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CLERK OF THE ASSEMBLY

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Announcements

TOBAGO HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

THURSDAY, JANUARY 27TH, 2022

The House met at 1.40 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER *in the Chair*]

ANNOUNCEMENTS

MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER: Members, we are reminded that we are guided by the Standing Orders of the Tobago House of Assembly and that respect and decorum must be maintained at all times.

You may be seated.

**APPOINTMENT OF COMMITTEES
OF THE TOBAGO HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

Members, in keeping with the Tobago House of Assembly Standing Orders 73 - 80 and after careful recommendations from both the Leader of Assembly Business and the Minority Leader, the following Sessional Select Committees are to be appointed.

Firstly:

The **STANDING ORDERS COMMITTEE** which is responsible for reporting to this Assembly on all matters relating to the Standing Orders.

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2022.01.27 D.C
1.40 – 1.50 p.m.

Appointment of Committees of the
Tobago House of Assembly (Cont'd)

MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER (Cont'd)

According to Standing Orders 74 (2), the Standing Orders Committee shall consist of five (5) Members inclusive of the Chairman. The Members of the Standing Orders Committee would comprise the following:

- (1) Ms. Abby Taylor, Presiding Officer - Chairman;
- (2) Assemblyman Joel Sampson, Deputy Presiding Officer and Member for Bon Accord/Crown Point - Member
- (3) Assemblyman Megan Morrison, and Member for Mt. St. George/Goodwood - Member
- (4) Assemblyman Kelvon Morris, Minority Leader and Member for Darrel Spring/Whim; - Member
- (5) Assemblyman Sonny Craig and Member for Buccoo/Mt. Pleasant. - Member

Secondly:

There is a **HOUSE COMMITTEE** according to Standing Order 75

- (1). The House Committee shall consider and advise the Presiding Officer upon all matters connected with the comfort and convenience of Members and every four (4) months report to the Assembly on its minutes of proceedings.

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Appointment of Committees of the
Tobago House of Assembly (Cont'd)

MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER (Cont'd)

Standing Order 75 (2) instructs that the Leader of Assembly Business shall be the Chairman of the House Committee.

Standing Order 75 (3) states that the House Committee shall consist of five (5) Members inclusive of the Chairman. The Members of the House Committee are as follows:

- | | | |
|--|---|----------|
| (1) Assemblyman Zorisha Hackett,
Leader of Assembly Business and
Member for Bethesda/Les Coteaux | - | Chairman |
| (2) Minority Councillor, Mrs. Petal
Daniel-Benoit; | - | Member |
| (3) Assemblyman Nathisha Charles-Pantin,
Member for Bagatelle/Bacolet | - | Member |
| (4) Assemblyman Wane Clarke,
Member for Lambeau/Lowlands | - | Member |
| (5) Assemblyman Niall George,
Member for Plymouth/Black Rock | - | Member |

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Appointment of Committees of the
Tobago House of Assembly (Cont'd)

MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER (Cont'd)

Thirdly:

The **COMMITTEE OF PRIVILEGES** according to Standing Order 76 (1), is responsible for any matter which appears to affect the power of privileges of the Assembly and will report to the Assembly as the need arises.

Standing Order 76 (2) instructs that the Presiding Officer shall be the Chairman of the Committee of Privileges and Standing Order 76 (3) states that the Committee of Privileges shall consist of five (5) Members, inclusive of the Chairman.

The Members of the Committee of Privileges are as follows:

- | | | | |
|-----|---|---|----------|
| (1) | Presiding Officer, Ms. Abby Taylor | - | Chairman |
| (2) | Assemblyman Terance Baynes
Member for Bethel/New Grange, | - | Member |
| (3) | Councillor Tashia Burris | - | Member |
| (4) | Assemblyman Dr. Faith B. Yisrael
Member for Belle Garden/Glamorgan | - | Member |
| (5) | Mrs. Petal Daniel-Benoit
Minority Councillor | - | Member |

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Appointment of Committees of the
Tobago House of Assembly (Cont'd)

MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER (Cont'd)

Fourthly:

The **PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE** as outlined in the Standing Orders 77 (1)(a), has the responsibility of examining, considering and reporting on the accounts showing the appropriation of sums granted by the Assembly to meet the public expenditure of Tobago, as well as other accounts as maybe referred to the Committee by the Assembly or under any law and the report of the Auditor General on any such accounts.

Standing Order 77 (2) instructs that the Minority Leader shall be the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee and shall consist of five (5) Members inclusive of the Chairman. The Members of the Public Accounts Committee are as follows:

- | | | | |
|-----|---|---|----------|
| (1) | Assemblyman Kelvon Morris
Minority Leader and Member
for Darrel Spring/Whim | - | Chairman |
| (2) | Councillor Certica Williams-Orr | - | Member |
| (3) | Councillor Orlando Kerr | - | Member |
| (4) | Assemblyman Trevor James
Member for Scarborough/Mt.Grace | - | Member |

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Appointment of Committees of the
Tobago House of Assembly (Cont'd)

MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER (Cont'd)

- (5) Assemblyman Zorisha Hackett, - Member
Member for Bethesda/Les
Coteaux

Fifthly:

THE REGULATIONS COMMITTEE shall have the duty of considering all such regulations defined by the Interpretation Act as under the authority of

any law laid before the Assembly and must be brought to the Assembly on all matters outlining the Standing Orders 78 (1) (a) to (g).

Standing Orders 78 (2) instructs that the Committee should not report on merits of policy of regulation. However, the Presiding Officer shall be the Chairman of the Committee and shall consist of five Members inclusive of the Chairman.

The Members of the Regulations Committee are as follows:

- (1) Ms. Abby Taylor, Presiding Officer - Chairman
(2) Assemblyman Nigel Taitt - Member
Member for Signal Hill/Patience Hill
(3) Assemblyman Watson Duke - Member
Member for Roxborough/Argyle

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Appointment of Committees of the
Tobago House of Assembly (Cont'd)

MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER (Cont'd)

- (4) Minority Councillor, Petal Daniel-Benoit - Member
- (5) Assemblyman Ian Pollard - Member
Member for Mason Hall/Moriah

Please note that the Special Select Committee would be announced at a subsequent Sitting.

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2022.01.27 ES
1.50 – 2.00 p.m.

Financial Status of the Assembly (Cont'd)
Statement

MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER: *Leader of Assembly Business.*

**LEADER OF ASSEMBLY BUSINESS AND SECRETARY OF
EDUCATION, RESEARCH AND TECHNOLOGY** [Hon. Zorisha
Hackett]: Thank you, Madam Presiding Officer.

In accordance with Standing Order 91 (1) to seek your leave to move
a Motion for the suspension of Standing Order 29 (2), which provides the
time limit for Statements by Secretaries and Assistant Secretaries.

MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER: Honourable Members, the leave is
granted.

Leader of Assembly Business.

HON. Z. HACKETT: Thank you, Madam Presiding Officer.

Madam Presiding Officer, I now beg to move that Standing Order 29
(2), be suspended to permit the Chief Secretary and Secretary of Finance,
Trade and the Economy to complete his statement.

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Financial Status of the Assembly (Cont'd)
MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER (Cont'd)

Question put and agreed to.

MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER: *Chief Secretary and Secretary of Finance, Trade and the Economy, you may proceed.*

FINANCIAL STATUS OF THE ASSEMBLY

HONOURABLE CHIEF SECRETARY AND SECRETARY OF FINANCE, TRADE AND THE ECONOMY [Hon. Farley Augustine]:

[*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Madam Presiding Officer, thank you very much Colleagues.

Let me take this opportunity at the very start, to thank the Chief Administrator in the Tobago House of Assembly, Mrs. Solomon-Caroma, as well as the Administrator for the Division of Finance, Trade and the Economy, Mrs. Baker-Henry and all other Accounting Officers and Technocrats within the Division of Finance, Trade and the Economy, for the assistance with preparing this Statement.

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Financial Status of the Assembly (Cont'd)
Statement (Cont'd)

HON. CHIEF SECRETARY (Cont'd)

I must say, Madam Presiding Officer, that we are off to a very good start and a start wherein we have collaboration and some measure of coherence among the staff in our respective Divisions.

Madam Presiding Officer, it is with deep and an abiding sense of duty and responsibility, that I stand here in this Legislative Chamber as Chief Secretary of Tobago, as Head of the Executive Council of the Tobago House of Assembly and as Secretary of Finance, Trade and the Economy. Moments like these are sufficient to keep reminding this 'Speyside chap,' as I was called by a predecessor, that there is actually such a thing as a Tobago dream, and that my chief role over the next four (4) years, is to bring to the front doors of every Tobagonian, an opportunity to realize that dream.

Madam Presiding Officer, my primary role today, is to present and lay in this Chamber, the Statement of the financial position of the Tobago House of Assembly as at December 13th, 2021. This is being done in keeping with my stated promise to Tobagonians during the election campaign.

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Financial Status of the Assembly (Cont'd)
Statement (Cont'd)

HON. CHIEF SECRETARY (Cont'd)

Madam Presiding Officer, later in my presentation, I will outline the path my Administration intends to take and the projects and programmes we intend to pursue, to stabilize the economy of Tobago and to bring relief to all Tobagonians.

Today's lengthy statement is not uncommon in this Chamber. We were here before. Tobago pressed the 'reset' button before. The difference today over twenty-one (21) years ago, is that Tobago decided to take a more radical route to transformation, by choosing to ignore the 'reset' button; to ignore the remote entirely and to finally throw away the whole big back TV and to start brand new with a sleek, modern (and to deliberately put it redundantly) Executive team in the Progressive Democratic Patriots (PDP) which for the first time in the history of our island, gives to us an Executive where not a single Member was a member of any other Executive in this country before.

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2022.01.27 ES
1.50 – 2.00 p.m.

Financial Status of the Assembly (Cont'd)
Statement (Cont'd)

HON. CHIEF SECRETARY (Cont'd)

Madam Presiding Officer, almost twenty-one (21) years ago, on Thursday, January 15th, 2001, then Chief Secretary Orville London stood in this very House and took a similar stance to the one I am taking today. Tobago had only two (2) weeks earlier, changed its political stewards for the first time in twenty (20) years, and he took the opportunity then, to lambaste his predecessors and to give a direction for the island for the preceding six (6) months in efforts to stabilize the economy then.

Now that we have the utmost 2020 vision which in Tobago creole we call 'looking back,' it is evident that the kind of fiscal responsibility we hoped for never really materialized. Moreso, in 'looking back,' we now know that we voted out 'Ring Bang' and voted in years of low returns Jazz Festival. We voted out a 'macaroni man' that is still stationary in Signal Hill, with his mouth wide ajar, laughing at the whole of Tobago, and we voted in overpriced and unutilized buildings that took our human development nowhere.

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1.50 – 2.00 p.m.

