

SENATE*Wednesday, September 17, 2025*

The Senate met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS[MR. PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, I have granted leave of absence to Sen. Dr. Desirée Murray, who is out of the country.

VACANT SEAT

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, I have received the following correspondence from Her Excellency the President Christine Carla Kangaloo, O.R.T.T.

“THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

By Her Excellency CHRISTINE CARLA
KANGALOO, O.R.T.T., President of the
Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and
Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces.

/s/Christine Kangaloo

President.

TO: SENATOR THE HONOURABLE WADE MARK

WHEREAS by the provisions of section 43(2)(e) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the President, in exercise of the power vested in her is empowered to declare the seat of a Senator to be vacant;

NOW THEREFORE, I, CHRISTINE CARLA KANGALOO, President as aforesaid, in exercise of the power vested in me by the said section 43(2)(e) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, do hereby declare the seat of Senator DEOROOP TEEMAL, to be vacant, with effect from 3rd August, 2025.

UNREVISED

Given under my Hand and the Seal of the
President of the Republic of Trinidad and
Tobago at the Office of the President, St.
Ann's, this 16th day of September, 2025.”

SENATORS' APPOINTMENT

“THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

By Her Excellency CHRISTINE CARLA
KANGALOO, O.R.T.T., President of the
Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and
Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces.

/s/Christine Kangaloo

President.

TO: MS. SOPHIA CHOTE, S.C.

In exercise of the power vested in me by section 40(2)(c) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, I, CHRISTINE CARLA KANGALOO, President as aforesaid, do hereby appoint you, SOPHIA CHOTE, a Senator.

Given under my Hand and the Seal of the
President of the Republic of Trinidad and
Tobago at the Office of the President, St.
Ann's, this 16th day of September, 2025.”

“THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

By Her Excellency CHRISTINE CARLA
KANGALOO, O.R.T.T., President of the
Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and
Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces.

UNREVISED

/s/Christine Kangaloo
President.

TO: MR. WESLEY ARTHUR GIBBINGS

WHEREAS Senator Dr. Desirée C. Murray is incapable of performing her duties as a Senator by reason of her absence from Trinidad and Tobago;

NOW THEREFORE, I, CHRISTINE CARLA KANGALOO, President as aforesaid, in exercise of the power vested in me by section 44(1)(a) and section 44(4)(c) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, do hereby appoint you, WESLEY ARTHUR GIBBINGS, to be a member of the Senate temporarily, with effect from 17th September, 2025, and continuing during the absence of Senator Dr. Desirée C. Murray from Trinidad and Tobago.

Given under my Hand and the Seal of the
President of the Republic of Trinidad and
Tobago at the Office of the President, St.
Ann's, this 16th day of September, 2025."

OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

Senator Sophia Chote SC took and subscribed the Oath of Allegiance as required by law.

AFFIRMATION OF ALLEGIANCE

Senator Wesley Arthur Gibbings took and subscribed the Affirmation of Allegiance as required by law.

1.45 p.m.

CONDOLENCES (SEN. DEOROOP TEEMAL)

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Senators, our colleague, Sen. Deeroop Teemal, passed away on Sunday, August 03rd, 2025. I now invite Members to offer tributes. I will start with the Government Bench. The hon. Leader of the House.

UNREVISED

Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Sen. The Hon. Darrell Allahaar):

Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, I rise on behalf of the Government Bench to join in expressing our deepest condolences on the passing of our colleague, former independent Senator Mr. Deeroop Teemal. Sen. Teemal was indeed a man of quiet dignity, profound wisdom, and deep spirituality. Throughout his tenure in this honourable Chamber, he embodied the very essence of what it means to serve as a Senator in the interest of the people of our country. He was guided, not by partisan leanings but by principle, conscience and a deep commitment to the national good. His contributions in this Chamber were always thoughtful, measured and anchored in values that reflected his grounding in integrity and his incredible sense of community. Sen. Teemal had the ability to lift the tone of our discussions and to remind us sometimes, in moments of contention, of the higher calling of public service.

Mr. President, beyond these walls, he dedicated his life to service in the social and community spheres and particularly in the area of culture, where he was widely respected as a leader and an elder, holding the distinguished post of president of the National Council for Indian Culture. Yet, Mr. President, his influence extended far beyond culture. His work in cross-culture dialogue and his consistent advocacy for ethical governments made him a bridge builder in a very diverse society. Mr. President, this nation has lost not only a former legislator, but a man of great moral standing, someone who was a voice of reason and a servant of the people in the truest sense.

His passing, Mr. President, leaves a void, but his example of humility and service stands as a beacon for those who enter public life, and on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, I extend our sincere condolences to his wife, his children, his relatives and all who mourn his loss.

May his soul find eternal peace, and may his family be comforted by the knowledge that his life was one of purpose, devotion and national service. Mr. President, I thank you.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Sen. Dr. Amery Browne.

Sen. Dr. Amery Browne: Mr. President, I rise to offer a sincere tribute on the passing of the late Sen. Deeroop Teemal. Mr. President, I must confess that this Chamber seems a bit strange in his absence, because he certainly made his presence felt and had a profound impact on this Parliament over the past seven years and beyond. Born in 1956, Deeroop Teemal was not the youngest Senator, but he was indefatigable in his patriotism and his service to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

What were some of Sen. Deeroop Teemal's enduring qualities? Well, he was always dignified, diplomatic, respectful and humble. He was always measured both in tone and in content. Never given to excess or extremes, no shouting, no uncouth conduct in the Chamber, or out of it. No slander. Always well researched in every contribution, but willing to call a spade a spade every time he rose to his feet, no matter who was in Government and who was in Opposition; an exemplar in every aspect.

Deeroop Teemal anchored his contributions in clear principles: spiritual soundness respect, and regard for all ethnicities dedication and devotion to his Hindu faith and to East Indian cultural heritage as a whole, whilst at the same time demonstrating tremendous sensitivity and appreciation for our multicultural and multiracial society. He relied on his sound academic foundation and contributions

as an extraordinary engineer. Most of all, he was defined by his love for his dear wife, Geeta, and his two lovely daughters, Priya and Kaajal.

He worked in many Ministries during his career and on a wide range of projects across different administrations in Trinidad and Tobago, actually demonstrating the importance of resilience and of governments showing respect for our senior civil servants and professionals even after elections. NIPDEC, WASA, the Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Works and Transport all benefited from his expertise over the years, and in so doing, Deeroop Teemal literally helped improve the lives of hundreds of thousands of citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Of course, he was a giant of this Senate, serving in the 11th, 12th and the 13th Republican Parliaments from November 2018 to August 2025. Mr. President, it would be no exaggeration to state that if we could clone Deeroop Teemal, our nation and our world would be a better place. But, given the limitations of science, we cannot. May his family draw comfort in the knowledge that in his living the way that he did live, he did make Trinidad and Tobago, and this world, significantly better. He lifted all who came to know him and all who had the privilege of becoming his friend or his colleague.

Mr. President, this morning I asked Geeta, his wife, whether there was anything in particular she would wish the world to know as this Senate says goodbye to our former colleague. Her words were simply to thank everyone for the outpouring of love and support, and to say that each of us should remember to live every day as if it would be our last with our loved ones. Thank you to Sen. Deeroop Teemal on behalf of this Opposition and the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. You will be missed.

I thank you, Mr. President.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker: Senator Francis Lewis.

Sen. Francis Lewis: Thank you, Mr. President. Good afternoon. Mr. President, hon. Senators. It is with a deep sense of respect and solemn duty that I rise on behalf of the Independent Bench to pay tribute to our dear departed colleague, Sen. Deeroop Teemal, an honourable man, a thoughtful legislator and a servant of the people of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. As mentioned earlier, Sen. Teemal served as an Independent Senator for the 11th, 12th and 13th Parliament from 20th November 2018 to the 3rd of August, 2025. During the 11th and 12th Parliaments, he was appointed, and this Senate affirmed the confirmation of him as Chairman of the Joint Select Committee on Land and Physical Infrastructure.

He brought with him a distinguished background in civil and structural engineering and a lifetime of community service. But much more than his professional credentials or cultural ties, he brought to the Chamber qualities of integrity, discipline and a quiet but unwavering commitment to the public good. In his time here, he was not one, generally, to seek the spotlight, but his voice, when he used it, carried weight. He spoke not to score points but to elevate discourse, whether addressing the rising costs and the inefficiencies of commissions of enquiry, a call for strengthening the integrity in the police service, or warning of the risks of fiscal imbalances in national budgeting. His contributions were always thoughtful, evidence-based and principled. He served with distinction, as I mentioned, on the Joint Select Committee on Land and Physical Infrastructure. A role in which his technical acumen and methodological approach, I presume drawn from being an engineer, proved invaluable.

His interventions and contributions reflected the raw ability to merge policy insights with practical know-how, and dare I say it, commonsense always anchored in the question, how does this serve the people of Trinidad and Tobago? Yet Sen. Teemal was far more than a technocrat. As president of the National Council of Indian Culture and the steward of the Divali Nagar, he was a quiet constant presence in interfaith and community development work. For those of us who have worked with NGOs one could well understand how challenging it can be to move forward. I think in your conversation it could be characterized as herding cats on occasions.

His presence in the Chamber reflected the very best of the Independent Bench, of what the Bench strives to be, to become calm in argument, to be measured in tone, firm in conviction, but always respectful of different views. He was not merely independent in name, but in thought and in conduct. He brought honour to this Bench. His passing leaves a void in our Chamber, dare I say, in the engineering profession, and in the hearts of those who knew him. His legacy lives on through the transformative impact of his work and the respect he earned throughout his career. He leaves behind a legacy of humility and service, rigour in deliberation and decency in public life. In these times, these virtues are not merely admirable they are essential but these are conclusions, and if I may very briefly, share a brief story of a conversation we had had, I will try to summarize it very quickly.

I had just joined the Bench and trying to come to terms with what it meant to be an Independent Senator. The conversation turned in my recollection and how that role of “Independent” is misinterpreted. A phrase that stuck in mind is “to work side-by-side” does not necessarily mean to be on the same side. We explored

that. It is no mere play of words, it is a clear reflection of the nature of true independence within a parliamentary democracy. Independent Senators do not caucus. One of the realizations is the loneliness of the role in the sense of, “You make up your own mind yourself, without working with others.” It carries no party mandate, nor does it confer, or try to determine a common line, or enforce a collective vote. We serve as he did, not the interest of a political organization, but our interpretation of the national interest as each of us individually and conscientiously try understand.

2.00 p.m.

We may arrive at different conclusions. We may speak in support of the same measure or express concerns over the same clauses in Bills, but such concurrence does not arise from coordination, nor coercion, but from conviction. That is a vital distinction that he made.

Independence is not adversarial. It is principled. It is deliberative and it ensures that the Chamber remains not merely a mirror of the other place, but a forum for considered judgment and scrutiny of a very different sort. Working side by side in the Chamber does not require that we be allies in a political sense. It makes us stewards, each in our own right, entrusted with a responsibility from the Constitution. In that lies the strength that Sen. Teemal brought to the Independent Bench. It is a strength not of numbers, not necessarily of unity of message, but of diversity of thought and the independence of mind that enriches the debate and strengthens the laws of the Republic.

To put that in context, there are 200-odd countries and jurisdictions in the world. About four of them within the region have an institution called an Independent Bench. Beyond that, there are another four or five. So call it eight to

nine countries in the world. That matters because the system of governance must work, and the servants of that system need to help it to work, and Deo did that.

So with that context and story, we offer our deepest condolences to his beloved family, to the communities he so faithfully served, and to the nation that he honored with his life's work. On behalf of the Independent Bench, I wish to thank his wife, his daughters, and his family for lending your Deo to us and to the country. May his memory be a blessing and may we strive in this Senate and beyond to live by the example he quietly but powerfully set. Thank you, Mr. President.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, it is my solemn duty this afternoon to rise and add my own words of tribute to our departed colleague and friend, former independent Sen. Deeroop Teemal, who passed away on Sunday, August the 3rd, 2025.

We have already, as a parliament and a nation, paid respects to Sen. Teemal at his funeral on Wednesday, August the 6th, 2025, but it is fitting that within this Chamber, the place where his public service found its highest expression, we again pause to honour his memory, his work, and his legacy. Sen. Teemal entered this Senate in 2018, appointed by the then President of the Republic, Paula-Mae Weekes, ORTT. He was reappointed in 2020 by our current President, Her Excellency, Christine Carla Kangaloo, ORTT.

For over six years across the 11th, 12th, and 13th Republican Parliaments, he served with quiet dignity and unquestionable devotion. As Chairman of the Joint Select Committee on Land and Physical Infrastructure, former Sen. Teemal applied his formidable knowledge as a Senator—in fact, as a senior civil and structural engineer—to some of the most pressing issues of our time.

He led enquiries into WASA and T&TEC, guided deliberations on flooding, landslides, road degradation, traffic management, climate change, and other matters that touched directly on the daily lives of citizens. His approach was always one of thoroughness and fairness, grounded in evidence but never detached from empathy. What set him apart was not only his technical expertise, but also the manner in which he carried himself; respectful, measured, and deeply collegial.

In a Chamber often marked by heated contests and sharp debate, Sen. Teemal reminded us that one could disagree without division and that persuasion and partnership were powerful tools of governance. Outside the walls of Parliament, he was equally accomplished as a leader in the National Council of Indian Culture as president of the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh for over two decades. Through these roles, he championed culture, faith, and values that strengthened our social fabric while remaining a steadfast advocate for national unity.

Hon. Senators, when I reflect on his service here, I recall a man whose contributions elevated not only our deliberations but also our standards. His voice carried the weight of reason, his questions sharpened our oversight, and his presence dignified our proceedings. We are all better legislators and better citizens for having served alongside this honourable individual.

Hon. Senators, as we mourn his passing, we must also celebrate his legacy, one of service, humility, and wisdom. His example challenges each of us to be more thoughtful in our words, more purposeful in our actions, and more committed to the people whom we represent.

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, it is written:

“As the ignorant are attached to their activities, similarly the wise must also

work, but without attachments, for the welfare of all.”

This verse speaks to Sen. Teemal and his life’s commitment to service. He served faithfully without seeking reward and with devotion to duty and country. May such noble karma guide the soul to peace and liberation.

On behalf of my family, all Members of the Senate, and the staff of the Office of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, I wish to yet again extend sincerest wishes for strength to the family of the late Sen. Teemal during this difficult time. May his soul find *moksha*.

Hon. Senators, I now ask that we stand and observe a minute of silence as a mark of respect.

The Senate stood.

Mr. President: May his soul rest in peace. Hon. Senators, the Clerk will convey to the family of Sen. Deeroop Teemal the sentiments expressed today. You may have your seat.

TRIBUTES

(DR. LENNY SAITH)

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, former Sen. Dr. Lenny Saith, ORTT, passed away on Monday, August the 25th, 2025. I now invite Members to offer tributes. The Honourable Leader of the House.

2.15 p.m.

Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Sen. The Hon. Darrell Allahar):

Mr. President, I rise once more on behalf of the Government Bench to express our profound condolences on the passing of former Senator and Cabinet Minister, Dr. Lenny Saith, who was the recipient of our nation’s highest honour, the Order of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. President, Dr. Saith's name is indelibly linked with public administration, governance and national service in Trinidad and Tobago. In fact, Mr. President, Dr. Saith once held the position, in which I have the privilege to serve today, as Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister as well as Leader of Government Business in the Senate, and this was during the Fourth Republican Parliament. Dr. Saith dedicated decades of his life to the development of our country, both as a senior public servant and later as a Government Minister. His was a career that reflected competence, loyalty and an unwavering commitment to the task of nation building.

Mr. President, as a Senator and a Minister, Dr. Saith was never one known for grandstanding or unnecessary flourish. Rather, he approached his responsibilities with quiet strength, careful thought and an ability to get things done. Many who served alongside him, the hon. Attorney General included—he is not here now—recall his calm demeanour, his sharp intellect and his capacity to manage even the most complex and challenging of national issues.

Mr. President, Dr. Saith was indeed a man who believed in service above self. He helped guide policy and decision-making at some of the most pivotal moments in our modern history. He was also deeply respected across the political divide, not only for his intellect and efficiency, but for his courtesy, humility and his sense of duty.

Mr. President, Dr. Saith's passing marks the end of a significant chapter in our nation's public life. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago acknowledges, with gratitude, his immense contributions to governance and nation building, and on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, I extend our heartfelt condolences to his family, loved ones, his friends and all who have had

the privilege of knowing him. May they be comforted by the knowledge that his life was one of honourable service and an enduring legacy to our beloved Republic. May he rest in peace. I thank you, Mr. President.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Sen. Faris Al-Rawi.

Sen. Faris Al-Rawi SC: Thank you, Mr. President, and I thank the Leader of Government Business for his kind reflections. I have the unusual task of reflecting upon my uncle, Dr. Lenny Saith. He was married to my mother's sister, Radhica Saith, father to two daughters, Reshma and Malini, grandfather to one, Lekha.

His humour was so dry that you sometimes wondered if he had a sense of it. He was disciplined beyond measure. He was balanced. He epitomized patience. He walked a road that few have the ability to stay on in terms of course. He never wanted or associated himself with power, yet he managed considerable portions of it. He was a reluctant servant in some senses, but a devout servant in every other sense. His reluctance really came in the fact that he admired and cherished the need for national service, but really took no part or parcel in public accolade or sentiment. He was, in many senses, for me, the antithesis of a politician.

In the family, he was renowned for having the ability to drown himself in newspapers in the middle of Christmas functions. We set our clock by how soon he would finish the paper and leave, so much so that we wondered who his successor would be. He said to me a few things in life that stood out, that facts are stubborn things and that they will often exonerate you. You just need to have the patience to allow it to happen. His sense of devotion was born out of his very humble beginnings. He was one of 10 children born to a labourer in Chaguanas, moved on to QRC. I was regaled with the stories of how he had to commute from

Chaguanas to QRC and eventually stayed there. He had a thirst for knowledge and a desire to reach out of his humble beginnings, but always had the tether to his siblings. Indeed, he ensured that he educated his 10 siblings.

He moved from QRC to India, where he received a scholarship, and it was there that his love of India and his Hindu roots took hold of him. But, it really brought him right back to his shores. He was at the University of Roorkee in 1958, where he received a Bachelor of Engineering degree. He moved on to a diploma in highway engineering from the University of Durham in 1960. He then moved to a Master of Applied Science from the University of Toronto in 1968, a PhD in Transportation Planning from Toronto in 1969. In 1994, he received the Doctor of Engineering degree from his alma mater, Roorkee, and in 2010, he was further honoured with the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman award from the Government of India.

None of that really mattered to him, in terms of it being labels by which he saw himself; it was really his return to Trinidad and Tobago in insistence to work in civil society. In fact, in the reflections on Sen. Teemal, whom I mourn as well today, at some time I thought I was listening to the life story of Dr. Lenny Saith, equally humble, equally calm. He, in his service to Trinidad and Tobago, had a few incredible contributions. He, like Sen. Teemal, worked in public service. He worked in various Ministries. He gave of his time as an engineer that way. By way of entrepreneurship, he then co-founded Trintoplan and, in their successful work projects, such as the Point Lisas Industrial Estate the ISPAT facility, which became ArcelorMittal the Beetham Highway the Lady Young Road, many landmark projects in engineering in this country came under his hand.

Political life came into his existence, again, out of service. In the city of San Fernando, he served as an alderman. He then, in the crushing defeat that the PNM suffered in 1986, in 1987, found himself moving into the People's National Movement. At a time when everybody was leaving it, when there was certain destruction foretold by everyone in the 33-3 context, he stood in the PNM, served as a temporary Senator in 1987. He went through that mission of rebuilding the PNM, becoming the chairman of the People's National Movement, something which seemed to defy his very character, a man of his silence, a man of his selection of very few words in description for things, a man who avoided sensationalism at all costs to become the chairman of a political party seemed, again, an antithesis to his character.

He served as a temporary Senator, as I have mentioned, in 1987, but in 1991 he came into government. I recall being at his dinner table many evenings, when my sister and I were often quite amused to be in his presence, someone so quiet, looking after children, the sisters and my mother, his wife, having left all of us in his care and custody, it was not an easy role for him to manage us, I need say. But he was that steadfast uncle that you could be bound to get very good and measured advice from, believed in that hard work.

He left the Parliament in May 2010, just when I entered it. And, it is not lost upon me that history tends to repeat itself: You are up today, you are down tomorrow. It is the journey that matters. It is perseverance, it is dedication, it is unstinting commitment, all of which he certainly held in the greatest way possible. I know that there are colleagues opposite me today whom he served with, hon. Attorney General John Jeremie SC, hon. Dr. Kennedy Swaratsingh, whom he often reflected upon quite kindly in his own way, as I am sure they know.

So, Mr. President, I was unfortunately out of the country at the time of his funeral, something which I could not get out of, but the universe has given me a second bite at reflecting upon him today in the anomaly of being both a sitting Senator and his nephew. To his wife, my aunt, to my cousins, to his wider family, the Saith family, I think that we all agree that he has lived a good life, and we celebrate his legacy and his commitment to country. Certainly, his shoes are very hard to fill. Certainly, I do not think we will see the type of his persona and being in politics, not in the world that we live in, anytime soon. So, I am confident that in receiving the messages which our Senate will send to his family, that they will be warm to know that I have shared this story with some of his reflections and again, I ask that his eternal soul, in his very strong Hindu faith, find its journey towards the maker, because I am confident that his journey is headed towards that divine light. I thank you, Mr. President.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Sen. Anthony Vieira.

Sen. Anthony Vieira SC: Mr. President, hon. Senators, I rise to join in paying tribute to the late Dr. Lenny Saith, a distinguished son of our nation. I did not know Dr. Saith personally, but I had the privilege of meeting him briefly as a young man when I visited his home on a few occasions.

[*Device goes off*]

Sen. A. Viera SC: My lasting impressions of him came mainly through his wife, Radhica, and his daughter Reshma, whose deep affection and admiration for him spoke volumes about the man he was in private life. To me, he appeared a devoted husband and father, a quiet and reserved gentleman, highly intellectual, serious and deeply private.

Dr. Saith's public record speaks for itself. He was an engineer of note whose early professional work, as you have heard, has helped to shape much of the modern infrastructure of Trinidad and Tobago. He was a founder of Trintoplan Consultants, providing opportunities for generations of engineers and contributing to projects that strengthened our industrial base.

In public life, he served as a Senator, Minister and Leader of Government Business in the Senate, holding several important portfolios, and acting as Prime Minister on numerous occasions. His contributions were recognized with the Order of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago in 2017.

Those who worked closely with him have described him as humble, soft spoken, disciplined and a man of great intellect and integrity. His daughter, Reshma, in her own moving words, remembered him as one of the titans of our country, a man whose legacy was humility and service.

As we reflect on his life, what stands out is not only the breadth of his professional and political achievements, but also the quiet dignity with which he carried himself. He was, by all accounts, a man who left an indelible mark on the national landscape without seeking the limelight.

On behalf of the Independent Bench, I extend deepest condolences to his wife, Radhica, his daughters, Reshma and Malini, and to all his loved ones. May his soul rest in peace, and may his life's example remind us all of the value of service, humility and quiet strength. Thank you.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

2.30 p.m.

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, it is with a sense of loss that I rise to join in paying tribute to the late former Senator, Dr. Lenny Saith ORTT, who passed away on

Monday, August 25th, 2025. I had the honour of serving alongside Dr. Saith, in this Chamber during the Fourth Republican Parliament, when he served as Leader of Government Business in the Senate, and I, as a Member of the Opposition. When I reflect on this time of interaction across the political divide, adjectives such as affable, soft-spoken, calm and respectful come readily to my memory as representative of Dr. Lenny Saith. He created an aura in the Chamber, which promoted camaraderie, even when I raised tauntingly or in a taunting way, matters, as was my duty to do, I was never met with anything but a sober, quiet response.

His profound respect for the institution of Parliament was unshakeable and unwavering. Dr. Saith's parliamentary career was long and distinguished. He served as Leader of Government Business in the Senate for a decade, guiding the legislative agenda of the then government, with skill and discipline. On several occasions, he also bore the responsibility of acting Prime Minister under the administration of the late Patrick Manning, his political mentor and close colleague. In every capacity, he demonstrated a calm, yet commanding presence and a commitment to the high standards of public life. But, long before entering the realm of politics, Dr. Saith was an engineer of rare calibre, with degrees and scholarship earned from India, England and Canada. He helped shape much of our nation's modern infrastructure. His tenure as Chief Engineer at the Ministry of Works and as Managing Director of Trintoplan Consultants Limited left an indelible mark on the landscape of Trinidad and Tobago through the roads, highways and industrial projects that continue to serve generations of citizens. For these contributions, he was honoured both at home and abroad.

In 2010, the Government of India bestowed upon him the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman award, its highest honour for members of the Indian diaspora. In 2017,

his own country, Trinidad and Tobago, recognized him with our highest national honour, the Order of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. These accolades spoke not only to his technical excellence but also to his unyielding dedication to national service. And yet, to all of his achievements in engineering, politics and leadership, Dr. Saith was also a devout family man. He shared a long and enduring marriage with his beloved wife, Radica, and was immensely proud of his daughters, Reshma and Melanie. Those who knew him closely will remember his loyalty, his kindness and his great love for family, as the qualities that most defined him.

Hon. Senators, Dr. Saith's life is a reminder that service is not confined to one area. He served through his profession, he served through his politics, he served through his culture, and he served through his family. His legacy is woven into the very fabric of our nation. Mahatma Gandhi, once said and I quote:

“The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.”

In every area of life, engineering, governance, culture and family, Dr. Saith embodied this truth. He was a citizen of uncommon strength, strong in intellect, steady in conviction and unwavering in his duty to Trinidad and Tobago.

On behalf of my family, all Members of the Senate and the staff of the office of Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, I extend deepest condolences to the family of the late former Senator, Dr. Lenny Saith. May his life's work continue to inspire us all and generations to come and may his soul rest in eternal peace.

Hon. Senators, may I ask that we all stand and observe a minute of silence as a mark of respect.

The Senate stood.

Mr. President: May his soul rest in peace. Hon. Senators, the clerk will convey to the family of the late Dr. Lenny Saith ORTT, the sentiments expressed today. You may have your seat. Thank you.

CONSTITUTION (AMDT.) BILL, 2025

Bill to amend the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.
[*The Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs*]; read the first time.

Motion made: That the next stage be taken at a later stage of the proceedings. [*Sen. D. Nakhid*]

Question put and agreed to.

2.45 p.m.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Mr. President: Leader of Government Business.

Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Sen. The Hon. Darrell Allahar):

Mr. President, thank you kindly. There are a number of questions on the Order Paper for oral answer. I have received the answers to all of those questions in draft and we beg your indulgence, pending approval by Cabinet, to defer them for two weeks, all of the questions.

Sen. Dr. Browne: All of them?

Sen. The Hon. D. Allahar: Yes. I have to get them approved, as you know, Mr. President.

Mr. President: Okay. Hon. Senators, there are several questions on the Order Paper and the Leader of Government Business has proposed, in accordance with the Standing Order, that Question No. 4, Question No. 8, Question No. 9, Question No. 10, Question No. 11, Question No. 12, Question No. 13, Question No. 14, Question No. 19, Question No. 20 and Question No. 21 be deferred for two weeks. Approved. Let us go.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The following questions stood on the Order Paper:

Body Cameras for use by TTPS**(Details of)**

4. Can the hon. Minister of Homeland Security indicate:
- (i) the status of the 5,000 body cameras, which were purchased for use by the TTPS; and
 - (ii) the percentage of TTPS officers who currently use body cameras on active duty? [*Sen. V. Dhanpaul*]

Expulsion of Students**(Details of)**

8. Could the hon. Minister of Education state:

Given the Government's position that students involved in school fights will be expelled, what measures will be taken by the Government to safeguard the right to education of children who face expulsion? [*Sen. J. John-Bates*]

Expelled Students**(Rehabilitation Measures)**

9. In light of the Prime Minister's utterances that every occurrence of assault and battery in schools will be treated as an expellable and arrestable offence, can the hon. Minister of Education indicate what measures will be implemented by the Ministry to rehabilitate any students removed from the school system and placed in the criminal justice system? [*Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman*]

Police-involved Shootings Tobago**(Details of)**

10. In light of the police-involved fatal shootings which occurred in Tobago in the months of April and May 2025, can the hon. Minister of Homeland Security indicate what steps are being taken to address matters of accountability, investigation, surveillance and review of police action within the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service? [*Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman*]

Police-involved Shootings Tobago**(Police Complaints Authority's Investigation)**

11. Can the hon. Minister of Justice advise of the status of the Police Complaints Authority's investigations into the police-involved fatal shootings which occurred in Tobago in the months of April and May 2025? [*Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman*]

Virtual Hearings at Police Stations**(Details of)**

12. Can the hon. Minister of Homeland Security provide the following information:
- (i) the total number of police stations at which virtual hearings are conducted;
 - (ii) the type of matters that are conducted by virtual hearings at the said Police stations disclosed;
 - (iii) the total number of persons who attended court virtually at the said Police stations for the period 2020 to April 2025; and
 - (iv) the total number of domestic violence matters that were heard virtually at the said Police stations, if any, during the period 2020 to April 2025? [*Sen. F. Al-Rawi SC*]

Trinidad and Tobago Courts at Police Stations

(Details of)

13. Given reports of the Minister's statements that he has "observed that the courts of T&T have taken possession of police stations nationwide", can the hon. the Minister of Homeland Security identify:

- (i) the total number of police stations in use by the TTPS; and
- (ii) the locations of the stations taken over as courts by the Judiciary?

[*Sen. F. Al-Rawi SC*]

Halting of Virtual Hearings at Police Stations

(Details of)

14. Can the hon. the Minister of Homeland Security inform whether it is the Government's policy to halt virtual hearings being held at Police stations?

[*Sen. F. Al-Rawi SC*]

Dilapidated Pavements in Port of Spain

(Details of)

19. Can the hon. Minister of Works and Infrastructure advise what systems are being put in place to address the dilapidated conditions of the pavements in Port of Spain, which makes commuting extremely difficult and dangerous for persons with disabilities? [*Sen. A. Lalite-Etienne*]

Increased Employment Opportunities

(Initiatives for Persons with Disabilities)

20. In light of the Minister's statements that there will be an increase in employment opportunities for citizens of this country in the near future as a result of the various initiatives presently being undertaken by the Ministry of Labour, can the hon. Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development indicate the following:

- (i) will persons with disabilities (PWDs) be included in these initiatives;
- (ii) if the answer to (i) is in the affirmative, what percentage of these initiatives is identified for PWDs; and
- (iii) which categories of employment are being considered? [*Sen. A. Lalite-Etienne*]

Social Assistance for Persons with Disabilities

(Strategies to Develop Means Test)

- 21.** Given concerns of the inappropriate application of the Ministry's means test system, especially in situations regarding the eligibility of persons with disabilities for social assistance, can the hon. Minister of the People, Social Development and Family Services explain what strategies will be developed to address this problem? [*Sen. A. Lalite-Etienne*]

Questions, by leave, deferred.

CONSTITUTION (AMDT.) BILL, 2025

The Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs

(Sen. David Nakhid): Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, I beg to move:

That a Bill entitled an Act to amend the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, be now read a second time.

In the name of God, the most gracious, the most merciful. Hon. Members, I rise today to speak in strong support of the Constitution (Amdt.) Bill, 2025, widely known as the "grandparents Bill". This is more than legislation. It is a statement of national foresight, inclusivity and pride. For decades, our Constitution restricted citizenship by descent to children whose parents were citizens otherwise than by descent. In doing so, it excluded thousands of grandchildren of Trinbagonians living abroad, individuals who carry our culture, values and spirit, yet could not

claim their rightful connection. This amendment seeks to correct that oversight and recognizes the realities of our global diaspora.

Now, Mr. President—and common with my practice after five years in the Senate, I beg your indulgence to read what was brought by us in the other place. I think it is very important that we have sight of it and we can therefore move on. I would also add, Mr. President, in my five years of serving in this honourable and august Chamber, there are few Bills that came across my desk that leaves open the possibility of political gimmickry like this one. It is very easy to play games with this one. But also by that same paradoxically, it gives us the chance to marry an opportune moment with a practically of our times, with the reality that we face in this geopolitical world, especially as a small island developing state.

I think it is important that we seize that moment, and we shall attempt to do so while I dissect this in a complete analysis. What was brought before us, it first states the purpose of the Bill, Mr. President. The Constitution (Amdt.) Bill, 2025, hereafter known as the Bill, seeks to amend the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, hereafter known as the Constitution, to allow persons to become citizens of Trinidad and Tobago if their grandparent was a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago at the time of their birth.

Clause 3 of the Bill specifically states that this Bill alters the Constitution as it seeks to amend section 17(3) of the Constitution, which governs the acquisition of citizenship by descent.

Section 17(3) establishes a general rule that a child born outside of Trinidad and Tobago acquires citizenship by descent if, at the time of birth, at least one parent is or was, but for death, a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago otherwise than by descent.

Key features of this Bill: Clause 4 of the Bill seeks to amend section 17(3) of the Constitution to broaden eligibility for the acquisition of citizenship. Clause 4(a), expansion of lineage: Amendment, deletion of the words, “his parents is, or was, but for his parent’s death”, and the substitution thereof with the words, “his parents or grandparents is, or was, but for his parent’s or grandparent’s death”. Effect: A person can acquire citizenship by descent not only through their parents but also their grandparents.

Clause 4(b), a broader inclusion of citizenship types: Amendment, deletion of the words, “otherwise than”, and the substitution thereof with the word, “including”. Effect: The previous restriction that required the parent to be a citizen otherwise than by descent has been removed. A person can become a citizen through parents or grandparents who were citizens by descent. I will tell you later why, Mr. President, and this august Chamber why that is so important.

Clause 2 of the Bill stipulates that it shall come into force on such date fixed by the President by proclamation.

Hon. Senators, when we examine a Bill brought especially to alter the Constitution, we have to look at it, the intent, the possible negative effects on the population, and also the language. What we have here is a language so well drafted—and compliments to our hon. Attorney General—that it ticks all the boxes that all our luminaries in legislation require. I go back, way back as far as Edmund Burke, onto William Blackstone, onto Cecil Carr, all the boxes are ticked. The language is strict, yet the intent expansive given what we want to accomplish as a government, and that is important.

Why? We all know the original intent of this Bill was for sporting purposes. The idea was that our national teams, sporting teams, originally advocated by the

TTFA in order to expand our talent pool. We have to be honest with ourselves. We have become a nation that has become less and less competitive in the international arena. When you are faced with such a situation you have to start thinking dynamically. I remember in this same House, the hon. Sen. Vieira stated on a Bill that we cannot become sedentary. We have to remain nimble, especially when you are a small nation exposed to external shocks. Our external shock is that in the last Olympic cycles we have failed. An external shock also is the performance of our national teams.

So, for want of a better analogy, we have to be that midfielder or football player who, when faced with larger opponents, we have to be more nimble. We have to be light on our feet. We have to be that rugby player who is able to manoeuvre among the big giants on that field. We have to have that dexterity and we must be allowed to exercise that dexterity in order to have our effect on the population of Trinidad and Tobago. So it is with the foresight of our hon. Prime Minister that things were expanded. The original intent, sporting was expanded, and there is also a reason for that.

In Lebanon, my ancestral home on my father's side, there is also such a Bill, but it only relates to the paternal grandfather. In other words, they have made a Bill that offends the ad hominem principle. Meaning, that anyone who has the lineage of their paternal grandmother can never receive Lebanese citizenship. While all those, they have a paternal grandfather, they can receive that citizenship. That offends the principle of ad hominem. What that does is singles out and discriminates against a particular class of people by gender. Some say by sectarian, especially the situation in Lebanon. So what our hon. Attorney General did was to expand the intent of this Bill to make sure that it passed muster. It is as

simple as that.

We could not only put it for elite athletes that could represent our national team. We had to make the Bill in such a way we offended no one, and that is what we did, and I applaud the Attorney General for that piece of legislation that was brought forward.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. D. Nakhid: Now, as someone fortunate enough, by the grace of God, to have represented our country on the fields of Europe, North America and the Middle East, I understand what that level of national pride means. Not merely rhetoric, it was about playing injured, subject to racial abuse, especially when I started in the 80s; subject to seeing your colleagues demonized, abused, not being paid, oppressed by their club owners. I have seen it all.

What we are doing as a nation, or attempting to do as a Government, is to make sure that we have the kind of inclusion and the kind of reception for our diaspora athletes that previously were barred from representing Trinidad and Tobago, be included in this Bill. Now, given the legislation presented to us, there is no mischief. It would be hard-pressed to find mischief in the legislation, or the drafting of it. Where do we find the mischief possibly, in the scenarios that can be created around the drafting of the Bill. Someone will say, “Well, as I have heard from the hon. Opposition Leader, that we are going to have a Bill that basically excludes or puts our local athletes at a disadvantage”.

