipeline of doing what we need to do, Mr. President. Assessment by the Ministry of Agriculture indicate that damage to farmers was at an average of 50% with the new crop cycle starting in April and running through September, because they are on the ground. NEMO will review the Report from the Ministry of Agriculture and further determine what kind of livelihood will be supported indeed. What is determined and humanitarian needs

was necessary as many homes were impacted by this flooding, Mr. President.

Sports, so when we come to this Honourable House and we want to talk about nothing is happening in Punta Gorda, or nothing is happening in Toledo, come on man, come on. Sports, my brother, well you know that you are my brother in sports, you are a known sportsman. The new football field, back in the days, under the PUP Administration, those post used to fall down, in fact, it almost fell on me when I was doing a sports campaign. No disrespect to you, my brother it just happened naturally. But right now the old Union Field is renovated and it's named now as Victor Sanchez, brand new, beautiful, going to Punta Gorda, brother, it's a whole thing, you know that, you are a sportsman, so you come to Punta Gorda. In fact, we had met the last time out there. The new sports auditorium, you know that as well, right? It's right around the Punta Gorda Airstrip.

Market, the new built and renamed Maura Lopez Market in Punta Gorda Town, back in the days we didn't have any market. I remember I used to go sit down and sell pumpkin, yam, and cassava right on the street side as you enter through town. Yes, I used to sell those, I am from a village, that is how hard I had to work when I was growing up.

Waste disposal, of course, the residents of Punta Gorda and particularly Cattle Landing and Forest Home, they will be happy to know that very soon the present dump site will be cleaned up and a proper waste disposal system will be put in place, thanks to the Mayor Ashton for doing all of these works. Of course, Mr. President, we can go on, and on, and on, right? In fact, I will go on. I am here for that today. It was just a summary you know, Mr. President. I have a couple more here. It was just a summary that I made, in fact, last night I was working all up until 1 o'clock, then I said, I need to go take a rest because I need to go tomorrow.

Jordan Village relocation families. Jordan, Mr. President, a beautiful area, like the Jordan River. From 2008, we determined that many families in that village needed to be relocated to safety from seasonal flooding. The Minister himself at that time was the Honourable Godwin Hulse who was the Minister of NEMO, he was there along with me, Mr. President. That time we went to that village and that project was completed a couple years ago, you see, the Honourable Godwin Hulse recollect that immediately, as fast as I said it, because he knows that I am talking the truth. That project was completed a couple years ago, today, the community no longer has to worry about flood water entering homes and we can all rest easily knowing that they are safe and have electricity expansion. We have extended electricity expansion to those areas because we believe it is a priority for every location. Again, the Honourable Godwin Hulse was then the Minister of NEMO at that time, he was with me. Community Emergency Fund for a future, Community Emergency is being established in each community starting with the flood prone areas. NEMO Toledo District Coordinators are currently conducting consultation on this. When you talk the truth you have to drink a lot of water, Mr. President.

House fire victims recently in the Toledo District, in January and February, NEMO have assisted a total of 15 families with humanitarian aid, Mr. President. I want you to do your homework and go check across at the Ministry and then you come here and say nothing happen, seriously. Go and do your homework man, go and check with the Ministry and they will provide you with the information.

And let us not forget when I said about roads and highways, the Placencia road, paved. How many of you have gone to Placencia, I guess many of us. In

fact, we will go to Placencia for Easter and Lobster Fest and all of those things. I am inviting all of you to come for Easter and Lobster Fest. You won't have to be worrying about the road to reach to Placencia when you are driving on that paved highway to Placencia. Hopkins, used to flood back in the days. I remember my father and I used to go out and hunt for jobs out there. It used to be flooded and we used to walk in the flood. Now it is paved, Mr. President. We paved the Hummingbird Highway, including the replacement of those 6 narrow bridges is currently underway. Works is happening as we speak going on that highway. While driving on my way this morning coming here.

Upgrading and paving of that portion of the Northern Highway known as the Philip Goldson, I haven't touched on this, these are more up on that side, but right across the country, right across this nation, you can see that development and transformation continues to grow on a day-to-day basis. So when you come in this Honourable House and talk that nothings is happening, this is what is happening, Mr. President. (Applause) This is the real thing that is happening here. So when they want to come crying that nothing is happening, where is the infrastructure, where is the millions of dollars are, like what Senator Lizarraga said, where is the millions of dollar that you accounted for. This is what we are accounting for, this is just a portion of it because many developments is happening right across this nation. Even the blind man I would say, he can see, feel, taste and hear. He won't see it, but he knew it, he could feel it when he take a spin around and around across that roundabout and I am telling you, when they come in this Honourable House and talk, I just listen. Members that represent us in both east and west, I think they are taking us for *papisho*, this is no *papisho*. We are real. We live in this real world today, a beautiful country, beautiful Belize.

So my message, Mr. President, we all need to listen to God. Let us love one another. Let us reach out. We cannot blame the police men, the police women that are on the ground, they are human beings just like us, they have families like us, they have sons and daughters, who knows if they have to cry on a night shift, on a day shift, on a restless shift. They are human beings so don't attack the police, don't attack them. Let us all go back and say, you know what, we all need to understand each other, we all need to love each other, we all need to believe in Christ who died on the cross. And with that, Mr. President, thank you and I would like to wish you a blessed Easter, (Easter) and to all of my colleagues here, again, thank you, be safe. This is Holy Week and let us remember God, the Most High, that will forever and forever live. Thank you, Mr. President. (Applause)

MR. PRESIDENT: Thank you for your passionate presentation, Senator.

SENATOR P. THOMPSON: Mr. President, I rise to make my contribution regarding this General Revenue Appropriation (2018/2019) Bill. Mr. President the Prime Minister has signaled in his presentation of the 2018/2019 budget that perhaps this may be one of his last presentation. He was obviously shocked by the results of the recent municipal elections, particularly in Belize City. The Prime Minister has nevertheless defiantly pressed on to begin to frame what he hopes will be the story of the legacy of the UDP. The UDP decade, as he has coined it, and if you listen to him, all have prospered and everything is good and fine. But in reality, Mr. President, our blessed Belize is like a ship lost out at sea, the waters run deep, the waves lash, the shark infest, the sails are tattered and thorn, and our motor labours ready to give out. And in the captain seat, Mr. President, of this uttering ship is the monarch of this kingdom and he has made this government one of the most corrupt, one of the coldest, and one of the most inept government we've ever seen in this country. And the population is screaming in pain, Mr. President, pain over crime, pain over poverty, pain over high prices of goods for food, pain over high gas prices, crisis in the health sector,

crisis in the education sector, problems with infrastructure and the loss of business competitiveness across the productive sector. And this budget does nothing to alleviate or to address these fundamental issues that Belizeans face all across this country every day. And this is after receiving more money than any previous government ever, after having spent substantially more than any other government, this country is saddled with all these problems. Now this is the UDP's legacy of the last ten years. Our society has decayed before our eyes, Mr. President. Our economy has become an after-market economy. Our justice system is broken. Our institutions are compromised. We witness attack upon attack on our institutions, innocent citizens protesting for their rights, our youths, our teachers, our poor, our working poor, our senior citizens, our women and our children. This government has become numb to the needs of the people. They have become deaf to the cries of the citizens. They have become blind to the crisis facing our country. They've become mute to the abuse of their position they hold entrusted for the people. And yet, Mr. President, this is another billion-dollar budget, but yet the quality of life of our citizens continue to deteriorate.

Let me ask these questions. Can the majority of our people afford decent housing? Can they afford to buy food, nutritious food? Do they have secure jobs? Can they access reliable public health care? Do they feel the future of their children is secure? Can they afford to send their children to school? Can they have faith in our justice system? Are their communities safe? The answer to every one of these questions is no, Mr. President. NO! Another billion-dollar budget but yet our people are crying out in hunger, real hunger. I have first-hand experience with this, Mr. President. People come to you and ask for handouts, good and decent people, they are not bad people, they don't have bad style, do you know why they come and ask for that, it is because they are hungry, literally hungry. They are desperate, they have to pay bills. Do you know what they say when we walk on the streets, boss we are taking a lick out here right now you know, nothing is happening for us out here. But this is the UDP's legacy, Mr. President. We have the highest level of poverty ever. We have the highest level of violent crimes ever. The worst trade deficit in the history of Belize. Our major industries such as citrus, bananas, and aquaculture are at the lowest point ever. This is the UDP's legacy, Mr. President, the UDP decade, 10 years of obsession with wild spending on infrastructure, 10 years of obsession with BTL and Mr. Ashcroft, 10 years of excessive borrowing, 10 years of corruption. But this is the UDP's legacy, Mr. President.

Mr. President, we have no reason to doubt the integrity of the Financial Secretary, he is an outstanding gentleman, and so we took his WhatsApp message sent to all government officials admitting that the government is broke, we took it for what it's worth. The Financial Secretary warned that our debt to GDP ratio has surpassed that dangerous threshold of 100%. And, indeed, when we look at the current World Bank data, it shows that back in 2016, the debt as a percentage of GDP stood at 98.6%, and in 2017, it stood 100.6%. So for every dollar this country produces in our economy, we owe that same amount of dollars in loans that we have to pay back. Like the U2 song says from the Joshua Tree album, they are running to stand still. The Financial Secretary, Mr. President, also warned that the government will have to borrow to meet short terms needs like paying public servants salaries, and other monthly recurrent expenses. Just imagine, you see the government domestic debt is also at its highest level ever.

As the government has turned to issuing Treasury Bills and Treasury Notes to finance day-to-day operations, let us take a closer look at this, Mr. President, with these Treasury papers, it reveals something very interesting. You see, the Central Bank Aggregates Holding of the Government Issued Securities stood at \$361 million at the end of December 31, 2017. This is the highest level

ever in the history of Belize, more than what the domestic banks hold and has steadily increase over the last 5 years. In 2013, these holdings stood at only \$96 million. Yes, you see, Sir, you see we know a little bit about Treasury Bills and Treasury Notes. And what that is saying, that when the Central Bank itself buys up the great majority of these Treasury Bills and Treasury Notes, do you know what the definition of that is, and I will quote, Bill Lindo right here, “Its printing money”. Printing money, that’s what he says every Sunday. Our government is creating money out of the thin air you know, you guys are laughing, right. We all know the disastrous impact this can have on our economy. Just imagine, the best minds, the most brilliant leaders, and what do we do? We hammer the people with increased taxes. Just last night the taxes went up. We borrow money like crazy from international entities. We borrow money from our local sources, and when that doesn’t work, what do we do, we just print some more money, and it continues, Mr. President.

This budget before us, it shows that we have a broke government, a bankrupt of funds, bankrupt of ideas, bankrupt of any plan to take us out of what we are in right now. The race to the bottom continues, Mr. President, pump prices, as I said, increased last night. We have the highest pump prices in Central America. People are taking lick out there, that’s what they tell us all the time, we are taking a lick out here boss; but this is the legacy of the UDP.

Mr. President, let me touch on BTL for a second. I know that my colleague, Senator Lizarraga, spoke about it, but I will repeat. You see, the nationalization of BTL has been heralded as the vanguard of the UDP for this Administration. In reality, Mr. President, this is the single biggest travesty of the past ten years. Almost \$600 million and counting, and the Prime Minister last Friday said, that the government has had to invest \$200 million more Capital in BTL. When you look at the Draft Estimates presented before us today, it projects \$11.8 million, as Senator Lizarraga said in dividends. The BTL and BEL for 2018/2019, when you do the math, do you know what the rate on return of that is, less than 1% if you start to add the interest that Michael Ashcroft will get. Nothing is going on with this, but this is the legacy of the UDP. You see, Mr. President, this government has been focus on political power and trying to win elections, but they are losing it now, you see, Mr. President. Hoarding land, rocking up legal fees for friends and families, giving contracts to cronies while the rest of us normal citizens are out here taking lick. We have to fight the good fight of life, Mr. President.

Now, Mr. President, I will end here because I am not longwinded like most people. Mr. President, the most recent maleficent of this UDP years is, the Civic Center, I don’t have to talk about this, you all know that. Let me state clearly before I go any further, that as a sportsman, I am very pleased that finally we will have a FIFA 133322 certified indoor basketball arena. It’s long overdue. And, indeed, it was due to the success of the 2009/2010 National Team that was organized by the Belize Basketball Federation which triggered these efforts. But there is something fundamentally wrong when we are the only country in Central America and the Caribbean where we would take the key of a publicly owned facility and put it in private hands for them to make a profit. Not only private hands, but a foreign entity at that. The people in FIFA who went to design this Belize Civic Center, looked at this decision in marvel and said what’s going on. Compounding this problem, these are borrowed funds that we had to get to build this place. But, Mr. President, what is really going on here, we try to access the head of BIL to try to get this contract but to no avail. This contract must be locked up somewhere in the Matalon Building. The only thing we know that this government has agreed to do is to pay a subsidy of \$850,000 should gross revenue from the Civic Center not reach this level. Now, Mr. President, realistically

speaking, anybody can do the math, unless APEX will be Turing the facility into a concert hall every other day and bring Machel Montana and Romain Virgo every other day. We won't reach those levels and this will cause us to pay exorbitant prices to the sporting federation, we cannot afford it in this depressed economy. The sporting federation just cannot afford these rates here if it is what they are saying. But if the government is willing to guarantee \$850,000, Mr. President, to a private entity, why not use that same money to benefit the public. Isn't that the reason for a government to take tax payers money and you use it for the benefit of the public, but I guess not in this UDP decade, this is the latest example of the UDP legacy, Mr. President.

Mr. President, we all dream of a fair and just Belizean society where everyone has equal opportunity for success, where the economic base is diverse, where there is a steady improvement in the well-being and welfare of our citizens, where hope and pride is amongst our citizens, but this is the UDP decade. We have seen nothing but cronyism, nothing but failed policies, nothing but corrupt practices, nothing but misguided decisions. This is the UDP's true legacy, Mr. President. I cannot support this budget. Thank you.

SENATOR REV. H. BROWN: Mr. President, I rise to make my contribution this afternoon, to the General Revenue Appropriation (2018/2019) Bill. I am not going to be very lengthy like my colleagues here today, but first of all, I want to say it's an honor to be here and to be able to represent the church on behalf of my colleague, Senator Rocke. And first of all, I want to say a big thank you to my public servants, who, I believe diligently prepared this budget. I know that it took endless hours of preparation and I've heard a lot today about the budget and some of it is discrepancy, but I believe it is just right to remind ourselves here today that a budget is a tool, a tool by which we measure where we want to go, what we want to achieve and what we want to accomplish. As has been stated by our Prime Minister and by Members of this House today, our country is facing some very serious financial times and we've heard about the goal to achieve 2% GDP, which is going to take tremendous work. And so, as I examined the budget, I did not have as much time as most of you here today, but as I looked and examine, there were two things that really stood out to me, and I want to not quote as closely as you guys have been able to do.

I want to look at, first of all, the infrastructure on pages 171-176. And I must dare say that as I looked at these figures and estimates that has been presented, it is commendable as to the accomplishments where our government want to see our country go in the next year or so. What has been accomplished over the last few years is also commendable, and as our Senator from Punta Gorda shared just while ago. I think it's not only for us to say that one government did it because today when I look at this budget I think about the people, our people, this is the people's money, it's the people's finances. And our government, yes, has been elected and given the responsibility to manage it and we expect that things will be done to better the life of every Belizean in regard to what happens in this country. And so, I am thankful for where I see our country going today in regard to the infrastructure.

I also looked primarily, and this is another area of concern to me, as you look at the crime situation, we look at the many social problems that our country is facing today, the crime, the violence. And I looked at the Human Resources Development on page 149-155, and I see that, there are some good things that have been put in place and will be put in place, but one of the things I see missing today, and has been missing for all the years I have been an adult, I see there is a focus on women, there is a focus on children, there is a focus on youth, but what happened to the men? Aren't the men important? Don't the men face challenges today? And so this brings me to a very important issue where, I believe, that our

holistic problem is that as a nation we've pointed fingers here and there, and all over the place, but I think we need to look inside and say to ourselves, what is it that I have done to contribute to what is happening today in Belize? Or what is it that I have not done as a Belizean to turn this whole situation around? As one of our Members said today, I think its Senator Courtenay, he said crime, violence, and the problem we are facing is not a party thing, it is a nation thing. And we need to embrace this as partners, the government, the Police Department, the private sector, the social partners, all of us, need to be a very integral part of how this is going to come about. I am sure many of you like myself was very touched when the viral video went out on many of our phones. And for me, personally, I felt like crying, because even though it's just a small area of our city, it's a picture of where we as a nation has gone. And I think we need to really look at this entire picture and say what can we do as a nation? How can we pool our resources? Yes, the government today has put together a budget, and like I said, it's a budget that is very tedious from my perspective, a very, yes, there are some errors here and there as was pointed out today with the copy and paste situation, and I am sure that the government will correct that situation. But the bottom line of this entire situation is how are we, as a nation, how is it that we as a nation is going to combat the problems we face? Are we just going to continue to throw stones and say, okay, that's the UDP, or say that's the PUP, or are we going to say this is our problem, we must embrace it, we must take hold of the situation and see where we can help. I know the church stands ready to work with any partner, with the Government of Belize, with the Opposition, with anybody who is ready to go into these neighborhoods and deal with it.

One of the areas as I was making note of the aspect of the Police Department and some of the things that I noted in the budget, it is projected a certain amount of money for the forensic services which, to me is very, very, very small, very minute. I think the time has come for Belize to establish a National Forensic Services. I know all of us, we've watched, like myself, I am a tickler of watching detectives, CSI and all of these things from the states, and I am saying, if these countries are so far ahead, why can't Belize have something that we can embrace to correct many of the errors that we have been talking over and over, how we have this poor judicial response to crime, and how we have this thing of 7% conviction rate and all of that stuff. I think we are living in a time when there are so many qualified people. And I think, even Belizeans who have gone abroad to study can become a part of solving the situation that we face as a nation. And so today, I really want us as a nation to think about, especially in this Holy Week, a week that we focus as my fellow Senator from Punta Gorda said, Belize needs to go back to the old days where we become our brothers keepers. He shared about his parents who had maybe a big pot, I know in the villages they don't have small pots that would cook for 2 or 3 people, they cook for an entire village. We need to get back to a place where Belizeans start looking out for Belizeans, we start to reach out to families. And we need to re-establish, I think, the biggest problem is the absenteeism of father, the father figure. Because when we look at that situation on Sunday, who was it we saw, women and children, and, well there were young men that the police were going after who were into this mischief. But a lot of times, where are the fathers? And we know that a nation that lacks leadership in the home is a nation that is headed for some serious crisis. And so, today, I want to make an appeal to our nation, to the authorities that be as that a nation we need to come together. Yes, the budget is a good guide, the budget sets out certain things that we want to accomplish on an economic level, but manage not only economically established, he has several parts, he is a social being, he is a spiritual being and, yes, he needs finances to survive. But for too long now, as a nation, our people have been looking to the politicians, whether red, or blue, or green, or whatever might come along, and, as one person has said instead of us teaching our people how to catch a fish, we give them the fish and then they come

every day to get that fish. We need to move away from that mentality. We need to reestablish the home, when we have good families, when we have sound families, our nation is going to move in the right direction.

As is said, I looked at the budget, especially for the Human Resources, and like I said, there is there for women, there is there for single parents, what about the single fathers? There are those who help their own families, are they thrown to the curb, they don't need because they are fathers? I believe not. Belize needs each one of us, every true Belizean citizen for this country to move forward, for us to correct the wrongs. (Applause) And, as a nation, we have to see, yes, the budget has been presented, there are going to be some short falls here and there, and as has been repeated today, we might have to come back to this House to get some certain amendments there, but it's for the people, it's for the nation, it's for us to move forward as a people. And so, today I just want to contribute my presentation today to say that Belize needs you. Belize needs me, what are going to do about it? We can have all the millions of dollars in the world, we can have all the billions of dollars in the world, but will our problems go away? No. As a people, we have to start caring for each other. We have to start looking out for each other. We have to go back to that place where an entire village brings up a child. We are a nation that needs to care about each other. Thank you, Mr. President. (Applause)

SENATOR S. DUNCAN: Thank you, Mr. President. A lot has been said about the various heads within the budget, and, I think, and in particular as I watch the time, I will attempt to focus on one particular area, Mr. President. I think it is fair to say that Belize is a small economy, and our history is really one of sort of a check and performance where we see ups and downs. And, as we try to put this into context, and why we see the budget where it is today, if we were to go back and look at what has happened in our history, and we look at the surplus, our deficit, which seems to be a very topical issue today, and naturally so since we are discussing the budget. If we were to look at the position in 1984, just after Independence, Mr. President, and we saw a period of high deficits. In fact, when the administration changed in 1984, I think it was, there was an overall deficit in excess of \$27 million, and it was a time when we had to enter into an IMF standby arrangement in the early 80's just after Independence. And the people made a conscious decision and changed the administration, and in 1984, when the UDP Administration took over, we were running a deficit. Within that term, we saw that by 1989, that position had turn around to a surplus. The people made their choice and changed the administration again, and put back in a PUP Administration. But by 1993-1994, the time of the next general elections, we were again, running a deficit. By mid-1994 it was in excess of \$33million. Again the people spoke and changed from a PUP Administration to a UDP Administration. That administration refused to enter into an IMF Program, and worked through the challenges and as you would guess, by mid-1998, we were running surpluses again. But in 1998, the people spoke and returned another PUP Administration which we now know lasted 10 years until 2008. It should therefore be no surprise that by 2008, we were back in that deficit position again.

Effectively, Mr. President, we have seen a continuous up and down when the PUP Administration is in office versus when a UDP Administration is in office. I think the last PUP Administration it was so bad that, in fact, we could not even approach the multilateral agencies to borrow. I say this to put it in context, Mr. President, since there is a lot of talk around the need for the borrowing by this present administration. But what we have is a situation where whenever the UDP took office, the coffers were bare. And, in fact, business people and most people will know that if you do not have money, you borrow. The coffers were bare, there was no money, we were running deficits. We had a Super Bond that needed to be

addressed and I heard one Senator question the savings from the Super Bond and what it has done for us. An achievement that this government had without the help of the multilateral agencies which backed out on us at the last minute. They said they were going to guarantee to make sure it happens, they did not, and we had to do it ourselves. The long and short is we were strapped for cash, we had no money, and we had to find ways to make the country survive. To compound the problem, the private sector was not investing, so there was only one place to turn to and that was government. And government had no choice but to borrow. What is very important is that today, as we run a deficit, there is a mark difference between the deficits we saw under the People's United Party's Administration. And the deficit that we are seeing under the United Democratic Party's Administration. So far, I have heard speaker after speaker, on both sides of the fence, as well as social partners, comment on the fact that we have used monies to build streets, to build roads, to put infrastructure in place, to help people pay off their mortgages, write off mortgages, to help with social programs such as BOOST.

The reality, Mr. President, is that the deficit we are seeing in this administration can be accounted for. And there is a clear understanding by the general public as has been manifested by the comments of various Senators in this Chamber today, that those funds and monies were used to do projects in the country for the people. A marked difference from the deficits we experienced under the People's United Party where the DFC Commission of Inquiry alone tells us that monies were sent out of the country to personal bank accounts and that is on records. So we are not comparing apples with apples. And the need for the deficit at a time like this is well established. There is good reason why one needs to run a deficit when a country is broke. We now see signs of the business sector investing, and I have no doubt that what this budget reflects as I look at it, is that government is fully conscious of that and is curbing, and curtailing and cutting back because the private sector is tripping in and there will not need government, that is, will not need to borrow and spend as much as it has had to when the private sector was not investing. In fact, we see very clearly that there is every indication and intention to go from the 2015 actual of deficit of 4.8% to a surplus. Now I know this surplus has been couched in different terms, and it has been said that it is at the behest of certain organizations. Be that as it may, if we are required through agreements, covenants, or conditions placed on us to achieve a certain goal, it seems to me, Mr. President, from the history, the performance that we have seen in the past, it seems to me that the administration to do it is actually the United Democratic Party's Administration. Every time this country has ran into problems, the people have so far called on the United Democratic Party's Administration to reverse the trend. And what we have in the budget speech is a commitment from this Prime Minister saying that that is precisely what will be done. If history is any indicator, then, to my mind, Mr. President, this will be done. But is not just that he said it, it is to recognize that over the last three years he has, indeed, been showing it that he intends to do that, and we see it in the surplus position reflected over the last 3 years.

We are fully aware that this government goes to lengths to take the general public into consideration. And it is for that reason that they refuse to enter into a standby arrangement with the IMF or any arrangement with the IMF. Even when in 1983, the then PUP Administration found it necessary to do that, the UDP Government has stayed clear of that approach because we know what it brings. And, in fact, this government continues to show its desire to work with the people, notwithstanding what some in certain quarters say, and there are several instances where this has happened. We can start with this Chamber and the 13th Senator. A position that the government did not want but when the people spoke, the Prime Minister decided to proceed with it. We can look again at offshore

drilling, and Senator Salas has already commented on it and I agree with him, again, a situation that was not the first choice of the government, but was prepared to listen to the people. Again we can talk on the most recent roll back of the additional tax measure that was withdrawn because people spoke and there was representation to do that, and we have a lot of these instances, Mr. President. Now I know that at one point it was described, or at least it seemed in derogatory terms that the government, I can't remember the exact words, but something to the effect that the government was brought to its knees.

Now, Mr. President, we all try to get our government to listen to us. And when the government listens and do what we ask, we deride and berate and describe it in terms that are very condescending, and in some areas and times disrespectful. But, again, it is understandable because I fully remember back in 2005 I think it was, when the people fought forcefully to stop the then People's United Party Administration from going to the National Assembly to pass a Motion in relation to the UHS debt. And did they listen? Of course not, they just found another way to do it. And today, we are now faced with a position of trying to deal with, how much is it, I think, \$90 million I think it reached. So there is a marked difference, Mr. President, between the 2. And as I read this budget and recognize the position of the government in curtailing what was happening before when it had to, it was compelled to spend in order to keep the economy afloat and turning over, rather than, laying off people and shutting down the economy. To now, when it recognizes that the business sector, and private sector is tripping in so the government can pull back somewhat, and that is what this budget is reflecting. We have no choice but to bring the debt position under control, and it's very clear from this budget, Mr. President, that the government recognizes that. So on that basis, Mr. President, I support the budget.

SENATOR E. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. President. I just rise to make my contributions, my comments on what we have before us this afternoon. And let me just say, first of all, Mr. President, that we are concerned once again, that there was no consultation as it relates to the budget for this year. We had one last year but for some reason we were forgotten to be included this year. The budget before us is entitled "Maintaining Steadiness; Consolidating Stability; Advancing Growth." Having heard from several of our Senators, it would seem that there is not much growth. I just want to take some time, Mr. President, to just go through a few of the ministries that we have in front of us this afternoon. And I want to start with the Ministry of Education, that's my field and so I will start there. Now if we look on page 101, it gives us the mission and vision statement of the Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports and Culture. And it states, and I won't read all of it, but, "To ensure that all Belizeans are given an opportunity to acquire the knowledge, skills, etcetera for their own development, and for full and active participation in the development of the nation in collaboration with all education stakeholders." Now when we look at that mission, or that vision statement that they have here, we say that we want to have them develop their own personal development and for full and active participation in our nations development. And so how do we do that? So we go through and we look at what is presented here before us today, and when we look at the entire budget for education, Mr. President, it is 27% of the entire budget before us today, that's more than a quarter of it in total expenditure. What does it entail and what can our people expect to get from over 25% of the expenditure of this government's budget? If we take a look at Capital Expenditure II, or Capital II Expenditure, we note that the Apprenticeship Program, and please may I take some time because myself is not seeing too well, old age right. So just forgive me if I make a little mistake. The Apprenticeship Program, Mr. President, if we note there, we went from over \$200,000 two years ago, to about \$20,000 last fiscal year, to now \$0 for the next three years, 2017/2018 was 0, 2018/2019, 2019/2020, 2020/2021, it says \$0.

When we look at Youth Development Services, 2 years ago, we were at almost \$30,000, all the other spaces have \$0, our Youth Development Services. And as I recall this morning while coming up, it was like a joke, we saw a blue license plate rushing in front of us, it had on it Youth Services, and they seemed to be in a rush passing 6 vehicles on a curve, and when I look here \$0, \$0, \$0, \$0. It makes me wonder what it is that they were rushing to do? There's nothing there for them but they were rushing to get to Belmopan, Madam President.

Again, we look at Special Education Unit, we are quite aware that our Ministry of Education has been pushing the matter of inclusive education where we want our children who have special needs to be included in the regular classrooms. To be working with children with these needs, Madam President, there is a lot that needs to be provided for our teachers to be able to do the best possible job that they can do, especially seeing that our regular teachers in the classroom are not very well trained in these areas. When we look at Special Ed Unit, they were allocated \$100,000, and they spent \$42,000. Now one may say that is good because they spent less than half of the budget. But looking at the needs that our teachers have to be able to assist these students, then spending less than half of what was budgeted, it makes you wonder what the priority of that area is. It also begs the question as to how serious are we as it relates to equipping our teachers to be able to have inclusive classrooms.