Financial Status of the Assembly (Cont'd)
Statement (Cont'd)

HON. CHIEF SECRETARY (Cont'd)

Madam Presiding Officer, we voted out ADDA and we voted out Virgin Atlantic millions and several investment schemes that enriched a few, but not the many. And so, while I am following a tradition established in this very House, where whenever a new political party becomes stewards of Tobago's economy, that a clear report and a clear directive is given at the very start of the four (4) year period, I will not follow the tradition of spending this time castigating my opponents. There will be sufficient time for that - trust me on that one. And if you do not know anything about my leadership style as yet, know one thing – Boss moves are made in silence. [*Desk thumping*] And so, I am sorry to disappoint the Media that my statement today would not give way to a sensational headline, but rather to the building out and building up of an island that is in desperate need of hope.

Madam Presiding Officer, December 13th, 2021, marked the first official working day of this new Progressive Democratic Patriots-led

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Financial Status of the Assembly (Cont'd)
Statement (Cont'd)

HON. CHIEF SECRETARY (Cont'd)

Administration, following the results of historic elections that were held on January 25th and December 06th, respectively.

Madam Presiding Officer, you will recall that the December 06th election was preceded by the historic 6/6 deadlock. The December 06th, 2021 election, was very much historic based on the fact that for the first time in forty-one (41) years of the modern Tobago House of Assembly, an election was held where the electorate was asked to elect rather fifteen (15) Area Representatives.

Madam Presiding Officer, we are well aware of the events that unfolded in the intervening period, between January 25th, 2021 and December 06th, 2021. I do not think it is necessary for me to revisit those upsetting events at this time, as it is not my intent to vilify anyone or any organization that has already had their behinds soundly whooped by Tobagonians.

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Financial Status of the Assembly (Cont'd)
Statement (Cont'd)

HON. CHIEF SECRETARY (Cont'd)

Madam Presiding Officer, the people of Tobago have experienced the events and witnessed the unflattering conduct of the then 'holdover Executive Council' during the period that can be considered a dark and empty period in our political history.

The results of December 06, 2021, election have now written a new political history for Tobago.

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Financial status of the Assembly (Cont'd)
HON. CHIEF SECRETARY (Cont'd)

As Head of this Executive Council and the Tobago Island Government, I think it is time for us to move on and to work on developing Tobago and Tobagonians. This is the mandate given to us by the people of Tobago for which I take this opportunity once again to say, 'Thank you.'

Madam Presiding Officer, it is now my fiduciary duty as Chief Secretary and as Secretary of Finance, Trade and the Economy, to lay in this Chamber a statement presenting the financial assessment of the accounts of the Tobago House of Assembly.

The THA Financial operating model, might I say, at the very start, is cash-based. What does this mean? It means that revenues are only recorded in the Income Statements when they are actually received and likewise, expenditures are only recorded when payments are actually made. The unpaid expenditures incurred are recorded as commitments and show up on the balance sheet as liabilities. Therefore, Madam Presiding Officer, this financial assessment was done based on three (3) key indicators:

- Revenues;
- Expenditures; and

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Financial status of the Assembly (Cont'd)
HON. CHIEF SECRETARY (Cont'd)

- Liabilities.

To put it simply, *'the money weh mek, the money weh spend and the money weh owe.'*

Madam Presiding Officer, taken together, these three (3) indicators above influences cash-flow management. In other words, it influences how money comes in and how money goes out and cash flow management helps to determine the financial position of any Corporation inclusive of the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) which is a Corporation sole in and of itself.

Madam Presiding Officer, there is a linear relationship between revenues, expenditure and the liabilities that run from year to year and that determines the cash balances or unspent balances of the THA.

What this simply means, Madam Presiding Officer, is that the cash balances or unspent balances and liabilities at the end of a financial year actually constitutes the financial position of the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) for that year. It is also the established financial position of the start of the next fiscal or financial year.

Financial status of the Assembly (Cont'd)
HON. CHIEF SECRETARY (Cont'd)

What this tells us, Madam Presiding Officer, is that with prudent cash flow management, there is likely to be a positive continuous cash flow from one financial year to the next.

But, Madam Presiding Officer, it pains me to remind this House, that the inverse or the opposite is also true and can happen and has happened, as you will see in a short while. The simple cash flow model outline used to determine the financial position of the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) at the end of the fiscal 2020 and fiscal 2021 periods have revealed some troubling data for us. Reports for both periods were prepared by the previous Administration which is the so-called dossier left behind for me.

So, Madam Presiding Officer, the reports for fiscal 2020 and 2021 have not been reassessed as yet and so the information that I am about to present here represents their reports (nuh meh own, nuh ah wee own) for those two (2) fiscal years. Remember, this is what we met here. He left a so-called dossier and so, what I am reporting on, is based on their records and their reports.

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2.00 – 2.10 p.m.

Financial status of the Assembly (Cont'd)
HON. CHIEF SECRETARY (Cont'd)

Madam Presiding Officer, the financial position of the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) as at September 30th, 2020 which is the end of the fiscal year and as reported, revealed the following:

- The balance as of September 30th, 2020, Madam Presiding Officer, was recorded in an overdrawn position of eight million, five hundred and fifty-one thousand, two hundred and eighty-seven dollars and twenty cents (\$8,551,287.20).
- It should be noted that the Assembly has an unsecured overdraft facility on the THA Fund account of two hundred and forty-three point six million dollars (\$243.6m).
- The THA pays an overdrawn funds interest rate of six point two five percent (6.25%) per annum. (And on the grand scheme of things, we have come to learn that that is quite high).
- The Contingency Account, the balance as at the September 30th 2020, was reported as three million, nine hundred and twenty thousand, three hundred and twenty-two dollars (\$3,920,322.00) and;



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Financial status of the Assembly (Cont'd)
HON. CHIEF SECRETARY (Cont'd)

- Madam Presiding Officer, it must be noted here that Contingency expenditures for fiscal 2020 was reported as seventy-eight million, nine hundred and forty-seven thousand, five hundred and fifty-four dollars (\$78,947,554.00) with an additional commitment of one hundred and ninety-five thousand, five hundred and fifty-two dollars (\$195,552.00).
- Unspent balances, Madam Presiding Officer - the record show that multiple transfers were done during fiscal 2021 as unspent balances totalling one hundred and forty-seven million, one hundred and sixty-seven thousand and seventy-seven dollars (\$147,167,077.00). Based on the methods used to arrive at unspent balances, one can only infer that this same one hundred and forty-seven million, one hundred and sixty-seven thousand, and seventy-seven dollars (\$147,167,077.00) represented unspent balances realized in prior fiscal periods.

We come to liabilities now. So, Madam Presiding Officer, because of the inter year financial relationship and the cash-flow dynamic that impact the liabilities portfolio coupled with the well-known deficiencies as it relates to proper and timely financial recording, it is proving challenging to get the actual value of what the liabilities were at the end of fiscal 2020.

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Financial status of the Assembly (Cont'd)
HON. CHIEF SECRETARY (Cont'd)

This situation, Madam Presiding Officer, is long-standing and I want to make it known that I stand resolved to fix it. We have to fix this.

The portfolio of our liabilities is not being properly managed and the liabilities over a year old, are difficult to ascertain and these records are literally all over the place, which leads to the question of what measures were put in place to pay down these liabilities over time? If it is that one cannot go to a singular desk anywhere in the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) and readily put one's hand on what our current liability stand is, it means that we are not paying attention to paying down our debts and it means that Ms. Mazy parlour in Speyside is doing better than the THA (Tobago House of Assembly), because if I go there I can find copy books from the 1970s detailing all the people who owe her and never paid. But the THA cannot seem to properly collate records on who we owe and how much we have to pay them. And therefore, the debt management of the THA is in a sick state.

Can you imagine, Madam Presiding Officer, that within your first month in office as Secretary of Finance, Trade and the Economy, a single Contractor will send for you from his Accountants, a list of works he claimed

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Financial status of the Assembly (Cont'd)
HON. CHIEF SECRETARY (Cont'd)

he has done for the Tobago House of Assembly, and for that single Contractor we are owing in excess of one hundred million dollars (\$100m) based on his claim? And the question is, if we contracted the service, why weren't we putting measures in place over time to pay down over time?

Owing money is something every single Government does all over the world, including the biggest economies in the world, but no responsible government will just incur liabilities and not have a plan to manage those liabilities. I am saying categorically right now, right here on this very day, that we are going to fix this. [*Desk thumping*]

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Financial Status of the Assembly (Cont'd)
Statement (Cont'd)

HON. CHIEF SECRETARY (Cont'd)

It is worth noting here, Madam Presiding Officer, that the total Development Expenditure for Fiscal 2020, was reported as three hundred and eighty-three million, three hundred and eighty-nine thousand, nine hundred and fifty-three dollars (\$383,389,953.00), considerably more than how much we were budgeted or received from subventions for Development Expenditure.

Meanwhile, the total Recurrent Expenditure (and this is actual figures) was recorded as one billion, eight hundred and forty-six million, three hundred and twenty-two thousand, six hundred and ninety dollars (\$1,846,322,690.00), giving a total expenditure of the THA based on the records that we have found, totalling two billion, two hundred and twenty-nine million, seven hundred and twelve thousand, six hundred and forty-three dollars (\$2,229,712,643.00) and that is the total for fiscal 2020.

In sum, Madam Presiding Officer, the reported financial data as at September 30th 2020, the end of that fiscal year, revealed that the Tobago

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Financial Status of the Assembly (Cont'd)
Statement (Cont'd)

HON. CHIEF SECRETARY (Cont'd)

House of Assembly (THA) started fiscal 2021 which starts (for those who do not know) on October 01st, 2020, with unexpended balances (or unspent balances) totalling one hundred and fifty-one million, eighty-seven thousand, three hundred and ninety-nine dollars (\$151,087,399.00), with a balance brought forward of three point nine million dollars (\$3.9m), plus one hundred and forty-seven point one million dollars (\$147.1m) transferred along with liabilities and commitments, the values of which are still to be verified.

In other words, Madam Presiding Officer, we transferred monies at the end of fiscal 2020, (which is September 30th, 2020), to the new fiscal period, starting October 01, 2020, which is fiscal 2021, and we brought forward monies - we transferred monies and created this sum of unexpended balances, and we do not know or did not know, or did not have on record properly, the liabilities and commitments to be pegged against that particular value.

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Financial Status of the Assembly (Cont'd)
Statement (Cont'd)

HON. CHIEF SECRETARY (Cont'd)

The foregoing, Madam Presiding Officer, is the manifestation of the actual inter-year relationship, between fiscal 2020 and fiscal 2021.

However, Madam Presiding Officer, circumstances change traditions and desperation eats away at discipline. And allow me to illustrate a particularly wicked behaviour that must be called as such. And the last time I checked, we are in a place that we call the House. And whether it be the House of worship or the House of politics, the truth we must speak. And we must always call sin for what it is. And the financial sins must be called out in this place. However, a number of historic developments in the life and operations of the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) were recorded in fiscal 2021. Things change, Madam Presiding Officer. And because things change, people change their behaviour - desperation step in. So, what are these circumstances that changed the fiscal behaviour and the fiscal relationship or the inter-year relationship, from one fiscal year to another, you may ask?