I dare say, based on what I said before, given the fact that we are a small island developing state, competition is necessary, if not absolutely essential as we look to move forward.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. D. Nakhid: So although we have a Bill that by intent started with the purpose of sport, what it gives us is the opportunity to marry that opportune moment and idealism, marry that with the practicalities that I stated before, that give you a fertile ground so pregnant with potential that it will be impossible thereafter to obscure or to not realize our true potential across the diaspora. That potential, though pregnant, must be delivered, and that is what the UNC Government is doing.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. D. Nakhid: What we are asking here of this honourable Chamber is to help us to be midwives, help us with the delivery, help us realize that what we are doing—and so said, so done is our prerogative.

As I see here, this was in the musings or the lexicon of the previous Government. Consultations started since March 2024, but it is a bit different to deliver the rhetoric. It is a bit different to muse about what can take place. It is those who take the hard decisions to bring what we muse about into reality, to achieve and have the impetus to drive us forward as a nation, that is where the difficulty lies, and that is what we have done. We have given the country a chance to compete, not only in the sporting terms, because this Bill is laden with opportunities to have competition, culturally, economically and contribute to the economic diversification that we so talk about.

We have heard for generations—I have heard about this since I was a kid, oil boom after oil boom, “Let us diversify the economy.” We are saying as a Government, our hon. Prime Minister is saying, “Okay, we will attempt to diversify the economy and we will get it done. We will also have diversity in sport and culture.” Why not? When you are faced with a situation where we are basically

fish playing among big sharks, we have to use every advantage that we can, not only construct, but every advantage that we can take to fruition. That is what this Government is trying to do by bringing this Bill.

Sporting excellence is crucial to us. As I mentioned before, this Bill, we should look past the political gamesmanship and look to see where, how we can maximize that potential across the board. Citizenship by descent was limited to children whose parents were citizens otherwise than by descent. Grandchildren of Trinbagonians born abroad could not automatically claim citizenship. Without citizenship, they could not compete in FIFA, world football, ICC, international cricket, World Athletics or IOC competitions. This puts us at a serious disadvantage. We are a nation of 1.4 million.

Having said that, the fearmongering engendered, that all of a sudden we will have this deluge of people coming in, well, there are safeguards to that. We do not only have administrative safeguards, we have legislative safeguards. Not only do we have that, we have innate safeguards. And what I mean by the innate safeguards, becoming a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago as third-generation lineage does not automatically mean that you are going to be placed on a national team. It is up to the discretion of the coach whether you are picked to play or not. That is an innate safeguard. You have to have the level that we accept that you represent the national team. It is as simple as that.

While I played for the national team and while I am sure Sen. Roberts coached the Olympic swimming team, we had multiple athletes who came from abroad, who were born abroad, who could not make the national team. It is as simple as that. So that innate safeguard of whether you are excellent enough to displace a local player is already there in the selection or non-selection by the

national coach, and we have to give them that prerogative, that chance to exercise their professionalism. The consequences of doing otherwise are clear. Talented athletes with Trinbagonian heritage in the UK, Canada, US, Europe could not represent our nation, limiting the depths of our national team and our competitiveness, internationally.

After this amendment, God willing, the landscape changes completely. The diaspora-born athletes can now claim citizenship, expand the pool, add to the competitive nature of our sporting level, and as I said before, having played at the highest level, that competition gives you that cutting edge that we need as a small island developing nation. We need that. Without that, as I said before, we become bloated, we become comfortable. And, as the philosopher said:

There is nothing that stifles innovation like comfort.

When we become comfortable with ourselves, when we do not face that competition, we relax, we stagnate. This is the kind of legislation that further gives us the impetus, especially with a dwindling of resources, to move forward in every possible way.

I will give you a couple of examples that could be game-changers. We have a player called Luke Singh, Canadian-born footballer, capable of strengthening our defensive line on the national football team; Tsaianne Leander, a Canadian-born forward, already connected with the women's national football team. So we are not gender-exclusive like some of the other countries. Jameel Ali, an aspiring gymnast in Canada, poised to make history at the Olympics, a serious Olympic medal hopeful and candidate; William Albert, a top gymnast from Canada, now eligible to compete for Trinidad and Tobago. This amendment elevates our sporting profile, globally, and inspires youth at home and abroad. It ensures that bloodline and

talent, not geography, determine national representation.

Let me address the sports versus other professionals' concern. I have heard some Opposition Members argue that the amendment should apply only to athletes. Let me be clear, yes, the primary motivation was so, but citizenship does not automatically, as I said before, confer employment, political power or voting rights. There are safeguards to that. Legal safeguards already exist.

I will address the voting rights, which seems to be a concern of so many on the other side. You have to reside two months continuously in that electoral district before you can. Nobody is going to come home to reside two months just to vote. That is a far stretch. That is where the political gamesmanship comes in. We have to renounce the hypocrisy. Let us be realistic in what is facing us as a country. I understand how easy it is to introduce the political gimmickry. I am not about that. I am here to give you every possible opportunity to involve yourself in the debate, but at the cerebral level, at a level where we forget everything else, other than what is before us.

Allowing these diaspora-born professionals, doctors, engineers, entrepreneurs and academics is a collateral benefit, not a deviation. It is not by mistake. Their contributions can enrich our economy, education and cultural life. It is not a flaw in the legislation. It is a strategic advantage. By welcoming professionals, we increase investment, knowledge and innovation. Trinidad and Tobago gains globally-experienced individuals who can contribute to national development across all sectors. I will bring it home to you. I will bring it home to you. Every single one of our legends in football and athletics that you can name in the last 25 years, ask yourselves, where were their professions, their talents honed, sharpened and then brought to us? Ato Boldon, in the United States.

Hon. Senator: David Nakhid.

Sen. D. Nakhid: Dwight Yorke—and my colleague said, “David Nakhid”—in Europe, Belgium, Greece, Switzerland; Russell Latapy, Portugal—

Hon. Senator: Scotland.

Sen. D. Nakhid: Scotland. Every single athlete you can name, all of our runners, all our athletes, their professions were honed abroad.

Why do I mention that? Let us face it, the Opposition—and I—you see, I do not want to criticize the Opposition, although they deserve it. They do deserve it. They have not put things in place given the amount of money that passed through this country like a dose of salts. They have not put things in place or the necessary infrastructure that our athletes here can truly go on to greatness in Trinidad and Tobago. And, I just gave you some examples, and I challenge you to show me one or two who may have succeeded in here at the highest level in Trinidad and Tobago without having gone abroad and honed their talent and their experience.

The economic potential: The economic implications of this amendment are substantial. Remittances to Trinidad and Tobago in 2023 totalled US \$329 million. By the World Bank, it was \$200 million. But there is always a discrepancy with the World Bank and what we have locally as reported. Our local reports were US \$329 million in 2023.

By granting citizenship to grandchildren abroad, increasing their connection to family here—and I want to tell you something anecdotal, Mr. President. I remember in university, the American University in Washington, I met a Trinidadian who fit this description. His grandparents were citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. He came to Trinidad and Tobago once; once. As a matter of fact, his grandfather was a member of the People’s National Movement. He came in when I

was a sophomore. And, anytime we had a little lime, he would come with a recording of “Lion de Liar”, the calypso, Lord Nelson, correct? He would come with that recording. He loved that song. He loved it to death. You know why he loved it? He felt a connection, especially with the words. He kept repeating all the time. He would sing the part where he would say:

“Doh show...”—me the—“...tailor...
...show...”—me—“...de corner whey de fella pass”.

He loved that. He used to say, “Nak”—he used to call me “Nak”—“Where else can you find such words in a calypso? Where else can you find the construction of that?” Where?” The absolute vision and forethought to say:

“Doh show...”—me the—“...tailor...
...show...”—me—“de corner whey de fella pass”.

He loved it so much, he would repeat it over and over and over. Just a simple connection, culturally, made this young man, who came to Trinidad and Tobago once, love Trinidad and Tobago, it would seem, more than four of us who were there in university, loved Trinidad and Tobago more than we did. He loved that calypso to death. That just shows you, just that simple cultural connection, what that does to our people, what it does to them, what they feel.

I know many of you who studied abroad, you met Trinbagonians who hardly came to the country. They would have their flag in their dormitory room, prominently so, a Trinidad and Tobago flag, and they would play more calypso than you and I. They identified themselves with Trinidad and Tobago only from the rhetoric of their grandparents, their parents, people they had met, by phone, shows they had seen on TV, maybe the West Indies cricket team in England. That was their connection. Then we ask ourselves, “But why did they have this love for

Trinidad and Tobago?” And I understand it completely. I understand it completely. That nostalgia, that psychological belonging to something greater than yourself is so important to the psyche of a nation. And that is what we saw, and that is what we see, and that is what we intend to see more of when we have this Bill passed, that connection between the diaspora and our people in Trinidad and Tobago. It is important for the national psyche.

By granting citizenship to our grandchildren abroad, you tap into businesses, start-ups, potentially adding 500 to US \$1 billion annually to our economy. Diaspora professionals bring the expertise, the skills, the international networks, creating jobs and fostering sustainable growth. It is not only about the sports, it is a vehicle for economic empowerment and national prosperity.

3.15 p.m.

I spoke briefly on the cultural benefits and the education. It is important that our local universities—they have the chance to revive. I mean, it is no secret that all of our major institutions seem to be on a downturn. This is the kind of policy, the kind of Legislation that can have a renaissance so to speak in all spheres of our society. It can lend to a renaissance that allows our people to look at a standard of excellence that exists outside that does not exist here. We always have to have a bar that is set in a way that we can look to, and if that bar is set in a way that comes from the diaspora, why not? Why not?

It is something that engenders a sense of unity. It engenders a sense of ambition where you want to be like that person who is in the diaspora and making it and making it big. I mean, it is no secret that all our cultural icons that we look to, Nicki Minaj, and the actress, Nia Long, all of those who made it outside of Trinidad and Tobago. They made it outside of Trinidad and Tobago because that

bar was set there and they reached that bar. And, they look back and we look at them and say yes, that is where we need to be as a country. This amendmen of the Citizenship of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago Act, it gives us that opportunity.

We are not the first in this regard, as you well know. As a matter of fact, we are probably among the last five in trying to enact the legislation. Ireland has done it, Italy, and India, in their own way. Jamaica, Barbados. All have strengthened their national identity, enhanced their economic growth, and fostered a kind of global influence.

I mentioned briefly our status as a SID, as we call it, SIDS: a Small Island Developing State. I will give you the example of Qatar, a nation smaller than us. Look at the weight—despite their recent setback—that they carry internationally. Why they did that? Why is that possible? It is possible because of their network. Okay, their resources as well, but they have far oversized, in terms of what they present as a small nation.

This is what we seek to emulate. This is what we have to do in order to stay in the game. We cannot be lagging behind anyone in terms of legislation and the possibilities of increasing our national pool in all aspects. We cannot be behind looking up and wondering where are we going to be after five, after 10 years. We have to be proactive in our national development. We have to be proactive in terms of a national impetus to push us forward, and this kind of amendment is that kind of impetus that we need at this point in time.

The Opposition Members raised three major concerns. As I said before—and this was widely circulated in the public arena—the mischief that would be found here will not be in the legislation as drafted, but will be in the scenarios that

can be created around the legislation. So, there are the three concerns that citizenship through grandparents will weaken identity. I have addressed that before; as a matter of fact, it might do the opposite. I mean we cannot speculate on something without having the raw data and the statistics. We believe and we should be given the prerogative to exercise that through this legislation.

They also believe that this was something that is citizenship for everyone. As I stated before, it is not. There are legal legislative safeguards, and there are administrative safeguards. For example, even if someone applies, they are going to be vetted and they will be vetted in a way that is strict and in line with all our administrations that are there. It is going to be something that is not going to be, okay you apply and you get through. As a matter of fact, Ireland is experiencing that at the moment. They have over 96,000 people in the system right now, with 6,000 waiting for citizenship. They are being vetted. So it is a procedure that takes time. Although, in some cases especially with our elite athletes, it might be expedited, in a way to fit what is before us.

Hon. Members, this Bill is about opportunity, it is about fairness. I think I stated to you exactly how fair we are where we do not offend the ad hominem principle. It is about vision. It enables our professionals to contribute, our athletes to compete, our young people to strive and our economy to develop economically and culturally.

We make it quite clear, evident, that no matter where you are born, if your roots are Trinbagonian, you belong. You belong and we embrace you. We celebrate our heritage around the world, encourage investments, support our national teams and embrace our diaspora. This is our time for Trinidad and Tobago's economy, culture and sports. I implore every Member, every Member to

back this Bill. Let us respect our history, improve our present and ensure that every Trinbagonian, whether living domestically or outside, has the chance to fully contribute to our country in the future. I leave you all with this, Mr. President.

I remember the founding member—or may I say the founding father of the People’s National Movement, he said:

“Let there not be any more Mother Africa or Mother India but let there be Mother Trinidad and Tobago.”

I think that was something that most of us know and remember. That was quite poignant and quite appropriate, and here is why. This Bill is saying while we in Trinidad and Tobago, every Emancipation Day, put on our finest African robes, after not two or three generations, seven or eight or nine generations. On Indian Arrival day, the same, put on our finest Indian robes and try to connect with what? Our Mother Land in India, our Mother Land in Africa, after six, seven generations removed.

What this Bill is saying to our diaspora, do not look to Mother Africa or Mother India, look to Mother Trinidad and Tobago. And, I think that is something that we missed. It is saying that to all our grandchildren of the third generation, do not look to Mother Africa or Mother India, where you are, look to Mother Trinidad and Tobago where we need to go forward as one people. As famously said, “no Mother Africa, no Mother India”, let this Bill represent Mother Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. President, I beg to move.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed.

Mr. President: Before I call on Sen. Faris Al-Rawi to speak, I would like to put on record my concern and that has to do with what is amounting to be a disrespect for

this Chamber. Even though I have appealed to all Senators to keep their phones on silent or vibration, many Members continue to ignore and disrespect the Chair. I am issuing a warning. If it continues whilst Members are speaking, phones are going off—because Members are in a different orbit. They are not focusing on what is taking place in the Chamber. It will not be tolerated. This is a final warning to Members who disrespect this Chamber and the ruling of this Chair. Keep your phone on silent, please. Hon. Sen. Faris Al-Rawi.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Faris Al-Rawi SC: Thank you Mr. President. Mr. President, I rise to contribute to this Bill. I propose to be as succinct as I can be. The Bill before us is essentially to amend two of our laws: one is the supreme law of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, in particular section 17 which is the section of the Constitution that deals with citizenship. Secondly it is intended to amend our Citizenship of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago Act which is a statute that we operate on, that is Chap. 1:50.

There is a legitimate aim that has been put on the table by the hon. Parliamentary Secretary, Sen. Nakhid, which is one which we can all say, as it relates to that part that we find accord, that is, the aim of ensuring that the persons who find themselves in the Caribbean, Trinidad and Tobago diaspora, who are now not citizens, find a way to access citizenship in a lawful way by process of law so as to be included in a very important aspect of our culture and participation as a nation. That is in sport and in particular, in the genesis of football.

The aim has been admittedly widened by the hon. Sen. Nakhid's reference to the instructions from the hon. Prime Minister as part of his discussion. There has been a reflection on an increasing of contributions by way of remittances, by way

of potential foreign direct investment coming now through “local foreigners”, if I can use that expression, persons who were once foreign, but who now have who citizenship in prospect of acquisition. One can see merit in that as well.

The hon. Sen. sought to deal with the issue of mischief as he called it, being the issue of electoral aspects, et cetera. But very interestingly, I thought it was quite fitting for Sen. Nakhid to pilot this Bill. He has served at the highest levels of sport and contribution. His reputation is well known in that regard. But very interestingly, he reflected upon his lineage from Lebanon and I thought that that was a very interesting reference point, which I hope to develop in a moment, because Lebanon has a reflective comparison, which I think is very germane to this Bill in how its citizenship or those who have descended, participate in their electoral system.

3.30 p.m.

That is something that I was actually going to raise myself in one of the aspects that I would invite the Members of the Government to consider. There is always a mischief at law which legislation treats with. There is a legitimate aim as a requirement. We are addressing a mischief in that legitimate aim. In this case here, the mischief in part is described as the exclusion of persons by descent and now the remedy that is being sought is for an inclusion. By way of proportionality, you make sure that the law does not go much further than it should to address the mischief and that it is generally proportionate in the circumstances.

Our legislation and purpose, if you look to the Constitution, is quite interesting. We are just looking straight to the Constitution at section 17 and the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago says very plainly that in section 17, we want to now include “grandparent”. So the supreme law of the

land, section 17, can be amended by way of a simple Act of Parliament. It is not entrenched in section 54 by way of reference to such a degree that requires either a three-fifths or a two-thirds or a three-quarters majority. We can do that by a simple majority amendment. When we look to section 17 of the Constitution, it is under “Chapter 2, Citizenship” section 17 says:

“Subject to subsection (2), every person born in Trinidad and Tobago after the commencement of this Constitution shall become a citizen...”—by birth.

It goes on in subparagraph 3 to say:

“A person born outside Trinidad and Tobago after the commencement of this Constitution shall become a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago at the date of his birth if at that date either of his parents is, or was, but for his parent’s death, a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago otherwise than by descent...”

It then excludes diplomats in service, et cetera, or treats with them in a different way.

What we propose by this Bill in clause 4, is to add in “grandparent” right here into section 17 so that you have two sources from which you can flow as a person born outside of Trinidad and Tobago, that your parent or your grandparent is someone from whom you can acquire citizenship by descent, no problems. This section of the Constitution without amendment, specifically says that that parent—now we are adding grandparent—should be born in Trinidad and Tobago. What the Constitution, without proposed amendment deals, is that it excludes someone who is a citizen by descent.

So in other words, put quite simply, the child of a parent born in Trinidad

and Tobago can acquire citizenship if that child is born outside of Trinidad and Tobago. The child of a grandparent who is born in Trinidad and Tobago can acquire citizenship if that child is born outside of Trinidad and Tobago. The proposed amendment that causes trouble is where we treat with the change from the limitation on citizenship by descent, now allowing for citizenship by descent. So put simply, a grandparent who is not born in Trinidad and Tobago but who has citizenship—and there are many ways in which you can have citizenship by naturalization, by registration, by birth or by descent. So a grandparent not born in Trinidad and Tobago—you can assume that that is naturalization or by descent, can have a grandchild not born in Trinidad and Tobago from a parent who is not born in Trinidad and Tobago acquire citizenship.

It sounds well and good, but there are other mischiefs to explore and the purpose of raising these other mischiefs is incumbent upon an opposition because the law will continue to speak. The Constitution continues to speak. We are amending the Constitution. We are changing the formula to remove the restriction on citizenship by descent as an origin being excluded. We are including citizenship by descent as an origin, that is, grandparent or parent, but there are other consequences that we must consider. And, we must therefore turn to consider what are the pros and cons or the benefits or matters which are not benefits, the opposite of, of acquiring citizenship.

A citizen of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago by virtue of our constitution, is entitled to all the privileges, benefits and obligations of citizens. Privileges would include health, education and rights that are enshrined in the Constitution in section 4 and section 5. Obligations would include, detriments would include compliance with our laws, because our laws may be such that

extraterritoriality or all the things attach on to you. So you have that in that social contract. You have, in the laws of the Trinidad and Tobago's, experience. You have pros and cons.

But certainly, the Constitution recognizes the right to political activity, if I can call it that, using different wording. And, certainly, we have the Constitution, which speaks to the manner in which our Elections and Boundaries Commission operates. And certainly, we have the Representation of the People Act, which allows the formula by which we consider participation in the voting process. Currently that is by way of reference to section 36, rule 36 of the Election Rules. It is by reference to section 12 of the Representation of the People Act and section 12 of the Representation of the People Act is very clear.

Sen. Nakhid touched upon it. Permit me to put it into context here. Section 12 of the Representation of the People Act says:

“Subject to this Act, a person is qualified to be an elector for an electoral district at a Parliamentary election, a Municipal Council election or the Tobago House of Assembly election, who on the qualifying date has resided in what electoral district for a period of at least two months preceding the qualifying date—”

Sen Nakhid put that on record.

My enquiries at the EBC demonstrate that notwithstanding that provision if there is a period of registration afoot and you are at the point of registering, you have obtained your citizenship, you have your passport, if that happens and you present yourself during a period of electoral registration, you will go on to the List of Electors. Whether you will be disqualified after the investigation because of the two-month inspection period, is a different matter. There is still that opportunity.

So Sen. Nakhid was correct, there are rules and regulations to treat with this in part.

But, Mr. President, we are acutely aware that the law in continuing to speak is headed, as other Commonwealth territories have it, and non-commonwealth, where citizens who are abroad are entitled to vote and extensively in anticipating where the law is going to go for electoral processes, it is incumbent upon us to at least explore what will happen with this law continuing to speak when the right to vote can be exercised from abroad. That is why I found the interesting reflection on Lebanon. In Lebanon, you have an interesting situation where a largely Muslim country, in some senses dependent on where you go, has a fair reflection of a Christian participation because persons who live outside of Lebanon can register their citizenship and actually vote from abroad.

We are digitizing the Elections and Boundaries process as a nation and for example, most people in this country are not aware that persons who are in jail in remand, vote during the elections. I can tell you as a matter of fact. Remandees for serious crimes voted in the last election. Most people would be surprised to hear that. But because the law continues to speak and because we are getting into the position where Trinidad and Tobago will inevitably at some point in the future be considering whether citizens from abroad who live abroad would be entitled to vote, it is not beyond reflection for us to consider the impact of opening the doorway to citizenship by removing the prohibition, which would have kept it narrower, where citizens by descent as a grandparent in particular, are not required to be born in the jurisdiction.

The second mischief, which we must consider, is a very real one, and that is in the context of foreign terrorist fighters. People who are stateless presently but

whose lineage can be traced back to a particular jurisdiction.

I can tell you that I have personally in another capacity, dealt with issues of courts abroad making enquiries of Trinidad and Tobago on our position in relation to children of foreign terrorist fighters and how they acquire citizenship or return to Trinidad and Tobago.

That puts us in a conundrum as we treat with the international law because the international law is split between *jus sanguinis*, law of the blood, *jus soli*, place of birth, the law of birth, and then it is complicated by two other aspects of reflection of law and that is the law of *renvoi* and double *renvoi*. Bottom line means, courts abroad sometimes apply the law of Trinidad and Tobago by way of example in their courts, or double it, meaning there is a complicated way of working it out. So there is another issue under the Anti-Terrorism Act that I must flag.

There is a third issue and that is, Mr. President, when we get down to the consequences of Trinidad and Tobago's numerical position. There was a very interesting contribution which I saw on television coming from the hon. Prime Minister reflecting upon Trinidad and Tobago's status being fairly in line with Ireland when you look to the number of people in the diaspora who live outside of Trinidad and Tobago in the ratio that is resultant. Trinidad and Tobago, according to the hon. Prime Minister's contribution, was that for every four people in Trinidad and Tobago, one of us with Trinidadian roots lives abroad. That therefore drives home the first issue for consideration under the Representation of the People Act and where the law will continue to it. I expect that perhaps today it is not an issue but when we are passing this law without conditionality, it can become an issue.

Now, I heard Sen. Nakhid raise an interesting point that hon. Attorney General, according to him, has advised that the law could not be adjusted such as to just select people for the purposes of athletics. He called it *ad hominem*. I think perhaps he meant to say it would be discriminatory because people in similar circumstances ought to be treated similarly and therefore you probably come down to that but I understand gist of what he was saying. That one could not seem to pass a law which could be discriminatory in nature. We saw that in the CCJ in the *Myrie* case and how those things went, et cetera, and certain aspects.

But, I want to point out something in the second limb which is the Citizenship of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago Act. We are amending section 5 of the Citizenship of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago Act. Section 5 of the citizenship Act is an interesting one. It came about by one of the amendments to the law. If I am not mistaken, when I pulled it up I think it was in 1978 but forgive me if I am wrong as to the actual date that did that. In the Citizenship of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago Act, we are amending section 5. Section 5 is “Acquisition of Citizenship” the marginal note, all be it not for interpretation purposes but just for aid, says:

“Citizenship by descent”

—Stick a pin, we are amending that. We are adding in “grandfather—grandparents” and we are saying that we are removing the limitation on not allowing persons by way of descent. But let us go to section 8. Section 8 of the Citizenship of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago Act:

“The Minister may cause the minor child born outside Trinidad and Tobago of a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago to be registered as a citizen ...upon receipt of the prescribed application made by the responsible parent

or the guardian of such child.

...special circumstances...”

—in subsection (2)

“...may be prescribed, may cause any minor to be registered as a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago.”

3.45 p.m.

Sen. F. Al-Rawi SC: Subsection (3):

“A person who becomes a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago by virtue of this section shall cease to be a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago one year after attaining full age unless he has taken the oath of allegiance.”

Section 8, “Registration of minor children.”. So this is someone who is a citizen by descent. It says “citizen of Trinidad and Tobago”, it does not necessarily say what type of citizenship. Was it by registration? Was it by naturalization? Was it by descent? But up comes section 5. Section 5 deals with “Citizenship by descent.”.

In the amendment that we propose, we are removing the mischief as amended in the House of the loss of citizenship where originally in section 5(1)(b) after you get your grant of citizenship:

“...upon receipt of the prescribed application...—

(a) by the responsible parent or the guardian of such child before the child attains full age...”

So you can get citizenship by descent if your parent or the person who has responsibility applies before you are an adult, by the child only, as it is unamended, if the child applies one year upon becoming an adult. Eighteen years old in Trinidad and Tobago, in other jurisdictions, it may be different, it is pegged that

way. The amendments in the House propose to remove that limitation. If we are being consistent, we ought to remove the limitation in section 8 as well where the loss of citizenship happens.

But if we are to treat with citizenship by descent in section 5 and to make sense of amendments, then you cannot fail to make amendments to the regulations. Now I accept that the regulations can be done by way of negative resolution but the regulations are right before us. When we look to the regulations, it says that for section 5, you have to effectively be bound by Form 1. Form 1 in the First Schedule is, and I read:

“CITIZENSHIP OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND
TOBAGO ACT
APPLICATION FOR CERTIFICATE OF CITIZENSHIP UNDER
SECTION 5(1) OF THE ACT

NOTE: Applicants are requested to submit...”—et cetera.

- “1. Full Name
2. Date...
3. Address
4. Nationality
5. Father’s Name...”

Father’s address. No reflections yet. Perhaps the hon. Attorney General will do it by way of amendments to the regulations after but the opportunity presents itself today to amend the Forms because the Forms need to include now grandparents, et cetera.

But what I am raising, if I go back to the issue between section 8 of the Citizenship of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago Act and section 5 of the

Citizenship of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago Act is that there appears to be a conflict. There is also an equal conflict in section 11 of the Act. Section 11 deals with dual citizenship. Section 11(1):

“Subject to this Act, a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago shall cease to be such a citizen if he acquires the citizenship of another country by voluntary act other than marriage.”

But later, subsection (2D):

“A citizen of Trinidad and Tobago by birth or by descent, who acquires citizenship of another country shall not lose his citizenship by reason only of such acquisition.”

Respectfully, it does not make sense. It has been the law for a long while, it is the first time that I have looked at it so I confess that I had not seen it before. I think it is in need of surgery and for clarification.

But when we jump back again, Sen. Nakhid said the law is treating in a better sense now. We are not dealing—he lamented that the descent in Lebanon is by way of paternal position but our law is not far off. If you look to the definition of a responsible person in the Citizenship of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago Act, a responsible person is a “responsible parent”, forgive me, which finds itself in section 5 and section 8:

“...in relation to any child means the father but—

- (a) where the father is dead; or
 - (b) where custody of the child has been awarded to the mother; or
 - (c) paternity of the child is not admitted or established in accordance with the Status of Children Act,
- the expression ‘responsible parent’ means the mother;”

But none of that takes into account the amendments we made to the Children Act.

Further, this law also repeats something which we abolished, which is that a married woman is deemed to be an adult. In other words then, it reflects upon marriages of minors which is again something that we have treated with. So there is work to be done in the amendments if we take it forward. There is a live issue of whether we can really leave behind what has been a guarded cage of citizenship by descent but it becomes very, very clear when we go to FIFA. Because one of the main positions offered by the Government, the original intention as the hon. Parliamentary Secretary described it, was so that our footballers could qualify.

When you go to FIFA “Guide to Submitting a Request for Eligibility or Change of Association”. The last version that I found, I do not know if there is another, is January 2021 edition. But when you look at FIFA:

“According to the Regulations Governing the Application of the Statutes, a request for eligibility or change of association must be submitted to the Players’ Status Committee (PSC)...”—and in particular that deals with Article 9.

When you go to the mandatory requirements referred to as cumulative requirements, and you get to Article 9, paragraph 2b), the player must meet this directly as part of the cumulative requirements, meaning there are other requirements. But listen to this requirement. The player must meet one of the following requirements:

“The player was born on the territory of the relevant association.”

In this case, you have to be born in Trinidad and Tobago, you want to play for Trinidad and Tobago. Or:

“The player’s biological mother or biological father was born on the

territory of the relevant association.”

Not adoptive. Our law allows for adoptive if you look to our Citizenship Act. Or:

“The player’s grandmother or grandfather was born on the territory of the relevant association.”

Or:

“The player began living on the territory of the relevant association before the age of 10 and has lived...”—in the territory for—“at least three years.”

Or:

“The player began living on the territory of the relevant association between the age of 10 and 18, has lived...”—on the territory for—“at least five years...can demonstrate that the move to the territory was not for purposes of participating for its representative team.”

Or:

“The player began living on the territory of the relevant association from the age of 18 and has lived on the said territory at least five years.”

FIFA does not allow the citizenship by descent with a root to the grandparent. And, I call upon the Minister of Sport who was here a moment ago and the Parliamentary Secretary to tell us if there is something that has superseded this. Perhaps their research has found that, I have not. So if the original intent was to qualify because there are so many people who can qualify because their grandparents have citizenship now by descent but you cannot qualify for FIFA according to this and I dare say that my research has also shown that other entities have similar rules. That is also found in Article 9, paragraph 2d) again with the same positions of grandparent being born, parent being born and the person having moved, et cetera, is a mandatory requirement cumulative to other requirements.

So let me summarize as follows. There is a proposed amendment to the Constitution. There is a proposed amendment to the Citizenship of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago Act. The Constitution is the supreme law. The supreme law is being amended by way of this proposal to include grandparents. No problems. The mischief for us comes about in the need for greater analysis of the impact of grandparents by way of descent. The analysis is required in consultation with the Elections and Boundaries Commission. The analysis is required with some of our international players as it related to anti-terrorism laws. The analysis is required in respect of perhaps taxation laws as well because right now, under our Global Forum requirements and our Financial Action Task Force requirements, you are looking at the issue of extraterritorial exposure to taxation and therefore, the avoidance in a different category, the evasion of taxation or the subjectivity to dual taxation or dual taxation relief, relief from double taxation, is an important point to at least have asked and answered.

If we are not careful, Mr. President, we could buy the soundbites that I heard in the House, which is, I heard a Member of the House say while I was watching the debate, so “yuh telling meh Russell Latapy is wrong and Dwight Yorke is wrong”. I do not know what they said but what I do know is what I have found so far, and I pray that I am wrong. I pray that something has changed this FIFA regulation of January 2021, that edition, if the cumulative mandatory positions of FIFA as it relates to acquisition of citizenship by descent require the parent or grandparent to be, (a), biological and (b), born in the territory, then we have a problem and we have a problem when you go to section 14 of the Citizenship of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago Act.

Section 14 of the Citizenship of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago Act

deals with “Loss of Citizenship”:

“A citizen of Trinidad and Tobago who became such by registration or naturalisation or whose citizenship was restored by the Minister in accordance to that Act shall cease to be a citizen...if he is deprived of that citizenship by an Order of the Minister...”

So you can get citizenship and you can be deprived.

“(2) Subject to this section, the Minister may by Order deprive such citizen of his citizenship if he is satisfied that the citizenship was obtained by means of fraud, false representation or the concealment of any material particular.”

In other words, acquisition of citizenship by descent is fettered only by fraud, false representation or concealment. You could be a criminal, you could be within the category of undesirable persons under section 8 of the Immigration Act as is referred to elsewhere in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago Citizenship Act.

But you do not have a discretion to say the person is undesirable because there is no reference to undesirability by linking it to a class of prohibited persons as is done in reference to section 8 of the Immigration Act. That means step outside of the noble and proper purpose of sport, criminals, deportees, stateless persons, potential foreign terrorist fighters are all receiving an open floodgate to Trinidad and Tobago. The Government may not like to hear what I have just said but I am obliged in having seen these flags to raise them here.

There was a very noble purpose in the Administration of Justice (Indictable Proceedings) Act, Preliminary Enquiry. We had a clause called section 34, it looked good. We asked for certain undertakings, it turned out to be difficult and obnoxious in the manner in which it came to life. I say that only to say that what

appears to be good today requires deeper reflection. In any event, there are aspects of the Citizenship of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago Act that have to be amended. Surely the responsible parent cannot stand as just the father, now that we have seen it. Surely the issue of child marriage and child rights has to be reflected upon. Surely, the issue of the forms only referring to father and not to grandparents or mother has to be treated with.

So when you put that against what appears to be a FIFA position which has no conformity with the submissions made by the Government, the question is: What is the rush?

4.00 p.m.

Send it to a joint select committee if you want. Press pause and fix it if you will. But I would very much like to hear from the EBC. I would very much like to understand, once you are registered and living abroad, where you register people by 10s, or 20s, or by 100, could be the difference in an election outcome or not—not that there is something wrong with that, citizens should be entitled to vote. But democracies have to pay careful attention to the details lest we be enticed by jewels and baubles when there is jeopardy behind us.

I ascribe no sinister purpose to the Members of the Government; I do not at all. I am raising these as concerns of mine in reflecting on the law. I do not think that anybody across from us there has the intention to do anything nefarious in relation to this law. So, please, Mr. President, I want to be crystal clear that I am not raising that for the sake of being difficult or throwing barbs at the Government. I am asking questions, which, I pray, will be entertained, and perhaps answers can be given that can give assurances that could allow us to find some support for this. I do not think there is much more to expand upon at this point. Mr. President, I

thank you for the opportunity to contribute.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Sen. Anthony Vieira, please. Are you speaking?

Sen. Vieira SC: Sen. Attz.

Mr. President: Oh, Sen. Marlene Attzs, please. Thank you.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Dr. Marlene Attzs: Thank you, Mr. President. I was so caught up in the presentation by Sen. David Nakhid and then, of course, by the contribution of the learned Sen. Faris Al-Rawi SC, that I was almost caught off guard. But I thank you for this opportunity to stand and contribute what is actually my maiden contribution in this Senate.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Dr. M. Attzs: I rise to contribute to this Bill, neither as a constitutional nor legal expert, but primarily as someone with an avid interest in our country's social and economic coherence, and also as someone who very proudly considers myself to be a "Trini to de bone", if the Senate would pardon me using the local expression.

And in that vein, I am someone who is extremely committed to ensuring that there is policy alignment that benefits every citizen. The Bill before us seeks to extend citizenship by descent to grandchildren of nationals. While I am not a constitutional expert, as I have indicated, I think that the amendments appear brief, but to my mind, the implications are far-reaching.

When we amend our supreme law, we must do so not for expedience, not for one event, not even for one sector, but for the enduring national interest. The hon. Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, Minister Watts, indicated in his presentation

that this amendment is not simply a tidying-up exercise, but it represents a shift away from piecemeal, reactive adjustments, towards a strategic recasting of who belongs and who may claim the rights of citizenship and how this links to our national development agenda.

It is my concerted view, therefore, that our duty in this Chamber is clear. We have a responsibility to interrogate and ensure the amendment is not just expedient, but coherent; not just aspirational, but implementable; not just symbolic, but beneficial to Trinidad and Tobago.

To all those who consider themselves “Trini to de bone” for generations to come, let me begin by situating this Bill in the broader policy context and certainly borrowing from how the hon. Minister Watts himself has framed its intent. I appreciate that during his presentation, Minister Watts presented and framed this Bill as a two-phased strategy. Phase one: The immediate facilitation of grandchildren timed to meet sporting opportunities, such as the 2026 FIFA World Cup. Phase two, Minister Watts indicated, was: A wider remit to consider citizenship under other skilled categories, investment, and professional expertise, what Minister Watts described as “talent acquisition through citizenship”.

While this phased approach is welcomed, in my view, the Government should situate the proposed amendment within a coherent diaspora policy. My question, therefore, is whether this is part of a comprehensive plan to harness diaspora skills, networks and capital, or is it primarily a one-off gesture responding to sport and short-term pressures? And, I note Sen. Nakhid said that while the original intent was for sporting purposes, it has since been expanded. But throughout his presentation, the hon. Senator made repeated mention of football, skill and sports. So, I still get the impression that the primary intent is to satisfy

the sporting requirements.