Again, Madam President, we look at the School Feeding Program, and that is an area that we always hear good things about. We are helping our children so that they can stay in school, because we all know too well that if a child is hungry that child can't perform. The child will not be able to focus if the child is hungry, yet, we went from \$651,000 to a measly \$8,000. And we expect, now, this government, Madam President, has touted that its one that looks at poverty alleviation, but yet from \$651,000 just 2 years ago, to now just \$8,000 for School Feeding Program. I am not sure how that is going to assist our students if that is the purpose of that, or how it's going to assist the ministry in providing for these students who really need the support.

Again, Madam President, as we look at enhancement of policy strategy framework in the education system, so we want to enhance this system when we look at that. We are now at \$43,000 that was spent and we are going to go a little bit more. How much is that going to be doing?

Skills Training Program, we are now from \$12,000 and we spent \$7,000 almost \$8,000 on Skills Training Program. Our young people, Madam President, especially those who are not too academically inclined depend on skills training to be able to have something that they can do to sustain them. If we are going to allow our students, or provide for them the opportunities to be able to gain skills so that they can take their rightful place in the community, then what we have here is not going to cut it.

Back to School Assistance Program, I see \$0. But we know full well that in August, as a matter of fact, from in July, some from in May, April, you see them coming to the schools with letters from the Ministers paying their school fees for them, assisting them with books, and I am not saying that that is not good because we have a lot of people who need the assistance, but here we see all \$0. Nothing is allocated there. Reintroduction of C.E.T. Module, was a drastic cut, Madam President, again another area that we should be focusing on so that our students who drop out of school can have an alternative, they can go and gain some skills so that they can be productive. If we look at the CAP III, we note that there are a few additions as it relates to teaching and training material and the enhancement of policy strategy framework in the education system.

Now, Madam President, before I am told that I didn't do my homework, or that I am giving false information, let me check the Poverty Alleviation Strategies as outlined by the Ministry of Human Development. You see, because I don't want to be blamed for saying that we are not doing as much as we should be doing when it's somewhere else. So I have to ensure that I cross check in the other ministries, and when I look at the Ministry of Human Development, one second, Madam President, under CAP II, Poverty Alleviation, \$0, \$0 \$0, \$0, \$0, I don't see anything there. When I look at Conscious Youth Development Program, there has been a decrease there, and then a slight increase. National Action Plan for Children and Adolescent, again a little decrease. Restore Belize Program, we went down from \$1.1 million to \$800,000. And we are fully aware that Restore Belize has put forth some very good programs I may say, and they have assisted a lot of students, but yet the portion allotted today has gone down.

Food Pantry Program, it says Cayo here, \$0, \$0, \$0, \$0, \$0. But if my memory serves me right, Madam President, I note that when the Minister made his presentation as it relates to his Ministry, he spoke of some 17,000 persons accessing BOOST. I don't see any mention here, maybe it's included in the Pantry there. If it is that the \$3.5 that is places there under Belize City, because he spoke of Belize City, Cayo and Dangriga. I see Belize City stating 3.5, Cayo nothing, I see no mention of Dangriga. But if this booklet tells me 12,000, so if its 12,000 it means that each person would be getting \$0.80 per day. If it is the 17,000 that the Minister mentioned, then each person would be getting \$0.57 per day. Compare that, Madam President, to a prisoner who get \$12.88 per day. Then one would want to ask the question, might it be better for me to be in prison if I am poor than to be out here getting assistance through BOOST or the Food Pantry Program?

MADAM PRESIDENT: It is not the Food Pantry, it would pay for a rate, so it's the purchase of the goods that people then go and buy at a

SENATOR E. SMITH: Yes. So \$12.88 for a prisoner and \$0.57 or \$0.80 if we look at the 3.5 in total. National Gender Base Plan of Action, we have been talking about our women and our children, and let me just, Madam President, if I may please acknowledge the Special Envoy for Women and Children who took part in our rally, and who made a very positive presentation to our teachers. We welcome her presentation. (Applause) And despite what was said in the media and everywhere else, on social media that is, we had a day to show that as teachers we are really concerned, and we made it known that that would not have been a political matter, but a matter that all of us as citizens of this nation should be joining forces to address. And so, we are really happy that she took the time out to be with us. But when I go through what I am looking at, Madam President, and I look at the Women's Department, Women and Gender Services, and I must commend that department for having done a lot of good work with the little that they have. But when I look at that, and I look at the National Gender Base Violence Plan of Action, I see \$0, that is of concern. When I look at violence prevention, I see \$0.

Again, Madam President, if we go back to the education, and we look at a few other areas in the CAP II, Child Survival, Education and Development, Science and Technology Works, Education Quality Improvement Program, all of these are areas where we've seen a reduction. These are important areas of our education system. And then when we look at the percent of ITVETs audited for the CVQ certification readiness, we are at 33%, that's on page 105, you are at 33%. I think that we ought to be a little bit further than that. But I am happy to see that we are projecting that we would be getting at 66%. And so I hope that that 66% will be realized. But when I look at the output indicators for the ministry, a

number of government owned primary schools, a number of government owned preschools, percent government and grant aided primary schools served by the National Free Text Books Program, a number of students served by the National School Nutrition Program, they are all blank, I don't see anything there. The outcome indicators, primary school enrollment, primary school repetition rate, dropout rate, completion rate, all of these things are blank. But when I look further, there's a table that shows the percentage passing for PSE, and I note if I can recall the numbers correctly, that it says 73 point something percent. Despite the fact that we keep saying that our teachers are not doing enough to teach our children, and that we are not doing as good as we should be doing, and that we are taking time out to do our rally and we are keeping the children back from their CXC and their PSE. Percent of sitters with adequate or above performance on PSE, 73%. Percent of CSEC examination entries earning satisfactory scores, 71.5%. I am not saying that what is there is the best that we can do, but what I am saying, Madam President, is that despite the fact that it is that we are blamed for taking action sometimes, these numbers that came from the ministry, these are showing that despite all of that, that our children are still performing. And so it means that with the limited resources that our teachers have in the classrooms or at the schools that our teachers are still performing, despite all of those obstacles, we are still performing. I will be the first to admit that we can do better, but we are not doing as bad as people want to think or people put out there.

I also wanted to look, Madam President, because again we are saying that we are all about Poverty Alleviation, if we look at the Ministry of Housing, and that is on page 200. Because you see when we think about Poverty Alleviation, for me, I think about employment, I think about families owning their own homes, and when I think of employment I think of sustainable employment, not just employment for 1 month, 3 months, and at the end of a road that has been completed then you have to wait another 3 months, 6 months, 1 year to get another job. So if we are going to be looking at reducing poverty, then one of those things would be that persons owning their own homes. Housing assistance, \$0, \$0, \$0, \$0. And then when I look at their indicators, number of new housing units constructed, it says nil. But when I read that, Madam President, then I recalled that maybe there is a reason why the Ministry of Housing didn't build any houses, because we have another Minister who does that, and so there was no need to include that here. And so maybe these houses are coming from, is it, Houses for the Poor, I am not sure what the name of the company is that was on the new lately, Mr. Lamb Fiasco, that might be the reason why there is nothing here, why it says nil. Percentage of population living in substandard housing, there's nothing here. We don't know that. Number of new homes constructed, nothing, but we are alleviating poverty.

You see, Madam President, we are quickly chastised when we point out some of these things because according to some, a lot is being done and we seem that we must be satisfied with where we are and we must not complain because, oh, it was worst. We all know that. I was one of the ones who were out there in 2005, so I know what it was. We have kept to that that it doesn't matter which government is in power, red or blue, wrong is wrong for us and we will call them out, and we will continue to do so, despite the fact that we are labeled as PUP Union. In 2005, the UDP embraced us, they loved us because we were fighting against the policies of the People's United Party. In 2016/2017 when the shoes was on the other foot, oh, it's the other way around.

You see, Madam President, as well when I looked at the Ministry of Labour, I am concerned that there is \$0 for the Advisory Body, I don't see anything, it says \$0, on page 207. Tripartite Body, \$0; Advisory Body, \$0; this is a key ministry for the labour movement and I see nothing written there. When we

looked at the Fiscal Strategy that was sent to us, we note that it was clear and these are not my words, these words were taken out of that document. It says, “The economy of Belize is currently challenged by low growth and high levels of public debt.” But yet when we read further, I saw yes, that there were some indications of steps to address these areas. I noted 7 steps listed to address public debt. And again, if my memory serves me right, I saw one to address low growth. It is very critical, Madam President, that we invest in our private sector because we need to grow our economy. If we cannot grow our economy then we will continue to be burdened with the responsibility of taking care of many persons who may not need to be getting assistance from our government. Those funds could be better used elsewhere. And so, our organization then, Mr. President, realize that we should be recognizing and increasing our human resources, that’s our best resource, the human resource. And until we are able to build our human resource, we will continue to be the way we are right now.

We must invest more in education. We have to look at more mandatory schooling. We have to look at the age, is it that we have to increase from where we are right now to ensure that most students should be in the classrooms? Is it that we have to put some more funds into the Truancy Department, so that these persons are better equipped to go out and catch these children, and when I say catch, I don’t mean literally catch, but to be able to identify the students who are always out of school and bring them back into the system, find ways of assisting these parents so that these children can remain in the system. We have to look at vocational training skills, again, as I said earlier, not all of us are academically inclined, but if we teach our children, our young persons, if we give them the necessary skills then they will be able to make a living for themselves. These young persons need to be able to care for their children. And for those who have dropped out of school, if they can acquire a skill, they would be able to maintain themselves and their families. If parents are able to put food on the table for their families, hopefully we would have less criminal activity in our country, because we are fully aware that one of the root cause of crime is poverty.

We also want to look at incentives, Mr. President, for maybe new and innovative businesses. How is it that we can assist these new business persons, these entrepreneurs to be able to expand their businesses so that they can employ more persons on a long-term basis? If we are able to offer a little more incentive to these persons, they may be able to do their part in lowering our poverty rate. We have to look at career development as well. One of the other huge things that we need to look at that as unions we keep saying, we’ve worked so hard, the committee works so hard to put together these cost saving measures. And every year its budget time we come here and we remind us that there are some very good things in that document if only we would use them. If only we would take time to go through the document with a fine-tooth comb, and start selecting those areas that can be applied quickly, that would help this government a lot as it relates to our budget and it relates to financing.

And so, Mr. President, I want to encourage us, I want to encourage this government to stick to your mantra of social programs and poverty alleviation but to ensure that when the budget is prepared that those areas that are of most need, that would be of most impact to our people that those are the areas that would be looked at a little bit differently. Before I close, Mr. President, let me just take the time to acknowledge the public officers who spent countless hours to put together this document. I am sure it was a lot of work for them, it took a lot out of them to put this together, and we appreciate the time and the effort on their part. But I want to reiterate again, we need to do more as it relates to our young people. We need to do more as it relates to bringing down the poverty level, as well as the crime level of our nation. If we can do those, Mr. President, we are going to have

a better nation. Thank you. (Applause)

SENATOR A. SALAZAR: Thank you, Mr. President. I am in a very somber mood today, so I won't be long and I will really stick to more of a macro look at things in place of looking in detail at the budget figures. The point really is that this budget debate has become more of a, or less of a discourse or discussion about budget and fiscal management, and has now being utilized more as an opportunity to make political commentary. I've heard about the basketball court, I've heard phrases such as the most corrupt government, in fact, Senator Lizarraga, similar to what the Leader of the Opposition did set of a blistering trail of attacks against the government and criticisms, as I perceive it. And so, what I'm really focusing on is in reality what has been the result of the fiscal management of the country of Belize between the two parties. And I think that when you look at it numbers don't lie. The numbers really do not lie.

For the past 2 years, which is something that I won't do today, but for the past 2 years since the first address that I gave in this Honourable Chamber, I gave a comprehensive comparison of all the key economic indicators between the two periods of government. Those indicators included our GDP, annual percentage change, rates of inflation, external debt serving, and I want to come back to the issue of external debt servicing. And I will give you an example of, Senator Courtenay gave an example by comparison earlier today, he compared both periods and he was unfair. I am not saying it was intentional but it was an unfair comparison. And why do I say that it was an unfair comparison is because, you see, he compared the trade imbalances between 2008 and 2017 in millions of dollars. But when you do that and don't account for the growth of the economy, the change in the size of the actual economy, and really do a comparison then that is unfair. It will reach to the wrong conclusion if you simply say in 2007 it was \$200 million, in 2017 its \$300 million plus. We need to look at percentages compared to the growth of the economy. So if we look at that, let's look at that. In 2008, the United Democratic Party came into government in a difficult period. It was a global economic down turn, that is no secret. Everybody is aware of the issues that afflicted North America. And Senator Courtenay referred the leadership of this country as "*Barrownomics*", I believe, that's the word that he used. But like I said, numbers simply do not lie. If you really take the statistics from the Central Bank of Belize over that period and you look at those same statistics over this period, you will see that definitely anybody with a sober mind would appreciate the so-called "*Barrownomics*" over "*Musa-antics*" and "*Ralphatactics*". Because, and let me just use, as I said, I don't want to go into details, but let me just use an example because we talk about comparisons, in 2007, this is the last year of the PUP Administration. In 2007, revenue was at \$653 million. I am using this example because we talk a lot about our foreign debt. We really make a big deal about our external debt payments, etcetera, etcetera, all over the media, all in this Chamber, but we don't look at figures. Like I said, numbers don't lie. So in 2007, revenue was \$653 million with a total external debt service requirement of US\$133.4 million, \$653 million was government revenue, total external debt service was US\$133.4 million. Today with an economy of \$1,106,000,000, our external debt service, the output, the final output, the final figures will be about US\$84 million. So when we really compare the management of our economy, and like I said, if you really want to look at everything else, you want to look at inflation, you want to look at unemployment, you want to look at the ratios of debt, external debt like I was talking about, just go to the Central Bank figures and make that comparison for yourself. Because you see, when we repeat certain things over and over, we tend to start to believe it. But if you make those comparisons for yourself, you will see that undoubtedly in these difficult times, because there is difficult global economic times in our region and despite what I have heard over the last 2 years,

including this year, predictions of gloom and doom, the sky is falling, none of that has occurred. Sometimes I feel like there is this desire for the government to fail, a desire for us not to be able to have, renegotiated our bond payments. A desire for default. But despite all those predictions of gloom and doom, none of that has occurred.

And over the past 2 years, we have been talking about, we have not been saying that it is a pretty economic picture, there are difficult times, they require stringent measures and they require caution, and that is what this government has been delivering. When you couple that with what is undoubtedly unprecedented development, unprecedented, I can drive anywhere in this country, anywhere, and I will see development that has been the subject of much criticism as well. So you see when we take this opportunity to throw phrases such as corrupt, “*Barrownomics*”, most corrupt, these sort of things, it invites a response because in my view, any sober minded person can make the comparisons that I am making.

I want to point out one more figure, and this is what Senator Thompson said, he said something which is not true. I am not saying he was lying, I am saying that he said something which was simply not true. To tell a lie means there is intent. He said that this is the highest trade deficit ever, that is not true. After he said it, I went to the Central Bank website to check for myself which he could have done. And I only compared 2 years, ten-year-period, 2007 and 2017. In 2007, our trade imbalance was \$308.1 million, in 2017, it was \$391 million, but we need to factor in the size of the economy. So, in terms of a percentage of GDP, in 2007, it was at 12%, last year it was 10%. So it is simply not true that this, the last trade deficit was the largest in history. In fact, the largest one that I found was under the past administration. So I guess the point of my contribution is that, well I feel very passionately about this that criticism is fair and fine, but we cannot simply stuck our heads in the sand and make it seem as if this government is charting a course to financial doom, that is not the case. The reality is that this government has delivered this country from perilous waters which it was in, in 2005, 2006, 2007, and 2008, and continues to do so.

As I said, I invite any of my colleagues, all of you, in fact, all of my colleagues to go to the Central Bank, or to go to any website which publishes information and statistics, reputable site, I would suggest the Central Bank and make the comparison for yourselves. We are talking about today, we are not talking about whether we should have built a sports complex or not, we are talking about the fiscal management of this country, we are talking about the budget, we are talking about a budget which is set to the times which is a difficult economic times for the entire region. So, and like I said, I invite all my colleagues, including the Opposition colleagues too, make those comparisons. And if you really make them soberly, you will see that that rising star to which my friend and colleague Senator Courtenay referred, is really like those stars of the asterism known as the big dipper, Mr. President, which is a circumpolar star, it rises only to over the horizon but does not reach the zenith. Thank you very much.

SENATOR V. WOODS: Thank you, Mr. President. It has been a very interesting day going into the 4 o’clock hour. First let me welcome you, Senator Brown, to our Chamber. I certainly hope we haven’t disappointed you on your first visit. And I also want to acknowledge, Mr. President, the fact that we are literally on the end of women’s month and children’s month has not been an easy one. And in this regard, and I will touch base a little bit on that in terms of the budget, but, in this regard I do want to salute Senator Elena Smith in her capacity as President of the BNTU. She is very right, she was adamantly critical under the former administration, we say former but we are three terms ago, and she is

equally adamantly critical of this administration. There is no better definition of a balanced approach, and I thank you for that. I think we should have more of that. I also want to acknowledge Senator Carla Barnett who took the time to share with me after the last Senate Meeting, a post that she had made on her social media acknowledging the comments that I had made because of the concern that not only myself, but genuinely, I think all of us have regarding this scourge of crime, the violent acts against women and children which continue. And so as we near the end of women's month, I also want to thank you Senator Barnett, again, we may privately or publicly disagree in our political views but not everything is political, and so I thank you for that.

And, Senator Brown, I have to say I hear you when you refer to we not addressing the men, and I would like to invite you to perhaps, not view it that way, we are living in a patriarchal society and many budgets before this one have addressed men and the Conscious Youth Program, they have, much of which had to deal with our young men. And what's most unfortunate is when you look at what's happening in our society right now, if you look at the ages of persons committing crimes, we're still dealing with young men, young fathers, and so, indeed, I hear you and we should not forget that the conversation needs to be all inclusive. I think a lot of the sentiment came about because of the month that we happened to be in and the amount of violence against women and children that occurred in this month. Indeed, I would admit my bias in looking at the budget I went straight to the issues of gender violence, women and children and I was disappointed. Senator Elena Smith gave the numbers, pointed out the decrease which clearly shows a lack of priority, a lack of focus. And there was time to put the focus on it because if we follow the Finance and Audit (Reform) Act, Mr. President, there should have been a mid-year outlook in November. Our Financial Secretary confirmed that no such thing has been done, had been done, is being done. I certainly hope that November 2018, we'll see a mid-year outlook, not because we request it but because it is required by law.

So, Mr. President, I did organized about coming here today and what my contribution would be, and I hesitated if I should contribute because I went back and I looked because I am sure most of us did, because we do our work. I do take issue with the comments that suggest that Senators are not doing their work, and I looked at the contribution I made last budget. I took out the budget, I kid you not, it looked just like this, all these post-its saved and accept for the year. So I opened to compare to determine if the 8 or less hours I am hoping that we will spend here, I am being optimistic, Senator Hulse, but if it was going to be a colossal waste of my time, and if it was going to be a waste of the peoples time, and of the Clerk's Office time, they certainly pulled some long nights last week. And why do I say that, Mr. President, because I took the time to look at what we did last year in terms of contribution and I have to tell you, Senator Brown, I will refer to a statement you made because I think it's very poignant here. Its more than shortfalls, its more than little mistakes, its gross disrespect to hand us things that clearly suggest no real effort was put into it. Now that is not a criticism against our public service officers because they do have senior managers, CEOs who are the principal officers and they have Ministers, so I lay it at their feet.

I will give a few examples, Mr. President. I will go to finance, I'll go to finance because we are dealing with the budget and means that we are dealing with monies and it has been said by just about everybody that, indeed, we are in very difficult times, we are basically a government that is seriously cash strap. So I remembered the conversation, I remembered the contributions made last year about what are we doing to collect the taxes that are uncollected, the arrears. So I went to look because we are in 2017/2018, looking now for 2018/2019, and on page 65, I kid you not, I could have just put the same page from last year. On page

65, it says, “Amount of tax arrears outstanding for more than 2 years \$32.4 million”. In 2016/2017, that was the exact figure. And in the 2017/2018 column it doesn’t indicate how much of that has gone down, which it should if we were really applying those efforts. It doesn’t say. That was under Income Tax, under General Sales Tax, amounted tax arrears outstanding for more than 2 years, \$27,500,211.71, exact same figure, no indication that it went down from 2016/2017. You won’t see 2016/2017 in there, but if you check this book from last year, it’s the exact same thing, Mr. President.

I continue, Foreign Affairs, and I am saying this because they are not just short falls. Under page 89, Program Performance Information, the key program strategies and activities for 2017/2018, opening the new Embassy in Venezuela and consulates overseas, I remember it like if it were yesterday when I pointed out the same thing but it was 2016/2017 then, and under the achievements it says, probably by September 2016. It is utter disrespect that we give, not just us but the people of Belize when we don’t take the time and we could take the time. I am not at any, don’t get me wrong, I am not suggesting that this is an easy task. Every year there is a budget, there is a call for budget, I am in the private sector, I use that term. So the departments in the company I work for, 4 months prior to end of our fiscal year, we put it out, the call for the budget. One month after that call watch your progress on that call for the budget. Two months after that we asked for another status report. We do it to allow us the last 2 months prior to the fiscal to check the draft and start to drill down. Now I know we are dealing with the budget for our country, and I understand that there are a lot of moving parts, process and procedure when applied and complied with can make a huge difference, so I was disappointed. And then I decided let me continue looking, and so I did, and it says on page 91, and we are still under Foreign Affairs, Key Program Strategies Activities for 2017/2018, envisage better managed Belize International Boundary Affairs in relation to the protection of national and sovereignty and preservation of territorial integrity. Now what were the achievements for that? I kid you not, it’s right here, I am not making this up. It says, establish the Border Management Unit, open the new Embassy in Venezuela, the one that in the achievement said it was going to be open in 2016, but the one that we know is not open, and establish a new cost center in Chicago. That’s the achievements for that objective. Mr. President, part of my background is that of administering a trust fund working with various NGOs, having to understand the intricacies and the details of the funding that comes from the folks like UNDP, EU, and so forth. Program Budgeting works if you have the monitoring and evaluation component, which we do through the Finance and Audit (Reform) Act, and it allows you to just do a check, are you trending the way you should? Because if you are not it allows us to say, wow, lets pause, rethink where do we need to change? But we don’t do that, we just go about our business everyday like everything is great.

Then I decided to just let me look a little bit further because perhaps, indeed, it was just a couple pages that I coincidentally stumbled upon and realized it was literally the same thing from last year. So I went to Health, page 81, and it says, under the outcome indicators, it literally says, percentage of licensed medical facilities that meet minimal standards, from 2015/2016 right through to 2018/2019, every year, 100%. Seriously! 100%, we are meeting minimal standards. The sky may not be falling but the roof of the Karl Heusner Memorial Hospital is. How do we justify these things? Is it that this exercise is an exercise in futility, because the ayes will have it and, yes, there are some little mistakes, and as Senator Brown said earlier, it would be caught by government. Well it wasn’t caught.

Tourism, I went again to the achievements for 2017/2018, they developed

a National Tourism Act for Belize. I had to go check my files because for the last 3 years or there about, that I'm approaching in this Senate, I can't recall seeing a National Tourism Act being brought before us. I checked lawyers who would obviously have access to far more updated Bills than the one I would in the compendium, and no, they could not point me to that. Then I kept looking and I looked at this Restore Belize, just as an example, the page for Restore Belize, its page 50. Now remember I said my bias was being that it is women's month and I really wanted to see, not that it's just because it's women's month, but from November we saw this spike, we saw this spike in crime. We saw this spike in violence against women and children and it just seem to have gone overboard in the start of the new year. When all of this was happening we were supposedly in budget mode.

So I looked at Restore Belize and it jumps out, Personal Emoluments at the end of this fiscal year, which is only a few days away, it was budgeted at \$21,000, and I am rounding, but it's going to end at \$12,000, fantastic right? That's the kind of cut we want, given the scourge we are having, perhaps it's not in that area we wanted it. But look at 2018/2019, Mr. President, it jumps to \$294,855. And then I looked immediately at the total staffing, it's the exact same staff, 6 staff, actually its worst, I guess it's not icing again, right, once you jump 40. Yeah, it's actually worst because in 2017/2018, it was 8 with the \$12,000, but in 2018/2019, we reduced it, and that is a 6 by 2, but the emoluments go up to \$294,000 and there are so many more examples of that throughout this budget.

Back to Finance, well before I get to Finance, I want to refer to what our Financial Secretary stated, and what our Prime Minister presented. And let me be clear, Mr. President, those of us who take the time to do the work that we do, take the time to call on the Public Service, the departments, the ministries have the meetings with economists, have the consultations with Members of the Unions and so forth. We take it seriously as we should because we recognize and heed those words of the government, of the Financial Secretary that we are nearing 100% and that these are very difficult times. And we listen to the words of stringent measures, but how stringent are they when you look at a budget and there's no confidence in the pages on which they are written on. And when we dare to point it out we are being told that we are being partisan, even those who are not even appointed by the Opposition. We are being told that we are complaining, another word I noted today sitting and listening is that we are bashing and mashing, another word that I took down is naysayers and haters. We all want to see government do well. We all get hurt when a government doesn't. One of the first presentations I made, having been appointed by the Opposition, is that it is very difficult for me and many other supporters of that administration then, because wrongs were done, I publicly have stated that, and I will state it under this administration that wrongs have been done. When a government does well there is no fear of being voted out, if that is what the fear is or concern. But in this Chamber there is no need to get into the three or four terms ago versus this term and then repeating some of really what was a rather disgusting behavior, in my view, last week Thursday and Friday to determine who is more corrupt. Is that really where we want to go? That's not what we should be aiming for, not in 2018, man, we come from a long and hard history that we should be doing better. So in meeting with some of these economists, some of which are affiliated with both parties and some who say that they are neutral, they were quick to go through the budget and be very technical about primary surplus and what the real position is when you add in this \$208 million BTL and all of that, and I literally said, spare me. Because for everybody that says, yes, there will be equal amount of those who will say no.

What I was more interested in from the economist perspective, knowing

what you know with the political blinders off, how different should we be approaching this budget exercise? It won't happen overnight, there has to be a phased process over several fiscal years, but how different do we need to be if we are serious? Because this cut and paste job is not cutting it. Responses I got, we've been talking about tax reform but we haven't been serious about tax reform. We've been talking about developing or establishing or re-establishing depending on which perspective you are coming from, market credibility so that we could get back investor confidence, both foreign as well as domestic. And we've been talking about governance reform, but it's just been talk. And the budget which is a tool, which is a guide, should at least paint a picture that we are going in that direction. It should at least suggest, especially a program budget, Mr. President, that we are making advances in that direction. I was disappointed in learning that there's been very little, next to none, consultation with the private sector, but equally that there's been none with the unions and with the social actors. Why is that important? Because whichever government is in, Mr. President, we are going to need their buying, their support, more importantly their input on how do we change things around, because the area that has not been looked at with any seriousness is that of Recurrent Expenditure. And no government can tackle it without honest, frank conversations with unions and social actors, that's a fact. So we have not addressed it, it doesn't appear that we will.

So I turn to the speech and the notes regarding the budget and why it is an example that has been dubbed as prudent stewardship, one that is about stable economic growth, certainly up for debate, one that's about judicious fiscal management, forgive me, Mr. President, I ask for your indulgence to refer because I am quoting from this presentation. One obtrude stewardship of public debt, collaboration with and respect for fellow social actors, yet none were consulted. And one of unrelenting advances towards an egalitarian promise land for citizenry. I like the next person always enjoy the witticism, the creativity and the flair in the use of the English language. But while Senator Salazar and myself may not agree a lot, I do agree with him that we should focus on the numbers. So I look to what the Financial Secretary in the Ministry of Finance presented as the Fiscal Strategy Statement for Fiscal Year 2018/2019, to see if, indeed, that language of prosperity is being met in reality. And, Mr. President, they say the government has stated that the Belize economy is currently challenged by low growth and high levels of public debt, they do not run away from that. Further rising debt service could swell future deficits again and make the fiscal position unsustainable. Having a below the line item and not accounting for it, and thinking that it absolves us as of accepting that our national debt is really much higher than we are making out to be is doing exactly what this statement is saying. The government is fully aware that the current debt level is unsustainable despite the recent restructuring in March of 2017, and that prudent fiscal policy, prudent fiscal policy is critical to placing public debt on a downward trajectory. So if you look at the budget in detail you are looking to see how that policy is playing out but you are not seeing it. It goes on to say that the debt restructuring needs to be underpinned by a credible and sustained program of fiscal consolidation combined with structural reforms to boost growth. Yet you are not seeing the reforms. There's been no consultation done to discuss what those could look like, how we can begin to do them, how they can begin to take shape. And it's necessary, Mr. President, because for now we are looking in terms of the debt restructuring meeting interest payments, but where, where is that fund account that is holding revenues for the principal payments so that your children, my children, my children, our grandchildren will not be further saddled, so that we can maybe ease that pain. There is no discussion of that. The lower than expected outturn in the fiscal year has been due to revenue shortfalls arising from weak economic activity and some slowdown in government investments. So we are not

making his up, this is coming from government.

I certainly am appreciative...

MR. PRESIDENT: Excuse me, Senator Woods. Members in the gallery, if you need to answer your phone, please go in the corridors please. Thank you. Please continue, Senator Woods.

