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**TO:** Library Assistant II  
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**DATED:** July 18<sup>th</sup>, 2022

**SUBJECT**

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Announcement

**TOBAGO HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

THURSDAY JUNE 23<sup>RD</sup>, 2022

**The House met at 10.20 a.m.**

**PRAYERS**

[MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER *in the Chair*]

**ANNOUNCEMENT**

**MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER:** A pleasant good morning to all Members, Chief Administrator and Administrators, students and other invited guests visiting in the gallery.

I warmly welcome each and everyone of you here today, at the first Budget Presentation for this Tobago House of Assembly Session 2021 – 2025.

I am aware that the strangers in the gallery would have received the pamphlets and the dos and don'ts of the Chamber and I would like to urge each and everyone of you to please adhere to the information while the Sitting is in progress.

Thank you. Let's proceed.

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Papers

**MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER:** *Secretary of Finance, Trade and the Economy.*

**SECRETARY OF FINANCE, TRADE AND THE ECONOMY** (Hon. Farley Augustine): Thank you, Madam Presiding Officer. Madam Presiding Officer, I wish to lay in the House Financial Statements for the last three (3) months.

**PAPERS LAID**

- (i) Tobago House of Assembly Draft Estimates. Details of Recurrent Expenditure for the year 2023.
- (ii) Tobago House of Assembly Draft Estimates. Details of the Development Programme and Unemployment Relief Programme for the year 2023.
- (iii) Tobago House of Assembly Draft Estimates of Revenue for the year 2023.
- (iv) Budget Statement for the Financial year 2023. [Secretary of Finance, Trade and the Economy (Hon. Farley Augustine)]

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Motion

**EXECUTIVE COUNCIL BUSINESS**

**MOTION**

**BUDGET FOR FISCAL 2022/2023**

**MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER:** *Secretary of Finance, Trade and the Economy.*

**CHIEF SECRETARY AND SECRETARY OF FINANCE, TRADE AND THE ECONOMY** (Hon. Farley Augustine) [*Desk Thumping*]: Thank you very much, Madam Presiding Officer.

Before I get started, allow me to say up front to my Colleagues in the House and to those looking on, that brevity may not be achieved today, but do not worry - just drink your water and let us mind Tobago's business together.

[*Desk thumping*]

Madam Presiding Officer;

Deputy Chief Secretary;

Secretaries;

Assistant Secretaries;

Minority Leader and other Members of the House of Assembly;

Chief Administrator and other Administrators;

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Senior Staff of the Tobago House of Assembly;

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen in the public gallery;

Local and international audiences following this presentation on radio,  
television, and other livestreams;

Members of the Media,

Good morning.

Madam Presiding Officer, I want to thank God for guiding me and  
strengthening me and using me to serve as I perform this critical function on  
behalf of the people of Tobago.

I want to express my sincere gratitude to the people of Tobago for  
gifting this Administration with the constitutional authority to lead the growth  
and transformation of the island.

Gratitude is expressed to my staff at the Division of Finance, Trade and  
the Economy, the Office of the Chief Secretary, Colleagues in the Executive  
Council, and everyone that participated in the pre-budget consultations.

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Extra special appreciation must be relayed to the electoral district of Parlatuvier/L'Anse Fourmi/Speyside, who have so kindly lent me to this entire island of Tobago. Thank you for your support and understanding.

*[Desk thumping]*

Finally, I want to thank all of you who are taking the time to listen to this presentation inside of this House and via the different media houses and online feeds.

On this historic morning, I have the honour and privilege to present the Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Tobago House of Assembly for the 2023 fiscal year, in keeping with Section 41 of the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) Act 40 of 1996.

It is indeed a momentous occasion for the brand-new Progressive Democratic Patriots (PDP) Administration, as well as for Tobago and the rest of the country, as it is not only our first Budget, but this is the first time in twenty-one (21) years that Tobago is receiving policy directives from a new dispensation.

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Interestingly, we are only the third political party, since the installation of Act 40 of 1996, to present a budget in this chamber.

The Draft Estimates, Madam Presiding Officer, are presented against the backdrop of worldwide gloom and anxiety, caused by three (3) major disruptive global events – the COVID-19 pandemic; the Russian-Ukraine war resulting from Russia's invasion of Ukraine and climate change. These events threaten the stability and indeed, the very existence of many countries across the globe.

Madam Presiding Officer, it is evident, even from a cursory glance at the current global developments, that the world has entered another of its dangerous periods. Economic recession; growing unemployment; growing world food shortage; high inflation and a resurgence of the tension associated with the "cold war" era are the most obvious manifestations of this period of danger.

We therefore, cannot proceed on the basis of complacency or in the folkloric "mamaguism" that God is somehow a national of this country who

Budget for Fiscal 2022/2023 (Cont'd)  
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has conferred immunity upon us from the dangers that have already struck, as well as from those developing to strike.

Your new Progressive Democratic Patriots (PDP) Administration of Tobago will face the threats with courage, alertness and planning, as well as with the most progressive agenda ever seen anywhere in this country, after genuine collaboration with the people of this island. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Presiding Officer, at this point, I want to highlight the significance of today's event. No single document expresses a nation's political and policy priorities more fully than does the Annual Budget. The Budget allocates expenditures to the hundreds of government programmes/projects and identifies the revenues – taxes, non-tax funds, and borrowed funds – to pay for these expenditures. More importantly, it expressly presents key policy mandates of a Government for the next fiscal year. Accordingly, our Budget will present the key policy mandates for the Tobago island government for the next fiscal year.

It is of critical importance to note here, Madam Presiding Officer, that the current constitutional arrangements that established the twin-island



Budget for Fiscal 2022/2023 (Cont'd)  
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Republic of Trinidad and Tobago have limited, if not denied outright, entitlement of the Tobago Government, since this colonial arranged marriage, to the political and policy powers of the Budget, due to uncertainties associated with the revenues to be allocated to Tobago by the Central Government.

For instance, Madam Presiding Officer, in the May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2022, Midyear Budget Review, the Minister of Finance increased the National Budget by three point zero eight two billion dollars (\$3.082b), but only allocated sixty million dollars (\$60m) or one point nine five percent (1.95%) to the Tobago House of Assembly (THA). This does not look like an oversight, but rather a deliberate contradiction to the recommendations of the Dispute Resolution Committee (DRC) which was accepted and approved by Parliament in 2000. But whether oversight or deliberate omission, it is a breach of the law which stipulates that the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) should be awarded between four point zero three percent (4.03%) and six point nine percent (6.9%) of the National Budget.

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Madam Presiding Officer, I want here to put the nation on notice, that this disregard will not be allowed to continue any longer. [*Desk thumping*]

New Tobago dispensation, new rules of engagement! [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Presiding Officer, the budgetary proposals which follow were influenced primarily by a series of stakeholder consultations; submissions from the Divisions of the Tobago House of Assembly (THA); ideas from an *online* platform, a series of virtual consultations and the Progressive Democratic Patriots (PDP) mandate.

Madam Presiding Officer, in the presentation that follows, I shall endeavour to discuss the fundamental issues, the challenges and opportunities for development which, defined in its broadest sense, encompasses not only production and productivity, but the entire socio-economic, constitutional and institutional ecology of Tobago.

Madam Presiding Officer, for the remainder of the presentation, I will proceed as follow:

- Firstly, I will provide an outlook of the international, regional and domestic economies;

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- Secondly, I will identify and discuss policy reactions and actions that must be urgently taken to save lives and livelihoods;

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HON. CHIEF SECRETARY (Cont'd)

- Third, I will articulate the long-term socio-economic development framework and the policy agenda for Fiscal 2023; and
- Fourth, I will present the budget numbers and the financing options. Finally, I will provide a conclusion, whenever that is.  
[Desk thumping][Laughter]

Madam Presiding Officer, I wish as I did before, to alert this House and listening audience that today's presentation is less parsimonious than I intended. However, I thought it necessary and important to take the required time to carefully set out the vision, policy agenda and programmes of my Administration. Notwithstanding the length, I assure you that the presentation will be dynamic and ground-breaking - as Progressive Democratic Patriots (PDP) always. [Desk thumping]

I now examine the outlook for global, regional economies, and then outlook for the national and Tobago economies.

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## GLOBAL OUTLOOK

Madam Presiding Officer, Tobago's development efforts face significant headwinds emanating from an international economy that is in turmoil. Projections for global growth are now very much dampened by the effects of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In fact, the most recent projections of both the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank are about three point six percent (3.6%) in both 2022 and 2023, assuming no further escalation in the Russian-Ukraine conflict or expansion of economic sanctions.

According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), other major economies, the United States of America (USA) is now projected to grow by three point seven percent (3.7%) in 2022, while Canada is projected to grow at three point nine percent (3.9%). Both economies are expected to contract in 2023, as monetary policy tightens to suppress inflation.

In the Euro area, growth is forecasted at two point eight percent (2.8%) on average in 2022 and even lower in 2023.

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In the United Kingdom, forecasted growth for 2022, is three point seven percent (3.7%), but is expected to fall drastically to one point two percent (1.2%) in 2023.

In Asia, China is forecasted to grow at four point four percent (4.4%) in 2022, despite some localized lockdowns in Shanghai and Beijing, but to rise to five point one percent (5.1%) in 2023.

India is forecasted to grow to a high of eight point two percent (8.2%) in 2022, but will fall to six point nine percent (6.9%) in 2023.

Madam Presiding Officer, according to the Economy Forecast Agency, (EFA) the West Texas Intermediate (WTI) price of Oil is forecasted to rise slightly to about one hundred and fourteen US dollars (\$114US) per barrel by December 2022, but is expected to rise even further in 2023.

The Henry Hub price of natural gas is expected to rise to (US) eleven dollars and thirty-five cents (\$11.35US), US per MMBTU by the end of 2022, and should fluctuate between ten (\$US10) and twelve dollars and fifty cents (\$US12.50) cents per barrel in 2023.

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Overall, this trend is likely to dampen demand for whatever Tobago seeks to export in 2023 and beyond. Associated with this will be growing inflationary pressures. Increases in the cost of fuel and food linked to both the pandemic and the Russian-Ukraine war will lead to higher inflation, inflation expectations, and greater demand for wage increases. The major implication is the need for wise investments to grow Tobago's competitive capacity in the face of these challenges, starting in Fiscal 2023, if possible.

### **REGIONAL ECONOMIC OUTLOOK**

Madam Presiding Officer, a good development strategy for Tobago will target production of goods and services that can be exported to markets of the Caribbean region. So they too must be screened for headwinds and enablers. Economic activity in Latin America and the Caribbean was poised for recovery to pre-pandemic levels, but now faces increasing uncertainties owing to developments at the global level. Real Gross Domestic Product in this region is expected to grow much less than the world average, in the amount of two point five percent (2.5%) for the next two (2) years. However, within the Caribbean itself, growth rates are projected to be much



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higher, at ten point five percent (10.5%) and nine point one percent (9.1%) in 2022 and 2023 respectively.

The development challenge within the region is great when consideration is given to the mitigation and adaptation measures required because of climate change and the decarbonization agenda. Every year, weather-related disasters create huge disruptions to production and financial losses within the region, driving down demand for the types of services Tobago can export.

The tourism-dependent economies in the Caribbean have started to reopen from pandemic-induced business closures and as a consequence, there will be some uptick in economic activity.

The International Air Transport Association expects overall air travel numbers to rise by four point zero billion (4.0b) by 2024, slightly exceeding pre-COVID-19 levels. Within the Caribbean region in particular, the figure should be about eighty-two to ninety-two percent (82%-92%) of the 2019 numbers between 2023 and 2024. Cruise travel is also expected to rebound, after facing disruptions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Guyana, our friends in the South, is poised for the largest growth within the region, driven by activity in the petroleum industry. With the lifting of economic sanctions by the USA on Venezuela, the crisis in that country should be greatly reduced, reversing the trend of outward migration and kick-starting their economy. This is a consequence of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the need to guarantee oil supplies given that Venezuela possesses one of the largest reserves of oil in the world.

The data suggests mixed prospects from growth and development stimulus in the regional economies, again, signalling the need for thoughtful investment in Fiscal 2023 to boost Tobago's capacity to win markets for its exports outputs.

### **THE NATIONAL ECONOMIC OUTLOOK**

The outlook for the national economy is of importance to the budget strategy of Tobago, because the Trinidad economy is the source of much of the transfer on which Tobago relies and much of the inflation the island imports. In this regard, the outlook for the national economy is also mixed.

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Like other petroleum exporters, Trinidad and Tobago enjoyed relatively high energy prices in 2021/2022, which will continue unto Fiscal 2023.

On the other hand, the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago and in its latest Economic Bulletin reported overall reduction in energy sector production in the third quarter of 2021. There was a decline in the natural gas production with the closure of Atlantic Train 1 and the maintenance closure of Atlantic Train 2. Mining and quarrying activity also declined. However, there were strong increases in crude oil production, as well as increase petrochemical output, the latter driven largely by the growth in methanol and ammonia production.

For the third quarter of 2021, the non-energy sector also experienced mixed fortunes, with increased activity in the transportation and storage, finance and insurance, and the manufacturing sectors. That, notwithstanding the manufacturing sector still had about thirty-eight percent (38%) excess capacity, with most of the growth in manufacturing concentrated in food, beverage, and tobacco sub-sectors.

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The country's gross official reserves at the end of April 2022, stood at US six point seven billion dollars (\$6.7bUS), representing about eight (8) months of import cover. Conditions in foreign exchange markets were quite tight over 2021, in spite of the improvements in energy reserves. Although business activity has slowly restarted, lingering effects of the pandemic are still evident within the labour market.

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The Central Statistical Office (CSO) recorded a six point five percent (6.5%) unemployment rate in the first quarter of 2021 as compared to four point two percent (4.2%) one year before.

In March 2022, the rates of headline and food price inflation nationally were four point one percent (4.1%) and seven point nine percent (7.9%) respectively, and core inflation was recorded at three point two percent (3.2%).

In spite of rising global interest rates, the Central Bank, starting in March, has kept the repo rate at three point five percent (3.5%) to facilitate the domestic recovery since inflation rates are still relatively low.

Overall, there has been little or no progress with respect to the diversification of the economy in Trinidad away from the energy sector. This points to the continuing need for budget policy in Tobago to be designed to stimulate meaningful development in order to lead the diversification of national exports while creating significant productivity growth to create buffers against imported inflation and to generate foreign exchange.

And that brings me to the Tobago economic outlook.

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Madam Presiding Officer, I now turn my attention to the Tobago economy. The most recent data provided by the Economic Management Research Unit (EMRU) in the Division of Finance, Trade and the Economy indicate that Tobago's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at constant prices fell by seven percent (7%) in 2020, relative to 2019, and rose by approximately four percent (4%) to an estimated one point seven billion (\$1.7B) in 2021, relative to 2020.

The positive improvement in 2021 has been largely attributed to the gradual reopening of the island's economy in 2021, as well as increased government spending.

Madam Presiding Officer, it is worth noting here in the last decade between 2011 - 2021, there were seven (7) years of declines in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), to the point where the island's constant-price GDP in 2021 was equivalent to that of 2011. This means that the economic pie did not increase. However, modest Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth is expected in 2022 and 2023.

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The data also indicate that the state sector was the largest contributor to Tobago's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2021, accounting for approximately forty-eight percent (48%) of the island's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

The second largest contributor was the Finance, Insurance, Real Estate and Business Services sector, accounting for about twenty-eight percent (28%).

The tourism sector was the third largest sector, accounting for about ten percent (10%) of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2021.

Finally, the data suggest that agriculture and manufacturing sectors were relatively small, collectively contributing about two percent (2%) to Tobago's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2021, with agriculture's contribution amounting to a mere eighteen point seven million dollars (\$18.7M).

Now, read accurately, Tobago's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) data speak loudly to continued underperformance of the Tobago economy and the urgent need for budgetary allocations to focus heavily on productivity growth,

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income generation and the development of competitive export capacity.

Thank God, Progressive Democratic Patriots (PDP) won this election! [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Presiding Officer, shifting my attention to the labour market conditions in Tobago, I wish to note that the entity charged with the legal responsibility to produce labour market data for the country – the Central Statistical Office (CSO) – continues to produce these data with significant lags.

The latest labour market data for the country and for Tobago are only available up to the first quarter of 2021. You see why we need our own Statistical Office? This situation is untenable and must be addressed frontally in the shortest possible time. Madam Presiding Officer, we cannot plan effectively without current and reliable data.

Madam Presiding Officer the most recent labour market data suggest that unemployment in Tobago for the first quarter of 2021 was approximately three percent (3%) – a figure which is significantly below the national figure of seven percent (7%).



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The share of the labour force employed in the government sector stood about fifty-four percent (54%), with the private sector employing about forty-six percent (46%). Comparatively, the share of the National Labour Force in the government sector stood at twenty-eight percent (28%), with the private sector employing about seventy-two percent (72%).

