The Minister of Social Development and Family Services (Hon. Cherry-Ann Crichlow-Cockburn): Madam Speaker I thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this budget debate, and I seek your leave under Standing Order 44(10), please.

There are three well-established criteria by which the records of performance of organizations and institutions, including governments worldwide, are scrupulously and objectively valuated. I refer to the heights achieved in discharging, one, their legal responsibilities, two, their financial responsibilities and, three and by no means least, their social responsibilities.

Madam Speaker, as I rise to make my contribution to the national budget for 2018/2019, I do so with a great deal of satisfaction and deep conviction that, given the disastrous financial state of affairs which the PNM Government inherited following our success at the polls in 2015, the record of performance of this Administration can only be described as phenomenal. [Desk thumping] If our citizens genuinely reflect upon the three evaluation criteria to which I have alluded, this is what they would find. In the discharge of our legal responsibilities, no one can truthfully deny the enviable track record achieved in working towards the completion of the more than 100 items on our legislative agenda projected for the period 2016 to 2020. But I leave that record of achievement to be dealt with by my colleague, the hon. Attorney General.

Madam Speaker, insofar as this Government’s discharge of its financial responsibilities to the people of Trinidad and Tobago is concerned, there is absolutely no doubt in respect of the clinically structured and intellectually charted road map along which our Minister of Finance has led us, caringly and confidently over the past three years, designed as it was to
extricate the nation as painlessly as possible from the calamitous state of affairs which confronted this Administration in September 2015, and now having guided us along a path to recovery, a stabilized economy and achievement of positive growth. [Desk thumping]

And now, Madam Speaker, what a budget presentation on Monday; what thoughtfulness, what immeasurable wisdom, what a demonstration of caring and putting people first. A “Turnaround” budget so patriotically, patently and professionally crafted in PNM tradition, in PNM style and, above all, in PNM’s unrelenting quest for a much improved quality of life for all. [Desk thumping] And so Minister of Finance I congratulate you on your presentation of such an amazingly appropriate budget, filled as it is with the wide range of cogent, comforting and caring measures all aimed at the good and welfare of all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, while I understand everybody being eager to support their respective side, even support in terms of clapping, jeering and any such behaviour could be considered disorderly. Please continue, ma’am.

Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The ability to look after the needs of the vulnerable members of our society is a blessing, an indispensable component of the social transformation landscape. From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs, according each and every citizen opportunities to aspire to self-sufficiency through the ability to acquire skills and qualifications, eventually leading to improvement in standards of living for themselves and their families.

Social transformation programmes have been at the heart of
everything that PNM Governments create and develop for the benefit of all, and are exemplified in affordable housing, free health care, free universal primary and secondary education, reflected in exceptionally low cost of water and electricity, the support for sport and the creative arts, maintenance of a safety net for the poor and vulnerable, and I can go on and on, Madam Speaker.

Today, however, my focus is on the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services and its role in the discharge of the Government’s social responsibilities. But before I do that, I want to make reference to the Leader of the Opposition’s contribution this morning. I can only, summing up that contribution, as being reminiscent of smoke and mirrors. All the Leader of the Opposition sought to do this morning was to try and obscure the truth of this situation, and that is the fact that we have an excellent budget. [Desk thumping] We have been presented with a budget that seeks to enhance the quality of life of most of our citizens, especially the vulnerable. So what did we get this morning? An attempt to distort the facts and to distort truth.

Our economy is in recovery, but that was denied. Our economy is experiencing growth and is expected to continue to experience growth into the medium-term, that was also denied. It is interesting though that the pundits have not denied this, but the Leader of the Opposition sought to do that this morning—smoke and mirrors.

The Leader of the Opposition also lost me, and the integrity of her whole contribution diminished when she used the analogy of doctors and patients and hospitals, because all that came to mind was the fact that her government would have opened the Couva Children Hospital when they knew it was not operational, and it could not have functioned, so it was a
farce, and that summarized her contribution this morning—a farce. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, I also want to mention the contribution of the hon. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre. Now I recognize and understand that he is passionate about Petrotrin because that is in his constituency. But where was that passion, where was that interest over the last eight years, during their period of their administration when Petrotrin had already been in trouble? He stood here today and said he had a plan. Why was that plan not implemented so that Petrotrin could have started to recover? [Desk thumping]

He also mentioned that this Government has not been sharing information, and they were not aware and the public was not aware of what was to happen with Petrotrin. But Madam Speaker, the hon. Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Rowley, almost a year ago, spoke to this nation and would have indicated what the situation was with Petrotrin, and except for those who may have buried their heads in the sand it was very, very, very clear that action had to be taken with Petrotrin to preserve the patrimony of Trinidad and Tobago.