SENATOR V. WOODS: Thank you. I'm certainly appreciative, Mr. President, that the Ministry of Finance has laid this out. I think this is valuable information to get serious conversation going with private sector, public sector and the necessary social actors to determine how do we start to turn things around because it cannot be business as usual. And why can't it be business as usual, because with the increasing needs again stated here, to fight crime and poverty the space for capital expenditure is narrowing further. And without the corrective actions, the ability of government to effectively influence the economy in a positive way becomes more challenging. As my colleague Senator Courtenay said, as he referred to the similar document, that the fiscal situation that we find ourselves in is a fragile one. And the journey ahead over the next 12 months is going to be fraught with risk, those aren't my words, those are the government's words. And so I agonized based on that, because if you saw that and you read those words and understood and comprehended it very carefully, it meant that when you picked up the budget book it should have read differently, there should have been a conscious effort not to just do a cut and paste job.

So I certainly won't take up my 45 minutes because it's not worth it given that there is a lot of mistakes in here and we cannot really debate a budget when we don't know what is presented is real. I was disappointed earlier today because I know that the Motion came, I believe it's called the Official Charities Fund and that factors into the budget. And relevant questions were asked but they weren't answered. In this last week, this nation lost a woman who I dub to be an unsound hero, Eva Middleton. Now I am very young compared to Ms. Middleton, but I've grown up hearing her name. As a young mother, her activism on breastfeeding was second to none. Her activism for persons with disability was second to none. Her championing for women rights was stellar. And this Official Charities fund is often just passed by so quickly, nobody really pays attention to it. But a lot of these charities and non-government organization, Mr. President, they are doing a lot of work and they are making positive impact in their communities, in our communities. And if we look at the budget for them, it's literally the same amount every year for the last 5 or 6 years. No attempt to at least review the work and prorate according to performance and impact, or according to priority. Case in point, Shelter for Battered Women, \$25,000 every single year, not even a blink this time when the issue of domestic violence has been out there front and center. Community and Parent Empowerment, \$29,557.00, every single year, notwithstanding the cry over the last 6 to 7 months, repeated again today by Senator Brown, about where are our fathers? How do we reach our single mothers? Not even a blink. Youth Hostel, in a former life I had a very brief stint going to the, I think it may have changed its name, the Youth Cadet Services, it's around Mile 21. You know, despite our limitations and despite our size, we do have good programs, and we do have good organizations out there, not all are equal but some really are working, some really are putting in that initiative that no less than the Attorney General referred to, Youth Hostel given the issues that we've been having not just this year, last fiscal year. Charities, \$21,736.00; Maria's House of Hope, \$8,000; we are not going to reach a lot of our victims of domestic violence with that. And the list goes on. Now I am not saying that this budget needs to go up significantly, what I am suggesting though, as I will point out in a couple other areas, we are not even prioritizing where we are putting

monies.

Not all organizations are equal, and not all causes will obviously get the same amount, but those who, or those which are determined to be absolutely critical in the fight for peace, for crime, for youth, for women, for children, and for young men, those should be given a second look. When an institution, be it a private one, a non-government one, or even the government is strapped for cash, we have to prioritize where we will spend. So that takes me to the Belize Infrastructure Limited under the Office of the Prime Minister. And not because it's about the Civic Center which was alluded to earlier, but underneath that Charities Fund, it refers to monies for the National Sports Council, the Belize City Center, the Belize District Sport Facilities, Orange Walk District Sport Facility, Stann Creek, Toledo, and Cayo. It is a couple \$100,000's by the time we add it all up. So even if the suggestion is well we cannot go over the total of \$2.3 million, but you could have taken from some of those to buff up just a bit more. Some of the other charities that are doing stellar work. Why do I say that? Because the Belize Infrastructure Limited, Mr. President, when I sent or I asked, and finally received after so many request, although an incomplete package of information from BIL, very incomplete, I didn't get a list of the 11 projects, since its inception. Those were:

The Belize Civic Center at over \$32 million, surely we could have saved the charity amount for that and put it to one of the other charities, surely we could have done that;

Santa Elena Sports Complex and Victor Galvez Stadium, a couple other million dollars, surely we could have saved the amount under that charities fund;

Then there was Falcon Field, Belmopan Roost Project, the Isidoro Beaton Stadium, San Pedro, Carlos Ramos, there was a Dangriga Sports Complex, and a Punta Gorda Sports Complex, and a Toledo Union Field.

So, millions upon millions have been spent, yet it shows up charities for some of these sports facilities. Could we not have taken a break for 1 year on the charities for those line items given the priority that the government apparently placed through BIL on several sports areas that were in these very same region? An to what end you might be asking, so that the Shelter for Battered Women could have had a little bit more; so that Helping Hands Ministry could have had a little bit more; so that Maria's House of Hope; so that we should have an attempt to show priorities that are addressing the social ills of this country. But since I am on the Belize Infrastructure Limited, why do I say that we are lacking confidence in the budget preparation and what is presented to us? Belize Infrastructure Limited is a perfect example. In 2014/2015, by the time that year was done, BIL, which is financed by taxpayers monies, \$8.7 million and I am rounding, 2015/2016 Budget, it was presented with a \$5 million price tag, by the time that year was done, it was at \$26.7 million. In 2016/2017 when that budget was presented just under \$1 million or so, by the time that year was done, \$19.5 million. In 2017/2018, haven't figured out, I am assuming, Mr. President, that the small figures won't cut it anymore to present the budget, it came in for debate at \$12 million but ended at \$14.5 million. You can see all of this on page 58. What you won't see is the original budgets. You would have to go back to the budgets of the previous years and that's when you realize to say that we are going to meet a target, there is no real confidence that you will meet that target. In those few short years, Belize Infrastructure Limited had not have spent over \$51 million, no audited report, no annual report, nothing to refer to, to at least before we approved the next round of multimillion dollars.

Then in this budget, they are going to get \$3 million more. You will never know what it's for in this budget book, so I called, well I emailed the Ministry of Finance, and while he could not recall the exact breakdown, he was kind enough to let me know that it was for the Marshalleck Stadium in Benque Viejo, and for some operating costs. That's interesting because that stadium has been one that has been riddled in some controversy, so it would be interesting to see if this would be the final amount that would finally get it completed. But, again, we don't know because there's been no annual report, there's been no audited report. So it's not just about a basketball court when we bring up the Belize Infrastructure Limited, it is exemplary of the need, let me take that back, it is exemplary of the lack of prudent stewardship. And I say that further because when I go to the finance and one of the strategic objectives...

MR. PRESIDENT: Senator Woods, just to let you know, you have 10 minutes to wrap up.

SENATOR V. WOODS: Sure.

MR. PRESIDENT: Thank you.

SENATOR V. WOODS: One of the strategic objectives, Mr. President, under 2017/2018, its really incredible the stuff that's written and we are supposed to do a genuine debate, but develop and implement new procedures for the approval of Supplementary Warrant to strengthen adherence to the budget targets. And what did we accomplish in 2017/2018, new procedures in place and being enforced. The Financial Secretary was also very kind enough when asked to send in email when were all those supplementaries authorized and when did those Special Warrants come to the House. We are not following the Finance and Audit (Reform) Act, which would mean that I would agree to that accomplishment. It's important to note these things, Mr. President, because if we are going to be asked to come and sit/and or stand for 45 minutes at a time and go through 6 to 8 hours, it should be based on fact. But we are not doing it. There is no indication this will change, and that is the most disappointing. It's not our money, it's not the government's money, it's the people's money. And if you were to go and ask just regular, ordinary Belizeans, how are these pages really benefiting them, the things in here, has the poverty gone down? No, it's gone up. Has there been a boost in low income housing? No, there's been none. Is the cost of living going down? No, it's going in the opposite direction. Diabetes, hypertension, serious issues in Belize, is the cost of eating healthy going down? No, but what's going down is the ramen, the can food, the processed food, all the things that are not good for you. So you have to ask how does this really relate to that quality of life and that promised land that we've been dreaming bout.

Mr. President, with the few remaining minutes, I would hope that next year's budget debate, because this will go through, as they always do, I would hope that we start with that mid-year outlook in November. I would really hope that we make a conscious effort to do things differently, to not take the public as illiterate fools that cannot understand that what is in here simply isn't adding up, because we understand it and they understand it. I sincerely hope, Mr. President, that we use 2018/2019, notwithstanding what's in these pages, but we use it as a year to challenge us in this Senate to do things differently, to ensure that the information is there. I did my work and so did all of us. I was shocked to learn, from the Clerk's Office when I asked for annual reports, there has been none filed with this office for so many institutions since 2010, that should concern us. It really should concern us because what is informing a lot of this figures if we don't have the annual reports?

So, Mr. President, I cannot support this budget. I think it's a flawed

exercise. It will continue to be a flawed exercise if we don't adhere to the procedures that have been set in place, and if we don't challenge the CEOs and the Ministers to comply and not to just do a cut and paste job. Mr. President, I sincerely hope that when it comes to the 2019/2020 Budget, that it's going to be a more rigorous debate, not one that's hurling accusations along a party-political line, but one that's an actual debate on what's in these pages, assuming, of course, that it's not a cut and paste. Thank you, Mr. President.

SENATOR DR. C. BARNETT (Minister of State in the Ministry of Finance and Natural Resources): Thank you very much, Mr. President. It's getting a little bit late and I will try not to use 45 minutes, that's my undertaking. Before I get into what I prepared to say though, I would want to suggest to my Senate colleagues that it might be useful for us at some point to have a sit-down with the Financial Secretary's Office and the people who actually prepare the budget. Not to talk about the numbers, because the numbers we are today approving the expenditures, the revenues for the upcoming fiscal year, but to understand the process of putting it together. There is a lot of cutting and pasting that is apparent. It's not, in fact, that they cut and paste, it's the structure of the computer program that they use, and so they don't go and make the corrections, but it's not a literal cut and paste that they do. And we are also facing a situation in which the old way of doing things is conflicting with the new way of doing things. And so for example where you see approval is given for, or a list of staff of 5 or 6 in an office, but you have a sum of money that is inadequate to cover all of those staff that are "approved", it's because the Ministry of Finance has not given approval for people to be hired into a post. So in the old days, what people would do to "hold on to a post" is budget \$1.00. You put \$1.00 against a post and so the post is held, it doesn't disappear. And that is the old way of doing things, that's not the new way of doing things. But I think it would be useful, there is a lot of that in the budget document, and all that has been put forward as errors are not really errors, although I will admit there is a lot of error in it, error of addition and that sort of things. But some of what we've been talking about as errors is not really error. It's done that way either because the old way, under the old Finance Orders and the old Stores Orders expect you to do things in a particular way, but the program budget format does not really fit with that old way of doing things. So it's a suggestion that we might want to have a sit-down at some point, with the Financial Secretary and his team so that they can explain how all of this comes about. And the Accounting Officers are, in fact, the CEOs not the Ministers, and the people who prepare the budgets are the Finance Officers, not the CEOs. So that's also a consideration that you have to take into account because it's really the way the process is designed to go.

Now, I want to talk a little bit, Mr. President, first of all, as I make my contribution to this budget debate, I want to give my own view of what we are seeing happening in the public sector and what we are seeing happening in the wider economy. The budget is entitled, "Maintaining Steadiness; Consolidating Stability and Advancing Growth", which in my mind reflects the critical objective of the government of maintaining economic stability and also of achieving and sustaining economic growth. So we see in this budget that the primary balance has consistently improved from a -4.68% of GDP in Fiscal Year 2015/2016 to a -1.75% of GDP in 2016/2017, to a projected outturn for this fiscal year of 1.82%, that's a positive 1.82% of GDP and it's projected to creep upwards from there to a 2.2% of GDP in the upcoming fiscal year. Now, that steady constant improvement over the 4 fiscal years, it's an improvement of almost 7% of GDP which is not to be snorted at. My colleague over there is remembering the year when we had to do a 5% correction in the 1 year in our primary balance which we did at the time to convince our creditors that, in fact, we had the, shall I say intestinal fortitude, to do the corrections that were necessary.

On the revenue side we see the tax revenue has also grown steadily over the past 3 fiscal years, perhaps not as enthusiastically as the budgets would have projected, but we've seen revenue growth that has been quite respectable, increasing overall by \$60 million in Fiscal Year 2016/2017, and a projected \$44 million in the fiscal year that is about to be completed. Overall, what I am saying to you is that the budget outturns have continued to move in the right direction. In the direction of fiscal consolidation, and fiscal consolidation at a pace that is not disruptive of the stability that we are trying to achieve when we have to make corrections in the economy at too fast a pace, the correction in and of itself can trigger economic instability.

If we look at what's happening in the economy as a whole, and if we take it sector by sector, and I am not going to go into great details, we know that the ongoing crop, the 2017/2018 crop, we are expecting 136,000 tons, long tons of sugar, in fact, from 1.3 million tons of cane. And last calendar year, we actually saw sugar exports increase by about 23%. Most of that, as we know, goes to the European Union. On the citrus side, we know that the 2017/2018 crop is indicating a contraction relative to 2016/2017. But we also know that the prices of citrus are buoyant and so we will not have as large a negative impact on the sugar earnings as could be if the prices had remained low. In the banana sector, and we've heard of the large investments that are going to be going into the banana fields in the south, 2017 we had banana exports rising by 20%. Petroleum and Marine production is where we know that we have really very difficult issues to overcome. Petroleum, the industry is at the end of its stage, end of life stage actually for the existing wells. And the marine exports, particularly the farm, the aquaculture sector still treating with very difficult disease problems. Taking all of that into consideration and I am taking my time to go through these one by one because when you listen to the script that's read sometimes, the picture that you get is one of overall, and individual sector decline, and that is just not the case. Overall export receipts last year, increased by a full 15%. All the major export commodities except for citrus, papaya, and marine exports increased last year. If we look at the manufacturing sector, because our manufacturing is tied to citrus, sugar, in particular, when those go down, manufacturing tends to go down, juices in particular.

But in our tertiary sector, tourism continues to remain buoyant, it continues to grow, we had a record year last year of almost 10% increase in stay over visitors, which is where the real money gets spent. And we are expecting that this year, as well, the season is going to be a record breaking one. Again, what I am explaining to you is that it is not doom and gloom throughout the economy the way we would hear it sometimes.

If we look at the monetary sector briefly, we would know that our money supply numbers declined a little bit. This reflects specifically the reduction in our net foreign assets in the banking system and we know that that reflect Central Government making extraordinary payments in relation, particularly to Belize Telemedia Limited last year. Our import cover of foreign exchange still well over three months of imports inching up to 4 months of imports. It's really important for us to find these numbers so that we can, when we come to this Honourable Senate, speak from a point of knowledge. All of these numbers that I am telling you about are available in the monthly and the annual, and the quarterly reports that are published to the Central Bank of Belize website, or they are published to the Statistical Institute of Belize website. And these institutions prepare their numbers and they publish them on a timely basis so these numbers are always available.

If we look at the information on consumer prices, if we look at the condition of the CPI, this is the Statistical Institute Publication that they put out in November of 2017. In November of 2017 they were showing actually a reduction in inflation as it relates to food and non-alcoholic beverages, and in other categories of goods and services, where we had increases in that period were in transport and in housing, water and electricity. And in the latter, we are talking about a less than 1% rate at that point in time. And in transportation, it showed a 6% increase, but we need to understand that the transportation number includes all categories of transportation including international airline tickets. So all of that factors into the consumer price index. And if we look at the CPI in January of this year, we similarly see that food and non-alcoholic beverages, the reduction in inflation there is 0.2%. Suggesting that we really have had food prices pretty much stable, and if you look at the data on food prices, you would actually see it inching downwards between January 2015 and January 2018. Where we have seen increases that are significant in our inflation data really is in the transport sector, but as I say, those include international airfares, as well as domestic bus fares and all of those kinds of things are in that transportation basket. What the data is also showing is that, in fact, our economy as a whole grew last year, 0.5%, as when we study economics, we say anything less than a percent could go in either direction, so it can go in either direction. But we are going to be seeing, and the Central Bank's projection and the IMF's projection for this current year is that we should be seeing an undisputed increase in GDP in this year, in 2018. Indeed, following the contraction that we saw in 2016, we are assuming that there is, or we are seeing an expansion of 0.5% in 2017. And in 2018, we are really looking for an increase in GDP of between 1.5% and 2%. And as I said, I am going through this in some detail because what we hear all the time is not insync with what the numbers are generally telling us.

I also want to call attention to the unemployment rate because there is a thing going on in our economy that's very difficult to explain and I've had discussions with some young economists and encouraged them to do some investigation into why the numbers would be showing this. Our numbers are telling us that unemployment has fallen to its lowest level in September of 2017, and remember, we gear up for tourism in November-December, so I am expecting that that number when they do the April Labour Force Survey it may be even lower. The largest employer is in the services and sales sector which employs over 40,000 people, so we are looking for an increase in that sector. But that reduction in unemployment which is implying an increase in the number of jobs and therefore in economic activity is not being borne out in the rate of growth that we are seeing, the official rate of growth in the economy. And one of the explanations for that is what my colleague Senator Lizarraga, had mentioned before in terms of the informal sector, because activities in the informal sector don't get included in the GDP. Once you are included in GDP you are in the formal sector, that's the definition.

The other thing that I want to mention because we hear often that we see poverty increasing in Belize, and the truth is we have not done a proper country poverty assessment since 2009. This year will make 9 years since we've done a full country, a proper country poverty assessment. For the most part when we hear in publications, when we see news reports and we hear the number 43%, that number 43% came out of the CDB study that was done in 2009 and published in 2010, since then, there has been no assessment. Clearly as we look at the situation in our communities, poverty remains a huge problem. But for us to understand and for us to determine the impact of what we do, the impact of the expenditures in this budget for us to be able to determine whether or not we are succeeding at what we are trying to do, we need that country poverty assessment to be updated, to be redone. Poverty assessments tend to go in cycles like the censuses. They

tend to be done by our Regional and International Financial Institutions with whom we do business, it guides their own investment decision. And I know that CDB in particular, 2 years ago had indicated that it would be assisting countries with a new round of assessments, but that has not yet reached Belize. It is an expensive undertaking to do it properly. The last time it was done, it was an International Firm of Consultants that came in and set up and did all the various studies along with a local committee of people. And there is a lot of discussion about what actually constitutes poverty fully enough, because when we used to do in the early days when we began to do poverty assessments, we were really studying what we call absolute poverty, or indigence, there were even definitions of calories per day that people consume, that sort of absolute number approach, and that was how, I think it was 2002 or 2003, when that first major one was done, how that would have been undertaken. But now there is another set of concepts that we refer to as relative poverty that attempt to understand quality of life issues as opposed to the number of calories you eat per day. And that's a whole different, that's the kind of assessment that would have been done in 2009. But the point I'm trying to make is that we need to do that kind of work so that we can understand, in fact, what has happened and whether or not the policies that are being implemented are having the positive impact that we want to have. So that's my plug for us to do our new and improved assessment of the poverty situation in Belize. We are still talking about the poverty increase from 2002 to 2009, that's just not adequate in this day and age.

I want to talk just a little bit about the work that we have been doing in the Ministry of Natural Resources. There's a lot that's set out for us in the budget. We tried to be true to the goals and objectives of the ministry. We tried to be true to what are reasonable performance indicators, but in our sector, as in many other sector, the ability for us to actually assess how good we are at doing what we are doing depends on the availability of the data, and sometimes the data is just not there. At the highest policy level, what we are trying to achieve in the Ministry of Natural Resources is equitable access, the first equitable access to the services that are provided, meaning everybody gets attention when they walk through the door. And you get that service on a timely basis so that the many long ques of documents outstanding, we've been trying to reduce those even as we try to keep up with the new applications that have come in. And we've had some success, but at the end of the day, it's really a humongous task to bring everything up to current state. My colleague Senator knows exactly of which I speak. We are also seeking to develop our staff in order to help us to achieve this because at the end of the day what we are able to deliver, really depends on the capacity of staff to deliver. And that means spending time and we've been spending a lot of time in particular recently with our customer services function so that they are able to respond more fully and more quickly to requests and complains from the general public. We are also seeking to review and implement improved business processes. Many of our processes go back too long to laws that are outdated, but the laws are there and we have to follow them. And so to the extent that we need to improve business processes and need to make amendments to laws, those eventually come through the House and to this Honourable Senate. We are also working to improve our collaboration with other ministries. That might sound strange but we are in a structure of government in which we tend to be siloed, and we are trying to work against the silo effect and we've had some success. I mentioned to my colleague Senator Salas, the work that we've been doing with the environment, the Forestry Department on the Northern Biological Corridor for example. And we are also working very closely with the UNESCO office in Belize in terms of removing the barrier reef from the World Heritage Site endangered list. And there's a lot of work involved with that, but we are fully engaged in order to get those done. So those are really our high-level kinds of policy objectives under which our goals and objectives are set out in the Ministry

of Natural Resources.

I want to finish on 2 sort of unusual topics. I want to talk a little bit about crime and I want to talk a little bit about corruption. The latter first, I had the privilege of presenting a lecture to the students at the University of Belize just last week, in which we were discussing the issue of corruption, what it is, what it does, the impact, who does it, why we want to eliminate it, as a part of their course in Public Administration, it's their certificate in Public Administration course I think it is. And so we talked about what it meant, the class has a number of public officers in it actually. And so we talked about what corruption meant and it's really about the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. And then we talked about 2 different aspects of corruption, what we like to talk about in the public domain which is what we know as grand corruption, that's committed at the high levels of government, or what we call the "central functioning of the state". But then there's the everyday corruption that refers to the abuse of entrusted power by low or by mid-level public officials in their interactions with ordinary citizens. And this is where some text books refer to what they call necessary corruption. So if you want to get something done, you go and you pay \$100 or \$200, or whatever the going price is to get a place in the line, or get an application received, or whatever it is. And when we talk about it in the class, and it was interesting because, as I said, this is a group of mostly public officers, they understand that corruption affects all of us, that it undermines our institutions and our values, and that it can deprive our citizens of their basic human rights. They also understood that although we traditionally define it as the practice of public officials abusing their positions, that this traditional definition does not account for corrupt practices in the private sector. As in the public sector, corruption in the private sector can lead to a diminished business climate when public trust is put at risk. And so, those of you, as I said to them in the class, those of you who are old enough would remember what happened when ENRON was discovered have been engaging in all kinds of fancy financial engineering, shall I resurrect that form of words. Yes, Doctor Anderson as well, which has led to all kinds of reform in terms of accepted accounting practices, how you approach accounting for certain kinds of transactions. Those of you from 20 years ago would remember all of the derivative creations in the basements of Wall Street led to the whole risk management as a new science that took over. And then de-risking came from all of that because all of that money that was being "derived" needed to go somewhere and then we had to de-risk it. I am being facetious but essentially that's the process. And so we need to understand that it is not a thing that only happens in the public sector, corruption is not unique to the public sector, it happens in the public sector, it happens in the private sector, and it happens in our NGOs as well. We know that this happens and so we have to be aware and we all have to subscribe to a commitment that we will adhere to standards wherever we are. It's as basic as that.

I mentioned to my colleague beside me earlier today, that one of the reasons why the whole issue of removing the zero rating from land clearing even came up is because it created a loop hole that members of the private sector, who could use it to avoid paying taxes, or to evade taxes, used in a way that really was not intended to be, and abuse for private gain, that's what we defined corruption as. And so we have to be aware that, in fact, when we are dealing with the issue, we have to be dealing with it from all sides. I lay this out because as I say, often we speak of corruption as if it is something that only public officials, and its worse than that because people assume that if you come from the private sector and you go into the public sector immediately you become corrupt. That's what you hear. But that does not mean, it doesn't matter to me, I am 60 years old, I have passed my care about what people think, but there are a lot of good young people who would want to become part of the public sector and make their

contribution, they would want to enter into politics for example, and they don't because they don't want to be tarred with that brush. I want to remind you that for every politician willing to do a corrupt act, there is a private entity willing to partner, and vice versa. And if the truth be told, acts of corruption in the public sector may often originate in the private sector and we know exactly of which we speak. I say this as someone who has had the privilege of working at the highest levels in both Administrations, at the highest level of Public Service and now in the Cabinet of this Administration. I was recently asked, in fact, by a former PUP candidate whether it matters, how did they put it, whether it matters to me what the public perceives, how the public perceives my service as a Senior Economic and, I wrote it down, a Senior Economic and Financial Advisor to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance. I don't know if he was talking about this Prime Minister, or the one before because I worked with both. I would not say, having worked with both and working still with this Administration in different capacities, yes, but working in both, I would not say that the PUP Government for which I was the Financial Secretary was all bad, that would not be a true thing to say, any more than I would say that the current government is all good. We all have our issues that we need to deal with. But the fact that I have chosen to be a part of this government will tell you where my, on the balance of probabilities prefer to be.

I have been a part of the Governance Improvement Process in government since 2004. I worked hard with people like Senator Godwin Hulse, I worked hard with people like Senator Elena, and a number of other people who put in long hours to implement improvements to our various laws and processes. We knew then that it was not work that was going to be finished one go. It is always a work in progress. It does not help us to point fingers, it does not help us to engage in what I call itinerant name calling. What we need is a general agreement on what is to be done and a commitment from all parties, government, Opposition, other parties, social partners to change, rather than what has been seen as the crime the past, you wait your turn. It's time for us to move away from that. And for those who feel that changing the people without fixing the system is going to be the solution, we have done that before. So my call today, is for us to work, continue to work with the UNCAC process, we have all the players around the table, let's not make that a process that's difficult, let's follow it through, let's insist that it be done because we are working on it, we have all the major and the minor players there, there's a role for everybody around the table there, let us get it done. And I want, as I finish this contribution on the issue of corruption, and I think because of the lecture that I did last week, reminded me how insidious it can be as a drag on the social fabric, it is not just a problem of government, it is a problem of the private sector, it's a problem of the NGO, it's a problem of everybody. Its big problems and its little problems. We have to change the way we do business across our society.

I want to finish, and I did say I wasn't going to take 45 minutes right, I want to finish by joining my colleague across the aisle, this is women's month, it is women's month, we have a few more days to go, not many, but enough for us to repeat over and over again how important it is for us to recognize that women make up 51% of this country, to the extent that women are not able to achieve their potential, the fact of inequality is a drag on development. (Applause) One of the biggest issues that stands in the way of women achieving their potential is the issue of violence in the home. We cannot get away from that. Women live in fear all the time, women live, well, I am getting to other things, let me finish. Women need to be able to enjoy their basic human rights like everybody else; same pay for same work; fundamentals, same opportunities for everything for which they are qualified, we need to do that; protection under the law, there are a lot of things that we've been talking about since we've had the really terrible violent attacks

against women in the last few months, we need to take all of that seriously. We cannot let it go. It is just not acceptable for us to let it go. It is the one issue that I think, we have to rise above the politics, we have to rise above the differences, and we have to agree as a society that we have to ensure that we achieve gender equality. I see it because of the importance of gender inequality as a factor in violence in the home. I see the whole violence in society as originating in the home having its origins in that inequality that bedevils our society.

In all of the work that we've done in the past, and sometimes I go back and I keep telling, but we've been talking about this for the last 30 years, you are not that old, but we've been talking about this for the last 30 years, the need to ensure that women are able to feel safe in their homes. If they can't feel safe in their homes, they are not going to be feeling safe in the streets, they are not going to be safe in the streets. There is a fundamental disrespect for the status of women that we are talking about here, and so we have to make sure that we address that. I would want to see us be able to address this issue in an open way, in a focused way, and in a way that seeks to get us beyond the barriers that we currently appear to be able to get across. It will, as I say, take us, or require us to be able to work across the aisles, but also, with all stakeholders in the process. There's a lot of good organizations in this country that are set up specifically to treat with the issues and we therefore need to sort it out. And, let me just say this, and I say this because my colleague Senator for the Churches expressed a view that I fully understand, I fully understand where he is coming from because our men are in crisis, there is no saying that the men are in crisis too. But that's the mirror image of the crisis that the women are in, and so we need to be able to sort out both, sorting out one, not at the expense of the other. We cannot leave this one in order to solve that one. We have to solve them both. We have to have our men have a more reasonable understanding of what it means to be a man. That's what it will take and it will take men and women working together to get that done. So let me close by saying that on this, I am asking men to work with women, be willing to sit at the table and understand what women go through. And I am asking women to be able to sit at the table, listen and understand what it is that men go through, so that together, we can sort out the sources of the violence that is tearing our society apart, beginning in the family and in our communities.

Mr. President, thanks for allowing me to go off on that tangent. I fully support the budget that is before us. And I repeat, again, my suggestion that it might be time for us to have a discussion with the Financial Secretary and his team just so that he can explain what it is that goes into the preparation of the budget. Thank you very much.

MR. PRESIDENT: Thank you Senator. Well it is women's months so I have to allow you.

SENATOR G. HULSE (Leader of Government Business and Minister Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, the Environment, Sustainable Development and Immigration): Thank you, Mr. President. It's been a very long day already and we got to go. It has been a long day already. Mr. President, in accordance with Standing Order 10 (8), I move that the proceedings on the Order Paper may be entered upon and proceeded with at this day Sitting at any hour though opposed.