Madam Presiding Officer, the share of the island's labour force with tertiary education as the highest level of attainment stood at seventeen percent (17%); the share with Secondary Education as the highest level of attainment was recorded at fifty-five percent (55%); and the share with Primary Education as the highest level of attainment was about twenty-eight percent (28%).

The levels of education and skills point to an economy with weak capacity to adjust in a self-reliant way to the competitive challenges of economic development in the national and global market process.

Madam Presiding Officer, I now turn my attention to prices and inflation. The data above point to an economy that is virtually defenceless in



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the face of the threats of inflation imported from the rest of the nation and the world. The most recent data on prices available from the Central Bank suggest that Tobago recorded headline and food price inflation in March 2022 of three point nine percent (3.9%) and six point three percent (6.3%), respectively. Core inflation, which excludes food and energy, was recorded at three point five percent (3.5%).

Given trends in the national and international markets, the forecast is sorry - for continued rising inflation in Fiscal 2023. Madam Presiding Officer, this signals the need to boost our defence against inflation and protect the population from the falling real standard of living it invariable brings.

Turning my attention to the operations of the Tobago House of Assembly (THA). Madam Presiding Officer, I wish to highlight the fact that Central Government transfers to the Assembly have typically been significantly below the amounts requested. On average on an annual basis, the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) requested four point eight billion dollars (\$4.8b) but received two point three billion dollars (\$2.3b) for the fiscal years 2017 – 2022, which is approximately forty-seven percent (47%)

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of its overall budgetary request. Significantly, the shortfall in recurrent expenditure for the period averaged thirty-six percent (36%), while the shortfall in development expenditure was about eighty-four percent (84%).

Additionally, Madam Presiding Officer, a disproportionate share of the allocation was assigned to recurrent expenditure. Specifically on average, eighty-eight percent (88%) of the allocation was assigned to recurrent expenditure, with about twelve percent (12%) (or an average of two hundred and seventy-two million dollars (\$272m) per year) being assigned to Development Expenditure for the period 2017-2022. Two hundred and seventy-two million dollars (\$272m) amounts to underinvestment in Tobago's development.

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It cannot finance the launch of serious development programmes in Tobago. Urgent steps are needed to address this investment deficit, starting in Fiscal 2023.

Moreover, Madam Presiding Officer, annual revenues collected in Tobago averaged two hundred and twenty-six point four million dollars (\$226.4m) for the period 2015 to 2020 - roughly ten percent (10%) of Tobago's actual allocation from the Central Government for that period, and thirteen percent (13%) of the Tobago's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Madam Presiding Officer, as I indicated to this House, the total liabilities of the Assembly as at December 20, 2021, stood at seven hundred and thirty-eight point one million dollars (\$738.1m). In addition to this, there were contingent liabilities in respect of the bond financing, which amongst to two hundred and fifteen point eight million dollars (\$215.8m) payable by 2027. This means that the total liability of the Assembly was in the vicinity of nine hundred and fifty-four million dollars (\$954m), which is about fifty-seven percent (57%) of Tobago's estimated GDP for 2021. Overall, the data on liabilities point to the urgent need to grow Tobago's

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GDP and for an allocation to service these liabilities to avoid an emerging debt crisis. In general, the outlook for Tobago is one populated with challenges and the mounting of calls for an intensification of the steps towards economic development which my Administration has started.

In addition, Madam Presiding Officer, like the outlook for the international, regional, and the national economies, the Tobago outlook also signals an urgent need for budget allocations in Fiscal 2023 to begin the process of strengthening the diversification and development foundations of the Tobago economy and by extension the national economy. In other words, the Tobago economy, if done right, can save the national economy.

*[Desk thumping]*

Allow me to highlight a few of the policy actions taken by this Administration since assuming office.

Madam Presiding Officer, the data and findings unearthed from our international, regional, and domestic inquiries so far, point to the need for the intensification of the basic-needs approach my Administration instituted since assuming control of the Assembly.

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Having witnessed and noted the devastating impact of COVID-19 and the attendant disruption of lives and livelihoods on assuming office, Madam Presiding Officer, my Administration took the deliberate policy decision to provide for the basic needs of Tobagonians with severe fiscal constraints inherited from our predecessors.

Policy decisions were taken in the following areas:

- Health;
- Housing;
- Food;
- Education;
- Debt management; and
- Support for businesses.

In Health, Madam Presiding Officer, you will recall that when this Administration took office in December 2021, our COVID-19 health challenge was at its peak. However, we took immediate action and through our COVID-19 strategic response, we were able to drastically - **drastically** reduce the number of deaths and hospitalizations. [*Desk thumping*] We

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expanded our capacity to properly store and look after bodies of the casualties of COVID-19, which reduced the pressure on loved ones, families and friends.

We increased the COVID-19 vaccination uptake, Madam Presiding Officer, and most critically, we strengthened our medical care capabilities at the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) at the Scarborough General Hospital. We established a pure parallel system for COVID-19 patients at the old hospital thereby reducing patients' exposure.

In addition, we improved COVID-19 home-care by creating and distributing physiotherapists-led breathing exercises along with improved reporting and communication tools. Madam Presiding Officer, we saved lives. [*Desk thumping*]

Additionally, from December 10<sup>th</sup> 2021, to May, 31<sup>st</sup> 2022, we distributed two hundred and twenty-two (222) general assistant grants through health valued at one point million dollars (\$1.4m) for relief and assistance in the area of:

- Medical care;

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- Burials;
- Food;
- Clothing;
- Household items; and
- Home rental.

In Housing, we have given out Home Improvement Grants to several households. Tomorrow, we will distribute an additional nine point seven million dollars (\$9.7m) in grants [*Desk thumping*] to seven hundred (700) plus households in the single largest Home Improvement Grant distribution in the THA's history. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Presiding Officer, many of these households have been waiting for years and have become very frustrated with the process. They got the first cheque and could not get the second cheque - years passing – Progressive Democratic Patriots (PDP) will fix that tomorrow. [*Desk thumping*] It is for these reasons that the Executive Council took the decision to clear the backlog by making the payments. Since then, the process has been reviewed and a new and cleaner process has been put in



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place. Our aim is to deliver the much needed support to our most vulnerable in their time of need.

In addition, we have already assigned fifty-four (54) service lots to Tobagonians as a result of our first draw for lots at Riseland Housing Development.

In terms of Food Security, there is a need for a long-term solution to the current global food shortages and so we have taken the decision to accelerate our capacity and capability to produce alternative flours and to promote household production of fresh vegetables while building out the island's food security and sovereignty systems.

As we must have all heard by now, National Flour Mills increased its price of flour by thirty-three percent (33%) as of yesterday, resulting in a twenty-eight percent (28%) increase for citizens. Madam Presiding Officer, this is even more justification for this strategic decision.

The Food Card Programme based on the findings of the 2021 special audit, was transferred from the Division of Finance, Trade and the Economy

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where it did not belong, to the Division of Health, Wellness, and Social Protection where it belongs. [*Desk thumping*]

I assure you, Madam Presiding Officer, that this is one Secretary of Finance who does not have a vote in his office with food cards to give out as he pleases. [*Desk thumping*] No Auditor General is calling my name. [*Laughter*] Work is being done with our bankers as we speak to upgrade the programme to the E-Wallet model and when completed, the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) will have in the country the single largest E-Wallet system for the transferal of funds for social protection. [*Desk thumping*]

In education, we have reinstated in-person teaching and learning at all our schools. Relatedly, we return the School Feeding and Nutrition Programme to full capacity from the first week of school reopening, providing meals for all students in the programme at the preschool, primary and secondary school levels.

In collaboration between the Divisions of Health and Education, we designed and implemented COVID-19 protocols at all our schools. We

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provided remote learning devices for over one thousand (1000) primary and secondary students.

We upgraded our School Transportation Programme in keeping with the new policy that was developed by the Division of Education, Research and Technology.

We provided grants to the tune of one point six million dollars (\$1.6m) to maxi taxi owners contracted under the School Transportation Programme to assist them with the required safety upgrades and maintenance.

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Further, we have already made twenty-one million dollars (\$21m) available to the Division of Education, Research and Technology to conduct extensive school repairs during the 2022 July/August vacation. I am advised that this is the single, largest July/August school repair programme that the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) would be having in its history. This is well justified as the plants were closed for two (2) years.

In terms of debt management to ascertain the correctness of the debts inherited, I commissioned a forensic audit in the programmes associated with those liabilities. The audit should be completed by September 2022, much later than we hoped for, but that deadline is necessary to facilitate the volume of work, and in the interest of transparency and open government, the findings will be made public, and where the evidence points to infractions of the law, the culprits will be prosecuted. [*Desk thumping*]

Notwithstanding, I have given a public commitment to provide compensation in small parts, for the works completed in these projects. We understand that many contractors unfortunately, got tied up by the wrongdoings of the past Administration, but our legal team and auditors

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have advised that we can only provide small payments at this time so as to not jeopardize the outcomes.

As an immediate response to these inherited fiscal constraints, I established a Debt Management Committee in the Division of Finance, Trade and the Economy. This Committee has been gathering information on co-efficient and implementable modalities and has submitted an interim report which is being actioned.

Madam Presiding Officer, our goal is to manage the liquidation of these liabilities without compromising or upending our current and future development agenda for the island.

**SUPPORT FOR BUSINESSES:**

In recognition of the lethal damage COVID-19 has inflicted on the Tobago business community, I commissioned the Economic Management and Research Unit (EMRU) in the Division of Finance, Trade and the Economy to conduct a study on the impact of the pandemic on businesses in Tobago and to identify practical, implementable and affordable solutions as to how the Assembly could further assist towards ensuring the indigenous business community.

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Madam Presiding Officer, the preliminary results from the study indicate that during the COVID-19 pandemic, some forty percent (40%) of our businesses experienced challenges meeting their payrolls and some thirty-seven percent (37%) their obligations to financial institutions, occasioned by reductions in sales, up to eighty-nine percent (89%); shortage of cash flow (up to sixty-three percent (63%) and disruption in the supply of raw materials/inputs - up to thirty-five percent (35%).

Madam Presiding Officer, these challenges have been identified as the major threats to the Tobago business community. As Chief Secretary and Secretary with direct responsibility for the development and management of the Tobago economy, I have been having extensive discussions with some of the leading banks and non-bank financial institutions with the aim of mitigating the harmful effects the pandemic has had and continues to have, on businesses on the island.

At the same time, the Division of Finance, Trade and the Economy is in direct discussion with some commercial banks with the aim of co-creating a Tobago-specific cash flow solution. We are currently (meaning

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at this very moment) preparing a THA-backed sixty million dollar (\$60m) liquidity facility to facilitate the island's business sector to recover from the adverse effects of the pandemic, along with practical and affordable ways of increasing the volume of domestic, regional and international visitors to the island. [*Desk thumping*]

This has been a snapshot of the policy actions taken and my Colleagues will present much more during the debate.

I will now set out in detail my Administration's Policy Agenda for Fiscal 2023.

I have said repeatedly in many places that the aim or more aptly, the ambition of my Administration, is to make Tobago '*the greatest little island on the planet.*' [*Desk thumping*] It is to develop every child; every family and every village in Tobago.

Madam Presiding Officer, this Administration recognises and acknowledges that for development to be meaningful, it must ultimately, positively impact the lives and quality of life of Tobagonians. In other words, Madam Presiding Officer, development is about "improving People's welfare."

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Our vision for Tobago is as an island with the following attributes.

Allow me to lay out the attributes of '*the greatest little island on the planet.*' [*Desk thumping*]

1. A per capita income and standard of living that surpass those of other small-island states;
  2. A highly educated and innovative population;
  3. A technologically-driven innovative, productive, resilient and competitive economy;
  4. An efficient, effective and accountable Public Service [*Desk thumping*];
  5. A modern, scientific and efficient health care sector;
  6. Constitutional autonomy within the twin-island Republic of Trinidad and Tobago; [*Desk thumping*]
  7. Every Tobagonian having opportunities for self-actualization; [*Desk thumping*]
  8. Protection and caring for the most vulnerable;
  9. A population that is united, peaceful, safe and secure; [*Desk thumping*]
-



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10. Green and modern state-of-the-art public infrastructure; and
11. Open, transparent, accountable and inclusive governance unlike what we have seen before. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Presiding Officer, despite the old, unproductive noises coming from our political opponents and detractors, (I am hearing some today) who have had their day and who were comprehensively rejected by the people, [*Desk thumping*] my team and I will continue to chart and implement a progressive, innovative and people-friendly course. [*Desk thumping*]

In keeping with our vision for Tobago, Madam Presiding Officer, the Budget Statement for Fiscal 2023, the first instalment of the longer-term development goal of making Tobago '*the greatest little island on the planet,*' is themed: '*Towards a Smarter, Greener, more Autonomous Tobago.*' [*Desk thumping*] And just in case you were just closing your fridge door, close it properly - sip your water. And let me repeat the theme for Fiscal 2023 on the first installation of our gender of making Tobago '*the greatest little island on the planet.*' The theme for this Fiscal year

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coming is, *Towards a Smarter, Greener, more Autonomous Tobago*. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Presiding Officer, we are starting now. Accordingly, the core development framework and the strategic priority areas for growth, development and transformation in Fiscal 2023 will be the focus of the remainder of this section.

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I will be discussing the following themes:

- Governance Reform;
- Economic transformation and business development;
- Tourism sector and the development of the orange economy;
- Food security and sovereignty;
- The blue economy;
- Human Capital Development;
- Health and Social Protection Programme;
- Community Development and Empowerment;
- Institutional Reform and Transformation;
- Development of young people;
- Sport development and recreational infrastructure;
- Public safety; and
- Physical infrastructure development.

Madam Presiding Officer, I start with -

**GOVERNANCE REFORM:** [*Desk thumping*] [*Laughter*]

Madam Presiding Officer, good governance is undoubtedly the linchpin that holds a society together and determines the successful outcomes of its development efforts. In Tobago's case, one element of good

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governance is autonomy, that is, the right of Tobagonians to determine their social, economic and political destiny. After nearly sixty (60) years of independence and almost forty-two (42) years of the modern day Tobago House of Assembly, it remains an irrefutable fact, that the current constitutional and legislative arrangements that established the government of Tobago and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, denied us our autonomy. Actually, they took away our right to determine our social, economic and political destiny without interference from the national Government.

The Autonomy Bills before the Parliament have been found to be woefully inadequate and were therefore comprehensively rejected by the majority of Tobagonians. Notably, there has been no legislative action on this critical issue for nearly a year now. Let me put the national community on notice therefore, that this Administration has taken steps and will take more steps, necessary steps, for the people of Tobago to be given their constitutional right to self-determination. [*Desk thumping*]

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To this end, for the first time in the history of the Tobago House of Assembly, Madam Presiding Officer, we have established as a stand-alone division, the Office of the Deputy Chief Secretary. [*Desk thumping*] The office includes a Department of Intergovernmental Affairs (DIA) with the principal responsibility to secure Self-Government for Tobago in the shortest possible time. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Presiding Officer, the first major gain from a sufficient level of autonomy, is that it will allow Tobago to control and deploy its resources and plan its development in the context of the national economy wisely, in light of the relevant facts and without reference from the goings-on in the Cabinet.

The second major gain will be a greater focus on the national investment capacity on national economic diversification and development through Tobago. Some of this relates to proper boundaries for Tobago being recognized in the law [*Desk thumping*] and some to the monetization of the oil and gas located in the seas around Tobago. This new THA Administration has resolved to purposefully pursue legislative and

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regulatory changes towards a fair share revenue agreement associated with greater autonomy for the island.

Given the recent discoveries of oil and gas in the waters around Tobago, it is time to return to the bargaining table, to negotiate a new revenue sharing agreement between Tobago and Trinidad. [*Desk thumping*] I am sure that the Prime Minister cannot inaccurately (ever again) say that all Tobago contributes is two hundred (200) and something million dollars.

We are grateful for the template that the Dispute Resolution Commission (DRC) has established and see the upper limit of six point 9 percent (6.9%) as a good starting point, but not a settled position.

I wish to advise my friends on the other side, who have been saying that had we gotten the woefully inadequate Island Government Bill, we would have gotten more money. I wish to advise that at this present moment, the law allows their Colleagues in Trinidad to give us more monies [*Desk thumping*] - six point nine percent (6.9%). And if they were so interested and love Tobago, it will be no problem to give us six point nine percent (6.9%). [*Desk thumping*] Therefore, Madam Presiding Officer, that

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six point eight percent (6.8%) in their Bill was a bluff. Therefore, this would be the starting point of our conversation with the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance in respect of Tobago's allocation for development spending in Fiscal 2023.

As a matter of fact, Tobago and Trinidad should advance the conversation to include consideration of a formula for sharing of natural resources, consensual exploration of these resources and reward sharing.

As part of the development of the Office of the Deputy Chief Secretary and this bold, new push for greater autonomy, this Division will negotiate our just dues through an Energy Bureau and it will simultaneously rally the support of our large, intelligent, powerful and influential diaspora living in Trinidad and elsewhere around the world.