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Financial Status of the Assembly (Cont'd)
Statement (Cont'd)

HON. CHIEF SECRETARY (Cont'd)

Well, you may recall the THA elections which ended in a six/six deadlock on January 25th 2021, and in looking back, we are seeing evidence of reckless, fiscal behaviour in an effort to change the inflow of a new political season. But you see, when the tide changes, there is nothing man could do to stop it changing of the tide. If it is high tide, it is high tide; if it is low tide, it is low tide. Until God changes the moons and the signs and the seasons, there is nothing man can do. So, here is the historical context, or moreso, the political, historical context.

Two (2) political parties were drawn at the polls - six for one, half a dozen for the other, in January 2021. By the time we got to May 2021, for the first time the THA raised one hundred and sixty-four point one seven five million dollars (\$164.75m) in bond financing on the domestic, financial market.

Madam Presiding Officer, additionally, the THA Act was amended, thereby increasing the number of seats from twelve (12) to fifteen (15), and

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Financial Status of the Assembly (Cont'd)
Statement (Cont'd)

HON. CHIEF SECRETARY (Cont'd)

then setting the stage for a second election within the same calendar year - the December 6th 2021, elections. And if my memory serves me right, this is the first time in the history of the Tobago House of Assembly (THA), in our forty-one (41) years, that we have had two THA elections in the same calendar year.

There can be no argument, Madam Presiding Officer, that these events have had significant impacts on the THA's cash-flows, and this should not have been. It should have had significant impact on Balisier House cash-flows, it should have had significant impact on the Bamboo Bullifay House cash-flows, but it should not have had significant impact on the THA's cash-flows. These impacts are indicative of the fiscal indiscipline that characterize and define the conduct of the last Administration, especially during the period January 25th to December 6th 2021, in which it functioned as a 'hold-over Executive Council' in fiscal 2021, and that is not withstanding a public promise made by my immediate predecessor

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Financial Status of the Assembly (Cont'd)
Statement (Cont'd)

HON. CHIEF SECRETARY (Cont'd)

Mr. Ancil Dennis, that they will rule with 'prudent restraint.' We did not see prudent restraint at all. In fact, we saw an avalanche. And I did not think that an avalanche was possible in the tropics where it does not snow, but in Tobago, we had an avalanche.

Madam Presiding Officer, in keeping with this Administration's commitment to fairness, transparency, accountability and good governance, it is necessary that the entire financial records for fiscal 2021, together with the period of October 1st to December 13th, 2021, be presented in this Chamber. And I am presenting it so that it is clear to all and sundry, that this current Secretary of Finance, Trade and the Economy and this current THA Executive will not be taking responsibility for the mismanagement that happened prior to December 13th, 2021. [*Desk thumping*]

The fiscal 2021 revenues, to put it in creole language, how much money 'weh mek,' or we got, or we earned or we collected for fiscal 2021:

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Financial Status of the Assembly (Cont'd)
Statement (Cont'd)

HON. CHIEF SECRETARY (Cont'd)

Recurrent	-	\$1,773,101,727.00
Development	-	\$ 230,000,000.00
Taxes and non-tax revenues	-	\$ 185,018,881.00
Unspent balances, URP	-	\$ 147,167,077.00
	-	\$ 18,000,000.00
(the standard eighteen million)		
CEPEP	-	\$ 8,600,000.00
TOTAL	-	<u>\$2,526,062,685.00</u>

For completeness, Madam Presiding Officer, we must add the releases received from the Ministry of Finance, during the period October 1st to December 13th, 2021, of fiscal 2022. For those who are really unsure of how we describe this, the fiscal year starts in the preceding calendar year. So, I am putting it simply and I am breaking it down for everyone.

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Financial status of the Assembly (Cont'd)
HON. CHIEF SECRETARY (Cont'd)

So fiscal 2022 would have started or started rather, in October 2021 and fiscal 2020 would have started in October of 2019. So in doing this review of the overall Appropriations of the Tobago House of Assembly for fiscal 2022, we have decided that we will exclude October 1st to December 13th, 2021 from what we have to treat with, because our tenure started – our first working day – on December 13th, 2021.

In terms of Appropriations, I went through the revenues for that period between October 1st 2020 to December 13th 2021. In terms of Appropriation for that said period:

- Recurrent was at two billion, seventy-five million dollars (\$2,075,000.000);
- Development - two hundred and sixty-four million, one hundred and thirty-five thousand (\$264,135,000);
- Unemployment Relief Programme (URP) - the standard eighteen million dollars (\$18m);
- CEPEP (Community-Based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme) - nine million, two hundred thousand (\$9,200,000).

Financial status of the Assembly (Cont'd)
HON. CHIEF SECRETARY (Cont'd)

- Our total Appropriation, meaning the amounts that we were allocated for this fiscal period totalled two point three six billion dollars (\$2.36b).

Madam Presiding Officer, it is extremely important to note, that as at December 13th, 2021 of fiscal 2022, the following amounts were reported, released by the Ministry of Finance and received by the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) in addition to the revenues collected in Tobago. This is how much monies we received for that short part of the first quarter of fiscal 2022:

- Recurrent: - \$395,175,000;
- Development: - \$43,016,875.00);
- **Total:** - **(\$438,191,875.00).**

That is releases from the Ministry of Finance for that period in the first quarter of fiscal 2022 and based on revenues collected.

We collected nine million, eight hundred and ninety-two thousand, seven hundred and fifty-nine dollars (\$9,892,759.00). So the total revenues, the total monies collected - monies collected; monies made, monies brought

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in for that initial part of the first quarter of fiscal 2022, was four hundred and forty-eight million, eighty-four thousand, six hundred and thirty-four dollars (\$448,084,634.00).

It is worth mentioning here, Madam Presiding Officer, that the amount of fifty-eight million, five hundred dollars (\$58,000,500.00) was already transferred from the Recurrent Releases to the Development Programme before I arrived on that desk.

More generally, Madam Presiding Officer, the financial data revealed that revenue totalling two billion, eight hundred and fourteen million, four hundred and thirty-nine thousand, six hundred and thirty-four dollars (\$2,814,439,634.00) was available to the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) in fiscal 2021 right up until December 13th 2021 of fiscal year 2022.

In other words, for the period October 1st, 2020 to December 13th 2021, the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) in terms of total revenues, was two billion, eight hundred and fourteen million, four hundred and thirty-nine thousand, six hundred and thirty-four dollars (\$2,814,439,634.00).

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Madam Presiding Officer, on the expenditure side of the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) financial operations and fiscal management, the recorded expenditure for fiscal 2021 and fiscal 2022 as at December 13th, 2021, totalled two billion, four hundred and ninety-two million, twenty-two thousand, five hundred and seven dollars (\$2,492,022,507.00).

For fiscal 2022 expenditure as at December 13th, 2021, the total was three hundred and sixty-eight million, seven hundred and sixty-eight thousand, three hundred and three dollars (\$368,768,303.00).

It must be noted here again, that the Tobago House of Assembly's (THA's) financial operations are conducted using the Cash Based Accounting procedures. And as noted before, this means that expenses incurred are only recorded as expenditures when they are paid for, and that the true actual expenditures of the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) for any reporting period are most likely to be higher than the recorded expenditures.

So, Madam Presiding Officer, the difference being picked up on the balance sheet, is what we are labelling as liabilities. Therefore, the ongoing fiscal statements of revenues and recorded expenditures must be considered

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and interpreted within this framework of accounting for the Tobago House of Assembly (THA). So what is the financial position of the Tobago House of Assembly as at December 13th, 2021? Let me put it clearly.

The financial position of the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) as at December 13th, 2021 as reported by responsible Public Officers (and not some of the irresponsible ones that we voted out of office, but responsible ones) is that our financial position is as follows:

In the Fund Account as of December 13th, 2021, a balance of ninety-five million, nine hundred and eighty-one thousand, four hundred and fifty-eight dollars (\$95,981,458.00) - that is in the Fund Account.

Madam Presiding Officer, you will recall that I indicated earlier that the Fund Account was attached to an overdraft facility of two hundred and forty-three point six million dollars (\$243.6m). Therefore, the balance of ninety-five million, nine hundred and eighty-one thousand, four hundred and fifty-eight dollars (\$95,981,458.00) in the Fund was actually overdrawn as at December 13th, 2021.

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So, Madam Presiding Officer, it could have likely been the product of cash-flow issues (we do not know) that may have occurred at the time; late monthly releases that could have accounted for this deficit or this overdrawn facility being used - we do not know. I am not casting aspersions, but that is what it is.

In terms of unspent balances as at December 13th 2021, the unspent balances stood at a reported fifty million, eight hundred and three thousand, nine hundred and forty-two dollars (\$50,803,942.00).

In the Contingency Account as at December 13th, 2021 the balance of that Account was reported as three hundred and ninety-five thousand, five hundred and forty-three dollars and eighty-eight cents (\$395,543.88). I had to look twice because what I thought should be in the millions, is in a few hundreds of thousands.

Madam Presiding Officer, in terms of liabilities inclusive of commitments - liabilities inclusive of commitments as was reported, as of date, is seven hundred and thirty-eight million, seventy-six thousand, three

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hundred and twenty-one dollars and fifty-five cents (\$738,076,321.55) and
that is as at December 13th, 2021.

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Now this is telling a seriously trouble picture for us in Tobago. And Madam Presiding Officer, that figure of seven hundred and thirty-eight point zero seven six million dollars (\$738.076m), does not include the larger term bond financing liability of one hundred and sixty-four million dollars (\$164m), plus, an annual interest of eight million dollars (\$8m) which becomes due for a payment in 2027.

It should be noted that I have signalled to the Minister of Finance, that a Line Item should be included in the THA Estimates of Expenditure to meet this financial obligation going forward.

Then, we move to the balance of fiscal 2022 Appropriations. The outstanding balances of fiscal 2022 Appropriations, meaning the remaining of monies after the subvention we were allocated, after they have spent what they wanted to spend between October 1st and December 13th, that figure now stands at Recurrent, one billion, seven and two million, five hundred thousand dollars (\$1,702,500.00); Development, two hundred and twenty-

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one million, one hundred and eighteen thousand, one hundred and twenty-five dollars (\$221,118,125.00).

Madam Presiding Officer, it is to be noted here, that the balances on the fiscal 2022 Appropriations are in the main funds assigned to specific expenditures for 2022. However, Madam Presiding Officer, these liabilities are on the books of the THA and therefore, it is the responsibility of this Administration although we did not incur it, to find ways and means to pay them.

And so, Madam Presiding Officer, when the seven hundred and thirty-eight million seventy-six thousand, three hundred and twenty-one dollars (\$738,076,321.00) liability was disaggregated by Divisions, major components of liability expenditures were found resident in primarily two (2) Divisions. In other words, two (2) Divisions incurred most of the debt; two (2) Divisions spent most of the money. And these two (2) Divisions - if you look at the Division of Health, Wellness, and what was formerly called Family Development, the liability stands at two hundred and forty-three

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million, six hundred and ninety-three thousand, five hundred and forty-four dollars (\$243,693,544.00).