The Minister is correct—Minister Watts, that is—citizen reform has the potential to turn brain drain into brain gain. But, I respectfully submit that without the necessary policy frameworks, such as skills mapping, investment incentives and cultural reconnection programmes, such an initiative as being proposed risks collapsing into an ad hoc piecemeal strategy rather than a genuine instrument of development.

Mr. President, I note that the considerations related to the Constitution (Amdt.) Bill, 2025, have been dealt with a great deal of depth and expertise by the Opposition Senator, and I suspect there will be greater detail offered by the legal luminaries in this Senate. Mr. President, I wish to suggest that the noble intentions articulated in this Bill must be matched by administrative capacity, and it is here I wish to respectfully raise some very practical concerns.

Minister Watts, in his presentation last Friday, and Sen. Nakhid, again, today, promised rigorous vetting. Minister Watts spoke to biometric and biographic screening, interagency collaboration, full background checks and integration protocols. I applaud these commitments. Indeed, the updated use of technology in this space and for the purpose outlined in the Bill could also strengthen our hand in other areas, particularly in crime-fighting. We have all read reports in the media about what I choose to describe as “imported criminal talent” that has found its way into our society. Perhaps with the kind of rigorous vetting now promised for new citizens, as Minister Watts and Sen. Nakhid have articulated in their presentations, we might also improve the screening of those who enter through legal channels. And, if that helps us to detect, not only potential citizens, but also those who might bring harm to Trinidad and Tobago, then we will all be

safer and better for it.

But I posit, Mr. President, that noble assurances do not administer themselves. Without breaching any national security protocols, I think this Parliament is entitled to some clarity. We should be clear on what standard operating procedures will guide this vetting process. We should be clear on what data-sharing arrangements exist between immigration, national security, foreign affairs and our overseas missions. And most importantly, we should be clear on what is the resourcing plan to manage what could be hundreds or thousands of lineage-based applications, without grinding our system to a halt.

Mr. President, I suggest that these are not academic questions. They are the difference between a promise on paper and a process that actually works. In local parlance, we say that “A promise is sometimes a comfort.” The fact is, our Immigration Division is already strained. Citizenship by descent through a parent is manageable, but proving lineage through a grandparent requires multiple generations of records, documents, not always easy to obtain or authenticate, especially from jurisdictions that may have weak systems. If the administrative machinery falters, the noble intent, as articulated in this Bill, may quickly turn into public frustration and national embarrassment.

I now wish to turn to the economic case presented by Minister Watts and also, by Sen. Nakhid. The economic case is ambitious in its promise, but one which requires careful scrutiny. I was pleased to hear both the Minister and Sen. Nakhid advance an impressive economic case. They both noted that remittances to Trinidad and Tobago have been in the tune of, whether you take a US \$100 million or US \$329million, whichever figure you choose to adopt, but they have been significant compared to remittance flows to other jurisdictions in the Caribbean.

The Minister and the Senator suggested that by extending citizenship to grandchildren, these remittance flows could double or triple, perhaps adding an additional US \$200million annually, and the broader diaspora contribution could exceed US \$500million.

As an economist, and particularly someone au courant with the foreign exchange challenges we are facing in Trinidad and Tobago, I think it is important that we place these projections in the wider macroeconomic context. Trinidad and Tobago, as we all know, faces persistent foreign exchange shortages, with the private sector often struggling to access foreign exchange for imports and investment.

If this amendment does, in fact, generate inflows of remittances and diaspora capital, then the real question is, how will these flows be captured, channelled and recorded in our external accounts? Will they strengthen our reserves and balance of payments, or will they bypass the formal system and continue to leak through informal channels? At a time when we need the money, we need the foreign exchange, such inflows would certainly be music to the ears of hon. Minister of Finance, especially if these inflows are in US dollars.

These are attractive projections. However, not to rain on the parade, in terms of this Bill that is presented, I wish to ask, what were the assumptions made in terms of arriving at increased inflows of foreign exchange, should we engage the diaspora?

I think we also should consider the age profiles. Some claimants may be young professionals, students or athletes, adding dynamism and bringing much-needed skills. Other claimants may not be of that age cohort, and they may require different kinds of access in Trinidad and Tobago should they decide to claim

citizenship, things such as access to health care or housing. Our fiscal and institutional systems must be ready for this dual demand.

4.15 p.m.

Without rigorous modelling, we risk legislating on hope rather than on evidence. Linked to this economic argument, Mr. President, is the question of skills and manpower planning. As I mentioned earlier, Minister Watts, in his presentation last Friday, has rightly described this as an opportunity to transform brain-drain into brain-gain. He cited doctors, engineers, entrepreneurs, and academics as potential beneficiaries. But skills integration requires more than an open constitutional door. I suggest that skills integration requires at least a three to five-year manpower plan.

I have to ask, in tabling this Bill, has the Government considered internship spaces for doctors, credential recognition for other professionals and potential labour market impacts on wages and employment? We cannot absorb an influx of professionals without readiness, otherwise we risk frustration on both sides—new citizens unable to practice their craft, and locals fearing displacement or wage depression. I am sure the hon. Minister of Labour would himself be hesitant to support any change that results in convulsions in the local labour market. Mr. President, I suggest that the issues of fairness and equity, which I raised in this contribution, and I also know that Sen. Nakhid spoke on the issue of fairness, these must also be examined closer to home, in how we treat children born right here in Trinidad and Tobago to migrants. As we debate extending citizenship rights to grandchildren living abroad, I respectfully suggest that we also confront a reality much closer to home.

In recent years, thousands of Venezuelan migrants have crossed our borders.

Many of their children were born right here in Trinidad and Tobago, children who by birth are Trinbagonians. Yet too many of these children born in Trinidad and Tobago continue to face barriers to access something as basic as education and health care. It would be inconsistent, even hypocritical, Mr. President, for us to suggest and celebrate citizenship access for grandchildren in Toronto, or London, or Brooklyn, while migrant children in Tunapuna or Couva cannot even enter a classroom because of bureaucratic hurdles.

If this constitutional amendment is truly about fairness, belonging, and national development, then equity demands that we also have a clear humane path for those children who are already here, who sing our anthem, play in our schoolyards, and who will shape the Trinidad and Tobago of tomorrow. Our Constitution must not only consider extending rights outward to the diaspora, it must also uphold rights inward to children already within our borders. Anything less could potentially erode public trust in the very justice we seek to advance.

Mr. President, another crucial issue I wish to raise is the question of safeguards. Sen. Nakhid, today, assured this House that there are the required administration, legislative, and innate safeguards in place. I suggest that if citizenship is to be extended, it must be done with strong guardrails. Hon. Minister Watts pledged in his presentation robust vetting and integration protocols. I say let us codify these safeguards and not leave them to ministerial discretion. Other small States and countries that have broadened descent-based citizenship impose residency periods before entitlements, they maintain foreign birth registers, and they deploy strong anti-fraud mechanisms, including DNA testing. Mr. President, if we in Trinidad and Tobago are to extend citizenship by descent, we must do so with the same strength of safeguards used in other jurisdictions, if not stronger.

Trinidad and Tobago cannot afford to take a softer approach, particularly since, as mentioned by Sen. Nakhid repeatedly, we are a small island developing state with significant social and economic vulnerabilities. We can ill-afford to have any shocks to our system that may inadvertently occur as a result of this Bill. The regulations should set out those protections early. For example, new citizens could have phased access to certain state benefits, so there is time for proper reintegration or integration. A central register of all lineage-based applications should be maintained so records can be verified and checked in the future. Citizens must have the assurance of clear and published processing timelines so that applications do not languish for years in a bureaucratic backlog. Other countries have already set standards in this area, and the examples cited by Sen. Nakhid include Ireland, India, et cetera. I suggest that these are not additional layers of red tape but rather they are the very tools that would ensure fairness, transparency, and public trust in the system.

Let me address what seems to be the driving urgency behind this Bill, our national sporting ambitions. In his presentation last Friday, Minister Watts laid bare the urgency the Government attaches to this Bill. Minister Watts highlighted the expanded 48-team FIFA World Cup, the six CONCACAF slots and the competitive advantage of early action. He said passionately, and I quote that:

“We need every eligible Trinbagonian on that field to compete effectively.”
But, Mr. President, while sport may be the immediate spark, citizenship reform ought not to be kicked about like a football lest we score an own goal in the process. So, Sen. Nakhid, I do know a thing or two about football.

Hon. Senators: [*Laughter*]

Sen. Dr. M. Attz: Decisions we make here will shape our laws, our identity, and

our economy for generations to come. Sport is important, yes, but it must sit within a larger national vision. Minister Watts and repeated today by Sen. Nakhid, they both pledged that diaspora athletes would not displace locals, noting commitments to a digital talent registry, expanded coach training and grassroots facilities upgrades. These are encouraging signals, Mr. President. But again, I wish to ask, what are the measurable outcomes? What share of national squads will be sourced from domestic leagues? How many grassroots facilities will be upgraded each year? And how many national coaches will be trained so that they, too, our home-grown talent, have the opportunity to make it to the international stage? If we are to inspire confidence among our young athletes, rhetoric must be matched by metrics. Otherwise, the risk remains that foreign recruitment eclipses rather than complements local talent.

In my considered view, the smarter path is not an either/or. What we require is a holistic strategy, structured diaspora engagement alongside sustained investments in our local pipelines, our youth leagues, our community clubs, coach education, and sport science. That is how we ensure our sporting success is not imported but cultivated and sustained so that citizenship reform strengthens rather than sidelines the development of our own home-grown talent.

A final practical matter that I think we ought not to overlook is the global migration dynamics, particularly deportations from larger states. With intensified deportations from the United States and elsewhere, grandchildren who qualify could arrive in significant numbers. The question is not whether they have the right, based on this amendment, they will by law, but the question is whether we are ready. Do our schools have the capacity? Do our clinics have staff? And do our housing markets have space to accommodate them? Readiness should not be

an afterthought, Mr. President, but it should be central to our deliberations.

Mr. President, I am not opposed to this Bill per se. I recognize its potential to deepen the bond with the diaspora, I recognize its potential to attract skills and investment, and I recognize, certainly, its potential to strengthen our sporting and cultural footprint. But aspiration is not architecture. Our responsibility in this Parliament is to convert vision into law that is precise, administratively sound, fiscally responsible, and socially equitable. And that, to my mind, Mr. President, includes presenting and testing the economic models that underpin this reform because it is not simply about citizenship, it is about the economic and social implications. It requires us to set out a manpower plan to integrate skills and talent because Sen. Nakhid and Minister Watts both indicated that it is not simply about sporting events, it is about brain-gain. So, we need to have a manpower plan and how we will integrate this additional skill and talent.

It is about providing assurances that the promised vetting safeguards are in place and they should be enshrined into law. And it is about tracking the real impacts and potential outcomes of sport development, not simply in terms of what we think we can accomplish. For me as an economist, the true measure of this reform will not be in how many new passports are issued, but whether it strengthens the stability, the fairness, and the resilience of our society. If citizenship by descent becomes a tool for national development, capturing remittances, attracting and integrating skills, and reinforcing social cohesion, then this amendment would have achieved its purpose. But we must be clear that there are safeguards and measures in place for us to measure the impact.

I therefore end this contribution by urging, let us extend citizenship wisely so that all who feel a connection to Trinidad and Tobago, both here and abroad,

may stand side by side to build a stronger, better, resilient Trinidad and Tobago for the benefit of all. And by so doing, we can ensure that every creed and race can indeed find its appropriate place in our country. Mr. President, I thank you.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Thank you very much, Sen. Dr. Marlene Attz. And on behalf of all our Senators, we would like to extend to you heartfelt, warmest congratulations on your maiden contribution.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Hon. Senators, I think it is a good time for us to pause for a cause, and let us have some light refreshments. So we will suspend our proceedings until 5.15 p.m.

4.29 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.15p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Minister in the Ministry of Housing (Sen. The Hon. Anil Roberts): Thank you, Mr. President. I see that my colleague, Sen. Al-Rawi, is not here as yet. I wish he was here because as I contribute to the Constitution (Amdt.) Bill, 2025, I wanted to deal with one or two points that he made. I must say that it was not one of his best contributions I have ever heard, but I forgive him because he might be a little bit distracted with “Nelson Gate, CEPEP Gate, Rental Gate”. So, I forgive the hon. Senator.

First and foremost, the hon. Senator started off by saying that the amendments brought a legitimate aim to enlarge the diaspora. All right? And, we may agree with that, but then he lost his way and concluded differently. But he said that section 17, which this Bill amends, he said that he was describing, you know, Constitution and supreme law and so on. But he has to understand and he

must agree that section 17 is not supreme law. It is not the Constitution. It is not entrenched. Section 54 of the Constitution states which laws are entrenched rights. What we are debating here about section 17 is not entrenched. Therefore, it can be changed by a simple majority, and that is just one vote.

Now, the supreme law can be amended by an ordinary legislation, and that was one of his favourite cases to quote. He would quote Suratt but today, he forgot about that. He talked about Lebanon, but he could have easily included Guyana and the United States, for example. The hon. Senator was talking about what could possibly happen in the future if, at some point in time, someone came to this Parliament to allow people to vote who are outside of the country and so on. I do not know if he thought this was the Yesenia Gonzalez crystal ball legislation. We could only legislate for what is real, what is here, what is law. We cannot legislate for what is his fantasy. We do not vote en masse like the USA. We do not vote for one man, one vote for a prime minister. We vote in constituencies. If someone is outside, it is against the law, they cannot vote. They have to—what would they do? Send a ballot from Brixton, and it will go where? Diego Martin West? It will go La Horquetta/Talparo?

It was a ludicrous argument, and I sat here and I was wondering what was going on with this former Attorney General who admitted that he had not seen that piece of legislation, even though his Government was discussing this, because he said that we are rushing and coming here fast and we should go before a joint select committee. But he was in the Government, and his Government, with this timeline, with this legislation that we are now taking the relay, “we take de baton, we improve it and we bring it here” to the Senate and to the Parliament.

But it began in March 2024. Last time I checked, he was a Minister in the

PNM Government and a former Attorney General who was discussing this, the preliminary discussion between the Minister of Sport and Community Development and so on, and it continued throughout. You have March to September 2024. And then in February, before the election where the people realized that those on that side did not deserve to be there, February 12, 2025—because the hon. Senator also attacked my colleague and tried to laugh and made a joke to say that he talked about ad hominem and that he should not have done that. And you know, well, Sen. Al-Rawi is normally the one that he may contribute in Latin because he is so trying to impress other Senior Counsels “who brighter than him, that he bright”, that he comes here with a plethora of Latin for us. Right?

Well, he did not read. In February 12, 2025, the PNM Government, there were comments from the then Ministry of National Security, under the PNM, that they received the policy brief and they said that the constitutional amendment will offend against the ad hominem doctrine as it applies only to high-performing athletes.

On April 04, 2025—election was 24 days away. I have to forgive him, he was busy making sure that the CEPEP board encouraged and enhanced contracts and extended to 2029, so he did not have time to study this. He was also ensuring that HDC hired some 2,300 workers for two-month contracts. But on April 04, 2025, the comments of the Law Reform Commission were received. The comments were similar to those of the Minister of National Security that suggested that the amendment offends against the ad hominem principle and advised that the policy be amended.

In comes a new Government with an intelligent Attorney General, a legitimate Senior Counsel who got into law school quite easily based on his results

without anybody having to beg and change the procedure, and immediately, amendments were made, adjustments were made, and this is not specifically for sport alone, so it is not ad hominem. There are other aspects to it that could affect the brain drain that has been existing. We could encourage investment, bring back our doctors, our professionals, enhance our diaspora and increase the talent pool from which Trinidad and Tobago could continue to be built. So therefore, we have gotten away from the ad hominem original intent which was simply for sport and sport success, which would be expedient.

So moving right along—but I forgive the hon. Senator. He even went on to research that criminals in remand “does vote” and so on. I was very—I did not even know. He is right. I did not know that. But I understand why he would research that, so that in the future elections, if he happens to be there, he will get to vote.

Sport is a powerful thing. Sport is so powerful, countries, globally, have policies of sport to improve and to create a geopolitical situation and a power position to let their ideology be known, to get and market their countries, to show their superiority, to encourage countries to take them seriously. Some examples of this would be back in the day, East Germany.

East Germany, when the wall came down in 1989, we found out, the world found out that East Germany was so intent on showing the world that their socialist structure was superior, that they had a secret plan, as secret as their nuclear defence, to show the world their superiority in sport through enhancement from doping, steroid use across the board. Those who are older would remember 1972, Kornelia Ender, swimmer, coming and winning seven gold medals, talking deeper than my voice, stronger than me and beating an American swimmer called Shirley

Babashoff, who ended up with six silver and one gold. When the truth came out, it was found that the German Government at that time, the East German Government, had a plan to identify talent, put coaches, inject steroids without the permission of the athletes, without the knowledge, in order to show the world that socialism was the way to go.

If you are talking about the power of sport, right here in Trinidad and Tobago, all of us can remember where we were, if we are old enough—some Senators over there look too young to know—when Hasley Crawford got up with his lane one, with his white and red socks in 1976, in Montreal, Canada, and he defeated the greatest field in 100 history, winning gold from lane one and beating Harvey Glance; Don Quarrie; the Russian champion, Borzov. Trinidad and Tobago still celebrates that up to now.

In 2005, in Bahrain, when Dwight Yorke took that corner and “Tallest” headed it in, we could still feel goosebumps now because of the national pride, how we felt, the unity. Everybody forgot who was African and Indian, who was “mix-up”, who was rich, who was poor, who was a lawyer, who was on the street, and everybody celebrated.

In 2009, Daren Ganga and his cricket team out there in India, the Champions League, playing for the Trinidad and Tobago Red Force, before the CPL franchise thing came about, and Trinidad and Tobago with 1.2 “buh-buh-billion” people watching for three hours, won six games straight and just lost to New South Wales in the final. That is the power of sport.

What are the benefits of that? We could never quantify it. How much do you want to pay Daren Ganga and his team for that sort of advertisement? If you calculate it, based on the average 30-second advertisement per X amount of

thousand people viewing, you would see that for that 10 days, you would have owed Daren Ganga and his team millions—hundreds of millions of dollars. That is the value to the mindshare. That is the value of the marketing of Trinidad and Tobago. That is the power of sport.

So when we say that we are coming here—and this is not an amendment only to deal with sport, but I am dealing with the sport aspect to show you that it is not just about football and qualifying for a World Cup now. It is about utilizing all of our talent pool across the board.

Who will remember Lara, in 1994, making 375, then his record being broken by Matthew Hayden and we were saying, “Boy, we will never get that again”? We had a world record. And, 2004 came about in Antigua and Brian Lara made 400, not out. For two and a half days, the world was watching Brian Lara, “and after dey say, Brian Lara, dey say, Trinidad and Tobago”. You cannot pay for that sort of advertisement. You cannot market your country better than your national athletes inspiring and showing the brilliance of your country.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: And it is very interesting because on this side, we appreciate that. And when we have athletes, we hear some on that side would say, “But why you gave them so much? Do they deserve that?” When Keshorn Walcott, in 2012, threw 84 metres 58 centimetres and we sat there waiting as one after the next, throw after throw, nobody beat him, even though two days before, someone had thrown 87 metres, and when he won that gold medal, the country went up in pure celebration. But the entire world was watching that event for a period of over an hour and a half, with Trinidad and Tobago emblazoned on his chest.

Then some people said, while I was Minister and we gave him and celebrated him with a HDC house, a TT \$1 million, a national award, they said, “Why so much? That is too much.” We could never pay these athletes for the value of what they bring to us, not just for marketing—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts:—but when people see our country, they Google our country, they go and find out about the food, the culinary arts, the beaches, the flora, the fauna, the business opportunities, what is going on there, you cannot even tell the multiplier effects.

So when we say that we want to increase our talent pool across the board, across the diaspora—we have been living, we have been existing for nearly three generations now. There are thousands and thousands of citizens out there who we require to come home to have that opportunity to build our nation, whether it be doctors, professors, artists, musicians, and these amendments will increase that pool, so that we can continue to diversify the country. Because already on that side, they are talking. All of a sudden, they know about deficit. Before, when they were on this side, they could not account to the Auditor General and they create phantom revenue—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts:—but now, they are predicting deficit because they were unable to be creative. They were unable to take decisions to move us forward.

Sen. Attzs, brilliant maiden contribution. I hope when I am finished, that I can allay some of your fears. Okay? The problem with our country is—let me deal with the first one, that you think maybe by increasing the talent pool, some of

our local athletes or local people, local entrepreneurs will be disadvantaged. First and foremost, competition is great. Competition is what makes us better. We are not, as Trinbagonians, afraid of competition. We invite it and we will rise to the occasion and improve our levels across the board, domestically. And if we take sport as an example, we will improve at all levels because competition makes you do that. So, in the short term, it will seem that we, some of our athletes right now, will be disadvantaged.

5.30 p.m.

But is that because they are not good? Or is that because the systems that had been allowed to wane or to dwindle under the PNM have created a situation where we go backwards? The problem in Trinidad and Tobago is that the PNM is like a recurring rash; it always comes back.

So, when you have, for example, in sport you had sport between 2010 and 2015, improvements on increase in funding, like the MPI Vote, the hon. Vishnu Dhanpaul, former Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Finance, would know that. The MPI Vote is where you will get money to invest in your athletes, in your coaches, in your programmes, in your grassroots development that Sen. Attzs was talking about. That had gone up by 2011 to 140 million. In comes the rash of the PNM, and it drop back to 10 million. Therefore, that investment that was cut by 130 million for nine and a half years leaves our athletes, our coaches, our management and our teams at a disadvantage. Therefore, while we were taking strides to move forward to improve to have grassroots level where we will have competition for our national teams, by the cut in expenditure, the cut in investment, the cut in sport, we are now at a position that we are at a lower ebb than we were back in September 2015.

In the 2012 Olympics, we had the greatest number of athletes ever to qualify for the Olympics in several different sports. We had 10 finalists, we had one gold medal and three bronze medals. The PNM came in, and by 2016, only Keshorn Walcott lasting, with the javelin that I give him, squeezed out a bronze in 2016. By 2020, which is 2021, because of COVID, PNM zero medals, no finals. In 2024, one final event, no medals, because the investment was cut. So, this Government, while taking this decision to improve the talent pool, is also simultaneously going to return Trinidad and Tobago to the levels of sport investment, sport education and sport science across the board.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: The PNM, I have to go into detail to let you all know. Because if you do not believe that sport is powerful, you come into power and you put a Minister of sport who says, “Well, I am the Minister of Sport, I play tennis a bit when I was seven and I walk a half marathon.” Now people might think that is funny, but would you go for a brain surgery with somebody who said well “I took two Panadol and I dealt with my child who had a fever”, or would you want somebody who is an expert, who understands the importance, who understands the revenue streams, who understands the diversification that is possible to lead the Sport Ministry? So, unfortunately, the PNM does not talk of, does not care about sport, and that is what happened.

There were 75 sport development officers there in September 2015. The PNM fire all and cut all. There was a rural coaching caravan which took the best coaches with scientific knowledge of talent identification. The PNM cut that. I already told you how they cut the MPI Vote in football that we are talking about now. The investment in football in the TT Pro League, the UNC Government

People Partnership at that time, was pumping \$15 million per year into the Pro League. There were four separate competitions, \$2-3 million into the Super League, all of which was cut. Where our professional football leagues were struggling, teams are struggling, the salaries of players and managers are cut, and therefore, the level of performance goes down. So, in this stopgap measure with a Government that needs to move forward, you have to have a short-term plan, a medium-term plan and a long-term plan. This, for sport as well as other areas of diversification, is an immediate short term plan to try to get some results because the PNM has left our sportsmen and women suffering.

We had no hockey turf for nine and a half years. Our national teams could not prepare. The aquatic centre went green three times. I swam in an aquatic centre in Fort Lauderdale in 1979, the Hall of Fame aquatic centre, which is still in existence. It has never gone green. The PNM put our aquatic centre green; they could not maintain the complexes. Furthermore, the policy of the people to lock the people out of their facilities ensures that the talent pool cannot get access to these facilities in order to compete in order to be great. The zero medals, zero finals is not a fluke it is a well-designed failure of the PNM across the board for 10 years.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. A. Roberts: They cut down elite funding. They cut down the SOSA awards. Some people would not even know what that was. Spirit of Sport Awards. It is an award that recognizes achievement, media, sports writers, grassroots coaches, development, and physiotherapists. PNM come in, "That is not important do not worry with that." There was a growth pole in Couva that was meant to diversify the economy. Part and parcel of the programme and plans and Cabinet Note that

were there in September 2015 were that these facilities, where we have the Ato Boldon Stadium, we have the National Cricket Centre. I started the aquatic centre that was completed late but—by the PNM and the cycling velodrome, and then the BMX centre was supposed to go there. If you open these facilities and allow parents to bring their children in the thousands, what it would have done is attract business. It would have attracted entrepreneurs who would have built a hotel, a little mall with a health shop and a restaurant and a massage and a dentist and so on. But by the PNM coming in and locking these facilities and saying, “Only those who ask for permission to go.” They defeated the purpose.

The second purpose of that was to encourage sport tourism. Why do we want to qualify for the World Cup? Yes, I love football, I love to win, I do not like to lose, but the real benefit of high performance, elite performance is the marketing of your country, the marketing of your brand. So, sport tourism with all these fantastic facilities if they were maintained properly, because now we have to find money to go and maintain them, to refurbish them, and to get them going. For nine and a half years the PNM did nothing with sports tourism. They asked for a sports tourism master plan, and they sent out an RFP in 2023. They are out of government and I do not think the RFPs have been analyzed or evaluated yet by the Ministry of Tourism, which now “doh” even exist.

That is what the PNM does. But sport tourism is a method to earn foreign exchange. Our system, our place on the globe where we exist Trinidad and Tobago, southernmost Caribbean in the middle between Canada, USA, Central America, South America connecting with the fantastic facilities, the great climate that we have, the food the beverage, the cheap oil and gas, or low electricity rates, low cost, plus a Caribbean airlines—our own airline. Sport tourism is the way to

go.

There was a plan and a programme and a Cabinet Note that was there to turn all of our students, all of our children, we were suffering from brain drain. One of the ways to utilize our existing human resources out there, whether they were studying economics, medicine, or law or social work, or politics, or political science, or social work in any country, we were going to make our children out there agents of Trinidad and Tobago. So, if you are at a university, say you are at the University of Florida, and you get your Florida swim team of 24 people to come to train for two weeks at the aquatic centre, stay at the Hyatt and pay money for taxis and so on, eat food, you will get a percentage of that as a salesperson. We would have had approximately at that time 755 agents selling Trinidad and Tobago, but in came the rash, which is the PNM, and that was thrown away. So, we are here today beginning once again.

There was also a national football development plan, Sen. Dr. Attzs that was there. It would have cost 87 million per year. In 14 corporations and Tobago, we would have had a technical director, a coach, a physiotherapist, an equipment manager for girls and boys teams from under-10, under-14, under-17 working and training all year around from which the TTFA can then hold their trials through competitions in the corporations and coaches on the national level, through the TTFA, could have seen talents spotted talent, shortlist talent and bring them into the national team. That was thwarted ten years ago. Therefore, our athletes are now at their lowest ebb. We are producing the lowest level that we have in the last 50 years.

Back in the days when you saw in Point Fortin and so on Leroy DeLeon and players of such a great ilk, they were playing football not really being coached in

institutions and by coaches, but just the mere fact that there were competitions running the younger boys who were skillful would play with the older boys. You have Sen. Nakhid here who will tell you. Now our players do not have that level of skill. It takes a scientific intervention, it takes an intervention of leadership that will understand. Part and parcel of what we need to do now is, we need to find talent while we put back the systems in place to give our primary school children, secondary school children and children across the board the opportunity to build their talent and achieve their dreams. We cannot sit back and just leave our children and say, “Oh, we are not doing very well. Let us tell them that they doing good.” Life is about competition, we must lift our level and we must improve and give our children to opportunity to succeed.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: Unfortunately, the PNM has put us on the ground, and we in the UNC we will take us from underground, we will dig ourselves out and create the programmes to deal and to improve our athletes, but for right know we need to get talent wherever it is. Whether grand mommy, grand daddy, across the board.

There was also the UWI SPEC Sport Management producing a graduate every year. There was a plan and a Cabinet Note to link each one. A year would take a graduate from UWI SPEC and put them in the 49 sporting organizations to manage them so that they would move away from nepotism and friendship and who to make who—Sport is the purest thing, sport is true meritocracy and that is why the PNM cannot understand it, because meritocracy means that you are not afraid of competition. Meritocracy means you get the brightest of the bright across the board. You do not have an Attorney General who did not take Mathematics, or

you do not have an Attorney General who could not get in to law school, you take the best. You do not have a Minister of Finance who now did finance degree in 2024 after he crash our economy. That is not how it operates. We on this side believe that you must be the best, and if you are the best we are not afraid of you, we do not cower, we stand there and we try to improve our levels so that we can be brighter also.

There is a Trinidad and Tobago anti-doping legislation that I passed in 2013, both Houses unanimously. PNM came in, we had a Commonwealth games and they said that was sport tourism. Sport tourism is not paying money to invite people to pay their bill and so on, so that they can have a competition. Sport tourism is getting people to come here, fly here, use taxi here, stay here, eat doubles and drink coffee here. Train and pay to use your facilities, and then go back. But they did not have a TTADO, a Trinidad and Tobago Anti-Doping Organization 12 years later after it passed, because sport is not important to the PNM.

So, now we have to go dust off that legislation and put things in place get a TTADO board, get a lab, get accredited and get testing. We do not know what is going on across our country. Also, it is very irresponsible because if you do not educate athletes, it is about the deleterious effects of doping it could impact your country's legacy if we have two or three athletes that test positive for steroids and so on, do you know what the will question? They will question Mc Donald Bailey's 1952 bronze medal. He did not run for Trinidad and Tobago because Trinidad and Tobago was not ready to let him go yet. The first medal we got was Rodney Wilkes, 1948. Yes it was not the red, white and black flag. It was TRI and it was a British kind of flag, but it was Trinidad and Tobago. But they will say that

Rodney Wilkes, Mc Donald Bailey, Hasely Crawford, Ato Boldon, Keshorn Walcott, Wendell Mottley on the relay the world record with Roberts that they took steroids and we are drug cheats and that will impact our brand, so we have to very careful and very serious, but the PNM did not care. So, for 10 years they were in charge and there is no anti-doping agency, no anti-doping board, nothing. I will now move on.

I heard some points—Sen. Al Rawi made it a little bit and I heard it from PNM something about voter padding and so on. Let us deal with that carefully. The mere fact that you would see some amendments to legislation to improve the calibre and quality of human beings the intellect to put all brains on deck and your mind will go to voter padding. Why and how would your mind reach there? I proffer to you that that has been and will always be the modus operandi of the PNM because they are about voter padding.

5.45 p.m.

Why? If politics is about masses of people thinking that you perform well and you did well, and you perform well and you implement policies that “impact de masses and they feel good, dey have money in dey pocket”, they feel safe, then it follows logically that they will vote for you. However, the PNM has never been of that. The PNM has never been there to perform well for the masses. What they have been there to do is to control the masses, to gerrymander boundaries, and to voter pad. Because anybody who could see voter padding in this legislation, someone needs to look within themselves, because their thinking is absolutely wrong.

Secondly—well, on that point, since 1962 at Marlborough House, the PNM told Capildeo, who had a serious problem with “de” boundaries, Dr. Williams said,

“Sign it nah, we up here”. “When we go home, we’ll adjust that, and we will make it fair and representative of our melting pot.” Well, it never changed, and it got worse.

The PNM even brought voter machines. In one constituency, when they brought down “de” voter machines, which eventually led to a no-vote campaign, “PNM win all de seats, but in one ah those seats they had more vote than electors, yuh know”. “That is de history ah de PNM.” So when they talk about voter padding, they know about voter padding.

The UNC, the ULF, and the Opposition do not know nor care about voter padding. We believe that we will perform well and “de people will vote for us across de board, across de races, and across de constituencies”.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: The PNM controls the EBC. Up to now, everybody knows it has even gotten worse, where “de” friends of PNM Ministers are heads of EBC. “De” UNC is not of that. We are about fairness and competition. “We not afraid competition.”

Tobago—“but de PNM didn’ even learn de lesson”. They tried to gerrymander the electoral boundaries in Tobago, and the Tobagonian people voted them out. They add on three seats—change it from 12 to 15 under some constitutional amendment, did nothing to the Constitution, did not amend anything, no powers, “no nothing”.

Tobago cannot even see about their own boundaries in national security, but “de” people saw it and they dealt with the PNM. So get this voter padding nonsense out of “yuh” mind. It just does not happen and cannot occur. Because, think about it, you are talking about if you are a naturalized citizen, that somehow

you will some way come down to Trinidad and Tobago, not to invest, not to set up a business, not to represent the country, but to come and live in a constituency for two months and then you will go and register in the EBC—“that is ah headache to go in dah office anyway”. “I dunno who want to go in that office”—and then you will sit down there for two months so you could come and voter pad? There is no need for a voter pad. You all have been beaten by a landslide and will be beaten again.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: So get comfortable over there. Nobody needs voter padding. “Is when yuh think it go be close”; there is nothing going to be close. We will fix the deficit that was left here by Sen. Dhanpaul, the last Minister of Finance, who lasted “ah corbeau sweat” of one month. We will fix that. We will fix the revenue stream. We will fix the energy sector. We will diversify. We will improve sports. We will get our nationals out there. We will increase competition and the country will develop without “de” PNM.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: The other assumption of voter padding, it is a very weird one. It is like the PNM is almost admitting subconsciously that anybody who has the wherewithal to be independent-minded and to live outside, will never vote PNM. “Yuh see, yuh have to assume dat” because if you think voter padding, and we want people to come, it means that we know that people are going to come and vote for us. That means conversely, that you know that people will never independently and intelligently vote for PNM. So that is how you all reach voter padding, but the truth is—“PNM, when yuh read yuh history, all de Trinidad and Tobago communities”, whether Brixton, Notting Hill, Brooklyn, Toronto, it is

people who ran from the PNM. PNM, you all are chasing people since 1956 into 1962 away from this country.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: There was a black power revolution because people could not get opportunities under the PNM. Only certain people were getting benefits. So when you see people out there, you all might be correct; they might never want to hear the three letters P-N-M in any form or fashion. So that is where you get this concept? Then, you should change your ways, but you got worse, because in the last 10 years, all your policies—your policy of recusal, your policy of contract—you have Ministers getting up every day to say, “nah nah, meh family get plenty contract, but I didn’ do nothing”. “I recused mehself 80 time, but I didn’ do nothing.”

That is not inspirational to the people. The people are fed up of that. The UNC is here to give everybody a fair shake, everybody a chance to take part in the national pie. So you are correct, the people will not vote PNM, but it is not voter padding, it is just that the PNM is not good.

Hon. Senator: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: Meritocracy—PNM is anti-merit. I already talked a bit about that, so I would not go in and bore you all, right? Because you all had a Minister of National Security who boasted he took six subjects and failed five. I cannot imagine my daughter, my son, somebody coming home and telling me, “Daddy ah take six subjects, ah fail five”. “Ah dunno know what ah would do. Ah feel allyuh might have to send meh in Remand to see if ah could vote in de next election, if my child tell me dat—yuh understand?”

Across the board in sport—and this is why we have to make changes—the

PNM's lack of merit, lack of competition, nepotism, and corruption spread its way across sport. So when you see the Olympic Committee, for example, the last few presidents—Brian Lewis, screened for PNM Port of Spain South. Waste of time, no development, no science, no encouragement, no funding, no development, therefore our children are suffering. President of the Trinidad and Tobago Olympic Committee before that, Douglas Camacho, PNM chairman of the sports company loves hockey—was the chairman of hockey—but could not even put down an AstroTurf for the national hockey team to train in nine years.

The previous TTOC President, Larry Romany, campaign manager for Colm Imbert, the Minister of Finance, who crashed the economy—now you understand how deleterious, how diseased, how infectious the PNM incompetence is, and we on this side have to face it, have to understand what is going on and solve the problems of which these amendments are one small piece—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts:—to improve our lot, and to improve our ability to make us more competitive, because our children were left wanting, our coaches were left wanting, our sport managers were left wanting, under the nine and a half years of PNM oppressive reign.

Now, we must be careful. Sen. Attzs, you are correct. We have to have systems in place to vet, to understand who is coming, and who wants to represent our country. We will have to get protocol officers, community service officers, and so on to teach, to interview, to understand, and to let them know who we are. Because just having a talented athlete who “doh” really care about “de” place is useless, because at the highest levels, you have to be motivated. You have to come with passion. You have to know that 1.4 million people on “de rock” and 300,000

people are supporting you. You have to know about “yuh” pan. You have to know about “yuh” anthem. You have to know “de” words. You have to know “ah bit of de history”.