*[Desk thumping]*

With regards to mobilizing our diaspora for the push for greater autonomy, one must appreciate that our efforts this round must be radically different from anything we have tried before. Tobagonians are frankly tired of the repetitive cycle of:

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- (1) consultations in Tobago;
- (2) ensuing public debates with the same leading voices;
- (3) a proposed bill; and
- (4) with rejection by the National Parliament.

We have been trying this method since APT James and it has not resulted in the granting of a Tobago Government structured the way we want. We are officially tired of the excessive talk and the lack of real action by the National Parliament. [*Desk thumping*]

So as we speak, efforts are on the way to establish the first Tobago House of Assembly (THA) outpost in Port of Spain. [*Desk thumping*] Just as Scotland is operating a Scotland House, representing the Government of Scotland, at number 58 Victoria Embankment Temple in London, not in Cardiff, not in Scotland itself, but in London, I wish to announce in this House, that there will be a Tobago House located on Pembroke Street, Port of Spain. [*Desk thumping*] We cannot get our autonomy by staying in Tobago; we will take the time to educate our Trinidadian friends and family on this matter, while pushing for the National Parliament to correct a



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colonial wrong. [*Desk thumping*] In other words, we will deliberately disrupt the national politics until they give us what belongs to us. [*Desk thumping*]

### **ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT**

Madam Presiding Officer, I now look at strategies for Economic Transformation and Business Development.

Our strategies for Economic Transformation and Business Development are built on:

- productivity growth;
- support for innovation;
- mobilization of foreign direct investment;
- diaspora engagement; and
- support for businesses.

Madam Presiding Officer, permit me to describe the Tobago economy as service-led, tourism-driven and government-powered, with productivity challenges that we must frontally engage. To address the productivity challenge in the public sector on the island, we propose to:

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- Accelerate the digital transformation of the operation of the  
THA in order to marry speed with efficiency.

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- Train, retool and reskill public servants and public officers at all levels;
- Lead an internal campaign to generate sentiments of pride, joy and patriotism among the workers of the Tobago House of Assembly (THA);
- Provide specialized training for administrators, heads of departments and other persons in supervisory positions;
- Introduce a more rigorous performance management system to monitor and evaluate worker productivity and identify training needs;
- Promote greater public accountability for public resources;
- Improve the working environment to ignite and sustain the productivity of workers; and
- Implement a 'recognition and award' system for service excellence across the Tobago House of Assembly (THA).

And to treat with the productivity issues in the private sector, we propose to:

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- Engage the different business chambers (small Tobago has two of them) and other business organizations on the island with the aim of co-creating solutions to their productivity issues;
- Provide financial and technical assistance to businesses through the Tobago House of Assembly's (THA's) Venture Capital Equity Fund and the Business Development Unit to incentivize productivity improvements in the private sector; and
- Provide the quality of public infrastructure that will enhance and promote productivity in the private sector.

Madam Presiding Officer, we will engage with the labour unions (as we have already started) and businesses in a tripartite arrangement to arrive at additional strategies to address the productivity problems on the island.

**INNOVATION:**

Madam Presiding Officer, we also need to expand and diversify our economy and, therefore, to find new and more efficient and innovative ways of doing some of the tasks we now perform; to also produce new goods and services, and make their delivery to market more efficient (quite like the smart app in the Division of Infrastructure). [*Desk thumping*]  
However, Madam Presiding Officer, we recognize that, for innovation to

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take place, we must foster an enabling environment that encourages and supports innovation in our society.

Our education system needs to be re-oriented to produce students who can pursue critical and innovative ways of thinking and turn them into life-altering technologies and businesses.

In addition, the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) must become an innovative institution where public service is continuously brought up to date by the application of new processes, the introduction of new techniques and the creation of new values.

This Administration therefore commits to creating an environment that supports scientific research and the development of innovative products and services. In this regard, we propose to:

- Provide targeted financial assistance to both individuals and businesses for innovation in products, services and business processes;
- Establish and fund a Tobago Innovation Challenge Programme at the primary and secondary levels of our education system;

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- Support, research and development in food technology, agri-technologies, renewables and the general sciences in collaboration with tertiary institutions;
- Develop the Tobago Strategic Policy Framework to guide the development and promotion of innovation; and
- Support the commercialization of innovative ideas and technologies, and protect their intellectual property rights.

**FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT (FDI) POLICY AND DISAPORA ENGAGEMENT:**

Madam Presiding Officer, we are mindful of the fact that, to fuel our economic transformation, we need to significantly address the financial constraints affecting the Assembly. We also recognize that to drive our development in any meaningful way, we must mobilize resources beyond our budgetary allocation and our domestic resources. In this regard, we believe foreign direct investment can be a significant catalyst to drive Tobago's economic development. Over the last twenty (20) years, Tobago has not done well in attracting foreign direct investment. Accordingly, this Administration will work to reduce or eliminate some of the legal as well as institutional constraints that negatively impact Tobago's attractiveness

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to foreign direct investors. In this regard, over the next fiscal year, the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) will move aggressively to stimulate Foreign Direct Investment flows by:

1. Developing a comprehensive investment policy that addresses the key constraints to doing business in Tobago;
2. Lobbying the Cabinet to amend the Foreign Investment Act and to review and promote the fiscal incentives that are currently offered to investors in Tobago. This is critical to ensure the country's economic diversification efforts;
3. Having the current Land License regime removed. [*Desk thumping*] It is inimical to Tobago's autonomy efforts to have some Minister sitting in an office in Port of Spain, without a clue about Tobago's needs, cultural nuances and spatial issues but down there deciding who can invest and where they can invest. Only a People's National Movement-Tobago House of Assembly (PNM-THA) could have so carelessly given away Tobago's economic independence. [*Desk thumping*] To solve Tobagonians concerns about FDIs, this Administration will be doing a comprehensive spatial plan for Tobago. This plan will determine and protect environmentally sensitive areas, and the integrity of small villages;

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4. Creating appropriate zones for commercial activities, residential activities and agricultural activities. This spatial plan will be the new way to manage FDIs among other investments and where they are placed. This is what Tobago should have done in the first place. [*Desk thumping*] It is wholly undemocratic and can potentially lead to corruption, to have one or two public officers deciding for an entire island, where FDIs should go. The Comprehensive Spatial Plan will determine where they will go;
5. Streamlining the processes and procedures for foreign investors for ease of understanding of the requirements for investing in the Tobago space, is now a necessity. Already, foreigners and Trinidadians are commending us on our decision to abolish forthwith the archaic dress code policy. [*Desk thumping*] Even some Central Government Services in Tobago have adopted the policy, namely, the Registrar General's office and the Licensing Division. Meanwhile, Madam Presiding Officer, 'yachties' in Trinidad are complaining that they are required to come ashore in their dingy, dressed in long pants, shoes and sleeves on their shirts in order to access services of Customs and Excise and Immigration. Tobago is leading the way; [*Desk thumping*]
6. Expediting the development of a land use or spatial development plan that would identify designated zones for certain types of



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development projects, will critically solve a lot of our issues with  
FDIs;

7. Lobbying the Cabinet to use the Trinidad and Tobago Embassies,  
High Commissions and Consulates abroad to facilitate  
investment. The Tobago desk at our Embassies and Consulates  
should be re-established; and [*Desk thumping*]
8. Launching a very aggressive investment marketing campaign to  
encourage persons from the diaspora to invest in Tobago. (In  
other words, come back home and spend your money)

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There is a large number of Tobagonians domicile outside of Tobago who are willing to contribute to the island's development. We must harness the skills and abilities of these persons, to deepen our economic and social transformation.

In this regard, over the next fiscal year, we propose to:

- Develop a comprehensive diaspora engagement strategy to provide a clear framework for the diaspora contribution and participation in Tobago's development;
- Develop and maintain a comprehensive database of Tobagonians in the diaspora.
- Collaborate more effectively with Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) groups in diasporaic communities, in providing philanthropy of different forms to the health sector in Tobago.
- Promote a diaspora homecoming event to coincide with the Heritage 2023 celebration. [*Desk thumping*]

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And so, if you are watching from on *Facebook* out there in New York, start to book your tickets for Heritage 2023. Come home.

- Develop a Mentorship Programme utilizing successful professionals from the diaspora, to assist in capacity expansion of young Tobago professionals;
- Collaborate with NGO groups in diasporic communities in hosting trade shows and exhibitions, thereby providing market exposure to Tobago businesses, products and services;
- Collaborate with local NGOs, cultural groups, fashion designers, agro-processors and other artisans to travel to areas with significant number of Tobagonians living abroad to engage and promote opportunities available at home.

And, Madam Presiding Officer, let me let this House know that at this very moment, the Executive Council is considering two (2) such proposals - a cultural group out of Roxborough and a group of young fashion designers.

We will also:

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- Provide a suite of incentives for Tobagonians returning home to invest in commercial activity on the island.

Madam Presiding Officer, the Diaspora Engagement Unit and the Foreign Investment Unit to the Office of the Deputy Chief Secretary will be tasked with leading our strategy to attract foreign direct investments from our diaspora. [*Desk thumping*]

Today is really a good day to be alive in Tobago [*Desk thumping*].

**TOBAGO HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY SUPPORT FOR BUSINESSES:**

Madam Presiding Officer, the development of an indigenous, private, business sector in Tobago, is another critical pillar in our strategy for economic development and transformation. Over the past twenty (20) years, the Tobago House of Assembly established a number of programmes and initiatives to provide financial and technical support designed to boost business development on the island. However, these programmes have not succeeded in developing the private sector in the island to encouraging levels.

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Under the Enterprise Assistance Grants Programme (EAGP) two thousand, five hundred and seventy-one (2,571) grants with a value of thirty-two point seven million dollars (\$32.7m) were dispersed since its inception in 2011.

Adjacently, under the Enterprise Assistance Fund (EAF) that was established in 2004, a total of two hundred and seventy-five (275) loans valued at twenty-six point five million dollars (\$26.5m) have been issued to date. Madam Presiding Officer, this loan portfolio is plagued with a very high and troubling rate of delinquency of thirty-two percent (32%). This does not speak well for the management and overall sustainability of the Fund. In fact, this speaks of a reckless management of State resources and is sometimes dangerous intersection of politics and business.

Similarly, under the Venture Capital Equity Fund Programme which commenced in 2011, a total equity investment of thirteen point five million dollars (\$13.5m) has been made in five (5) investee companies, eighty percent (80%) of which are currently experiencing severe financial hardships. And I must hasten to add that the financial hardships of these

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businesses started sometime ahead of the pandemic. So COVID-19 did not cause that.

Madam Presiding Officer, as the Secretary with responsibility for these Boards, I have given the Boards the mandate to reorganize and repurpose them to improve efficiency and their overall levels of effectiveness. There will be policy changes, especially within the Business Development Unit (BDU). For starters, the Unit will be required to now consider providing grants and/or loans for the purchase of stock or raw materials. SMEs will also now be empowered to use the funding to purchase equipment and/or stock internationally.

Additionally, the BDU will be required to consider grants and loans for the creative sectors. So now, our local filmmakers, musicians, performing and visual artistes can look forward to investments in their craft.

*[Desk thumping]*

There is still a need, Madam Presiding Officer, for us to find innovative and creative ways of mobilizing larger volumes of cost-efficient investment capital to fund economic and business development projects on

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the island. It is against this backdrop that my Administration is seriously pursuing the establishment of an economic development financing mechanism along the lines of a Tobago Development Bank.

I am pleased to announce that discussions have been held with officials of the Caribbean Development Bank and the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago about the establishment of a Tobago Development Bank. [*Desk thumping*] The officials of both entities expressly stated their support for the idea and have committed to providing technical support for the design of the governance and operational aspects. The CDB has also expressed its willingness to fund the preparation of a detailed Concept Note to initiate the process.

Madam Presiding Officer, we envisage a Tobago Development Bank will perform the following functions among others.

- Mobilization of investment capital to fund the economic expansion and development programmes and projects of the Assembly;

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- Provision of banking and financial, intermediary services to financial entities, indigenous to Tobago, such as credit unions;
- Provision of low-cost educational loans to Tobagonians;
- Serving as the banker of the Assembly;
- Provision of land-banking services to Tobagonians; and
- Subsuming all the existing THA Business Financing and Development Programmes in its operations. [*Desk thumping*]

In addition, Madam Presiding Officer, my Administration has decided to establish a Trade Unit in the Division of Finance, Trade and the Economy, with the core mandate of creating trading links and exporting opportunities for Tobago export-oriented businesses.

The Unit will also provide the necessary technical support to these businesses to ensure that they meet all the standards and requirements to export their products regionally and internationally. The Unit will be geared to building the much-needed infrastructure to expand the market access and would boost the viability of the island's businesses.



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Further, Madam Presiding Officer, the Cove Eco Industrial and Business Park remains one of the most important assets in Tobago's industrial development equation. It provides factory spaces for businesses to establish their production plants. It also provides long-term land leases to businesses that prefer to construct their own factory spaces to meet certain production requirements that are not available in the built spaces. Currently, there are fourteen (14) tenants operating production plants at the Business Park. The Business Park is operated and managed by Eco Industrial Development Company of Tobago (E-IDCOT).

Madam Presiding Officer, the new Board of Directors of E-IDCOT have been mandated to immediately conduct an evaluation of the company's business model that specifically looks at its processes, systems and human resources.

In addition, my Administration is actively pursuing the development of E-IDCOT becoming Tobago's premier project and management entity, [*Desk thumping*] which will manage all the major development projects of

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the Assembly. This is intended to create a circular flow of finance among the entities of the Assembly again, and reduce financial outlook.

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Madam Presiding Officer, the Studley Park Quarry is pregnant with significant revenue-earning potential, notwithstanding the failure of the last Administration to birth these possibilities. But I believe the Division of Infrastructure has a midwife in charge now, who can birth these possibilities. [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*]

This Administration is intent on harvesting the revenue-earning potential of this treasured asset and accordingly, the new Board has been mandated to review and address where necessary, the business model of the company. It has also been mandated to explore the possibility of diversifying the product offering towards new value-added products such as stone tiles, sandpaper and to explore new export markets.

The new Board has also been mandated to consider changing the name from 'Studley Park Quarry' and to create a structure that will take care of the mining assets of all of Tobago and to look for new spaces around the island where mining of our precious stones can be done.

**DEVELOPMENT OF THE TOURISM SECTOR:**

Madam Presiding Officer, please permit me to look now at our strategy for Development Of The Tourism Sector and the Orange Economy.

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Madam Presiding Officer, tourism is an important sector in Tobago's economic landscape and for the short-to-medium term, it is expected to continue to play that role. Madam Presiding Officer, our borders have now been reopened. We are learning to live with COVID-19 and actively preparing for the resumed inflow of visitors. We must rebuild our tourism sector and regain lost momentum.

Therefore, in Fiscal 2023, this Administration intends to make the required investment in order to take specific steps to begin unlocking and deploying the underutilized development potential of the tourism sector.

However, as you are well aware, Madam Presiding Officer, we do not have sufficient high-end rooms to sustain an economically viable tourism industry that we agree with. The preliminary estimates suggest that we need at least five thousand (5000) high-end rooms to build a viable tourism sector in Tobago. That does not necessarily means 'Sandals.' Currently, the shortfall is about two thousand, five hundred (2,500) rooms.

Madam Presiding Officer, I am happy to announce that we have had preliminary discussions with two (2) major investors. Collectively, these two (2) investments will result in the direct injection of approximately one

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point five billion dollars (\$1.5b.) into the Tobago economy should they materialize. Both investments are likely to add about eight hundred and fifty (850) rooms in the next three (3) years.

One of these investments relates to the tricky Rocky Point Hotel development. This project started in the most troubling manner, but we are attempting to responsibly manage this project in the interest of all Tobagonians. When we got into office, the developers reached out and indicated that they had not had a formal conversation with the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) prior. It is unbelievable that a tourism-related project (a 5<sup>th</sup> schedule item) of that magnitude was planned for Tobago without Tobago's leadership's input. They planned it and a Chief Secretary just sat down; sat down like a *moomoo* and clapped. [*Desk thumping*] After learning of these developments, we did the responsible thing and invited the principals to Tobago to tour the land and to meet with the stakeholders.

It is the expressed intention of my Administration to monitor and work closely with the developers to ensure that all the concerns that were raised are addressed to the satisfaction of all stakeholders. We are at this

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moment, awaiting the final designs and plans commensurate with those concerns.

All things being equal, Madam Presiding Officer, indications are that during the construction phase, these two (2) investments will provide approximately one thousand and fifty (1,050) jobs for young Tobagonians and approximately four hundred and twenty-five (425) full-time jobs upon commissioning and full operation.

Madam Presiding Officer, we are exploring and evaluating a development model where the value of concession and the land provided to any developer are exchanged for shares/equity in a holding company. This is a model we intend to pursue, where development projects in Tobago require concessions from the Tobago House of Assembly (THA).