Then when we looked at the Division of Infrastructure, Quarries and the Environment, that debt incurred, was three hundred and eighty-six million, one hundred and thirteen thousand, nine hundred and forty-six dollars (\$386,113,946.00).

So, Madam Presiding Officer, while the big-ticket items included in the liabilities recorded in the Division of Health, Wellness and Social Protection are physically identifiable and reasonably justifiable in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic that has placed significant demands on governments all over the world and health care systems all over the globe, the expenditure of some of the other big-ticket items are questionable and disturbing. Of particular concern is the reported liability in the Division of Infrastructure, Quarries and Urban Development.

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Madam Presiding Officer, the investigation into the Executive Council's decisions associated with these major liabilities, reveal an intriguing story of corruptly wicked, financial recklessness by the previous Executive Council.

Madam Presiding Officer, Executive Council Minute No. 423 of November 04th, 2020 - thirteen (13) days before the THA was dissolved; thirteen (13) days before we pack up shop here to go and fight an election, thirteen (13) days when everybody was preparing and expecting an election day to fly out of a back pocket - a mere thirteen (13) days before that, Madam Presiding Officer, a corruptly wicked and financially irresponsible and reckless Executive Council met on November 04th, 2020 and they agreed that funding be approved for the implementation of the 2020/2021 Road Resurfacing Programme, also known as the first wave of 'election paving' at an estimated cost of one hundred and sixty-eight million, forty thousand, seven hundred and fifty dollars (\$168,040,750.00), VAT inclusive

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and that the supplemental funding required for the Road Resurfacing Programme in the amount of one hundred and sixty-seven million, forty thousand, seven hundred and fifty dollars (\$167,40,750.00) VAT inclusive, be identified by the Secretary of Finance and the Economy.

That Phase 1 of the 2021 Road Resurfacing Programme as outlined in Appendix 2 of the Note be commenced in the first quarter of fiscal year 2021, in the sum of seventy million, nine hundred and ten thousand dollars (\$70,910,000.00) VAT inclusive and that the Secretary be authorized to include any additional roads, not on the list of Appendices 1 and 2 which may require urgent resurfacing, and that the Administrator of the Division of Infrastructure, Quarries and then called the Environment, be granted covering approval to sign and issue contracts for the works identified in Appendix 2 of the Note. So in other words, thirteen (13) days before you call an election date, you meet as an Executive Council; sign away scores of tens of millions of dollars; give the Secretary then, a carte blanche sort of

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approval to add any other road to the list of roads to be done - give the Administrator a carte blanche approval to bypass any procurement process and to sign away contracts and create additional liabilities for the Tobago House of Assembly (THA).

Madam Presiding Officer, if I look in the Bible to find a contextual definition of what '*wickedness in high places is*' this will be a classic example. [*Desk thumping*] But it does not stop there.

I go to Executive Minute No. 24 - on the same day - November 04th, 2020 - the same day; the very same day that they made that first Executive Council approval - the Executive sat on that same day - thirteen (13) days before giving us an election date and granted covering approval for the engagement of suitably qualified local contractors to perform emergency restoration works to failing infrastructure throughout the island of Tobago, that have been caused by inclement weather or otherwise.

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They granted approval for the Division of Infrastructure, Quarries, and the Environment to sole select suitably qualified firms from the Assembly's pool of pre-registered contractors to execute the works. Election coming! So, you have no time for procurement. You are sole selecting them now and they soul selecting the people who they know would give them a kickback to fight an election. But if they knew what they were doing, they will realize that that was a wasted investment. [*Desk thumping*] And on this same day ... [*Interruption*]

MINORITY LEADER: Madam Presiding Officer, the Chief Secretary is imputing improper motives... [*Inaudible*]

MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER: Member for Darrel Spring/Whim, was that a question or a statement?

MINORITY LEADER: Question.

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MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER: Can you please reserve all questions until the Statement by the Honourable Chief Secretary has been finished.

[Desk thumping]

HON. CHIEF SECRETARY: Madam Presiding Officer, if I may help the goodly Assemblyman a bit. The issue about imputing improper motives only stands against Members of the House, based on the Standing Orders. And guess what? As Tobagonians and God willed it, not a single one of them is back here in this House. *[Desk thumping]*

So, on November 04th, the Executive Council, via Minute No. 421, they gave a carte blanche approval to conduct or perform emergency restoration works that has been caused by inclement weather or otherwise. They granted approval for the Division of Infrastructure, Quarries and the Environment, to sole select qualified firms. (They picked their own). And they agreed that the sum of ninety-nine million dollars (\$99,000,000.000)

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VAT inclusive, be approved to fund the three (3) phases of restoration works identified in Appendices 1 and 2 of the Note.

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They agreed that supplemental funding be available in the sum of ninety-nine million dollars (\$99m) VAT inclusive, to meet the shortfall generated as a result of a budgetary allocation of zero dollars; such funding to be identified by the Secretary of Finance and the Economy.

They granted approval for the execution of Phase 1 of the emergency road works identified in Appendix III of the Note in the first quarter of fiscal year 2020/2021, at a cost of sixty-one million dollars (\$61m) VAT inclusive, again to be identified by the Secretary.

So Madam Presiding Officer, the former Executive Council on the very same day – November 4th - thirteen (13) days before giving us an election date, made two decisions:

- (1) To implement a Road Resurfacing Programme at an estimated cost of one hundred and sixty-eight million, forty thousand, seven hundred and fifty dollars (\$168,040,750.00); and
- (2) Emergency Restoration works at an estimated cost of ninety-nine thousand dollars (\$99,000.00).

Madam Presiding Officer, both Council Notes were approved solely on the basis that the supplemental funding be identified by the Secretary of

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Finance and the Economy. May be the Secretary of Finance and the Economy then had a money tree growing in his backyard where he can just go and pick from it; (It is not in the budget) he could go and pick the notes off the tree and just bring it and pay for these projects because no source or line of funding was identified in the Executive Council Minute.

Madam Presiding Officer, if I may, I walked with copies of those Executive Council Minutes. Therefore, if the Minority Leader wishes to have copies, I can give him same. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Presiding Officer, the total cost of two decisions made thirteen (13) days before an election date was given, amounted to two hundred and sixty-seven million, forty thousand, seven hundred and fifty dollars (\$267,040,750.00) without indication of the source of funding.

Madam Presiding Officer, I do not know if the former Secretary of Finance was a Chief Financial Magician who was aided and abetted by a circle of magicians - maybe they were *financial obeah men and women*? I understand that there maybe a Member of this House who was part of that circle of *financial obeah men and women*. [*Desk thumping*]

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Madam Presiding Officer, what is even more unbelievable, is the fact that the former Executive Council after undertaking the actions I just outlined, again, on January 13th, 2021, twelve (12) days away from the elections of January 25th, 2021 – we were looking for an election, those of us in the Progressive Democratic Patriots (PDP) were busy walking up and down, knocking door to door and an Executive Council is meeting twelve (12) days before the election.

Nomination Day already passed - we know who the Candidates are and an Executive Council is sitting down and making a decision via Executive Council Minute No.46 - and I have a copy of that as well for the Minority Leader - and in that Executive Council Minute, granted covering approval to engage contractor presented in Appendix II to perform the additional emergency restoration works to failing infrastructure throughout Tobago caused by inclement weather or otherwise.

They agreed that supplemental emergency response funding be made available, not exceeding eighty-five million dollars (\$85m) VAT inclusive, to

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be sourced from the Assembly's Contingency Fund or as identified again by who seemed to be a Secretary of 'Financial Obeahism.'

And then they granted covering approval to the Administrator of the Division of Infrastructure, Quarries and the Environment to sign contracts on behalf of the Assembly pertaining to the expenditure of the said eighty-five million dollars (\$85m). And if my memory serves me right, there is a monetary value limit to which an Administrator in a Division can actually sign off on. Once it is over a certain limit, it is supposed to go up to the Chief Administrator. That is the Financial Rules and Regulations. [*Desk thumping*]

We had an Executive Council when they realized that it looked like they will lose the election, met in a dark room somewhere and decided to spend away Tobago's money in this wicked and most reckless manner. And I paused for a bit when I got this report. I said, "Farley, you have to check, because whenever there is inclement weather, your electoral district is more than likely to be most affected because of the geographical terrain of the area" and so I checked.

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You know the only inclement weather condition that happened occurred in the first week in September - around September 2nd and 3rd; and then when I checked again, based on a list I received as the then Area Representative and Minority Member of the House from Tobago Emergency Management Agency (TEMA), that they gave to me, of the issues that popped up in my district as a result of that inclement weather in September. When I checked as of today, they have not fixed any of the issues. People's houses are still "cata cataing" and cantilevering off cliffs – ain't fixed yet. But you have all these emergency spending being allocated and assigned by the Executive Council on account of inclement weather, and that was done starting in November.

When I checked the November weather - sunny days throughout; I checked the December weather - sunny days throughout. I checked all the days leading up to the election - sunny days throughout and they are there in sunny days signing away Tobago's financial heritage in this reckless manner.

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Perhaps, Madam Presiding Officer, they were preparing for sunny days ahead with a new political steward of the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) [*Desk thumping*].

So, Madam Presiding Officer, what is revealed here, is that in three (3) months (from November 2020 to January 2021), the former Executive Council made three (3) decisions to spend three hundred and fifty-two million, forty thousand, seven hundred and fifty dollars (\$352,040,750.00) without first identifying the funding to meet this expenditure. This clearly points to a '*spending spree*.' We had some spendthrifts around. And let me put that in context for you.

Our budgetary allocation from the National Budget for Development Expenditure for this fiscal year, is only two hundred and sixty-four million dollars (\$264m). And in three (3) months we have spent more than how much we are allocated for an entire fiscal year. And if you sit and think that that is prudent management, then you have to get your brain checked.

Madam Presiding Officer, it begs the question, how much more financially wayward and reckless behavior can an Executive in a Government

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exhibit? And let me pause to say it now. This kind of behavior will be unacceptable under my stewardship and is unacceptable under the stewardship of this Executive Council. [*Desk thumping*]

And what is even more disturbing is the manner in which contractors were engaged under these programmes. In one case, Madam Presiding Officer, records revealed that three (3) preferred contractors by the then Executive Council, were to be awarded, totalling two hundred and six million, four hundred and sixty-eight thousand, nine hundred and twenty-five dollars (\$206,468,925.00). This aggregated in the following amounts:

- One contractor - one hundred and twenty-three million, three hundred and forty-seven thousand, five hundred and twenty-five dollars (\$123,347,525.00).
- Another contractor - seventy-one million, seventeen thousand, nine hundred dollars (\$71,017,900.00).
- A third contractor - twelve million, one hundred and three thousand, five hundred dollars (\$12,103,500.00).