So you are correct. We cannot just go and pick up anybody and anybody and put them in a red, white and black. That will not happen, and it must not happen. We must also understand that sometimes even the best laid out plans fall by the wayside. In 1991, Panam gold—Trinidad and Tobago celebrated 50-metre freestyle swimming. Mark Andrews, red, white and black, and then he did an interview the next morning and he had been born in Canada, adopted by Trini parents, naturalized here and swam for Trinidad and Tobago since 1976, and he said, “I won de medal for de wrong country”. We cannot deal with that. We do not want that. That happened from someone who grew here, lived here, trained here, and “went in de gym here”.

So yes, it is a serious concern especially when you are increasing “de” pool that we have to get people like Chris Birchall who came down. His mother was Trini, and he was the most passionate midfielder running five kilometres per game, tackling and scoring and really moving Trinidad and Tobago forward as we qualified for the World Cup in November of 2005.

Mr. President: Sen. Roberts, you have a few seconds.

Sen. The Hon. A. Roberts: Few seconds. We also have to be careful because, especially under the PNM, we have had great athletes who get no support, no love, no respect and they go and run for other countries, like Keron Clement, Olympic and World Championship 400-metre hurdle gold medal. He is a Trinbagonian, but you heard “The Star-Spangled Banner” when he received his medal.

So, I commend and I ask all of you to support. It is not the be-all and end-

all, but it will be a start to increase the ability and the capability of our nation's athletes, business people, and solve the problem of brain drain. I thank you, Mr President. I wish I had more time.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Sen. Foster Cummings.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Foster Cummings: Thank you, Mr President, for the opportunity to contribute in this debate. As we discuss the Government's proposed measure aimed at—in the first instance as spelt out by the Government and the speakers who spoke earlier—allowing athletes with ancestral ties to Trinidad and Tobago to acquire citizenship and thereby become eligible to represent the country in international competitions.

Now, Mr President, during Sen. Nakhid's presentation, he did indicate that initially, that was the intention of the proposed measure, but that by the urgings of the Prime Minister that they intended to expand the initial purpose of the amendments, and to—as he put it—increase or make an appeal to persons from within the diaspora to come back to Trinidad and Tobago and to expand our talent pool—if I think I got it correctly.

Now, Mr President, the Opposition is not involved in any political gamesmanship, as the Senator indicated. We have a responsibility as part of our democracy and our system of government that the Government proposes legislation. In the Senate, there is an Opposition Bench, and we give our position on what we think, or how we—some of the things that we think the Government may not have looked at, and there is an Independent Bench who will also give their independent positions. It is not about gamesmanship; it is about looking at the

proposals brought to the Parliament and saying to the Government, maybe you did not look at this.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. F. Cummings: Maybe you omitted X, Y, or Z, and in your exuberance or your enthusiasm to put forward your policy, you may have been zeroing in on a particular objective—in this case, expanding the pool of sportsmen and women who can represent Trinidad and Tobago internationally. And, in an effort to do that, you may have opened the gate to the possibilities of other things happening that you did not consider. And so from this Bench, we will speak to some of those issues. We acknowledge the stated intent, and we recognize the value of encouraging meaningful engagement with members of the diaspora.

Now, Trinidad and Tobago has ties throughout North America, Europe, and there might be many persons who want to acquire citizenship through the measures that are being debated here today. Should we, in an effort to expand the pool of persons available to us—and you say not only for sports—remove some of the safeguards that existed in the original legislation to the extent that persons can so easily access the citizenship that you wish to open the door to, and it becomes open to abuse?

6.00 p.m.

Mr. President, in putting legislation together, we always look at what applies in the region. We then probably take a further look in terms of what applies throughout Caricom. We take a further look to what applies throughout the Commonwealth and sometimes you look at some of our European neighbours, if you want to call them that, and I will come back to that. But since a lot of time was spent, both by the last speaker and the previous Government speaker, speaking

about the effect of this measure on our sporting pool of professionals, I took a look at the policy of FIFA.

Under Article 7, Acquisition of a New Nationality, FIFA requires that a player who acquires a new nationality must show a genuine link to the country. This can be proven in one of four ways, and a parent or grandparent birth is one of them. Along the parent route, the biological mother or father must be born in the country. The grandparent route, the grandmother or grandfather, must also be born in the country. Now, there are other routes, either the player themselves was born there or they have lived there for the required number of years. Mr. President, FIFA requires the parent or grandparent to have been born in the country, while this Bill allows citizenship through a parent or grandparent who may have obtained citizenship by descent without being born in Trinidad and Tobago.

So, as a responsible Opposition, we have to ask the question: Did the Government consider that the measures being proposed today, that are being sponsored on the back of expanding the pool available to us so that we can have sports persons and increase the chances of Trinidad and Tobago performing well, internationally, did the Government take a look at this? How then is this measure going to affect us, at least in terms of football? Because I suspect that some of the persons you want to attract are to make sure that we can have more talent to go out there and qualify for the FIFA games, and therefore, we would want to suggest to the Government that you take a look at this. Because what it means is that someone eligible under this legislation, this amendment, which expands now to grandparent who was a citizen or became a citizen by descent and were not born in Trinidad and Tobago, will not qualify under the FIFA rules, Mr. President. It does not automatically guarantee FIFA eligibility based on what is in this legislation.

Let us go a bit further. Let us look at World Athletics. According to Rule 4.2, an athlete may represent a country:

“...if they are a Citizen...by virtue of:”

Birth—“...parent or grandparent...born...”—there.

“...Resided...”—there—“...for at least three years...”

“...granted refugee...or asylum status...”

And residence rights, and that is in terms of athletics.

So, again, I have to ask the question: How is this particular piece of legislation, based on how it is drafted and put before us, going to increase the pool of persons in terms of FIFA and in terms of persons taking part in the athletics?

Mr. President, in our neighbouring St. Vincent, in 2023, the Parliament passed amendments to the Citizenship Act to grant citizenship to second-generation Vincentians. But in that case, it was, again, for grandparents who were born in St. Vincent. The same for Jamaica. And, even if we look across the seas to Italy—while we are taking action here to open the gate, in Italy, for instance, Mr. President, if we look at *IMI Daily*, an article:

“On March 28, 2025, the Italian Government adopted Decree-Law No. 36, introducing urgent measures concerning Italian citizenship. This...intervention marks a radical turn point in the...right to citizenship by descent.

Until now, foreign-born descendants of Italian citizens could claim...citizenship...”—through—“...generational limits...without needing to demonstrate any actual connection...

The”—Italian—“government has now sharply curtailed that model. Under the new rules, citizenship by descent is no longer guaranteed indefinitely across generations.”

And that Government would have taken action, Mr. President, because of abuse of the system, people who have no real ties and connection to the country, taking advantage of this policy that basically opens the door to anyone, some people who may never have heard about Trinidad and Tobago, their grandparents were not born here, their parents were not born here, they know little about our culture and our behaviour and our practice, and yet we are removing the safeguards that would have existed in the original legislation.

Mr. President, the current legal framework under our Constitution, section 17(3), previous speakers would have spoken about it:

“A person born outside Trinidad and Tobago, after commencement of this Constitution shall become a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago at the date of his birth if at that date either of his parents is, or was, but for his parent’s death, a citizen of Trinidad Tobago otherwise than by descent, so however that, in the case of a person employed in the service”—that is people who work with the diplomatic core, et cetera—“under an authority of the Government that requires him to reside outside of Trinidad and Tobago for the proper discharge of his functions, this subsection shall be read as if the words ‘otherwise than by descent’ were deleted.”

This clause establishes the conditions under which a person born outside of Trinidad and Tobago can automatically acquire citizenship. Parents must be a citizen other than by descent. And now that we add in grandparents, it would

follow that the grandparents would also have had to be a citizen other than by descent.

The key requirement is that at the time of the child's birth, at least one parent must either be a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago or have been a citizen at the time of the death, but only if that parent was a citizen otherwise, or other than by descent. What we are doing in terms of what the Government is proposing, Mr. President, is that neither parent nor grandparent needs to have any significant ties to Trinidad and Tobago.

Now, I spend some time speaking about how this will not significantly impact our sportsmen and sportswomen, and I would have hoped that in the Minister laying the Bill, that he would have spent some time demonstrating to us and demonstrating to Trinidad and Tobago, then what are the other areas specifically that the Government hopes to have some significant or measurable benefit coming from this legislation.

The Minister did say that there were safeguards in place, and I would hope, and maybe in his winding up—and I do not want to preempt what the Minister may address in his winding up—but I would hope in his winding up that he will indicate to us what are some of the safeguards that he spoke about during his presentation of the Bill. Because clearly, those safeguards are not mentioned in the legislation nor were they mentioned by the mover of the Bill in the Lower House, in the other place, or earlier on when the Minister moved it, and neither by Sen. Roberts, who spent quite a bit of time, you know, briefing us on what the benefits would be to the sporting fraternity. I wondered whether we have an impending Cabinet reshuffle coming because the Minister sounded very much like a Minister, or a wannabe Minister of Sport.

Sen. Roberts: [*Laughter*]

Sen. F. Cummings: Mr. President, the Minister spent some time the Minister—the real Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs—

Hon. Senators: [*Laughter*]

Sen. F. Cummings:—spent some time—well, it would not take much for him to sound better than the real Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs.

Hon. Senators: [*Laughter*]

Sen. F. Cummings: Mr. President, the Minister spent some time speaking about voter padding and the perceived effect. He was suggesting that there is no intention about voter padding. I am not suggesting that there is any intention to voter padding, but what I can say from my experience in the political arena, Mr. President, is that the EBC list for electoral—persons who are qualified to vote as electors in Trinidad exceeds one million electors, or just about one million electors. A lot of those persons on that list do not reside in Trinidad and Tobago.

But I am also aware, Mr. President, that many of those persons—might not be a very large number—but many of those persons who have migrated from these shores, the names still appear on the EBC list. Some of them do travel, although they do not live here. So, notwithstanding that two-month requirement that is in the law, although they do not live here, they do travel to Trinidad and Tobago during election time and vote, and there is nothing to stop them from doing that because their names are on the list.

So, to say that persons who might take this opportunity to become a citizen will not participate in the voting process, we have no way of guaranteeing that that will not happen. Right? Persons may come. Persons may take advantage of this opportunity. Persons will get their name on the electoral list because by the time—

from the minute they are allowed to be a citizen and they get their national ID card, they will become an elector and they can then return to the country where they have lived all their life, and if they choose to participate in the voting process, they return when the time comes and they will be allowed to vote because their names are on the list. I am sure the Government must have considered this when they brought this legislation, that this can result in an expansion of the electoral list in Trinidad and Tobago by persons who do not reside or live here.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Senator: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. F. Cummings: Must be. And it is not about which side or not. It means that what we are in fact doing, if we are going along this route, we have to consider—we must have spoken to the EBC. I recall, as a representative, political parties meet with the EBC on request sometimes. UNC and PNM and NJAC and everybody else, you can meet with the EBC to have discussions. And, in our conversations in relation to concerns that we as a political party had about the electoral list, the EBC said to us that in their verification of the electoral list, they do not remove persons other than persons who are confirmed dead. I am sure they would have said the same thing to the UNC, Mr. President, in that, no matter what field exercises they conduct, unless there is a death certificate saying that Mr. X or Ms. Y has died, that those names will not be removed from the list. And, we asked the question: So, what if this person cannot be found? This person has migrated for the last 40 or 50 years. Is the name going to remain on the list? The answer was yes. So that, that ties into the point I made earlier, that those persons—there are many persons on the list who do not live here and the actions we are about to take are likely to increase that.

The phrase, “otherwise than by descent” operates to limit automatic citizenship to cases where the parent’s citizenship is based on a direct and formal link to Trinidad and Tobago, rather than being passed on solely through ancestry.

6.15 p.m.

In other words the current law requires that the parent would need to have acquired citizenship—and I mentioned it earlier—by being born here or by being registered as a citizen through other specific provisions or becoming a citizen through naturalization. A parent whose citizenship—and because now we are talking about grandparents as well, I include that in the sentence—exists only by descent, that is, it is inherited from their own parent or grandparent would not satisfy the requirement. The provision therefore is intended to prevent automatic citizenship from extending indefinitely to persons who never had a substantial contribution to the country.

So notwithstanding the Government’s desire to open or to expand the pool, whether it be for sport—and I spent some time saying to the Government “look at the FIFA rules, look at the Olympic Committee rules and see whether you are really going to achieve what you set out to achieve.” Whether you want to have no restriction whatsoever, why would we want to offer citizenship to third generation children—if you wish to refer to them that way, and the grandparent was not even born here. Why remove that? The parent—when it was only parent, the parent had to be born here. Now we are expanding to grandparents. Some grandparents have quite a large number of grandchildren, 40, 50, 60, depending on how fertile the children were. And now we are saying, all your grandchildren, wherever they are, whether they never came to the Caribbean ever, whether they know where Trinidad and Tobago is on the map, can all become a citizen. And

you see when we write laws, Mr. President, we cannot have legislation done because you are in government and assume that you are making laws. You are trying to solve one problem, but you are creating another problem. You are not always going to be in government.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. F. Cummings: And notwithstanding, Minister Roberts' statement about what is a rash and who is a rash. The one correct thing he did say is that the PNM always comes back.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. F. Cummings: So we are pointing out the loopholes now to you, but since you said that the PNM always comes, we give you the opportunity to fix it, if you do not fix it, when we come back, we will fix it, Mr. President.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. F. Cummings: The Bill, Mr. President, proposes three key changes and is expanding to include grandparents. It amends the existing texts to allow a person—born outside as I said—to acquire automatic citizenship. That is the problem you know. It is allowing a sort of automatic citizenship expanding it and removing the safeguards that are put in place. It creates an additional pathway. It extends eligibility to those persons whose grandparents as I said were not born here.

The amendment is aligned with the Government's objective to facilitate inclusion of foreign-born athletes with ancestral ties, where the parent may not hold citizenship but the grandparent may be, and that is fine. That is fine if you want to say "Alright, well we were granting it to parents all along and the parent may not be a citizen, the parent may have passed on and you could now use the

route of a grandparent.” All of that is fine. The problem that we have with it, is that you are doing this even for persons who have assumed citizenship by descent.

This change fundamentally reverses the original safeguard. In effect, it removes the existing requirement that they must have some connection with Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. President—I do not want to just pause because I just do not want to a repeat that. Mr. President, the Opposition considers clauses 4(b) and 4(c) unnecessary, because the current law already accommodates children of citizens by descent through a controlled registration process. The automatic entitlement proposed by these clauses is disproportionate and unjustified expansion of our citizenship. And you know, in terms of governance and government, Mr. President, you want to make sure that you do not create law that can be open to abuse. Because the Trinidad and Tobago passport is a treasure. It is only because of some citizens who have misbehaved themselves in recent time, in certain territories that we now require a visa to go to certain places. But before that and even after that, the Trinidad and Tobago passport is one that people want to have as a second passport.

So you really have to ask yourself, is this measure going to achieve the intended benefit? Or is it that you—somebody said, “Look if we do this, we could get a couple more footballers to come and join the national team”. And nobody considered, well could we look and see whether in fact if we allow persons whose grandparents who were not even born here to get the citizenship whether they will in fact qualify according to the FIFA rules. I am sure Sen. Nakhid will take some time to address that in his winding up.

The Government implies that the amendments proposed that 4(b) and 4(c) are consistent with international norms and that similar jurisdictions have moved

towards expanding citizenship in this way but has not proposed or shared with us examples of that anywhere else in the world. And I suppose for the benefit of all of us and for the benefit of the citizens, if the Government has such information it should be shared with us. I have not been able to find any in my research.

A review of international citizenship regimes reveals a consistent global trend towards limiting automatic transmission of citizenship by descent, particularly across multiple generations born abroad. Countries such as Italy, Germany, Norway, the United Kingdom, Canada, Mr. President, Australia have all implemented frameworks that restrict and regulate descent-based citizenship in order to safeguard national identity, manage migration and ensure a meaningful connection to the State. These measures reflect a deliberate policy orientation that prioritizes proximity, residency and civic participation over remote ancestral claims. What we stand the risk of doing, Mr. President, is watering down the respect of the Coat of Arms on a Trinidad and Tobago passport. If every Tom, Dick and Harry is around the globe—globetrotting with a T&T passport, we could end up expanding the kind of visa requirement and restrictions being placed on Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. President. That is something that the Government must take account of and must look at seriously.

I am yet to hear from the Government's side what are these measurable benefits that will come. You talk about doctors, lawyers, other professionals. The current legislation accommodates that. The current legislation accommodates that and if you include grandparent, then fine, but when you say that they do not have—the grandparent did not need to be born here, the parent did not need to be born here, you are just really opening the floodgates too much, and it is something that you really need to look at very, very seriously.

In the Italian situation that I spoke of earlier, Mr. President, under the revised law, automatic citizenship, which is what I am referring to the effect of the Government's current legislation, is now limited to persons whose parent or grandparent were born in Italy. Claims based on more distant ancestors such as great grandparents are no longer accepted.

In addition, the law introduced residency requirements and stricter documentation standards to ensure a real and sustain connection to the country. When we were speaking about the requirement in terms of elections and boundaries qualification, we were told I think it was by Sen. Al-Rawi that the person needs to reside in Trinidad and Tobago for at least two months to be eligible to go on the list, but in this case I am speaking about, additional requirements to qualify the person making the application. We know that the application based on the current legislation can either come from the person after they have crossed majority age or from the parent or grandparent before the applicant reaches majority age. But notwithstanding those regular qualifications, the sticking point still remains that the person grandparent or parent should be more connected to Trinidad and Tobago. Because it will actually result in a surge in applications and operational overload.

In doing this, is there any plan put forward by the Government of improvements at the Immigration office? Is there any study done to see what the likely workload is—how it is going to increase? How is that going to impact regular citizens who go to apply for their passport and already have to wait, in some cases a few months, before they can get an appointment? Have we looked at those things?—the concerns about loyalty and national identity and integration. A previous speaker spoke about the possibility of importing—you know sometimes

you open the door, you import both the good and the bad, persons who may have criminal intent or criminal records.

Mr. President, what are some of the implications for us? The experience in Italy provides a clear warning against expanding citizenship in this way and if adopted—if clauses 4(b) and (c) are adopted, it can produce far ranging, unintended consequences for the citizenship system and the broader democratic framework of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. President, what are the strategic advantages, the economic strategic advantages? I would really like for the Government to expand a bit on that, because I am not clear that it is going to assist us in terms of sport and I am also not clear in terms of what other advantages it will come. It appears, Mr. President, that someone, somewhere in the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, came up with an idea, did not think it through properly, did not research it, did not look at the downfall of opening this gate. It appears that somewhere in the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, there needs to be some assistance in terms of research and how do we put legislation together that does not affect us negatively. So we may have to recommend that reshuffle sooner rather than later.

Hon. Senators: [*Laughter*]

Sen. F. Cummings: And it—

Hon. Senator: Be careful what you ask for you know.

Sen. F. Cummings: What is going on here, Mr. President? What is really happening here? They do not even know who are the ambassadors—the sporting ambassadors. They cannot speak to the country and tell them who the sport ambassadors are, but they are bringing legislation here. They cannot speak. They

have to ask people at the podium, “Who is really the ambassador in meh Ministry again” and yet legislation coming here that is not properly researched. Alright?

We need to—

6.30 p.m.

Hon. Senator: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping and laughter*]

Sen. Dhanpaul: Samuel Badree.

Sen. F. Cummings: Right. Wrong name of ambassador, and somebody “pick up de wrong draft ah de legislation and give it to de Attorney General”.

Hon. Senators: [*Laughter*]

Sen. F. Cummings: Right. Right.

Hon. Senators: [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. F. Cummings: Right. They are wrong. I think they sent the wrong copy to the Office of the Attorney General.

Hon. Senators: [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. F. Cummings: I am sure the Attorney General, with the experience he has, Mr. President, I am confident that the points being raised by the Opposition, which I said are not political gamesmanship, we all love Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. F. Cummings: We all love this country.

We want what is best for our country. We want when a Government Minister travels to a First World country and presents his diplomatic passport with the Coat of Arms on it, the officer receiving it would look at it with some level of respect. It would not be every Tom, Dick and Harry from everywhere who never visited this country before, walking up with a passport. We do not know their

conduct across the world. We do not know those who may have—somebody spoke about people who have been going to fight wars in places that do not concern us, and they have connections through grandparents and parents to Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Senators: [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. F. Cummings: Some of them have never come here. And nobody should speak about gangs who supervised LifeSport.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. F. Cummings: Nobody who supervised LifeSport should talk about gangs.

Sen. Roberts: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. F. Cummings: Nobody. Nobody. Nobody. Right.

Mr. President, what we want is responsible reform. The Opposition supports clause 4 insofar as it reflects the Government's intent to facilitate participation by foreign-bought athletes who share a familial link to Trinidad and Tobago. Not for someone who has absolutely no connection with us whatsoever, and based on, for the third time, Mr. President, before I am accused of repetition, for the third time, the FIFA rules do not allow those persons whose parents or grandparents were not born in Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. F. Cummings: I dare Sen. Nakhid or Sen. Roberts to tell me that the FIFA rules I am reading from are wrong, or that the Government did not consider this or that. They did not forward this as part of the file to the Attorney General's Office in consideration of this legislation, because it must be that there was some mishap, fall down, or lack of research at the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs in not putting forward a proper proposal to the Attorney General's office. This is really

an embarrassment.

Mr. President: You have two more minutes.

Sen. F. Cummings: This is really an embarrassment.

Therefore, Mr. President, we will not support reckless, unnecessary and destabilizing legislation.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. F. Cummings: We will not do that. We will not do that. The former speaker had his turn. He spoke at length about what he did in the Ministry of Sport, what he did not do, what he wanted to do, and what he would have done if the Prime Minister had returned him to the Ministry of Sport, but we are not here debating the efficiency of the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs. What we are debating is citizenship for Trinidad and Tobago and how do we protect—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. F. Cummings:—how do we protect our State from intrusion by persons who may not have our best interest at heart, and therefore we urge the Government to make sure that they look at this legislation again.

Now, no Government likes to hear an Opposition coming and schooling them about what they should do and should not do. You are in office and you are supposed to be governing, but please, please, let us not water down our requirements for citizenry or citizenship because we are trying to be expedient, because we are trying to score a point in the sports fraternity, because we are trying to appeal to certain people. Let us make sure that what we are doing can stand scrutiny and withstand the test of time. Because as I said earlier, you are not always going to be there, and when you are making legislation you have to make it for all time, for the best interest of all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and for the

best interest of our country that we all love dearly. Mr. President, I thank you.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Sen. Anthony Vieira.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Anthony Vieira SC: Thank you, Mr. President. When we think about citizenship, what comes to mind? For me it is about active participation, mutual responsibility and the protection of shared values. A strong nation depends on engaged citizens contributing to the common good and upholding democratic values. Mr. President, we should never take the privilege of our citizenship for granted. It is the glue that binds us. It is what defines us as Trinbagonians. It is a crucial part of the spinal cord of the Constitution.

When I first became aware of today's sitting last week, and that it was Government's intention to introduce and carry this Bill through all its stages, I was flummoxed. "Where dis come from?" The Bill proposes to amend section 17(3) of our Constitution to allow a person born outside Trinidad and Tobago to acquire citizenship, not only through a parent but also through a grandparent who was a citizen at the time of that person's birth. This Bill comes to us entirely out of the blue. As far as I am aware, there has been no national consultation, no Green Paper, no White Paper, no official policy pronouncement on the need to widen the net of citizenship. No context has been provided.

The Bill makes no mention of sport or to the possibility of recruiting elite athletes in our hunt for Olympic gold and other glittering sports prizes. I only learned of this dimension watching the news on Friday, and today in this Chamber. There is no reference to it in the Explanatory Note. So devoid of context, I began my research for today's contribution on a clean slate. No preconceived notions

whether as to sports or otherwise. All I knew is that the Government wants to change the Constitution by widening the net for citizenship. So as with all Bills falling for consideration, the first question I ask myself is, what are we seeking to remedy that previous law does not cover?

What is the scope of the mischief that this Bill has set out to remedy? I later discovered, via an article in the *AZP NEWS* by Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Trade, Investment and Tourism, Dr. Neil Gosine, that this legislation, and I quote:

—is intended to correct—“...a longstanding gap in our laws.”

There is a belief—“...that our outdated restrictions were costing us some of the best sporting talent...”—of the—“...diaspora.

...that this was not just a sporting measure but...one that would strengthen our competitiveness internationally while reconnecting our families abroad to the homeland.”

Sen. Nakhid spoke about expanding our talent pool, regaining our competitiveness and the need to diversify sport and culture. These are all laudable goals. They have a ring of plausibility until we examine them more closely. Now, do not get me wrong. Like everyone in this Chamber, like everyone in the country, I am delighted when we do well at sports events. This is a sports-loving nation. Sports can play an instrumental part in effecting positive change in individuals, communities and our society. Sport transcends borders, religion, politics. Sport fosters national pride.

I agree with Sen. Nakhid, sporting excellence is crucial. I agree with Sen. Roberts, sport is a powerful thing. The vision of elite athletes getting glittering prizes on international sports podiums is alluring, and the provision of an eligible

pathway for athletes who trace a lineage to Trinidad and Tobago to be able to wear our colours, is at first glance unobjectionable, even intoxicating. Regrettably, that vision is based on assumptions that may not hold true.

In any event, whether vision or illusion, as legislators we are not rubberstamps. We are required to consider the broad range of possibilities, the broad range of possible outcomes, assessing the best and the worse possibilities. We are required to ascertain whether there may be unintended adverse consequences. As you know, the law of unintended consequences is an economic principle that describes the effects of policy that are unforeseen or ignored. In other words, we are required to consider whether this legislation, if put into effect, carries any risks.

The excitement about the prospect of Olympic medals should be tempered with a large note of caution. We are proposing to change the Constitution for an athlete eligibility policy. Let that sink in. Now, I am going to come back to the athlete eligibility dimension, but first it may be worthwhile comparing the proposed legislation to what obtains elsewhere. Given that this Bill is being touted not just as a sporting measure but as a national developmental tool, representing progress on multiple fronts, including trade, tourism and national pride, and as part of the larger project of modernizing our laws to keep pace with global standards.

So I ask, is there a longstanding gap in our laws? Are the current restrictions outdated? Will this legislation bring us up to speed with the rest of the world? Is this Bill innocuous and relatively standard fare? As it turns out, when we compare this legislation with international practice, we see that it is far from ordinary and not in keeping with global standards.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. A. Vieira SC: In Canada and in the United States, citizenship by descent is strictly limited to parents. There is no automatic grandparent provision. Across the Caribbean region, Jamaica, Barbados, Guyana and the OECS states, the rule is likewise, parental descent only.

This Bill is outside the mainstream of both North American and Caribbean practice. Ireland is a notable exception, allowing a grandchild to claim citizenship but only through registration in the Foreign Births Register with rigorous documentation. India has taken a very different approach. It created the Overseas Citizenship of India, the OCI scheme, which recognizes persons of Indian origin abroad, but India places very clear guardrails.

OCI holders may visit India; without visas they can work there, but they cannot vote. They cannot hold constitutional office. They cannot own agricultural land. In other words, most countries—most countries guard very carefully against the risk of extending citizenship beyond the first generation born abroad. And where they do extend it, as in Ireland and India, they either require formal registration or they impose limits on the rights enjoyed. We have no such guardrails in the proposed legislation.

6.45 p.m.

Okay, so it turns out citizenship by grandparentage is not the norm, but is that sufficient reason to put brakes on this Bill, or is there cause for concern? Are there consequences which are still not yet fully understood? This Bill is stark in its simplicity. Once a person qualifies for citizenship through a grandparent, they become a full citizen with all the rights and privileges of citizenship; a full citizen with all the rights and privileges of citizenship. This includes the right to vote, the right to run for Parliament, eligibility for state services, health care and pensions.

It is conceivable that someone who has never lived in Trinidad and Tobago,

who has no intention of returning to Trinidad and Tobago, could nonetheless fly in at election time to vote. And, as you have heard, if we are moving in a certain direction, soon there will be the possibility of online voting, so that this concern is magnified. That possibility should give us pause.

Superficially, the thinking behind the Bill kind of makes sense. Yes, yes, I agree, I agree, there may be some benefits. It is possible that this legislation can help families reconnect, families abroad to the homeland. Diaspora reconnection and talent attraction is a rationale used in other diaspora-friendly regimes and there are potential benefits to be gained by allowing second-generation descendants an easier path to reunite, to invest, to work or to retire in Trinidad and Tobago. It is possible that this legislation may attract returnees with skills, investment and cultural links. There may be an economic upside, in that more citizens can deepen remittances, skills transfer and offer cultural, creative links. It is possible that if we grant citizenship to an athletic grandchild, that player, once a citizen, could be eligible for the Trinidad and Tobago team, but the risks are also equally clear.

Citizenship is not just a passport, it is a bond of loyalty and obligation. Is it unreasonable to ask whether this legislation might dilute genuine links to our beloved nation? What happens when citizenship is granted to those who have no shared values or standards? This legislation, as we have heard, raises electoral integrity concerns, as it will enable individuals with no practical connection to our society to exercise political rights.

Remember, we are not just opening our doors to sportsmen, we are opening our doors to grandchildren across the globe. We are already struggling to keep pace with the burden of funding a large ageing population, with pension benefits and the need for health care. Not just newly minted citizens, but their spouses and

their children will also benefit from this legislation. When this Bill widens the eligibility net for pensions, health care and other services for people who have no history of contribution, we are raising the risk of further fiscal and social burden on an already overburdened Treasury and other state resources.

Tracing lineage to grandparents abroad also raises complex documentation issues and we need to guard against the possibility of fraud, especially when it is so easy to forge documents today using AI and the like.

Even though I am a Member of Parliament, I do not get to walk through the Members' door with my arms swinging. There are screening and security checks. But this Bill does not just open the door, it leaves that door wide open and unattended. That cannot be right, not in the dangerous world in which we live today. Sen. Al-Rawi referred to the Anti-Terrorism Act. I share that concern.

Last but not least, since this Bill is being touted as an important sporting measure, it behoves us to consider what citizenship by grandparent reform would and would not do for sport. Sen. Nakhid spoke about administrative, legislative and innate safeguards, but he offered no real and substantial particulars.

As a general rule, an athlete must be a national of the country he represents. However, if that athlete has represented another country, he can only switch after three years since last representation. In other words, this legislation does not and it cannot override the rules of the various international sporting federations, including applicable transfer waiting rules.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. A. Vieira SC: Another elephant in the room is the assumption that dual nationals will choose Trinidad and Tobago over the United States, Europe or other First World countries. My sense is that if they are capped abroad, they will

represent that country. Trinidad and Tobago will only be a fallback position if they do not make the cut there, but I could be wrong on this.

As mentioned earlier, it is not enough to be a national and to just hold a TT passport. We have heard that FIFA does not allow citizenship by grandparent descent, and many international sporting federations have specific ancestry and residency conditions to be met, including compliance with any transfer of allegiance and waiting period rules, and these all apply on a case-by-case basis. In other words, the grandparent rule is just a start. It does not guarantee a finish.

While the proposed legislation would allow a player to the Trinidad and Tobago team, if that player is not cap-tied or does not qualify for a switch, he may not be able to wear our colours at the event. Long story short, in the world of World Athletics, an athlete must be a citizen and he must also satisfy Eligibility and Transfer of Allegiance Rules, and here it is worth pointing out that many of those rules are being tightened to guard against the very thing we are looking to promulgate.

Transfers are controlled with waiting periods and nationality review oversight to curb opportunistic switches. This Bill, if passed, may open a door for foreign athletes to get a pick on our team, but security at that door may block that person from competing. The amendment to our Constitution cannot bypass applicable waiting periods, cap-tied rules or naturalized player limits.

But here is my real concern. Mr. President, I am not aware of any other country amending its Constitution for an athlete eligibility policy, and as such, we are constrained to consider the proportionality of constitutional change. We have to consider fundamental law versus tactical gain. Constitutions are meant to enshrine the enduring framework of governance and citizenship. To alter the

Constitution for the instrumental purpose of broadening an Olympic talent pool risks cheapening constitutional sanctity.

Now, I do not want to suggest that this legislation is gripped by a flawed belief, but I am very concerned about treating the Constitution as a secondary consideration, and I also wonder whether we are not being guilty of overreach.

Other countries who offer pathways for diaspora athletes—Ireland, Israel, Italy—they do not do so by rewriting their Constitutions, but through ordinary nationality legislation or immigration policy. Could we not achieve the same objective using less extreme measures, for example, by amending the Immigration Act and Regulations, or through the passage of specially tailored legislation?

In any event, whether it is about unlocking benefits for sports specifically or about opening the country to its diaspora generally, this Bill raises a central question: Should citizenship acquired under this amendment not be accompanied by appropriate guardrails? India's example shows that one can embrace the diaspora without opening the door too widely.

The Foreign Investment Act sets out clear conditions before a foreigner can acquire land. You need a licence, there are restrictions on use, there are reporting and compliance obligations. So, in a similar vein, can we consider amending the proposed legislation to include guardrails, such as requiring registration in a special register? Citizenship should not be automatic. It should require proof of lineage and good character via a register akin to Ireland's Foreign Births Register with prescribed evidentiary standards.

We should require a substantial connection, such as a period of residence in Trinidad and Tobago. We can borrow from Canada's 2025 proposal, for example, a period of Trinidad and Tobago at any point, say one to three years, or regularize

citizens to be registered before a certain age to demonstrate a living link. We could place limits on political rights, such as voting or holding public office for citizens who reside permanently abroad. Can we clarify the entitlements in relation to pensions and social benefits to ensure equity for those who have lived and contributed here? There should be anti-fraud controls and security screening, including background checks, clear cut-off dates, the need for certified records, perhaps even DNA testing where necessary and proportionate, and penalties for misrepresentation. The systems around us are advanced and complex. We need to failure-proof them. There should be published, projected, eligible population and processing capacity.

Athletes with no residency, no training in this country and no immersion in local sport systems are less likely to contribute to domestic sporting development. Yeah, they may deliver a result in the short term, but leave no legacy in coaching, youth mentorship or community engagement. If this legislation is to yield fruit, we should adopt selection policies that require a genuine and ongoing connection to Trinidad and Tobago, for example, minimum domestic training camps, participation in national programmes or residency periods, once they do not conflict with the rules of the particular international sporting federation. What about having a documented commitment clause in athlete agreements? What about having early eligibility audits to ascertain and handle things like cap-tied status and transfer windows to avoid late disqualifications? Without such safeguards in place, we risk enacting a reform that is both unprecedented in our region and potentially destabilizing.

7.00 p.m.

And we also risk rewriting the Constitution in vain, because as explained

earlier, citizenship is only one step. International federation rules still apply. We could issue 10,000 diaspora passports tomorrow, but only a handful of athletes might qualify.

Mr. President, citizenship is a profound status. It should not be widened without careful thought, without policy, without context. This measure is not the international standard. Most countries limit citizenship to one generation abroad. That is the global standard. The reality of the consequences of this Bill may be very different from the idealized version. If Government is determined to use this measure as a national developmental tool, at the very least it should be paired with prudent safeguards.

I would like Government to explain, how many people are expected to become eligible? What measures are going to be put in place to safeguard against abuse and to ensure fairness to citizens who have lived, work, and contributed here all their lives? Tell me more. I want to hear more about the specific administrative, legal and innate safeguards. Without such answers, this Bill risks creating a system that may be open to the exploitation that may strain our services and may under-mind the integrity of our democracy. We must welcome our diaspora, yes. But we must do so responsibly with clear rise and strong safeguards.

Mr. President, if the true objective is diaspora inclusion or sporting competitiveness, there are other more proportionate paths. We can legislate for streamlined residency and naturalization pathways. We can negotiate athlete eligibility policies through our National Olympic Committee and sporting federations. We can establish diaspora engagement programmes that encourage overseas-born children of nationals to connect, train and contribute without altering constitutional fundamentals.

In the article penned by Parliamentary Secretary, Dr. Gosine, it was reported that this Bill was brought forward with urgency, relevance and purpose. But constitutional change is a matter of the highest legal and political significance. Because the Constitution provides the supreme framework within which all other laws and institutions operate, the process of amending it should not be rushed. It should not be rushed on an urgency basis, rather it should follow broad consultation, and careful deliberation.

Constitutions are not “play things”, they are the bedrock of our country’s sovereignty. They require stability and frequent or hasty changes, risking undermining public confidence and the rule of law. To alter citizenship provisions for short-term or tactical reasons, is to risk far more than we stand to gain. Let us embrace our diaspora. Let us strengthen sport certainly. But let us do so by proportionate means. Means that respect the sanctity of the Constitution and safeguard the political, economic and security interests of Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you.