As it relates to the troubling Manta Lodge and Sanctuary Resort is only troubling projects they had, but as it relates to the troubling Manta Lodge and Sanctuary Resorts, this Administration is actively pursuing the divestment option in relation to these properties which were purchased by our predecessors in 2014 for thirty-two million dollars (\$32m) and which continue to attract millions of dollars in expenditure annually.

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Further, Madam Presiding Officer, this Administration will establish a Tourism Cross-Sectoral Committee. The Committee will provide guidance and take actions on matters impacting tourism development which are outside of the direct purview of the Division of Tourism, Culture, Antiquities and Transportation and its supporting companies. (It is my understanding that a similar Committee was operational several years ago). This initiative is rooted in the recognition of the gaps in addressing several issues which impact tourism; not the least of which are visitor safety; beautification of downtown Scarborough and open spaces; management of sites and attractions; service delivery across the industry; air and seaport facilities; health protocols and other cross-sectoral issues.

Madam Presiding Officer, other initiatives we intend to undertake will include but not limited to, the following:

- An aggressive strategic marketing campaign, aimed at revitalizing the domestic and international arrivals;
- Strategic partnership with tourism stakeholders in pursuit of several green initiatives that will make Tobago the ideal green, sustainable, hospitable, relaxing, warm and therapeutic place for vacationers;

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- Upgrade of existing public and community awareness initiatives that highlight economic opportunities for residents;
- The provision of financial and technical resources through the Tobago Tourism Agency to enable the adaptation of digital technologies such as websites, booking engines and property management systems integrated with channel managers to improve business processes; and
- The provision of financial and technical assistance to assist businesses to undertake appropriate organizational changes and the transformation of business activities, processes, competencies and models.

Madam Presiding Officer, as previously mentioned, Tobago is a service-driven, tourism-led. For an economy such as ours to be buoyant, it will require predictable, sufficient and reliant air and sea transport.

At my last check last night,, Madam Presiding Officer, the paltry offerings by Caribbean Airlines of twelve (12) flights daily are sold out till after the Tobago Carnival in October, and even beyond. And while this is so, the hotel and guest house capacity remains at maximum, fifty percent (50%) bookings.



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The excuse I was given, is that it is costly to keep the ANR Robinson airport opened till the usual 1:30 a.m in the morning. In other words, it is too costly to keep the Tobago airport opened till 1:30 a.m, while the Trinidad airport is opened twenty-four (24) hours every day.

I have checked with the Airport Authority of Trinidad & Tobago (AATT) and discovered that the cost to keep the airport open till 2 a.m. daily will cost only sixteen thousand, eight hundred dollars (\$16,800.00). Somebody in the Central Government thinks it is too costly to pay sixteen thousand, eight hundred dollars (\$16,800.00) per day \$16,800.00 to keep the Tobago airport open for this economy to get moving again.

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Madam Presiding Officer, we propose to foot the bill from our airlift support resources to keep the Tobago Airport opened till 1.30 a.m. [*Desk thumping*] After all, Air and Sea Ports are part of the remit of the Fifth Schedule. This is a clear signal from this Administration, that we do not just want autonomy, but we are ready for the responsibility. [*Desk thumping*]

Caribbean Airlines will now have no excuses. The movement of Caribbean Airlines between the both islands, is an essential service and it is the duty of the Central Government to fund such an operation. Therefore, I am using this platform to say to Caribbean Airlines, "Please return to full capacity."

Madam Presiding Officer, the gains from the targeted investments will be considerable. The tourism business establishments will become more efficient, which will free up time and resources to focus on strategic tasks. Business incomes and savings will grow as the gap closes between enticing a potential visitor and closing a sale. New jobs will be created as the sector develops and altogether, Tobago will experience a rising standard of living.

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Madam Presiding Officer, the Creative Economy also called the 'Orange Economy' comprises designs and visual arts, tourism, and cultural heritage, new media and software, performing arts, music, and literary arts and publications. The most recent estimates by United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) suggest that if the Orange Economy globally as seen as a single country, it will be the fourth largest economy, currently worth four point two nine trillion dollars (\$4.29t) and the ninth largest export of goods and services, at six hundred and forty billion (640b) and it will have the fourth largest labour force, or one hundred and forty-four million (144m) workers.

Madam Presiding Officer, we inherited a poorly maintained and underdeveloped Shaw Park Complex, along with the newly formed Tobago Performing Arts Company and we immediately set out to bring some structure to the space. We got the air conditioning fixed after all this while.

*[Desk thumping]*

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We supported with THA resources, the Adventures of the Performing Arts Academy as it is this Administration's intent to explore opportunities in the Orange Economy. The possibilities for the Orange Economy was brought to the fore by the overwhelming response of one of TPACs Symmetry Production – “The Bitter Cassava” production. The production was well received in both Tobago and Trinidad and the THA sponsored that and paid for that adventure, might I add.

Over the next fiscal year, we propose through the Shaw Park Complex and TPAC, to undertake the following initiatives:

- Provide technical support to primary and secondary schools in Tobago for Visual Arts and Performing Arts (VAPA) programmes;
- Provide technical support to the various communities to enhance the quality of the Heritage productions;
- Host a Festival of the arts called, “Mele” to showcase local and cultural talents;

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- Embark on a marketing campaign to take 'The Bitter Cassava' production to regional and international audiences;
- Provide technical support aimed at making the Tobago Carnival a distinctly Tobagonian product, blending the cultural nuances of Tobago with a contemporary carnival flare;
- Build out all performance and training spaces at Shaw Park Complex to include among other things, a recording studio; a green room; LED room, dance studio, small theaters, meeting and conference rooms etcetera;
- Explore filmmaking opportunities;
- Have a dedicated team that will market Tobago as a film maker's paradise;
- Create documentaries; soaps; sitcoms; children content; public education content and creative advertisement for the promotion of Tobago among others;

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- Bring world renowned experts in the performing and visual arts, to take up residency at the facility to promote the training of our young people;
- Transformation of the Shaw Park Complex as an academic facility, where tertiary level institutions can offer their degree programmes. This will be part of our development of education for export; and
- Within the next month, the Department of Culture and Antiquities will be resident at the Shaw Park Complex.

Finally, Tobago's most expensive development project is being put to good use. [*Desk thumping*]

Moreover, Madam Presiding Officer, the Tobago Festival Commission will be mandated to offer to visitors some of their signature Heritage Festival events, including goat and crab races throughout the year.

Further, the Commission along with the Tobago Hospitality and Tourism Institute, will oversee the introduction of a Food and Wine Festival in 2023.

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Relatedly, the Department of Culture will establish a Steel Pan Academy in Tobago and will include the making and tuning of pans and also classes in playing the steel pan.

Madam Presiding Officer, this Administration has decided to establish an Antiquities Unit to more effectively use our archaeological artifacts as part of our tourism product. In Fiscal 2023, the Antiquities Department will rehabilitate and refurbish various historical sites inclusive of the Speyside Waterwheel, the Roxborough Cocoa House and the Canoe Bay Sugar Mill among others to more formally integrate them into the island's tourism product.

The Department will also develop an Antiquities Registry System that will more accurately keep check of our cultural and historical assets. Given that Tobago has had a more storied path, than most other Caribbean territories, there is an urgent need to have an Assembly Bill sent down to Parliament to have legislation enacted to protect the island's artifacts. We have a few indiscriminate and inconsiderate citizens pilfering and trading artifacts from across the island. Individuals have stolen artifacts from State

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lands and private holdings and have taken these artifacts into their homes and even exported a few. Some have harvested the artifacts and sold them as scrap-iron. Others have repositioned artifacts in their own yards and use artifacts, such as large copper pots once used to boil sugarcane juice to plant flowers and adorn themselves, thereby robbing the population of access to part of their history.

We will also explore having archaeologists and university students participate in controlled/authorized digs. In the long run, Tobago will have to invest in a climate control facility and appropriate spaces to house artifacts and historical records on the island.

Madam Presiding Officer, I now turn to:

**FOOD SECURITY AND SOVEREIGNTY.** [*Desk thumping*]

The state of the agricultural sector and food security in Tobago are untenable. The island's agricultural sector contributes less than one percent (1%) of Tobago's estimated GDP, which amounts to eighteen point four million dollars (\$18.4m) in 2021. The sector employs two point five percent (2.5%) of the labour force or about eight hundred (800) workers. This



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means that labour productivity and agriculture crudely measured, is just about fourteen percent (14%) even lower than that of the government sector at eighty-eight percent (88%) Further, it is estimated that as much of the eighty percent (80%) of the fresh agricultural products sold and consumed in Tobago, are imported from Trinidad. The data signals an urgent need for rapid productivity growth in and transformation of our agricultural sector.

Additionally, Madam Presiding Officer, the COVID-19 pandemic, the disruption of supply chains globally, and the Ukraine-Russian war with the attendant increases in food prices, have made it more urgent for decisive actions to be taken towards the development of our agriculture sector and food security systems.

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My Administration intends to make safe and nutritious foods available and affordable to all Tobagonians. Towards this end, we are committed to undertaking all necessary steps to revitalize Tobago's agricultural sector and build sustainability in the island's food security systems.

The Division of Food Security, Natural Resources, the Environment and Sustainable Development is committed to addressing delays in Tractor Pool services to farmers. A Committee has been established to review the operational efficiency of the Tractor Pool service. In cases where the demands for land preparation services exceed Tractor Pool's ability to deliver these services, the Division will outsource to private tractor operators to help the situation.

We intend, Madam Presiding Officer, to get more young people involved in agriculture through the strengthening of 4-H school clubs as well as apprenticeship programmes. The Kendal Farm School will be upgraded to the Tobago Agriculture Research Institute (TARI), which will deliver a Tobago Youth in Agriculture Training Programme. The strategic objective

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is to establish an institution for continuous training and development of farmers and a cadre of skilled young agri-entrepreneurs to drive the sustainable development of the sector. The institute will place greater emphasis on the use of virtual training and more community-centric, face-to-face training as it seeks to make its offerings more accessible.

Madam Presiding Officer, in addition to the aforementioned initiatives, TARI will also utilize existing infrastructure at Hope Farm, Goldsborough and other sites across Tobago to link research training and practice geared towards stimulating growth and productivity in the agricultural sector through the deployment of climate-smart agricultural technologies.

The roll-out of TARI will be spearheaded by the Departments of Agriculture and Fisheries in collaboration with the Tobago Agribusiness Development Company (TADCO) work on the establishment of TARI will commence in Fiscal 2023,

Madam Presiding Officer, TADCO has been mandated to lead and ensure the sustainable growth and development of agribusiness on the island.

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TADCO will repurpose the Shaw Park temporary market into a day/night market where farmers, agro-processors, food vendors, artisans and craftsmen will be able to sell their products.

Madam Presiding Officer, the THA will strengthen ongoing collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) towards enhancing the school nutrition programme through greater infusions of local agricultural produce in the meal offerings. This initiative is intended to provide a guaranteed market for locally produced agricultural products to be consumed in the School Nutrition Programme.

We also intend to foster greater synergies between the agriculture sector and the tourism sector through festivals such as the Yam Festival, the Blue Food Festival, the Breadfruit Festival, the Mango Festival and Cocoa at the Lure Estate.

Another aspect of the agro-tourism initiative will be the revitalization of the cocoa industry, especially its valued history and culture.

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Madam Presiding Officer, to support the research and technical agenda of the sector, various databases are being digitized to make the collection and sharing of data more efficient. The Research and Development of Information System (RAIS) project has been launched by the Division. Data enumerators have been employed to start collecting agricultural data from the various agricultural districts.

Madam presiding Officer, we propose to increase production and productivity in the agriculture sector by:

- Making agriculture lands accessible and available for farming through an enhanced road infrastructure development programme - one that is not fraught with corruption; [*Desk thumping*]
- We will be establishing at least two highly specialized mega-farms of no less than one hundred (100) acres each;
- We will be introducing, promoting and deploying appropriate farming technologies and;

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- Providing financial and technical assistance to incentivise agricultural production and agro-processing in Tobago.

### **THE BLUE ECONOMY:**

I now turn to The Blue Economy.

Madam Presiding Officer, according to the United Nations and its affiliates, the Blue Economy is defined as the range of economic sectors and related policies that determine whether the use of oceanic resources is sustainable. The Blue Economy concept is about promoting economic growth while preserving and improving the livelihoods that are dependent on coastal assets and the ocean. Madam Presiding Officer, given Tobago's geographical location and its associated marine park resources, the development of the Blue Island Economy represents significant potential for the socio-economic transformation of Tobagonians.

Globally, the fishing industry is a multi-billion-dollar industry that provides significant economic growth and development opportunities for small-island economies like Tobago. We are all aware that many Tobagonians currently derive their livelihoods from our marine resources and

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coastal assets. However, there is still substantial, untapped potential to use these resources to spur diversification and the strengthening of Tobago's economic base.

Our core strategy is the modernization of our fishing industry. In this regard, we will provide the necessary resources to the sector to:

- Start work to establish the Tobago Institute of Marine Education (TIME), which will deal primarily with research and development and the training of fishers and other operators in the industry and to have this facility operational while exploits in the development of marinas are beginning. Tobago must not have a marina completed without there being trained professionals in the space to manage the operations and maintenance opportunities associated with marinas. In this effort, we are prepared to partner with the University of Trinidad and Tobago and to also send on scholarship, a small cohort to the Caribbean Maritime University in Jamaica to be trained;
- To support the establishment of marinas in the Tobago space with the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) (Not Central

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Government and certainly not NIDCO) leading the way. [*Desk thumping*] I Recently, had cause to politely and legally tell NIDCO that it was out of place. Act 40 of 1996 is clear once it is a 5<sup>th</sup> Schedule matter, the activity SHALL (not if or maybe) but shall be carried out by and through the THA; [*Desk thumping*] So marinas will be built and private companies will be engaged, but it all will be done not through the THA and not through any external parties; [*Desk thumping*]

For the Blue Economy we are also:

- Strengthening the Fisherfolk Associations (so we want to with the strategic aim of having them transition into cooperatives);
- Provide financial assistance and technical support to assist fishers to increase their fleet and fleet sizes; the configuration of fleet types, and infusion of modern fishing technologies; (we have to go past fishing with pirogues)
- The Relaunch the Gas Rebate Incentive Programme (after all these years);
- Promote the development of value-added in respect of seafood products that satisfy international, up-to-date food safety



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standards by financing options through our Venture Capital  
Equity Fund Limited (VCEFL) and Business Development  
Fund;

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- Upgrading of all fishing facilities on the island and ensure that they are for the very least HACCP-compliant or to meet international up-to-date food safety standards and be functionally effective.
- Research, develop and deploy appropriate sargassum (or seaweed) management systems and technologies.

It is my dream, Madam Presiding Officer, that in the next fiscal year, Tobago will have the opportunity to move away from the use of backhoes and excavators for the clearing of beaches. We cannot be battling coastal degradation and contributing to it at the same time.

We will

- Develop and implement an integrated and coordinated security and safety framework that includes, but is not limited to, the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard; Police Service, Maritime Services, Air Guard, Division of Health and TEMA.

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And we will:

- Commission a fish audit to determine the types and sizes of fishes, the breeding grounds and quantities in our waters.

Madam Presiding Officer, please permit me now to speak to the issues of:

**ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE.**

As many are aware, North-East Tobago was designated as a UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Reserve, approximately nineteen (19) months ago.

Allow me to break from my script, Madam Presiding Officer, and do the unusual thing, and commend one of our predecessors in the former Secretary, Kwesi Des Vignes who was instrumental in this initiative as well.

The North-East Tobago Biosphere Reserve presents a rare, largely intact Caribbean island Ridge-to-Ocean ecosystem that includes the world's oldest, tropical rainforest reserve. The Biosphere Reserve encompasses eighty-three thousand, four hundred and eighty-eight (83,488) hectares with a marine area of sixty-eight thousand, three hundred and eighty-four

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(68,384) hectares, that is home to coral reefs and mangroves among other resources.

Madam Presiding Officer, my Administration intends to exploit fully, all opportunities for the development and marketing of Tobago that comes with such a designation. The UNESCO Man and the Biosphere designation presents prospects for:

- Enhancement of Tobago's international reputation and brand recognition which can be used by entrepreneurs to successfully market local goods and services;
- The attraction of "Green Visitors" (new phrase) in greater numbers and creating additional spending in the wider tourism sector;
- Increased funding from international donors, development banks and private investment to support environmental conservation activities and development of the green, blue, and purple economies in support of sustainable development.

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- Enhanced opportunities for education and professional development through international exchanges; and
- An elevated focus on the environmental challenges of concern.

Madam Presiding Officer, it is important to note, that the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere designation provides a robust framework through which a progressive, ecologically focused, culturally sensitive, people-centered development agenda can be pursued. Indeed, international organizations are already showing an interest in establishing long-term investment profiles and partnerships, based on the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere designation.

Madam Presiding Officer, given the challenging socio-economic legacy of COVID-19 and in consideration of key environmental and ecological assets for our socio-economic well-being, the potential of this designation to be an important post-COVID-19 recovery catalyst for North-East Tobago and the entire island, must be harnessed and we intend to do so.