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

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

SENATOR G. HULSE (Leader of Government Business and Minister Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, the Environment, Sustainable Development and Immigration): Thank you, Mr. President. Let me try to not use all the time allocated to me, which would be 75 minutes. But let me just do a synopsis of what I've heard so far, and then allow me to speak a little bit about the ministry for which I am responsible. We started the budget debate this morning with Senator Lizarraga highlighting some points, no public sector growth he said, there's an informal sector of about 40%, we need to go after them, there's a role back of the productive sector, corruption played large, and we are borrowing to pay. His recommendations are that we have to grow the economy, shrink government, work with the private sector and not chastise them, and that there are too many ministries.

Growing the economy, nobody can quarrel with, Mr. President, nobody quarrels with that. That is a formula that's tried and proven. But it is a little more difficult than we tend to assume. Let me start by saying that of all the projects that have come before the Investment Committee on which I sit, on which I used to be its Chair, almost to an investor, they request all the relief possible from taxation. That is the incentive to get them here. So, while we have our 5 point agenda which is, that it must be legally and economically, it must be socially and economically feasible and acceptable, and legally doable, while it must bring revenue to government, why it must create meaningful jobs, it must bring foreign exchange and it must preserve the environment. All the members of that committee can tell you every single person wants relief from taxes. So the question I ask is, how then does those investments help us? And most of them want us to give them work permits to bring in experts, etcetera, who pay more taxes. That is why you don't see the ballooning of the investments the way a lot of people are saying, and they are coming one after the other, a lot in tourism, some in other sectors.

Shrinking GOB, I think that has been discussed already. And while, yes, GOD, is the largest employer, who is going to bell that cat and say, you go home, you go home, you go home and you go home. Because once they go home, where do they go? To the private sector that has no jobs, and then those are other persons on the street, and I think somebody simply said, I am not sure it's only poverty you know, or maybe we classify it that way, but when there is no job, you have to eat, and then the problem kicks in.

Senator Courtenay talked about the projections in the big book were inaccurate, and I concur. There are many, many errors, and we had it last year; and we have it this year again. And I urge my colleagues to try to do better. These estimates are prepared by public officers, as Senator Barnett said, starting with Finance Officers, they go to the Financial Secretary who is really their boss, and then it comes back the other way around. In my ministry which I will talk about in a moment, I have personally engaged, the Finance Officer personally engaged the CEO, and sat down with them for hours to go through these numbers for two reasons: I want them to be accurate. I want the performance indicators to be right and reasonable that I can support. And I am extremely sensitive and thin skin and I don't like criticism at all. I am happy to see nobody criticize, maybe they never praised the Ministry of Agriculture but they didn't criticize. So I agree the figures need to reflect, and it can't only be cut and paste, cut and paste, cut and paste, because that says nothing. In fact, that speaks to a kind of laziness and a carelessness to say that it doesn't matter, we will just put some figures in a book and that should not happen. (Applause)

Senator Salas spoke mainly about this corruption and Senator Barnett

spent a good while highlighting the corruption. In one of my presentations when I talked about living the positive C, and I spoke at a funeral and I said, there is a little thing called a dash from the time you are born to the time you die. And on that dash, it would be good if we live the positive C's meaning, Comradery, Corporation, Consensus, Communication and so rather than the negative C's, Criticism, Crisis, Chaos, etcetera. And I try to instill that in my colleagues and also in the people who work in my ministry. But somebody said to me the other day, they said, Hulse you miss one thing you know, he said, you see corruption stems from the other 3 C's, Cash, Currency, and Capitalism. And wherever you have that, you have corruption. He says, and if you want to change it, you need to go to some other system where you don't have the cash. That's going to be hard.

Crime, fellow Senators, I personally have been a victim of crime for the 6 years that I have been a Minister, it visited me personally, once in my warehouse, once in my home, they broke into my home. None of those the Police have sorted yet. The third one was with my son, just before he went to study he was jacked at Memorial Park, right out there, just drove up in his mother's vehicle and bam with a gun, jacked and off, still unsolved. And the last but not least, last week Friday, my other son, almost stabbed to death right here in Belmopan. He was attacked by a bunch of whatever they are called, I don't know. He is just recuperating, thank God he didn't die. So I personally have been visited by crime and nobody would want to solve it more than me. A lot of things come in my head, lock down the city, bring out the Police, all sorts of things, but it is a complex situation, its complex, it's deep seated, it starts in the family. And those of you who were saying how old you are, please, I will not say how old I am, but there is a time when I knew that the neighbors raised you, and that, in fact, if I went home and Mr. Man down the street told my father, you know Godwin passed and didn't say good morning, that is a problem; because he would say, how did I disrespect Mr. So and So? So I would be walking down the street, good morning, Mr. So and So, good evening Mr. So and So, and so and so. And anyone could lash me, scold me, etcetera. My mother said, there is no crazy teacher in school, so I can't go home and complain about what the teacher did. And children were seen and not heard, and all of that, and we began this slow freedom, slow freedom, until now it's the other way where the children rule the parents, and the teacher, and everybody else, and the parents go to school and curse out the teacher and all sorts of things. So we have a social mess. My wife talks about it every single day, she hammers in my head, it begins in the home, it begins in the home, it begins in the home. There is no longer God. We don't respect any longer our divine creator. Money has become the God. We sell our parents and the sea shore for a dollar, and everything turns on the almighty dollar. And those of us who do not comply to that are the odd person out.

I shared with my colleague a text that I got this morning, Minister, could you help me to get two pig out of somewhere? I texted back and said, Well, Sir, I don't know who it is, there is a protocol in this ministry for buying anything from any of the Central Farms and others, see the Chief Agricultural Officer. He texted back and say, Minister, can you do some little subsidy or something, something, here we go again, absolutely no I can't. There is a process for that kind of thing. I would never get into selling and those things. There was a time when our animals at the Agriculture Show walked off after the show. Since our last Agriculture Show they began to stay in the coral. Those are the kinds of things we have to deal with.

Senator Salas talked about the Integrity Commission. I have said time, and time again, and, yes, I will encourage my colleagues to bring back a piece of legislation here for the Integrity Commission, not only to appoint its members, but to put those who should be on it, on it. I remember the now deceased, Elson

Kasake, who, at one time, there was an article written that when they had privatized the Registry, and that he should have submitted to the Integrity Commission. I think it was a Mr. Marshalleck, a good attorney who worked back to say, hold up, he is not entitled to file to the Integrity Commission. So all the people in this government who control cash, who heads department, they don't file, they don't file. We here file. Which one of us here touch money? Which one of you have any control over the finances of the government, including the Ministers? We are not on SmartStream, we are nothing. I don't sign any cheque, prepare any bill, do nothing, but we file. But all the people who do that, CEOs and everybody else, they don't file. So if you want to get on top of that, man, let's bring the people who manage government money and all things, Commissioner of Police, Director of Income Tax, Director of GST, everybody, Customs Controller, everybody, bring them to file. That is how we get rid of that. (Applause)

Let me go on a little bit. Senator Courtenay said, he quoted from Lance Lewis, I think he is Reverend Lance Lewis, saying that we have to take responsibility. My good Senator, I take responsibility for the Ministry of Agriculture, there are no ifs, buts, or maybes for that. I take responsibility for that ministry. And when I was at Labour and Local Government, I took responsibility for that, when I was at Natural Resources, I took responsibility for that, full responsibility because the public purse pays me, it's a job and the day I don't want to do it I am going to go home. And in that ministry you will note that this year's budget is not a cut and paste from last year, and it's not a karaoke. I will go through it in a moment to detail to you, what our projections are for that ministry.

Senator Courtenay also said one of the ways we can increase revenue is to increase the cost of services for Immigration. He asked during the Senate investigations of CEO Edmund Zuniga, whether he would support increasing the charges, and CEO Zuniga said yes. He also asked me the same question and I said yes, and I am happy to say to him that we are taking a paper to Cabinet to increase the charges across the board. In fact, it should have gone today, but I happen to be here today, so we can't be at two places yet. Not in lieu of the other taxes, but simply that we will increase because they are too low, they go back from the 80's, some of them.

The Civic Center management contract, Senator Woods asked for it. I assured her, I have been told by Ms. Mastry and CEO Audrey Wallace, it would be provided to her and everybody else. There is no secret, it's nothing to hide. In fact, only yesterday too, I was provided with the 11 she mentioned, and so I await everything else myself. I haven't even had time to look through them. But I understand there is a website and it's all posted and those contracts can be made available to every single person. There is no secret there. We may not agree with the projects, we may not agree with the amount of money spending, but the fact that it was spent, the contracts were open and they were fair and were good, and I will say that a coercible look through them tells me that, in fact, like we've heard out there, oh, only cronies get and only cronies get these big contracts, man, really! All the contractors I see here, most of them I know, and I would never classify them as UDP cronies, etcetera. I mean, if you look at, for example, the Isidoro Beaton Stadium, and I said this before, the brother of my esteem colleague here, and that man is married to my cousin you know. He got the contract for here. I don't see him as a flag waving crony of anybody, \$2,374,694.00 and he did a good job, excellent job. He did the road from the University of Belize straight up to the Wingstop, an excellent job, excellent job. In fact, I can tell you he did such an excellent job that when my son, who has a building on that side, wanted his side walk cemented and so forth, he didn't go and say, well, look you dad is Minister and he could give me something for something. In fact, I see Jose up there, he knows because his brother works right at that place and has his massage

place. He said, boy we can do this but it will cost you x thousand dollars and my son forked out the money. That's the way it's done. It's not everybody that will say this Minister got one cent out of no government contract that pave anything for my son. And that's on the record, we paid what we had to pay. I also see Coleman Construction doing the Toledo Union Field, \$1.4 million, and everybody know Mrs. Coleman, grew right next door to me, good friend of mine, we were boy and girl together growing up living in Hattieville. He is not a flag wave for the UDP, but it is a good contractor, Coleman's dad learnt the hard way, practical doing it, but his son went to University, well trained engineer, good guy, does a good job. Nothing is wrong with that. You have a lots of other people, BGG Limited, International Environments Limited. If you look at the famous Belize Civic Center, it was Medina's Construction, that company, they do good work together with the International Environments Limited. So man, please, let us not say that, in fact, everybody who is out there is some crony hustling etcetera. So we take responsibility, the Civic Center Contract will be given out.

I want now to turn quickly, and I agree with Senator Smith who says that the issues really are poverty alleviation and get the level of crime down. We have in this country develop a conscience of patronage, a sickening conscience of patronage and thank goodness I am not on a ballot to be elected because maybe I wouldn't because I have to say the truth. The fact of the matter is, people in the inner city, and I campaigned in the inner city, are desperate because they don't have a piece of land, they live in a little place, they can't even grow a stick of weed if that was legal, or hemp that is now legal, they cannot fish because the canal doesn't have any place for them to fish, they don't have any job especially if they went to jail because no one will hire them because they were in jail. And so they are strapped, they need that Pantry assistance, they need that BOOST assistance, but more than that, they need some kind of employment, and who has the jobs in Belize? The British did not leave any city with industries, that wasn't them, that wasn't them. The cities that the British have are shopkeepers, the English are a nation of shopkeepers, and who are the shopkeepers now, Indian and Chinese, and they won't hire anybody. And the few people that they hire are just a few, and the generally they want to hire what they call their own people. So, how many Belizeans shops are in that place you could count them on one hand, including my good friend here. How much are there? Save U and those are struggling, as well as Brodies. Well, that's a long history, but let's go beyond that because it's not about blaming, it's about solutions.

What have we thought in the Ministry of Agriculture? We figured one of the ways to do it is to try to see if we could locate some agro processing facilities in these inner cities. When Williamson went in that was a shame, 900 women went down one time. As much as it's called a sweat shop, and as much as human rights have been against, oh, sweat shop and this and that, in those developed nations they don't understand this thing. If the lady was making \$75.00 or \$100.00 per week, God forbid, please let her make that because it's better than making nothing. Better she makes that than make nothing. So, maybe if we could get some processing in the city so from the rural areas, the agriculture products are grown, the transporters bring it to the city, it's processed in the city, shipped through the port and off to some markets. That might be a formula, and that's is one of the formulas we are contemplating in the Ministry of Agriculture.

I want to now also turn back to the fact that when you look in the rural areas for example, and the statistics that Senator Barnett talked about, poverty had shown back then, Punta Gorda and some of those areas. I will challenge the economist, I will always challenge the economist to tell me how you can live in a rural area and be considered poor. Let us take the Belize River Valley that I am intimately familiar with. Pristine Belize River, has fish all the time, beautiful land,

people don't have land papers you know, but they lived there for years and years. What do you call it, prescriptive rights, 60, 70, 80, 90 years that they are there. If you look at, for example, my in-laws, my wife's mother and father, they didn't go to any high school. They raised 13 children and the least educated one has a Bachelor's Degree, the man used to paddle down a river I think. And across the street was Mr. and Mrs. Eck, my colleague Senator Aldo Salazar's wife comes from that family, my condolences to his wife's uncle who was brutally murdered and my friend two nights ago. But his wife comes from that family, all well-educated out of the bush but they didn't have electricity, running water, never had roads. So when the Lemon Road was fixed, when electricity pulled through there, when the water that we put when I was Minister of Local Government they had heaven. They don't need anything else, they have pig, chicken, goat, vegetables, corn, rice and beans. But I can tell you, and Senator Elena knows the area good, there are some in those areas now that say to me, yes, but we don't have any chicken, and if the Mennonites comes, what will we buy the chicken with? So they too are getting this mentality of dependency. God forbid. Please man this is becoming sickening. Let us get out of that, you are not poor, what you don't have is cash flow and that is something that we can't fix. I said to my colleague Minister Castro, don't give no hand out in the River Valley and those areas, it is unacceptable, because that perpetrates the dependency. And if we could begin to move people out, we have huge employment of temporary workers from Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, in the South working in the agriculture field. We try to take people from Hattieville, we try and take people from Belize City, hell no; they don't want to go there, they are providing house, providing food, providing working conditions and providing a pay. They don't want to do that. We have about 15,000 guest workers, right form across the border, cutting the bananas, picking the oranges, cutting cane up north. So we have to get it right too you know.

I want now to move strictly to my Ministry for a quick second. What we have been doing there this year is to set a serious target, and you would look in the budget, and if I could pull your attention to page 120, actually it's 121. And you will see there for the 2018/2019 Budget Estimates, you will see that our recurrent for Agriculture, our Recurrent Expenses is lower than our Capital II. That, to me, is a good thing. And you will notice that our Capital II, even though I didn't get this year what I wanted because it was \$4.7 million, it was slashed, we had to slash everything, but we took the time to fight for and try to get the projects that we considered were important. And, yes, Senator Woods, we did this with consultation with the private sector. We sat with small farmers, we sat with banana, we sat with citrus, we sat with sugar, we sat with the fish people, aquaculture over and over, and those meetings I spent the full day. I didn't walk in and say hi and bye and I will leave it to the experts. In fact, with the aquaculture people we sat with Central Bank, we sat with the Commercial Banks in the persons of Senator Stephen Duncan from Heritage, and Sandra Bedran from Atlantic, we sat with all the industry players, we sat with BAHA, we sat with the Ministry and we consulted. And we came up with figures of how we are going to go forward, and we put in the budget what we need to do to help them to go forward. That is consultation from the Ministry. I do not take responsibility for the fact that we didn't consult generally, but we consulted with those people in the particular industry that were important to us. And that is why I was able to go back and say at Cabinet, and my colleague say I can tell you, no man, I can't get that cut out of my budget because I need that in order to advance this program. You will also note that this Ministry of the revenue derived from ministries, total revenue is \$24,976,997.00, all ministries, the revenue, and these are not taxes, these are fees etcetera. Our Ministry contributed almost half, \$11,138,905. And hopefully next year when you see the budget if we get the rates for Immigration and some of the other services in Agriculture we may be contributing almost 3/4.

So we are paying our way because our total Recurrent Revenue and Capital is roughly \$33 million and we are contributing a 1/3 of that from this Ministry.

I want to now run down quickly a few things. How is the Ministry going ahead? We started with Farmers Market, because there was a quarrel that the potato, and the onion, and the other vegetable farmers have to sell to these middle men who gouge them and then they do all the work, middle men make the money and they lose. So we established Farmers Market, we put one at the Agriculture Show Grounds, that we put with cool facilities etcetera and we are struggling to get it up, we opened it for a couple Saturdays and then it kind of died. We are in communication with the Belmopan City Council to use it full time as the market there. It is free, so that the farmer can take his things there and sell to Mr. and Mrs. John Public without going through the middle men. We did one in Corozal, Orange Walk, and we are working on a couple others. Onion and potato farmers had a big issue last year. The Honourable Abelardo Mai had a major issue with potato farmers. I am here to tell you, Honourable Senators, this Minister is not, under any circumstances, going to engage in controlling any free market enterprise. So what we did, we didn't tell the potato farmers, oh, you have to sell to that one, don't sell to that one, no, no, no. We brought them together with the producers, the business people together, we sat them down in a room and we facilitated that meeting so they could arrive at prices, at sales, at forecast as to how and when they will be available because to my mind and our colleague, that is the right thing to do. And I must commend all the people in that Ministry starting with the CEO right down through the Ministry of Agriculture staff who are energized and hope to try to push this program.

The program is a 5-part program. It starts with engaging in the marketing to try to facilitate, not to dictate. BAHAMA which is the control to ensure that we don't introduce any objectionable pest or other things in the system. We also help to facilitate with DFC and the other banks the way we sat with the shrimp people. We also are looking at the next major item which is data. And if you look on the page 121, you will see that statistically data and collection and analysis has a huge figure of \$875,000 under Capital II. That was totally misunderstood because people thought, and some of my colleagues thought, oh, why do they need so much money just to collect data? It's not that, it's not that at all. What we intend to do, Mr. President, is to ensure that by the end of this fiscal period, we are able with confidence to give you figures that make sense. If you go out there right now and you ask, what is the total gain in production? Nobody knows, your guess is just like mine. What is the total acreage of cane under cultivation, a census of cane farmers which is mandated in the law from 2001, nobody knows. This is like state secret. Citrus the same thing, shrimp the same thing, not only do we not have that basic statistics of production, we do not have cost, so everybody is in a vacuum. We cannot tell you what foreign exchange it takes to produce a pound of nothing. We can't even tell you what the total cost of the production is with an accurate figure. So how on earth are we going to compete? How on earth are we going to sell international when we don't even have those basic figures? So what this intends to do is to fan out across this nation up to 40 people that we are training and we will fan them out across this nation, to begin to get accurate data. We did a beautiful cattle sweep, everybody knocked their chest including myself. That was 2 ½ years ago. So what happened to all the cows that was born since, and all the ones that were slaughtered? So what happened to the registry, Senator Courtenay? It was a onetime figure like a snap shot. That is something that has to be ongoing. It cannot just be that you do it one time and done and you say, aha, we did a cattle sweep. That's what that figure is for. And so when it was cut out the budget, I fought tooth and nail to put it back in the budget because that is our signature operation. So when I stand here next year and I give you some figures, I can put my neck on the chopping block because it is accurate. If we don't do that

and we haven't done it over many, many, many years in agriculture, we are guessing and we are spitting in the wind.

So, I want to also highlight that in those consultations, we found out, as you will see, that there is a figure there for Agricultural Diversification. You will see, that is to help those farmers who are morphing from one product to another product, because a lot of them are doing that when the markets are flooded with some products and they are having some difficulty. We are also engaging IFAD, with a project which is going to help us to move from some of the depressed areas, not move the farmers literally, but move their production cycles and take it into areas that are more profitable and more beneficial. So we have that as well.

You will notice one of the things we have here which is a big item, and we are very proud of it, and this is Renovation Ministry of Agriculture, and you will say, oh my goodness! Well I am one of those Ministers that think that renting private buildings are a waste of time. I make no apology. I think we pay too much for rent. I think government can build their own buildings and save a tremendous amount of money. The Ministry of Agriculture, using our people at Central Farm and some of our other technical people in the Ministry, built the building out at the Agriculture Show Grounds with an awesome conference room that we are very proud of, and we did it out of recycled material. Do you know where we got the material from? Taking down the old market and the old Marion Jones thing, we took that down, we took the material there, we steel brushed, we sand blast, we ospho, we paint, we design, and we put up an awesome building. And we are in the process of doing one now for the Ministry itself, so the full department is out there and the Ministry will be out there, and I will come out of that Lands Building that I am in together with Senator Barnett, and so they can have that for themselves. But this Ministry will have a permanent home called the Agricultural Ministry, at the Agricultural Show Grounds, where we will go on forever because I don't think anybody will reverse it. (Applause) And that is why we are doing it and we are maintaining it too.

So, we have the Aquaculture Project. You will note in this that the size of the staffing has gone up. And the first thing I asked my colleagues, I said, staff went up, you must be joking, from 97 to 150. I said those Senators are going to kill me. No, it's not only aquaculture, it's across the board, the whole Ministry. The reason for that is that we took on the Taiwanese Aquaculture Project when they handed it over so we had to take the staff. And so the staff now shows as part of the Ministry's staff, including some of the other improvements that we have made.

Apart from that there was another other signature thing that we did, ladies and gentlemen, which is something that got me in this game of politics. I would have not had any interest back in 1982. I would not have known that we even had a government, I was not there at all, I was growing rice happily and raising cattle, until my whole export was shut down and there was an infamous S.I. called "It is an offence to deal in rice", like marijuana. And I have been trying to get that thing repealed, and I have been trying to get that thing repealed and successive governments, and I spoke to everybody I can think of, from Honourable Dito Juan whom I had campaigned for at the time, just please could you do something about that so that we can be free to sell our product without government intervention. Government should regulate, government should ensure that there are sanitary and phytosanitary regulations are fined, government should ensure that you pay your taxes, but government should not get into who you sell to, when you sell, how you sell, and how much you sell for. That is a private sector activity, I am sure my colleague will agree. I was happy, happy, ladies and gentlemen, that after 35 years, we finally got the repeal of that S.I. We repealed it at No. 63 of 2017,

which repeals the Supplies Controlled Distribution of Rice Regulation. Amen! We could now sell our rice, beans and corn and everything properly.

But then, I must mention that, in fact, in talking about the exports, and Senator Thompson said that bananas and citrus and aquaculture is the worst. Well it's not totally accurate. Bananas there are two major investments taking place which we are happy and everybody knew the difficulty we had. There is the Go Bananas #10, which the Belize Bank had in receivership and the receiver Leslie Gibson. That farm now has now been acquired by Fyffes, which is a sign of confidence and a very good move because it once again solidifies them as the marketer into the country, and as you know, they are now owned by Sumitomo. And also, Fyffes has agreed to lend the port, the Big Creek Port monies to do the dredging of the channel so the ships can dock right alongside the dock now and they don't have to badge out the product. That is an excellent move.

I am happy to report that the lab that citrus, CGA has, Citrus Growers Association is now certified as a certified lab, that is a stellar achievement. And they have an awesome plant nursery where they are working very hard on plants that are not (HLB) huánglóngbing or greening, as they call it, resistant but tolerant. And that whole replanting schedule needs to come good on stream to bring this industry up. But what is even more exciting is that they have an offer on the table from a large processor who wants to buy AmBev shares and wants to buy some of the citrus growers as well. And it is my understanding that they have the capacity to process citrus and citrus related fruit across the board. That speaks very well for small farmers and speaks very well for that industry. The Ministry is actively encouraging it.

Aquaculture, sadly to say we've been plagued with this disease, and you all probably heard in the news that Belize Aquaculture Limited (BAL) has laid off 100 people. It hasn't closed down, so we wanted to put that in a little bit of perspective. And what they are doing is to consolidate a little bit and close down for the time being one of their hatcheries, or their hatcheries, there are a number of them because they don't need to be carrying that work force until they get out of this, if you would like to call it, this trough of the disease that we've had. But the reports and the meetings we have had, and Senator Duncan can attest to this, shows that they are making some progress. Planning to produce in 2018, there are 14 farms, and of those, all of them are planning to produce. Total acreage, each one of them plans to put in is quite significant. The projected pounds is 7,687,000 pounds they are projecting, and this comes from the association for this year. So that speaks well to the recovery of that industry, and there are several strategies that they are using including things called aqua mimicry, I won't go in to all of that and what it means, the symbiotic bio floe nursery, that's line ponds, there's organic production, there's rice brand, health feed, all sorts of different technologies they are using to overcome this early death syndrome. The Ministry is fully, fully, fully engaged with them on that.

Then there is the school program. I want to go into that a little bit because what the Ministry has been doing is encouraging these school gardens. And we've partnered up with the Mexican Government, and we've done so far in Toledo, we've done in Orange Walk and we've done in Cayo South. It's a three prong approach, the Ministry of Agriculture helps with the gardens, the establishment of the coward structures or greenhouse as they call it, the kids now learn how to do their vegetables there, then there is a feeding program so they use the same nutritious food to eat at lunch time and discourage any kind of snacks and chips and all the rest of things. So, and then, the Ministry of Agriculture has now come in with that as part of the curriculum as well, for those students who want to be engaged in that. When I dropped out of the plane, I was heading down to Toledo

to open another one of those.

Agro processing, I mentioned before, is something we are working hard on because we do believe that the value added in agriculture is from the agro processing. The days of primary products have long passed. The Senator here complains to me all the time that we are making good ham in Belize but yet we are importing ham. That is agro processing, and I can assure him, we will work on our ham, bacon and all the rest of those things that can be done locally. And in those cases, it's not that government is going to control, but we are going to regulate, because we cannot allow, in some of these infancy and fledging enterprises that the cheap subsidized foreign product comes in to knock out the domestic ones. So please, don't jump on me, and then we say, well, oh, they are controlling this and so, we do have to do that.

Just when you see us for example, regulating the importation of things, and avocados was just a sad, sad, sad situation, but there is a story for avocados, just like there is a story for limes as well, they come from some areas in Mexico and other places that are prone to the Mediterranean Fruit Fly, and we don't want any eggs or things to be introduced in the country that could damage our citrus industry, that is a big thing and that is why BAHA control some of these things very tightly. We control the importation of chickens, we don't allow it, we don't allow eggs. In fact, I'm free to tell you, the Prime Minister's son wanted to import some for this Passover here, and BAHA said, 'no *papa*', you cannot do it. We don't make the exception, we don't make the exception because to me the industry is a million times more important than facilitating or benefitting one person who wants to do something that may bring some kind of disease or something into the country and all of us do down, so we are now allowing it. So we are not allowing your orange, we don't allow your egg, we don't allow you none of that.

Of course, I have to big up Western Dairies because as you know they exported this year ice cream man, ice cream to Grenada, can you imagine that, a container of ice cream, I used to think it cannot even make it from Spanish Lookout to Belize City and it would melt. Grenada, well accepted too, and they are one of the first companies that has utilized the CSME for what it was designed. Senator Courtenay when he was Minister of Foreign Trade, we worked closely together on these things because we saw that vision at the time. What you is, you have a single market and economy, the same way people complain about Chukka, we can go over there. We can establish our business. We can move our currency. We have common social security, all the trappings to get it done, which is what the Mennonites are doing. We also got black-eyed beans into Egypt, my goodness, Egypt, Lord, that was an achievement and I am happy for that and pushing on.

Then we have grains, I am happy to report that that is really a new investment that is being driven. We are exporting grains into Guatemala under the Partial Scope Agreement, again, Senator Courtenay and I have worked on that. And under that Agreement, after I think its 5 or 6 years, my memory may fail us, you go up a certain percentage. We started with 20,000 tons, we can now go up, and this year I understand we have well over 30,000 tons. They are exporting to PEPSICO, that's the Pepsi Company, but to their Frito Lay division to make chips and this is food grade corn coming out of Belize and going there. They have asked us to put a warehouse over there so that we would just take it to the warehouse and from there the distribution happens over there. That is stellar, and that is important, and that is big time.

Coconuts, the new things with coconuts and TEXTBELL is fresh coconut

water in the coconut itself in New York, with a straw. You can just go and buy it, it's there, bam. And this is expanding and expanding, I see Senator Elena smiling, I think she knows about it. And so this is something else that we are pushing in the Ministry, and pushing in the Ministry and there is already an association of about 4,800 acres of coconuts.

I talked about rice already, and one of the things about rice you must know, it is such a staple around the world. It is such a staple, in fact, poddy in some Asian countries means food of the gods. We lost Papisho, we lost Papisho when the Taiwanese left. We are trying to rebuild that under the guise of CARDI's management for a seed production unit, because I am here to tell you all that Monsanto and some of the other bigger companies in the world are dominating food production with all sorts of generic types of seeds that they are selling. In fact, the Mennonites were growing some rice called Crystal which you needed to buy an expensive seed and buy certain chemicals. And the last thing you would want is to lose your proprietary right to your seeds and your small farmers don't have any seed and would have to import it from the US, the UK, or from Monsanto somewhere you cannot grow. We are trying to reverse that trend and to create and develop seed banks for our local seeds here, rice, beans, corn, etcetera, and CARDI has been charged with that responsibility using *Papisho* as the research station.

The tax, I am clearing, crop dusting and harvesting. Well I know it was controversial but we managed to convince the Ministry of Finance that we don't want that tax for a simple reason, but it was not ill-conceived per se, it was not a malicious thing. You see, there's a big misunderstanding between land clearing and land preparation. Not a lot of land clearing happens, but I can tell you when you prepare the land, the Mennonites and others who do this pop on the 12.5% GST, right on it, because they charge me. The difference is, you clear your land one time, you know, one time, a lot of land clearing is happening, and that GST that they get refunded, they don't take it off from the person they clear from you know, they keep it right there, but they get it refunded, and that is why the idea was not to refund it anymore. But because it's on the land preparation, that's where the damage came in and let me explain to you, every single time you plant a crop you prepare your land, you only clear it once. You only knock down those big bush once. Land clearing and land preparation are two different things for those of you who are in agriculture and wanted to know.