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So, three (3) contractors alone were allocated a sum of two hundred and six million, four hundred and sixty-eight thousand nine hundred and twenty-five dollars (\$206,468,925.00). Let us think about that for a moment.

We have as part of the Programme of the Tobago House of Assembly (THA), to give contracts to small community contractors. In fact, when they heard us moot it on the platform, they ran ahead and said that they will implement it, and they started hiring these community contractors. Based on budget we were to expend nineteen million dollars (\$19m) for all of these small community contractors, giving them a significant mobilization fee, because the then Executive Council recognized that these small contractors will not have the capacity. So, they waived some of the standard procedures - was supposed to give them a large sum up front, and allow them to work. Do you know what is sad in all of this? When I got to my desk on my second day in office, I received a call asking, "So what happened to us, the small contractors? All yuh ain't engaging we again or what? I have already

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started to buy up stuff, and we were just told to pause everything.” These small contractors, for just nineteen million dollars (\$19m), as opposed to two hundred and six point four million dollars (\$206.4m) - we signed contracts with them - gave them contracts and we did not fully engage them before the election - we did not. And then on top of that, I had to come as Secretary of Finance, Trade and the Economy and give approval to the Division and say, “Okay, go ahead, run ahead with these contracts for these small contractors.” Let them ‘eat ah food’ too. Because it cannot be one set of big contractors eating all the food. That could never be fair and that could never be right, and that could never be justifiable in the manner in which this was done.

So clearly, Madam Presiding Officer, without any concern about financial prudence and based solely on the *proviso* that the then Secretary of Finance and the Economy will identify the funds; will find the funds - contractors were hastily engaged to resurface and pave roads and build retaining walls and box drains throughout the island. And when you look at

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the quality of the workmanship, many have to be redone. You see roads built with concrete - not a steel membrane in it; roads cracking up and falling apart. But out of desperation, fiscal discipline fled the House, fled the Tobago House of Assembly, and we are left to now clean up a big mess.

So, Madam Presiding Officer, to navigate the maze of financial confusion that I have outlined, I have commissioned Forensic Audits into the following programmess.

For the period October 2019 to November 2021, I have commissioned forensic audits into the following programmes:

- (a) The Emergency Restoration Works Programme; [*Desk thumping*]
- (b) The Road Restoration Programme; [*Desk thumping*]
- (c) The Road Resurfacing Programme; [*Desk thumping*]
- (d) The Emergency Infrastructure Rehabilitation Project; [*Desk thumping*] and
- (e) The Agriculture Access Roads Programme [*Desk thumping*]

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I can now report, Madam Presiding Officer, that the process for the audits have begun with the retrieval and seizure of all the necessary documents by the Internal Audit Unit. A Specialized Forensic Audit Firm has been identified, evaluated and selected to conduct an audit into the programmes listed above.

Madam Presiding Officer, let me state here, that if any evidence of fraud and corruption and misuse of the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) funds is unearthed by the audit, those who are identified will be criminally liable; will face the full brunt of the law, or may find themselves never working for the THA led by this team again. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Presiding Officer, we have had dozens of Audit Reports on THA by the Auditor General over the last twenty-one (21) years, representing every kind of issue associated with the former Administration's inability to properly account for hundreds of millions of taxpayers' dollars. And regrettably, Madam Presiding Officer, there is no evidence that any

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action has been taken despite the promises to address these issues. So, on December 6th, 2021, the people of Tobago gave the Progressive Democratic Patriots (PDP) a mandate to fix those very issues that they ignored.

In terms of releases and overdrafts, Madam Presiding Officer, for the last six (6) years, the Central Government has been making monthly releases to the Tobago House of Assembly in clear contravention of Section 47 of THA Act 40 of 1996, which states:

“Monies appropriated by Parliament for the service of the financial year of the Assembly shall be credited to the fund in quarterly releases in advance *en block*.”

Madam Presiding Officer, you can recall that I mentioned earlier, that the utilization of the two hundred and forty-three point six million dollars (\$243.6m) overdraft facility, in the six (6) years, was mainly due to the unlawful monthly releases by the Central Government to the Tobago House of Assembly (THA). In other words, they are giving us our monies month to month - we now have a cash flow problem - we have to use that overdraft

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facility and we have to then find money to pay the six point two five percent (6.25%) interest on that overdraft facility, which we never budgeted for in the first place.

But Madam Presiding Officer, on Wednesday, 22nd December, 2021, I led a Tobago House of Assembly delegation in a meeting with a team from the Ministry of Finance, led by Finance Minister, Honourable Colm Imbert. The issue of the monthly releases was discussed among other important matters.

I am pleased to report to this House, that for the first time in six (6) years, the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) was able to receive more than one month's allocation at a time. [*Desk thumping*]

I am also pleased to report, that having had that discussion with the Minister of Finance, I got an appreciation for the financial position of the country as a whole. The law does say we must accept our monies and get our monies on a quarterly basis and a quarterly basis only, but out of

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sympathy for my Trinidadian brothers and sisters, I placed on the table a proposal as 'a middle ground' arrangement, that we receive two (2) months in advance and the third month in the second month. That way, the THA will always have a surplus and will not have to use the overdraft facility except for an emergency.

And what is surprising and perhaps not surprising at the same time, is that while we had the People's National Movement (PNM) in Tobago and the PNM in Trinidad, not even that could be achieved. But as soon as Tobago changed around the thing, immediately we are getting more than one month in advance. [*Desk thumping*] That is performance, Madam Presiding Officer.

Going forward, it is expected that we will continue to receive our releases in increments that represent at least two (2) months of our budgetary allocation.

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Allow me, Madam Presiding Officer, to place in the public record, our sincerest thanks and appreciation to the Minister of Finance and the Economy and his team for their positive and most timely response in resolving the issues related to the allocation of funds to the Tobago House of Assembly. You have to appreciate how speedily this was done.

We went to Trinidad the Wednesday before Christmas. While Tobagonians were preparing for Christmas and painting their houses and varnishing their furniture and washing all the china in the cabinet, we were in Trinidad talking to the Minister of Finance. And by the time we got to the new year, we started receiving our funds *en block* larger than we received in the last six (6) years.

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And so, I must reiterate my gratitude and 'thank you' on behalf of the people of Tobago, to the Minister of Finance, Colm Imbert.

Madam Presiding Officer, the team I took to Trinidad also held meetings with THA's bankers and Urban Development Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago (UDeCOTT). The discussions were very informative with the strategic intent to improve the overall operations of the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) in terms of financial matters and large construction projects.

The conversations are ongoing Madam Presiding Officer, the conversations are ongoing and perhaps, it is a good time to pause and reflect personally on this particular period of time that I took a team from Tobago to Trinidad, to deal with these matters on behalf of Tobago.

It is no secret that I got married on December 12th, 2021. But a newly married man left his young wife at home, in the middle of Christmas to go seeking Tobago's business - if that is not love for country, I do not know what is, Madam Presiding Officer. [*Desk thumping*] And I thank my wife - my beautiful wife for being patient, understanding and accepting of this new role

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that I have taken on, which calls for some sacrifices on behalf of the family - my family as a whole - in order to see Tobago set right.

The way forward – Madam Presiding Officer, having outlined the state of the finances of the Tobago House of Assembly, allow me to turn my attention to the plans of this Executive Council going forward, starting with the realities of COVID-19.

Madam Presiding Officer, I will like to now turn my attention to the realities of governing in the era of the COVID pandemic.

When I entered active politics in 2017, I was under no illusion that it was going to be an easy task. In fact, a former Member of the former Executive Council said to me quite plainly, “Farley boy, you like hard work, you could have gotten it easier had you just stepped on our side.” I guess he now understands that ‘*short cut does break man foot,*’ including political feet. [Laughter] [Desk thumping] But I was under no illusion that it will be an easy task. I understood then as I do now, that I was auditioning for a role as a major player in a system of governance that is established primarily to fix the people’s business.

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What I could not anticipate was the exigencies of the COVID-19 pandemic. None of us anticipated that - none of us knew that COVID-19 will be here or what COVID-19 really was about - perhaps except for a few Scientists in space. So, Madam Presiding Officer, like you and all Tobagonians, I am aware that these are challenging times. We are confronted every day with the realities of a pandemic, the likes of which has never been seen in human history.

COVID-19 has had a devastating effect on the lives and livelihood of all of us. Regrettably, Madam Presiding Officer, some of us have lost loved ones and everyone of us know of someone who died from COVID-19. We are exhausted by the social media status things like “RIP”. Madam Presiding Officer, we are unable to interact with the people that are near and closely dear to us. We have been forced to become accustomed to wearing a mask.

The term, ‘social distancing’ has become part of our everyday jargon. Today I speak directly to the people of Tobago when I say, as a Tobagonian, “I feel your pain, I feel your frustration and I feel your anger.” You may recall

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that just prior to this pandemic, I and all had to deal with the loss of my mother, and so I understand like you, what it means to loose a loved one.

Madam Presiding Officer, everyday I think about my Tobagonian brothers and sisters who are most valuable/vulnerable - our seniors - the single mothers and single fathers and children. Our children have been particularly hard hit. Some students may have lost a member of their house-hold or an extended family; some may have lost a breadwinner in the family. We have children preparing to go to primary school or 'big school' as we call it, who have never seen a classroom before in their lives; have never interacted on a playground, independent of their parents in their lives, We have secondary school students, who on February 7th, will for the very first time in their lives, be able to connect with friends and classmates who they only saw *online* and never in person.

We cannot at this point, estimate what is the socio-psychological impact that that will have on our young people across the country. The dropout rates have increased; truancy rates have increased; delinquency has increased; domestic violence and social issues are on the rise - all of these things have

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been brought on by a pandemic. So one of my major concerns about our students, is their inability to interact with their peers at school.

We have to ramp up our mental health services and we have to find the mental health professionals wherever they are and get them to come into the space, or Tobago will pay dearly down the road for these young people to whom the pandemic is putting an untold damage on. I am already old and my hair is already thinning out and dropping out, so I have lived a lot of my productive years already. But what about these young ones - what about these young ones who have not had the pleasure and benefit of the kinds of social experiences we as adults have all benefited from? And what impact will that have on our economy down the road? We have to think seriously about that.

I am sure that you are aware that last week we were informed that the Omicron variant of COVID-19 arrived on our shores. There is one major issue with which I am primarily concerned about and that is that it can disrupt schools even further.

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There is still a low uptake of COVID-19 vaccinations among teachers and students and among public servants. A week ago I presented the numbers to Tobago of what our vaccination rate among our workers looks like.

As Tobagonians, we are aware that tourism is one of the major drivers of the Tobago economy. Recent estimates suggest that the direct and indirect contribution of tourism to economic activity in Tobago, is significant.

Outside of the Tobago House of Assembly (THA), tourism is the single largest employer of working adults in Tobago. However, we also know that COVID-19 has brought the tourism sector to a virtual standstill and although we had some good news - recently, with the arrival of British Airways - and we expect some good news on Saturday with the arrival of Virgin Atlantic with the reopening of our borders to tourists. Tourism at this point still remains a major challenge.