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On the other hand, climate change remains the biggest existential threat to life and livelihoods that we have grown accustomed to. For Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in the Caribbean region, sea level rise and rising sea surface temperatures, pose significant threats to coastal ecological systems such as coral reefs, beaches, coastal communities and infrastructure.

Madam Presiding Officer, with the Buccoo Reef Marine Park area, RSSTs and the anthropogenic effects arising from land-based activities, have already resulted in significant coral decline in the Buccoo Reef. In addition to serving as nurseries for pelagic species, corals also play an important role in wave attenuation. Therefore, coral decline also results in feedback effects that manifest along our coastline in the form of coastal erosion and accretion.

Madam Presiding Officer, these effects are very evident along Tobago's treasured coastline. We are concerned about erosion along every coastline around the island, particularly along the Windward coastline.

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Recently, a technical team from the CDB visited and conducted an assessment of coastal erosion around Tobago. Madam Presiding Officer, having led the team along the visits, I can tell you that they were very astonished by the severity and aggressive nature of the erosion taking place around the island.

The situation in the East is dire, with homes, beaches and fishing facilities under direct threat. The preliminary and conservative estimate given by the CDB team for the implementation of a well-engineered Coastal Protection and Restoration Programme, is at least one point two billion dollars (\$1.2b). I am advised that the team submitted an interim report to the Ministry of Planning and Development for funding consideration. Madam Presiding Officer, our Technical Officers are in constant contact with the Bank's team and await the required and necessary funding.

It should therefore be clear, Madam Presiding Officer, that addressing the issues related to RSSTs, SLRs and coastal erosion, require an approach that incorporates coastal risk assessment, including but not limited to:

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- Modelling of the impacts of sea level rise on coastal geomorphology;
- Modelling of impacts of RSSTs on coastal biological systems - for example, coral reefs;
- Community-based vulnerability assessments within coastal communities;
- Identification of coastal adaptation pathways.
- Identification of the limits to adaptation and selection of the most appropriate adaptation of options.

Madam Presiding Officer, the Coastal Management Unit in the Division of Infrastructure, Quarries and Urban Development, is engaged in a process of finding hard solutions. However, the tactical installation of armored rocks and other hard structures along vulnerable coastlines is only one strategy, which regrettably, could at times lead to maladaptive coastal management outcomes, that could exacerbate the effects of coastal erosion. Such maladaptive responses already exist in coastal South-west Tobago in



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areas such as Black Rock, Swallows, and the Pigeon Point Heritage Park.

What is therefore urgently required, is a suite of solutions that include:

- Infrastructure fixes;
- Nature-based solutions;
- Institutional strengthening; and
- A clear plan of action.

In this regard, Madam Presiding Officer, the Secretary with responsibility for Coastal Management, is currently engaged in a process to undertake a comprehensive study of coastal erosion across all of Tobago. The project is entitled, “Living with the SEA.” Beginning in Fiscal 2023, we will establish a “Living with the SEA” working group that will be tasked with responsibility of developing a Comprehensive Coastal Resilience Plan for areas that have been affected by the impacts of climatic and environmental changes.

As part of the global community, Tobago is committed to playing its part in meeting global climate targets. Notwithstanding our insignificant role

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in fuelling climate change, in pursuit of a net zero economy, the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) intends to account accurately for the role that its natural assets play in offsetting carbon emissions by exploring non-evasive ways of measuring the carbon sequestration capacity of Tobago's forest resources. Some experts believe that results of such an exercise, may very well reveal that the island has already achieved and indeed, exceeded the net zero target.

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Madam Presiding Officer, this information is expected to be particularly valuable to our international environmental reputation and tourism marketing efforts. Further, verifying Tobago's status in terms of the net zero target allows us not only to get involved in potentially lucrative carbon trading markets, but it also provides useful information to guide economic development on the island along sustainable pathways by monitoring the cumulative, climatic impact of existing and planned economic activities against the carbon offsetting capacity of the island.

So, Madam Presiding Officer, reforestation is an important climate mitigation strategy that contributes to the achievement of the net zero target, given the role of forests in carbon sequestration. However, in small island developing states (SIDs) like ours, with limited land space and competing land uses, efficient use of the limited space is a social, economic and environmental imperative. In addition to continuing with conventional reforestation activities, the THA finds it prudently necessary to invest in agroforestry systems, including, but not limited to, 'The Tobago Breadfruit Initiative,' which helps to address issues related to food security in a way which integrates households and communities in the

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process, while addressing the climate challenge by positively contributing to the carbon sequestration capacity of the island.

In addition, Madam Presiding officer, focus will be placed on restoring natural ecosystems like mangrove forests to address climate impacts. The integrity of natural ecosystems like mangrove forests, is a critical element of the matrix of solutions for addressing climate change impacts, particularly in small island developing states (SIDs).

Mangroves have a superior capacity to sequester carbon compared to terrestrial forests. They provide a range of ecosystem services and critical functions which include among other things, shoreline stabilization, storm protection and water quality maintenance, as well as the provision of habitats, feeding and nursery grounds for a variety of terrestrial and marine species.

In this regard, Madam Presiding Officer, my Administration is committed to making the required investments in the restoration of natural ecosystems by supporting the restoration of wetlands across the island, including where necessary and practicable, the acquisition of privately-held wetlands assets that are considered critical to our conservation and net zero ideals. [*Desk thumping*]

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Globally, the energy and transport sectors are the source of a very significant majority of greenhouse gas emissions and therefore, these sectors hold the key to meeting the climate challenge. Reducing the global carbon emissions to net zero by mid-century is consistent with efforts to limit the long-term increase in average global temperatures to 1.5 degrees Celsius. However, this calls for a transformation of how we all produce, transport and consume energy. It also calls for the meaningful involvement of citizens in the process, and the transition to net zero is for and about people. A transition of this nature can only be achieved, Madam Presiding Officer, with the sustained support and participation by citizens.

Madam Presiding Officer, for many countries, the net zero path is narrow and staying on that pathway requires immediate investment in clean and efficient technologies. While Tobago is not a significant producer of energy in-house, its long tradition of environmental stewardship, our international obligations, and our commitment to that net zero pathway, calls for scaling up investment in renewable energy, particularly solar energy.

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In light of the rapidly-reducing cost of solar power infrastructure and as the technology becomes more efficient, electrification must be considered as an important economy-wide tool for reducing emissions in support of our net zero ideals. Accordingly, the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) is committed to facilitating the process to ensure that the energy requirements of all new public housing developments and existing THA-owned facilities will be satisfied in part, by renewable energy powered by solar electricity. [*Desk thumping*] The Tobago House of Assembly (THA) is committed to the development of a policy framework to incentivise the inclusion of renewable energy in supplying power to all new industrial, commercial and residential developments that are privately owned.

Further, Madam Presiding Officer, this Administration is committed to a progressive urban and rural planning agenda which provides for significant uptake in the utilization of renewable energy in facilitating the establishment and maintenance of commercial infrastructure and communication in support of sustainable development.

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We will partner with the private sector to eliminate the use of plastic bags at groceries and department stores island-wide. The private sector has already indicated that they are willing to foot fifty percent (50%) of the bill.

Finally, Madam Presiding Officer, the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) intends to incentivize greater use of greener and more energy-efficient vehicles by working with public and private partners, locally and internationally, to facilitate the establishment of the appropriate infrastructure on the island to promote these vehicles.

Already, the Public Transport Service Corporation (PTSC) has signalled that its next fleet of buses due to arrive in 2023, will be electric. The Tobago House of Assembly's (THA's) next fleet of vehicles will also be electric. [*Desk thumping*] This Executive wishes to signal that all publicly-owned car parks and locations with public offices will all have charging stations for electric vehicles. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Presiding Officer, I refuse to allow Tobago to be left behind the way we were left behind with the promise and undelivered CNG Gas Station.

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Madam Presiding Officer, I will now speak to Education and Human Capital Development.

### **EDUCATION AND HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT**

Madam Presiding Officer, education is the key ingredient in our growth and transformation matrix to make Tobago '*the greatest little island on the planet.*' As Chief Secretary and also as an educator, I place a very high premium on education and knowledge capital. Accordingly, this Administration has resolved to make the necessary levels of investment in the education, training, retooling and reskilling of Tobagonians, especially our young people.

Madam Presiding Officer, our strategic policy objective is to prepare Tobagonians to be responsible and productive citizens who can actively participate in the island's development and compete on a global scale.

Madam Presiding Officer, the goal of this Administration is to immediately begin to rebuild and transform the island's education system into a modern, digital, technologically-driven, client-friendly, high-performing and resilient learning ecology.



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Our intention is to make the investments necessary for the development of the education sector in Fiscal 2023. Madam Presiding Officer, the investments will be geared towards the following:

- Completion of all the preconstruction works and requirements for the construction of the New Scarborough Secondary School at Bacolet at a projected cost of five hundred million dollars (\$500m.), which will be funded by a CDB loan;
- Completion of the assessment of the other secondary schools for their upgrade to Smart School designation;
- Development and design of a plan for the construction of a new, special school for students in the speech, language and hearing impairment sector;

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- Capacity-building training in school leadership and governance in the focal areas of school-based management; performance based management; public discipline; policy and planning; effective school framework and positive behavior management.
- Provision to our teachers with the necessary training and resources that will equip them with the competencies required to effectively engage students in technologically-enabled digital classrooms;
- Monitoring and evaluation of the performance of the students at primary school level via the Tobago District Assessment;
- Assessment of COVID-19 induced learning losses and making the necessary interventions to correct same to avoid future losses;
- Development and strengthening of the Technical Vocation and Education Training, known as (TVET) to provide for a two-track education system in Tobago that will include our trade schools;

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- Conversion of the Roxborough Secondary into the Caribbean's premier and possibly only TVET school, that takes a youth from secondary education, all the way to tertiary education.

It must be one of a kind.

Madam Presiding Officer, I am ironically making this pronouncement three (3) days after the passing of one of the island's most foremost TVET educators and former Roxborough Secondary teacher, Mr. Arcturus Browne of Charlotteville.

- An aggressive campaign to acquire sufficient and suitably qualified teachers and educators in TVET.

We will also have:

- Reassessment of the School Nutrition Programme, to ensure that our students are being fed clean, safe and healthy meals. A School Feeding Observatory will be set up to facilitate timely access by parents to the weekly menus. The Division of Education and Technology has already signalled its intent to now increase by five dollars (\$5), the cost we pay for breakfast and lunch for our children;

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- The creation and alignment of the school curriculum with a Tobago-centric, cultural, and historical agenda, that will reinforce the students and their communities sense of self.
- Development of specific interventions and associated investments to improve the performance of our students at both primary and the secondary levels;
- Ensuring that all critical, remedial or enhancement works on the school plant are completed on time and within budget;
- Retrofitting schools at the various levels of the education sector to accommodate special needs students and staff;
- Effective September 01, 2022, there will be the hiring of pupil aids and teacher aids to assist with the integration of students throughout the public school system; [*Desk thumping*]
- Effective September 01, 2022, there will be the hiring of Occupational Therapists, Speech Language Therapists, Physiotherapists, Art Therapists, and Diagnostic Specialists for our schools in general and our School for the Deaf at Bon Accord and Happy Haven, more specifically. Currently, we have none formally engaged in the education system;

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- Construction of a purpose-built, modern, technologically advanced school for special needs children on the island has finally started with pre-construction works. [*Desk thumping*]

Tobago should be collectively ashamed, that in 2022, we have inadequate facilities for special needs children. We are all to be blamed for the lack of proper measures to integrate special needs children in our school system.

This Executive Council has established a special Committee led by the head of Planning, Mr. Bobby Andrews, to complete the planning and speedy execution of plans for the development of the school at Signal Hill. Already, one architect has committed his services and those of his students for free to this project. Given that we are collectively responsible for their marginalization, I wish to appeal to all Tobagonians to contribute in whatever way you can to this project.

There will also be assigned as of September 01, 2022, designated maxis travelling from Tobago East and Tobago North to transport the special needs children to school. These maxis will be used until we acquire

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special-built buses. Support staff will accompany these students on the maxis.

Madam Presiding Officer, no longer is that mother in Parlatuvier required to take a transport to Scarborough to drop off her child, return home and take another in the afternoon to collect her child. That problem will be fixed as of September 01, 2022. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Presiding Officer, the gains from investments in the development of human capital, will be many and widespread. If, as intended, we invest from pre-school to university, then as a society, as communities, as individuals, we will be able to make better decisions and increase our chances of transforming Tobago's productivity. The cost: Madam Presiding Officer, of criminal behaviour will also fall dramatically, and social harmony will grow.

## **HEALTH AND SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMME**

I now turn our attention to Health and Social Protection Programme.

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Madam Presiding Officer, the general health status and well-being of any population have implications for its socio-economic development. The COVID-19 pandemic, has upended the health and well-being of the global population and has clearly demonstrated this. It has also tested the resilience and exposed the fragility of the health care systems in all countries.

Our own health care system was severely stretched and stressed by the pandemic. The fragility and weaknesses in our health care system were laid bare before us, worsened by the inept management of our predecessors. We are committed to fixing this. [*Desk thumping*]

This Administration is committed to reorganizing and transforming the institutions, systems and processes towards building resilience and the specialized capabilities into the island's health care delivery.

Among the development measures we propose to implement in Fiscal 2023 are:

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- The upgrade of primary care delivery systems throughout the island aimed at prevention and treatment of all diseases particularly the Non-communicable Diseases (NCDs);
- Aggressive and continuous public health education and promotion;
- Continued development of the Infectious Diseases Centre at the old hospital to enhance our ability to engage in research and treatment;
- Full operationalization of the Roxborough Hospital to deliver all tertiary, medical care services;
- An Integrated Digital Data Management System for the seamless sharing of information across the entire health system. This will also feed critical data and information into the island's Public Health Observatory (PHO);

Finally,

- An Insectary, Food and Water Testing Laboratory, to support the surveillance of, and response to vector-borne, food and water-borne diseases;



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- Improvement of diagnostic capabilities, by installing necessary imaging and laboratory equipment and training the complement of staff to facilitate quick testing and timely return of results to clients;

Madam Presiding Officer, I know someone waiting five (5) years now on a laboratory test result. Early detection allows for timely intervention and treatment.

- A structured programme for continuous training and upgrading of our medical and the support staff; and
- Development of a comprehensive Waste Management System, featuring modern green waste disposal solutions;

Soon, Madam Presiding Officer, very soon, Tobagonians will be sorting our waste and managing our eco footprints.

Madam Presiding Officer, it is said that there is “no health without mental health.” The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for a more focused and robust approach to the mental health of our people - adults and children.

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Madam Presiding Officer, it is in this regard, in Fiscal 2023, a Mental Health Education drive will be implemented to enlighten and empower children, teens and adults with specific and scientific facts.

We will also strengthen our capacity to deliver community mental health services by expanding the human capacity infrastructure, such as halfway homes, community day-care centres and community homes. The goal is to make mental health an easy and caring household conversation, without stigma. Tobago has to get to the place that people challenged with mental health are not viewed as if someone did them something or they did something themselves to deserve it, or it is 'obeah' or demonic possession. We must fully understand the facts surrounding mental health.

As it relates to in-patient services, we propose to increase the bed capacity to at least eight (8) male and eight (8) female or by thirty-three point three three percent (33.33%) up from the current capacity of just twelve (12) beds. Additionally, we are going to establish a dedicated Child Psychiatry Ward with a capacity of two (2) male and two (2) female beds.

In addition, we are going to upgrade and reopen the Tobago Rehabilitation and Empowerment Centre (TREC), [*Desk thumping*] which

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was closed down - one of those that suffered the fate of 'Hurricane Agatha,' but became fully closed and was converted to a COVID-19 facility during the height of the pandemic.

Madam Presiding Officer, Tobago has two state-of-the-art hospital plans and therefore, the critical, physical infrastructure to support establishment of a medical school. Our intention is to, (and by the way, that is one of the good sides of 'Hurricane Agatha') in partnership with a consortium of international hospitals, explore the option of establishing a teaching and research hospital model on the island. This will ensure that Tobago can move to the cutting edge of teaching and learning in the medical and allied health sciences.

Just like the other elements of our investment programme to upgrade education and health care capacity, the benefits of building a medical school in Tobago are substantial. For now, I will only indicate that the investments will provide Tobago's providers with reliable, cost-effective and sustained health care processes. These will enable our providers to achieve the goal of delivering international-standard care and grow Tobago's reputation for enhanced patient outcomes. It is through

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advances like these, that living standards will improve in Tobago and the nation, by extension.

Madam Presiding Officer, we recognize that there is a very strong link between health, wellness and social protection. The island's social safety net was literally torn apart, mashed-up and disseminated before the pressures of COVID-19. The demonstrated incompetence of the last Administration did not help the situation. Hundreds of individuals and families were unable to receive much-needed help while some Secretaries had hundreds of food cards and social emergency cards in their back pockets playing politics. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Presiding Officer, it is not surprising that the 2021 Auditor General's report on the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) COVID-19 programmes, was damning.