BAHA, we already said what they will do. And again, you all know that there was this provision passed in this very Senate for 10% from these Statutory Bodies. We have been able to maintain BAHA because we've convinced the Cabinet that BAHA is such an important entity that top quality scientist that we need them to continue in this process.

BNDC used to be a drain on the budget. Every year BNDC has to be subsidized. Thank goodness that has passed, it's no longer doing it. And I said to Senator Courtenay when he said, what's the story of limes? Just so the public will know, this is not to take the private sector out of it, but I said already, that there are some areas where these products come from that are risky. So in a very short, when there's a little shortfall, what BNDC, what we are attempting to do is, look, before we have to give 50 permit and everybody is bringing in from all about and we cannot monitor, let one entity import and we will then sell it to the distributors and they do their thing and we will not make any profit out of it. In fact, what we intend to do is we intend to, whatever small profit we make is redistributed to small farmers in terms of seed, etcetera, to help them with. So it's not that BNDC is going to be a profit making entity, it's just going to be that sort of management and regulatory agency in the interim to ensure that we don't bring

no disease fruit into the country.

I want to also talk about sugar. Cane has been magnificent this year and last year. In 2016, we had 203 crop days, in 2017, we had 208 crop days. The tons exported in 2016 was 120,515 metric tons. But in 2017, we went up 12,000 metric tons, 132,186 metric tons. In 2016, we ground, and produced 133, 847 tons of sugar. But in 2017, we produced 144,000 tons of sugar, added to Santander 38,000 tons made us the biggest sugar producer in CARICOM, so we need to big up the sugar industry, the biggest in CARICOM. (Applause) We ran out Trinidad, well Trinidad is already out of the picture, Jamaica is struggling with their 5 mills, and Guyana, well we wish them luck. But we are pushing on. We are driving COTED to ensure that our sugar can go into the Caribbean as a direct consumption product. And there is an argument over whether it's refined, we are not pol-wise we are refined, color wise we have a little issue. But we are not quarreling about that, we know we came out of the English system. We know how the Europeans white man used to say, everything white is best, and that culture still reign through the Caribbean, if it is not white, white, white it's not good, white flour, white sugar, white everything. But we are trying to cover that. So hopefully at the next COTED Meeting we will be able to advance that process. And the 2 companies are working together with the Ministry, both Santander and ASR/BSI. The last COTED Meeting by teleconferencing here you know. I won't travel. I don't want to go on any plane and be flying, and spend the money. We do it right by teleconferencing man, I can hold those guys. I don't have to watch cricket. Anyways, Senator Courtenay asked me that because we used to go all over the place with these things.

But let me just finish by saying this, we are pushing the sugar agenda, and hopefully we can expand it. But one of the more important things we've done is, we've scaled back on the SICB, and the SEPC and have pushed SIRDII because we believe in the research. We don't believe in government control, and so even among the cane farmer's saying, oh, government isn't doing this, government isn't doing that, we have said categorically to them, you are not a union, you are an association of business people, and you are producers talking to manufactures, you both talk. We should not be deciding when you deliver, how you deliver, how much you deliver, you both decide that. And we've so far gotten them to come on board with that which has made a tremendous difference. And all this business that we used to have in the past that they are striking and they are doing this and they are doing that, is going to disappear. I don't believe that we should be in that at all. We should be in helping with the research because the small farmer cannot pay for that, and we help these markets. But man, we shouldn't tell the factory when, and which farmer should deliver when or when not to deliver, and how much to deliver and all the things about Minister Castro delivering, that is a waste of time. Let the private sector do what the private sector is to do with facilitation of government, and government earns the revenue. So, my dear Senator Thompson, it's not totally accurate that we are falling down in agriculture.

I want to also say to you, in the final wrap up of this, that one of the things that is important is now the small sector sheep, tilapia, other small ruminants, pigs and local chickens. And we've just launched the Sheep Project at Central Farm with the help of the Taiwanese. We had some hiccups but we've just launched that project and we hope to try to expand that across. I understand everybody likes barbeque sheep, so maybe they knock out ham, I don't know. And we are looking to see how we can expand that because that's where the very small farmer can have an impact. He may not be able to grow sugar, so far sugar is still confined to the northern districts and the central, he may not be able to grow citrus because the processing plants are too far away, but he can grow sheep, he can grow local chicken, he can do eggs, and he could do pigs. The chickens have been controlled,

so to speak, by the Mennonite Community, and there's been some serious criticism about this. I heard my good colleague, Honourable Mai in the House last year complaining about that, but that's not something we could do anything about. The Mennonites are highly organized in this department. But there is a growing demand for what we call local fowl, and this is where the Ministry is helping small farmers who want to get into that.

Let me just quickly go to 2 other departments in the Ministry which is Immigration. As you all know, the Senate Hearings have concluded, we are waiting on the report. But there's been tremendous improvement in Immigration man, I mean, I even heard Senator Woods, in one of her talk shows, had said, yes we applaud what you are doing going forward, but we are looking at what happened in the past. Well, we've looked at that, but going forward, man, Immigration is not what it used to be. It is in a good nice building, the staff are getting trained, getting organized, we are trying to even perfect that with more efficiencies, and, as I said to Senator Courtenay, we are going to be looking at the fees and things that we are charging and hoping to bring that into a stellar institution. There's been a lot of changes that we've made, all trying to be transparent and upfront. They have contributed the most to this Ministry's budget. In fact, Immigration has paid its way this year.

And finally, Forestry and Fisheries, have been doing quite well. Senator Salas talked about the Offshore Act which he has lauded and applauded, and the Northern Corridor that we have done. He didn't mentioned the plastic, we are taking plastic bags. You did? My apologies. We are taking plastic bags, oh, yes, he did say he has his biodegradable cup. We are taking plastic bags off the market, and for those who are complaining they get into people, we are dealing with gillnets, we dealt with gillnets, they did that. All this business of rosewood and all that mess we've cleared up, so you are not hearing any major complaint there.

And, of course, last but not least, we are looking how we can expand the world wildlife, WWF, has given us a little short time before they take us off that decertifying list, and we are going to meet those targets. As you know, Minister Omar Figueroa has been batting around the world, he is a young man looking for some of these same things we've you spoke about that can come to us without having to have government borrow money to improve some of these things. There's even been a talk about some of the other things that we can do to help in the environmental fisheries and forestry area. So there's quite a bit of progress there.

Last but not least, Mr. President, and I will wind up because it's really, really late now. I wanted to say that we look at this budget, at least the portion of the budget that our Ministry is responsible to with responsibility. We went through it item by item. We looked at where we could cut, we looked at what was more important given the limited funds, I wanted \$4.7 million dollars for Capital II, I got two point something million. But we saw how we could work with that and how we could try to push this forward because we recognized agriculture is one of the most powerful pillars of the economy, and if we could boost it, if we could drive it, if we could get the experts up, and I am guaranteed we are going to push it, and push it to the max. (Applause) And I am very, very happy for President Trump to be saying that he will shut his borders and he will put walls, and this and that, and he will renegotiate NAFTA, and all the rest of things he is doing because Mexico and them are beginning now to look south. So we are looking at south-south trade, and that is good for us. So I am not into American politics and what they are doing there. But if we could trade with Mexico, trade Central America that we are on border to border with, it becomes a good thing. We were looking at a Partial Scope with Mexico, again Senator Courtenay will remember

back then, we were looking at a full scope but the Mexicans didn't want that, Dr. Barrera and Dr. Solis say, no, no, no. But now they are prepared to look at a Partial Scope, which is very good. It is very good for us, Partial Scope with Guatemala is working. We have sent, and I mentioned last year we had sent our first shipment of official cattle. We are doing beans, we are doing corn, we are doing unofficial rice some, we will be doing pigs, and that is the way to go. CARICOM is fine, but we know CARICOM, they are small countries, they are far away, we have to go on ship, they have too much regulations too, so if we could push the Central America Corridor, that will be to our benefit.

On that then, with all the criticisms we've had, and all the things, it's not all that doom and gloom, my fellow Senators and Colleagues, there are some bright spots. And I am sure you've heard from some of my other ministerial colleagues in the House, there were also bright spots. So I ask you to join us in moving forward. Some of you may say, well I can't support the budget because the budget doesn't have anything I tried to outline, but it does, and that there is some growth pattern in it. And the other issues we have, we have to come together. I said to Senator Courtenay, and I will repeat, I am a consensus person, and I am prepared to join with every and anybody in trying to bring some solution to this crime situation because it is not us alone. It is not a government thing, it is not a UDP versus PUP, we are not going out there killing PUP and not killing UDP, or killing NGO people, no, it's all of us in this. So if we could collectively put our minds, we are ready to roll. Mr. President, please put the question.

MR. PRESIDENT: 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, 2019, to 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. Central Bank of Belize (Amendment) Bill, 2018.

SENATOR G. HULSE (Leader of Government Business and Minister Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, the Environment, Sustainable Development and Immigration): Mr. President, I rise to move the second reading of a Bill for an Act to amend the Central Bank of Belize Act, Chapter 262 of the Substantive Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2011; to make additional provision in relation to the entities with whom the Central Bank of Belize may engage in foreign exchange transactions; and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

Mr. President, the Central Bank of Belize had submitted a draft amendment and there were some reasons for it. The draft Central Bank Amendments seeks to empower the Central Bank to engage in foreign exchange transactions with persons other than those currently provided for in section 28 of the Act. Section 28 of the Act limits the type of entities with which the Central Bank may engage in transaction in foreign exchange. This limit in section 28 is consistent with the traditional Central Banking functions and relationships. However, the nature of Central Banking has been changing and requires Central Banks to have relationships with other types of entities which were not provided for under section 28.

In particular the amendment to the Act is required to support the Central

Bank in conducting the repatriation of US dollar banknotes on behalf of the commercial banks. The Central bank has been providing this service since the 21st of January 2000 and currently repatriates US dollars banknotes through two service providers, the Federal Reserve Bank of New York and Bank of America. In view of the existential threat of de-risking since last year the Central Bank has been exploring the option of contracting the services of other Banknote Service Providers in order to reduce dependency on any one provider. Although the Bank has been relentlessly pursuing this objective we are not able to find other service providers until recently in 2017. Central Bank is now minded to contract a prospective Banknote Service Company but lacks the statutory authority to engage in the foreign exchange transaction with this entity as it is not included in those categories of entities with which the Central Bank may engage in transactions in foreign exchange under section 28 of the Act.

If enacted the Central Bank will, with the approval of the Minister of Finance in accordance with the terms and conditions approve, engage in transaction in foreign exchange with this or another entity specified. And so that, fellow Senators, is the reason for this amendment. We ask for your support.

SENATOR M. LIZARRAGA: Mr. President, I welcome the explanations given by the Leader of Government Business because he answered a lot of my questions, but he did not address a lot of my fears. Because, quite frankly, I don't know what is a Banknote Service Provider. And if the Federal Reserve will not take US dollar cash because that is what we are seeking to deal in, US dollar banknotes, if the Federal Reserve or if the Bank of America will not take our US cash dollars, then the obvious question is why? And then the other obvious question is who are these Banknote Service Providers, because the last thing we want to do is to run the risk of, and I am sure my colleague from the banking sector will answer but we don't want to run any risk of a further de-risking because of cash and dealing with, I've never heard of a Banknote Service Provider, so I stand to be educated but I would certainly like to know that what we are doing will not put us more at risk for de-risking from those US regulators especially, and the US Feds. and Bank of America. Thank you, Mr. President.

SENATOR S. DUNCAN: Good morning, Mr. President. Actually, the idea is to try to reduce the risk that we face in the system. We are very much aware that the Central Bank has already, in the past being de-risked there are couple banks that has remove the corresponding banking services to the Central Bank. And I think what the Central Bank is doing, which I agree with and support, is to try to broaden what is available to them to provide the service to the country. As it now stands today, the commercial banks send the US dollars that we want to repatriate through the Central Bank because we are not allowed to go direct, banks in the states don't want to take it direct from us, and they've been accepting it from the Central Bank. We don't want that to dry out. So every so often when we send out US dollars we send it first to the Central Bank, and then the Central Bank bulk it and send it to the United States.

At some point, well they don't know what will happen and they are not saying that it will happen but I think what they are doing is trying to safeguard against the county not having any means of getting it done at all. So effectively when they get these funds, I have no doubt that the Central Bank will not transact with anybody that will make the situation worse, they have not provided the name here because clearly, they don't want to be tied to only one institution, and they want to be able to negotiate with. Today, today we have companies that pick-up funds from banks that come to your offices and they pick up your cash and take it for you. When we use to send the cash ourselves, we had these services out of the US who come and actually pick up the cash and take it back on the plane for you.

They take it to the United States, well, to their banks. You see you have to understand that what happens when they do it the banks in the United States are likely and they take it from them.

Remember today that we do things, and when we were being de-risk they stop taking wire transfers and sending wire transfers etcetera for us. But interestingly enough, they accept it when we pass it through another bank. So the US banks are still taking the same risk from Belize but not directly from banks in Belize. And you have to understand that I cannot explain to you why, but that's what they are doing today. So we send wires today but I don't have a bank in the states to send it to, we send it through a third party bank called Crown Agents out of the UK and the US banks are prepared to work with Crown Agents, but not prepared to work with me. It's the same wire, it's the same Citrus Products of Belize Transactions proceeds from citrus etcetera, and they do it, but I cannot get to send it direct. And so we are concerned about that happening with the same cash. So when you have these big companies like Brinks and these guys come and they will buy the US off you, and they pool it with what their stock and they turn it over, and if they have to sell it to the Feds they sell it, but they may not have to sell it to the feds because they have other people that they service so they become an intermediary and they can take money from you and sell it to somebody else who needs it. So that is how it will work and that's what we are trying to accomplish as a back stop. It doesn't say that they will stop what they are doing now, and I have no doubt, knowing the people at the Central Bank, they will not do anything to make the system more risky that is a definite.

SENATOR E. COURTENAY: Mr. President, first of all, I would like to thank Senator Hulse for the explanation because I was mystified as to the purpose of the proposed amendment. A lot has been clarified but not sufficiently. First of all, Mr. President, to the extent that the Central Bank wish to engage in a foreign currency transaction, section 28 is relevant. That section talks about engaging in transaction in foreign exchange. Entering into a contract with a service provider to up US currency pound sterling or euros and to carry it somewhere is not a foreign exchange transaction, first point. So without getting into a legal argument, without this amendment the Central Bank, because it is a Statutory Body, established as a body corporate, has the contractual capacity to enter into contracts as it has done with many people to provide a service to it. It is not a foreign exchange transaction.

The question that arises is when we look at the proposed amendment it says notwithstanding subsection (1) and subsection (1) lists a number of institutions with which the Central Bank can conduct foreign exchange transactions. Notwithstanding subsection (1) the Bank meaning the Central Bank, with the approval of the Minister, being the Minister of Finance, may engage in transactions in foreign exchange with a specified foreign entity for the purpose of facilitating transactions in foreign exchange with an entity referred to in subsection 1(d) or f. The example that has been given to us moving foreign currency from Belize to the United States, to the fed, for example, is already covered by section 28, if you believe you have to use section 28, I don't believe that. Why would the Minister of Finance have to give approval to the Central Bank of Belize, to enter into a transaction in foreign exchange if it is for the movement of foreign currency remitting foreign currency to the United States? I cannot understand why the Minister of Finance would become involved in that.

When you look at subsection 3 that is being proposed it goes further, it says, "The Minister, when giving approval under subsection (2)," listen carefully. The Minister "may determine or authorize the Board to determine the terms and conditions under which the Bank may engage in transactions in foreign exchange

with the specified foreign entity.” Why would the Minister of Finance want to get involved in saying to the Central Bank that has a Board of Director established by law, that you can enter into a transaction for the transport of foreign currency to the United States but I am telling you that these are the conditions and these are terms on which you must enter into that contract? That cannot be right, Mr. President. The Central Bank of Belize, and Senator Duncan you can shake your head, but that what the provision says. But shake your head this way not like that. Thank you. The Central Bank Board has to approve any contract that the Central Bank enters into and it cannot, with respect give to the Minister of Finance, the authority to say you tell me the conditions on which I will enter into that contract.

Two final points, Mr. President. And to be quite clear, it is not that we are opposing this it is that we are seeking clarification and understanding of what is being done. Two final points: The first is, we will recommend a definition be given to a specified foreign entity who is the Central Bank engaging in foreign exchange with, and what is worse especially if the Minister can say I am telling you to enter an exchange foreign exchange agreement with X on these terms and conditions. So we need a definition of specified foreign entity.

And finally, Mr. President, and colleagues we would commend to the Senate that consideration should be given to replicating what is in section 32(a), The Central Bank of Belize Act is amended in section 32(a) to allow the Central Bank to enter into derogative transaction. Section 32(a) subsection (2) says, “every contract entered into by the Bank pursuant to subsection (1) of this section, shall be laid by the Minister on the Table of the House of Representatives at its next practicable meeting.” I think some of the colleagues will recall that we had enter into a certain contract and we lost on the end, and the result of that experience was what caused this amendment to be made. So if you are entering into a derogative transaction it must be laid on the Table of the House of Representatives at the next practical meeting, and every Order made by the Minister, shall be laid before the House of Representatives, subject to a Negative Resolution. So our recommendation is, Mr. President, and colleagues, is that if we are going to be entering into foreign exchange transactions with specified foreign entities they should also be laid on the House Table in the House of Representatives. Thank you, Mr. President.

SENATOR G. HULSE (Leader of Government Business and Minister Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, the Environment, Sustainable Development and Immigration): I thank both Senator for their explanation. I am clearly not able to respond to some of those more than what I have. I have a note which says that if the amendment is passed then a requested will be submitted for approval to engage with a prospective entity called Travel X. Thank you. I ask the question be put but I will certainly seek clarification and I will ask, actually the better way to do it is that I will ask Ambassador, Former Senator Joy Grant who is the Governor of Central Bank for some additional clarification.

MR. PRESIDENT: Honourable Members, the question is that the Bill for an Act to amend the Central Bank of Belize Act, Chapter 262 of the Substantive Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2011; to make additional provision in relation to the entities with whom the Central Bank of Belize may engage in foreign exchange transactions; 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. **Customs and Excise Duties (Amendment) Bill, 2018.**

SENATOR G. HULSE (Leader of Government Business and Minister Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, the Environment, Sustainable Development and Immigration): Mr. President, I rise to move the second the reading of a Bill for an Act to amend the Customs and Excise Duties Act, Chapter 48 of the Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2011, to implement the Customs and Excise Trade Classification based on the Harmonised System of Classification Version 2017; to implement the fourth phase of reduction of duties in accordance with the Economic Partnership Agreement, to vary the rates of excise duty on certain items; to increase the scope of items subject to excise duty; and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

SENATOR M. LIZARRAGA: Mr. President, briefly I mean what we see obviously is tax measures being imposed on a particular sector that had found, yes, a loophole. I mean people became innovative in trying to remain competitive in this environment where the taxes on diesel are so high people began to use other fuels, Mr. President, to mix it and at the risk of, not at the risk it's a calculation they decided, look I'll burn up an engine because an engine is \$10,000.00 but by then I would have saved substantial amount of money mixing my stuff with kerosene, right. They mix the kerosene with the diesel and the engines became disposable and they were trying to remain competitive. The government was losing revenue because of the low or no tax environment of the kerosene. But this move, Mr. President, will have, and I don't have the numbers but I'm sure there are people in this country that still use kerosene for cooking and other purposes. But more importantly, Mr. President, the need for taxation on these fuels will make that sector that sought to remain competitive or be competitive less competitive.

SENATOR V. WOODS: Just a minor point, I do associate myself with the comments that Senator Lizarraga. But a request, Mr. President, in the future I notice the second time we are getting information on CDs, in 2018 a lot of our instruments don't come with a CD drive and perhaps just a regular web link to all of us would work, it would even save the Clerk's office some money on the actual physical CD and we don't have to worry about the environment.

SENATOR G. HULSE (Leader of Government Business and Minister Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, the Environment, Sustainable Development and Immigration): Thank you, Senator Woods I thought the same. I omitted to make the point thought that there is a school in Corozal that I have to big up when I was making my previous presentation that we have engage to do Apps on our computers for all this data collecting we are doing etcetera. If you had gone to the last Agricultural Show, you will see they have an App on your phones that you can punch and irrigation pumps comes on and off, and these are young students who are just geniuses on the computer and we've asked them how we can innovate this kind of CD thing so we don't have it. We just spoke about it last week when we got it too because most instrument don't have them. I ask that the question be put.

MR. PRESIDENT: Honourable Members, the question is that the Bill for an Act to amend the Customs and Excise Duties Act, Chapter 48 of the Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2011, to implement the Customs and Excise Trade Classification based on the Harmonised System of Classification Version 2017; to implement the fourth phase of reduction of duties in accordance with the Economic Partnership Agreement, to vary the rates of excise duty on certain

items; to increase the scope of items 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.

SENATOR G. HULSE (Leader of Government Business and Minister Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, the Environment, Sustainable Development and Immigration): Mr. President, I propose to move a Motion to read together Bills number 4, 5, and 6, namely the Immigration (Amendment) Bill 2018; Belizean Nationality (Amendment) Bill, 2018; and Passport (Amendment) Bill 2018; as they all deal with the bifurcation of the department, and if so carried by the Senate, I will then read them together and the debate may be on all three simultaneously.

SENATOR E. COURTENAY: I quickly second the Motion.

MR. PRESIDENT: All those in favour of Senator Hulse's suggestion, kindly say aye; those against, kindly say no. I think it was unanimous, the ayes have it.

Proceed Senator Hulse.

4. Immigration (Amendment) Bill, 2018.

SENATOR G. HULSE (Leader of Government Business and Minister Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, the Environment, Sustainable Development and Immigration): Mr. President, I rise to 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 provide, as a companion measure to amendments to the Belizean Nationality Act, Chapter 161, and the Passports Act, Chapter 164, for the bifurcation of functions related to immigration and nationality services, to regularize the use of the term used to describe the head of the government department responsible for immigration; and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

5. Belizean Nationality (Amendment) Bill, 2018.

SENATOR G. HULSE (Leader of Government Business and Minister Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, the Environment, Sustainable Development and Immigration): Mr. President, I also rise to move the second reading of Bill for an Act to amend the Belizean Nationality Act, Chapter 161 of the Substantive Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2011, to provide, as a companion measure to amendments to the Immigration Act, Chapter 156, and the Passports Act, Chapter 164, for the bifurcation of functions related to nationality and immigration services; and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

6. Passports (Amendment) Bill, 2018.

SENATOR G. HULSE (Leader of Government Business and Minister Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, the Environment, Sustainable Development and Immigration): Mr. President, 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 provide, as a companion measure to amendments to the Immigration Act, Chapter 156, and the Belizean Nationality Act, Chapter 161, for the bifurcation of functions related to nationality and immigration services; and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

Mr. President, the purpose of the Bills or the intent of the Ministry of Immigration and Refugees is to recognize and restructure the Immigration and Nationality Services Department with a view to improve deficiency and its service delivery to the public. Just by way of some background, the Immigration and Nationality Services Department is charged with the execution of its mandate to provide services to the public under broad categories of immigration services, border management, nationality services, permanent residence and passport. All of these services fall under the following acts within the laws of Belize: the Immigration Act, Chapter 156; the Belize Nationality Act, Chapter 161; the Free Movement of Skills Persons Act, Chapter 45 of 1999; the Aliens Act, Chapter 159; and the Passports Act, Chapter 164.

Over the last few years, and going back to some 10 years to 2007, the Department has accumulated huge backlogs in the processing of applications for Permanent Residence, and applications for Belize Nationality as follows: Application lodge and accepted from 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017, is a total 1,433; application completed is only 185, the remaining is 1,248 outstanding on permanent Residence alone; Nationality applications lodge and accepted from 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2017 is 1,160, applications completed is 190, remaining is 1,041. The proposal in order to alleviate this situation and to ensure expeditious and more efficient processing of the pending applications and timely delivery of the current ones to applicants, the Ministry proposes separation of the Department into two departments. One of which will be a uniform body dealing with Immigration Services, inclusive of border management and enforcement activities, which are not done at this time very well. While the other department will take responsibility for Nationality matters, including the acceptance of applications for issuance of permanent residence, Belizean Nationality, Belizean Passport and Free Movement of Skilled Persons Certificates. Each department will be headed by its own Director to be assisted by a Deputy and unit heads, as per an organization chart.

The Border Management and Immigration Services, this department will comprise of the uniform services with responsibility for the following: Belize Northern Border station, Phillip Goldson International Airport, Belize City Cruise Terminal, Belize City Port, Belize Western Border Station, San Pedro, Dangriga Office, Independence Office, Harvest Caye, Punta Gorda Office and Jalacte. The Belmopan Immigration Services office deals with: various permits including, extension, dependent permits, temporary employment, permits, etc; the Orange Walk Town Office, Corozal Town Office, San Ignacio Town Office is the Secretariat for the Visa Vetting Committee. Stations at A to E, or stations which are mainly involved in the recording of arrivals and departure of persons into and from Belize.

In addition to the above station, Border Management and Immigration Services Department would also be responsible for the enforcement unit, comprising of an Operation Unit, and Investigation and a Persecution Unit.

Operations include: assignment of officers for the Mobile Interdiction Team, conducting checkpoints, border patrol, escort of convicted immigrant offenders to prison, repatriation, and work permit inspection on construction sites, bars and restaurant.

The Investigative Unit will undertake interviews for permanent resident; interviews for passports in the case of lost, certain first-time issues; interviews for nationality; interviews for visa; and interviews in the case of suspect marriages.

The persecution unit undertakes the detention of offenders, recording of statements, interviewing of witnesses, escorting of offenders to court, repatriation, preparation and presentation of cases in court.

The Nationality and Passport Department will be responsible for accepting admissions of temporary border permits and border crossing cards; acceptance and processing of applications for permanent residence; acceptance and processing of applications for nationality by registration, marriage or descent; acceptance and processing of application for passport; acceptance and processing of application for skill certificate, and be the secretary to the National Scrutinizing Committee. Application for services which fall under the Nationality and Passport Department in the district and towns will continue to be performed through the existing offices in those districts by clerical staff in those stations.

The Ministry does not foresee any requirement for additional staffing for the Border Management and Immigration Services Department, however, there would be need for a redeployment of 5 Administrative Officers from the main stream, Public Service to be deployed as follows: Border Management and Immigration Services Department, Human Resources matters, Nationality and Passport Department Human Resources matters; Customer Service, Permanent Residence Unit, Nationality Unit, and Passport Unit. It should also be noted that the Ministry intends to request re-designation of the recently approved two posts of Assistance Directors to a Deputy Director, one for each department.

SENATOR E. COURTENAY: Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, first of all, again, thank you to the Leader of the Government Business with providing us with the explanation that he just gave us. But we have to ask the question, why these amendments, and why these amendments at this time? Mr. President, I think it is, to be frank, an act of disrespect to the Senate for these amendments to be proposed at this time. The Senate is well aware that a committee appointed by a resolution of this Senate to look into the entire processes and activities of the Immigration Department is well advance and is now in the process of drafting its Report. We heard testimony in this Senate with respect to the organization and activities, the difficulties and the challenges, we visited the premises in order to see for ourselves, the work flow, the staffing and the arrangements. We are now at a point where we have taken all our evidence and we are now at the point of preparing a Report to be submitted to this Senate. The justification given to us just now by Senator Hulse, of the backlog, your Committee, Mr. President, received testimony on the question of the backlog. We received testimony on how the department is addressing the question of the backlog. It is noteworthy to me that we did not get any proposal that this bifurcation should take place. Unless there is some urgency, it is the proposal of this side that these Bills be kept in Committee to await the outcome of the Report from the Senate Special Committee.

If I may make a few comments on the substance of the legislation. The first point I wish to highlight which only came listening to Senator Hulse, is that the Belizean Nationality (Amendment) Act, in the proposed clause 31(3A) (2)

says that the functions of the Department are: acceptance and processing of applications for permanent residence, for nationality, for passport, and the secretariat for the Nationality Scrutinizing Committee. There is no provision for the issuance and processing of skills certificate. And, indeed, skills certificates are not listed. The Act is not listed in the Schedule to the Immigration Act, where all the other pieces of legislation are listed. So it seems that there is an oversight in terms of assigning the responsibility to that department.

But, again, Mr. President, and colleagues, why is it necessary to have two Directors? Why it is not permitted, why is it not advisable that there be one Director with two Deputies of the two sub-departments within one department? There is no justification or explanation for that. We just debated the General Revenue Appropriation Bill, is there any provision in the Bill for a post of new Director? Well we will have two so there will be an additional Director. Senator Hulse says that there is no additional staff, so I take it that you mean promotion. However, it is, my question is, why is there no provision in the budget for this new arrangement of the Immigration Department? Again, as I indicated a short while ago, Mr. President, in fact, before I go there, one of the things that I had noticed during our Committee deliberations, and, again, I see it being replicated here, and these are the things, Mr. President, that raise concern. The Director of Immigration and the proposed second Director of Immigration, are persons who are described in the legislation as public officers in the existing legislation replicated in these proposed amendments, as public officers appointed by the Governor General on the advice of the Prime Minister. In terms of building institutional knowledge and capacity, it seems to me that one of the recommendations that our committee would want to consider is whether that arrangement is the best arrangement for stability or whether it should be an appointment by the Public Service Commission rather by than the Prime Minister himself. I simply raise it as a point that our Committee would want to look at but we have it being replicated in the legislation, in the second Director that is being proposed.