Regrettably, Madam Presiding Officer, we do not have control over the reopening of our borders. Hopefully in the near future, we may be able to open our borders so that we can stimulate the tourism sector. In fact, I will let you know, Madam Presiding Officer, that on the next conversation that I have

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with my goodly Prime Minister - and I will call him my good friend now because he has shown that he has an ability to listen and to hear Tobagonians. I guess the results of December 6th, cleaned all the wax from his ears and so he is now hearing us loudly and clearly. [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*] I will raise the matter of opening our borders further and how to treat with cruise ship arrivals on the island, who have already begun to show an inclination to arrive and make Tobago, both Charlotteville and Scarborough, ports of call for them.

In the mean time, Madam Presiding Officer, we have to find a way to support hoteliers, restaurateurs, reef tour operators, vendors and tourism workers so that they can transition seamlessly from where we are now to where we were pre-Covid-19.

I will let you know that the Secretary with responsibility for Tourism, along with her Assistant Secretary have been diligently meeting with all the stakeholders and painstakingly going through one by one, with each of them.

Madam Presiding Officer, we have also begun to prepare to give the ancillary workers within this sector, some grant funding to assist with

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reopening - that is our reef boat operators, our tour guides and those in
ancillary services.

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Madam Presiding Officer, every Tobagonian is aware, that apart from the tourism sector, the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) employs the largest working force in Tobago. Fortunately for us, we have been able to sustain our levels of employment in line with pre-COVID-19 levels. Going forward, Madam Presiding Officer, I am confident that we will be able to sustain our current levels of employment in the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) notwithstanding the restructuring actions that are necessary.

Notwithstanding the difficult challenges related to COVID-19, Madam Presiding Officer, I have also been working assiduously with my Secretaries and the technical staff, to ensure that we identify additional funding for key projects. My hope is that with the implementation of these projects, that we will be able to buffer some of the negative impacts and fallout from COVID-19.

I am pleased to report to this House and by extension the people of Tobago, that my Administration has had conversation with the Minister of

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Finance towards augmenting the allocation to the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) in his mid-year review of revenue and expenditures in the National Parliament. And so, we remain hopeful.

Madam Presiding Officer, after the review, it is my intention to return to this House to lay the Revised and Reprioritized Estimate of Expenditure for fiscal 2022 - to borrow a term from the Assistant Secretary of Health, Wellness, and Social Protection, 'Sunny days are ahead.' [*Desk thumping*] We have some clouds, but the clouds are parting and the sun is revealing itself in all its glory.

Madam Presiding Officer, notwithstanding the challenges I have outlined earlier, I want to speak directly to my fellow Tobagonians by quoting from the words of the late, great Bob Marley, "*Everything is going to be alright.*" [*Desk thumping*]

As Tobagonians, we need to continue to work together in our quest to build a Tobago that works for every child, every family and every

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community. As we focus on the well-being and welfare of every Tobagonian, we must understand that there is no other pathway to making Tobago the greatest little island on the planet.

In this regard, Madam Presiding Officer, based on clinical and scientific, logistical assessment of the current COVID-19 treatment protocols, my Administration has taken a decision to establish a specialized COVID-19 parallel health care treatment facility at the old hospital up the Fort. I want to put on record that what could not be done in almost two (2) years, will be done in under or just about two (2) months. [*Desk thumping*]

We are in the process of finalizing the operational details for the facility with an international team of medical specialists to be engaged to manage the facility initially and to mentor and train those who will work at the facility. Madam Presiding Officer, more will be said on this in the coming days.

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In terms of the next step, the short-term strategic policy agenda, between the months of January to June 2022, Madam Presiding Officer, let me take this opportunity to outline what those priority projects are. I want to reassure firstly, all and every Tobagonian that my Administration will work to ensure that the available resources are organized and mobilized towards meeting and satisfying the basic social and economic needs, such as:

- Health care;
- Education;
- Recreation or Sport;
- Transportation;
- Public Health;
- Food;
- Shelter; and
- Clothing for every child, every family and every village.

No one shall be left behind in our basic needs policy objective.

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I will now like to turn my attention to solutions that are intended to bring both emotional and financial relief to all Tobagonians.

The Tobago Social Safety Net. Madam Presiding Officer, COVID-19 has shown us how vulnerable our small economy is to exogenous shocks. Consequently, as we move forward, I intend to roll out a suite of projects and programmes as part of a new initiative for social protection in line with our mandate to protect the most vulnerable members of our Tobago community. The name of this programme is the 'Tobago Social Safety Net' or (TSSN).

Immediately, we will adopt a robust approach to identifying members of our community who have been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. We will use all existing channels including line Divisions and Departments of the THA, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) to ensure that social support is delivered to those who need it and not to those who you think would give you a vote.

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Let me say now - any Member of my team who thinks that social support is for your party members alone, you do not belong on this team. [*Desk thumping*] Our goal is ensuring that our Tobago brothers and sisters receive the support they require at a time when they are most vulnerable.

Already, the Division of Education, Research and Technology has distributed more than one thousand (1000) tablets to support the *online* learning of students, who have been affected by COVID-19. One of the things that we have learnt from COVID-19, is that we do not have the capacity to deliver social service support in an efficient and timely manner to those who need it the most. COVID-19 has revealed that too many or too much of our Social Support Services were in the hands of politicians and not in the hands of Social Welfare workers. [*Desk thumping*]

I am happy to report in this House, that upon assuming office, the vault that was located in the Office of the Chief Secretary that contained all

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the food cards that allowed for some Members of the former Executive Council to give out four hundred and change food cards from his ever bulging santa claus bag, was removed promptly from my office and aligned directly with the directors of that programme, [*Desk thumping*] because social support is not for political gain, it is for a human good.

Madam Presiding Officer, our goal is to establish an Administrative Support Service Platform called “Service Tobago.” Each Tobagonian or resident of Tobago will eventually be assigned a digital identification number, which he or she will use to access services *online* or in person. I will let this House know that we have already begun talks to move away from the food cards and to move to an *E-wallet* system, which means that we will no longer be using a very expensive initiative to maintain, and that pretty soon Tobagonians will be able to apply for these social services from their homes, be assessed by a Social Welfare worker within a quick time,

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and receive the funding support they need without ever having to get up from where they live and spend the few remaining dollars they have, to catch a transport to come into town. [*Desk thumping*]

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Digitization is the way of the future.

MANDATE LETTERS:

Madam Presiding Officer, in line with our promise to Tobagonians to fix dis – “Dis” as my brother, the Deputy Chief Secretary will say, to fix “Dis” - today I give a clear mandate to each Secretary in the Executive Council to deliver a suite of projects and programmes that are intended to bring immediate relief to Tobagonians.

Madam Presiding Officer, leading up to the preparation and delivery of the budget for fiscal 2023, I intend to issue mandate letters starting from February 1st to every single Secretary and Assistant Secretary. Secretaries will be required to use these mandate letters as the basis to plan and implement projects and programmes related to the function of their Divisions.

Currently, Madam Presiding Officer, we are in the process of formalizing the policy prescriptions outlined in the PDP’s mandate. The plan to issue mandate letters to each Secretary, is in line with PDP’s commitment to the people of Tobago, to exercise prudence in the development and management of the Tobago economy.

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Madam Presiding Officer, in the near future, it is my intention to introduce in this Chamber, a full roll-out of Progressive Democratic Patriots' (PDP's) Policy Mandate for the four year period - 2022 to 2026. You may be aware, Madam Presiding Officer, that the Comprehensive Economic Development Plan (CEDP) 2.0 expired a very long time ago. The Comprehensive Economic Development Plan (CEDP) 1.0 expired and nothing happened. The Comprehensive Economic Development Plan (CEDP) 2.0 expired and nothing happened, but I assure you that when I issue these mandate letters, some things will happen. [*Desk thumping*]

And so, Madam Presiding Officer, I wish before concluding, to share some of these priority areas with this House and with Tobagonians that are relative to the first quarter of calendar 2022 - that is between January and March, 2022. I am happy to announce that next week we will be launching our:

- Smart App – “Show me a Road Tobago.”
- There will also be the installation of traffic mirrors across the island.

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- Resurfacing work on the entrance of Pigeon Point Heritage Park has started as the assessment was done a day or two ago.
- Assessment Report and architectural with designing of the Gru Gru Patch bridge is already on the way.
- Inspection and improvement of drainage at James Street, Goodwood (so that that family that was being flooded every time it rains - that will come to an end).
- Provision of an Evaluation Report on No.1 Village Street, Mt. St. George.
- The widening of the carriageway at the Signal Hill Traffic lights.
- Complete Development Strategy for the rehabilitation of the 'Little Tobago' jetty and the Plymouth jetty.

I am happy to announce that both the 'Little Tobago' jetty and the Plymouth jetty were visited by me and respective teams. I can tell you that when we got to 'Little Tobago' the scope of works got increased from repairing the existing jetty, to also including repairing the existing house that

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was rebuilt after Sir William Ingram's house and repairing the two bird watching platforms that are on the island.

- A plan and undertake public consultations for the designing and the redesigning of the City of Scarborough. In terms of some broader goals the Division of Infrastructure, Quarries and Urban Development will review the effectiveness of current strategies, programmes and projects within that Division.
- There will be a re-alignment of the Division's goals and objectives to pursue a new strategic vision and they must develop and implement a systematic infrastructural development mandate to support the growth path of Tobago.

In Tourism, Culture Antiquities and Transportation - Madam Presiding Officer, I was there just this morning and I do not know how we were renting that building - it just cannot house the staff. But, in that Division, the hardworking employees there will assist us in pursuing the asession of one additional international airline to establish:

- Stakeholders;
- Working groups;

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- To conduct consultations and undertake data gathering to assess the needs of the tourism stakeholders;
- To establish a system that raises awareness;
- Engage the stakeholders and defines responsibilities and collects data and analyzes results for continuous improvement.

They are going to assess the Division's current performance indicators.

We do not need to be a statistician to know that we have performed badly in Tourism over the last decade or more. They are going to develop an appropriate multi-stakeholder tourism indicator system for sustainable destination management and they are going to implement indicator systems to measure its effectiveness and optimize to achieve goals and objectives.

Food security, natural resources, the environment and sustainable development or the Division now simply called, "*the Division with the long name.*" In that Division, the tenure of agricultural development workers to be rectified, including benefits. I am happy to announce that the Lawyers, that the Assistant Secretary in the Office of the Chief Secretary, Mrs. Williams-Orr, that the line Secretaries and the teams involved have already started

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processing the employment records of the workers in the Development Programme within agriculture. This must be the best news and the only good news that these workers have received in almost a decade. [*Desks thumping*]

Madam Presiding Officer, we had workers working in a Development Programme whereby they were retiring with zero benefits. They were working for twenty (20) plus years and no arrangement for any kind of regularization, inclusive of benefits to be accrued over that period. That is cruel and since a caring and loving Government is now in place we are fixing that for the Development workers in that Division. [*Desk thumping*]

- A new Tobago Agribusiness Development Company Board (TADCO) was already approved and confirmed by the Executive Council and you will hear about that in the coming week.
- The removal of the Mauritius boat in Belle Garden - Madam Presiding Officer, let me pause for a moment. You know there are some people in our space who do not like progress whatsoever. This boat washed ashore revealing that fifteen (15) citizens of Mauritius had died tragically in a way we do not know how, while crossing the Atlantic. These bodies were stored in Tobago at one point and then moved to Trinidad because we required the space.