Mr. President: Sen. Kenya Charles.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Kenya Charles: Mr. President, it is an honour to contribute to this Bill this afternoon, because I am speaking today, not as I am, as a Senator, but as an ex-national footballer.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. K. Charles: I have represented this country since I was 15 years old. So many of you all do not know that I played football.

Sen. Baig: Tell them.

Sen. K. Charles: And I would like to let Sen. Dr. Amery Browne know—because

I have seen him been playing lately, that he cannot pass me, no day, no time on the football field..

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. K. Charles: Yes, we have had foreign-based players because our national pool has never been a big pool and speaking from experience, I have been there. These players brought a higher level of play to our teams. In order for us to be competitive, with the regional powers, recruiting nationals living in foreign countries afforded us the opportunity to dominate the opposition and give a good account of ourselves at the CONCACAF level.

Mr. President, in the women's game we are unable to escape the fact that we compete in the same confederation as the number two ranked team in the world, which is the US, and the number nine ranked team in Canada, and additionally the number 29 ranked team, Mexico and the number 40 ranked team, Jamaica now.

Mr. President, 15 years ago for the most part, we would have had the better of Jamaica even though the games were highly competitive. However, in the past 10 years, as a result of utilizing the players born and raised in developed countries, Jamaica's senior women's team has surpassed us. We are nowhere competing with Jamaica right now. And Jamaica has even surpassed all the teams in the Caribbean and Central America. This is highlighted by the fact that they were the topped ranked team in the Caribbean and they made it to two Women's World Cups; not one, but two.

On the male side of the game, recruiting foreign-born nationals has been even more widespread. With that, top ranked team in the regions, in the US, Canada, Mexico, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, Suriname, Curaçao, and Jamaica are actively making their roster open to eligible off-springs of nationals

living abroad. As a matter of fact, the Curaçao and Suriname teams are made up mostly of players whom are born and raised in the Netherlands. So the Curaçao team that we played on September 5, if you watched their roster, most of them are playing in the Dutch league. So our league is nowhere compared to the Dutch league in Trinidad and Tobago.

The US with all the resources it has, financial—14 million registered players and four professional leagues—have been recruiting players for their senior national teams all the way to the under-15 national teams, making it more difficult to compete with them. So if the US is doing this to recruit to get players for their national teams, I do not see what the issue is with us doing it for our national teams.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. K. Charles: I honestly believe by amending this Bill to allow worth, with his parents or grandparents, is or was would definitely help us in sports.

Firstly Mr. President, to be able to compete, we have to be on the same level as these other countries and implementing this Bill, somewhat evens the playing field. This opens the access to a larger pool of athletes. Even though I am talking about football, the benefits of this Bill traverse all sports, so please do not assume that I am excluding the other sports.

Mr. President, Trinidad and Tobago has a really good opportunity to make it to the next World Cup. I firmly believe it is our collective desire to see Trinidad and Tobago to another World Cup or at another world champion medal podium. The legislation could very well assist us in reaching there.

I remember in 2006, I had just finished CSEC and I was home watching these World Cup games, and I could tell you that Trinidad and Tobago, the energy

and the vibe, that we had in this country, we have never felt it like that again, except when Keshorn Walcott won the gold medal. We want to bring back that opportunity, we want to that reach there again. We want to see Trinidad and Tobago, the red, white and black in the next World Cup and all of us jumping up and having a good time. Now this Bill does not take away from the talent that we have locally, but this will encourage our athletes to work harder to give themselves an opportunity to represent our country.

Mr. President, we have all heard stories from coaches that some athletes particularly that they are better and they tend to become complacent. So especially, widening this pool could reverse this and there would be more competition for placement on this team. I just had a conversation with one of Trinidad and Tobago's top athletes, gold medal athlete, and he was saying to me that they were having this same conversation about this same Bill and he is in full support of having this Bill. Because you know what, he believes that our athletes have got too complacent that we believe that we already reach and we do not need to do anything more to represent the red, white, and black, which, we could see, that we only have about four or five athletes at the World Championships right now when other countries have 40, 50, 100 athletes at the World Championships.

We want to talk about tourism. Look recently Chelsea and England, the star defender visited Trinidad and Tobago, the birthplace of his grandmother. This was shortly after his team won a \$100 million FIFA World Cup. During his visit, he participated in a training session in Fyzabad, because that is where his grandmother is from, and visited our national under-15 team. On this visit, he brought his football knowledge to our young players.

I always say I remember when the former England captain visited Trinidad. I

could remember everything she said to me that day because it stood with me. So our international athletes are not only coming to play football, but they are bring a sense of knowledge to us a sense. They bring a sense of understanding, and also a sense of discipline. Formalities aside, he visited the Ariapita Avenue, and partied true Trini style, bringing some sort of money to our economy, documenting the sites and for the local nightlife. It is anticipated that as a result of his visit and him recording his activities, that there could be a spin off effect on fellow professionals, friends and followers of tourism, and even potential recruitments of this Bill, Mr. President.

I know what might be saying what happens to local athletes, as Sen. Vieira asked, when this come to fruition. Guess what, we are not forgetting about the local athletes, we are simply asking for the best local and international representation of our country.

Many of you all may not know my dad is a national coach, and we had this conversation this morning, he said to me “the first pick that you always look to pick is your local players but where the space is always missing or where we are missing players we will look for our international players.”

So we are not forgetting the local players at all but we are simply asking to bring the international players to give a very strong team and a very big showing at the national level. Mr. President, let me make it absolutely clear, there will be a robust process that will enable us to the exclude undesirables, and persons with criminal records and affiliations. These persons obviously will not be eligible to benefit from the legislation for security reasons. Widening the pool of athletes in any sport also brings another level of thinking, different mind sets, cross cultural tolerance and sometimes a different skill set that might be otherwise lacking

locally.

7.15 p.m.

This can be seen by our players that played abroad and the players that played locally. Now, the Opposition front-liners have a new love for country all of a sudden. They are patriotic, but not patriotic enough to support a Bill that will give our national team a better chance to a World Cup.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. K. Charles: Mr. President, so I do not know who they are trying to fool but when it comes to the red, white and black I am not half patriotic. I step forward with my whole heart for my country.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. K. Charles: As mentioned before by my colleague Sen. Roberts, we should have known that they do not care about the country and sports, you know, especially as they decided to put the “nobody lives here” MP as the Minister of Sport and Community Development.

Hon. Senators: [*Laughter*]

Sen. K. Charles: The Minister also—and as he said, the Minister admitted that sport was not her forte and you can find this in the *Express* article dated April 2018, in case they forgot what she said. Now, if they had any idea, we would not be debating this Bill here today and playing catch-up with the other countries. We would have already had this in place, as mentioned by Sen. Nakhid. We are only one out of five of the 211 countries registered with FIFA that are not utilizing this type of legislation. Again, I will say how do we expect to compete with the rest of the world and we are not on the same level with them?

Mr. President, I have spoken to some of my former teammates. Some have

retired and others are still actively involved in playing at the national level and they are all in agreement with this amendment. One even went on to say, he said, “We do not want this inno, we need it”. “This is not only men footballers and women footballers, but all athletes are praising and praying that this Bill comes alive.”

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. K. Charles: And I would like to say, I did not forget my teammates from Tobago, eh. “Ah called and ah message dem and ah ask what dey thought about this”, and they are all in agreement with this Bill.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. K. Charles: I have friends who are coaching at the national level now, Mr. President. They are very much in support of this. They are not saying we do not have the local talent, but we need to expand our pool to better compete. The players we hope to capture with this legislation would not automatically be accepted to the national teams. They would be required to practice and try out as our local players. They have to come here. We have camps. They have to come, they have to train. They have to do everything and if they are good enough, they would make the national team and if they are not good, well, they have to go back home.

Mr. President, I was told that there are athletes with ancestral alignment to Trinidad and Tobago who are left unable to compete at the international level. This is because they probably cannot make their national team—senior national team. They may have made it at the under-17 and the under-18 levels but they—bigger pool, so it is harder for them to make the senior team level but they are willing to come to Trinidad to come and better our team. Why do we have to

forget them? They are a part of us. Their grandparents were born here. Their parents may not have lived here but we say, “all ah we is Trini”. At some point they will represent the red, white and black.

I was also reminded by Sen. Allahar, we have a bona fide diaspora now. A generation is 30 years. We have three generations of Trinbagonians now. We have grown up as a nation and no longer depend on Commonwealth identity or our regional Caricom identity to define us. It cannot be that Commonwealth citizens and Caricom nationals can have a greater right to apply for citizenship after residing here for a requisite number of years, than grandchildren of our overseas citizens, our diaspora. We are growing up as a nation. There will be growing pains. Our foreign policy is now directed towards our sovereign interests.

Regional cooperation is all fine and good but sometimes a regional position which tries to please many different countries ends up being a compromise that is ineffective. I am sure—and I am talking from a football point of view. I am sure the likes of Dwight Yorke, Russell Latapy, Derek King, Ross Russell, Anton Corneal, Kieron Edwards and all the other coaches and officials of our national sporting organization in this country are excited about the merits of this legislation. Let us give ourselves the best chance of our sporting excellence. Let us give ourselves the best chance of reaching another Men’s World Cup 2026 and to our first Women’s World Cup in 2027.

Hon. Senator: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. K. Charles: Well, says the mayor who got voted out. Anyway, Mr. President, as I say, I hope we can get the support from the Members on the other side and our Independent Senators, thank you.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Sen. Brian Baig.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Brian Baig: Thank you, Mr. President. I seek leave of you, as well as I have a lot to refer to, so I ask for leave to refer to my notes. Mr. President, let me first say that it is an honour to be in this House and have to listen to our Government Members, especially those who have represented the red, white and black for Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. B. Baig: I speak of none other than Sen. Nakhid. I speak of none other than Sen. Kenya Charles and we also have and we must also make note of it, a man who ensured that we have Olympic champions in this country, by none other than Sen. Anil Roberts.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. B. Baig: We must make note of that. Mr. President, on the 28th of April, 2025, Trinidad and Tobago voted for a Government to allow them to give them a chance to breathe. A chance at a future for themselves and their families. For an improvement in the standard of living and their families. For an improvement of their standard to get a decent job or to get a better living wage and to be seen not as ghosts, but a chance for their children to have educational opportunities so that they can lift themselves out of poverty. A chance to live in a country where those who break the law face the consequences, where they can go to the hospital knowing that they will get good access to health care, including the lifesaving service—

Sen. Dr. Browne: Mr. President, Standing Order 46(1). At this stage, we really should be focusing on the Bill.

Mr. President: I am giving him the opportunity to—that is his opening. Yeah, yeah, yeah—continue, please.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. B. Baig: Thank you, Mr. President, thank you. “Doh worry nah, man. Ah coming to it. Relax.”

Mr. President: You continue, please.

Sen. B. Baig: Yes, so Mr. President, we have a Government that is transparent and people-friendly. We on this side will not let down the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. B. Baig: Mr. President, I must remind this nation that between 2010 and 2015, sports were seen by the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC as a critical role for the development of youth regardless of socio-economic background and this is why the UNC Government invested in a National Cycling Velodrome, a National Tennis Centre, a National Aquatic Centre as well as renovating and expanding a number of recreational grounds. After that, Mr. President, we all saw what happened. They were abandoned; they were not even used. In fact, they got to the point that people were using it to play “all fours”. But now with this Government, we shall ensure that those centers shall be used for sporting facilities and shall be used properly.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. B. Baig: Mr. President, the Constitution (Amdt.) Bill, 2025 seeks to amend to Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. It allows for persons to become citizens of Trinidad and Tobago if their grandparents were citizens of Trinidad and Tobago at the time of their birth. Today, we are here not to debate whether Trinidad and Tobago should join the modern world, but it is to declare that

we cannot afford another day of legislative paralysis while our competitors harvest our human capital. We stand at the crossroads, Mr. President, where legal frameworks and institutional capacity must align to unlock Trinidad and Tobago's full potential, sporting otherwise.

Today's constitutional amendment represents more than legislative housekeeping. It signals our commitment to systematic reform that addresses both immediate competitive needs and long-term structural deficiencies in our sports eco-system. Every one of us in this Chamber and every citizen listening across our twin island nation, can recall those transcendent moments where we were not defined by our differences but were united as one people under one flag with one voice. I speak of those moments with pure and unadulterated national pride.

Sen. Roberts talked about it in 1976 with Hasley Crawford. But I was not around then, but that was in 1976. But I listened to my grandparents and my parents talk about that day and just hearing them, I felt a national form of pride. Who can forget that day in 2012, the London Olympics, as was stated by Sen. Charles, when the man by the name of Keshorn Walcott, who I think we all should congratulate, has made the finals of the world championships today, when he threw that javelin. I was one person who made sure and ran home to see him throw that javelin and also to stand up and hear our national anthem. We again, Mr. President, with this amendment, we shall ensure that more Keshorn Walcotts can come back to Trinidad and Tobago and represent the red, white and black.

Mr. President, who could forget 2006, where everyone celebrated when we qualified for the 2006 World Cup? I remember buying my Dwight Yorke jersey, the number 19 jersey. I have it still. I wear it every game we go to. I also wore that jersey proudly when I studied abroad in London because I am from Trinidad

and Tobago and I let people know I am from the country of the red, white and black.

The debate before us today is not merely about an amendment to the clause, it is a profound choice about our national character and our future trajectory. This is not a technicality, it is a matter of identity, opportunity, fairness and national pride. It is about recognizing that our diaspora is not foreign. They are our extended family and their children and grandchildren are waiting for us to open the door. We must ask ourselves are we a nation that looks only inward, content with the resources we have within our shores, or are we a nation that looks outwards with the vision and confidence to embrace the full global breadth of the Trinbagonian family?

Mr. President, we are currently as was stated here by my colleagues, we are currently in the 2026 qualifying World Cup. We are in the final stages of the CONCACAF groups and we have to remember that we must be ensured that we do qualify. I do believe we will qualify, especially when this Bill is passed.

The 2026 FIFA World Cup alone is projected to create US\$5billion in economic activity across North America. Small nation participation usually delivers these proportionate returns. We need every eligible Trinbagonian on the field if we want to compete. Every single day that we delay, every week that we procrastinate is a day we actively weaken our national team's chances at success. It is a day we deny our coaching staff, headed by legends such as Dwight Yorke, Russell Latapy, of the full complement of these players.

Mr. President, FIFA, World Athletics, the International Cricket Council and World Rugby explicitly require citizenship documentation or passport evidence. Administrative naturalization processes create timing uncertainties, incompetence

with intentional competition schedules. This is not a matter of endless debate in committees. It is a matter of decisive action on the Floor at the Parliament. Inaction in this context is not a neutral stance. It is an active choice to forfeit a competitive advantage, Mr. President, and to tell these young men and thousands like them—

7.30 p.m.

[Device goes off]

Mr. President: The person whose phone went off, could you just leave the Chamber and settle for 15 minutes and then return, please? Continue, please.

Sen. B. Baig: Thank you, Mr. President. This amendment, it allows us to seize the opportunity to strengthen, not just our football team, but our talent pool across all sporting disciplines. International sporting organizations, as I said, like FIFA, World Athletics, and rugby explicitly recognize grandparent eligibility rules.

Mr. President, at the last five Olympic games, over 30 Caribbean medals were won by athletes who either trained abroad or came from the diaspora roots. Trinidad and Tobago has a diaspora pool of over 300,000—which was mentioned earlier—eligible third-generation descents abroad. Even if 0.1 per cent had an elite sporting talent, that is 300 potential elite athletes.

In contrast, our current national pool of athletes who are considered elites based on world ranking, including team sport, is around 200 athletes. The scale speaks for itself. This is the best solution for our athletes, ensuring that we can field our strongest possible teams for the next upcoming cycle of Olympic and world championship qualifiers. It addresses the urgent without get bogged down in the complex, securing a quick tangible or popular win for the nation.

Mr. President, the benefits of this policy extend far beyond the field of play,

with profound economic, social and cultural implications. Therefore, this process will allow the extent, the same facility of third-generation citizenships for other foreign-born individuals. We will develop the rules that will guide access to citizenship for those who can bring investment, specialized skills and other benefits to our nation. We will transform reactive citizenship processing into proactive talent acquisition. Our gradual approach ensures quality control while building institutional confidence. This learning approach ensures that our systems evolve with changing international standards.

Mr. President, this amendment is not a leap into the unknown. It is a necessary and overdue step to keep pace with our neighbours in a competitive Caribbean region. To fail to act is a choice to be left behind, and we do not want to be left behind. We must never forget that Trinidad and Tobago, as a sporting nation, we were once number one in the Caribbean. We are no longer number one in the Caribbean. Our Caribbean brothers and sisters have already recognized the immense value of their diaspora. You would like to know how? Let me tell you how.

In St. Vincent and the Grenadines—I heard Sen. Foster Cummings talk about St. Vincent and the Grenadines. He told you one part, he did not tell you all the parts, so I am going to give you the other part he left out. The St. Vincent and the Grenadines, their Parliament approved the Citizenship (Amdt.) Bill in 2023, explicitly allowing citizenship for grandchildren. Their Prime Minister, the hon. Ralph Gonzales—I would like him to listen to this—noted:

This was in response to request from people involved in sports—athletics, football and body building—who wish to represent their nation.

In Saint Lucia, just last year, in 2024, they amended their citizenship Act to

state that a person becomes a citizen at birth for their father, mother, grandfather or grandmother is a citizen by birth; a clear and ambiguous embrace of the grandparent rule. In Jamaica—hear the country, Jamaica—the nationality Act has long recognized their third-generation individuals, driven by the strategic need to maintain ties of the Jamaican diaspora. In Guyana, their citizenship Act similarly provides an opportunity for second and third-generation individuals with Guyanese lineage. So there is evidence. So it is clear from Kingston to Castries, from Kingston to Guyana, which is Georgetown, they are way ahead of us and we must not be left behind. We cannot be allowed to be left behind. They are proactively acting, so why should we wait? Now is the time, the time is now, and we must do it now.

Imagine, Mr. President, just last week, we played Jamaica. We were defeated by Jamaica. The man who scored the goals for Jamaica, his name is Bailey Cadamarteri and Jon Russell, both of whom were born in England. Mr. Cadamarteri is a former England under-19 player, who became eligible to represent the Reggae Boyz because of his paternal grandfather in Jamaica. We are at a competitive disadvantage. Is it that we are going to allow that? No, we should not allow that. We must have a level playing field, so when they come back here, “is licks down the line fuh dem”. Trinidad and Tobago must be part of the world and we must not be left behind. I say that again.

Mr. President, with this amendment, we could have players such as Jadon Sancho who can come to play for Trinidad and Tobago because he has Trinidad and Tobago lineage, and I would love to see that. I am nonetheless a supporter of Manchester United, even though we put him on loan.

Mr. President, if one looks at the Bill before us, clause 3 of the Bill

specifically states that the Bill alters the Constitution as it seeks to amend section 17(3) of the Constitution, which governs the acquisition of citizenship by descent. Section 17(3) establishes a general rule that a child born outside of Trinidad and Tobago can acquire citizenship by descent, if at the time of birth at least one parent is, or was, but for his parent's death, a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago otherwise than by descent. So it is a very simple amendment. When you look at section 17(3) of the Constitution, as I read, and it is stated and clarified, and I will clarify yet again, it states:

“A person born outside of Trinidad and Tobago...”—where you would have now the amended—they would have their grandparents.

So, Mr. President, as I move on, I know one of the concerns raised is the abuse of the system. I will get to that later on in my contribution. Mr. President, I would say that to be against this Bill, you are against and rejecting our talent. Why do you want to reject our talent? This Bill is not just about sports or passports. For young people, it is about the access to opportunity; opportunity to compete, to contribute, to represent our beloved nation. It means having a chance to represent your heritage on the world stage. It means stepping into a system that sees your potential and gives you the tools to achieve it. So we must understand that. By widening this to our grandchildren, we are cultivating a larger community to young people. We are giving the chance for them to cultivate and to move further with our diaspora. This is especially critical for national sports.

Mr. President, this is not a new or sudden request. Media reports highlighted this. In fact, our national coach, Mr. Dwight Yorke, has indicated that he is all for this. Our former national coach, Mr. Angus Eve, is also saying that he is all for this. So let us give them what they desire. Let us give them what they

need. So let us all support this.

I want to remind colleagues—I am sure that you all would have heard about some great footballing stars, one such as Miroslav Klose. He is a German striker who holds the record for the most goals at the World Cup. Do you know that he was born, Mr. President, in Poland? And, believe it or not, we have a Polish man playing in Germany. I want to also remind you of a man by the name of Ivan Rakitić, born in Switzerland, and now he is playing for who? Croatia. Why? Because of Croatian grandparents.

Hon. Senator: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. B. Baig: “Yuh understand?” So these persons, they are qualified because they were able to play for these countries because of their lineage of the grandparents. So, we are seeing worldwide that this is nothing new. We are not inventing something. Everybody wants to get that chance. So, Mr. President—

Mr. President: We have a Procedural Motion and I call on the Leader of Government Business.

PROCEDURAL MOTION

Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Sen. The Hon. Darrell Allahar):
Thank you, Mr. President. In accordance with Standing Order 14(5), I beg to move that the Senate continue to sit until the completion of the business at hand.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. President: Continue, Sen. Baig.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

CONSTITUTION (AMDT.) BILL, 2025

Sen. B. Baig: Thank you, Mr. President. I want to turn now to some constitutional considerations and now we are talking about the law. These laws,

they have been changed since 1976, so we are moving on and we are going beyond. It would be remiss of me if I do not consider the constitutional issues of this Bill. It is a well-established principle that legislation should not offend the ad hominem doctrine. That doctrine provides that legislation should not target a specific individual or group, rather it should be based on general societal concerns and principles.

Mr. President, I want to refer you that there is a Privy Council ruling in *Liyanage v The Queen*, 1967. Lord Pearce indicated and explained ad hominem legislation, which targeted known individuals or groups of persons, was unconstitutional. However, His Lordship reasoned that the law should be:

“...intended for the generality of the citizens or designed as any improvement of the general law...”

Mr. President, any proposed legislative changes to the Constitution to accommodate a specific limited class of persons may also be considered to be enshrined, that it does not be discriminatory, contrary to fundamental human rights and freedoms. This, what we are doing here today, we are ensuring that we are not doing that. If the Government is to propose legislative measures which would inevitably benefit a limited class of persons, then we will have to demonstrate how these measures will be viewed as an indirect form of discriminatory, as a justified and proportionate means of achieving its goal of having a pool of candidates who may be eligible to represent Trinidad and Tobago in the international arena by facilitating applications for third-generation citizens. Quite briefly, as you all are aware, there is a plethora of cases which examine the principles of proportionality vis-à-vis the infringement of the fundamental rights and freedoms enjoyed by an individual.

Mr. President, I wish to refer again of the Privy Council ruling in a very known famous case, which was mentioned earlier, and I see it fit to raise it again, the *Kenneth Suratt and Others v the Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago*, 2007. I am surprised—I must agree with my colleague, Sen. Roberts. I am surprised I did not hear Sen. Al-Rawi raise this. He was famous for quoting this when he was in government. *Suratt and Others v the Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago* has confirmed that a proportionality test is to be used when balancing enshrined individual rights and legislative measures, which may curtail those rights having regard to the overriding public interest.

In *Suratt*, the constitutionality of the Equal Opportunity Act, Chap. 22:03 was an issue, and it has been passed by a simple majority and not pursuant to section 13 of the Constitution. The Privy Council, applying a two-step proportionality test, held that the Act was constitutional and there was no inconsistency with section 4 of rights and freedoms. The two-step test applied in *Suratt* was: Does the limitation of the fundamental right pursue a legislative aim, and if so, is a limitation proportioned to the aim?

In *Suraj*, the appellants claimed that regulations made in response to the coronavirus pandemic, which, inter alia, limited gatherings of people, were unconstitutional since the regulations would inconsistent with fundamental human rights protected by the Constitution, including the right to respect for private and family life, freedom of movement, freedom of conscience, and religious belief and observance, and freedom of association and assembly.

7.45 pm

In determining whether the restrictions implemented by the Public Health [2019 Novel Coronavirus] Regulations, 2020 were constitutional, a central matter

considered by the Privy Council was whether ordinary or subsidiary legislation can impugn upon the fundamental rights and freedoms set out in section 4 of the Constitution as long as it pursues a legitimate aim and proportionate to the aim as stated by Baroness Hale of Richmond in *Suratt*. The Privy Council reaffirmed, Mr. President, that, the rights in section 4 are qualified by a proportionality test and are not absolute.

Additionally, the Privy Council noted at paragraphs 71 and 93 respectively, that to interpret the rights in section 4 as absolute would conflict with the nature of Trinidad and Tobago as a democratic state.

Sen. Cummings: Standing Order 46(1) relevance.

Mr. President: Continue, please.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. B. Baig: Thank you, Mr. President. You see, Mr. President, when the PNM is being edified, they could never accept being edified. So, Mr. President, with this learning in mind, I would like to put it on record, that this Bill does not focus on any particular person, group or persons. But rather, it applies to any person with third generation lineal ties of Trinidad and Tobago throughout the globe who desires to represent T&T in anyway, any value, or any avenue, Mr. President. You want to raise a next Standing Order now? I hope you are edified.

Mr. President, I want to bring you now to the point of ensuring national security. Mr. President, let me clear the air on national security. This expansion of our national family will be built on a non-negotiable pillar of rigorous security. Authentic lineage requirements will eliminate mercenary arrangements.

Applicants must prove direct grandparent ties to Trinidad and Tobago, citizens, not financial capacity or sporting achievements alone. We are opening

the door to our diaspora but not compromising the safety of Trinidad and Tobago. We are a responsible Government. The amendment will be complemented by robust security screening procedures, developed in consultation with the Minister of Homeland Security. I hope I have answered the issues raised by Sen. Vieira.

Every single applicant under this new provision will be subject to the most stringent and comprehensive vetting and background checks. We will also be consistent with our international best practices for certain legitimate opportunities. This will include biometric and biographic screening, inter-agency checks with our law enforcement and our intelligence partners, and go through a thorough review of each individual's history.

Integration protocols will ensure new citizens understand their responsibilities while maximizing their contributions to the national development of Trinidad and Tobago. These protocols address concerns about citizenship without obligation, creating mutual benefit frameworks, rather than one-sided arrangements. We are inviting family home. We will take every necessary precaution to ensure the integrity of our citizenship and security of our nation, Mr. President.

Mr. President, the final point I want to raise on this is that I hear my friends in the PNM talking about this whole issue of national security, about immigration, but you know what I see when I hear that? It wrecks of PNM hypocrisy, and I will tell you why. I speak of a *Newsday* article dated Tuesday, 9th July 2024, where it says,

“Hinds: National Security...”

—not Hans eh.

“Hinds: National Security ‘very open’ to review...citizenship laws to

benefit sport.”

Their own National Security Minister at that time, the worst National Security Minister they ever had, he said that they were willing to look at it, willing to open the door, but the PNM now is against this. This is why on April 28th they were voted out of office. “Because one minute all yuh talking something good, and then all yuh against it. All yuh never cared about people. All yuh never cared about the nation and the people of Trinidad and Tobago.” That is why the PNM, Mr. President, stands for “People Never Matter”, Mr. President.

Imagine the same PNM wants to come here and talk about this, you all should hold your heads in shame, should hold your heads in shame. Mr. President, I will close by saying, the UNC here is led by the Kamla Persad-Bissessar to ensure that the people of this country will get proper governance. We are a Government that will listen and then act.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. B. Baig: I will say it again. When the UNC wins, our will footballers will win.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. B. Baig: When the UNC wins, our athletes will win.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. B. Baig: When the UNC wins, Trinidad and Tobago and our nation, we will win. Mr. President, with these few words, I thank you.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Sen. Vishnu Dhanpaul.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Vishnu Dhanpaul: Thank you, Mr. President, nice to see you again.

Hon. Senators: [*Laughter*]

Sen. V. Dhanpaul: Sen. Baig is a very tough act to follow, so I would not try. Mr. President, let me begin and get to the point. The Opposition is prepared to support the Bill, inclusive of clause 4(a). We are not prepared to support the Bill if it includes 4(b) and 4(c).

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. V. Dhanpaul: Straightforward and to the point. Mr. President, as you are aware, this Bill seeks to amend section 17(3) of the Constitution, to extend the granting of citizenship beyond parents of persons born outside of Trinidad and Tobago to now include grandparents of persons born outside of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. President, the amendment makes sense, especially the countries attempting to widen their pool of footballers and track and field athletes, or maybe sportsmen and sportswomen as a whole. However, Mr. President, as I have said, we cannot agree to the inclusion of clauses 4(b) and 4(c) in the Bill. It is too wide. To quote to hon. Leader of Opposition: "Persons who acquire citizenship through these circumstances, that is, these are the parents or the grandparents were born in Trinidad and Tobago, have no direct link to Trinidad and Tobago." According to the rules of FIFA, given that the discussion has centered around football and athletics, according to the rules of FIFA and World Athletics, these persons may not be eligible to represent Trinidad and Tobago, since they have no direct connection to the country. As far as I am aware, FIFA rules require a player to have a clear connection to the country to represent it.

Mr. President, there has been no explanation from the Government why

clauses 4(b) and 4(c) are included in the Bill. We are not too sure what is behind this, and what is the motive. Apparently, what we were told by the Government is that this piece of legislation, a policy, was outlined in the UNC's manifesto, and it is apparently written in stone. But, given the UNC's manifesto, the only thing I am sure was not written in stone was the elimination of the dirty float, the dirty, managed float, and the move to a devaluation.

Mr. President, let me respond to some of the issues outlined by the hon. Prime Minister, in a statement, I believe it was last Friday. The hon. Prime Minister, on the issue of potential voter-padding, as a result of the amendments to the Bill, stated, and she told the population, "Rest your fears. There will be strict application processes, a strict vetting process, strict safeguards, verification of lineage, digitization of application processes, fraud protection, strict checks and balances, and safeguards at every step to protect our security." However, Mr. President, we have had many similar safeguards in Trinidad that have not worked.

Mr. President, the hon. Prime Minister also spoke about the measures this measure: Encouraging engineers and doctors to come to TT. Nothing is wrong with that. But let me put out some other possible scenarios for the benefit of the hon. Prime Minister. And, Mr. President, let it be known that I have never given the hon. Prime Minister bad advice.

The hon. Prime Minister correctly stated that it is possible to find a Trini in every country. I agree with the hon. Prime Minister. And, one of those countries in which there are many grandparents and grandchildren connected to Trinidad and Tobago is Venezuela. Mr. President, hypothetically speaking, in this scenario, it will not be difficult for a Venezuelan terrorist group to recruit a grandchild as a clandestine member of their group to gain citizenship and a Trinidad and Tobago

passport, and gain legal access to this country. It is very much not far-fetched because now these new shady citizens can disappear and blend into the population and create a security nightmare within their sleeper cells. It is not a far-fetched idea at all. It is something that the population needs to know.

Mr. President, Members on the other side also spoke about the Bill increasing the possibility of increasing remittances. Mr. President, from my experiences with remittances, that is a zero-possibility. Remittances right now amount to less than one per cent of GDP. That has been so for decades. You know why? Because we are a unique country in a developing world. This is one of the few countries in the world where the residents of the host country, meaning Trinidad and Tobago, send money for their relatives who went abroad to live the American dream. So it operates just the opposite of achieving remittances in Trinidad. That is why the figure is so small. We send the money to them.

You know what is a very good example of that, Mr. President? Do you know that the senior citizens grant, I am just using an example of how this thing operates, with all the checks and balances of the senior citizens grant, do you know that there are citizens of Trinidad and Tobago living in Canada and the United States who are collecting senior citizens grant in Trinidad and Tobago? They probably never did anything to increase the national income of Trinidad and Tobago in decades. But they are collecting a senior citizens grant in Trinidad and Tobago. And they have passed all the means tests, all the means tests.

Hon. Senators: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. President: Senators, I am trying to hear. I am trying to follow, but there is a running commentary on this side. Could you allow the Senator to speak in silence, please? Continue.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

8.00 p.m.

Sen. V. Dhanpaul: I was speaking about the senior citizens grant and the fact that people were able to beat the means test. But just some more advice for the hon. Prime Minister, if you want to test the patriotism of your diaspora, let the Ministry of Finance issue a diaspora bond, okay? Let us see the appetite for that issue among the diaspora. I will tell you this, there are certain administrations—I would not call the name—it was contemplated to issue a diaspora bond. There was absolutely no appetite for it among the diaspora, none. The idea was to hive off a piece of an actual US \$500 million bond and leave it for the diaspora to participate. Nothing transpired. That is the level of interest, and that was not long ago. I cannot date it.

Sen. Roberts: How long ago?

Sen. V. Dhanpaul: It was not long ago.

Sen. Roberts: Tell me.

Sen. V. Dhanpaul: But if you say a number, I will whistle.

Sen. Roberts: 2010?

[*Sen. Dhanpaul whistles*]

Hon. Senators: [*Laughter*]

Sen. V. Dhanpaul: So, you know, Mr. President, these fellas—I stayed very quiet when they were speaking, but anyway, the budget debate will come. So if they wanted to test the waters of the diaspora issue, the issue of diaspora bond, let us see; let us see the interest of the diaspora in the domestic economy, and it could be twofold. You will see the interest of the diaspora in the domestic economy, and this is something Sen. Swaratsingh would not know about. It will

help the budget. It will help finance the budget. Piece of advice for the Prime Minister. And it is not a novel idea, it is nothing new, try it. I have one question for the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs or the proxy, or the Parliamentary Secretary. Obviously, the athletes attracted to Trinidad and Tobago will want to participate in the Elite Athlete Assistance Programme. Is it possible that an athlete could access the assistance from the Elite Athlete Assistance Programme and then disappear? What you have to remember, Mr. President, is that the people involved in this, the participants, if this Bill is approved, each person involved will have two passports. They will have options; they can participate in the Elite Athlete Assistance Programme and disappear. They have another country to go to. Can I get an assurance from the Government that they will put things in place to avoid that? Or just tell me I am going mad.

The second thing is, these individuals will also have access to the Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses, GATE. Again, Mr. President, I want you to keep in mind that these individuals will invariably have two passports. It is highly possible that these new citizens will access GATE to become lawyers, to become doctors, to become engineers, become accountants, free of charge. And with the second passport, guess what? Disappear. There is nothing to keep them here; there is no contract. How do you avoid this situation? I would like some feedback from the Government, please.

So, in summary, Mr. President, I cannot envisage any great impact of this Bill on remittances. I cannot envisage a “brain regain” as coined by Wendell Mottley 1994. I cannot envisage an influx of lawyers, doctors, and nurses through the promise of citizenship. In fact, our doctors and nurses who are already citizens are the ones who are first to migrate.

Sen. Roberts: They run from the PNM, but it has no PNM anymore.

Sen. V. Dhanpaul: In closing, Mr. President—

Sen. Roberts:—I will resign from the PNM.

Sen. V. Dhanpaul:—I would like to draw a parallel between this grandparents Bill. Again, I use the words, it is not a farfetched parallel, and the Citizenship by Investment Programme, very popular in several Caricom countries. While the mechanics and intent of both programmes are different, the negative consequences are very similar. The Citizenship by Investment Programme's stated intent was to provide citizenship for a certain level of investment into the country. Mr. President, the programme started innocently enough with legitimate applications, cheques and balances galore throughout the process. However, in the last few years, even with all the cheques and balances of the programme it seems to have lost its moorings to the extent—and this is very critical—that the United States threatened to impose travel restrictions on the Caricom countries with Citizenship by Investment Programmes citing the following concerns: security vulnerabilities, lack of transparency, potential misuse by illicit actors. This programme attracted the Russian oligarchs, I do not know if you are aware of that, Mr. President, without proper vetting and monitoring.

Mr. President, the Trinidad and Tobago authorities need to take a bigger, better look at this, and take careful note of the response of the United States to the failure of the Citizenship by Investment Programme. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Sen. Michael Simon de la Bastide.

Sen. Michael Simon Victor de la Bastide SC: Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, the framers of the Constitution obviously thought that to be entitled as a

right to citizenship, a person should have a strong nexus with this country. In that regard, under section 17 of the Constitution, the right to citizenship is reserved only for those persons who are born here or whose parent was a citizen otherwise than by descent as at the date of the person's birth. Or if a person has acquired citizenship by descent, it means that he or she was not born here, but either their parent was born here or the parent acquired citizenship by a process known as registration or by a process known as naturalization. Now, those processes are set out in the Citizenship of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago Act, and basically, they provide a pathway by which Commonwealth citizens and non-Commonwealth citizens can acquire citizenship in Trinidad.