Madam Presiding Officer, as we move forward to making Tobago '*the greatest little island on the planet,*' we are committed to building resilience, efficiency and effectiveness in our social protection programme.

To this end, we intend to:

- Fully digitize the social protection processes to ensure greater accessibility and more timely delivery of support to our most vulnerable;

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- Restructure the Social Protection Department to ensure that staff at all levels are provided with capacity-building opportunities in the areas of leadership; industrial relations; public service policies; performance management; report writing and Social Protection Department policies; [*Desk thumping*]
- Review policies and streamline the processes of the Social Protection Department to ensure diversity, equity and inclusion and more importantly, that no one is left behind; [*Desk thumping*]
- Institute a robust community engagement programme across the island where staff of the Social Protection Department are available at Health Centres, Community Centres and other community-based locations to facilitate greater access to the services of the department, which means that you no longer have to journey from country all the way to get road, to access these services; and [*Desk thumping*]
- Review and streamline the processes of the Social Emergency Card and Food Card Unit to ensure greater public accountability. Because I know my Secretary of Health's name would not be calling in any Auditor General's Report. [*Desk thumping*]

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**HOUSING:**

Madam Presiding Officer, I want us to move to Housing.

Appropriate and affordable housing is a basic need of every child and family. Accordingly, my Administration is committed to improving both the quality and the availability of affordable housing to low and middle-income families, as well as to our young professionals.

At present, there are over eight thousand (8,000) applicants in the system awaiting public housing solutions. Many applicants need to update their files. A digital platform will be created to facilitate this process. Some applicants, Madam Presiding Officer, have been waiting for over fifteen (15) years to hear their name called, to no avail. This is not surprising and as I have been saying for some time now, our predecessors only built three hundred and fifty-six (356) houses in the last twenty-one (21) years, which is an average of seventeen (17) homes per year. The previous Administration also provided an average of eleven (11) service lots per year. If that isn't underperformance, I don't know what is! [*Desk thumping*]



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Given the current high price of a standard dwelling unit and the low average income of most households in Tobago, the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) is compelled to intervene through subsidies as the major player to address failures in the real estate market. The Secretary of Settlements and his Assistant have been mandated to “fix dis.” [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Presiding Officer, I am pleased to report that, under his astute leadership, the long-awaited Shirvan Integrated Housing Development and a new Bacolet Housing Development, which are projected to provide approximately four hundred (400) housing solutions and one hundred and twenty-two (122) service lots to Tobagonians respectively, are actively being pursued. These projects have garnered significant private sector interest, with several unsolicited proposals already presented.

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Madam Presiding Officer, while we welcome unsolicited proposals, the request for expressions of interest for these two (2) housing developments will be published before the end of Fiscal 2022. [*Desk thumping*] Let me put on record, Madam Presiding Officer, that we welcome proposals from anyone for affordable, resilient and sustainable housing solutions that deliver on value for money. [*Desk thumping*]

Additionally, work is advancing at the Riseland Housing Development with technical and financial support from the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB). Madam Presiding Officer, it is projected that infrastructure works will be completed by the beginning of Fiscal 2023 (most likely, October 2022). Further developments at Adelphi, Courland Phase II and Adventure Phase III are to follow and collectively, these projects are designed to deliver three hundred (300) housing units to Tobagonians. [*Desk thumping*]

In keeping with our stated commitment to expand villages and keep families together, we are actively exploring the use of State Lands in



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Speyside, Kendal, Pembroke and Culloden for the purpose of housing and service lots. [*Desk thumping*]

In keeping with the Land Use Plan being developed, the Division of Settlements will be collaborating with the Division of Infrastructure, Quarries and Urban Development, to establish new road networks and re-establish existing ones such as the Miss Mills Trace, to make lands more available.

Madam Presiding Officer, we are also undertaking a strategic review of social programmes to simplify accessibility and the delivery to Tobagonians. The Home Improvement Programme includes several grants and subsidies geared towards providing financial relief, ranging from fifteen thousand dollars (\$15,000.00) to fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000.00). The strategic review will look deliberately at these amounts in light of the grievous socio-economic impact of COVID-19 and other related social conditions. It is important to note here, that in the new fiscal year, applicants will be able to access Home Improvement Assistance via simplified,

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digitized forms which are less onerous and features secure and efficient workflow processes while providing for transparency and accountability.

Going forward, the strategic framework for the sustainability of our Housing Programme will be anchored in the following:

- Multiple funding modalities, both public and private;
- Projections for future growth in demand based on the demographic trajectory of the island's population;
- Upgrade of the current housing stock, with emphasis on attaining certain minimum standards of housing quality;
- The availability of State lands;
- Formulation of general policy guidelines;
- Auditing of infrastructure and utilities;
- Establishment of the planning and regulatory framework;
- Identification of the responsible agencies; and
- Green construction technologies.

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Madam Presiding Officer, we have begun to think through an ambitious but achievable Housing Programme. It is our intention to provide one thousand (1000) fully-serviced housing lots in our first term. That is two hundred and fifty (250) units per year, [*Desk thumping*] or a three hundred percent (300%) increase in delivery. [*Desk thumping*] We intend to pursue our Housing Programme using partnership investment instruments with investors both at home and abroad. We encourage Tobagonians at home and abroad to join us in investing in a piece of our own paradise.

We anticipate that the provision of one thousand (1,000) housing lots will lead to direct injection of more than one point five billion dollars (\$1.5b) into the Tobago economy. We intend to commence work on our housing strategy in the second quarter of Fiscal 2023.

**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND EMPOWERMENT**

So, Madam Presiding Officer, let me now speak to Community Development and Empowerment. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Presiding Officer, the conceptual definition of communities, presents a targeted unit of

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measure for economic growth development and transformation. Therefore, the development of the island's communities into socially cohesive, organized and productive, socio-economic units, is one of the most significant policy objectives of my Administration. We intend to mobilize, organize and empower our communities to actively participate in the socio-economic transformation and governance of Tobago. Already, we are training several young people across the island through the University of the West Indies in Social Entrepreneurship, paid for by the Tobago House of Assembly (THA). This is a critical component of our expressed mandate to develop the island "child by child, family by family, community by community". [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Presiding Officer, for too long, many of our CBOs, NGOs and FBOs have been left in a state of relative dysfunctionality. We are persuaded that building effective functionality into them is essential to the realization of our policy mandate. In Fiscal 2023, Madam Presiding Officer, we propose:

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- To develop the administrative framework for the rollout and we will roll out the District Fund Programme; (DPF)

Let me say here and now, that even the Minority Leader will receive in equal parts, [*Desk thumping*] [*Laughter*] access to this fund - in equal parts, Mr. Minority Leader.

We will:

- Develop an institutional framework for the establishment of community administration;
- Upgrade and expand the community-based technical/vocational training programme;
- Institutionalize the relationship with the faith-based community through the Tobago Faith-Based Council;
- Conduct of upgrade works on several multi-purpose facilities and community centers across the island;
- Continue the reconstruction of the Integrated Community Centre and pavilion facility at Charlotteville;

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- Embark on full refurbishment and upgrade works to the Scarborough, Plymouth, and Bethel Community Centres.
- A new policy framework for putting community facilities back in the hands of communities, where they belong; [*Desk thumping*]

Communities must own and manage their facilities, not an Administrator some place in town.

- Commence the planning and design of a community facility for Roxborough; and
- Establish two (2) skills training facilities in the East and West of Tobago.

Madam Presiding Officer, our institutional arrangements for community participation will be defined by a greater degree of direct participation in policymaking, providing greater opportunities to practise democracy. The formation and establishment of institutional arrangements for community governance fall within the purview of the Division of

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Community Development, Youth Development, and Sport. The Secretary in this Division, is already engaging in community-wide consultations to establish the community governance model, the people want. We anticipate a full rollout of the new arrangements before the end of Fiscal 2023.

Together, with other arrangements to enable public participation in the policy making process, Tobago will achieve several returns from their investments. Most important among these, is greater participation in shaping the development policies of government by the owner of Tobago - Tobagonians themselves.

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A second gain will be better policies – in the sense of policies that are desired by the people who will better learn the roles, responsibilities and limitations of government officials.

A third gain will be a more harmonious and satisfied population.

**INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND REFORM:**

Madam Presiding Officer, let me seg way into Institutional Development and Reform.

It is through State institutions that the resources of the country are utilized for development purposes. Therefore, the capacity and capability of our institutions have direct implications for development. Global empirical data have shown that countries with high-quality institutions experience greater socio-economic development outcomes and better public accountability.

Madam Presiding Officer, over the last twenty-one (21) years, we have all witnessed public denouncement of the poor quality of the Tobago House of Assembly's (THA's) institutional systems and procedures in successive reports of the Auditor General. A case in point, Madam Presiding Officer – in 2006 the Auditor



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General's report revealed that the former Tobago House of Assembly (THA) then had recorded in its financial statement that it had two hundred and twenty-five point eight million dollars (\$225.8m) in a bank account, but could not provide the banking details to support this. Incredible!

Madam Presiding Officer, there are hundreds of other similarly scandalous findings in every Auditor General's Report on the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) in the last twenty-one (21) years. It is my hope that the Minority Councillor, who in her previous incarnation had direct responsibilities for these matters, will shed some light during her contribution in the space. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Presiding Officer, I wish to give Tobagonians and the national community the assurance, that on my watch, these financial capers are a thing of the past. We fixing dis! [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Presiding Officer, as Secretary of Finance, I am pleased to announce that the Assembly, in collaboration with the national Government, has embarked on a project to advance the Government's Public Financial Management Reform Strategy. This is aimed at strengthening the Government's public financial resource management system, which has been plagued with two (2) fundamental

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challenges, namely, an outdated Public Financial Management (PFM) framework and poor information management.

Madam Presiding Officer, this has been happening for a while, but a particular Officer who had some responsibility for the execution of this matter who now sits in this House, did little to nothing in ensuring that this was a reality in the Tobago space. [*Desk thumping*] [*Interruption*]

**MR. K. MORRIS:** Madam Presiding Officer, I rise on Standing Orders 45 ...

**HON. CHIEF SECRETARY:** Against who? You? I did not call a name. I threw the corn and if the yard fowl wants to pick it up, let the yard fowl pick it up. I did not call a name... [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*]

**MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER:** Members, Members, please allow the presentation to be completed.

**HON. CHIEF SECRETARY:** Thank you.

**MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER:** Please proceed.

**HON. CHIEF SECRETARY:** With financial and technical support from the Inter-American Development Bank, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago was able to actively initiate the project named, 'The Integrated Financial Management



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Information System' (IFMIS) project. As I indicated, this should have happened a long time ago. The Tobago House of Assembly (THA) was selected, along with three (3) Ministries, to be part of the pilot of the Government's IFMIS Project Implementation strategy. The intention is to move the Assembly fully into IFMIS by the start of Fiscal 2023. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Presiding Officer, recognising that the progress of the project is dependent on drive and support at the highest level, the Executive Council has recently approved and appointed an IFMIS Support Committee to provide oversight, technical support and project reporting. It is also envisaged that this Committee will encourage user participation, as well as promote an effective, persuasive and practical change management process throughout the critical stages of the project's implementation. Further, we will continue to ensure that appropriate resources are adequately allocated to support the project implementation process.

Madam Presiding Officer, my Division will lead the implementation project and will also serve as the Pilot Division within the Tobago House of Assembly

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(THA). To date, the Division has successfully led the first phase of the end-user training and capacity-building sessions.

The Division is expected to complete the implementation of the Pilot and go live at the beginning of Fiscal 2023.

**POLICY RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE:**

Madam Presiding Officer, I spoke earlier about the lack of statistical data. Here is the fix. Another critical area of our institutional strengthening project, is policy research and policy development - something that was shut down, closed and mashed up by our predecessors. This is a critical first step in the socio-economic planning and development function. Accordingly, we have to grow and develop and expand our capacities and capabilities to collect, collate and analyse data to produce scientifically validated information and knowledge for use in planning and decision-making at all levels of the society. We therefore propose to upgrade the Policy Research and Development Institute or (PRDI) to a semi-autonomous institution purposefully designed to do the following:

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- Collaborate with and support the Central Statistical Office (CSO) and other data collection entities to upgrade the collection and dissemination of official data and statistics;
- Build institutional capacity, both technical and financial, to transform the data collected into scientifically valuable information and knowledge that can facilitate project planning and decision-making; and
- Provide a good range of technical business development and services to the public.

Madam Presiding Officer, the Assembly will seek technical and financial support from international financial institutions, such as the CDB and the IDB, towards the development of this most important institute. It is proposed that its work should be supervised by a Technical Oversight Committee comprising specialists in at least the following areas:

- (a) Statistics;
- (b) Big-data management and analytics;
- (c) Project planning and appraisal, including impact assessment; and
- (d) Economic development.

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Madam Presiding Officer, to effectively undertake this upgrading exercise, we propose to recruit the services of a highly qualified and expert statistician and general data analyst to anchor the technical work of the PRDI and serve as its Managing Director, who will lead the process of defining, recruiting and evaluating the technical capacity of staff to be engaged. This programme is set to take place in fiscal 2023.

Madam Presiding Officer, to improve the institutional efficiency of the development planning process on the island, my Administration has taken calculated steps to control Town and Country Planning in Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Presiding Officer, you will recall the Motion that was tabled and debated in this honourable House. Since then, meetings and discussions have been held with the Minister of Planning and Development, and agreement reached that the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) will assume full responsibility for Town and Country Planning in line with the provisions of the 5<sup>th</sup> Schedule of the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) Act 40 of 1996. [*Desk thumping*]

Accordingly, accommodation has been identified and secured at the recently refurbished Policy Research and Development Institute (PRDI) building. At

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present, the records of the Town and Country Planning Department are being digitized. However, to expedite the seamless transfer of operations to the Tobago House of Assembly (THA), I have committed to meeting the costs associated with the digitization of the Tobago records and systems.

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What this means, is that Tobago will for the first time, have full control of its two (2) fundamental functions of the Town and Country Planning Department - development planning and development control. [*Desk thumping*] Very importantly, the new arrangement for Town and Country Planning will allow us to have control of our development agenda, and thus, removing the related frustration and hardships that Tobagonians have endured in the past.

**REFORM OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN TOBAGO.**

At this juncture, I know all our Administrators are listening intently.

Madam Presiding Officer, effective and efficient public service delivery in Tobago and Trinidad has been rather an inconsistent reality. There are thousands of testimonies from citizens about poor, disturbing quality of public service delivery in Tobago. This raises the specter of “bureaucratic politics,” a huge permanent and virtually uncontrollable organization called the Tobago House of Assembly (THA), run by entrenched, unelected and politically appointed officials. Having had my



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own unpleasant experiences and a notable body of complaints since becoming Chief Secretary, Madam Presiding Officer, I have no need for further evidence or argument to convince me that we need to fix this. Madam Presiding Officer, adapting the requirements of bureaucracy to those of democracy has been a persistent challenge for public administration generally. The core issue is accountability - the capacity of the public to hold public officials accountable for their actions or inactions. Public officials' accountability, is a key and permanent feature in '*the greatest little island*' that we are building. [*Desk thumping*]

Towards this end, Madam Presiding Officer, my team has been in discussions with a number of international institutions and agencies with the aim of securing technical support and grant funding to effect our public administration reform agenda. Discussions were had with the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), and numerous private sector entities. Conversations were also had with the Ministry of Digital Transformation and a suite of other government agencies. In these

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dialogues, I made a very strong case for the THA to be the pilot for these projects and programmes.

In keeping with this, Madam Presiding Officer, we propose to launch a new initiative titled, “*Innovate Tobago*” - designed to get this right. Madam Presiding Officer, “*Innovate Tobago*” is conceived as a public service initiative that promotes, encourages and incentivizes public servants to come up with new and more efficient ways of doing their work. We are placing innovation at the heart of the public service transformation, public service delivery and economic development. So, Madam Presiding Officer, adjacent to and linking with “*Innovate Tobago*,” our aim is to transform the entire THA operations into an overarching, digital ecosystem, under a project titled “*Tobago Online*.” “*Tobago Online*” will have two (2) key components, E-government and E-economy, aimed at the following:

- Promotion of an integrated, efficient and effective public service;

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- Development of a new and efficient way of delivering public service; and
- Fostering of efficiency growth in economic activity.

Madam Presiding Officer, I am happy to report that several commitments were made to provide technical and financial support towards our public administration reform agenda. The findings from the following audits will shape and define how we move forward with our public administration reform programme:

- process
- system;
- HR and training needs;
- technology use;
- innovation; and
- customer service

It must be noted here, that the audits will take place across all Departments of the Assembly, notwithstanding the fact that the audit will define the way forward. Madam Presiding Officer, we recognize the need

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for immediate action to be taken to improve public administration on the island.

We also identified the need for some specific training for our senior public servants and we have been providing such training. Relatedly, Madam Presiding Officer, we intend to build out and operationalize the previously announced Tobago Public Service Academy, which will be the premier training institution for the retooling and reskilling of our public servants on the island.