And so I go now to my area of core responsibility, and that is the delivery of social services, including income support through the provision of three major grants: the senior citizens’ pension, the Disability Assistance Grant and the Public Assistance Grant.

Now, it was very interesting today, normally those on the other side label this Government as uncaring, but having heard this budget and having read their budget contributions, they know that they could not have come here today and say this Government is not caring. [Desk thumping] So they
have gone with a new word, “incompetent”. I sat there and then I got tired of listening to it. The Leader of the Opposition used the word “incompetent” at least eight times, but ladies and gentlemen by the time I am finished and after all of our colleagues are finished, this nation will be left as to no uncertainty that this is a very competent, if not one of the most competent governments, to lead this country.

And so, the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services continues to maintain the safety net, and to provide income support so that we can ensure the protection of the vulnerable in our society, and try to cushion the impact of poverty. This is all in keeping with the PNM philosophy of caring and putting people first, the UN’s 2030 agenda for sustainable development, which seeks to end poverty in all forms, and Trinidad and Tobago’s National Development Strategy, Vision 2030, Putting People First and Improving Service Delivery. Over the last three years this Government’s commitment to care for and protect our poor and vulnerable citizens was very evident in the fact that despite our straightened economic circumstances, we maintained all grants, all benefits, all services at existing levels, with no reduction in quantum or frequency of payments.

In 2018, we spent $4.4 billion or 93 per cent of our recurrent expenditure on these three major grants. This year in 2019, we will be again spending approximately 93 per cent of our budget, but this time it has been increased to $4.6 billion. [Desk thumping] But even though Government has now reversed the decline and stabilized our economy, we have to be still prudent. So alto the turnaround has begun, this Government will continue to exercise prudent for we are not yet out of the woods.

So the proposed increase in the cap of combined monthly incomes to
$6,000 will result in increases for 27,263 existing pensioners. The minimum
senior citizen pension of $3,500 per month will be maintained, for although
the turnaround has begun this Government has to be cognizant of the fact
that pensions in state enterprises for which the Government has a say could
be similarly affected, and this Government at this time cannot afford to
increase pensions in state enterprises. So what we have done, the seven
current bands will be consolidated into three and we will introduce a new
band of more than $4,500 to $5,500. So the maximum income to qualify for
senior citizens’ pension will increase from $4,500 to $5,500. This increase
in the maximum income to qualify enables an estimated 2,500 persons, who
are already 65 years of age, to access and qualify for a senior citizens’
pension.

Madam Speaker, and I say here now to Mrs. Ward in Diego Martin
and a constituent, Mr. Harding in Arouca, they will now qualify for this
senior citizens’ pension. [Desk thumping] Persons receiving the maximum
pension of $3,500 will increase by 1,817 persons to 69,208. Madam
Speaker, 24,636 persons will receive an increase of $500, and 2,627 persons
will receive an increase of $1,000. [Desk thumping] This measure is
expected to cost an additional $194 million, but it will be money well spent.
[Desk thumping]

I just want to inform this august House and the citizens of Trinidad
and Tobago, that Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana are the only countries
that provide a senior citizens’ pension that is non-contributory, and while
ours stands at $3,500, Guyana pays the equivalent of $612. So we are
indeed taking care of our elderly in Trinidad and Tobago.

The budget also proposes an increase in the Public Assistance Grant.
This grant is normally paid to children with a disability, adults who are unable to work because they have a disability, children whose parents may be deceased or incarcerated or may have abandoned the families, the spouses of imprisoned persons who are unable to work because they have to care for their children. So these are people in our society who are very vulnerable. There are 23,885 such persons, and we also have 1,024 children with special needs. So while the increase is $150, this is very important and will be very, very well received by these persons because of the impact it will have on their ability to take care of themselves.