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The boat was there, the police completed their investigation. We discovered that this group was a group of migrants looking for greener pastures who never made it there alive; we knew what happened. The case was closed. The Mauritius Government is not interested in sending anybody here to pay all those monies to collect a boat to take back to Mauritius. And yet, you would not believe, Madam Presiding Officer, the amount of obstructions we received internally from people who are supposed to be Public Servants - the executing arm of the Government - just to move this boat that was taking in water and was a breeding ground for mosquito larvae.

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Serious obstructions - to the point where I had to remark, “If you want to be a policy maker, come and fight an election. You cannot want to be a policy maker and be a public accounting officer at the same time. The law requires that you be one or the other.” So, for matters like that, let me make it very clear that we will have little patience with those who are obstructionists when it comes to the progress for the people of Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] So the boat which they could not remove in more than a year - we moved in under two (2) months.

- The Division will execute a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Tobago Sea School for sea training in soft and hard skills for fishermen and divers - that is being done as we speak;
- The Establishment of a Technical Committee to collaborate with other Divisions on the strategy and execution plan for the rehabilitation related to the Tobago jetty and the Plymouth jetty;

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The 'Little Tobago' jetty was not placed solely in the hands of the Division of Infrastructure for them to manage the infrastructural repairs that are needed, and I am choosing my words carefully - 'infrastructural repairs.' We are not going there to build out any big, massive structure that will injure the environment. We are keeping the same footprint and we are repairing what is there, so that that island can be of best use to visitors and locals alike.

- The Plymouth jetty

We already had conversations with the leaseholder for the lands surrounding the jetty. We brought the leaseholder to Tobago and we visited the site. We looked at all the permits he had already obtained, and we looked at plans from a previous Executive Council of the Tobago House of Assembly, under Mr. London, and we are in the process of reconciling all of these things to take some action where the Plymouth jetty is concerned.

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In the Division of Health, Wellness and Social Protection, we will finally have a true parallel health care system, which means that they are parallel – the lines never meet.

So we are building out the parallel health care system.

- Establish a Medical Mission Task Force to enhance Tobago's COVID-19 response;
- Review and update the Human Resources Plan to achieve optimum use of an organization's human resources supporting organizational goals;
- Review and improve the efficiency of our White Waste Collection Programme;

Let me remind you, that we are looking to have white waste collected on a quarterly basis at the end of every quarter, as opposed to once per year at Christmas time. Tobagonians, clean out your house before Christmas.

- Collaborate with the relevant stakeholders to create cemeteries management strategy for Tobago;

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While this one was not discussed at our retreat, I had the good fortune of meeting with the owners and managers at Belgrove facility where efforts are almost there for Tobago to have its first crematorium. [*Desk thumping*]

In terms of our supporting sectors, we are going to:

- Collaborate with MSU (which is Management Services Unit) and other strategic partners to realign the goals, objectives and resources of the Assembly to achieve its new mandate for Tobagonians.

In fact, the MSU has already submitted to me for my review, the realignment strategy.

- We are going to improve the dialogue between the Assembly and Religious Organizations;
- We are going to commission scientific studies to find data-driven solutions to cultivate a more transparent government,

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economically stable landscape and technologically driven
Tobago;

- We are going to implement strategies to improve the ease of doing business rating of the Assembly and by extension, Tobago.
- We will review and execute practical measures to support all citizens affected by COVID-19; and
- We will establish a Strategic Planning Advisory Committee that will help us build out a new strategic plan - short, medium and long term for the THA.

In Community Development, Youth Development and Sport -

- We are looking at the assessment report of lighting at Patience Hill and Louis D'Or Recreation Grounds. Those grounds have already been visited and the assessment is on the way.
- The resurfacing of the Buccoo and Charlotteville playing fields to commence. Charlotteville's resurfacing will commence close to the completion of the work being done for the new

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community centre and pavilion, and plans are afoot to begin work at the Buccoo ground adjacent to the primary school.

The residents of Buccoo are happy that their playing field is no longer a paddock for horses, but a playing field for human beings. [*Desk thumping*]

- There will be the launching of the Empowerment of Small Contractors Initiative. We will tidy what the former Administration did and we will work on ensuring that small contractors have their capacity built out.
- There will be the rebranding of the Sou Sou Lands Park in honour of former Member of Parliament for Tobago West, Miss Pamela Nicholson.
- An assessment was done and we are looking to reopen all the Y-Zones.
- The Les Coteaux Community Centre is to be renovated and reopened and work has started there.

In Education, Research and Technology -

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- The Line Secretaries will host a series of stakeholder consultations and discussions with the Teaching Service Commission, teachers, parents and students and that is well on the way and preparations are being made for the reopening of schools on February, 7th 2022. (The Division has already procured and already installed commercial grade-size sanitizers throughout all our schools).
- A multi-disciplinary team to complete preventive maintenance report and to assess all schools infrastructural issues, are being put in place.

And this is without bias or without affecting those maintenance workers that are resident on the school compound.

In the Division of Settlements, Public Utilities and Rural Development, there is:

- The continuation of the Rural Electrification Programme.

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I am happy to announce that the Line Secretary, Mr. Pollard has already started off (perhaps biasly) in his own district, I cannot blame him. [*Desk thumping*]

But a few years ago, Madam Presiding Officer, the former Line Secretary for this Division, stood here in a budget debate and told me as the then Area Representative, that he will announce, 'let there be light and there will be light between Kings Bay and Speyside.' All now I am still waiting on the light. [*Desk thumping*] [*Laughter*] The more he called for light, is the more darkness I received. The last time I checked, a total of ten (10) street lights in a row, were not working in that particular area, and that was at the start of this calendar year.

- We will complete the distribution of housing lots at the Belle Garden Estate.

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I visited the Division and I told them that ‘by *the hook or the crook*,’ that the people we committed these lands to, must get their lands by the time we get to March. [*Desk thumping*] We are going to give them their land so that they can start to build.

- An assessment is also being done of all available house lots across the entire island in public housing communities and those too will be distributed to those in need.

(And I am happy to say, Madam Presiding Officer, that you do not need to sleep with a Secretary to get a housing lot). [*Desk thumping*]

- We are going to provide an Assessment Report on the Rehabilitation of the Adventure Estate Sewer System.

In fact, I am happy to announce that the report was already completed and the Engineers have identified that we will need to expend in the region of three hundred thousand dollars (\$300,000.000) to fix this problem. Imagine that, Madam Presiding Officer. Just over three hundred thousand

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Statement (Cont'd)

HON. CHIEF SECRETARY (Cont'd)

dollars (\$300,000.00) to fix this sewer problem and we were spending hundreds of millions of dollars - passing that mere days before the election and for years the residents in Plymouth and Adventure were complaining. That is an insult to the people who voted for us.

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- A Strategic Management Plan for Waste Water in Tobago, starting with South-West Tobago, is being developed as we speak, and efforts are being made to begin doing some spacial planning for the island of Tobago.

Madam Presiding Officer, among the several things we hope to achieve within this first quarter:

- We hope to begin thinking about this Tobago House of Assembly Chamber – our Parliament, the Parliament of Tobago.

I visited this space a week ago and I went into the Presiding Officer's Chamber for the first time as Chief Secretary. And for the first time, I was privileged to be able to see the office itself, and was alarmed that a mere few inches behind the back of the Presiding Officer, is literally a latrine and a kitchen joining each other. There is no better way to describe what is there. You cannot even change your mind in that bathroom, because it is so small. And for some crazy reason, we have a toilet there that is carpeted - right next to a kitchen in an already cramped office.

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I walked around the property with renewed eyes and I looked at where the Clerk of the House - where her office is, and what I have noticed all along, is that none of the partitions go to the ceiling, so there is no sense of privacy.

The Accounting staff is stretched to the limit. And one of the reasons why we have been having staff members across the Tobago House of Assembly (THA) being quarantined so often, is that some of the spaces are so small, that we cannot even install sneeze guards for them. That is the reality of our Parliament here in Tobago. This Parliament may I add, is the single, oldest Parliament and Political Institution in the entire country of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

This Institution is older than the Red House. When they had a '*micky mouse*' Parliament in Trinidad, we had adult suffrage in Tobago and voting for our own Representatives and that is why Tobago, historically, continues to bemoan the fact that we do not enjoy that right to self-determination and greater autonomy, because that is what we lost - to become a Ward with Trinidad.

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3.40 – 3.50 p.m.

Financial status of the Assembly (Cont'd)
HON. CHIEF SECRETARY (Cont'd)

I want to make it clear that over the next four (4) years, we have to fix this Parliament. This place will be the only place that some Members will ever be viewed by the public or ever be heard by the public.

We just had a swearing in ceremony and the footage, without disrespect to those who did the work for us, looked as if it belonged somewhere in the 1980s - our Parliament on show to the rest of the world and that was our best footage.

Our workers here have been clamouring for more space for a while. What was known as "CAST" or is still known as same, (Central Administrative Services, Tobago) - they have moved out of the building next door and they have long given us permission to occupy that building since the former Presiding Officer, Mr. Kelvin Charles - a long time ago.

I also visited that building last week when I was there. I risked tetanus and I risked falling through the wooden floors to go through all the rooms across on that side. The one positive outlook, is that we have sufficient space to create a beautiful and dignified annex to this historic

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building that can house the Parliament of Tobago. We have to begin to look at that.

Madam Presiding Officer, I am putting your good self on notice, that the Executive Council will put this project into your hands and we will ask you to do what Jamaica did recently, and what was done for the building of the Hall of Justice in Trinidad - to commission a competition in the space for designers anywhere, to design what they think our new Parliament should look like - to come into the space; look at it and design what they think it should look like. There is no better form of open procurement practice than that. When that is designed, we will have a dedicated *website* for this House by which Tobagonians can come *online* and vote for what they want. So this Executive Council will not be the ones to decide what the new Parliament will look like or what the new arrangement will look like.

In this quarter, Madam Presiding Officer, you will receive the Executive Council Minute authorizing you to begin that process. [*Desk thumping*] We cannot rebuild this space in one year, certainly not in this fiscal year, but we have to start somewhere.

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And where we are - we have a situation where for the foreseeable future, even if per chance COVID-19 leaves this place, we will still not be able to accommodate the public in our Chamber anymore. Where I am standing right now Tobago, is where the public gallery is supposed to be. That is where I have to use to present to you. And where we have two Members seated, was the one row dedicated to the media. Clearly, nobody considered our spacial constraints here, where we moved from twelve (12) to fifteen (15). They considered winning an election, but some people ought to leave the gambling alone because they gambled poorly and the ball dropped on the other side as God will have it.