But one of the things they must show is that they have either worked here under the Government or lived here, or a mixture of both for a period of, I believe, for the Commonwealth citizens by registration, it is five years and the non-Commonwealth citizens it is one year living here and then five years—within a period of seven years, five years of living here or working for the Government. So, in effect, in order to be entitled to citizenship under the Constitution as of right, you either have to be born here or your parents were born here, or your parents either resided here or worked for the Government or both for a period of time.

Now, it seems obvious that the persons who are born here ought to be entitled to citizenship as of right, not simply because of their connection with the country, but by virtue of the fact that these are the persons who will make up our population, these are the persons that give our state life. They make the State a viable state. It is these persons, the persons who are born here, that contribute to the State simply by living here, working and producing here, earning their income here, spending their money here, and paying taxes here. Without the people who

are born here, we have no economy, and without an economy, we have no State. People who are living abroad, whether they are grandchildren, they are not the people who form our population, and they are not making the contribution that persons who are born here do.

Of course, people who are born here, their contribution goes beyond what I have described, they are the people who are here participating and supporting our charitable organizations, and our social programmes. They are the ones who create our culture, and they are the ones who develop our culture by participating in our cultural and religious celebrations; Carnival, the steelband movements, parang, and all of the religious celebrations, whether it is Hosay, Phagwa, Divali, Christmas, it is the people here who are born here. These are the people who have to stick with the country through thick and thin, they are here for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer and in sickness and in health. Some will leave, but the fact remains, Mr. President, that it is the majority that will stay, and it is they that will form the population. They are not here for holiday, they are not here to spend their retirement away from the cold, and they are not citizens just for a convenient passport. And therefore, it is only right that the Constitution should confer on them as a right, citizenship of this country, and it is only right that the Constitution should confer on their children citizenship even if those children are not born in the country.

Now, the Constitution (Amdt.) Bill, 2025, if passed into law, will extend the category of persons on whom the Constitution confers citizenship as of right. First of all, we have persons who are born outside of Trinidad and Tobago who have a parent who acquired citizenship by way of descent. So it means, Mr. President, that those newly created citizens acquired citizenship automatically,

notwithstanding that neither they nor their parents were born in this country. And then the other category that will become citizens under this Bill, if it is passed, are persons who are born outside of Trinidad and Tobago and whose parents were not citizens of Trinidad and Tobago at the date of their birth, but whose grandparents are citizens, including by descent. These persons will also acquire citizenship as of right.

Now, it does seem that after a few generations, Mr. President, it will be the case that no person will have to rely on a grandparent to acquire citizenship. As by then, all parents, whether they have been born in or out of the country, would have acquired citizenship from the grandparent and will be able to pass that on to the children. So eventually there will never be a case where a child's parent did not have citizenship, but his grandparent did have. Except perhaps where the parent may have renounced their citizenship. So, in summary, neither the persons in this new category of persons who receive citizenship automatically nor their parents would have been born here. And it is therefore very likely that their parents will have never lived here.

8.15 p.m.

And, if they are not born here—these persons that are now acquiring citizenship—and their parents were not born here and never lived here, then it is very likely that these persons will never seek to live or work here, or to make Trinidad their home. It is very likely that they will not seek to make any contribution to this country, and that is reasonable to expect because this is not their home, and this is not their parents' home.

Indeed, in cases where a person acquired citizenship from a grandparent who has acquired their citizenship by descent, it would be the case that neither the

person's parent nor the grandparent was born in Trinidad and Tobago or ever lived in this country and therefore, never made any contribution to this country. In that case, I would just like to say this, Mr. President. The most recent ancestor of that person to have lived and worked here and made a contribution to this country may be their great-grandparent, who may have lived here but left here over 100 years ago. So, it is very unlikely that that person, this newly created citizen, would have any interest in Trinidad and Tobago.

But that 100-year period, as I read this section, could be even longer, because the great-grandparent from whom the grandparent acquired citizenship by descent, he or she may have acquired, under this Act, their citizenship by descent. So, as you—

Hon. Senator: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. M. de la Bastide SC: No, no, we are not going from—but what I am saying is, as time passes from the passage of this Act, as one non-resident citizen passes their citizenship on to another generation, and so it goes, you will end up having a citizen whose most recent ancestor to have lived in this country could be five/six generations away. Now, that is not going to happen now but that is where this Act leads to, because every grandparent, every ancestor, every generation is able to pass their citizenship onto the following generation, and they do not have to live here. They do not have to live here, they do not have to contribute.

And so we get to a situation—and I think Sen. Foster Cummings talked about it—just within two or three generations, but certainly over a period of five/six generations, you are going to get persons who are citizens, but they do not know where Trinidad is. They have never heard of the place because so many years have passed since one of their ancestors lived here, but they are entitled to

come and live here, to come and use our services, our public services, to come and get a T&T passport. And, I say they would not know where Trinidad is, they would not know where it is, because when I go abroad now, people still do not know where Trinidad is. We are still the most educated people I know, but they do not know where Trinidad is. If you are lucky, they would ask you, is that in Africa, is that in Jamaica? So, imagine, generations pass, and this person has citizenship, but their knowledge of Trinidad and their association with Trinidad has long been lost in the midst of time. That cannot be right.

So, needless to say, Mr. President, I think it is plainly wrong to confer automatic citizenship on a particular category of persons, when it is almost certainly the case that at the very least, the majority or a substantial percentage of persons in that category will not live or work here, or make any meaningful contribution to the country, or have any real connection to or interest in the country. That is where this legislation takes us.

Citizenship, Mr. President, it carries with it benefits, which, as a matter of law, must be provided. I would not repeat those; those have been set out already. But citizenship, I would say, also carries certain duties. Perhaps the most important of these is to contribute, in some way, to the good of the country.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. M. de la Bastide SC: However, those duties are not usually legally enforceable. It is up to the citizen himself or herself to fulfil those duties.

So, one of the dangers of giving away citizenship to persons who have no real ties or connection to or interest in this country is that they exercise those rights in a cynical and mercenary manner, because they do not feel they have any duty to this country, because it is not their home. People will use the danger, as other

contributors have suggested, that they acquire the passport just to avoid visa restrictions, or they come here to retire from the cold. After they have lived their productive life, and they have invested in the country where they come from, and they have contributed, they come and they say, “Okay, well, time to retire. Trinidad is a warm place, I will come here.” Because they can exercise their right to reside here.

So, Mr. President, in that context, I believe it is a slap in the face for those citizens who have contributed to this country by living and working here, and seeing the country through, and experiencing themselves the bad times and the good times, and who have, through their collective efforts, worked hard towards the development of the country, to be now told that someone who has never lived or worked here, or contributed to this country in any meaningful way is to have the same citizenship rights and benefits which they enjoy.

I am not against providing those persons with a grandparent who was born here, or a parent who has acquired citizenship by descent from a grandparent who was born here, a pathway to citizenship, provided they can show that they have real and substantial ties to this country, and/or that they are likely to make a contribution to the country, even if it is simply by coming here, living here, working here. What I am against is conferring citizenship automatically on persons who fall into that category, or even into the broader category of persons entitled to citizenship which will be created by this Bill, if it is passed into law.

The pathway I refer to, by which this can be done, can be created legislatively in a number of ways. One is to pass legislation which provides for persons who have grandparents born here, or parents who have acquired citizenship by descent, to apply for citizenship, provided they meet a certain

criteria. The criteria can include, for example, that they intend to live and work for a period of time, or that they own property here, or that their immediate families reside in the country, or a combination of all of those things.

If the application is made on the basis that they will do certain things in the future, say to live and work here for a period of time, then the legislation can provide that the person is entitled to live and work here for a period of time, after which, if they have in fact lived and worked here, they can apply for citizenship. This is a model that I am aware that the United Kingdom certainly had in place. I am not sure if they still have it. But, if you had a grandparent in the UK, and you wanted to come and settle in the UK, you got a work visa for five years, at the end of which you were allowed to apply for citizenship.

Hon. Senator: It still exists.

Sen. M. de la Bastide SC: It still exists, I am told. So that would show that you have an interest in the country, you are willing to commit, you are willing to contribute. So, I have no problem with that. If the diaspora wants to come and contribute, legislate for that.

I cannot say that I have heard any good reason for the type of amendment that would grant citizenship over generations to people who have no contact here. It is said that the legislation—we have heard a lot about sports, about having it facilitate elite sportsmen to represent this country. Well, assuming you are okay with people who are not connected here really, representing your country, simply if you want them to be citizens, simply legislate a pathway for that.

You have a pathway for commonwealth citizens to become citizens. You have a pathway by registration. You have a pathway already for persons who are non-commonwealth citizens to become citizens. Well, have a pathway for persons

who have indicated that they want to represent the country and the Minister is satisfied that they have the requisite skills to do that on an international level, and that they have a grandparent who was born here.

I heard this thing about *ad hominem*—the suggestion that the legislation would be *ad hominem*. I think people misunderstand the *ad hominem* objection to laws. It was raised when we had the Pensions Act. It was raised by the Opposition. I said then, *ad hominem* legislation is legislation which is passed to try to, if you like, skew the result of court proceedings, to try to make sure that somebody is convicted. This has nothing to do with court proceedings. I do not know how this could be unconstitutional. We already have a legislation that, as I said, creates a pathway for commonwealth citizens and a different pathway for non-commonwealth citizens. So, I am not sure that there is any merit—I do not think there is any merit that legislation would be unconstitutional, that legislation providing for a pathway for persons who have grandparents that were Trinidadian that want to come and represent Trinidad internationally.

They say it will increase—the legislation would increase remittances. I really cannot see how that would be so. It seems obvious to me that people send money back to this country, to the extent that they do, out of family bonds, bonds of love, family. I do not see how that is that because I am a citizen, all of a sudden, I am going to start sending money back to the country. I cannot see that.

So, I think this legislation is taking us—Sen. Foster Cummings was talking about Italy. From what my research tells me, Italy did have, at one time, legislation that allowed anybody who could show that they had a descendant, an ancestor that was Italian, no matter how far back, they could get citizenship. And they have changed that. Surely, we do not want that. And other contributors have, and I am

not going to repeat what they have said, they have said all the dangers associated with that.

Finally, Mr. President, there seems to have been little analysis carried out to determine what are the practical implications of conferring citizenship to this new, broad, ever-growing category of persons that, under this Bill, will get citizenship automatically. We live in an increasingly unpredictable world. We have had the pandemic, and no doubt there is a risk of something like that happening again. We have conflicts occurring in unexpected places. I am referring here to the war in Europe between Ukraine and Russia. The point is that it is entirely possible that world events may occur which suddenly make this country an attractive place to seek refuge, or we may go through an economic boom at the same time other countries are suffering economically, causing newly acquired citizens to migrate here for economic reasons.

8.30 p.m.

So it is not farfetched, you know, that people may think, “Well yeah I give them the citizenship” because they are not really from here, which in itself is an argument not to give them. But, if they do decide they are giving them, if they do decide to come here, do we have—in large numbers—a reliable estimate of how many new citizens would be immediately added to our population as a result of such an amendment? If a significant percentage of those new citizens were to choose to move permanently to this country, do we know how that will impact our economy? Do we know how that will impact our national infrastructure? Our public services? It seems to me—in addition to all the other reasons that are given, why I do not agree with this Bill—that if you are going to change the criteria under which persons will get citizenship automatically, you will have to carry out some

kind of analysis of the type that I have described. Certainly, if it is going to lead to a large number of new citizens.

So, Mr. President, for the reasons I have stated in this contribution, I am not, at present, in favour of the Bill before us today. Thank you, Mr. President.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Okay. I would like to suggest that we suspend for another period of 45 minutes.

Hon. Senator: What?!

Hon. Senators: [*Laughter*]

Mr. President: Or—you all find 45 is too much?

Hon. Senators: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. President: Alright. Let us say half an hour. Take a half an hour and we will come back at two minutes past nine.

8.32 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

9.02 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. President: Sen. The Hon. Philip Alexander.

Minister in the Ministry of Housing (Sen. The Hon. Philip Alexander): Mr. President, thank you very much for this wonderful opportunity to stand here today in my pink suit, according to my colleague, and contribute to this most worthwhile piece of legislation. And, I would like to thank the hon. Prime Minister, Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC, for having the vision to see this through.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. P. Alexander: We have information from that side that they wanted to do this. This was their plan. They wanted to do this, but could not do what are we doing.

Mr. President, before I get into the substance of what I wanted to say, I just want to address the hon. Senators on the other side. I wanted to deal with Sen. de la Bastide's worst-case scenario of people with no ties to this country running to Trinidad because we passed this law. Now, Trinidad has, for all intents and purposes, and has had for quite some time, a negative population growth. Our experience has been of people fleeing this country. So to say that we are going to pass a law today and tens of thousands of people are going to run back to Trinidad and Tobago that is not necessarily a bad thing. That is bringing our people home and contributing to the tax collection that we have been talking about, and making Trinidad and Tobago a better place.

We are viewing this Bill through narrow lens of sport and forgetting the massive contributions that Trinidadians and Tobagonians have made to this world, and that to quote that song, "Trini 2 De Bone":

"There's no place like home, some people say,
Though some have to leave to make their way".

That has been the experience for a lot of people. That has been the experience for my brother. My brother ended up in the White House in the United States of America. Trinidadians operate at the highest level all around the world, but they "doh" want to be away from home. It is just circumstances for the people related to all of us warranting that they go somewhere else to maximize their abilities. Along the way their children are born outside, and those children should have a claim to where mummy and daddy come from.

Viewing it just as a sports Bill, while it would have in that narrow confine, a massive impact, because in 2023 Soca Warriors head coach Angus Eve said:

"Chap. 2 section 17(2) of the Constitution states that 'A person shall not

become a citizen of TT if at the time of his birth—(a) neither of his parents is a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago.’

This law...Angus Eve said, is detrimental and hampering the expansion of Trinidad of Tobago’s football, and its player pool, while small nations capitalize on available players and move forward.”

That is just the narrow lens of football, but this will impact every other type of sport. Basketball, somebody was talking about basketball. Tennis, a lot of our tennis players, our swimmers, we have people that are functional in every sport all around the world. This will open the door to those who, for want of a better term, needed help to get back here and will help us. It will take us higher on the global stage, but it would also bring people in other skill sets, other disciplines that would assist in the development of Trinidad and Tobago, for the most part has been stunted.

I compare Trinidad and Tobago with Singapore and I have compared those two countries for almost a decade. In 1962, both those countries’ stories start—Singapore was expelled from Malaysia, and Trinidad and Tobago got Independence and we had a population of 880,000. They had a population of 1.7 million, but Trinidad and Tobago is seven times the size of Singapore. Singapore’s population is five times the size of Trinidad’s population, because they knew that to be able to play on the big stage, they had to show up in numbers. Trinidad’s population could easily be 10 million people. Easily. And function takes us to that level, develops us to that level. We do ourselves a disservice if we continue to view Trinidad and Tobago as if it is backward; it is a backwater of 1.4 million people. It is time for us to think bigger.

Sen. Dhanpaul spoke about Venezuelans using this Bill to create sleeper cells

to detonate themselves. But I just wanted to ask, under the last administration, their government, tens of thousands of Venezuelans were legitimately allowed into this country and they could be detonating themselves every day. What is to stop them? They do not need this Bill. They are here already. And there was no vetting, they were here, they came in, however they get in, and they give them ID cards. What is to stop them from detonating themselves? This was not a correct objection. The reality of our situation is our country. Our Constitution must evolve to reflect the lived experiences of our people, especially those whose grandparents laid the foundation of this nation. This amendment allows us to honour that legacy by extending citizenship by the descent to grandchildren through their grandparents. The proposed changes to section 17(3) are precise, deliberate and legally sound. They do not open floodgates, they simply widen the doorway for those with legitimate ancestral ties. This is where the conversation should have gone, but we chose to look at it from the position of voter padding. For voter padding to be an issue to affect this country, thousands of people have to come back and live here.

9.10 p.m.

To live here, you have to be able to pay your bills. You have to pay your rent or your mortgage, buy your food, groceries, water, and transportation, so you either have to be gainfully employed in Trinidad and Tobago, paying taxes, or bring your retirement fund here when you are coming. But it is not like people could just hop on a plane, fly to Trinidad, vote, and go back. It does not work that way. So all of those objections, while fear-mongering, do not hold up to reality.

The language of the law has been carefully amended to include grandparents and citizens by descent while preserving the safeguards already in place. This

reform strengthens our national identity, expands our talent pool, and deepens our connection with the diaspora. It aligns us with international norms, especially in sport where eligibility through grandparents is already standard practice.

This is not a political manoeuvre. It is a constitutional refinement. It does not grant automatic citizenship. It maintains the requirement for legal verification and lineage. It does not dilute our sovereignty. It reinforces it by embracing those who already belong to us in spirit and heritage. Let us not be held back by fear or factionalism. Let us move forward with clarity, compassion, and constitutional courage. This is our chance to say to the world, “If your roots are here, your future could be here, too”.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. P. Alexander: Mr. President, during the COVID pandemic, that was another issue that was raised. Countries in the Caribbean started renting and selling citizenship. You could buy into any of these countries when the world realized that you did not have to go to an office in Times Square or in Toronto in the cold and winter. A lot of people who have no ties to Caribbean countries—

Hon. Senator: [*Inaudible*]*—*the people in Barbados.

Sen. The Hon. P. Alexander: Correct. Yeah, we demonstrated that Trinidadians can survive in Barbados. The reality is the truth that our people, who are descendants of Trinidadians and Tobagonians, have a rightful claim here. We are correcting something that should have been corrected a long time ago. We have suffered economic downturns, recessions, and hiccups that forced people out of this country. This Government is fixing all of it, and if people want to come back here, it is because this Government is fixing the country.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. P. Alexander: It is because Trinidad is a good place to live again. It is because people are thinking that it is possible for us to end the drug trade, the corruption, and all of the gang violence and madness that has made Trinidad and Tobago the failed nation it almost was. So if it is possible then for us to reclaim our people, then let us do that.

This amendment is not just about legal language. It is about real lives. It is about a grandchild of a Trinidadian who dreams of wearing our red, white, and black on the international stage, but is blocked by a technicality in our citizenship laws. It is about families split across borders who cook our food, speak our dialect, celebrate our festivals, but are told they do not legally belong. They feel Trinidadian in every way that matters, and we celebrate them.

This morning, Gerard Anthony Joseph was on *TTT* via Zoom, because he is in—I think it is the number one movie right now or getting there—*President Down*. He is the villain in *President Down*. He had to leave Trinidad and Tobago—I think it was 1987. I know, because he was my martial arts teacher when he was in Trinidad operating in St. Finbar's Church. A lot of people knew him when he was here in Trinidad. He had to pack up, take his family, and go abroad to find his way. We celebrate our Trinidadians when they make it on the world stage. Why can we not then make it possible for our Trinidadians to come back home and celebrate themselves here as well?

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. P. Alexander: This law personalizes the policies. Senators are not just voting on a clause; they are voting on someone's future. It builds moral urgency. The law is outdated, and real people are paying the price in a time when the world is trying to erase borders. We should be doing the same. It invites

empathy across party lines. Everyone has a family. Everyone understands legacy—all of the above and more. I rise today not merely to speak to a clause in our Constitution, but to speak to a principle, one that touches the very heart of who we are as a nation. This is not about party lines. This is about modernizing our citizenship laws to reflect the realities of our diaspora and global families.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. P. Alexander: Mr. President, we are here today to do good work. We are here today to right a long-standing wrong. For too long, we have been wandering tribes. For too long, it meant nothing to be a Trinidadian and a Tobagonian. For too long, it was too easy to have nothing to claim. This law—these few lines—this much effort today fixes that. All through this world, people could point to countries and claim belonging to a Mother India, Mother Africa, Mother China, Mother Syria, but to Trinbagonians, one generation or two generations later, disconnected and left to wander with no claim. This Bill fixes that.

Mr. President, we are here to do good work. All of us who take pride in being a Trinidadian and Tobagonian—make no mistake, the number one reason for all of us being in this House doing this work requires pride in this country and love for this country. And this work we do today—these few lines of this Bill—gives Trinidadians and Tobagonians far flung all over this globe, a connection back with home, with Mother Trini.

This Bill creates the opportunity for Trinbagonians who have no place else to call home, home. And when it is time for a family to look to home, this Bill gives them that connection. It is not just about footballers, cricketers, netball players, and tennis players. It is not about sportspeople. It is not just about doctors

and lawyers and every type of discipline that can advance our stake in the world, but it is about identity. This is about unifying a culture.

This Bill—these few words can end the separation that politicians have used to divide us by creating an identity that now unites us. We all come from somewhere. Yes, our foreparents came from other places, but this, Trinidad and Tobago, is our home and for—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. P. Alexander:—our children and the other generations born at sea, and the generations born in other lands, they can now apply to claim Trinidad and Tobago as home. Mr. President, that is good work. For all of us in this House, we get to have pride in our identity. This small island, we treat it with such scant courtesy and disrespect. Mr. President, I know that very few opportunities will present themselves to us to vote together for something good. This Bill allows us to do that. This Bill could unite this House in doing good work today. I hope that everyone here who loves this country, who feels pride in Trinidad and Tobago, takes the opportunity here to send a message to all our people, far flung all across the world, “yuh could come home”. Thank you, Mr. President.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Roberts-Radgman.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Melanie Roberts-Radgman: Good evening, Mr. President, and thank you for the opportunity to join the debate at this time. You know, Mr. President, as I sit and I listen to those on the other side with—it seems somewhat like a false sense of patriotism that has somewhat founded itself on the other side, and some sort of commitment to the red, white, and black, as they call it. I cannot help but wonder,

since when does love of country become such a thing of convenience? Mr. President, it was just less than three weeks ago that the nation was ripped of our Independence Day celebrations.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman: We were ripped off of our key and our main annual opportunity to really splurge and to celebrate all red, white, and black. We have not forgotten it. It is still very soon. We have not forgotten it. When we first received the Order Paper, and I started contemplating this Bill, and what my contribution might look like—much like Sen. Attzs—DenisePlummer’s “Nah Leaving” kept playing in my head, especially that part where she says:

“Meh navel strings so deep and freedom doh come cheap”

And then she goes on to say:

“Is here wey conceive me”

That part:

“Is here wey conceive me, is here ah go dead.”

It keeps on coming over and over in the refrain. I had to pause and think to myself, really and truly, what makes a person—just in a very general sense of speaking—a citizen of a country?

Is it really just a legal device of sorts, some sort of status that is documented within a passport? Is it a transactional designation, something that we just hand out for convenience? Is it something that we just give to someone with maybe a remote tie to the country? We allow them the highest claim, a high degree of access to our rights, liberties, freedoms, protections, or privileges, just for the sake of a transaction, without any real emotional connection.

Now, I am a student of—if you want to call it Greek political thought, Mr.

President. So I started doing some reading, and I noted that the ancient Greeks saw citizenship to be both a privilege and an obligation. To the Greeks, it was rooted in loyalty to the State and—this is the part that really gets me—participation in its affairs. It was seen as a bond that was not forged by kinship, but rather one that really connected the person to the State itself. It was almost, I do not want to say a spiritual thing, but that is almost how the Greeks viewed it. Your citizenship was something that was sacred to you. It really connected you on a very personal level with the State in which you lived and worked and contributed to, and where you gained certain benefits, certain privileges, and certain protections from.

There were two elements that stood out that were really distinct, and I think connect our concept here in Trinidad and Tobago—our concept of citizenship, and it is the notion of the State in which boundaries are contained and which power is centralized, which we call our Government. And then, the second element is the inhabitants of the State who participated through the performance of various roles and relationships. For purposes of this debate, I want to focus just on the second element, and that is the inhabitants of the State who participate through various roles and relationships.

Essentially, what this refers to is persons living in the State, or living within the country, with a vested interest in the affairs of the State, and who actively participate in the State. And it signals a very real, a very sincere type of connection to the place that one was born, and perhaps to a lesser but somewhat legitimate degree, to the place that your parents were born.

What the Government proposes here, however, confers upon a person who essentially has no real connection to Trinidad and Tobago—essentially a stranger to Trinidad and Tobago, the full suite of rights, freedoms, and privileges that the

rest of us have earned and worked so hard to preserve. The thing is, we need to understand that citizenship is not just a physical document. It is not just your passport or something that you just get. It was, I think, Robert A. Heinlein who said it best. He said:

“Citizenship is an attitude, a state of mind, an emotional conviction that the whole is greater than the part, and that the part should be humbly proud to sacrifice itself that the whole may live.”

It is:

“...an emotional conviction that the whole...”—meaning the country in this context, our great Republic of Trinidad and Tobago—“...is greater than the part...”—meaning the individual citizen, and the individual citizen would—“...sacrifice itself...”—so—“...that the whole...”—meaning our country—“...may live.”

Here, what he is speaking about is an emotional conviction that leads a citizen of a country to sacrifice him or herself for the country. Is this something that we really ought to take so lightly that we would seek to confer upon persons with very little ties to Trinidad and Tobago, persons unconnected by birth, persons not even connected by the birth of their parents, not even the birth of grandparents, and we will take something so sacred, something so sincere, and then we will just hand it over to this person for the sake of a transaction, for the sake of convenience?

Mr. President, there are reasons, real, real reasons, why countries hold fast to that birth requirement, eh. It amazes me that this Government will now seek to erode the sanctity of what it means to be a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago. I wish to very strongly caution the Senate—this very Senate, against knee-jerk, impulsive, ill-advised decisions, especially when matters of national security and sanctity are

concerned. We ought to let the current and unprecedented predicament in which we have found ourselves in right now, be our guide. Let that serve as a cautionary tale of what happens when we just do things on a whim.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman: Now, Mr. President, even if we moved away from the sort of feel-good and emotional arguments that many of us have spoken about today, and if we decide to turn away from what we would call the emotional, the geographic, and the cultural facets of citizenship, I would urge us at least to look at the practical realities of what this Bill purports to do.

Sen. Nakhid, when he made his presentation—when he piloted the Bill, he touched very briefly on the legal safeguards that might be put in place for vetting applicants. Other Senators in their contributions would have cautioned about it and asked for more information about whatever safeguards might be put in place. I am hoping that at some point, we will hear a little bit more about that. But, see, the thing is, for those of us already living in Trinidad and Tobago, we are painfully aware of the administrative nightmare that is accessing any kind of civil service across the country.

Now, let us look at the practical reality of having to go through an extensive vetting process. Imagine the kind of burden that this puts on our systems, on our physical resources, and our human resources, who must now verify documents across several generations—not just one or two generations. We are talking about three, maybe even more generations.

Consider the practical issues around missing records, fraud, forgeries, and being unable to verify information properly that the civil registries, the courts, and all of our systems now have to contend with. Sen. Attzs put it actually quite

eloquently when she spoke about the frustration and embarrassment that might arise from placing this kind of strain on an already not-so-efficient system. And, while we are talking about the strain on resources, we also have to consider the risk of financial strain. Several Senators would have also pointed to that as well.

Hon. Senator: [*Interruption*]

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman: Mr. President, if I could make my contribution without disturbance, thank you. I remember Sen. Nakhid also. He mentioned in his presentation the term “external shocks”. Maybe it was not the best context there, but the term does have some relevance in this debate. We are, as a nation, very vulnerable to external shocks. We are a rentier State, if you want to call us that, and we are all very aware of the fiscal impact that our reliance on hydrocarbons has had on the economy. Even this Government has continued to belabour our financial position at this time. How then, considering the state that we are in at this present time, can the Government advocate for a constitutional amendment that directly leads to the widening of the pool of persons who now have a direct and unchecked right to access the free health care, the free education, and all the other public services that our Government has to fund—and now at an increased cost—might I add, without any proportional increase in tax revenue?

Now, connected to this point, is the fact that with these amendments, what this Government is doing or seeking to do is also recklessly provide those abroad with the advantages that citizenship brings without expecting them to share in the burden of what we call civic life, daily life, living in Trinidad and Tobago.

Again, other Senators would have alluded to it. I will wrap it up by saying this. This quote comes from the great Theodore Roosevelt.

“The first requisite of a good citizen in this Republic of ours is that he shall

be able and willing to pull his own weight.”

You see, it is very easy to connect with the fun aspects of being Trinbagonian. Everybody loves our music, they love our culture, the vibe that we have, our food, you know, it is nice. Everybody likes the Trinidadian accent. The slang is easy to connect with. It does not take somebody with even a grandparent from Trinidad and Tobago to connect with that. But at the end of the day, you have to ask yourself this: “When de soca stops, de doubles run out, and de lime done, who really and truly is left waving our flag”? It is really us.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman: “And de coffee done too, or de coffee geh cold.” Really and truly, it is us that are left waving our flag.

9.30 p.m.

And to be fair, Mr. President, it is not lost on me the stated outcomes that the Government hopes to achieve. They are legitimate outcomes, if they are what they say they are. And, you know, if we take those intentions as being pure—and I am having some difficulty believing that the intentions are pure, especially given Sen. Al-Rawi’s very careful contribution of FIFA eligibility rules. I would think that that would be something that the Government would have considered, especially seeing that this Bill was initially piloted to address the issues of widening the pool of applicable athletes. But nonetheless, if we were supposed to still give some benefit of the doubt, then perhaps we need to ask ourselves, is there a more appropriate way of realizing these outcomes?

Now, the Government would have spoken about remittances and foreign investments and that kind of thing, but can we not achieve a similar outcome through the development of maybe a more modern, more investor-friendly, legal

and regulatory framework? It was just a few months ago that we sat here and saw the Government repeal the TTRA, whose mandate, among other things, was to address deficiencies such as this. The TTRA was brought into being as a result of a real recognition that we needed to improve our anti-business rules and regulations here. The Government voted to repeal the TTRA.

Sen. Vishnu—

Sen. Smith: Mr. President, 46(1).

Hon. Senator: What? Be serious.

Mr. President: I would not uphold that but what I would advise is that we cannot revive, in accordance with the Standing Order, a decision that has been taken by the Senate, and that is the repeal, until six months after. So I would ask you to be very cautious when you are going down that road.

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman: Thank you for your guidance, Mr. President. The idea is not to revive it but just to say that there are other means of reaching the outcomes that the Government hopes to reach, whereby by introducing this amendment. There are other ways to get there. That is the point I am making. But I will move on, Mr. President.

Even my colleague, Sen. Dhanpaul, would have already addressed the feasibility of issuing diaspora bonds. So we have seen where there are different ways for us to get to these outcomes. If they are legitimate ones, there are other ways, less preposterous ways, might I add, of achieving these outcomes. Similarly, the Government also spoke about avoiding brain drain and encouraging what they call “brain regain”. I think it was Sen. Attzs who would have cautioned about, again, the need for a developed policy framework in order to properly support this objective.

I want to go a bit further by saying this. It is an old Trinbagonian saying that old people like to say. “Learn to dance ah yard before yuh dance abroad”. The idea here is that perhaps before we start focusing on brain regain or bringing in skills here, perhaps we need to focus on ensuring that we are creating opportunities right here in Trinidad and Tobago to keep our talent at home in the first place. The irony in all of this is that it is this very Government who continues to hound some of our brightest, our most talented professionals out of the jobs due to perceived political differences—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman:—and then to stand here now in the Senate and talk about brain drain? Like really? Be for real.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping and interruption*]

Sen. Roberts: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. President: I know some people are restless—[*Inaudible*]

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman: Thank you, Mr. President. And you know, it was actually Sen. The Hon. Anil Roberts who stood up and had his usual PNM-obsessed rants. But you know, the irony in all of this is that I am not sure that with his legacy, he should really be talking about failed sport programmes, and I will say no further on that.

Hon. Senators: “Ohhh”. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman: Now, Mr. President, not to be distracted. The idea here is that as a responsible Opposition, what we are trying to do is really ensure that there are adequate checks and balances in place. We are really trying to ensure that we are safeguarding against the sort of impulsive and reckless decisions that

sometimes the Government is known for, which, in the end, leads to detrimental consequences to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Just this week, actually, Mr. President, we would have all sat there and witnessed some very concerning statements being made by Government Ministers right here on our doorsteps. Impulsivity and recklessness seem to be the order of the day when coming to this Government. So, we have a responsibility to examine, cross examine, and examine again, the sort of Bills we have coming into the Senate, the sort of proposals being made by the Government.

Imagine, Mr. President, we came here today with an Order Paper with maybe about 10 questions, and these questions were filed months ago. And surprisingly we came here and they came in woefully, woefully, woefully unprepared—

Sen. Al-Rawi SC: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman: Yeah—to answer even one question.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman: I do not know that I have ever seen in the history of the Senate, at least in the history of me following the goings on in this Senate, where every single question on an Order Paper has had to be deferred, Mr. President.

Sen. Al-Rawi SC: It is actually the first time.

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman: Well, I am hearing now, it is the first time in the history of this Senate that it has happened. So, forgive us if we are concerned about the motives, the motivations, the capacities and capabilities—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman:—of this Government, especially on matters that have the kind of lasting effects that it will have on the country.

Mr. President, governance is serious business, and when coming to decisions of this magnitude, we need to measure twice and cut once. Imagine in the Government's rush to force this Bill on us, they failed to note that this Bill initially purported—when we first heard about this Bill, it was said that it was targeting football players or sportsmen living abroad, to get them here, and nobody on that side gave any consideration to what the FIFA's admission rules were and whether we will get around that. That by itself tells us every single thing that we need to know. This piece of legislation has not been properly thought out. It has been rushed. It is incomplete. It is highly inappropriate.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. M. Roberts-Radgman: And in the interest of time, Mr. President, I will close pretty much how I began, by again reminding us of the words of Robert Heinlein.

“Citizenship is an attitude, a state of mind, an emotional conviction that the whole is greater than the part and that the part should be...”—proud to—
“...humbly...sacrifice itself so that the whole”—meaning the country—
“may live.”

Mr. President, no one who cares about Trinidad and Tobago, no one who loves the red, white and black, no real citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, in any real conscience and in their good conscience, could support this legislation. Thank you.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Sen. Sophia Chote, are you speaking? Okay. I think I recognize Sen. Francis Lewis, please.

Sen. Francis Lewis: Thank you, Mr. President. Good night and thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this debate on the proposed constitutional amendment that seeks to expand citizenship by descent, to include persons born outside of Trinidad and Tobago whose grandparents were citizens of the Republic.

You know, it has been said that sport has the ability to excite passions. If nothing else, I have seen that tonight. There are considerations in this Bill that I find attractive. There are others that I find troubling, and I would like to just explain a little bit around both of those statements. Let me begin by stating that the principle of inclusivity and diasporic engagement is in and of itself something that is commendable, and I think it is something that we need to think about how we are going to do it. We acknowledge the historical contributions of Trinidad and Tobago descendants abroad, and we recognize the enduring connections that some families have sought to maintain across generations.

But this debate is not simply about the principle of that or the Constitution or sport. It is also about something else, and as I was preparing for this, it is about priorities, timing and the responsible use of this Parliament's limited time and constitutional reform capacity, and I will explain a little bit more about that in a minute.

The substance of the Bill raises some serious and reasonable questions about whether citizenship by descent, through a grandparent, not just a parent, should be something that we should confer. It raises serious and legitimate questions about how strong and meaningful a connection based solely on a grandparent, especially if the individual has never set foot on the soil, does not know the anthem, cannot speak the language, has no intention to reside here, may not even have visited, and very separate from that, the administrative task of administrative mechanisms, how will the State, with reasonable efficiency and dispatch, verify citizenship of a

grandparent from 50, 60 or more years ago, especially where records are incomplete, and at what point does it stop? Is there going to be generational dilution of citizenship claims? Should we go to great, great-grandparents after?

Beyond all of this, my concerns have to do with the cost benefits, beyond the speculation. I hear a lot about, “Well, if we might,” but there is not very much analysis or economic thought given to what is the cost-benefit analysis and what is the likely impact on the economic needle of the country?

In terms of priority, we have to ask, why is this Bill before us now? This is the first Sitting of this year, and I really struggle with, is this the very first thing that we want to give priority to? Our national priorities—I did a quick perusal of social media and then an online search, and I said, name for me the top five things in the last three months that people seem to be exercised about, and this is just from what is coming up in media and social media: Foreign exchange availability and use, and the questions around that. We are still under a state of emergency that goes to the end of October. There are serious questions being asked about job security, given recent announcements of lay-offs and dismissals. Regional relations seem to be negatively sharpening, particularly with those of a close neighbour. Crime and public safety continues to be significant concerns, and up with that, the need, and just within the last few days, the reorganization of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service.

These are issues that a parliament needs to address. I am not sure whether this Bill, at this time, in this way, meets the criteria, at least my criteria, of priorities. And when I do, as I do frequently, an economic pulse check, all does not seem to be well. The general reports I am getting are that there seems to be a business slump. I am not polling sufficiently to know if it is nationwide, if it is by

specific industries, but there is great concern being expressed. And when I ask: Well, why? How come? Some speculate, “Well, people are waiting to see what will come up in the budget.” So maybe that is the response. I do not know, but things are not moving as robustly as one would expect.