I am on public record as saying, that I support having the Tobago Public Service Academy despite it was announced by my predecessor. And in the early days of coming into office, I announced that it will be one of the agenda items we will adopt and carry forward with. Madam Presiding Officer, this Administration recognizes that good governance includes continuity where things are good and abandoning things that are bad. [*Desk thumping*] So we continue things that are good and we throw away the things that are bad.

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Madam Presiding Officer, another identified issue impacting public administration in the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) is the rapid rate at which our senior public servants are being transferred to act as Deputy Permanent Secretaries and Permanent Secretaries in Trinidad.

In keeping with Section 1 of the THA Act 40 of 1996, I have discussed this matter with the Prime Minister with the aim of us co-creating a solution to the problem. I propose, Madam Presiding Officer, to bring to this House and have Section 73 of Act 40 of 1996, be considered for amending by reclassifying 'Administrators' as 'Permanent Secretaries.'

[*Desk thumping*] Madam Presiding Officer, we are 'fixing dis' for our senior public servants on the island so that we will get better administration for Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

At the level of the Executive Council, I have already issued mandate letters to Secretaries in every Division, clearly outlining the policy directives. However, this is only the first step. In Fiscal 2023, we intend to establish the Policy Mandate Secretariat. The Secretariat will lead, guide

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and support the implementation of the policy mandate framework in Divisions, Departments and special purpose companies of the THA.

Madam Presiding Officer, our intention is to establish the Policy Mandate Secretariat in the Office of the Deputy Chief Secretary before the end of Fiscal 2023. [*Desk thumping*]

Please allow me to turn to:

### **DEVELOPMENT OF OUR YOUNG PEOPLE**

According to the 2011 National Census, the island's youth population, that is persons ten (10) to thirty-five (35) years of age, were recorded at twenty-four thousand, eight hundred (24,800). This figure is significant as it represents forty-one percent (41%) of the population of Tobago, which at the time was recorded as sixty thousand, eight hundred and seventy-four (60,874). Madam Presiding Officer, such significance must be recognized in the broader scheme of the future developments of the island. Therefore, purposeful attention must be given to growing and grooming these future leaders, workers and caretakers of Tobago.

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I want to say to the youths of Tobago, that they should perhaps go and check out Jeremiah Chapter 29:11 - it says:

“For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you; plans to give you hope and a brighter future.” [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Presiding Officer, our mission is to create opportunities and an enabling youth-friendly environment that will ensure that every young person in every family and in every village self-actualizes and contributes to making Tobago, “the greatest little island on the planet.” [*Desk thumping*]

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Our portfolio of projects ... [*Interruption*]

**MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER:** Good afternoon Members. I am cautioning you all - I know you all miss the little banter, but please allow the Finance Secretary to complete his presentation.

Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**HON. CHIEF SECRETARY:** Madam Presiding Officer, Members of the House, I know things are exciting, but let us remain calm – drink some water.

Our portfolio of projects and programmes for the island's youths, is purposefully designed and engineered to produce young people who are intellectually accomplished; politically conscious; culturally literate; economically empowered; socially connected; technologically savvy and healthy; and who can co-exist in diverse circumstances in liveable communities. To put it simply, Madam Presiding Officer, we want every Tobagonian to be able to hold their own nationally, regionally and internationally.

The Department of Youth and Sport has completed the Tobago Youth Empowerment Strategy (Tobago Y.E.S) and a 4-year implementation plan



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designed on an ecological perspective. In keeping with our commitment to open and participatory governance, the strategy will be put out for public discussion.

Apart from the Divisions of the Assembly, other state agencies and key youth stakeholders are recognised as critical to the success of our youth development agenda. Our next fiscal year, we will:

- Appoint the Committee for Sustainable Youth Development (CSYD);
- Aggressively pursue digitization of processes and procedures in support of a shared digital platform to improve efficiency in the delivery of services to youths;
- Improve access to development opportunities for our youths;
- Establish a 'Youth Work Lab' to engage intellect of our young people and youth leaders in examining the critical challenges facing us as a people, and to arrive at workable solutions;

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- Establish the Youth Information Management System (YIMS), as part of the E-Government digitization project (which I spoke about before) to provide for the registration of youth and youth organizations and for our young people to have real time access to services;
- Establish the Tobago Youth Apprenticeship Programme which will deliver internship training for young people in all sectors of the island's economy. The TYAP will also serve to rationalize the repositioning of both the World of Work and the Y.E.S programmes.
- Establish "Youth 'Micro-business' Hubs" across the island with the necessary adjacent financing and technical support that will foster entrepreneurship and innovation among young people;
- Develop and pilot a Youth Business Incubator (YBI) to provide a youth-friendly nurturing environment for young people to be imbued with business acumen;
- Initiate the Implementation of the Tobago Youth Service Programme on a phased basis;

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- Implement the Environmental Youth Ambassadors, the Youth Leadership Exchange will return and the Youth Leaders Mentorship programmes;
- Implement the Reconnecting Youth Mentorship Programme to promote respect for the elders and other laudable actions by our youths;
- Construct for the first time, a small housing estate dedicated to young professionals aged forty (40) years and younger; [*Desk thumping*]
- Further legitimize the Youth Tobago House of Assembly by creating a direct channel where every quarter, questions from the Youth Assembly will be answered in this House by the adult representatives; and [*Desk thumping*]
- At least once per quarter, this House will take up a Motion previously debated by the Youth Assembly and debate it as well. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Presiding Officer, this Administration has taken note of the

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fact that institutions like the Cadets, the Pathfinders, the Boys Brigade, the Scouts, the Brownies and the Girls Guides have been great contributors to the development of many of Tobago's great leaders. Accordingly, we have taken a decision to provide the support necessary to ensure effective and efficient functioning of these entities going forward. In addition, we propose to establish an organization tasked with promoting a culture of volunteerism and social responsibility among our youths.

**SPORT DEVELOPMENT AND RECREATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE:**

Allow me to turn now to Sport Development and Recreational Infrastructure.

Madam Presiding Officer, this new Administration views sport as the vehicle for positive, economic engagement of youths as well as for the promotion of their physical well-being. It is an avenue through which our talented young sportsmen and sportswomen can develop professional careers that are economically viable.

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Madam Presiding Officer, our very own Dwight Yorke, Kellyanne Baptiste, Kenya Cordiner, Cyd Gray, Renny Quow, Akeem Stewart, Semoy Hackett and many others have all participated and performed with excellence at the professional level globally. Therefore, it is evident that Tobago's children and young people are very capable of becoming professional sportsmen and sportswomen. With this in mind, my Administration is committed to ensuring that a sports friendly environment is created in Tobago and that the necessary technical and financial infrastructure is put in place to ensure that they realize their fullest potential.

In Fiscal 2023, we propose to make the needed investments in the following:

- Undertake a sporting facilities development and upgrade programme to bring some of our critical facilities up to regional and international standards. Among the facilities targeted are the Cyd Gray Stadium and the tennis courts at Shaw Park;
- Introduce training programmes for coaches and sport administrators aimed at ensuring that they are internationally certified and

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equipped with the knowledge and technical skills to increase Tobago's flow of world-class athletes;

- Introduce a comprehensive sport development programme across the entire education system from nursery to tertiary;
- Finance inter-community competitions aimed at rebuilding and developing sporting activities at the level of the community;
- Resuscitate, shot back to life, raise from the dead, the 'Lalonde Gordon Sport Fund' and appoint a Management Committee to oversee its efficient operation. The Fund will receive and process applications for financial support and provide counselling to prospective athletes. It will also identify elite athletes and monitor and support their performances at home and abroad;
- Introduce arrangements for providing academic support to our young sportspeople aimed at ensuring that they achieve high scores in the SAT exams, thereby being enabled to benefit from lucrative international scholarships;
- Introduce a sponsorship programme to boost opportunities for Tobago's young athletes and to participate in national, regional and international sporting activities;

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- Work on Tobago's first fit-for-purpose motorsport facility in the new fiscal year. At this point, we have preliminary designs. Consultations with members from the varying motor sport disciplines have begun and are expected to continue over the next month or so. Visits were already made to proposed sites and we expect to begin the new fiscal year with the plan being made available for public discussion and then to the beginning of construction.
- We will not be able to afford the full FIA certified facility in one bite. Therefore, the project will be phased, with each phase following FIA building codes and rules.
- The first phase of the facility will allow for drifting, drag racing, radio control equipment, karting and dexterity. The facility that we will build in the first phase will also allow for defensive driving training and will be made available for other activities. We welcome private sector involvement and investments as we will employ PPP modalities to get this facility going;
- Tobago will engage in non-traditional sports. Cricket, football and track and field cannot be our only areas of investment.

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- Tobago will also receive its first Beach Soccer Facility. At the moment, an analysis of possible locations is being undertaken. Other beach sports such as volleyball will be accommodated at the same facility.
- A few of the football fields that are below regulation size and are already lit, will be considered for conversion into futsal facilities;
- Lights at Patience Hill and Louis D'Or grounds will be installed soon; [*Desk thumping*] [*Laughter*]

We will:

- Complete the enclosure of the Canaan playing field; [*Desk thumping*]
- Over the next three (3) months (and in advance of the new fiscal year) work will begin in Plymouth on a new pump track or a new cycling track; and
- Work will begin soon on refurbishing the two (2) YMCA pools;



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Madam Presiding Officer, this Administration has received many complaints and concerns about the size of the Indoor Sporting Facility under construction at Bacolet and the location of the pavilion being constructed at Goodwood.

Madam Presiding Officer, when Governments do not listen to people, they make costly mistakes. And so in Goodwood at this very moment, after avoiding putting the pavillion where it should be, with its back against the seaward side, and trying to avoid driving piles, we now have to consider reorienting the entire electrical infrastructure because one of the lighting poles will appear literally where the pavilion is being constructed.

The Bacolet Facility, as it is presently constructed, is at best a high school gymnasium, not fit for international purpose. Therefore, in response we have commissioned a review of the technical details of these projects, with a view to ensuring that investments will serve the long-term sporting

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development needs of Tobago. Actions on the results of the review will take place in Fiscal 2023.

Madam Presiding Officer, while improving the foundations of our sporting activities, gains from these investments are projected to be considerable. They include greater community participation in sport and inter-community commercial relations and eventually, greater capacity to compete and win on the national, regional and the world stages. The income of our professional athletes will grow accordingly. [*Desk thumping*] Even more important, the investments will help the Tobago children to develop physically and mentally and to build capacity for teamwork to acquire and practise leadership skills to build self-confidence and eventually to develop adequate ways to cope with the challenges of life as they mature. These outcomes will raise the living standards of households and communities across Tobago and the nation.

Allow me, Madam Presiding Officer, to turn my attention to:

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## **PUBLIC SAFETY**

The fundamental duty of a government is the safety and security of its citizenry. It is widely held that any government that cannot provide for the safety and security of its people, has no right being in office. Over the last three (3) decades, the different governments were severely challenged to provide the level and quality of public safety and security to the population of Trinidad and Tobago. It is a sad note that Trinidad and Tobago placed sixth in 2022 among the countries in the world with the highest murder rates per capita.

Madam Presiding Officer, public safety and criminal justice continue to be the major socio-economic development challenges facing the country. They negatively impact on business development, foreign direct investments, visitor arrivals and the general socialization of individuals. While Tobago is relatively and much safer than Trinidad, my Administration has taken serious note of the changing face of criminal activities on the

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island, where firearms are now the weapon of choice in the commission of murders and robberies.

In light of the foregoing, my Administration has decided to intervene directly. Accordingly, I have been holding monthly meetings with all heads of national security outfits, including the Port Authority of Trinidad and Tobago; the Airport Authority of Trinidad and Tobago and the TEMA. At these meetings, extensive discussions are held on the various coordinated strategies that should be deployed to improve public safety on the island. I gave my commitment and I will give it now, that the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) will assist where necessary and possible towards ensuring that tools, other equipment and the working environment needed to enhance the performance of these units, are provided.

In keeping with that commitment, Madam Presiding Officer, the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) has handed over two (2) boats to the Trinidad Tobago Police Service to be part of a Marine Unit in Tobago. Going forward, these engagements will be formalized into the Tobago Security Council. [*Desk thumping*]

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In addition, my Administration proposes to establish the Department of Public Safety, in the Office of the Chief Secretary and to do so before the end of Fiscal 2023. The core mandate of this Department will be the supplemental and complementary delivery of public safety services along with the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, Fire Service and other agencies of National Security.

Madam Presiding Officer, the Department of Public Safety (DPS) will also have the core function and responsibility for the protection and the security of physical assets, critical installations and officials of the THA.

The units will comprise the following:

- An Assembly Police;
- Traffic Wardens;
- Litter Wardens;
- Environment Police;
- Lifeguards;
- Reef Rangers;
- Forest Rangers; and
- TEMA.

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The DPS will be established in keeping with the provisions of the Supplemental Police Act Chapter 15:02. It is to be noted that the work has already begun on the appropriate governance and public accounting framework for this Department. The initiative is projected to create one hundred and fifty (150) additional permanent jobs when implemented.

Efforts are underway to provide public lands for a new correctional facility on the island. We will give agreed-upon acreage to National Security at no cost, so that a proper facility can be built. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Presiding Officer, I visited the Tobago prisons recently. I visited on a Thursday and by the next day, a decision was taken and executed to remove all of Tobago's inmates and to take them to Trinidad. Not a single word was said to the affected families. Most likely, that was a security decision. But given the state of the facility we have at Scarborough, we have committed to sending a team from the Division of Infrastructure to do some upgraded works so that our non-violent inmates can return to the island. [*Desk thumping*] There is a social cost to not having our prisoners

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rehabilitated at home. Have we counted the cost to families? Have we counted the cost of having our Tobago sons and daughters and young people indoctrinated into more serious criminality in Trinidad?

I have also visited the Scarborough Fire Station, built by fire officers themselves, and they should be justly proud. [*Desk thumping*] This Executive Council has taken a decision, to take up the cost of three hundred thousand dollars (\$300,000.00) that is needed to complete the works there so that the station can be used again. [*Desk thumping*]

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This contribution will be forthcoming within a few weeks.

I visited Camp Signal Hill and it is clear, abundantly clear, that National Security does not care about Tobago's security. I have given a commitment to that team, that the Division of Infrastructure will assist in completing the dorms at Signal Hill so that our sons and daughters would not have to sleep in squalor. It is heart-breaking to see the conditions under which they work so dutifully. In fact, a week ago I met with the Chief of Defence Force, who is trying his very best notwithstanding the constraints. Although National Security is not a fifth (5<sup>th</sup>) schedule item, Tobago's security is very much our business. [*Desk thumping*]

The Coast Guard's Operational Base alongside the fishing depot in Scarborough (I have visited them as well) is in need of new toilet facilities and facilities to house women officers. A design and scope is being completed by the Division of Infrastructure. I should let you know that former Chairman of the Tobago House of Assembly, Lennox Denoon, supervised the construction and opening of that operational base and therefore, I see it as my duty to supervise the repairs that are needed and the



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additions that are necessary. [*Desk thumping*] It should also be noted that this Executive is not the first one to give this kind of assistance to the National Security apparatus. I will make the point again therefore, Madam Presiding Officer, that we cannot want more autonomy and not want more responsibility. [*Desk thumping*]

A commitment has been given to the Cadets to have the legal paperwork done to ensure that they have legitimate use of the lands they were previously gifted at Signal Hill. The Government quarters which they now occupy in Shaw Park, will be given some minimal upgrades and we will assist in getting uniforms for their charges.

The Police Station in Scarborough will get assistance in repairing their male and female dorms.

Madam Presiding Officer, we are doing more than our part with assisting with public safety and security.

#### **PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT:**

Permit me to now speak about Physical Infrastructure Development.

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Madam Presiding Officer, my Administration is cognizant of the fact that the state and nature of the island's infrastructure have significant implications for economic performance, quality of life, public safety and the overall functioning of our socio-economic system. In fact, there is preponderance of the evidence that suggests that investment in physical infrastructure 'crowds in' rather than 'crowds out' private investment. Given the current state of our development and where we intend to take Tobago, our physical infrastructure development needs are enormous. We therefore must deploy skilful resource mobilization and astute financial management strategies to satisfy our infrastructural needs.

In Fiscal 2023, we propose to expand the road network in the island by developing new link roads, thereby opening up new lands for development activity. Roads identified as critical priorities under this programme include a road from Mt. St. George to Mason Hall Road and then on to Castara; one from Union to Orange Hill Road; one from Calder Hall Trace to Cradley and one from Hooglie Bush Road to King Peter's Bay Road.

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We also propose to devise a system to better prioritize roads for critical maintenance and upgrade throughout the island. In addition, we will develop a comprehensive drainage improvement and flood mitigation programme for Southwest Tobago to reduce the incidence of flooding in areas such as Canaan, Bon Accord, Carnbee and Lowlands. We will also develop a robust cleaning and maintenance regime to ensure that existing drainage systems are cleared to minimize flooding, particularly in flood-prone areas.