Mr. President, I am concerned about the consultation that has taken place or has not taken place or has not taken place with the drafting and the conceptualizing of this bifurcation. I am given to understand that the new premises are not organized along these lines. So even though a few weeks ago there was a movement from the old premises to new premises there is now put on top of the new movement, a new bifurcation and the premises and the organization is not setup to deal with this new proposed arrangement.

I raise two concerns and I put it on the public record. Mr. President, it is because, and we had copious testimony on this issue, because the left hand in Immigration did not know what the right hand was doing, it opened itself to abuse. We have testimony of recommendations from experts in Immigration as to how to ensure that information flows throughout the Department, to ensure that some of the irregularities and illegalities are not repeated. Nevertheless, we come here before hearing from the Senate Special Select Committee with a proposal for a bifurcation. I want to put on public record our concern on this side. Reregistration is on the horizon. The question of the issuance of nationality in that process is going to be an issue. An election is not too far off, Mr. President. I will urge my colleagues for us to make haste slowly to defer this bifurcation amendment until the Senate Select Committee has completed its work and made its Report. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

SENATOR DR. C. BARNETT: Yes, I understand, Mr. President, some of the issues that my colleague across the aisle is raising. I have a couple of points. We just had to do a similar exercise in the Ministry of National Resources for

pretty much the same reason. When a structure was agreed many years ago, the number of transactions that passed through that structure was small. The number of transactions that pass through the structure now caused, by definition because it is impossible for one person to attend to all of the transactions that by law that person had to deal with. And so we had to do the same reorganization. And so I understand from an organization point of view why that needs to be done. You would not find that in the provision in the budget for the post right now because by law we can't put it in the budget until by law it is agreed in here. So we had to do the same thing as well. Once the laws came in to being, then we went to the Ministry of Finance to provide any additional resources. In our case we didn't need additional resources either but you still have to go through a formal process of shifting a post from here to here in the budget. And so you would see that shifting happen, but it can't happen until the posts are provided for under the law.

The third thing is that as a Member of that Senate Select Committee, one wanting to get the work completed, we have now had three, at the very least, postponement of the submission of the Draft Report. I am hesitant to delay an important process for another process that we don't seem to know when it is going to be done. I have earlier had a conversation with the Chairman, and I don't really want to have too much to say about it here because we haven't discussed it as a Committee, but I am really very uncomfortable with the fact that we have not been able to put a draft of the Report in front of us for consideration so we at least can have a timeline for completion when we see how much work is there to be done on the draft. So unless I know that I can't say that I am willing to wait until that Report is completed before I deal with this because for me that is just not rational. Thank you.

SENATOR M. LIZARRAGA: Mr. President, bear with me, it's late and my mind is a little foggy maybe. But let me say this, first of all, I would like to associate myself and put on record that I agree with everything that Senator Courtenay has just said and I would like to add some more points.

First of all, what is the rush? I understand and I heard what the good Senator said a few moments ago, that we are all awaiting this investigation. But I don't see what the urgency is in the Immigration Department right now for us to bust it, split it in two. It is not, Mr. President, like we have decided to make the department that much bigger because we want to follow the recommendations of the Auditor General. We are only talking about 5 more people. I don't think that 5 more people in the Immigration Department would cause a need for such a major administrative split in the department. I don't see 5 more people in the department meriting another Director, a second Director. If it were to say that we are getting a lot more people because we heard the Director of Immigration in public testimony, saying that for her to follow the hundreds of recommendations of the Auditor General she needs to have the resources. But let us look at the budget this year. Did we allocate resources for that, no. On the contrary, overall salaries went down by 16% in that department, and Personal Emoluments went down by 6%. And staff only went up, Minister, I beg to correct you, you said 5 people more, according to the budget it is only three people more. So there is a major reduction in the cost for Personal Emoluments, yet there is an increase again, we've seen this in other departments, where there is an increase in staff but we do not see here a justification for a new Director. That's why you have Deputy Directors. I don't want to infer this but, I mean, one is left to ask the question, really, what is the purpose for splitting this department? Is it to move somebody? Is it because we need somebody friendlier in there like Senator Courtenay has rightly said. Minister, you've just said it, Leader of Government Business, that we have a lot of backlogs. And I agree that the backlogs need to be looked at, but I don't think the answer right now is to create divisions in that department, I think we are

supposed to strengthen the department. I must congratulate the government on the wonderful new job, to me, that they've done with the new locations. It is very professional. I must commend the staff. The staff is very professional. It is a pleasure walking into the place. It is still a little small and crowded but you know what, it is cool, people are professional and they move you. And I like it, the Director is right there with an office right down stairs where she sees everything and is on top of things. Five more people don't need a new division. That absolutely does not make sense. You want to make a new division? Make a new division just to investigate the old backlogs, and give them the resources but you've allocated no such resources knowing what the Auditor General has recommended.

Listening to the public testimony here from the Director, and saying that she agrees with all the recommendations, practically all the recommendations. All the previous Directors that have had an opportunity to come here agree with the recommendations of the Auditor General. So it baffles me, and I am sorry I didn't have the time during the budget and I am going to rant a little bit now. It baffled me when I looked at the budget for Immigration and saw that we have a cut. So we are not serious. So one has to ask now, why is this split? Seriously. We know what has happened there, we know, you know. We know what has happened in that department. We know how critical the reregistration process is. We know that there is a huge question mark hanging over on Nationality Register. And now you seek to create a department, or split a department rather, and create a post for somebody who is going to be just in charge of Nationality, just in charge of Residency to fast tract, no man. We have to be very careful. I caution, Mr. President, that this move at this time is most unwise. I see no reason for it, especially because the growth in the department is minimal. You already have 218 persons, according to the budget you are going to have 3 people more, and you need another Director. No, man, something is wrong. Something is very wrong. Thank you, Mr. President.

SENATOR S. DUNCAN: Mr. President, I must confess that I guess not being a politician I am not seeing anything sinister, and maybe I am being naïve, but it seems to me that, in fact, what is being proposed is indeed a strengthening in and of itself of the department. We are going to get separation of powers. We are going to get separation of duties. Somebody cannot get everything done by the same Director because you have to go to a different Director to get Nationality versus, so to me, when you put in two different Directors you are actually putting more resources into the department because you are going to pay more people. So you are now going to have two senior persons where you only have one now. Unless I am missing something, I understand the point about the Senate Committee that's taking place and whether or not they might be at cross purposes, but I think that is very different from the strengthening of the department.

In terms of the cross purposes though, when the Senate Committee was formed, the resolution was really about investigating certain aspects of the department. It was never intended to usurp the role of the Minister and the Director and the public officers. And what will come out of that Report will clearly be recommendations. I have no doubt that with the recommendations there will be every desire to adopt the recommendations but they will need to be studied clearly. But I do not think that any of the recommendations should stop the work of the department and the Minister for structuring the department as he sees it fit, that's one. But, secondly, if something comes out there that conflicts we can change it, I mean, it is not as if it is going to be written in stone. I really don't see that we need to, at this stage, tie the hands of the Minister and his Director. To be honest, what I see happening here seems to me to actually be strengthening the department. I was surprise because it is clear that they are saying, let's strengthen

the work load, let's split it out so you have two people looking and focusing on something so this person will become adept and more focus on this aspect. The other person will become more adept and proficient and more focus on this other aspect. I don't know, but that seems like strengthening to me, to be very honest. I am not seeing anything sinister in it at all, and I know what is coming down the road in terms of reregistration, but if that will bring a load of work in itself, isn't it better to have the department split so that they are settled before that comes on board? I must confess that I don't see any reason to not support it. I support the movement.

HON. G. HULSE (Leader of Government Business and Minister Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, the Environment and Sustainable Development, and Immigration): Mr. President, I've heard my colleagues but I want to say that with due respect.

MR. PRESIDENT: Senator Hulse has given you the courtesy anyways, Senator Woods, continue.

SENATOR V. WOODS: Thank you, Mr. President. I will be brief. I wasn't going to say anything but I have to admit that I am a little bit concern with some of the lack of clarity given. I know that that may not be much to some, but, Mr. President, I noted that Senator Barnette said that a similar exercise was done in her department; but that wasn't done on the heels of or during the time of a Senate Select Committee Inquiry into your Ministry.

I also heard that you refer to separation of duties but then I heard Senator Duncan refer to separation of powers, and those are two very distinct things. No they don't mean the same thing. They are very different. Separation of duties definitely would allow for any institution to run more effectively and efficiently. Separation of powers, however, can provide a counter system in an institution. And if we are going to pretend here that this is not a significant Bill, then we are doing ourselves a disservice and we are doing a disservice to the people of Belize, who witnessed week after week, a Senate Inquiry and the findings of that.

Who will the new Director report to, the Minister. But that was part of the problem that was aired. Of all the justifications by those who are supporting this, by the Senators who are supporting it, there is still no indication of the urgency for now. Senator Barnette was clear that apparently there has been a couple postponements, I gathered from the three, postponements from the Senate Select Committee. That Senate Select Committee is still ongoing. Whenever it meets again, one would hope, because in light of this, and one would have hoped that the very same Senate Select Committee was at least informed that this was coming because, guess what, you are taking too long. It suggests that that didn't occur. But one would hope then, that you can urge your fellow colleagues in that Committee to set a firm deadline, and if by all means if that deadline isn't met then bring this back. I can appreciate that. But if we are going to play with definitions I think we are running a risk. I am all for separation of duties. It makes a lot of sense, there is a lot of work, but separation of powers now that's a whole different story.

There is no mention here, but just a cursory check with the department right now, and the reasons being cited have already begun to be addressed, this backlog. It has begun to be addressed, in fact, I believe, the figure given when I had called in to check that it was significant, it was about 3 years. So, again, I ask, why the urgency? Is there, perhaps, more that should be done with the meetings and the processes of the NSC, the National Scrutinizing Committee, because as we know how Committee goes, those can be very bureaucratic and maybe that's

adding to the backlog. But I fail to see why we would rush now when clearly there is no real clarity as to the urgency and why not wait, Mr. President, for the recommendations of the Senate Select Committee. And by all means, if that Senate Select Committee, if those of you who are on there cannot commit to a firm deadline that you set, knowing that this is on the horizon, then bring this back out of Committee, I think that would be a reasonable approach but to just rush this through because you want to rush it through I don't think that's rational for putting those forward.

SENATOR A. SALAZAR: Mr. President, I really wasn't going to say anything on this but, I feel compel to as the Chairman of the Committee. I don't think that anybody needs to put any deadline on us, on the Committee. I think that the Committee has worked diligently. We spent over a year of our time in hearings. The issue of the Draft Report is a matter that we are awaiting for some things that were promised to us for us to be able to start our work in earnest. To be frank, those of us in the Committee have not started in earnest because we really have a first step to have completed. And I don't feel there is a need to tell the Committee that we must produce a Report or else. Listen, all of us, the whole purpose of the Committee, of that Senate Select Committee, was so that we could improve on what we have. That was the whole purpose. This Bill is geared towards that same purpose. I don't understand why we would oppose. I understand the concern that, well, the Committee is working, but I don't think that, this comes out of the people who have their shoulders to the wheel. This is where it is coming from. It is what I understand. And it is being put forward to try and alleviate, to try and improve a situation. I don't understand what the opposition to it really is. The Bill is being put forward to try and improve the Ministry. What can be wrong with that? I thought our entire goal was to do so. So it is really difficult for me to comprehend why there would be any opposition. We are all trying to achieve the same purpose. I think it is a good-faith effort. I don't think there is any sinister motive behind it. I am not really seeing what you are seeing. Maybe you have different information from me, I ask that you share it.

So I think it is a good-faith effort. We all are working towards the same thing. Let us continue to do our work in the Committee, and when the report is produce we are going to make recommendations, base on what the state of the law is then. For me that is the end of the matter. I really don't see the big deal. Thank you, Mr. President.

HON. G. HULSE (Leader of Government Business and Minister Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, the Environment and Sustainable Development, and Immigration): Sorry about that, Mr. President and good Senators. At my age you have to visit that little house every now and then, and so we are trying to get through this thing. The last time I did that some years ago, the budget was read. Mr. President, I hear my colleagues, but really there is no sinister motive. Really, man, we are trying to bring some efficiency to this Department, this has been a long road. Major changes happened in 2014 that never happened from the day of Independence. The Nationality Department was started after Independence because we didn't have any citizenship before. Immigration started in 1963 and Nationality started in 1981. We are not changing the department for 5 new persons. What I said, Honourable Senator, is that the Ministry does not foresee any requirement for additional staffing for the Border Management and Immigration Services Department. However, there would be a need for redeployment of 5 administrative officers from mainstream public service to be deployed. Those are AOs and they're being paid already. They are in the system and we want to bring them to the department to help with the efficiencies as well.

This is a thing we had discussed in 2014, when we were looking at how we can

deal with some of the mess we found out in 2013 from the Penner scandal. One of the things we did, which we don't want to lose sight of, is the Nationality Scrutinizing Committee, you know. Remember that that Committee has seated on it a representative from you all organization with equal powers like everybody else. They can stop anything, ask anything, and question anything, and the Minister cannot deal with any Nationality unless that Committee has looked at it, passed in January 6, 2014. And I agree with Senator Courtenay there are some tweaking necessary to the Committee but it rides on the integrity of the people there. The rest are public officers but that doesn't mean that no Nationality can full-scale now through because elections are coming. Not a single Nationality is being issued until that Committee says so. Even to the Guatemalans ones. I may say to the Senator, the Department no longer issues to Guatemalans because there has been a thorough looked into that, and investigation based on some of the questions you asked me. And to see how we will deal with that, there is nothing wrong in giving them Permanent Residency, that won't hurt anybody, they can't vote. And maybe when we solve the Guatemala issue then maybe they can advance, but for the time being all of those things we have done. This is purely to bring some efficiency to a department like the Lands Department. When I was at Lands, for the short time I was there, I looked at the same thing. There were three sections for lands, and I don't want to divert too much, but it was public land; land in transition, called temporary use and enjoyment; and land in private hands called permanent use and enjoyment. And I didn't call it title like the lawyers because you have to get permission to dig a well, cut the trees, etc. So there were three things that I looked at. We can set up a public land thing, a transition which is leases and all of that, and private. And Dr. Paul said, "You know there are 28 different title, no, no", there were three clear sections.

What we are looking at here to is also 3 clear sections: Refugee Section, under Former Director, Maria Marin. And then we will have two other departments, we will have the Immigration and then we will have the Nationality cleared. It is the same staff assigned to the different departments. What caught Maria, I think she kept saying she couldn't handle all the work, and so you had all these other officers, you had in the Nationality Section, for example, Officer in Charge of Passport, Officer in Charge of PR, Officer in Charge of Nationality, Officer in Charge of Customer Service, and all of those waited for the one Director. In the Immigration Section you had the Port Commanders, as I listed all over the country. You had investigation, you had persecution, all waiting for one head, that was fine in 1981, 1982, 1983, 1984, but today when the department is large and a lot of things are happening this is an efficiency move. And there is nothing sinister to it. I do not agree with Senator Courtenay that it disrespect the Committee, it doesn't. The Committee will come with their recommendations. That will be put forward in front of this very Senate to vote on it. And the Senate has to vote on that and nothing can be leaked from that until the Senate votes on it, and that's a problem. It is a problem because I went to court with the Narda Garcia case in a similar thing. But, this Senate will have to approve that Report and it will, and we will look at all aspects, and any other recommendations we will consider. It is all in an effort to move forward, fellow Senators. And I don't see if we are talking about efficiency and performance, etc., and we come back here at the next budget and then you are going to beat up us on this and say we didn't do this, and we didn't do that, I am telling you, the reason why this Ministry has three CEOs, and I am head Minister and two Deputy Ministers, is for the same efficiency. Because when I was at Labour, Local Government, Rural Development, Fire, Metrology, NEMO, and all the rest of them, I had one Deputy Minister and one CEO trying to cover all those departments. We ran into the Penner mess. Now we have Forestry, Fisheries, Sustainable Development, we have Minister Omar Figueroa with his CEO, Mr. Percival Cho. We have Immigration under Minister Beverly Williams with her CEO Edmund Zuniga, and

I as the substantive Minister have functional responsibility for Agriculture and Cooperatives and I have CEO Alpuche. This is all about bringing in efficiency into the department. I ask for the support.

MR. PRESIDENT: 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 provide, as a companion measure to amendments to the Belizean Nationality Act, Chapter 161, and the Passports Act, Chapter 164, for the bifurcation of functions related to immigration and nationality services, to regularize the use of the term used to describe the head of the government department responsible for immigration; and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto, be read a second time.

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 provide, as a companion measure to amendments to the Immigration Act, Chapter 156, and the Passports Act, Chapter 164, for the bifurcation of functions related to nationality and immigration services; and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto, be read a second time.

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 provide, as a companion measure to amendments to the Immigration Act, Chapter 156, and the Belizean Nationality Act, Chapter 161, for the bifurcation of functions related to nationality and immigration services; 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. **Firearms (Amendment) Bill, 2018.**

SENATOR G. HULSE (Leader of Government Business and Minister Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, the Environment, Sustainable Development and Immigration): Mr. President, I rise to move the second reading of a Bill for an Act to amend the Firearms Act, Chapter 143 of the Substantive Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2011; to establish a framework for an heirloom firearm licence; to provide for facilitating the deposit of a firearm for safe keeping in a police station; to provide for new and updated fines and fees; and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

Mr. President, this Bill just seeks to amend the Act *inter alia* to delete or repeal and replace certain definition, establish a framework for an heirloom firearm licence; to provide for the expiration of licences and for facilitating the deposit of a firearm for safekeeping in a police station.

SENATOR M. LIZARRAGA: Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, some quick comments on this. I want to say that I recognize and appreciate the moves that the government is doing in trying to curb crime in this country. But in all earnest to pass these laws we have to be conscious, cognizant of the fact, and I will try and paraphrase what a Chief Justice had said, way back when we were on the Crime Control Council. The very privileges that you are seeking to take away today you will be fighting to regain tomorrow. So we have to be very careful. We live in a free society, and we've enjoyed our freedom. Yes, there's an issue, yes,

we need to tackle the issue, but we must proceed with caution. So all I am going to do, I am going to support these Motions but I am going to throw some suggestions for caution.

First of all, in the Bill before us, section 2A under the definition of ammunition, it states that ammunition, that cartridge casings are now classified as ammunition. I can see, and I can recall as a young man, I used to go a lot to the shooting range. We used to pick up cartridge cases, we used to make jewelry out of it and stuff like that, you know. All of these things now, under this definition, makes this an offense, just a caution. Antique firearm, I am not sure whether antique firearms will be disarmed, it does not say so here. It makes reference to heirloom firearm being disarmed, and certified disarmed by the Commissioner, but it does not say so for the antique firearm. And it says, antique firearm is a firearm more than 20 years old. Well I have guns that are more than 20 years old and I don't consider them to be antique, and they can still function, they can still fire, okay. Also, while it states that there is this new classification for antique firearm, there is no mention of antique firearm license fee in the schedule of fees. There's no mention of antique firearms license fee, and also, there is no mention of antique firearms in the form II, the application for authorization. So, there's no way that you can apply for an antique firearm license, the form does not exist.

When it comes to the application for an authorization to transport a firearm, there again, is no application that I could see, no form that one can use, or it's not certainly not set out in here for the application for transportation. And also in section 3B (5), it says, an authorize carrier shall have a firearm or ammunition in his possession for no longer than is reasonably necessary to deliver the firearm or ammunition to its destination. I don't know what is a reasonable time necessary. That might be too wide.

And then, I have a major problem with section 6. Section 6 replaces the, repealing the previous section 6 and now replacing it with this, this section 6 which speaks to evidence as to ownership. And it says, "for the purposes of persecution for an offense under this Act, a person who is found with any firearm or ammunition; or occupies, controls or is in possession of any land, building, mobile home, room vessel, vehicle, aircraft or other place in or on which is found any firearm or ammunition." Given this definition and simply putting it if there is a firearm case left in a plane, for example, the owners of that airplane can be held responsible. I am going to be corrected by the legal minds, but the same thing happens if it is left in a bus, if it's dropped in your car, whatever, okay. I am not even talking about a gun or ammunition yet, just an empty cartridge. I have a big problem because down on the bottom it says, under (d), "shall be deemed to be in the possession of the firearm or ammunition in the absence of lawful excuse, the proof of which lies on the person." So if somebody, again, comes and throws an empty shell into your yard, just the case, just the empty expended shell, I am not even talking about guns or ammunition, or stashes it in your fence. The last time, we had a similar piece of legislation, I relayed to this Honourable House that my fence was being poked with holes on the outside because I have a fence that is adjacent to an alley, and they were breaking holes in the bricks to stash things for sale. And you would see a car come by the street and somebody would come out and go by the fence, pick up what they have to do, take it to the car, and back again. Legally, if you follow the strict wording of the laws, and I stand to be corrected again, that's my fence. I occupy, I control it, I am in possession of the land. So I cautioned and I ask that we look at this section, Leader of Government Business, seriously. I understand what we are trying to achieve, but, again, the proof of which lies on the person who is the owner of, under section (b), who occupies, controls, or is in possession of the land, etcetera, to me is heavy. And a lot of innocent people can get hurt because you have grandsons living with

grandmothers, and even an expended shell if left in granny's yard or house, or fence, granny can be charged. And that to me is onerous.

I am happy to see that the licensing now has been moved up from 1 year to 3 years. This is good for several reasons: It takes of that pressure that you have to be walking in to the police station with you guns every year to get it license. It also gives the government revenue in advance, so it's a win-win, I believe. I am also fully supportive of section 31A, where it speaks to the illicit trafficking of firearms and the person in possession of two or more illegal firearms etcetera. And I would like to say that I think that the fines being proposed under 31C (1b), where it says, the "license firearm holder uses or allows the firearm to be used by any other person in connection with an illegal act," I think if that is found to be true, a fine of \$2,500 or in default, imprisonment for a period of 2 years is too low. I think we have to discourage this because in a lot of instances, we've seen where people actually rent, license gun holders rent their guns to persons to commit crimes. No man, yes, okay, they rent their guns. How do you think a lot of the ammunition gets to these people? Come on, let's be real, and let us be real. Right, they sell their ammunition, and we've even heard police officers lending their guns for crimes to be committed. So please. The fact is, it's a good law. If someone with a license, or in charge of a licensed firearm allows his firearm to be used for a crime, first of all, it's illegal, you shouldn't even lend, if I am correct, your licensed firearm to somebody else. You have the right in the case of your family or even your employees to get a license for those persons to share/use the gun so to speak. So, I think that the fines under that, Mr. President, again, are too low, because we need to send a clear message that that sort of activity needs to be discouraged.

And then I would suggest strongly, as I will with all these pieces of legislation before us that we need to have a major campaign, public awareness campaign following the passage of these laws before innocent people get hurt. And I sincerely ask that you look seriously again, at that section 6(b). Thank you, Mr. President.

SENATOR O. SALAS: Yes, Mr. President, thank you. I also would be supporting this Bill, but I have a question. Maybe there may be a good reason for what I will point out right now, but I refer us to page 6, section 3A (1), where it lists the different types of licenses and one of them is the gun dealers license. But I do not see that included under section 3 in the list of fees, in the table that lists the relevant fees. The gun dealer license fee is not included. And also in the First Schedule, the type of license being applied for, I don't see gun dealer license include nor in Form II, the application for authorization. I question if that's an oversight or if there is a legal reason why that is not there. Thank you, Mr. President.

SENATOR V. WOODS: Mr. President, I share the same sentiments and I question if we can even pass this Bill, because the gun dealers license is obviously mentioned in the Bill and its critical, and there's no reference to it in that table. I did have a question, and I am not so sure, I mean, I look at the principal Act to be amended and I couldn't locate it there, so if it is there, just correct me, no problem. But in persons applying for a license, I am talking individual, grounds for the Commissioner to revoke such license. As I read through this and the principal Act, what came to mind was, a person who applies for a license, if you check his records and if it showed up that he had, you know, maybe somebody had took him to court and ordered a restraining order, I say he but it can be he or she. Would we still give that person a gun license? I ask out of genuine concern, one of the horrific tragedies earlier this year, refer to the fact that there was an altercation, the persons gun was taken away on the Wednesday or Thursday, but

given back to the person and then the person shot his wife. So, again, I looked for it in the principal Act, I looked for it here, correct me if I am wrong, if the revocation is in there, but I would hope that it's an opportunity to improve or at least we include it as one step to combating to try and mitigate that level of violence in the home. Thank you.

SENATOR G. HULSE (Leader of Government Business and Minister Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, the Environment, Sustainable Development and Immigration): Mr. President, guns, guns, at least we are more advanced than the debate between the Republicans and the Democrats and everybody in the US. They can't get it at all. And so, at least, we are advancing somehow. Let me go out of the order and ask the Attorney General to please explain, to respond.

SENATOR PEYREFITTE: I just wanted to, it seems like there is an issue with the amendment of the principal Act under section 6. The whole tenure of the firearms license to, this new Bill. The message that we want to send is very simple. A firearm is not a toy. It is a very dangerous weapon, and care must be taken to ensure that it is not treated as a toy, as some piece of jewelry, as some fashion piece. You have some people, they treat their firearms, boys and their toys, Mr. President, and they gather around in circles and see who has the biggest gun, or which gun can do what, and which gun can flip this and flip that. A firearm is not a toy, it is not a showpiece. So what the Act does is to say you must be very careful how you deal with your firearm, how you store your firearm, and all things related to a firearm. And, responsibility for firearms go especially to people who have licenses because people who have license firearm think that they can do whatever they want with that firearm, and the answer is no.

Now, when you look at number 6, what we are saying is that the whole concept of custody control and knowledge. The police are on board. There is a Court of Appeal case by the name of Yohan Abadi and the Crown, which establishes custody control and knowledge as the basis to determine possession in general. So if you have, indeed, Senator Lizarraga, a fence that you share with an alley, and ammunition or firearms are found in that fence from the outside, then clearly you have no control over what happens on that side of the fence, and therefore, you do not fall under section 6. In terms of the burden, it is generally speaking, the burden is on the Crown to prove possession, and in this case they are asking the person being accused, they are giving that person the burden, that already exist in the old law, it's there already.

But the new, educationally the new approach by the police has to be, as we had discussions with them on this, is for them to use their discretion, use your discretion. And I like the example you give of a grandmother and a grandson. What we are saying to the grandmother as well, if you find expended shells, is to try and control your grandson, and if you cannot control your grandson, then report your grandson. Because if he is engaged in illegal activity and you don't stop him, or take any steps to discipline him, then you need to feel the full brunt of the law as well. Now, naturally the discretion will be employed, if the police come and find an expended shell in your yard and it's easy for something to be thrown in your yard or through your fence, that is when the entire concept of control comes into play. You have very little control of what's thrown into your yard. Now if you have it under your mattress, then it's difficult for you to, the law would want to know, well who could have thrown it under your mattress from off the street. That is a very different scenario, and so what you have to understand is that the law provides for the policemen to have discretion when dealing with custody control and knowledge, and they are very well aware, I can assure you, of the leading Court of Appeal case of Yohan Abadi.

Where you see no provisions for fees, it simply means that the old fees remain. Where you see no application form, then the application that is required to be made is by a simple letter, an application letter that could lead to further request for information from the Commissioner of Police.

Indeed, Senator Woods, it's not set out as to what would constitute solid reasons for the Commissioner to grant you, or reject an application for a gun license. And if you have, the difficulty we found with that is that you may have a person who may have committed a crime in the past, but that person has straightened up his or her life, they have proven to be good business people, they seem to be living a different life and we didn't want to restrict a person's ability to gain what they need to protect their business simply based on their past. It's widely left to the Commissioner of Police, indeed, but the Commissioner of Police generally would look at your behavior, references that are made on your behalf, and a general investigation into your background is done usually when you are applying for a gun license. So, indeed, there is no set or fast rule, it is totally within the discretion of the Commissioner of Police, and we thought that for now it best be left with a wide discretion so that the Commissioner has no limitation as to what he can consider as necessary to reject or accept a gun license application.

SENATOR G. HULSE (Leader of Government Business and Minister Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, the Environment, Sustainable Development and Immigration): Thank you, very much, and I thank the Attorney General for those explanations. As I was saying, we advance over the US, but I wish we were like, I don't wish we had the same oppression that the Japanese put on Okinawa, that's an island, Senator. But I understand from history that when the Japanese banned every kind of weapon they developed the martial arts known as karate, that's why they became so famous and they fought with sticks, they don't need any gun. That would have helped our situation because this is really dicey.

I hear Senator Lizarraga, and I too am concerned too about cartridges and a farm because you can't control who is passing through there, who is hunting and the cartridge end up all over the place. But I heard the Attorney General saying that, in fact, control is the issue. And I am glad that there are three attorneys in here. I have to make light of this, some may be more expensive than others, but at least if you are caught with the cartridge and you place these three attorney who have been in the Senate today to hear that explanation of control. On that basis I ask that the question be put.