The Special Child Grant currently is paid via cheque, and these cheques are printed at the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. So there are times based on administrative reasons where these cheques may be late. This has not been a good thing because it has produced undue hardship on families, and so a number of them have been accessing the Public Assistance Grant. But what happens in situations like that, if a family has two children who may have a special need, the sum that they are paid is less than if they were receiving two Special Child Grants, because in that case instead of receiving $1,600, they would receive $1,400. So what we have proposed is to have children paid under the Disability Assistance Grant. In that instance they will not be subjected to a means test and they will also receive $1,500. This would represent an increase of $750 for some persons, and an increase of between $350 to $700 per child or $1,400 to $1,600 for two children.

Now Madam Speaker, I heard the Leader of the Opposition speak very disparagingly about an increase of $100, but for those whose pockets are well lined and their savings may be in the six and seven figures, $100
may not mean a lot, but for our poor and vulnerable citizens an increase of $150 means a lot.  [Desk thumping] I want to relay to this House a situation that occurred at my constituency office, so that they would understand how important $100 can be.

A young lady with two children, a single parent, came to my office, and her situation was such that she needed assistance. It would have taken some time for her to access the Food Card or the Public Assistance Grant, so the staff at my office gave her $100 and took her to the grocery. Madam Speaker, that young lady was able to shop for groceries for the week for herself and two children on that $100. Has anybody in this House ever been to the grocery and the Bill came exactly rounded to $100? I think not, but you see God takes care of the poor and the needy, and that was done on that day.  [Desk thumping] This Government, by providing this increase, continues to take care of such people, and I just wish to inform this House that the lady did in fact get a Food Card and her Public Assistance Grant.  [Desk thumping]

4.00 p.m.

And so, Madam Speaker, the Disability Assistance Grant, in addition to removing the eligibility age for children—sorry, the measure to remove the age eligibility and allow children under 18 to access this grant is nothing short of a stroke of genius by the Ministry of Finance because it now enables middle and lower-income families to access this grant because it is not means-tested.

And, Ladies and Gentlemen, our experience has been for a number of middle-income and lower-income families, it has been very onerous
taking care of children with special needs on $800 or $1,150 a month. So, now because of this increase to $1,500 and the fact that they cannot be means-tested and told that they do not qualify, this is of very, very significant importance, Madam Speaker, to those 23,245 persons.

And, of course, the Ministry continues with its General Assistance Grants, all of these grants continue at the same quantum, there will be no reduction. So, for example, victims of natural disaster can still access grants to the value of $10,000 to replace household appliances; for house repairs, they can access grants of $15,000; for the rewiring, up to $25,000; and for sanitation $15,000.

Madam Speaker, we will still be providing assistance in terms of the Funeral Grant of $7,000, Rental Assistance Grants of $2,500 for up to six months and, of course, one that has grown in great importance, the provision of a grant to purchase prosthetics up to $40,000, but in exceptional circumstances that grant can be provided up to $75,000. And in 2018, we would have spent $1.7 million to provide prosthetics to 49 persons.

Madam Speaker, I now come to an area that seems to be of great importance and a thorn in the side of the Members on the other side and that is food support. Madam Speaker, the fact that this Government, this administration, has been able to save $150 million by taking action that resulted in 18,000 persons who knew that they were not eligible for the food card, come out of the system, seems to be a problem for the Members on the other side, but, Madam Speaker, neither myself nor this Government will take that to heart. I personally prefer to be disparaged
for doing right than to be lauded or recognized for doing what is wrong. [Desk thumping] And so, Madam Speaker, this Government will continue to provide food support to families that are in need and unable to provide a nutritional meal for themselves every day.

Those on the other side like to talk about this Government is incompetent but, Madam Speaker, they would have spent $97 million and an additional $20 million in settling a court matter on the biometric system, and this system was only used to support 3,158 persons or 2 per cent of the recipients. And it was a system that was fraught with corruption and wastage, and no database was maintained so it was almost impossible to determine what were the numbers and how many persons were being, in fact, serviced. But that was not by accident, Madam Speaker, that was by choice.

But having taken all the action that we have taken, we are now assured that the 24,300 persons who have been paid the food support are, in fact, persons that are eligible for such support. And so, Madam Speaker, this budget provides for an increase of $100 per month in food support.

Now the Member, the Leader of the Opposition, would have indicated that 18,000 persons could not have been cheaters, and she looked across at our side and looked at us as if to say, you all cannot be right, you have to be crazy, there could not have been 18,000 persons in the system who were not eligible.