So in conclusion, Madam Presiding Officer, we want a Tobago that works for the many and not for the few. I want all of us to take note of the fact as I conclude, that we inherited a seven hundred and thirty-eight million dollar (\$738m) liability portfolio and that we will have to come up with very creative and innovative ways to settle these liabilities in a manner that does not disrupt and stymie our development agenda and progress.

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3.40 – 3.50 p.m.

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While I will be the first to acknowledge that settling these liabilities will pose some challenge by limiting our fiscal space, as Secretary of Finance through the Administrator, a technical team has been put in place to start identifying ways and means to get this done at the lowest possible cost in a manner that is most sustainable.

Madam Presiding officer, I cannot end without making special mention of the role and office of the Deputy Chief Secretary of Tobago. Notice I said 'of Tobago' and not just 'of the Tobago House of Assembly,' because a significant part of our mandate is firstly to build out that office here in Tobago that will be completed within this quarter in Tobago. Already MSU has built out the structure for that office; it was approved and it was confirmed on Wednesday by the Executive Council and so Deputy Chief Secretary, Mr. Watson Solomon Duke is now duly authorized to begin to build out his office in Tobago.

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A part of that mandate includes, but is not limited to setting up an outpost in neighbouring Trinidad which will assist our trade agenda and assist Tobago in marketing itself to investors and providing services to Tobagonians who live down there. And there are more Tobagonians living down there than living on the island of Tobago. It is about time Tobago dresses like an adult and behave maturely in this political space. We are not children of anybody - we are partners, and as far as I am concerned, Trinidad and Tobago contains two (2) Executives that run Trinidad and Tobago. The Premier Executive is that of the Cabinet in Trinidad and the second Executive is the Executive Council in Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Those are the two (2) Executives that run this entire country *collectively*.

Madam Presiding Officer, through the Deputy Chief Secretary, we will advocate for those Seventh Schedule items to be realized. They are still too many offices based on law, that says that they are mandated to set up an office in Tobago and they still have not done that. There is no reason why in

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2022, Tobagonians have to jump on a plane or a boat to go to Trinidad to rectify land matters. Our land matters do not belong in Trinidad - they belong in Tobago, and we have to address those issues frontally and might I say, with some radical force that has never before been seen in this country.

[Desk thumping]

Madam Presiding Officer, it is my intention to have frank and open conversations with the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance toward securing the financial commitment of the Central Government, towards addressing the liabilities left by none other than their Colleagues - than their brothers and sisters.

In fact, I am happy to report that my first conversation with the Prime Minister went very well, and we have already agreed on a time when we will meet again. Perhaps, Madam Presiding Officer, it is time I go and learn how to play golf properly, because if I have to play golf with the Prime Minister

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so that we can talk, I will do that, because I am insisting that we have a mature, a responsible and a professional relationship, that results in the growth and development of Tobago and by extension, Trinidad and Tobago.

[Desk thumping]

Once Tobago is developed well, Madam Presiding Officer, this entire country will benefit. Take for instance our forex shortages. If Tobago is developed well, we will have such a significant tourism industry that we could then remove from the fiscal landscape, the shortages brought on by reducing fortunes in the oil and gas sector.

It is also my intention, Madam Presiding Officer, to engage the major players in the domestic financial services sector with the view of exploiting any possible solution towards this end.

You would note, Madam Presiding Officer, that my office is already inundated with visitors and guests. Perhaps it is because they too are feeling

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that fresh breeze and because we now have a much more 'open and willing to work with anybody' kind of government. [*Desk thumping*] And so to Tobagonians, I tell you my doors remain open. On every second Thursday in the month, there will be a public day at my office that is now located at the Victor E. Bruce building.

On every third Thursday in the month, there will be a public day at the Roxborough Administrative Complex, further to which for the first time, there will be an office of the Chief Secretary located at the Roxborough Administrative Complex. So, country people, you do not have to come to town to see your Chief Secretary - he will keep coming to you. [*Desk thumping*]

Finally, let me thank Tobagonians on behalf of this team. I thank Tobagonians for investing in us, fourteen (14) of the seats in this House.

Let me take this opportunity to reassure the Minority Leader, that though he is on the other side, I will never treat his office nor treat his

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2022.01.27 ES
3.50 – 4.00 p.m.

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constituency the way I was treated, or my Colleague, former Minority Leader Duke was treated, when we were on the other side. [*Desk thumping*] Democracy dictates that we should have a healthy and a robust Opposition. It is par for the cause. It is what will make us all in this House, better.

It is in our best interest, Mr. Minority Leader, through you, Madam Presiding Officer, that we are able to ensure that all Tobagonians, including those who have a minority viewpoint in the space, are welcomed to be part and parcel of our development agenda. That does not mean, Madam Presiding Officer, that we will allow those who were 'chooking out' our eyes for the last twenty-one (21) years to continue 'chooking out' our eyes. We will simply move them to a safe space where they can no longer 'chook out' our eyes, and ensure that we serve them from that safe space.

I also wish to thank all candidates who offered themselves in the December 06th, election. It is a sign that democracy is alive and well in this House and in this place, on this island. It is a sign that people still desire to

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want a better Tobago and I truly believe that we all have that same goal objective in mind - we may just have different roots to that objective.

Madam Presiding Officer, I was just a student preparing to complete Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) levels in 2001, when Tobago for the first time in twenty (20) years, changed its Administration. I had spent five (5) years prior at Bishop's High School and knew what it meant between 1996 to 2001, to see teachers get up and protest and walk out of the classroom; to experience staff shortages; to experience the non-delivery of the curriculum because there just was not enough; I knew what it was to see that we had to breakdown a public library at a time when we did not have widespread internet access on the island, and could not rebuild one for the rest of my secondary school life, and most of my adult life; I was part and parcel of the group of Tobagonians who were saying, "We want change, we want something different; time for Hochoy to go;" I was one of those who

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were trying to influence my parents so to do, granted my parents did not take me on, but I tried to influence them so to do; I have lived long enough to see that my parents were right and better judges of that new regime, that new party to which we gave Tobago's treasures to; I have lived long enough to experience grave disappointment and Tobago is too highly anointed to be so disappointed; I have lived long enough to see that Tobago has not met its deliverables.

I read through the harsh statements of then Chief Secretary in 2001, as he at that time, sought to bury his opponents and to make Tobagonians ashamed and named them for their delivery style and their government style. And it breaks my heart as a young Tobagonian, to stand here today and to tell you that that which they condemned, they repeated tenfold.

So, I cannot end without talking to my Colleagues, because it is not sufficient for me to talk to those who were here before and to talk to the Minority, but my Colleagues with whom I share an Executive, this is an

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opportune time for me to remind you, that you are here about the people's
business.

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2022.01.27 D.C
4.00 – 4.09 p.m.

Financial status of the Assembly (Cont'd)
HON. CHIEF SECRETARY (Cont'd)

You are not here to look good; you are not here to drive fancy cars; you are not here to forget the potholes you once felt, when all you could have afforded was a Ringroad; you are not here to get rich and switch - you are here to do the peoples' work.

I take it very seriously - your ability to deliver. If you cannot deliver, then you might as well from now, tell me you cannot deliver, and let me give someone else the task. The only measure by which I will judge you on, will be your results and your integrity in public life - every single one of you.

I still hold this team and myself to the highest standards that we all signed to in that social contract during the election, and I will continue to wave it over all our heads. And I want to encourage Tobagonians to wave it in our faces because we cannot continue with governance as we had it. If we do that, Tobago will forever be lost. We have this one and singular moment in our political history to make a difference. We will not have another moment like this again - not have another.

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HON. CHIEF SECRETARY (Cont'd)

This is the single largest political team in the history of Tobago, larger than when it was even twelve/nil. At twelve (12) it was just fifteen (15). We are at eighteen (18). And so, Tobago and God has blessed us richly. God has blessed us to the point, that even seats/electoral districts that were considered 'crapaud seats' for our opponents, salt was thrown on those crapauds and we have been able to restore some dignity to those seats. [*Desk thumping*]

Please do not waste the investment of the people - the people invested in you - you have to now invest in the people. Stay on the ground; keep your heads out the clouds and on the ground; see the people who walked with you; who voted with you; who you called incessantly during the campaign; whose homes you went by and picked them up and lifted them off into a polling station - remember those people as you govern. Remember them in your decision-making; remember those who were poor and who could not make ends meet in every Executive Council decision taken; remember them and remember the impact on them. And I caution you that we have to do better than those who we replaced.

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2022.01.27 D.C
4.00 – 4.09 p.m.

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HON. CHIEF SECRETARY (Cont'd)

The only truth is, that Tobago is holding us to a highest standard than it held our predecessors and rightfully so, because we told them that we are better; we told them we will fix this. So let us go forward prayerfully with God by our side (not behind us, but with God by our side) holding each other and together we will fix Tobago; together we will make Tobago the greatest little island on the planet. And we will do so child by child, family by family and village by village.

Thank you, Madam Presiding Officer; thank you Colleagues, and thank you Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER: Thank you, Member for Parlatuvier/L'Anse Fourmi/Speyside.

Members, are there any questions?

MINORITY COUNCILLOR (Mrs. Petal Daniel-Benoit): Thank you, Madam Presiding Officer.

Madam Presiding Officer, the Chief Secretary and Secretary of Finance, Trade and the Economy would have outlined priority projects that Secretaries will implement during the period January to June 2022. Can the

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Chief Secretary and Secretary of Finance provide an estimated cost for those priority projects outlined?

MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER: *Member for Parlatuvier/L'Anse Fourmi/Speyside.*

HON. CHIEF SECRETARY: Thank you, Madam Presiding Officer. Thank you for your question, Councillor.

A full estimated cost cannot be placed on the table immediately. Some of these projects at the moment have required realigning of funds and realignment of priorities because we inherited a budget that was done by another team, and so even those budgetary realignments are changing.

I did in the presentation however, present to this House how much monies we have remaining for both Recurrent Expenditure and our Capital Development budget as allocated by the Central Government and that is what we will be using to fund these projects for the remaining portions of the fiscal year - not just for the first six months.

I will say additionally, that we have been meeting with various agencies, some of whom have already indicated that they will be putting

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grant funding on the table for the people of Tobago, and some of whom have indicated that they will be presenting to us shortly, financial instruments through which we can use to fund the development programme of the island.

And in true Progressive Democratic Patriots (PDP) style of transparency, all of those things will be brought before the House and before the Public Accounts Committee which I give an undertaking that my Members will actually attend. So the new Chairman of the new Public Accounts Committee would actually have a quorum to actually host Public Accounts Committee meetings, unlike what happened previously.

MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER: Thank you Member for Parlatuvier/L'Anse Fourmi/Speyside.

MADAM PRESIDING OFFICER: *Leader of Assembly Business.*

ADJOURNMENT

Motion made: That the House do now stand adjourned to a date to be fixed. [Hon. Zorisha Hackett]

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 4.09 p.m.