MR. PRESIDENT: Honourable Members, the question is that the Bill for an Act to amend the Firearms Act, Chapter 143 of the Substantive Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2011; to establish a framework for an heirloom firearm licence; to provide for facilitating the deposit of a firearm for safe keeping in a police station; to provide for new and updated fines and fees; 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.

8. Police (Amendment) Bill, 2018.

SENATOR G. HULSE (Leader of Government Business and Minister Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, the Environment, Sustainable Development

and Immigration): Mr. President, I rise to move the second reading of a Bill for an Act to amend the Police Act, Chapter 138 of the Substantive Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2011; to bring the Police Act into conformity with the Public Service Regulations and to strengthen disciplinary control of persons holding or acting in offices in the security services; and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

Mr. President, this Bill seeks to strengthen the discipline within the Police Department, it provides for swifter dispensation of disciplinary matters and aligns the Police Regulations closer to the Belize Public Service Regulations of 2014. It will also provide for the appointment of a Non-Police Adjudicator, thereby it provides for greater transparency in the police disciplinary processes.

SENATOR. M. LIZARRAGA: Mr. President, I am very pleased to see, well let me rephrase, I am pleased to see that we are addressing irregularities. I am pleased to see that we are making an effort to address serious issues within the Police Department. I am not pleased in the sense, Attorney General, that we have so many issues within the Police Department. Nonetheless, we know, we acknowledge that we have issues and we are making an effort tonight to pass laws to address them, and I applaud the government for doing so. Madam President, I would like to draw your attention quickly to some things that caught my eye. Section 7 (1A), speaks to when a member of the department dies and his family is left in the possession of his firearm that he shall deliver those items to the nearest Police Station. Well it doesn't state fines for not doing so, it doesn't state the timeframe or penalties.

Now we come to the section that seeks to deal with discipline. Under section 9 of the principal Act is amended by repealing section 24 and replacing it with the following section 24(1C). And for offences under this section, Madam President, the fine is stated as not exceeding \$150.00 which shall be deducted from his pay in 2 instalments. If the fine imposed is or above \$100.00. So in these cases I am going to be discussing right now, the fine is \$150.00. It can be accompanied by a caution, a reprimand, an extra duties for a period not exceeding 10 days. We believe that some of these offences under this section should attract criminal offences as well, Attorney General. We believe that many of these fines are too low for many of these offences and I will go through them quickly. The first one:

An officer is allowed under this to be absent from duty without reasonable cause for one day but not exceeding two days. To me, in today's day and age, I am sure every officer has access to a telephone or some way of messaging man. If you are going to be absent from work, you don't miss work for two days and don't show up, you send in and you get permission or you apply for leave. I think it's disrespectful and I think that that should be looked at. Or being late for court as well, that especially, that's the part that caught my eye. I think if you are found sleeping on duty, \$150.00, come on. While on duty, in uniform or in a public place being improperly dressed, dirty or untidy, there's no excuse for that, the fine should be heavier than \$150.00. Now, willfully making false statements, entries, or returns pertaining to the activities of the department. I believe that that could be dangerous. I don't know what are the full implications of that but you can certainly see where mischief to this, mischief in this area can lead to cover up, can lead to a lot of things. And I think that's a serious offence, a very serious offence that should carry with it dismissal. To me those are grounds for dismissal. Being inattentive or uncivil while on duty, come on man. You are the law, you have to conduct yourself and comport yourself properly, especially when you are on duty, right. You can't be uncivil as a police officer and then expect to walk away with \$150.00 fine. No, we have to be serious.

Then the incurring debt without any reasonable prospect or intention to pay, well lots of police officers have done this you know, they go and they rub down business people, intimidate them, and most of the times the loans that they get is not \$150.00 or people. So there needs to be some better definition of that. You go incur a debt or some monies that you owe and you don't pay it, over \$150.00 you pay up, you take your fine, you take your lick. No man, we need to send, these people are in charge of upholding the law. If you are going to be serious about tightening up and those thing, do it good.

Failing to provide a full and true statement to financial position when called on by the Commissioner of Police to do so, we are here trying to champion for accountability and transparency, and yet, if this officer is not accountable and transparent with his Senior Commander, he is only going to be charged \$150.00. So if he is involved in some illegal activity, again, take the fine. That needs to be looked at, reclassified or moved into another category.

Persuading or attempting to persuade, procuring or attempting to procure, or assisting a police officer to desert or be cognizant of any such desertion or intended desertion, failing to give information of any desertion or intended desertion to Superior Officer and Non-Commission Officer or Constable, what comes to mind is turning the other way. We've seen a lot planes and a lot of things flying over and landing all over our place, these police officers can say to the other one, boy lets go take a drink, you know, divert you, persuade you to desert, don't be in this area. I mean, the implications of these, if you try coerce somebody into not doing their job, that's a serious offence, and \$150.00 is too low a penalty for that. Sorry, I've jumped a category, and it says that the fines for these, I stand corrected, is \$200.00 but not exceeding \$300.00. My point still stands. You can get extra duties, you can get a reduction of rank or grade and you can get dismissal. Anyhow, I am just saying that if in fact we are going to be looking only at fines, dismissal yes I agree, then let's put so immediately. There are certain things that you should let your officers know, these offences, automatically you will be dismissed, automatically, right. Using obscene language, abusive, threatening or insulting language, or behavior towards a magistrate or a superior officer, you have to have discipline in the ranks man, that's immediate dismissal.

Failing to complete any indictable case file within the period specified by practice, directions and the failure results in dismissal of the case at bar, we've seen so many people, so many cases rather, fall apart, because of, let's say police sloppiness, let's call it that, failure by the police to do their work properly and the fine will be \$200.00 or \$300.00, no man! Failing to provide a blood or urine sample for the testing when directed to do so by an officer, again, we need to look at this list. Failing to provide a specimen for testing for drugs. Striking or assaulting a member of the department, that is dismissal. But you can be fined \$200.00 to \$300.00. Say what you mean and don't leave wiggle room, because that is why we have such a lack of discipline in the force today, because you are friends with the officer, you will only charge him \$200.00, he won't get fire, \$200.00 to \$300.00 is a lot of money. Don't start me off because we just talked about billions of dollars. So I am saying, if you want to have a professional force, and if the intent of this legislation is to get professionalism in the force, then send the message clearly, these things will not be tolerated! No easy fines. Listen to this one, pawning, selling, neglectfully losing, making away with, willfully or negligently damaging or failure to report damage to a firearm, ammunition, etcetera, etcetera, so we know it's a problem in the department, the mere fact is here that they do pawn, they do sell, and they do lose or make away with firearms, and then \$200.00 to \$300.00, no man! I am sorry, if we are going to get serious, let us get serious. And the same things goes for that section I, and 2, for section T,

section U, for section X, for section Z (A). We applaud you for subsection (6).

Mr. President, I wanted to highlight these sections, there is a whole series of sections here, in section 13 and 14 that deals with motivation. To me on the part of the officers, because the fines etcetera, etcetera, goes towards this fund and I like that. I think the Police Fund is a good fund based on what I have read here, and it kind of motivates them because they get a portion of the money that is ceased, etcetera or forfeited. So I like those. All in all, again, I said, Mr. President, I am going to support them, the rest of the Bill we support. But I just think that, I am not joking Attorney General. I think that if we are going to be serious about sending a message, because we are going, when we see the next pieces of legislation before us, we will be heavy handed you know. We are going to be extremely heavy handed, and you know that, Attorney General. So we have to appear to be, at least, holding our police officers to a much higher standard. We have to raise the bar for police as well. Mr. President, thank you very much.

SENATOR V. WOODS: Thank you, Mr. President. I actually had some questions more so than general commentary. And, again, perhaps it's the Attorney General who can respond to clarify. I want to say that I do share the view, or the concern, that this is supposed to be a professional force and these are regulations or certainly guide lines to assist the Commissioner and those at the helm of the police in terms of discipline. I am not so sure if I have quite reconciled that there is a different, there seems to be a different bar for police officers committing offences against the general public. But like I said, I haven't quite reconciled that. I think professional forces should be held at a higher standard. They are leaders in our community so if they commit an offence, how do you justify if it is criminally they will be charged or if it is just this disciplinary action. When a layman commits similar offence, it would be a criminal offence.

Anyways, like I said I had a question. On section 6, and bear in mind, this is on page 3, Attorney General, bear in mind I am coming from the perspective of the private sector and you know, human resources regulations, dealing with the Labour Department. I understand this is the central service, so perhaps there is a different code where it refers to, it's a new section, right, and its referring to, sorry, section 14, the amendment being number 6, and its section 14 of the principal Act. It says, A police officer, specified in subsection (1), may resign from the Department at any time giving to the Commissioner no less than one month's notice and in lieu of that forfeits the month. But then it goes on to 3, and I am only asking if this is constitutional, because from a private sector perspective and with Labour Laws, it's basically saying that this person shall resign without affecting Commissioner's power, no constable on probation shall resign within the first 6 months, so he has to stick it out regardless. And then it goes on to 4, saying that, if he or she resigns, that person then is liable to repay the value of the cost. I am only asking, Attorney General, like I said, this is clearly a professional force, essential service, perhaps there is a different code.

And then, section 15, which is page 3 at the bottom there and it goes on to 4. The onus of returning the property of the government is not on the government, it is on the spouse or the widow, or a family member of the person who dies. I am just curious as to why is the onus only placed on them and not also the government be it through the Commissioner, or whoever he or she delegates, it's their property.

Then on number 9 on that page, which is repealing section 24 and replacing, perhaps again, Attorney General, you can clarify since we have the benefit of you being in the Senate. It says in section 24 (1), a non-commission officer or constable who engages in an act under subsection 2, commits a minor

offence against discipline and is liable on conviction by the Commissioner, or in his absence, a suitably qualified person or officer of the department delegated by the Commissioner to: (a) a caution; (b) a reprimand; (c) a fine; and (d) extra duties for a period not exceeding 10 days. My question is, is it or, or, or? Is it all of these things? Again, I'm coming from a private sector perspective and we do it in stages depending of the level of the offence, it's either a caution, or a reprimand, or a fine, or extra duties. This is not so clear. And then, a similar question on page 6, which is number 3 of that same section, and it's now referring to the major offences. This one, I thought, was a little bit more obvious again, because I would think it was meant to say one of the following, or one or more of the following. But certainly, if you are going, if the offence is such that it requires dismissal, then A through E, I would think is moot. So, I am just asking if that should be or, or, or, or or/and, for clarity, and those were my questions really.

SENATOR M. PEYREFITTE: I will answer your questions first, Senator Woods, then I will deal with Senator Lizarraga. The sixth amendment, section 14, where it talks about without affecting the Commissioner's powers, no constable on probation shall resign within the first 6 months after graduating from the National Police Training. If you look at the subsection (4) which is just below that, what we are saying is that you cannot resign essentially without a penalty. And that, I mean, if you resign, you resign. I mean, if a person graduates from the Academy, and 2 months later decides they don't want to show up for duty, there is very little that you can do to ensure that they show up for duty and work, they can choose to just abandon the post. And that is why there is a provisions in here that deals with once you are absent from your post for 5 straight days, then you are deemed to have abandoned your post and then you will be dismissed. The purpose of 4 is to answer 3, that if you do, do that though, then you will be liable to repay the department the value of its cost of initial recruitment training. So, nobody can stop you from resigning really, but 3 and 4 go together in the sense that 4 will be the price to pay if you resign within 6 months after leaving the academy.

Your other concern was section 15, when a member of the department dies. If you notice, it's written this way, when a member of the department dies, his family or the person in whose possession, so the onus only becomes, or only goes on the person or the family member if that family member possesses the items. So if heaven forbid a police man dies, and his wife or children, or whoever, then gathers his guns, gathers his handcuffs, uniform, whatever, once they have chosen to take possession of it, then the onus is on them to deliver it to the police station. They don't have to take possession if they don't want to, but once they choose to do that then they must take it to the nearest police station, because if they take too long to do that, the possession of government property, and more importantly, if there is a firearm, they would be in illegal possession of a firearm. So what we are saying is that in a case where you have no control, the person who has the authority to carry the firearm has died unexpectedly, then you cannot be deemed to be in possession of that firearm, it would be totally unfair. But what we are saying is if you possess it, you must then take it to the nearest police station.

The other concern you had with section 24, whether or not its 'or', all of them are 'or', and if you look at the next one from you jump to page 6, if you look at the options that you are given, a fine; extra duties; stoppage; reduction of rank grade or dismissal; well if you are going to be dismissed, then all the other penalties become redundant, right. So when you read that in conjunction with, now you go back to 24, the or is just between C or B. Meaning then, your pay cannot be deducted and you be put on extra duties. So at that point you would have a choice. There is a choice between C or D, or there is a choice between A, B, or C, or D. You can't have both C or D. You can only have one. There is nothing in here that says that you can't have both of them. You can be cautioned

and you can be reprimanded, and you can be given extra duties, but you cannot be fined and be given extra duties, because we believe that it will be counterproductive for the police officer to be out there, already upset that they have to work extra duties, plus they are not getting paid. I mean, even though they had brought that upon themselves, we didn't feel like that would be efficient to have them working extra and not getting paid at all. I mean, it's very difficult sometimes to have full fledge workers when you getting paid, much less when you are not getting paid.

Senator Lizarraga, I really want to see how you will be if you actually disagreed with a Bill. You know, anyways, it's late, indeed. But come on, man! Can this government do anything to your satisfaction? Can this government pass a piece of legislation where you can say, listen, I support it, and you sit-down with the full understanding that no piece of legislation is perfect, show me one, Sir, show me one. Show me a piece of legislation that is 100% bullet proof, show me one. There is none. So for you to, on every Bill, on every law, on every amendment to just complain, and complain, and complain, it's a start. Can't the government and the Attorney General's Ministry who you say we don't know what is our purpose, can't we be given credit for making a start? I mean, come on, but then it's like you have to dirty it, like you give me a warm bucket of milk and then you urinate in it, man. Come on, man, can't you just give me a bucket of milk and done. I mean, look, I don't join the social media bandwagon, you know. You are not going to get me to beat up on any constable, or any non-commission officer, who may make a mistake, as all humans do. These people, Senator Lizarraga, go out there every day and put their lives on the line. They scrape up the dead bodies that you and I would not want to do. They go into areas that you and I would not want to go, and they get paid on average \$150.00, \$175.00 per week, constables. So when you say \$150.00 is not enough, which world do you live in? Which police department are you talking about? What we are saying is that there is a need for discipline, there is a need for us to do better, but if after facing murderers, thieves, robbers, all day, if a police constable who is working hard and doing their job, happens to make a mistake maybe just once, maybe he was frustrated, maybe he was overworked, maybe he was in court one day and he just snapped, he made a mistake. You are telling me that the police have to be perfect. So then, all this is doing is saying, listen, because discipline is required of you, discipline is expected of you, we are going to tell you, if you do these things despite getting no pay, and despite the bullets. And the grenades that you have to face every day, we expect discipline from you but if you step out of line, there is a way for us to reprimand you, caution you. I mean, come on man. I mean, you have people commit all kinds of offences in the private sector.

Senator Woods said that they will be held to a higher standard, the police officers. Listen to me, the police officers have a level of responsibility and pressure that none of us in this room could fathom you know. They are under a lot of pressure, and now we see people punching them, and cursing them in public and calling them all kinds of things, but yet, they are to be perfect, 100% of the time, dismiss them right away, one in fraction. But when private sector people evade customs duties, and commit other crimes, they don't say shut down their businesses forever, they are given second chances, and they are allowed to make good, and they are reprimanded. They are not saying you can no longer have a trade license or a business license for life. What they do is they count it up as experience and you move on, you are disciplined, and you are allowed to continue your business. The police officers, what they have to deal with, we have to discipline them, but you will not get me to support the crucifixion of the Police Department, or any members, or any constables, for any infraction that they may commit from time to time, so that is my response to that, Mr. President.

SENATOR G. HULSE (Leader of Government Business and Minister

Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, the Environment, Sustainable Development and Immigration): Thank you, Mr. President. I move the question.

MR. PRESIDENT: Honourable Members, the question is that the Bill for an Act to amend the Police Act, Chapter 138 of the Substantive Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2011; to bring the Police Act into conformity with the Public Service Regulations and to strengthen disciplinary control of persons holding or acting in offices in the security services; 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.

9. Crime Control and Criminal Justice (Amendment) Bill, 2018.

SENATOR G. HULSE (Leader of Government Business and Minister Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, the Environment, Sustainable Development and Immigration): Mr. President, I rise to move the second reading of a Bill for an Act to amend the Crime Control and Criminal Justice Act, Chapter 102 of the Substantive Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2011; to make provision for better maintenance of public safety and order through discouraging membership of criminal gangs and the disruption and suppression of criminal gang activity; and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

Mr. President, the Bill to amend Chapter 102, this we call this the Anti-Gang Legislation, even though it is not a separate piece of legislation, it amends the Criminal Justice Bill. Of the Crime Control and Criminal Justice Act Revised Edition 2011, by removing part I which is the suppression of criminal gangs, and replacing it with the now proposed draft Anti-Gang Legislative Act. This is an Act to provide for the imposition of penalties for persons, groups, or organizations found in contravention of this Act in specified circumstances and to provide for matters connected therewith. The proposed amendment will provide the law enforcement agencies with necessary legislative tool to effectively target the elements of society that are predominantly responsible for the alarming number of murders that have been experienced over the past 5 years. The crime statistics provided by the Belize Police Department, over the last 5 years, show an average of more than 60% of murders, 75 murders annually all being attributed to gang related activities. It also provides for a better interpretation of the Anti-Gang Legislation, the description of a gang member and they are associates, and criminalizes the harboring and concealment of a member of a gang and other specified circumstances. The Act will strengthen the existing legislation on the suppression of criminal gangs and provide the law enforcement agencies with the legislative tools to better control and prevent the incidents of gang related crime.

SENATOR O. SALAS: Mr. President, thank you. This, as the Leader of Government Business has labeled it, Anti-Gang Legislation, it's a very sensitive one. I want to be very careful in how I make my comments on this. In my comments on the budget, I referred to our murder rate, I referred to the enormous challenge that our Police Department is facing, and I pointed out that they need more support, more resources, more training resources. So, yes, they need help. But this Anti-Gang Legislation as we are calling it, I need to say, that this will not solve the problem. It is not only draconian, extremely harsh, it could alienate our youth even more. It's like we are saying there is no hope, there is no hope for anyone who is a gang member, or prophesies to be a gang member, so are we even trying to give rehabilitation a chance? What we could very well do if this Bill passes, is that we will move the gangs from the streets and place them in

prison. What could also happen is that a youth who tends to join a gang, or profess to be in gang are youths at risk for the most part. Youth that are desperate, youth that feel they have no other place to go but to associate with these groups, not necessarily hardened criminals at the beginning. And if these youths are sent to prison, they could very well come out as hardened criminals.

Also, I need to mention that Anti-Gang Legislation like this one that we are considering, has been tried in other countries. It has been tried in Jamaica and has not been successful. I looked at, I did some of my own research and I found similar definition for what we have in the interpretation section for gangs, gang leader, gang members. I think it is brought to the point of being vague and it is almost as if we are borrowing from overseas models, models that, as I have pointed out, have been tried and have not been successful over the long term. Initially, I am certain that the first year, probably the first two years, we will see suppressed gang activity, but that won't last long from what other countries have experienced. The Jamaican experience, for example, is that the Anti-Gang Laws have been difficult to enforce. Confusion arose when police and the public were unclear what conduct is prohibited, what friends, what clothing, what tattoos, or whatever other graffiti or sounds could lead to an arrest.

I have said it, and I repeat, I fear that this law could place a burden to our security and justice system under even greater pressure. Our prison is already overcrowded, this would make it even more crowded. How will we pay for this? Who will pay for that? And, as I said, there could be a flurry of arrests in the beginning and that would bring a lol in crime, but I fear that may not be for long. The poor youth in our city, Belize City, south side will be at greater risk of conviction. And what usually happens is that the crime bosses find a way to not be affected by such legislation. We could create a situation where our prosecutors would have, they already have excessive workloads, this might give them less time and fewer money to handle increased arrest. And the way some parts of this Bill are framed, some arrest could even be frivolous if we are not careful. I also worry and fear that accused persons could very well languish for quite a while in prison awaiting trial. Some of us in society, some of us in this very Chamber could say, good, good because we get them off the streets, out of sight, out of mind. But as has happened in other countries, Appeals Court could very likely rule this Anti-Gang Legislation unconstitutional because it may breach freedom of association as we have it in our constitution.

I mention El Salvador, and I will state their example that they tried a similar Anti-Gang Law where many youth were arrested, but what happened a couple years later? Most of them were subsequently released. In Trinidad and Tobago as well, it has been shown that Anti-Gang Laws cannot solve crime. There is currently a bitter debate raging in Trinidad and Tobago, where just 3 months ago, Anti-Gang Legislation failed to pass the House in Trinidad and Tobago. So, again Jamaica, in 1974, they passed harsh laws, harsh laws such as this one that we are expected to solve crime. At the time murder rate 200 per year. In 2014 now, moving to 2014, 1,200 Jamaicans were murdered in addition to more than 200 killed in police fatal shootings. So, what to do? And I've written about this in other separate instances. I had wondered why the homicide rate in Nicaragua is so low, in 2017 it was just 7 per 100,000. Nicaragua who just, not long ago, were in the throes of a civil war. And yet last year their homicide rate was 7 per 100,000, ours was 42 or so per 100,000. They don't have Anti-Gang Legislation. They did other things. They targeted gang leaders with tactics, not to outshoot them but to outsmart them. They found ways to integrate youth who are unattached and at risk, find ways to involve them, they enforced existing laws. We have good laws in place that could address all the crimes that gangs, gang members commit. They engage the public as respected partners in solving crime, community policing. If

they had zones within the country or their inner cities that were abandoned to the control of criminals, they found ways to end that with targeted development projects for instance. They also used their prisons to correct and to rehabilitate rather than to embed antisocial behavior.

So, to conclude and to basically summarize why I cannot support this Bill, Mr. President, and I have said this before in other forums, what we need are crime solving strategies that are preventative and rehabilitative. Mr. President, this will not accomplish what we hope it will, not for the medium to long term. And defamers of the legislation, I guess, recognize how draconian this piece of legislation is, that it was included under NO 28, that there will be a review. Different provisions of the Bill, parts 1A, 1B, 1C, will be reviewed, a report will be published on the outcome of the review and the report will be Tabled before each House of the National Assembly. This indicates that there is, to me, it indicates that there is a recognition that this is quite harsh. But I don't think this Bill should pass. And so, Mr. President, I will call for a division on this Bill because I need to register my 'no' to this Bill. Thank you very much.

SENATOR M. LIZARRAGA: Mr. President, I will not grace any personal attacks against myself with a comment. And it is typical for people to misunderstand that we are all in here trying to walk away with the best possible piece of legislation, and certainly the ayes will have it, but that doesn't stop us from giving our views, doing our homework, because we do, do our homework, we read it, we may have different views, and there is nothing wrong with trying to improve that which we all know there is no such thing as perfection. We all come here to do our job, so I hope that we don't continue along these personal lines, petty personal lines.

The matters before us here today, Mr. President, are very, very serious matters. We are trying to bring about change to a culture that has taken over our society, a culture in our citizens, a culture in our businesspeople, a culture in our politicians, a culture in gangs. We are not condoning any illegal activity whatsoever. But the problem before us today is a very complex and complicated problem. It's not only a legal problem, it's a sociological problem, it's an economic problem, a cultural problem, or religious problem, values, morals. And we can't seek, yes, we have to send the right message, yes, we have to send the message loud and clear so that our law officers must be protected, that there should be a strong rule and respect for the rule of law, not only from gangs, from all of us. And sometimes, Senator Salas, it is unfortunate that when the scales have been allowed to tip so far, that to bring balanced back to a situation, you had to have add extreme weight, heaviness to try and tilt back the scales, and that is what we have before us today.

I have a lot of cautions and concerns, and a part of me is saying don't even get into it because it won't make sense at the end of the day because the ayes will have it, and the ayes are not really interested it seems in hearing anybody else's views. I understand why you felt the way you felt, right. But nevertheless, you know what, I have a job to do, right. I have a job to do and I am going to share, again, a lend caution. We intend to support this piece of legislation, but I am going to put on record the areas that I have extreme concern about. And let it not be said that we have not supported legislation just to correct that which is constantly repeated in error, Mr. President, that on many occasions we have wholeheartedly, and I hope the Leader of Government Business can correct that misstatement by his colleagues or colleague, because there are many pieces of legislation that we've wholeheartedly supported, that he has presented in this House.

Mr. President, there is a section that concerns me that I did not see addressed, and maybe the Attorney General, in his kindness, can point me to that section if I have missed it. It's a section, I wrote this note when I was looking at section 6, page 8. And I made a note and I said, "what of officers who share information with gangs, should they not be considered by law as gang members too?" And then I said, "why only 20 years in section 3B (1E), knowingly assists, aids, or abet any gang member to carry out gang related activities." And I was trying to make the connection because in other sections the penalties are more.

SENATOR M. PEYREFITTE: What section is it, sorry, 7B?

SENATOR M. LIZARRAGA: Section 3B(1) (b) speaks to knowingly assist, aids, or abets any gang members to carry out gang related activity. And again, putting it into perspective with we are trying to clean up the Police Department too, and we've heard instances where the Police Department has been sharing information with gangs, and that sort of thing. And it is in that light, and perhaps I am missing it, Attorney General, and maybe you can tell me if I am missing it that, a police officer will carry a disproportionate amount of fees, fines, penalties, whatever, if he seeks to get involved with sharing information with the gangs. You see the section before, talks about being a part of the gang, the colors, etcetera, etcetera, right. And then section 6 speaks to a police officer, yes, but does that mean that he is, what does it mean in that instance? Is it that he is a member of a gang, the police officer? No, okay. So that section would cover sharing information with the gangs?

SENATOR M. PEYREFITTE: That's right.

SENATOR M. LIZARRAGA: Okay then that was my question, thank you. That was the clarity I was seeking. Thank you very much. And then under section 3F (2), it says, a person who recruits to a gang, a person whom he knows, or ought reasonable to know is a child, commits an offence and is liable to conviction. But increasingly we see children involved in gangs, page 13, all the way to the bottom, section 3F (2). And the question we have there is what happens if the person recruiting is a child? Because we've seen children involved in gangs and around schools, etcetera, etcetera, increasingly more children. So we wonder if the law makes provision for that, if the person doing the recruiting is a child. In section 3J, a person shall not use a common name or identifying sign, symbol, tattoo, or other physical markings, color, or style of dress, or graffiti, or produce records, sell, perform in public circulate, play a recording, a visual audio, audio visual communication that seeks to promote or facilitate gang related activity. I say, wow! That's censorship at a new level.

SENATOR M. PEYREFITTE: Where is that?

SENATOR M. LIZARRAGA: It's at 3J (1A). Let's deal with the first part of that section, where it says a person shall not use a common name or identifying symbol, identifying sign or symbol. There are lots of gang members today that wear crucifixes that use a rosary. I am telling you. Now I am only saying, I don't know, I use a rosary sometimes, because I am wearing a rosary and I go to Saint Ignatius Church or whatever, and I am in a gang-fested area and the police come around there and they are attacking people with rosaries, I mean, I am just saying, can we...

SENATOR G. HULSE (Leader of Government Business and Minister Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, the Environment, Sustainable Development and Immigration): It has to be if you are doing a criminal activity.

SENATOR M. LIZARRAGA: I understand you. But these people wear these rosaries, MS13, all of them wear rosaries, it's a symbol, an identifying sign maybe, okay. Of course they have tattoos, etcetera, etcetera, I am only saying, these are the things that jump out at me. So, again, I am happy to see that the force is going to be motivated, that 10% of any value of property forfeited will go towards their cause. We are glad to see that the violence has been redefined to include violence against property. Although I don't know if I am quite clear, if that includes graffiti, if that include, I don't know what all that includes. And maybe if the Attorney General would be so kind, as to give us some explanation of section 5A. And then on section 5K (4), arrest without a warrant. It says, a person arrested under subsection 2 shall be brought before a relevant judge within a period of 24 hours, beginning with the time of arrest. And I was wondering, what happens if this person gets arrested on a Friday night or a Saturday?

And then, prohibitions against weapons in public places, we certainly see that it's intended to address knives and pointed objects, and pocket knives, cutting devices, etcetera, but it clearly states, that offensive weapons shall not include firearms subject to the Firearms Act. And we were wondering why? It's 1(B) section 6, subsection (5), that whole section deals with removing blades or pointed objects from public places but it does not state that an offensive weapon will be firearms subject to the Firearms Act, and we were just wondering why, because we are talking about guns. And then, when it comes to the Schedule, it says in the back, Schedule II, gang related activity serious offences, again, it lists a whole host, but it does not list corrupting politicians or officials, or bribing public officials or police officers, and we think that that should be a serious gang related offence, because a lot of the times, these people have protection either from police, or public officials or politicians.

Again, Mr. President, we understand, perhaps, the need. We hear your concerns, Senator Salas, but we would like to put on record that we need to address this whole scourge before us from a multifaceted approach. Well, I hear you, and we were very disappointed quite frankly, that a lot of the social programs needed to accompany these people. You see, I had forgotten and I need to mention this. I listened to Commander Howell, is that his name?

MR. PRESIDENT: Howell Gillett.