But, Madam Speaker, when we looked at the fact that during their tenure, every month, each MP was given 50 food cards to give to
constituents; when you total that for five years it comes up to 87,000 food cards. Now, if they would have given out 87,000 temporary food cards, it is very believable that 18,000 food cards were, in fact, given out to persons who were not eligible. But we, this Government, has taken action to ensure that only persons who need that support are getting it and will continue to get it. [Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker, this Government is very concerned with moving our clients from a state of dependency to one of self-sufficiency, and what we have been doing is taking action to ensure that. This is a totally different approach from the one that was taken by those on the other side when they were in Government. They seem to be content to keep our citizens, keep the clients of the Ministry in a state of being dependent. And we can all understand that when people rely on you for their income, for their very livelihood it is a means of control, and I believe that is something in which those on the opposite side engaged. But we, Madam Speaker, our intention is not just to reduce poverty, but to bring our clients to a state of independence, and to this end we seek to educate them, and so we have our adult education programmes. Currently, there are 4,000 persons enrolled in 26 courses at 26 centres.

We also seek to ensure their entrepreneurial development, and to this end a seed grant valued at $15,000 is provided. And this grant is primarily for the benefit of the Ministry’s clients. This grant, Madam Speaker, is now conditional on the completion of training because it is not our intention to just give a grant, but to ensure that when the grant is given, the person can manage a small business and manage it
So, we are currently working in collaboration with the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago. And before a grant is approved, those applicants must engage in training that entails marketing, customer service, record keeping, financial management and the mindset and practice for the entrepreneur. And this year, a couple months ago, we had 67 persons graduating from the training and receiving their seed grant.

Madam Speaker, those on the other side during their tenure were supposed to have had a developmental component to the food support programme, it was called “Rise Up”. But it would seem, I do not know if it is that they did not have any ease, but that fell flat because it never got off the ground.

This Government is in the process of introducing what we call our Social Transformation and Empowerment Programme Uplifting People - Step Up. And this is essentially a programme of psychosocial support designed to facilitate families through a social-protection framework from programme entry to exit. We will work with economically challenged and other vulnerable families experiencing psychosocial barriers which prevent such families from achieving their fullest potential.

Madam Speaker, this process involves a process where short-term assistance in the form of a grant, exposure to developmental programmes, life-skills training, and skill-enhancing tools are combined over a period of up to two years. And a key feature of this component is that a family caseworker is assigned to provide continuous support to the family. The Ministry is currently in the process of recruiting social workers to
facilitate the full implementation of this programme.

Caring for and protecting our vulnerable: Madam Speaker, this Government recognizes that the civil society engagement is a key success factor in sustainable development. And we also recognize that we need to partner with these organizations to assist us with the socially displaced, with the elderly and with persons with disability. And to this end, we continue to pay subvention to 24 NGOs, and three statutory boards including the Trinidad and Tobago Association for Retarded Children, the Trinidad and Tobago Association for the Hearing Impaired, and the Trinidad and Tobago Blind Welfare Association. Madam Speaker, last year we budgeted $43.7 million to provide subventions to these organizations, and this year we are projecting to increase it by $13,207,000.

In caring for our elderly, we continue to provide free transportation on our public transport service and the ferry service. We also provide free transportation to our elderly and persons with disabilities on our ELDAMO services. And Madam Speaker, over the last period we would have made 10,200 trips transporting such persons.

I am very happy to inform this House, once again, that Cabinet has approved the National Policy on Persons with Disabilities, and in September the Ministry was finally able to lay the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities before this Parliament. That document, that policy, Madam Speaker, will help us in addressing the demands and rights of persons with disabilities in advancing legislation and increasing the role of assistance services to support full inclusion of these persons.
Madam Speaker, the National Enrichment Centre: After three years we have finally been able to take all of the corrective actions that needed to be taken after those on the other side would have opened that centre while it was still a construction site, while there was still remedial work to be done and while none of the statutory approvals have been obtained. We are awaiting the certificate of completion and that is supposed to be provided, it should have been provided today, and we now have an opening date for the operationalization of that centre at the end of October.

Initially, the centre, we will operate it as a resource centre where persons with disabilities and their respective organization can have access to the centre for data information, as a meeting space, as a space for recreational activities, for use of the pool for therapy, and we expect to transition to full operationalization by the end of fiscal 2019.