September is the benchmark month for Divali and Christmas. If orders are not placed, preparations for those two seasons where many businesses particularly in retail, generate as much as 40 per cent of their sales in that very short period of time, the country and the economy, by extension, are going to be in trouble.

You know, last week, there was a conference of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. On the last day, there was a question about the challenge of financing Parliament. To put that question in another way, it really was, do citizens see Parliament as delivering value, and is Parliament a good return on investment?

9.45 p.m.

So the conference in Bahamas was dealing with that question and the reflections really caused me to pause. “Leh we” put or try to put a number to that in the context of this Parliament. This Parliament, based on last the year’s budget, cost this country \$140 million. That is our operating cost for the 375 staff that support the two Houses. Each House sits roughly 60 sessions a year. So together, 120 sessions. If I do a very simple calculation of 140 million, divided by 120 sessions, a session costs about \$1.1 million to \$1.2 million. That is what this session cost today, in the context of the budget. Are we delivering value? I am not sure that a citizen looking at this House, looking at these deliberations, looking at this Bill and the preparation that went into it, that has to persuade people to vote

for it, that a citizen looking at that legitimately will say “Yes, they are delivering value for money.”

In that context, the choice to dedicate scarce parliamentary time to the Bill that extends citizenship to grandchildren of nationals living abroad who may never live here, likely to never live here, is at best a curious prioritization. We are at the start of our legislative year. I would dearly love to see, Mr. President, what our legislation agenda is to look like. I understand there is a stand your ground Bill that is likely to come in the near future. I understand a budget has to come, but beyond that, I am not sure what is coming and the time here is valuable.

The—and I know—peripherally, I have had people either approach me or ask me “What are you all trying to do there in the Senate?” Two of the many comments are worth repeating. One had to do with, “What allyuh doing?” “Why allyuh wasting big people time?” Whether there are merits to this Bill or not, certainly for people that chose to come to me—and in a few cases I actually went out—they do not understand why this is happening. The second is that another person questioned—and I gave great assurances that “Nah that cannot possibly be true.” But if you could buy the talent from sports people, maybe that is a strategy not to invest in sport. I cannot see that being logical, but if that is being repeated—

Hon. Senator: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. F. Lewis: I agree with you Senator.

Hon. Senators: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. F. Lewis: Maybe, but I am saying, might you wish to consider—sorry Sir.

Mr. President: Please, please. Let us not get into crosstalk. Please. And, let us be respectful. I would like to listen to what Sen. Francis Lewis has to say. Please. Continue, hon. Senator.

Sen. F. Lewis: Thank you, Mr. President. This is a constitutional amendment. A constitutional amendment is no ordinary legislative act, it requires deeper scrutiny and very careful calibration to reflect on the weight of what is being proposed. Constitutional amendments in Trinidad and Tobago are rare. I looked back in the last 25 years from 1999 forward and looked beyond that, and when our Constitution came into effect in 1976, it was considered and still considered to be a very stable document. That is relatively rare. So it is in that context that the Constitution provides a very clear, very robust framework for governance.

Amendments are typically reserved for major necessary adjustments rather than routine changes. There have only been a few amendments overall in those years. My best estimate, and I stand to be corrected, is, in the last 25 years from 1999 to 2025 we have only had about a dozen constitutional amendments. Eight have passed, four have failed. In the last few months from the end of May to now, with a two month hiatus for the recess, we have had five matters brought before this Senate for voting; two of these have been constitutional amendments. The weight gentlemen, ladies, is my concern. Yet, here we are in this matter moving to amend the supreme law of the land—it is not an ordinary law—not to address a core democratic reform, but to broaden a class of descent-based citizenship. The tenor from many countries around the world, given movements in migration, is to tighten citizenship not to slacken it. So are we in sync? Out of sync? There are those who studied this matter who could give a much better answer to that question than me, but it would worry me.

In terms of—and this is a failure I think of—now I am not saying the work was not done. I am saying I am not aware of it. But, the Government has not provided any cost-benefit analysis of what this could mean to the public service,

health care access, and NIS eligibility. There is no estimate of how many individuals might become eligible under this provision. We are given an assurance that it would be looked at, but how will the Bill be administered without fraud, given the generational distances involved? We have not been provided with clear numbers of how many persons are currently in the immigration system, some for many, many years. I am not sure if we say “Yes, let us go,” what is the likely impact on those persons?

If we talk meritocracy, if we talk fairness, I wonder if one were to find a talent, a person, a foreign person that we wish to become a citizen and that person will be allowed, even facilitated to jump the queue ahead of other worthy persons who have been waiting for years and want to get on with their lives. You cannot simply say let us change the Constitution and citizenship. These are the ripple effects, that to me go out, that we as a Parliament and the citizens of the country have a legitimate concern with. And then, beyond that, dual citizenship complications. Not impossible to address, but it needs to be addressed.

In terms of diasporic engagement, I think the Government is absolutely clear and right that we need to find strategies to engage with the diaspora, but it can take many forms, cultural, economic, diplomatic, and not all of these require constitutional citizenship rights to change. One of my colleagues spoke at length about how some countries, including India, have chosen to deal with it. We can come up with alternative methods if—I am not saying that constitutional amendments may not be required, but let that not be the first thing we do, if there are other options available.

Citizenship is not just a document. It is a legal identity that carries respites, responsibilities and loyalties, as Members here have pointed out. For many it is

offensive for it to simply be transactional or to be of convenience. I know it is not intended to be offensive but that certainly can be an interpretation that comes up. So what should be our priorities? If we are to amend the Constitution again in three months, let us do so with deliberate purpose and for reforms that truly meet the moment. This country, and by extension this Parliament, is faced with a number of very urgent national priorities, some which I referred to earlier. Those issues affect every citizen, not just those born of Trinidad and Tobago grandparents.

So in closing, I try to weigh the pros and cons, so let me offer it. In terms of the pros, I think the Bill is well-intentioned. I am very supportive of the principle of inclusivity. I am very attracted to strengthening ties with diaspora and the possibilities for diasporic engagement. I think there are possibilities hinted at, but not deliberated, expressed and analyzed for boosting the economy. There is the potential for economic benefit, whether it is investment, whether it is in tourism, whether it is other spheres of activity.

The promotion of cultural integration and global recognition is very strong and a very real possibility. It fosters a more inclusive model of citizenship and in—not a strange way, but the world has evolved and there is an evolution that appears to be happening, in terms of how people in the world think about citizenship that is more fluid, more mobile and it is affecting in very positive ways in some cases, national identity.

So there are a slew of positives out of taking this action but there are concerns. These include the timing is questionable, the urgency is unconvincing and the impact is uncertain. I am not saying that any one of those cannot be addressed. I am saying they have not yet been addressed. We are uncertain as to

the safeguards and how would it be administered to minimize fraud? I am taking as a given that anything we do, “somebody, somewhere go scam it” but our job is to minimize that risk, not to eliminate it. That elimination is not possible. But I am not hearing other than an assurance “boy, we have safeguards in place.” The assurance is good, but I am looking for a little bit more. On that issue, fraud has to do with generational distances involved, difficulties in proving ancestry, verifying documents and the risks of exploitation or deceptive applications.

The administrative strain and increased workload of government agencies who have to make this work—I have heard nothing said on that. No cost-benefit analysis. No estimate of how many individuals might become eligible and their likely consequences. I would celebrate any win in sport or in other areas of national activity, but it has to be a little bit more than that. The analysis has to be deep. I am sorry to tell you. There are complications related to dual citizenship. There is the potential for dilution of national identity and—again back to the cost-benefit analysis.

At the core, our Senate time is valuable. As legislators, we are duty-bound to ask, what is being proposed, but why now, by whom and at what cost and where does it fit in the order of priorities? Much of the defense of and the support for this Bill suggest it is a sports strategy being required to change the Constitution. That is very shaky ground for me. You want a sports strategy? Let us pursue a sports strategy. Let us fund it. Let us understand what the implications are, and if it is then necessary to change the Constitution to support a much broader strategy that benefits the country, you would have my support. But you do not start with change the Constitution and then we will work the rest out. That does not do it for me.

So let us not confuse constitutional symbolism with constitutional substance. Let us put the pressing needs of the present, whether it is crime, whether it is the State of Emergency, whether it is education, equity and let us make provisions for those who have connections. But those connections have to be actual, not simply biological, by extension. My advice is to put this proposed amendment because there are positives, to put it to committee for rework. Mr. President, I thank you.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Minister of Transport and Civil Aviation.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Transport and Civil Aviation (Sen. The Hon. Eli Zakour):

Mr. President, it is with profound honour that I rise before this esteemed House today to address the Constitution (Amdt.) Bill, 2025. Mr. President, my contribution will not be long, as I do not want to repeat much of what was said by the speakers before me. In addition, Mr. President, my colleagues on the other side on the front Bench are very agitated and they are ready to go home or back to work at their new jobs.

10.00 p.m.

Mr. President, many persons over the years have left this country, migrated from this country because of the PNM being in office, over the years. Those persons would have had children and their children had children. Some want to return or come or move to this country. The PNM denied them the opportunity to be born here. That guilt alone should encourage them to support this Bill.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. E. Zakour: Mr. President, if you allow me, Sen. Roberts -Radgman asked for some protection when one of my colleagues was speaking on

this side, but when some of my colleagues were speaking, I heard the horrible things my colleagues on the front Bench were saying about my colleagues, and it is that arrogance is why they are on that side.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. E. Zakour: There are other reasons why they are there, if you allow me. In a Trinidad *Guardian* article, September 12, 2025, at a PNM, Diego Martin meeting, their own Deputy Political Leader said:

They lost election—“...due to ‘too many stupid mistakes’”.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. E. Zakour: And I am quoting:

“We don’t listen.

...an ‘absence of democratic decision making’...

One of our most serious shortcomings is disconnection with the grassroots.”

Sen. Al-Rawi SC: Mr. President—[*Inaudible*]

Sen. The Hon. E. Zakour: But I will move on. I will move on—

Sen. Al-Rawi SC: [*Inaudible*—the Standing Order.

Sen. The Hon. E. Zakour: Sure.

Sen. Al-Rawi SC: I regret that I rise on Standing Order 46(1), please.

Mr. President: No, he has now started. I gave everybody an opening. He just started.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: You cannot shut down a speaker when he is now on his legs. He has the democratic right and he has my protection to speak.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. E. Zakour: Thank you, Mr. President. I will move on. Mr.

President, when we speak about citizenship, we are not just speaking of a passport or a legal status. We are speaking about identity, belonging and the bond between generations. Trinidad and Tobago is blessed with a vibrant diaspora and strong family tradition. Many of our citizens have built lives abroad, while others have remained right here at home, yet whether near or far their children and grandchildren have grown up hearing stories of this country, carrying in their hearts a love for a land that they may have not been born in but they still call their own. Yet today our laws do not recognize that bond.

A child can claim citizenship through a parent but not through a grandparent. That means many patriotic young people with roots here, grandchildren of our citizens, remain excluded from being part of the national community their families helped to build. Think for a moment about what that means. Someone who wishes to have a life here, to reconnect with their heritage, to belong and to participate fully in our national community, cannot under the current law. That bond with Trinidad and Tobago is not recognized. They cannot stand fully as citizens even though their grandparents were born here.

This Bill seeks to change that. This amendment affirms the rightful place of the grandchildren of our citizens within the national family, recognizing their heritage and strengthening their bond with Trinidad and Tobago. This amendment allows us to recognize and include the grandchildren of our citizens, strengthening their connection to Trinidad and Tobago and enabling them to share in the responsibilities of citizenship. Mr. President, citizenship is about belonging, and in a time when nations are actively welcoming back the diaspora, we must strengthen the ties that bind our people to this land. This Bill does just that. It ensures that the grandchildren of our citizens are recognized as part of the national family with

all rights and responsibilities and pride the citizenship brings. With those few words, Mr. President, I thank you.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Sen. Dr. Browne.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Dr. Amery Browne: Thank you for recognizing me, Mr. President. Mr. President, this debate has gotten to a very interesting stage. I would not give any credit to Sen. Zakour for that, but we have gotten to a very interesting stage. What has happened, Senator, the Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs has piloted the Bill, and then speaker after speaker, on both the Opposition and the Independent Benches have risen with clear, cogent concerns, very specific questions posed to the Government, ranging from the FIFA Statutes to the clauses of the Bill, to the phrasing of the Constitution itself.

I have sat here, pen in hand, waiting to hear the Government refine its case to any degree of persuasion so that a reasonable listener, or a higher bar, a participant in this debate expected to vote on this Constitution (Amdt.) Bill might be persuaded on its merits. Mr. President, I regret to inform you, there have been no such responses from the Government.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Dr. A. Browne: They have not even attempted pre-scripted references and so on, and I wonder if the Government is aware that there is going to be a vote at the end of this process. And, if they listen to all of the contributions, they have a captive vote on their Benches. That is fine, but if they are listening they should be once again concerned about the direction of this debate. So I do not know where the solution is going to come from for the Government.

Senator after Senator has risen and the Government has not reacted appropriately or prudently. The core message is this, “One good clause, one good subclause, plus two bad subclauses, equals bad law”, because when we are asked to vote, we are asked to vote on a Bill as a whole, and I have not heard the relevant reactions from the Government side. At times, we are tempted to conclude that the Government has a very cavalier approach to amending the Constitution. I wonder what would Basdeo Panday have said in listening to this, because constitutional amendment was one of his—he had that close to his heart. A pet peeve of the great Basdeo Panday.

Time and time again he would reference, but never in his contemplation was it this kind of cavalier trite amendment. He had much more serious priorities on his mind when he was advancing that type of case. So there have been extremely weak justifications, or attempts to justify. Mr. President, it is unusual for the piloter of any Bill to present a complete case. Normally the essentials are delivered and one would rely on other contributors on your Bench to fill out a cogent case after presenting those essentials. I have to say, the piloter of this Bill has, to a degree, been let down by the Members of the Bench.

If you listen to the contributions thus far, it is almost—there is a programme called SETI, Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence, where you are beaming out these signals for years hoping there would be a reaction or a response, and I think that is what has been happening in this debate. Consistently that signal has gone across toward the Government and we are just waiting for a ping back and there is nothing. There is nothing in return. There is absolutely nothing in return.

Let me take you, Mr. President, to the core of my concern. The Government really tried to build their case for this Bill on FIFA. That is where the discussion

started. The backdrop is clear, challenging results in World Cup qualifying; everyone is concerned. Everyone wants to help. Everyone would like to help. We are hoping for solutions. I do not think that is essentially a political issue and, you know, in times past Oppositions might throw things at the Government. I do not see that at the core as a—it is a national challenge.

So they built a case on FIFA, but sadly the Government's case also has collapsed on FIFA. Because I take you back, and Sen. Al-Rawi flagged it, the FIFA Statutes appear to be completely incompatible with the phrasing of this legislation. Because according to FIFA, Article 7—so I have a document in my hand, this is a FIFA document, and I should not wave it:

“Commentary on the Rules Governing Eligibility to play for Representative Teams”.

The wording could not be more clear. Article 7, “ACQUISITION OF A NEW NATIONALITY”; this is page 23 for an abundance of clarity:

“ACQUISITION OF A NEW NATIONALITY

Any player who refers to art. 5 par.1 to assume a new nationality and who has not played international football in accordance with art. 5 par. 3 shall be eligible to play for the representative teams of the new association only if he fulfils one of the following conditions:”

And what are those conditions, Mr. President:

“a) He was born on the territory of the relevant association;”

In other words, he was born in Trinidad and Tobago. That clearly does not fall within the pursuit of the Government in this matter. He was born on the territory of the relevant association:

“b) His biological mother or biological father was born on the territory of the relevant association;

c) His grandmother or grandfather was born on the territory of the relevant association;”

—or d), also does not apply:

“He has lived on the territory of the relevant association:”

Mr. President, this is a complete and total mismatch with the Bill that the Government has presented here because they have completely removed any birth attachment or requirement from their pursuit, “of a pool of new players”. So what is taking place here in broad—well, it is not broad daylight anymore, but under the glare of the Senate Chamber. What has the Government brought here? It certainly is incompatible with the rationale that they presented to Trinidad and Tobago. I am not pretending to be the discoverer of this, other speakers have alluded to it, but it is here in black and white.

What is the explanation? We await it. None of the other speakers—that is why I said the piloter was let down by his team. No one even attempted or feigned to explain or address that core concern. You see, Mr. President, this Bill had easy passage, relatively easy passage in the Lower House simply due to the strength of numbers of the Government. I heard some of them boasting, “election”, and they come with votes, and that is fine, and that works in the Lower House because you get seats commensurate with the votes in the relevant constituencies. But, you see in the Senate, Mr. President, it does not really matter because when you form a Government and you form an Opposition, the formula remains the same.

You have six Opposition Senators and you have nine Independent Senators.

Mr. President: I know that when many people speak, the last few speakers, they

get into trouble. You have not said anything pertinent to the Bill. What you are doing is giving people a lecture.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: So I think that people are becoming a bit tired. So I am asking you if you could just connect your contribution to the Bill rather than giving us a lecture. Connect your Bill to the clauses, and I know people are going to repeat themselves. I wish to be flexible, “buh doh gih meh” a lecture “dey” tonight, please.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Everybody knows how many Independents they have here, how many Opposition, how many Government, “so doh go into dat”. “Ah doh think we need dat tonight.” Just give us your succinct contribution to this Bill and everything will go fine with us. Okay?

10.15 p.m.

Sen. Dr. A. Browne: Thank you, Mr. President.

Mr. President: Thank you.

Sen. Dr. A. Browne: Mr. President—

Sen. Al-Rawi SC: For the record.

Sen. Dr. A. Browne:—for the record, the eligibility and compliance documents of FIFA have not been addressed by any speaker on the Government Bench.

Sen. Ratiram: Mr. President, I rise on Standing Order 53(1)(b), persistent and tedious repetition.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Ratiram: How much time would you make the same point over and over?

Mr. President: Now, I did not want to go there, but Sen. Al-Rawi spent a

considerable amount of time on that document.

Sen. Dr. A. Browne: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. President: Well, you were making reference to that. You may not have been quoting it—

Hon. Senators: [*Interruption*]

Mr. President: No, no, no, no. Listen, listen, listen, listen.

Hon. Senators: [*Interruption*]

Mr. President: Listen, this matter has been raised, but I am going to give my colleague and friend the opportunity to prosecute your case. Go ahead.

Sen. Dr. A. Browne: Thank you, Mr. President. That is only fair. I appreciate your ruling and your guidance. So, Mr. President, I will move on from the ratio of the seats in this Senate. But the point I was seeking to make is that there is a different standard here and the Government is in danger of failing in meeting that standard.

I heard Sen. Roberts—I will not deal with Sen. Roberts quite as yet. These are the questions I would pose to the Government at this stage in the debate. First of all, exactly what are you proposing to fix with this Constitution (Amdt.) Bill? Secondly, what are the details of your offering to fix that which you are proposing to fix? Thirdly, is there a direct match between what you are proposing and what you are claiming to fix? And fourthly, does your proposal introduce measures that have not been fully explained, and measures that can open Pandora's Box for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago?

It is my view the Government has not passed that basic test with this quite unprecedented Bill. They have not explained the rationale to the extent that these measures propose that persons whose parents and grandparents were never born in Trinidad and Tobago would receive automatic citizenship in perpetuity across

generations. And, I wonder if the Government has even considered the implications to what it means to be a Trinbagonian for the future and the potential for abuse, the implications for how our passport, a Trinidad and Tobago passport of the future, will be considered by other nations.

There was talk about the diaspora, the diaspora, and very nonspecific, very vague references, Mr. President. Mr. President, you do not engage—the principal tool of engagement of your diaspora is not the issue of citizenship access. There is an existing large diaspora out there of citizens of Trinidad and Tobago who left this country and are living elsewhere, and their children. They were born here, they left Trinidad and Tobago. They are not addressed in any way by this Bill. And in all the ramblings and talk about diaspora, I heard no reference or context based on a national diaspora policy, which was drafted under the previous administration, available to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago of today. And for some reason, it appears to have formed no backdrop to their intentions here. So I am still on a quest to identify what has made this a priority, and I think Sen. Lewis tapped into that. Why now? Why has this jumped the line in Bills of everything else?

And then I heard another Senator say, very loosely, “Well, this is something they wanted to do when they were in power and they did not do it.” But there was no substance to that, there was no evidence presented and it just seemed—just throwing it out, hoping that it would somehow be persuasive. Mr. President, further responses, general chatter without specifics.

I heard talk in the debate about professionals being brought home to engage the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, and there were references to medical professionals, legal professionals, engineering and other fields—

Sen. Al-Rawi SC: And scientists.

Sen. Dr. A. Browne:—scientists. Sounds very good. Sounds very good. But what are the details of this proposal? How exactly is this to work? And I wonder if the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs spoke to the Minister of Health before bringing this particular Bill, because I know as a fact that there are many medical professionals right here in this country today who have been corresponding with the Minister of Health, not only with him, with his predecessor as well—that is the clear truth—pleading for placement and a location in the system in Trinidad and Tobago. So the current Minister of Health has not even dealt with that and now we are coming to the Senate and throwing out references that, “Oh, we are going to be bringing back all of these professionals.” Well, first of all, a professional does not require citizenship to participate in the health care sector of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Dr. A. Browne: And secondly, we have many such professional citizens right here who are struggling to find a place in the system as it stands. So, again, those are points that have not been connected and certainly have yet to be responded to by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

So, Mr. President, the backdrop is the poor results in the World Cup qualifiers. We saw in the newspapers and other references that the Government had a solution. They were bringing a Bill to treat with that. And when we look at the clauses of the Bill, there is no reference to athletics, to football, to athletes, to sports; a very, very interesting formula to address this. And when you look at the statutes, not just for FIFA, but for the Olympics and other disciplines, it is a mismatch. So it is as if you are building a spacecraft, but you are putting propellers and a rudder and other things. That is for operation on the ocean. So they are claiming one thing in their rationale. When you look at how they want to amend

our Constitution, it does not match at all, Mr. President; Pandora's Box.

Suppose some of these individuals who were not born here, whose parents were not born here, whose grandparents were not born here, and who are now being granted citizenship, who may eventually play a sport, but maybe they would eventually do other things. There was reference to terrorism. I would not repeat that. Possibly they could become a burden on the State. That is another possibility, Mr. President, or they might return as a citizen under these measures, having had little or no connection to Trinidad and Tobago, and eventually become a voter.

I want to spend a moment on this issue of the future of voting in Trinidad and Tobago, because it is something the Government, when in Opposition, made quite heavy weather of on a number of—

Mr. President: I hope you are not going to repeat—

Sen. Dr. A. Browne: No, I am not.

Mr. President:—what so many others have said.

Sen. Dr. A. Browne: Because, Mr. President, we are in a debate, and what has happened is the Government has not—the only response I heard from the Government was this reference: “We do not need”—it was Sen. Roberts—“to voter pad, because we won the last election, we will win the next.” So, when you have legislators sounding a concern about the potential abuse of a law for voting purposes, if your only response is: “We do not need to abuse the law because we are confident of our votes in the future,” that is not a sufficient reassurance if we are seeking to pass good legislation. So that response was completely unpersuasive.

Then there is the question, Mr. President, of consultation; has not been addressed. Because the Government is in the process of consulting on stand-your-

ground legislation in Trinidad and Tobago. But they come here today to amend the Constitution, the supreme law of our land, and I have not heard one reference to any engagement with consultation with the citizens or any group of stakeholders. I ask the question, why?

Sen. Allahar: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. Dr. A. Browne: Sorry?

Sen. Allahar: How many times you—[*Inaudible*]

Sen. Dr. A. Browne: We? We did not bring this, you brought it. So, Mr. President, I am not even going to respond to that kind of crosstalk. So, they are consulting on stand your ground, but on a constitutional amendment, I heard no reference whatsoever.

So, Mr. President, what does the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce have to say about this? What does the TTMA—what about the trade unions? Maybe the Minister of Labour, Small and Micro Enterprise Development might intervene and say that he spoke with them. Because we are contemplating a very different future for our society. What are these stakeholders saying when engaged by the Government? But they can only say something if they are engaged. But this Bill has come to the Lower House and this House basically by surprise. No one knew what these measures would have been. We were anticipating something related to sports, Mr. President. Has the Government considered the implications for national infrastructure, or a burden on our national infrastructure and implications for the economy?

I just want to make the point that when we are seeking to amend our Constitution, we would have expected a data set to be presented.

Hon. Senator: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. President: I am hearing everything that somebody is saying on this side, disturbing the proceedings. Let us have peace. Continue, please.

Sen. Dr. A. Browne: Thank you, Mr. President. So, there was no data point presented whatsoever. There was no projection. There were no figures. There was no anticipation of how many would respond, would react, how many are we pursuing. And therefore, it would be hard to even project implications for our infrastructure and the economy, Mr. President.

The Government also has not presented how this fits into their national development policy. Is this Bill really an example of policy on the hoof, on the fly? Was this open door to citizenship not by descent or by birth part of their manifesto? I did not see it in the manifesto. So, it really speaks to the antecedents of this particular proposal. That spoke about consultation.

Sen. Roberts gave us a very wide-ranging speech about sports in Trinidad and Tobago. He was undisturbed in doing so, with very little reference to the Bill. But he did respond on the issue of voter padding. He did not respond on the issue of safeguards. That is not how good law is made, Mr. President, and that is not the standard in the Senate.

There was talk about who failed—I did not quite get the clear reference—subjects in secondary school and I wonder if that is the direction the Government wants to take the discourse, because I am sure there are some Members of their team who would be very uncomfortable with conversations about who failed what subjects in school, Mr. President; extremely uncomfortable.

The Government made heavy weather of the fact that they have a number of distinguished sportspersons on their Bench. I just want to go on record, Mr. President, in saying that we must respect everyone who put on a national uniform

for Trinidad and Tobago and represented this country, because it is a very difficult thing to do and sometimes a very thankless thing to do.

10.30 p.m.

I also want to point out that we also have Members of this Bench who represented Trinidad and Tobago in the field of sport. I would draw one example to my immediate left. Sen. Al-Rawi represented Trinidad and Tobago in the field of karate as well, so—

Hon. Senator: Hmm. Okay.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Dr. A. Browne: —we have some reference. It may not be of the same fame. [*Laughter*] It may not be of the same fame, but I became concerned when Sen. Charles appeared to question the patriotism of Members of the Opposition. I did not think that was necessary in the context of the discussions that we have been having here today. But Sen. Melanie Roberts-Radgman adequately responded on the issue of patriotism, so I would not belabour the point.

So, we come to Sen. Alexander, Mr. President, who is no stranger to the news and the national discourse. No stranger—what I found is that once again, he was not able to offer any substance to the debate. There were no references to the Bill. There were no clarifications to the legitimate questions that have been raised. A lot of “ole talk”, almost like a blog. After all the tributes earlier today that were made to serious Senators who are no longer with us, we are left disappointed. And then his crescendo point was something about an actor who was a martial arts instructor who is a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago who left the country and did well.

Mr. President, this Bill has nothing to do with those circumstances whatsoever, and

such a martial artist or actor would have to wait two successive generations to have any relevance, but it still will not be because he was born here and therefore—I mean it really was a bewildering attempt to contribute to this debate. And then with all the talk about attracting people to come back home and this is going to be some explosion of talent etcetera, I would just say that is fair less likely to occur. Whatever amendment we make to the Constitution, Mr. President, if we create an environment of chaos, disruption in our nation and region, particularly if you have senior representatives of the Government talking about things like nuclear war.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Dr. A. Browne: Mr. President, in conclusion, given the clear and valid concerns expressed by the participants in this debate, this Bill has not passed the threshold for assent by this Chamber. The Government vote is assured on their side. But I present two options——

Mr. President: This is a habit I have seen developing with you particularly. You tend to attempt to influence, or attempt in an indirect way, to influence Members of this House. So you are going down a road now where you are talking about Government, then you will go to Opposition, and then you will go to the Independent Senators. I do not think that is your role.

Sen. Dr. A. Browne: What, what?

Mr. President: No. I am saying that this is the second time I have seen this from you as a Senator. I am just saying, concluding——

Sen. Al-Rawi SC: What is the breach?

Mr. President:——try your best to allow Members to exercise their freedom without you trying to influence whatever they are doing.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: It is a subtlety I am detecting—

Hon. Senator: No, no, no.

Sen. Dr. A. Browne: Mr. President, may I ask you for clarification?

Mr. President: Yes.

Sen. Dr. A. Browne: Because I—this is a very fundamental point you are making.

Mr. President: Yes.

Sen. Dr. A. Browne: I am asking you to be clear on what is the breach of the Standing Orders that you are pointing to—

Sen. Al-Rawi SC: Or privileges.

Sen. Dr. A. Browne:—or privileges of this House. Because as far as—Mr. President if you would allow me to finish. As far as I am concerned, as a Member of the Opposition, I have a constitutional duty and the whole point of debate—

Sen. Al-Rawi SC: And privilege.

Sen. Dr. A. Browne: —is an exercise of persuasion and influence. So please provide some further clarification on this fundamental.

Sen. Al-Rawi SC: On this fundamental.

Mr. President: Senator, you continue to speak.

Sen. Al-Rawi SC: No, no, no.

Mr President: I am the Presiding Officer. I have no duty to explain anything to you.

Sen. Al-Rawi SC: Yes.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr President: I am just letting you know, you continue to speak, whenever you go off course I would intervene. Continue please.

Sen. Al-Rawi SC: No, no, no.

Sen. Dr. A. Browne: Mr. President, I request clarification from you.

Sen. Al-Rawi SC: Yes.

Sen. Dr. A. Browne: With respect to any breach of privilege or the Standing Orders on this matter.

Sen. Al-Rawi SC: The Constitution.

Sen. Dr. A. Browne: Because I am unclear as to how to proceed, if what you have pointed out is “I am seeking to persuade Members of the Senate”.

Hon. Senator: Yes you are.

Mr. President: You have— just now, excuse.

Hon. Senator: Do not let him off.

Mr. President: You have eight more minutes to wrap up. Continue.

Hon. Senator: You want the guidance.

Sen. Dr. A. Browne: Mr. President.

Sen. Al-Rawi SC: You will persuade who you wish to persuade.

Sen. Dr. A. Browne: Mr. President, I respect your position in this Chamber but I wish to note on the record my concern. If it is my ability to persuade or guide—no, this is fundamental.

Sen. Al-Rawi SC: Read section 55 for the record. Read it, of the Constitution.

Sen. Dr. A. Browne: So Mr. President, I am not going to argue with you. Yeah. I am not going to argue with you.

Mr. President: Listen, do not challenge the Chair. If you continue—I am warning you, I will order you to take your seat and go to the next speaker.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr President: You have eight minutes to wrap up, wrap up. Okay? Continue please .You have eight minutes to wrap up, please wrap up.

Sen. Dr. A. Browne: Mr. President, I have registered my concerns and I have registered my respect and regard for the rulings of the Chair.

Mr. President: Why are you threatening the Speaker?

Sen. Dr. A. Browne: I am not threatening the Speaker.

Sen. Al-Rawi SC: You go ahead. Wait and see.

Sen. Roberts: Yeah. We would wait.

Mr. President: This is the second warning eh. Continue to wrap up.

Sen. Dr. A. Browne: Mr. President, I am continuing.

Mr. President: Yes but do not refer to me. Just wrap up.

Sen. Dr. A. Browne: Mr. President, I was offering two options at this stage to the Government: One is to withdraw and bring a fresh Bill that is fit for purpose. Not necessarily a constitutional amendment Bill, or two, to send this Bill as is, to a Joint Select Committee where it can be extensively examined and subject to surgery. Hopefully, we will emerge with a proper law.

Mr. President, it boils down to this. It boils down to this. The Government is asking in bringing this constitutional amendment, that Members of this Senate simply trust us, trust them, trust them. Mr. President, the last time we did that, in this Chamber, the last time we did that in this Chamber, we emerged with section 34. We will never do that again. Mr. President, I thank you.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr President: Sen. Wesley Gibbings.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Wesley Gibbings: Thank you very much, Mr. President, thank you very much Members for the warm greetings, both from friends and subjects of my journalism.

I am not unfamiliar with the proceedings of this particular forum, albeit from those seats and not from this Bench. But it is also—I think it is interesting that on my very first day this particular debate is transpiring and I will have the honour of contributing to it, because there are issues in it about which I feel very passionate. Those of you who have followed my journalism over the years would know that I have a real concern about the extent to which we have been harnessing our human resources. Both on the part of people who are here but also on the part of people would like to be here.

So when I looked at the Bill, there are few triggering terms and words. I saw grandparents for example and when I think grandparent, I think about my maternal grandfather who sailed from South China in the early 1920s. He could not find here on a map. He did not know what we were all about. He did not know what was here but he set forth on a very brave journey from China. He did not speak the language. He came and met my maternal grandmother who was the granddaughter of an enslaved African who was brought here. My paternal grandmother found her way here from St. Lucia after her family first landed in St. Kitts in 1838 as indentured labourers from India. So when you talk about grandparents by grounding in terms of and my understanding of this notion of my ancestors, does not necessarily relate to red, black and white 2025.

Now all of this is not to say that there is not a requirement to engage this kind of questioning in an orderly fashion and some of my colleagues on this side, on this Bench have articulated the requirement for a process. A process that has not been entirely identified by the promoters of the Bill and I would urge that on this particular question we consider not necessarily open doors but activated turn styles and I would come a little bit to elaborate on what I mean by that. But let me

launch into this discussion. Again, I almost omitted the most important person of all, when you speak about *jus sanguinis*. You are talking about the right to citizenship by descent. You are talking about my wife who was born in Jamaica.

So all of these things ought to—and I think that I am not the only one with this kind of experience here, who can point to polls that have influenced the way we have developed as human beings as individuals but in a way that we have developed as a nation. This is a nation we speak very glibly of migrants, people who came. So there are people who would like to be here. There are people who are already here, who I believe ought to have been embraced by a broader approach to the question before us today.

But I want to say that I agree philosophically with the trust of this Bill. I think that it is designed to expand our stock of human resources, of human assets. Let us not be delusional, we are in a deficit. Every day we confront this. I have been in journalism for over 40 years now, and it sometimes amazes me that we have not attempted to move forward, employing our historical antecedents, in a way that Wilson Harris described it, the late great Guyanese writer. The way he described was that history should not be an anchor, it should be a sail. I should be something that helps take us forward and to carve a path and we know that as Trinidadians and Tobagonians and what here gives that we are very unique creative people and we can only benefit in my view expanding the stock of human resources in all areas.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

10.45 p.m.

So I agree with the Bill as it is, *prima facie*, entirely, on the basis of that philosophical assumption that we can benefit. We stand more to benefit than to

lose from adopting this approach, which I insist in keeping with recommendations I have heard, should be considered to be activation of a turnstile at the entrance, or turnstiles as opposed to an open door.

In any case, again at the philosophical level, I have no absolute problem with an open door. I think we are here because doors were opened in the past.

We would not have been here. We would not have been here on the basis of the education that we have acquired that came through a wide open door, all be it pried open by the colonizers. And yet sometimes I hear language from our people here that so closely resembles the language we are hearing from other countries that are not comfortable with people who look like most of us here.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. W. Gibbings: Why are we doing this ourselves? I think we need to develop a wider appreciation for ourselves. We have value. Yes, we are in deficit when it comes to human resources. I am crystal clear on that. We need more people who operate at different levels in a wide variety of spheres, not only in academics and politics and so on, in wide areas.

I have resumed my love for painting, for example, and I find that my community of interest in terms of the creative space is not restricted to Trinidad and Tobago or even the Caribbean. I find a strong sense of fraternity with people who—some of them do not even speak my first language. So I think that—let us apply that.

I also do not see mal intent in what is being proposed. Neither have I detected ill-intent on the part of those who have suggested changes, because I think that this measure ought to have been part of a wider suite that would improve and expand the possibilities before us as people in terms of accessing some of these

human, financial and other resources.

So, for example, Sen. Attzs spoke about our migrant population. There are close to 40,000 people who are registered on the UNHCR list as asylum seekers and refugees. They are human beings. I have personally been in touch, in contact with quality professionals who came here and are among the 86 per cent of Venezuelans who are here. And those of you who have followed my work would know that I railed heavily against people who have used derogatory language to describe these people. These are people, many of whom are professionally trained and highly competent people. And whatever we think about it, they want to be here, they want to be here. There are many of us who do not want to be here. They want to be here. They have something to offer. So why should we not consider what we have to offer?

Now, all be it, it is not a *carte blanche* thing. I mean, we need to have a needs assessment. Somebody spoke about skills banks and understanding what we have and what we need. Where are the areas in which we are in deficit, but it is something to consider? The other group of people who want to be here or may want to be here given the right conditions, are our brothers and sisters within the Caribbean Community. As it is right now in Trinidad and Tobago, yes, subject to the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas, which among other things, speaks to the free movement of skills.