SENATOR M. LIZARRAGA: Yes, Howell Gillett. With your permission, Mr. President, I want to quote some things that he said on his morning talk show on Channel 5 the other day. You see, he made a lot of good points and he made the fight for the social ills. He spoke to the fact that mother's, of course, know, and we saw on these videos mothers being and women being very aggressively involved in those things, in these whole things. He spoke about community building. He spoke about many other social issues that contribute to the present situation, social issues which we still believe are not addressed in the budget today. He also spoke that people told him that the police should not be going after marijuana because they are trying to make a living and trying to make money. He said this. So the use of marijuana, and the passage of that law, if I might add, has spurred this demand, spurred this demand with no regulations that were passed to address supply. So these people are fighting now to make supply, and the citizens are telling the police, "You shouldn't be coming after us because we are just trying to make some money." Mr. Howell said that there is rivalry due to the marijuana trade. He came out and said that clear. He attributed a lot of this violence to the marijuana trade. He admitted as well that parenting skills needed to be improved, we don't see anything for strengthening those in the budget. As a matter of fact, most of the social programs in the budget have been cut. He acknowledge and thank the church for getting involve, because you need to start

working on values. He said that we need to start working on strong families, because we all know that the absence of strong families is what create the need for belonging, this belonging that they feel that they need gangs in the families. He also said that people told him that, if we don't have jobs, then we need to resort to crime, and that's a quote direct from him. This is why it's important that we focus on the economy and providing good sustainable jobs. The jobs that we promised for all of these gang members, done, not sustainable. He said something very important, he said they did a survey, and of the 13 schools that were not doing well, he says, nutrition was a key factor. And I am going to quote, he said, "If we don't do something at this young age, we will deal with it as a police issue at a later age." He acknowledge this, and yet a lot of our programs aimed, or designed, it is claimed to help the young people, have been cut. And he also, of course, acknowledges that crime is bad for businesses and that he feels horrible, going down streets and seeing all the businesses close early because they are afraid to be open late at night.

So, Mr. President, while we are at this crossroad, while we have the need, to put an end, yes, to this lawlessness, this lack of respect for the police, this lack of respect in many cases that the police has for citizens and their rights as well. We need to be cautious, because I will tell you, Senator Salas is right, if we are not very careful of how we handle this matter, it will and can get out of control. So, all the more reason, we need to be sober, you cannot take it personal, we are all here trying to fight for the best for our country. A lot of consultation should have taken place with this Bill before. And I made mention to the President today, when we were on our lunch break, I said, Mr. President, we need to get the Committees of this Senate meeting because we have not formed our Committees, we have not met as Committees and a lot of these differences of opinions and views could be sorted out in Committees before they come here, so that when they come here, Attorney General, we are basically well advanced, and we would have listened to one another before and shared that good relationship we have outside these Chambers, unfortunately. I don't know why we don't have the relationship in here that we have outside. No, nobody is here and there are no cameras here, I don't know why you are grandstanding, there is nobody here, it's only us here. So we are here alone, at this late hour trying to work and trying still, to put in our best. So listen, man, learn to listen to one another. Let us learn to listen, please, Mr. President, let us learn to be humble, none of us are perfect. Let us learn to listen, and learn, we all have different experiences, we all have different points of view, and we all need to contribute to this country. And no one of us is more or less important than the other, just like no one of our citizens is more or less important than the other. It doesn't matter if they live in the southside or in northside. We have an obligation to protect their rights, under the Constitution. We have an obligation to give them an opportunity. We have a lot of constitutional obligations and a lot of responsibility, and you more than anybody should be fully aware of them.

Mr. President, I submit those comments for sober consideration, not to grandstand, not to be controversial, for nothing else than to contribute because we all have a responsibility here man. We are equals, in this room we are equals, we should be, okay. Thank you, Mr. President and colleagues.

SENATOR M. PEYREFITTE: Yes, Mr. President. I could just address Senator Lizarraga's relevant concerns first. There was a question in the Schedule, if politicians and other people could be involved in that. Well I mean, that is covered in section 3B, that is a general provision that covers everything. A person who whether or not he is a gang member, politician, lawyer, priest, whatever, if you are not a gang member, but you know you only assist, look at B, knowingly assist, aids, or abets any gang member to carry out a gang related activity, 20

years in prison. If 3B(1), A person, which means any person. If you look at, I think he raised a concern about section 3J (1). Your concern is that something that is otherwise innocent like a cross, a person could be found guilty of something like that, but look at the last sentence of that 3J (1). It's not just that you use it, but you use it as a means of communication to promote or facilitate gang related activity. So, a police officer sees you with a crucifix on a chain walking down the street, clearly you are just wearing it, you are not using it to promote gang related activity, so you wouldn't fall under that section. The section that deals with taking before a judge, even though that we will have a relevant judge to deal with these matters, the judges will just have to be available within the 24-hours. The police officers, if they detain somebody, and if you notice it's within 24-hours, so if they detain them on a Friday at 2 o'clock, then just take them to the court before 5 o'clock. If they detain them Friday night, then a judge or any other person available will have to, and they choose to charge them, then the judge will have to make himself or herself available. There is no law against the Chief Justice designating certain times for judges to sit. And I have been involved in cases where we have sat on weekends to do cases in the interest of time, or in the interest of saving time. So there is nothing against judges adjusting their schedule in order to accommodate this Act. After all, these relevant judges will accept that they have a specialty situation to deal with and they would make themselves available. I think those were the technical points, the questions that you had.

I wanted to just address Senator Salas on his position essentially, that this piece of legislation can't be supported by the NGO Community. Mr. President, I don't accept that we can do nothing. I don't accept that we should just let the criminal gangs roam free as they wish, even though they present a particularly dangerous situation in our country. These young men have decided that their criminal activities should best be done through gangs. And, Mr. President, if that is their position, then the government has a responsibility to address gangs. Now, Senator Salas, you ask what if a person is a former gang member, or a reform gang member? Well then he has nothing to worry about. It affects freedom of association in no way, get together with your friends and form a dominoes club, or a poker club, or a chess club, or a checkers club. Nothing is wrong with anybody saying you can't form an association. But if you are a part of an association and that association only goal is to cause terror in Belize, then I am sorry, Senator Salas, this piece of legislation is necessary. We cannot, and, yes, it is draconian, yes, it is tough, but their behavior is also draconian. They show no mercy. They show no consideration. They show that they give two hoots about law abiding citizens. And so, the government and the people's representatives have to let these gang members know that the people of Belize will not tolerate gang activity. And we are sending the message to everybody, to police officers, to coast guard, to everybody, anybody. You don't have to be a member of a gang, but if you help anybody to engage in criminal activity that is destroying our social fabric, the time has come for that to be addressed. We cannot tolerate that anymore, and, to be frank with you, we cannot tolerate the cuddling of gang members. I mean, the previous piece of legislation, we felt no love for the police. In this piece of legislation it's like a lot of love for these gang members, it's too draconian, you care so much about these gang members. And the position of the government is that, if you are a member of a gang you are a criminal. If you are a member of a gang or a group whose sole purpose is to commit criminal activities, then there will be no mercy for you. You will be dealt with in an aggressive fashion to the fullest extent of the law. If they believe, if any gang member believes that this is too draconian, then stop being a member of a gang, stop being a member of a criminal gang. You cannot complain that the system is dealing with you harshly when your purpose is to cause terror to hard working innocent people. And then people out there who are working hard, these constables who are making \$175.00 per week, how will they feel if we have special programs for criminals but we

don't have special programs for decent people. No man! No, no, no! If you are a member of a gang, tighten up, brace yourself for some serious prison time, or stop engaging in criminal activity, it is that simple. Thank you, Mr. President.

SENATOR V. WOODS: Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, I read this Bill like I am sure everybody did with a lot of concern given the current state that we are in. After reading it, however, and checking it against the principal Act, I am not so sure why these amendments will do any better than what the principal Act laid out. One example, the principal Act said, under section 3 (1), which is repealed and changed right, but it said, any person who in a public place: (a) wears any item of dress; or (b) wears, carries, or displays any badge, label, insignia or article with the intention of displaying his membership of or support for a criminal gang is guilty of an offence on liable summary conviction to a fine not exceeding \$2,000 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 1 year, or to both such fine and imprisonment.

Senator Brown, earlier in the day, much earlier in the day, referred/made reference to a video that went viral regarding what appeared to have been a gang gathering of sorts at a funeral. So I'm at a lost as to why the current Act, the principal Act, it could have been applied if I read that correctly. So I am not sure, Mr. President, why these changes. Is the intent of the changes to make the political will present on the part of the police because it should have been there even under the former Act. Obviously I am concerned with the comments made by Senator Salas because, indeed, there has been research done and there is examples in other regions. Indeed, Belize itself, under this government, has invested in several recommendations, reports, crime councils, that had brought out some very, I thought, good recommendations. They are not short term. People didn't become gang members overnight so I don't expect the solution to be solved overnight. But there are real recommendations, Mr. President, that certainly could aid and assist the police in what the objective is here for, or it has been laid out to be, as well as aid and assist the larger society, the society at large. I am not so sure why those haven't been, doesn't appear that they've been looked at, or certainly amendments to whatever resource is required and adjustments doesn't appear to have been put in place to take those on. So I hear the comments of Senator Salas. If we are a country that says you are innocent until proven guilty. I also question some of these, some of the wording in this Bill, and some of the measures.

Under section 33 (1), it says, no, this is under the amendment, a person shall not use a common name, although it doesn't define what a common name is, or identifying sign, symbol, tattoo, or other physical marking, color and style of dress, or graffiti or produce record, sell, perform in public, circulate or play a recording of a visual audio, seek to promote or facilitate gang related activity. The question I ask reading it is, what common name? The question I ask is, what identifying sign and symbol? Is it something that we are all supposed to know? I mean, in other Bills, there is normally a Schedule, it's not limited to, but that wasn't here. That certainly would help for when you look at other sections of this which is a terminology that I am not so sure of how it find itself in a Bill, or in any piece of law, where it says, and there are several references to it. For example, under 3C (1), a person who harbors a person whom he knows, or ought to know, is a gang member. I don't know how the terminology 'ought to know' find its way in law. And it's throughout there in this Bill. I have a son, sometimes they bring friends over, sometimes they ask to stay a couple days at a time, as a parent, I try to do my best to find out as much as you can, I am not so sure I ought to know, this is why I am saying that it would certainly help if the common name, the insignias or the sign. I always find it interesting when we watch news and some of the persons being interviewed, or some of the persons shot and killed and they

have varying tattoos and insignia, and other people can immediately say, oh, it's from that gang, or that gang, or that gang. So clearly there is some knowledge of what those are and it certainly would help.

I had to go back, because I recall in 2011, and I wanted to double check if I was right on my recollection, and I checked on the last amendment made to this Act which was in 2010. But in 2011, you know, this country had a Gang Press release. Gangs actually issued a press release, that happened, it happened in September of 2011, and it happened twice, you had the Supal Gang, the George Street Gangsters, Gill Street Gang. I found that interesting because then clearly there was a knowledge of who the gangs were, certainly who their leaders were too, because they spoke. And then there was another press release, so, again, I am not so sure...

SENATOR M. PEYREFITTE: Correct, so now when the police come and arrest them it will be in abetting.

SENATOR V. WOODS: So I am not so sure, I am sorry, did I say that?

SENATOR M. PEYREFITTE: No, no, I am saying it. It's a pity you didn't talk before me. I didn't know you wanted to speak.

SENATOR V. WOODS: Oh, I didn't know I had to inform you, but I will remember that.

SENATOR M. PEYREFITTE: If you want an explanation.

SENATOR V. WOODS: I am not asking for an explanation. It's coincidental, I guess, that we, I would have an Attorney General, and the one before that was also Attorney General, and perhaps that should be a Standing Order that at all times the Attorney General should be a Member of the Senate.

But as I was saying before I was interrupted, Mr. President, my point is that the original law, had it been applied, could have addressed some of these things, or should have addressed some of these things that now the new law with the more, with the stiffer penalties and more draconian measures are attempting. So is it that there's been some research or study that has proven, that we tried to follow this but it didn't work? And the reason it didn't work is because we needed stiffer measures. Because in 2011, for sure, in one week you had the identification of several criminal gang members. There was even a meeting with the Prime Minister, so I am not so sure why this is being touted as the measure to be taken.

I go back to Senator Salas's point because I think it speaks to human rights, and it can't be something that there is human rights for some and there is not human rights for others. And as a person that I believe that you are innocent until proven guilty. I believe in human rights. A lot of this stuff in here is very subjective, and that's concerning. What's concerning is that, what is also concerning is that if you are monitoring and investigating, for example, over the weekend, or any other weekend where shots were fired, it is clearly a criminal offence. Whether you are in a gang or not, that's an offence. So is it that we need more strengthening of our investigative branches?

Mr. President, I like everybody else, we worry for Belize. We worry about the level of crime, certainly worry about the increase of what appears to be gang warfare which is what's touted. I asked for some of the common names prior to coming to today's session to see if they are really as common, because there is no definition in here for common, and there were about at least 10 gang names that

were given to me. I was that there is a lot more. Then I asked for the location of the gangs to see if its information that is so readily available, and it appears that it's quite readily available. So again, I don't understand why the original Act, which provides for a lot of this already, perhaps not in such great detail, why it hasn't been applied then? And the last time this Act was amended was in 2010. So we certainly had sufficient time, and we certainly knew from then the names. We also knew some of the leaders, because like I said, they actually sent out a press release, there were actual interviews and they associated themselves with gang.

Mr. President, I will close on, again, re-emphasis that there are some stellar reports out there, some stellar reports that were commissioned under this government. And that's a fact, they have some really good recommendations. No they are not draconian, no they might not have the military force on the street, but they have been proven in other jurisdictions to make that positive impact that we are looking for. And so I am asking, Mr. President, aside from all of this brute force, this draconian measure which the Attorney General did mention that it is, can we also get the commitment to those other things because we haven't tried them. And perhaps we are missing a big part of that puzzle. It's been proven time and time again, no they are not, they certainly not the things that people get excited about, but they are actions and interventions that address a lot of the root causes, that address a lot of the social factors that involve children and women in this gang culture, and addresses a lot of the rehabilitation effort. Don't get me wrong, Mr. President, I don't want to be misunderstood. Anybody that commits a criminal activity should be dealt with to the fullest extent of the law. I don't ever want to be misinterpreted or misunderstood. But I am putting to you, that there are so many other recommendations documented with proven research commissioned under this government that I think we are not addressing and we should really make an effort to do so sooner rather than later, with no need to reinvent the wheel, it's all there. Thank you, Mr. President.

SENATOR E. SMITH: Thank you, Mr. President. I won't be long. As I guess we already have been saying that there needs to be something done as it relates to crime we've also said that we are prepared and we are willing to work with any group or groups to assist in dealing with the situation. I have two concerns at this point in time. Again, I want as my colleague on the other side mentioned just now, I don't want it to be misconstrued that we are against punishing criminals. My concern though, is the fact that maybe it would have been best if we would have done some probably meetings with stakeholder groups and to discuss some of these that we have, some of these measures that we have in here. And the concern from me really is the fact that we have not had a chance as an organization, the group that I represent. Given that we just got this over the weekend to really sit, and meet, and go through this as thoroughly as we would need to, to present a unified position on this. And so for me, Mr. President, while I agree that we need to put measures in place to address the situations, I am not sure that I have the go ahead to either support or not support this Bill at this time. Again, I just want to be clear that we support the matter of dealing with crime, because we have seen where it has gotten out of control and we realize that we must put things in place to address it. Again the concern that I have is that maybe we should have done some sort of, I am not sure if it is consultation, but some means of getting to our organizations and other organizations to maybe have a little sit down so that we could better understand and could question, you know, maybe some of the concerns that we would have had before today. As I said again and I will repeat, we have not had the chance to really sit and go through and to make a formal position, so it puts me in a situation where, let's say, in a funny predicament, and I will end it at that. Thank you, Mr. President.

SENATOR G. HULSE (Leader of Government Business and Minister Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, the Environment, Sustainable Development and Immigration): Thank you, Mr. President. Just a quick comment, if you read the part of the principal Act that's being repealed and replaced with this, you can see that, in fact, this is really fine tuning and strengthening the Act completely, it defines a gang, it makes it clear. And as Senator Peyrefitte said, the gang is an organization or an association, combination or other arraignment consisting of 3 or more persons, whether formally or informally organize, that commits or has as one of its objects and purpose the commission, or facilitating the commission of a serious offence. It is as simple as that. You cannot go around with the intention to commit serious crime down. And you cannot be in a group of 3 or more to do that. And yes I hear, Senator Woods, the previous legislation had elements of that, but it also had elements that talked about the DPP appointing a committee, the principal Act that we are repealing, the portion says, the gang is an organization or association, or a combination of persons which is formed for, or which acquires the purpose of committing or facilitating the commission of any of the offences set out in section 5(2) of this Act. And 5(2) had 5 offences, offences under the Misuse of Drugs, drugs related killings, offences under the Firearm, kidnapping and blackmail and conspiracy to commit robberies. The new amendment puts in a slew of offences. Everything you can imagine, and it goes in detail, and it doesn't have this issue, it has the Committee but it doesn't have it in that sense. In other words, use a local term just to volunteer a reason why this has not worked. It was kind of weak, it was kind of powder puffing if you like, these guys who were doing these things, almost like, okay, here is a piece of legislation but you all need to understand. This one is draconian to the point. You are killing everybody out there, you are committing crimes, I am sorry to the bottom of my heart for all the difficulty you had and that you had a fatherless-home, and that your mother was young, and that you were left with grandparents and you didn't finish school, and I am sorry for all of that, and the systems needs to put into place for that. And I agree with that 100%. All sorts of systems.

But you have to remember, it's just like when we tried to do the gender policy, with due respect to the church, the state has a responsibility to deal with all people equally. And we said at the time, let the church say to those who commit sins, change your sinful ways, the same things applies here. There are lots of organizations, NGOs especially, churches especially try to get these guys, but you cannot tolerate a bunch of guys walking around bravado firing guns, doing this and that and going to show you how bad they are bad. Well the state has to show them how bad they should not be bad. And that is the purpose of this piece of amendment, and I hope it's applied.

I hear Senator Salas, but I am sick and tired of in this system we have these things. You know one of the things they accused President Obama of is he was going to bring in Sharia law, there are lots of states you know, we don't want to list them off, we don't have anything like that here, but go there, go to Singapore and see if you can put graffiti or anything there, they will flag you good. That is what had happened when President Clinton asked for pardon for a little boy, but not in Singapore, you cannot even spit on the street, and that might be considered draconian. But to have a proper society sometime you have to bring down the hammer. I agree with Senator Lizarraga on that point. Please put the question.

MR. PRESIDENT: Honourable Members, the question is that the Bill for an Act to amend the Crime Control and Criminal Justice Act, Chapter 102 of the Substantive Laws of Belize, Revised Edition 2011; to make provision for better maintenance of public safety and order through discouraging membership of criminal gangs and the disruption and suppression of criminal gang activity; and

to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto, be read a second time.

Mr. Clerk, there is a division called.

CLERK: A division has been called on the Crime Control and Criminal Justice (Amendment) Bill, 2018.

Senator Godwin Hulse	-	Yes	Senator Dr. Carla Barnett	-	Yes
Senator Michael Peyrefitte	-	Yes	Senator Macario Coy Sr.	-	Yes
Senator Stephen Duncan	-	Yes	Senator Aldo Salazar	-	Yes
	-	Yes	Senator Eamon Courtney	-	No
Senator Valerie Woods	-	No	Senator Paul Thompson	-	No
Senator Markhelm Lizarraga	-	Yes	Senator Rev. Henry Brown	-	Yes
Senator Elena Smith	-	Abstain	Senator Osmany Salas	-	No

MR. PRESIDENT: We have eight (8) Senators who voted “Yes”, four (4) Senators who voted “No” and one (1) that abstained. I think the ayes have it.

Bill read a second time.

10. Protection of Witnesses Bill, 2018.

SENATOR G. HULSE (Leader of Government Business and Minister Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, the Environment, Sustainable Development and Immigration): Mr. President, I rise to move the second reading of a Bill for an Act to provide for the protection of witnesses in criminal proceedings, by enhancing the ability of a witness to give testimony in a judicial proceedings and to cooperate with law enforcement authorities; and to provide for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

Mr. President, the aim of the Protection of Witnesses Bill is to provide measures to secure the protection of children and other vulnerable witnesses and to lessen the intimidating nature of criminal proceedings. The objective of the Bill is to provide for the granting of investigation and witness anonymity orders and the conditions to be satisfied for the granting of those orders. The Bill further provides the court with the power to make directions to special measures to be taken in respect of children, victims, to certain serious offences or where the quality of evidence given by a witness, is likely to be diminished because of fear or distressed. The specific measures that may be taken provide for the screening of witness from the accused, evidence to be given by a live link, evidence to be given in private, video recorded, evidence to be admitted as examination in chief, video recorded cross examination and re-examination. The examination of witnesses through an intermediary and the appointment of a legal representative to cross examine witnesses on behalf of the defender, recognizing that the latter provision will incur substantial resources that are not yet available. This will only be commenced by Ministerial order. The Bill also provides for witnesses out of the jurisdiction to give their evidence via live link.

The Criminal Justice System in Belize has experienced difficulties in apprehending offenders and securing convictions for some of the more serious offences, this has weakened public confidence in the effectiveness of law enforcement officers and the court system and may have in turn lessen the deterrent effect of crime and punishment, putting the general population at risk of greater harm in 2017. As mentioned before, 142 murders were committed but only 42 charges were laid. One of the major reasons for the low solving rate is the unwillingness of witness to give evidence, obviously, due to fear of reprisals.

SENATOR M. LIZARRAGA: Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, before I begin, I just want to make a small correction, page 264 of the budget list pay scale for police men, and I think you will note that the pay scales start around \$263.00 per week.

Mr. President, brief comments again. We are particularly pleased to see this Bill before us that seeks to provide for the protection of witnesses in criminal proceedings. Too many times we have seen cases fall apart, and we all know of the horrible conviction rate that we have. While I talk about conviction rate, I want to refer back quickly, if you permit, Mr. President, to something that the good Senator from the churches mentioned earlier that the time is way past due as well, to strengthen all these things to have that forensic lab that has been promised to us for so many years. But anyhow, Mr. President, back to the Protection of Witnesses Bill. We would like to suggest, Mr. President, that while we realize that this seeks to address injury or death that was caused by a firearm or imitation firearm, or any offence involving a firearm, imitation firearm, or any weapon of offence and it mentions that these offences are murder, attempted murder, man slaughter, robbery, attempted robbery, rape, and attempted rape. We were wondering, Mr. Attorney General, why, for example, human smuggling was not put into this, kidnapping, money laundering, drug trafficking, police brutality, organized gang activity, threats, because we've seen a lot of witnesses that have been threatened, or an attempt has been made to influence them and/or their families through intimidation. And we throw those out for suggestion to be added perhaps.

There is a section under section 15 (2A) on page 14, and it says that, in determining whether the measures to be specified in order are necessary for the purpose mentioned, the court shall have regard in particular to any reasonable fear on part of the witnesses. Subsection (a), says, "that the witness or another person would suffer death or injury." And I am wondering if the use of the word would is appropriate there, because how can they know for sure, shouldn't it be could? And I was just wondering why the word would, there's no way of knowing for sure, somebody would suffer. But perhaps I can get an explanation. I am sure there is a legal explanation for it. But I am saying, maybe if that person is fearful, or somebody is fearful for another person and they are saying, look, I mean, this person could suffer death or injury. That would not be better in that situation.

And, again, when we see Schedule I as well, we were wondering again if those previously mentioned additions could not, in fact, strengthen this piece of legislation, and again, add human smuggling, kidnapping, money laundering, drug trafficking, police brutality, organized gang activity, threats or intimidation, especially of witnesses in an ongoing investigation or case.

Thank you very much, Mr. President. It's been a long day, I hope I am not going to be called upon for any other thing else tonight, any other business. I had forgotten to welcome my colleague, I am sorry that you came on board for this marathon, I think this is a first for us. But thanks again colleagues and good night.

SENATOR O. SALAS: Yes, Mr. President, very brief. I want to say that I wholeheartedly support this Bill. It is long overdue. I am very happy that we have this now. And I want to highlight particularly sections 25 to 28, screening witness from accused. This has been needed for so long. Because we have not had this, because that has not been used or allowed up to now, some horrific crimes have gone unpunished. Child abuse for example, where families would never allow their child to face the accused, especially when an attorney would probably try to tear them apart. So screening witness from accused, I am very happy that this will soon be in place. And evidence by live link has also been very much needed. There has been very instances when visitors to a country have been mugged or even raped for example, and have chosen to head home almost immediately. And, in some instances, the accused has gone scot-free. This now aims to correct that and so very happy that this in place, evidence in private and video recorded evidence as well. So I just point that out and I congratulate the framers of this Bill, and I support it strongly.

SENATOR G. HULSE (Leader of Government Business and Minister Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, the Environment, Sustainable Development and Immigration): Thank you, Mr. President. I move the question.

MR. PRESIDENT: Honourable Members, the question is that the Bill for an Act to provide for the protection of witnesses in criminal proceedings, by enhancing the ability of a witness to give testimony in a judicial proceeding and to cooperate with law enforcement authorities; 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.

Bills read a second time.

III COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE SENATE ON BILLS

MR. PRESIDENT: Honourable Members in accordance with Standing Order 54, the Senate will now resolve itself into a Committee of the whole Senate, to consider the Bills that were read a second time.

Honourable Members, I will now take the Chair as the Chairman of the Committee of the whole Senate.

Members in the gallery, can you please excuse us for this portion of the Committee Meeting. Thank you.

(In the Committee of the whole Senate)

MR. PRESIDENT in the Chair.

1. General Revenue Appropriation (2018/2019) Bill, 2018.

Clauses 1 to 3 agreed to.

Schedule agreed to.

2. **Central Bank of Belize (Amendment) Bill, 2018.**

Clauses 1 and 2 agreed to.

3. **Customs and Excise Duties (Amendment) Bill, 2018.**

Clauses 1 to 3 agreed to.

4. **Immigration (Amendment) Bill, 2018.**

Clauses 1 to 11 agreed to.

5. **Belizean Nationality (Amendment) Bill, 2018.**

Clauses 1 to 8 agreed to.

6. **Passports (Amendment) Bill, 2018.**

Clauses 1 to 3 agreed to.

7. **Firearms (Amendment) Bill, 2017.**

Clauses 1 to 14 agreed to.

8. **Police (Amendment) Bill, 2017.**

Clauses 1 to 19 agreed to.

9. **Crime Control and Criminal Justice (Amendment) Bill, 2017.**

Clauses 1 to 4 agreed to.

10. **Protection of Witnesses Bill, 2018.**

Clauses 1 to 37 agreed to.

Schedules 1 and 2 agreed to.

All Bills were reported back to the Senate without amendment.

IV REPORTING AND THIRD READING OF BILLS

**SENATOR G. HULSE (Leader of Government Business and Minister
Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, the Environment, Sustainable Development**

and Immigration): Mr. President, it's late, if I may read all the Bills and then the recital.

MR. PRESIDENT: Yes, please.

SENATOR G. HULSE (Leader of Government Business and Minister Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, the Environment, Sustainable Development and Immigration): Mr. President, I rise to report that the Committee of the whole Senate has considered the following Bills entitled:

1. **General Revenue Appropriation (2018/2019) Bill, 2018;**
2. **Central Bank of Belize (Amendment) Bill, 2018;**
3. **Customs and Excise Duties (Amendment) Bill, 2018;**
4. **Immigration (Amendment) Bill, 2018;**
5. **Belizean Nationality (Amendment) Bill, 2018;**
6. **Passports (Amendment) Bill, 2018;**
7. **Firearms (Amendment) Bill, 2018;**
8. **Police (Amendment) Bill, 2018;**
9. **Crime Control and Criminal Justice (Amendment) Bill, 2018;
and**
10. **Protection of Witnesses Bill, 2018.**

Mr. President, I repeat that the Committee considered these Bills and passed them without amendments.

I now move that those Bills be read a third time.

MR. PRESIDENT: Honourable Members, the question is that the General Revenue Appropriation (2018/2019) Bill, 2018; Central Bank of Belize (Amendment) Bill, 2018; Customs and Excise Duties (Amendment) Bill, 2018; Immigration (Amendment) Bill, 2018; Belizean Nationality (Amendment) Bill, 2018; Passport (Amendment) Bill, 2018; Firearms (Amendment) Bill, 2018; Police (Amendment) Bill, 2018; Crime Control and Criminal Justice (Amendment) Bill, 2018; and Protection of Witnesses Bill, 2018, be read a third time.

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

Bills read a third time.

A D J O U R N M E N T

SENATOR G. HULSE (Leader of Government Business and Minister Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, the Environment, Sustainable Development and Immigration): Mr. President, before I move I the last Motion, may I take the opportunity, with your permission, to wish all my colleagues a very happy Easter and to be safe, please, wherever you are travelling you and your family, and please enjoy, and I hope to see all of you back at the next Senate Sitting. I move that the Senate do now adjourn.

MR. PRESIDENT: Honourable Members, the question is that the Senate do now adjourn.

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

The Senate now stands adjourned.

The Senate adjourned at 9:55 P.M. to a date to be fixed by the President.

PRESIDENT