Madam Speaker, our community care programme which provides accommodation for persons, elderly persons who may have been abandoned at hospital or who may have been in a home for the elderly but were subject to elder abuse, we currently have 86 such persons in 22 homes. And there has been an increase of 31 over the last period, and this is linked to the removal of persons who were subject to elder abuse to a safe environment. In 2018, we would have addressed 69 reports of elder abuse, and would have resolved 79 per cent of such cases.

Under the Geriatric Adolescent Partnership Programme, Madam Speaker, we continue to provide caregivers to assist elderly persons and persons with disabilities who are unable to care for themselves. Currently,
we have 600 caregivers within the system, and they have provided assistance for 1,719 persons over the last period. But, Madam Speaker, we are recognizing that there is an increased demand for this service, and so the Ministry is working towards gathering all of the data to support a recommendation for an increase in the number of caregivers so that we can ensure that we can take care of our elderly and persons with disabilities.

Subventions are also paid currently to four senior activity centres and this is to ensure that there are opportunities for our elderly for active lifestyle. Madam Speaker, over 2018 we would have spent $3.2 million on these senior activity centres.

Our socially displaced: Madam Speaker, the last head count that was done last year would have indicated that there are 414 persons who live on the streets, 392 males and 22 females. Court Shamrock in San Fernando and St. Vincent de Paul, which is responsible for the centre for socially displaced persons in Port of Spain, currently provide services to 160 socially displaced persons. And what they provide is shelter, a place to sleep, a place to bathe and a meal.

At our New Horizons facility where we have socially displaced persons with mental health issues, we had 46 new residents enrolling, six graduated from the programme, and five of them would have been able to seek employment during the period of their stay with us.

The Piparo centre, which deals with persons with substance abuse, continues to be a success story. We would have had 40 persons going into the system during this period. It has not finished yet so have not had any
graduates but they continue to engage in agriculture and have been able to provide all of their vegetables, all of their seasonings and 133 pounds of tilapia from their tilapia production system.

Madam Speaker, the Street Dwellers Working Committee, the committee that was established to oversee the implementation of the Street Dwellers Working Committee report, has been established. Thus far, we have selected two locations for the establishment of assessment centres and transitional housing, one in Port of Spain and one in Cocorite. And I am very happy to report that the centre in Cocorite will cater for children and women [Desk thumping] because currently there is no place for women and children. We have also finalized the design brief for the centre that will be established in Port of Spain.

Madam Speaker, a few weeks ago, I delivered a statement in this august House on our Social Mitigation Plan, and at that time Parliament and the nation were updated on the Ministry’s ongoing work in this area. Thus far, we have implemented the standard means test. We have developed a framework for the “Step Up” model, our public education campaign on financial security is in place and ongoing in collaboration with the Central Bank. We have established the two committees to guide the operations of the one-stop-shop model, the social support and empowerment unit and to oversee implementation of the Social Mitigation Plan. So, Madam Speaker, we are well on our way with the full implementation of the Social Mitigation Plan.

The family plays a critical role in the nurturing and socialization of individuals, and it is also very important to the socio-economic prosperity
of our country. And within recent times there has been great concerns with respect to the declining stability of families, and the resultant negative impact on communities and country. The social ills of domestic violence, child and elder abuse, indiscipline and violence are also of great concern.

And to this end, Madam Speaker, the Ministry pursued two major policy initiatives aimed at safeguarding the family. One was the implementation of the National Parenting Policy for Trinidad and Tobago, and it was laid in this honourable House as a green paper to facilitate wider public consultations. We are also working on the developing the national family policy for Trinidad and Tobago because the intention to provide a nurturing and secure environment for the family.

The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services collaborated with the Gender and Child Affairs Division of the Office of the Prime Minister and hosted our inaugural national symposium on the family. The response was overwhelming, and the feedback from that symposium is being incorporated into the draft national family policy.

We also launched our national campaign on values, attitudes and behaviours because we recognize that we need to go back to a state of civic-mindedness and a return to values and morals and such basic things as “good morning” and “thank you”. And, Madam Speaker, that campaign has been launched and it has been rolled out.

We also hosted seven community parenting workshops, and we have established a number of community-based support groups. The National Family Services outreach programmes “Let’s talk”, and our
radio programme “Let’s Talk” have been very successful. As a result we have experienced an increase in our client base, and we have responded to 8,041 requests for counselling, referral services, information and co-parent counselling.