In addition, we propose to conduct a full audit of Tobago's public infrastructure, including the Cultural Complex (that is leaking at this time) aimed at assessing current infrastructure needs, assessing the feasibility of our infrastructure development programmes and preparing a plan for expansion and green-upgrade of public infrastructure, prioritized for consistency with Tobago's forthcoming development strategy. Further, in keeping with our strategic intent for balanced development in Tobago, we propose to construct a marina at Kings Bay. The East will be getting some development too. *[Desk thumping]* Thus far, we have published a request for proposal for this project. We will continue working on the proposed Scarborough development

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project. To this end, a Technical Committee has been established to research and investigate the technical specifications and the cost of this project and report to the Executive Council.

In Fiscal 2023, the funds spent on infrastructure development will directly create new jobs for our skilled workforce in the construction sector. They will also boost productivity and general economic performance in every other sector of the economy and set improved foundations for job creation and rapid economic growth and transformation.

Madam Presiding Officer, I now present the draft Estimates of Expenditure for Fiscal 2023.

Remember, Madam Presiding Officer, we are expecting six point nine percent (6.9%). [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*] The law already says that we can get six point nine percent (6.9%), so since you love us and care for us, give us six point nine percent (6.9%).

Madam Presiding Officer, the total Draft Estimates of Expenditure of Assembly Fiscal 2023, amounts to three point nine seven billion dollars (\$3.97b), [*Desk thumping*] of which Recurrent Expenditure amounts to three

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point zero seven billion dollars (\$3.07b) and Development Expenditure Estimates to nine hundred million dollars (\$900m); URP to fifty-nine point five, nine million dollars (\$59.59m), and CEPEP to fifty-three point one, seven million dollars (\$53.17m).

The total estimated expenditure of the Assembly was predicated on a forecasted National Budget of around fifty-seven point four billion dollars (\$57.4b) an increase of one point nine billion dollars (\$1.9b) in Fiscal 2023 and an allocation of six point nine percent (6.9%) thereof, to the Assembly in keeping with the upper end of the Dispute Resolution Commission's (DRC's) recommendation. [*Desk thumping*]

Allow me to highlight just some of the Recurrent Expenditure estimates for 2022, which is the Recurrent Expenditure that makes up the three point zero seven billion dollars (\$3.07b) as is aggregated as follows:

- Personnel Expenditure - \$830.45m;
- Goods and Services - \$975.37m;
- Minor Equipment Purchases - \$80.10m; and;
- Current Transfers and Subsidies - \$1.18b

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Madam Presiding Officer, the Recurrent Expenditure for Fiscal 2023 represents an increase of nine hundred and ninety-two million dollars (\$992m) over the parliamentary allocation of Fiscal 2022. The Recurrent Estimates disaggregated by Divisions for Fiscal 2023 are as follows:

- Assembly Legislature - \$30.30m;
- Office of the Chief Secretary - \$216.42m;
- Office of the Deputy Chief Secretary - \$69.15m;
- Finance, Trade and the Economy - \$184.25m;
- Tourism, Culture, Antiquities and Transportation - \$255.85m;
- Education, Research and Technology - \$485.06m;
- Community Development, Youth Development and Sport - \$161.34m;
- Infrastructure, Quarries and the Environment - \$455.36m;

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- Food Security, Natural Resources,  
the Environment and Sustainable Development - \$250.98m
- Health, Wellness and Social Protection; and - \$918.40m
- Settlements, Public Utilities and  
Rural Development - \$40.43m

And those are Recurrent Expenditure proposals.

Some key Recurrent Expenditure Programmes for Fiscal 2023 are:

- Tobago Regional Health Authority (TRHA) - \$600.0m
- Tobago Tourism Agency Limited (TTAL) - \$75.0m
- Tobago Festival Commission - \$50.0m
- School Feeding Programme - \$43.0m
- Project Financing Repayment - \$31.2m
- Tobago Agribusiness Development Company - \$23.0m
- Development of Green Spaces - \$20.0m
- Reforestation and Watershed Rehabilitation - \$18.7m
- Tobago Performing Arts Company (TPAC) - \$15.0m
- Information Technology Centre - \$12.9m; and
- Assistance to Sports Organizations - \$5.8m

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Those are just some of the highlights.

Madam Presiding Officer, I will now present the Development Programme Estimates. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Presiding Officer, the Estimates for the Development Programme for Fiscal 2023 amount to nine hundred million dollars (\$900m). This represents an increase of six hundred and thirty-six million dollars (\$636m) over the parliamentary allocation for Fiscal 2022. The Estimates are disaggregated as follows:-

- |                                     |   |           |
|-------------------------------------|---|-----------|
| • Pre-Investment                    | - | \$3.40m   |
| • Economic Infrastructure           | - | \$360.27m |
| • Social Infrastructure             | - | \$400.63m |
| • Multi-sectoral and Other Services | - | \$135.70m |

Madam Presiding Officer, to activate our agenda for economic growth and transformation, the Development Programme Estimates will deliver support for the following among others:

- |   |   |         |
|---|---|---------|
| • The Enterprise Development Company<br>of Tobago (E-IDCOT) | - | \$15.0m |
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- Venture Capital Equity Fund Limited - \$9.0m
- The Business Incubator Programme - \$8.2m
- Enterprise Development Loan Programme - \$5.2m
- Enterprise Assistant Grant Programme - \$5.0m

Madam Presiding Officer, as we seek to revitalize and reposition our tourism sector, the Development Estimates cater for the following among others:

- Construction of Tobago Cruise Ship Berths - \$10.0m
- Store Bay Beach Facility overall or redesign - \$6.0m
- Tobago Tourism Agency Limited - \$5.0m
- Pigeon Point Infrastructure Works - \$5.0m; and
- Restoration of Historical Sites - \$3.0m

Madam Presiding Officer, as we seek to develop our Food Security and Sovereignty System, the Development Programme Estimates provide for the following among others:

- Agriculture Access roads - \$37.0m
- Improvement to beach and landing facilities - \$9.0m
- Improvement to the Botanical Gardens - \$2.3m; and

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- Agri-business and Agro-Tourism  
Development Programme - \$2.0m

As we embark on the transformation and modernization of our education system, our Development Programme Estimates will make provision for the upgrades of several educational institutions, including but not limited to:

- Improvement to Primary Schools - \$8.5m
- Improvement to Secondary Schools - \$8.0m
- Upgrade to Mason Hall Government  
Secondary School, particularly roofing  
system - \$5.0m
- Construction of School for the Deaf - \$5.0m
- Establishment of Early Childhood Centres - \$4.5m
- Upgrade of Technical Vocational Facility  
at Roxborough - \$4.0m
- Scarborough Secondary Pre-construction  
Consultation - \$2.0m

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Madam Presiding Officer, as we seek to advance housing opportunities and improve our housing stock on the island, our Development Programme Estimates provide for the following, but not limited to:

- Development of Adventure Phase II - \$21.0m
- Affordable Housing Project - \$12.0m
- Home Improvement Grant Subsidy - \$10.0m
- Housing Development Incentive Programme - \$10.0m
- Shirvan Integrated Housing Development - \$9.0m
- Village Expansion Programme - \$2.3m

Madam Presiding Officer, we continue to upgrade and expand our road infrastructure and protect our coastline from the harmful effects of coastal erosion. Accordingly, our Development Programme Estimates provide for, but not limited to:

- Major improvement works on Secondary Roads - \$28.0m
- Improvement of Milford Road Bridges - \$18.0m
- Scarborough Enhancement Project - \$14.0m
- Turpin Bend Solution – Charlotteville - \$10.0m

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- Windward Road Special Development Programme - \$10.0m
- Road Resurfacing Programme - \$8.0m
- Rehabilitation to Claude Noel Highway - \$8.0m
- Coastal Protection Programme - \$8.0m

Madam Presiding Officer, the Development Programme Estimates are associated with the critical and strategic areas identified as necessary to kickstart the island's longer-term sustainable development agenda.

My Administration has commissioned a team, led by Dr. Vanus James, to prepare a long-term Development Plan for Tobago. In early July, the team will start a series of consultations with stakeholders across the island as we seek to chart the way forward.

The Comprehensive Economic Development Plan (CEDP) Plan 2.0 has long expired and there is an urgent need for a new medium-to-long term strategic plan for this greatest little island.

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### **OTHER EXPENDITURE ESTIMATES**

Madam Presiding Officer, in Fiscal 2023 we intend to spend fifty-nine point five nine million dollars (\$59.59m) and forty-three point three seven million dollars (\$43.37m) for URP and CEPEP, respectively. These figures are programmed to meet the announced increases in salaries for workers in these programmes.

Madam Presiding Officer, our decision to institute the wage increases was based on the fact that these workers are among the lowest-paid and their standard of living has been severely compromised by the astronomical increases in food prices.

Additionally, this Administration intends to implement a basic living wage policy in Tobago, and this can be construed as a first step in this direction. [*Desk thumping*]

I now present the financing options.

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**REVENUES**

Madam Presiding Officer, for Fiscal 2023, the Estimates for Tax and

Non-tax revenues are as follows:

1.	Taxes on Income and Profits	-	\$138.05m
2.	Taxes on Property	-	\$5.0m
3.	Taxes on Goods and Services	-	\$67.52m
4.	Taxes on International Trade	-	\$2.50m
5.	Other Taxes	-	\$4.10m
	<b>Total Tax Revenues</b>	-	<b>\$217.17m</b>
6.	Property Income Taxes	-	\$0.02m
7.	Other Non-tax Revenue	-	\$2.05m; and
	<b>Total Non-Tax Revenue</b>	-	<b>\$2.07m;</b>
	<b>Total Revenue from Taxes</b>	-	<b>\$219.24m</b>

Madam Presiding Officer, the total revenue projected to be collected in Tobago for Fiscal 2023, is two hundred and nineteen point two four million dollars (\$219.24m).

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The revenue projection presented above, is the Tax and Non-tax Revenue likely to be collected from the economic activities conducted in Tobago and the utilization of resources in and around the island. We are well aware, Madam Presiding Officer, of the longstanding anomaly in the current economic accounting and recording practices, which do not apportion to Tobago its share of aggregate revenues collected.

Currently, taxes, fees, duties and levies of companies with branches operating in Tobago, pay their taxes on their Tobago operations in Trinidad. This is a direct contravention of Section 49 (2) of the Tobago House of Assembly Act 40 of 1996. [*Desk thumping*] which stipulates that those institutions with subsidiaries operating in Tobago should/must pay their taxes attributed thereto, in Tobago.

Another source of leakage of Tobago's revenue related to taxes and import duties paid by residents of Tobago for goods landed in Trinidad due to the underdeveloped state of the island's international trading infrastructure.

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These are problems recognized by our predecessors, but never resolved. We are going to 'fix dis'. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Presiding Officer, the Assembly has continued its engagement with various multilateral agencies. Quite recently, we received a visit from a technical team from the CDB. Among the matters explored with them were the construction of an innovative facility to replace the Scarborough Secondary School and development of Coastal Erosion Protection. Conservatively, it will require about one point two billion dollars (\$1.2b) to address the problems of coastal erosion and another five hundred million dollars (\$500m) for the construction and outfitting of a *smart* facility to replace the Scarborough Secondary School, as well as for technological upgrades to several other schools on the island.

In addition, this Administration held discussions with the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) for a repurposing of the Scarborough Renewal Programme at an estimated cost of thirty-five million dollars (\$35m), and for funding of the Riseland Housing Development at a cost of eight million dollars (\$8m).



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Another possible source of financing of the 2023 Estimates will take the form of foreign direct investments on the island and funds mobilized through engagements of persons in the Diaspora. Attracting (FDIs) foreign Direct Investment in the capital producing sectors will be a key priority of this Administration. Let me be pellucidly clear in the event that I was not before - we are very open to Foreign Direct Investment, but please come straight to Tobago. Do not go through anybody; do not go around so and do not go to another agency to come to us. [*Desk thumping*] We are capable of managing our own affairs as of Act 40 of 1996. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Presiding Officer, we are actively pursuing the PPP modalities of financing to execute some of our housing development projects as well as other major public infrastructure works. Let today's budget presentation serve as a public notice that we are calling investors far and wide to come and do business with the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) for Tobago.

Madam Presiding Officer, the last Executive Council raised one hundred and sixty-four point two million dollars (\$164.2m) via bond

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2.00 – 2.10 p.m.

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financing to support expenditure in the development programme, most of which was used unfortunately, to electioneering to no avail. [*Desk thumping*]

Although there is an option to raise an additional one hundred and thirty-five point eight million dollars (\$135.8m), given the current level of inherited liabilities, this Administration has chosen to exercise some fiscal restraint and not incur additional debt at this time.

I now wish to bring the curtain down on this presentation and I need you to listen as I conclude.

This is my maiden Budget Statement, Madam Presiding Officer. I have attempted with the utmost frankness to bring to the attention of this House, Tobagonians and by extension, the national community, the fundamental problems and challenges confronting us in our attempts to make Tobago Smarter, Greener and more Autonomous. The policies we propose to pursue in Fiscal 2023 are informed by the socio-economic realities that are confronting us, and which require this new Administration to steer clear of

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2.00 – 2.10 p.m.

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the deceptively easy path taken by the last Administration, and to select options that will ensure that we move towards becoming *'the greatest little island on the planet.'*

Madam Presiding Officer, the mission requires commitment - commitment of a high order by the Tobago Government, the Central Government and the people. It necessitates a critical fusion of the social and economic measures with the individual efforts of the entire population. There must be real total buy-in at all levels of the society in respect of the fundamental need to perform and to raise output through hard work, discipline, innovation and a resolve to eliminate corruption and waste of every single kind from the public service operations of the Tobago House of Assembly (THA). [*Desk thumping*]

If as Tobagonians we are prepared to take on these challenges, I can think of no task which would be beyond our united capabilities. Madam Presiding Officer, only we can fix Tobago.

As I close, I want to share with you my discovery in a text written by Tobagonian scholar, Susan Craig-James. In her research on "The Formation

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of Society 1763 – 1838,” under the subsection on the Resistance of Enslavement, she quotes from the journal (and I want you to listen to this story, carefully Tobagonians) of an eyewitness (not hearsay) in the person of Ninian Jeffers, a British seaman, in explaining the indomitable spirit of the Tobagonian.

She reports that the majority of the enslaved in Tobago were marked with whips all over their bodies which signaled that the people of Tobago since then, refused to remain conquered. She told the anecdotes of several rebellions all over the island, but the one most apt to close this presentation today, is that of a rebellion in Betsy’s Hope.

The Estate was torched and the rebels fled to the hills of Charlotteville. However, eight (8) were caught and brought back for punishment. The eyewitness’ account (not hearsay) was that none of the eight (8) whimpered or murmured. There was no fear of the oppressors. One of the eight (8), a man called “Chubb,” who reportedly rolled up his sleeves and placed his hands on the table in front of them to be cut off. After it was cut off, he refused

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to allow them to drag him to the gallows. Instead, he chose to get up and walked himself to the gallows.

Then there was another of the eight (8) called “Sampson.” Sampson hung for an unbelievable seven (7) days before dying. Imagine being hung and refusing to die for seven (7) days straight!

Why am I sharing these gruesome stories from a time so far gone? I am telling you, I am telling this nation and I am reminding Tobagonians of the Tobago spirit. On December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021 that spirit once thought dead, was awakened among our population. It is the spirit that never yields to a disadvantage. It is one where we rather die on our feet than on our knees. It is one where no amount of blows can beat out our dream for freedom. It is one where we are proud Tobagonians even unto death. It is in our DNA to desire to be autonomous. That is who we are.

Today, we are thankfully not enslaved in chains and we are not being dismembered limb by limb. But we do endure no-lesser evil in our political

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disenfranchisement – one that every Tobago political representative since James Biggart, at least the genuine ones, has fought for.

Let this, my first budget statement, remind the nation that Tobago will not stop agitating for the correction of an inherited colonial mis-arrangement. The Tobago spirit does not and will not give up easily. We do not waver from that which is right. I am not Chubb; I am not Sampson, and I am not from Betsy's Hope. I am Farley from Speyside, but so long as God and the people of Tobago desire that I lead them, I will do so without fear and I will do all in my power to direct this Executive, this Tobago House of Assembly (THA) and the people of Tobago, towards the fulfillment of the Tobago dream – towards a smarter, greener, more autonomous Tobago.

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And so, Madam Presiding Officer, with that I ask that these fiscal measures as presented for Fiscal 2022, be debated and accepted.

Thank you. I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

**MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER:**

“**BE IT RESOLVD** that this House approved the Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure respecting all functions of the Tobago House of Assembly for the financial year October 01, 2022 to September 30, 2023, copies of which were laid on the table at an earlier stage of the proceedings.”

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Leader of Assembly Business.*

**ADJOURNMENT**

*Motion made:* That this House do now adjourn to Tuesday June 28<sup>th</sup>,  
2022 at 10.00 a.m. [Hon. Z. Hackett]

*Question put and agreed to.*

*House adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 3.57 p.m.*