I have had the privilege to work at the Caricom Secretariat at that time when the revised treaty was being worked on very actively, and having led that, I became a very strong advocate for broadening the range of skills and partly as a result of the effort of myself and others, media workers found themselves as part of that category. And I have used the skill certificate that I have in my possession—I see

Sen. Swaratsingh is indicating so has he—in order to live and work without the requirement of a work permit in another Caricom country. So this is another catchment area for people who would not mind being here and contributing.

Now, my preference is for an expanded regime such as the move made by Barbados, Belize, Dominica and St. Vincent and the Grenadines who have agreed that effective next week, October 1st—or two weeks from now, that they will facilitate full, free movement of other Caricom nationals under a special protocol that was enacted like two years ago.

So that is within the spirit of the philosophy being prescribed here, which is that we have recognized that there is a deficit in terms of the skills needed here. Yes, there are some that are dormant and I listened very carefully to the other contributions. There are people who have not been given a fair break here, we need to consider them as well, and they belong to a wide variety of communities within our community. The disabled for example, are just one. There are people who are being discriminated against. We have an Equal Opportunity Act here that explicitly excludes one category of people, “based on sex” our LGBTQIA+ community. And we are just turning a blind eye and rejecting even what they may have to offer to our society. So there are people who are already here, “we”, and I have written about what do we consider to be “we”. Who do we consider to be the “we” in this? Do we consider the “we” to be in this just those people who come from our very specific communities, or have very specific allegiances? Or is this “we” a bigger we? I think we need to broaden this concept of who is the “we”. And the “we” yes, “we” include the diaspora.

There are other Caribbean countries. Jamaica, where I have professional obligations, they are constantly revising and looking. Different society, different

needs, different economic configurations but they have recognized this need as well. So we need, I believe, to consider these things, that there are people already here and we are not harnessing everything that we have here. We need to be very frank and honest with ourselves. We are not making the best use of the resources we have here.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. W. Gibbings: We are also not—and that includes people who are “from here” and then people who were not always from here. My grandparents, they never left here. They stayed here and they built their homes, their communities, they saw about us, the grandchildren and the great grandchildren and they never thought—it had never occurred to my grandfather to return to Quanzhou.

In fact, it is an uncle of mine who did the research and found the village and he went and lived and worked in Quanzhou in south China, the son of a south Chinese gentleman who came here not knowing the language or anything, and the granddaughter of an enslaved African in Quanzhou making a contribution. He even told me that he thought about running for the community elections once in the village where he lived which is where my grandfather came from.

So I have a view on this thing that is personal, yes, but it is also based on a philosophy that as human beings, we do not often take advantage of what we have. There are people who want to be here who would like to make a contribution and we need to build a facilitating environment for them, in the same way same that we need to have a facilitating environment for the people who are here who belong to this “we” but we shun them based on all kinds of prejudices.

I want us to come back a little bit to this thing about the treaty, the Caricom treaty, because again, it is something that is in my consciousness continuously. I

told you where my wife is from, and I have lived and worked in Jamaica, Guyana and St. Lucia. That is the “we.” That is my “we”. We may miss out or we are missing out on an opportunity there, in terms of again, the stock of human assets. They are our people. That is our “we” and it would have been really good if this Bill had come with a suite of other suggestions and proposals and arguments for, among other things, indicating that this country is interested in moving in the direction of those four, those Caricom four, Barbados, Belize Dominica and St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines came up more than once during this discussion but from October 1st on a reciprocal basis. So there again, that is the turnstile approach. They are not saying everybody come and work. It is based on reciprocity. They are saying, yes, you could come and live and work and be subject to contingent rights based again on this measured approach. So you are not necessarily saying carte blanche because we all have limited resources and I listened very carefully to the suggestion that perhaps on the basis of scarce resources, we need to move cautiously, because when people come, they come with children, there are education requirements, primary and secondary health requirements.

Under the special protocol treaty of these four countries, they have stipulated that they are subject to the availability of resources, things like that, words like that, to indicate that, yes, this an open passage but it is a turnstile based on certain conditions. You know, you go to a football game and some turnstiles are for where some of you go with the fancy setup and where the rest of us go in our shorts and, you know, more modest conditions. So you set those rules so that you have a level of orderliness in how you do these things and there is a level of realism on what we

have on offer as well, you know.

Yes, we are a great place, we are a great country. I have never thought about leaving here permanently. I have let my bucket down here. I have my son, who uses the same language. I am going to put this on the record, it is the greatest child in the world. Some of you know him. Sen. Lewis is smiling because he knows it is true. And he tells me well, “Dad, I ain’t going nowhere”. And of course, he is subject to *jus sanguinis* as well, just as much as he is entitled to *jus soli*. In terms of he says yeah, he says, “I was born here”, this is his place, but also he is entitled to say Jamaica is his home and he has lived there. But he wants to be here and make a contribution and he is making a great contribution. You know, I never lose out on an opportunity—Sen. Lewis will tell you, to talk about him because he and his generation are the people we have to think about. I turned 67 yesterday. I am on the way out.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. W. Gibbings: I could talk about 40 years in journalism, 44 years of marriage, spending most of my professional life macing from those seats and not from here. But these are the people we have to think about and there is more like him, there is more like him. I have my nephews. Some you, I have spoken to some of you about it, and they studied in the UK at the highest level. The Attorney General is smiling because he knows one. He wanted to be here. He wants to come back here and make a difference, but we are standing in their way. We are standing in their way and I think that the spirit of this is suggesting welcome. We are suggesting that we want to and that we are not interested in closing a door.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

11.00 p.m.

We may decide that on an orderly basis, entitlement to rights and services within the Constitution, within the law, within international law—it is perfectly acceptable what is happening within Caricom, for example. It is not 100 per cent carte blanche. There are certain provisions and conditionalities attached to it.

So I had not thought about contributing at all. I did not enter here, saying, “Oh, I have to say something,” no. But I said, no, I saw grandparents, and I saw citizenship rights, and I saw human assets, and I thought that here is an opportunity for us to seriously contemplate this measure in the broader context of widening our access to human assets. At first, when I heard about the sporting, I said, “No, we are missing out, this should not be. Let us broaden this question.”

So I am not going to spend much more time—I have a few recommendations. I cannot carry on like this without at least suggesting a few things. I think that this measure, along with others—and I think that I would urge the Government to consider these other measures to provide greater access to people who want to be here and those who are here to make a contribution, to consider something of perhaps an administrative hierarchy.

Sen. Nakhid spoke about the fact that this includes legal, administrative and innate conditionalities. He did not use the word “conditionality”. So there may be a case for a hierarchy, an administrative hierarchy for those who may benefit from this on the basis of their grandparents, and a hierarchy can apply to rights and entitlements, and there might be steps to full accession to full citizenship. There might be something to be considered among the administrative steps. I am not sure if this is something that can be embraced or included in this as legislation.

The second thing—and I spoke about it before. I think we need to take the big step on Caricom skilled nationals, the movement of Caricom skilled nationals,

either by enhancing what already exists in our Caricom skilled nationals legislation or by going the whole hog and opening this up to full free movement for our brothers and sisters within Caricom. And very importantly, in order to facilitate this administrative hierarchy, if I can use that term, is that there is a dire need to recalibrate our immigration functions here, you know, to promote greater efficiency in the system.

There are too many people here—I can call names off the top of my head, and I will not—who are also making a contribution to this country, who are involved in a whirlwind, a never-ending cycle of administrative confusion regarding their immigration status here in Trinidad and Tobago. If this is to be considered and if it is to be activated in tandem with the suggestion that will broaden the net, widen the catchment area, then there would be an urgent need to recalibrate the immigration services offered in Trinidad and Tobago. This is not to say bad things about the people in the immigration office.

I went to renew my passport yesterday in Chaguanas and I must say that, I mean, they were some of the most pleasant people working in the public service I have met, I encountered them yesterday, and I pay tribute to them and I think the process went very smoothly because of the attitude. Now what we need is the mechanism within the working environment to ensure that they do their work a lot more efficiently. So I want to thank you very much for the attention.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: Sen. Wesley Gibbings, I know that you are in a temporary capacity today. I do not know if you will have the opportunity to visit this august Chamber in the future. Whatever happens, that is up to the Almighty and the decision-makers. But on behalf of all of our Senators, I would like to extend to

you our collective congratulations on your contribution here today; maiden contribution.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: I recognize—Senator, are you speaking? Sen. Sophia Chote.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Sophia Chote SC: Thank you, Mr. President. I consider myself to be quite fortunate to be able to speak at this late hour because I have now had the benefit of hearing the analyses of my colleagues and I have learned a lot about the discussion and the topic under consideration. May I say, as an Independent Senator, I firmly recognize that a democratically elected government has the right to govern. That is undisputable.

One of the processes that a government has to undertake is to introduce legislation in the Houses of Parliament for the scrutiny and consideration of the legislators, and that is what we are doing here. Now, that is a high bar that any government has to cross because as we would have heard from the speakers who went earlier, there is a lot of depth, analysis and research, particularly in some quarters, on matters which will result in a change in the law.

Now, when I looked at this proposed legislation, I thought to myself, this is an amendment to one section of the Act. So as most lawyers do, I thought, well, let me have a look at other sections of the Act which talk about citizenship. My understanding, putting it succinctly, is that citizenship involves rights and responsibilities. So I looked at section 7 of the Act to see how citizens or the door to citizenship was opened to a particular group of people, and the group of people I am talking about are commonwealth citizens, citizens from the Republic of Ireland and British protectorates. So section 7 deals with that group of people. Quickly, I

looked it up. The Commonwealth Secretariat website says that when we talk about that group of people to which the door is opened under section 7, we are talking about people from 57 countries, and we are talking about something like 2.7 billion people to whom the doors of Trinidad and Tobago may be open under section 7.

It includes countries from which our diaspora may come. It includes England, it includes Canada, it includes Australia and many other countries. So I thought to myself, well, what is the need for section 5. I pause to say, before I leave section 7, section 7 has protection. Section 7 says, look, you can apply, the Minister will consider your application if you can show you are:

“(a) ...of good character;”

You have:

“(b) ...adequate knowledge of the English...and...”

And very importantly:

“...of the duties of a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago;”

It then goes on to talk about, that person can have:

“(c) ...either resided in Trinidad and Tobago...been in the service of the Government, or has had partly such residence and partly such service, throughout the period of five years...”

But listen to this, this part is quite important:

“...or such shorter period (not being less than twelve months)...”

So it means you have a high end of five years and a low end of 12 months, and the Minister may, in special circumstances, in any particular case, accept such an application immediately preceding the date of his application. So there is a considerable degree of flexibility existing in section 7 for people coming from the diaspora—sportsmen, sportswomen and so on—once they fit this category.

So I thought to myself, why are these protections not listed in the section 5 in the proposed amendment? And then I said, okay, well, they are not listed there but perhaps these regulations, which the Minister will be taking into account, would have been presented to the legislators for the legislators to say, “Listen, yes, we accept there are protections and controls over admission to the country for the purposes of becoming a citizen, which is entirely different from coming here to work, coming here to visit or for any other purpose.” We are talking about the issue of citizenship and let us keep our eyes on the ball.

So I compared the two sections, and on the face of the Act, could not understand why no explanation has been given to this honourable Senate for the difference between the two sections. No explanation has been advanced for the lack of the protections which appear in another section of the Act, right after it, so it could not have been missed. No explanation has been given to the absence of regulations, which I think we were owed, as legislators, quite frankly.

I go now to looking at the policy. It seems to me that the policy falls into two categories. One aspect of it is to attract elite sportsmen and sportswomen. The other aspect of it, it has been more vaguely articulated, you know, what can the diaspora bring to us and so on. I have already addressed that to some extent through section 7. But when we talk about diaspora, everybody talks about India and the Indian diaspora. So I will give an example of an experience which I had, or from which I benefited, as being a parliamentarian in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago during the period 2015 to 2020.

In or around 2018, parliamentarians from the Indian diaspora were invited by the Government of India to visit New Delhi to talk about India’s diaspora and what contributions could be made to India through its diaspora. Together with

many of my colleagues—well, I do not know if they are here today—do not see many of them today, they may be in the other place. But we visited New Delhi, and it made me understand what that country talks about when it talks diaspora. We are not in their shoes.

11.15 p.m.

India does not tie-in its benefits from its diaspora to citizenship. In fact, and I am saying this because I heard the words coming from the mouth of the hon. Prime Minister of India, who visited us not so long ago, and he explained that a large amount of money which came into India from its diaspora came from citizens of India who went to work in oil-producing countries like Saudi Arabia and other countries in the Middle East. And they sent huge amounts of money back home and helped, by so doing, the Indian economy to thrive because they helped maintain their families, helped them set up businesses, and grew the economy.

What are we talking about here when we are talking about diaspora? We must not simply throw words around because they sound good. We must try to connect them with some sort of practical reality. I do not hear any sort of practical proposals for benefiting from this diaspora. There is nothing preventing people in the diaspora from helping citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, even if they are not citizens. Many of them do, through NGOs and that kind of thing.

So, I find, one, the drafting of the legislation is incomplete. It is flawed. It does not meet the standard that it should meet to allow it to be passed. The policy articulated as to the need for it, I find unconvincing. I have to end by saying that as legislators, when we use language and when we represent things to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, let us be fair and honest in our representations. If you do not know something is a fact, do not say it. Throwing around the names of

countries and trying to draw analogies between their situations and ours is misrepresentation.

Now, I use the example of Guyana, if anybody does a quick Google search, you will see that the legislation in Guyana is tight. You must have a Guyanese parent if you are living abroad in order to get citizenship. So, to come here and suggest that we have a wide range of countries from Guyana to Jamaica, and elsewhere, which allow persons to come in and access citizenship, is simply wrong.

Now, the other thing which—and I apologize if I sound a little irritable, but it is late, and I will not make you irritable, Mr. President, by keeping us much longer. But could we just stop the fear-mongering? So when I hear colleagues talking about, “Well, you know, foreign fighters, their children will come back.” Well, if those foreign fighters were citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, their children are citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, and as I understand it, some of them are already back.

So let us put aside the fear-mongering. “Oh, deportees with children, you know, we will have to deal with that in our communities.” Deportees were deported presumably because they are citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Their children will be citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Not because their parents committed crimes, it means that children should be stigmatized.

So, please, let us lift our game a bit. And let us try to look at what is actually before us for consideration and speak to that. For the reasons I have set out, I regret that I am unable to support this legislation. Thank you, Mr President.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: The hon. Attorney General.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

The Attorney General (Sen. The Hon. John Jeremie SC): Mr. President, it is late, and I did not intend to join the debate, but if I could just ask for a few minutes before we move to the next stage. Now there are a couple of terms my friend, Sen. Wesley Gibbings, was throwing around, and it reminded me—I know that you were doing it naturally—of a habit that some other colleagues have in this place, they use the Latin. So I just want to clarify two things.

So the Senator spoke of *jus soli* and *jus sanguinis*, and they are important because those two concepts establish the bedrock on which most states proceed when dealing with citizenship. So, *jus soli* is birth, and *jus sanguinis* is blood. So that is what I will describe it as.

Now, having put that to one side, I want to deal with some of the criticisms that I have heard during the course of our very long debate. Now, the first one that I want to speak to is: Why is there a need for a constitutional amendment? That was said in the context of a fact; it is not a fact. And that we have been here three times since we came back to amend the Constitution. Now, I have checked, and the Government came in and started its parliamentary business on May 23rd; this is the first constitutional amendment.

Sen. Lewis: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: It is, just allow me to speak. It is the first constitutional amendment. It is not the first Act that we have passed that required some interplay with the Constitution. I think Sen. Lewis and, perhaps, Sen. Vieira to a lesser extent, were speaking on the Prime Minister's Pension (Amdt.) Bill. That was a Bill. It was a Bill that was passed by a constitutional majority. It did not amend the Constitution. The Constitution, as a statute, as a piece of law, said,

in section 54, that legislation of that type required a particular majority. That was not a constitutional amendment. This is the first constitutional amendment Bill.

Now, having put that to one side, why is it before us as a constitutional amendment? And that is a good question. The answer is this, citizenship is an important thing. It is dealt with both in a statute, the Citizenship of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago Act, as well as, the Constitution. So, if we wanted to, as a Government, make a change in respect of citizenship, we had to do two things. We had to look at the provisions in the Constitution that dealt with citizenship, and we had to look at the provisions in the Citizenship of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago Act.

If you look at the long title to the Bill, you will see that it is described as:

“An Act to amend the Constitution of the Republic...”

It goes on:

and to make consequential amendments to the Citizenship Act and related matters.

So, there is nothing pernicious.

There is no evil intent in what we seek to do. It is the most routine type of measure that one could pass that will require a constitutional amendment, and let me explain that. Unlike the Pension (Amdt.) Bill, which is a separate piece of legislation, not a constitutional Bill, this is an Act that requires a simple majority. The Constitution is a statute as well. It is passed by us in this Senate, and we pass statute. It is just that the Constitution is a super-statute; it is described as the supreme law, but it is a statute. In it, there is a provision—and if I am teaching, it is because that is part of who I am. I think Sen. Al-Rawi and Sen. Jones-Simmons, and some of the others, would know that that is who I am.

The Constitution has a clause in it as a super-law which says listen, if you do various things; section 54, if you pass an Act like the Pension (Amdt.) Act, which is a statute too, you do so with a super majority because you might be affecting people's rights. This affects no one's rights in that sense. So there is no entrenched provision in the Constitution, section 54 leaves this out. You can pass a law here. It is the ordinary function of the Government to pass a law with respect to citizenship, and you do that by way of one extra-vote, a simple majority. That is the business of government.

Now, having said all of that, what I want to turn to would be some of what Sen. Chote described to be what I think would be fear-mongering. So you had a lot coming from my friends opposite. They are my friends, opposite. They were my friends and colleagues at one point in time.

Hon. Senator: Now they are just friends.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: Now they are just friends, exactly.

Hon. Senators: [*Laughter*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: But you see, my friends opposite, part of their DNA is fear mongering. It is. So that when you speak about voters coming in and benefits that will be given away to hordes of people, that is unfortunate. We have laws. You do not vote in Trinidad and Tobago unless the law allows you to vote. You cannot vote—and it is unfortunate, but this is what was said—you cannot vote by just being a Trinidad citizen in the United States.

11.30 p.m.

For the reason that I think Sen. Roberts colourfully illustrated is because you are not in a constituency if you are in Washington, if you have constituency voting. There is no way that you could vote in Washington, and where would you go to

cast that ballot? At the High Commission? They will lock you up. How would you get the vote from Washington to Port of Spain? Or if you were in England, what are you going to do? You are going to go to the Trinidad High Commission? They will lock you up. I used to be there, and it is preposterous.

So the fact is that you have to comply with the election laws to be entitled to vote. This Bill before us, to describe it as mischief does capture it. I think it is an evil intent, that is an evil intent to say that there is any possibility that this Bill can lead to vote apartheid, and I suppose all of the comments about section 24 or 34 or whatever. It is a straight piece of legislation. It deals with citizenship full stop. There is no harm that will befall us in respect of elections.

Now, in terms of the benefits, old age pension. There is a law, I think you get it at 65, you have to have worked for 20 years in Trinidad and so on and so forth. That is nonsense as well. It does not begin to get us to the point of do we support this legislation or do we not? So if you look at the legislation on its merit, it was presented by Sen. Nakhid in a particular vein and interestingly enough, my friend, who I have known for, well, not 40 years, but a long time. I have been one of his subjects, the persons he has covered, our new Independent Sen. Wesley Gibbings. A completely different contribution, not full of fear but full of optimism. And—

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: What did Sen. Gibbings speak to? He spoke about his own personal circumstances. He said, “Listen, I want to open this thing up”. That is the approach which—I am not a sportsman, but I know what the benefits are, I know what the immediate sporting benefits are. And it is not too much to say that our colleagues in the rest of the region, and this is in direct answer to

something that my friend, Sen. Dr. Browne, former colleague, said—

[Device goes off]

Sen. Roberts: Fifteen minutes.

Hon. Senators: *[Crosstalk]*

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: May I continue, Mr. President?

Sen. Roberts: Dhanpaul, take the blame.

Sen. The Hon. J. Jeremie SC: My friend spoke about the lack of an international benchmark, because he was there doing what my friends and colleagues on the other side do. That is your job, and you cannot be upset with them for that. They have to rubbish the Bill. So he said there are no international benchmarks, and I know what Sen. Chote said, but there are Caribbean precedents, there are models. This is not the first place and the first time that this type of legislation is being enacted. You have St. Vincent, St. Lucia, Grenada, and Jamaica just surrounding us, different models, so I am not trying to say that we—and we should not in any event—copied what they did. But you have some territories which would give you citizenship, third-generation citizenship, which is what we seek to do here. Some territories which would give you that type of citizenship as of right. And you have others who will say, listen, you are entitled to make an application, and that application must be in a prescribed form, and you must satisfy various criteria.

So, wrong to say that we are looking at the Constitution, amending the Constitution every day, that is wrong. Wrong to say that the Bill before us seeks to have—well, has anything to do with elections or benefits or anything of that nature. Wrong to say that there are no international benchmarks. And I dare say, not correct to say that we ought not to look at what our colleagues around us are doing to harness their own diaspora. I made the point that I enjoyed Sen. Gibbings

contribution because not only was it hopeful but it was consistent with the lived experience of quite a number of us who have worked and lived outside of Trinidad for vast periods of time, and who have families who are basically all over the world, and the legislation seeks to widen the diaspora and to capture the benefits which flow from that.

Do we need regulations in section 5 because there is a section—so there are just a few clauses, two material clauses 4 and 5, they have no problem with 4(a) and 5, they said nothing about that. Knowing them, they might develop a problem with one or the other. But they said they had no problem with 4(a) and 5. The problem was with 4(b) and (c). And what do (b) and (c) do? Well, they substitute the words “otherwise than” for “including”. And again, it is because under the existing law, the restriction was by descent, was it? And we have moved away from that to include everything. That is more inclusive, it is consistent with the legislative objective, and it is the policy of the Government. And I am reminded by Sen. Allahar that it is not in any way discriminatory.

Now, Mr. President, I did not intend to speak for more than a few minutes. I have already exceeded the time, but I would just like to make one point in answer to Sophia Chote. Yes, there is a need for—it uses the words:

“...upon receipt of the prescribed application made...”

Now, that is a new section, and I dare say that the old form 4 in the regulations will have to come, but it is our habit in this place to bring regulations afterwards. In any event, the Act is going to come into effect as I understand it on a date to be fixed by the President by proclamation, which is the formula that we normally use when we pass legislation. It does not come into effect tomorrow, okay. So the President is not going to be asked to proclaim until an appropriate regulation is

made under 5, and new forms come in. Mr. President, I thank you for that half an hour at this late hour of the night.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. President: The Hon. Sen. David Nakhid.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

The Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs (Sen. The Hon. David Nakhid): In the name of God, the most gracious, most merciful. Mr. President, given the long time that we have debated this amendment Bill, I thought that when I piloted the Bill, our intentions were clear. It was to not only expand the talent pool across all sports to engage the diaspora. Now, I hear that we are throwing words around like diaspora. I did not see it like that. It reminds me of what my father used to say, you know, Mr. Nakhid, God rest his soul. Some people see the glass half full, and some see it half empty. And some people, like the PNM, do not see the glass at all. They just do not see it, and it is a pity. We have a saying in Arabic, you know [*Arabic spoken*].

Hon Senator: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. The Hon. D. Nakhid: [*Laughter*] It means those who cannot see are like a donkey bearing books on its back, useless.

Hon Senator: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. The Hon. D. Nakhid: [*Laughter*] Bearing books on its back, and that is what I got here today, it was full of responses, histrionics as we heard from the hon. AG, a fair amount of fearmongering, thrown in with a lot of misinformation, and downright falsehoods, which leads me to the pivot used by Sen. Cummings, it is a pity he is not here, Sen. Dr. Browne, which formed a large basis of their contribution that our legislation was not in line with FIFA's legislation. They read

selectively as the PNM normally does. What do they do? They read selectively out of context. But here I have the governing legislation, which clearly states, and I read Article 321:

FIFA, over the years, have crafted definite criteria for the purpose of evaluating and establishing pathways to govern the engagement of potential players at the international competitions.

As of January 2021, FIFA Commentary on the Rules Governing Eligibility to Play for Representative Teams indicated that players need to provide proof of nationality. Proof of nationality, first and foremost, is your passport, your citizenship. So if you have that, all of these fears expressed, all this information peddled to the public becomes redundant. It is moot. Once you have your passport, FIFA does not delve into how you got your passport. It is a legal document from a country that seeks to play international football, or cricket, or whatever.

11.45 p.m.

When I looked, it continues. According to FIFA commentary, Article 5, paragraph 2, a player may be granted eligibility to represent that country under the following conditions:

“...through the operation of a national law, they have:

- (a) automatically received a nationality...without being required to undertake any further administrative requirements (e.g. abandoning a separate nationality)...”

So what they were quoting may be unbeknownst to them. Maybe they are like a donkey bearing books. They just do not know.

What they have not realized is if they attempt to acquire a new nationality,

as Sen. Browne stated, a new citizenship, then when there is doubt, what does FIFA look to? They look to where are your ancestral roots better grounded. For example, if it is better grounded in Canada, you have a grandparent that was born there and you want to play for Trinidad, then they say, “No, you cannot, you have to play for Canada.” You cannot represent dual nationality. They read very selectively and totally misled, not only the Senate, they misled the country.

Once you have a passport, FIFA does not—and it is nowhere indicated—go into any background checks to see how you acquired that passport. And it says it right here:

“...through the operation of a national law...

a) automatically receive a nationality...”

And how do you receive a nationality? They issue a passport.

“...without being required to undertake any further administrative requirements...

(b) acquired a nationality by undertaking a naturalisation process.”

So in all ways, however you look at it, once you hold that passport and you come to FIFA and say, “Well, I want to play for Trinidad and Tobago,” and Trinidad and Tobago grants you that passport, FIFA does not go into any background check, “Well, you got it from your grandmother, your grandfather, you got it from here.” They do not; absolutely not—

Hon. Senator: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. D. Nakhid: No, keep quiet.

Hon. Senators: [*Interruption*]

Sen. D. Nakhid: So what you are doing—

Hon. Senator: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. D. Nakhid: What we are doing here, we are seeking—

Hon. Senator: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. D. Nakhid: What we are doing here, we have heard them come here and misrepresent and show fierce indignation as to our attempt here to move the country forward in ways that we see fit. We were elected to govern, as I heard a Senator just say, and that is the truth. And if we think the way to move this country forward, out of the doldrums that they created for 10 years, then it is our prerogative. It is our prerogative.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. D. Nakhid: The audacity of that group, after 10 years of inaction— when I say inaction, I hold right here. I heard Sen. Cummings talk about, “I do not know where they get this from, and it is embarrassing.” “We geh dis from all yuh. Look it right here”. March 2024, a preliminary discussion occurred between the former Minister of Sport and Community Development, Shamfa Cudjoe; LSU, the Legal Services Unit; PSD, for development of a draft policy and subsequent legislative amendments allowing for high-performing athletes with third-generation linear ties to Trinidad and Tobago to acquire citizenship to widen the pool of athletes for participation in competition. “Dis come from all yuh. All yuh coming here playing all yuh doh know where it come from. Where it come from? Where it come from. It embarrassing”. As a matter of fact, you all are embarrassing by lying to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. President: “Umm”, please—

Sen. D. Nakhid: By telling untruths.

Mr. President: Yes, please.

Sen. D. Nakhid: Sorry. Being strangers to the truth.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. D. Nakhid: I am not surprised because this is all you all have. We come here with legislation, well-intentioned, and you all sat down there and misrepresented FIFA's position for about six or seven hours, wasting people's time, giving people the wrong impression of where we are.

And then Sen. Cummings had the audacity to talk about LifeSport or this—when before the elections, 15 million in contracts to family and friends. I mean, where you all have the gall, with the kind of governance that you all showed us, to come here and question our intention, is beyond me. It is beyond me. That level of misinformation, falsehood, I do not want to go into more—I really do not want to get into the politics of it, but you all forced my hand.

I would like to deal a bit with Sen. Roberts-Radgman. You know, I love to hear when people talk about, you know, they admire Greek writers, and then she began to speak about, you know, *Otan den gnorízeis típote apo' Elláda, mi milás ya Elláda*. This simply means in Greek, if you do not know about Greece, do not speak about it.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. D. Nakhid: Greece was an idea. Greece was never a physical structure with boundaries and geographical—it was always about an idea, the idea of Greece. So you could be Greek by culture, by language even. It was similar to what we call “Arabism”. You could be an Arab just because you know the Arabic language; you could be considered an Arab. If you adopted the culture of an Arab, you could be considered an Arab. So do not come to regale us about the Greeks talk and their affinity to citizenship. It is very duplicitous. That is completely wrong. I think someone spoke about it, if you do not know, do not speak about it. Because you

have people on this side who knows.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. D. Nakhid: And unfortunately, I have to speak to you like that because I heard enough. I heard, for six hours, just misrepresentation and a fair degree of foolishness. It is not surprising to me, my homeboy—it is not surprising to me when a PNM Senator, who speaks like he speaks on behalf of the Opposition—not the Opposition, sorry, the Independent Senators. I heard Sen. Amery Browne get up and speak like he was speaking on behalf of the Independent Senators. Thank God, we have a Senate President who could recognize that and had to pull him up. But that is totally unacceptable, with the kind of condescension and contempt, and then he begins to speak about what this House requires.

Well, first of all, I do not think we require anybody lecturing to us and pontificating to us. Everybody here is a professional in their own right and everybody has to be given the liberty to give their own opinion. And we heard many opinions that I disagree with, but I accept it. I agree with some of them and I do not. Some of them stipulated, “Okay, let us go into committee stage and see what we can”—okay, that is fine. This is the crux of a debate. This is the essence of a debate, and I like that. But do not come here and pontificate and pretend that you represent all of the Senate. I mean, that is, not only disingenuous, it is disgusting.

The intent of this Bill is to expand our talent pool. It is to give us a chance to compete at the highest level. And yes, there is a certain expediency to it because of the practical realities that face us right now. If you all, meaning the Independents and the Opposition Senators, do not put that as a priority, what is needed right now, what the country needs right now, what our athletes need right

now, do not come and tell me that you are patriotic. That does not make any sense. So we must take our time. Listen, every opportunity has to be met, cometh the hour, cometh the people or cometh the man. You cannot tell me, “No, we have to give it time.” Now it is needed. All the football fraternities, the fans, it is needed now.

Hon. Senators: [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. D. Nakhid: It requires you, as legislators, to make a decision. The worst thing you can have in a society is when there is indecision tied to a lack of vision, and that is what I heard today by many of you. “Oh, well, we have to bring it to a committee and we have to say—you have no ties to the country.” I have seen people live here, born here and display less patriotism than people who never came to this country. Do not pretend you do not know some of them. That is just the reality. Who are we, any of us here, to determine what is in a man’s soul, in his heart, whether it is love for country? You to determine it because his grandmother or grandfather was not born here? Nah, that is not good enough. If you want to talk about integrity and morality, that does not fit the bill either. No one here has the right to determine how someone feels about their country. “Oh, well, he was not born here and it is three generations past.”

Look at us, Emancipation Day, Indian Arrival Day. Who shows more loyalty to Mother Africa or Mother India than our Africans or Indians? Who? So that is disingenuous and it is a specious argument, and that is why I am so passionate now. You come with an argument that has a logical consequence to it, you come with an argument that is honest, okay, even if you are wrong. But you come with misrepresentations, falsehoods, deliberately, I cannot accept it.

Sen. John-Bates: Mr. President, I rise on a point of order, please, 46(4), offensive

and insulting language. The Member has indicated that we are deliberately misleading, please.

Mr. President: Well, the word “misleading” might be inappropriate, but I think he is responding to what has been said. But I would guide him on misleading. I do not think the word “misleading” should be used in this context.

Sen. D. Nakhid: Thank you for your esteemed guidance, Mr. President. Well, I would not take up much more of your time. There are no amendments that have been posited. My final point is, a government that does not make a decision is worse than a government that takes a decision, even if it is a wrong one. That is a fact. The worst thing you can do is be entrusted by the people and you are just indecisive. You just sit on the fence. You cannot do—you do not want to do anything. You do not want to be proactive. You are reactive to everything.

So we come at something, “No, no, no, no, no, no, no,” and full of history on it. We have decided, under the esteemed leadership of a Prime Minister who decided to expand this Bill into all sectors, to make it non-discriminatory as possible, to make it as inclusive as possible to the diaspora. We backed this Bill. We support this Bill. We were hoping that you all saw it in like mind, in order to have something that took our country from the doldrums that they left us with for 10 years. We have to be proactive. We have to be brave. We have to be courageous in taking this country forward. And you all have left the country disappointed; disappointed with some of your contributions.

Mr. President, with that said, I beg to move.

12.00 a.m.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Bill committed to a committee of the whole Senate.

Senate in committee.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Senators, I have received no written amendments in accordance with our Standing Orders. In the circumstances there are five clauses and with your agreement, I shall take them collectively. Okay. I have not received any amendments in writing. Now, as you know Senators, there are five clauses in this Bill before us. I shall now put the question. The question is that clauses 1 to 5 stand part of the Bill.

Question put.

Mr. Al-Rawi SC: Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Al-Rawi SC: In relation to your general omnibus question, I just have one question please, for the hon. Parliamentary Secretary in relation to clause 4. May I?

Mr. Chairman: Well, if you are going to ask let us deal with the first three clauses then, because you are going to delay it. So, may I suggest that we deal with the first three clauses combined?

Clauses 1 to 3 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 4.

Question proposed: That clause 4 stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Al-Rawi.

Mr. Al-Rawi SC: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman through you, in relation to clause 4(b) and clause 4(c) that is the deletion of “otherwise than” substituting with the word “including” and then “including by descent”. Is the hon. Parliamentary Secretary saying for the record that citizens by descent at the grandparent level will in fact qualify under the cumulative requirements—let

me stress that “cumulative requirements”—of FIFA’s Article 9?

Sen. Nakhid: Mr. Chairman that is not a matter for this Bill. That is something that is completely different from the intent of this Bill.

Mr. Al-Rawi SC: Mr. Chairman, I did not hear that. Sorry.

Mr. Chairman: Could you just repeat for him, Sen. Nakhid.

Sen. Nakhid: That is not a not matter for this Bill and the hon. AG can expand.

Sen. Jeremie SC: My colleague is saying that the Bill on the whole meets the requirements of FIFA for third generation players. I would not like to be tied to saying on the record that clauses 4(c) and (d) achieve that result. I say that the Bill in 4 and 5 cumulatively would achieve that result.

Mr. Al-Rawi SC: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The hon. Attorney General is extremely eloquent and very measured. I appreciate where he is coming from. For the record, Mr. Chairman, and I will leave it just after saying on the record, but unless of course there is any position otherwise. The reason that I have asked that question is that it is attached to the legitimate aim expressed in the piloting of this Bill, and I put for the record, because there may be action upon it later that the cumulative requirements do require “birth of grandparents”. I say no more. I accept the Attorney General’s position for now.

Mr. Chairman: I will put the question, upon further clarification, Members.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 4 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 5 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Question put and agreed to: That the Bill be reported to the Senate.

Senate resumed.

Bill reported without amendments.

Question put: That the Bill be now read a third time.

Hon. Senator: Division.

The Senate divided: Ayes 16 Noes 13

AYES

Allahar, D.

Jeremie SC, J.

Roberts, A.

Swaratsingh, Dr. K.

Maharaj, S.

Baptiste, L.

Alexander, P.

Ratiram, R.

Persad, Prof. P.

Chaitan-Maharaj, Dr. N.

Baig, B.

Charles, K.

Zakour, Eli.

Smith, D.

Nakhid, D.

Gibbings, W.

NOES

Browne, Dr. A.

Al-Rawi SC, F.

Roberts-Radgman, Mrs. M.

Dhanpaul, V.

Cummings, F.

John-Bates, Mrs. J.

Vieira SC, A.

Chote SC, Ms. S.

Attzs, Dr. M.

de la Bastide SC, M.

Jones-Simmons, Ms. C.

Lewis, F.

Lalite-Etienne, A.

Mr. C. Mc Nish abstained.

Question agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the third time and passed.

ADJOURNMENT

Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Sen. The Hon. Darrell Allahar):

Mr. President, I beg to move that this Senate do now adjourn to a date to be fixed.

Preparation of Practice Note

(Use of Cellphones in Chamber)

Mr. President: Hon. Members, before I move for the adjournment, I want to put Members on notice that I am going to instruct the Clerk to prepare a practice note on the use of cell phones in this Chamber. So you can look forward to receiving a practice note when you return to this honourable House. I ask Members to take that practice note very seriously. I will be speaking no more on this matter.

Question put and agreed to.

Senate adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 12.18 a.m.