Madam Speaker, I want deal now with the steps that we have taken to improve the operations of the Ministry. We are currently in the process of transitioning the recipients of the senior citizens pension, the Public Assistance Grant and the Disability Assistance Grant to a direct method of payment. Thus far, we have transitioned 80,668 persons and this represents 56 per cent of that population.

What this means, Madam Speaker, is that these clients no longer have to worry about cheques being lost, cheques being stolen or cheques being late. The money is deposited directly into their bank account, and they can access it on the same day.

And we have introduced our standard means test, and that has improved assessment greatly because it is now standardized across the board. A read of the Auditor General reports for last year would have revealed that there was one local board where four different forms were being used for means testing. What this meant, Madam Speaker, is that one person may have come in and would have been assessed as being qualifying for the grant, and another person may not have been, but with the standard means test now, across the board, all persons will be assessed in the same manner.

Madam Speaker, we sought to have an integrated IT system purchased on behalf of the Ministry. This was being done through
iGovTT. They went out to tender and the tender was not successful. The Ministry decided to use our in-house capabilities to develop an integrated system that may not provide all of the things that we require, but one that can facilitate and improve and enhance our effectiveness and efficiency.

And, Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to announce that we do, in fact, now have such a system, and this system allows for simplified data sharing and collaboration across all local boards; this will eliminate double-dipping and duplication. It also will result in a reduction in processing time for applications, there will be more complete information on the data base, and because of online registration we will not have the problem of lost files.

Madam Speaker, one of the key features of this that the public of Trinidad and Tobago, I believe, will be very much interested in, is that the public will be able to go online and self-assess. They can access the means-test form and do their own self-assessment, and that will remove a situation where persons complain about “they qualify”, but they were told that “they do not qualify”. They can do their own self-assessment, print that form and come into the Ministry with it.

Madam Speaker, we continue to train the staff in the Ministry, particularly our front-line staff because we recognize that we can have the best grants, the best programmes, but unless we have accompanying excellent customer service, this can detract from what we are providing. And so, we continue to provide customer service where we seek to improve the knowledge, the behaviours and the attitudes of our staff. And we have seen improvement in that there have been a reduction in the
number of complaints, and a reduction in the number of persons complaining that they have been taking too long to receive their grants.

We continue to educate the population of Trinidad and Tobago about what the Ministry offers, and thus for this period we would have had 40 sessions, education awareness sessions, and based on those sessions, Madam Speaker, we have been receiving very good reviews, and we have more persons who are really in need from depressed areas coming into the Ministry to access the grants that are being offered.

Madam Speaker, I would now take some time to speak to my constituents of Lopinot/Bon Air West. [Desk thumping] I wish to thank all of the constituents of Lopinot/Bon Air West for the support they have provided over the last three years. I wish to thank all of them for coming out whenever there are meetings, whenever we have our caravans and providing information on what is happening in their area and how they feel about different things in the Government and in the community.

And, Madam Speaker, I just want to remind and say to the constituents of Lopinot/ Bon Air West, during the campaign I made two promises; one was to get water into Windy Hill. And, Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to inform this august House that water was in the pipes of the residents of Windy Hill [Desk thumping] but I also want to exhort my constituents, the Government is working on your behalf. We have worked very hard to bring water into Windy Hill and there are over 400 households, but only 40 of you have registered so far to be connected. So, I am exhorting you, work together with us, go to WASA, pay for your reconnections so that you can have a water supply to your home.

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We were also very successful in having an intake put in place at Mc Davis Trace. So the persons who live in lower Surrey Village and at Soap Hill have had no problems with water this year. [Desk thumping]

My second promise was to get electricity to the persons at upper Bertie Road in Five Rivers. They have not had a supply of electricity ever. And, Madam Speaker, working together with T&TEC and with their electrification project, we were able to bring electricity to upper Bertie Road in Five Rivers, and for that I am very grateful and take the opportunity to thank T&TEC. [Desk thumping]

For some reason, Madam Speaker, the residences of Ulex Drive, Fern Drive, and Poinsettia in La Florissante have not had their streets paved in the last 25 years, and this was a burning issue for them. I wish to report that working together with the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, those three streets were paved, and we got a lagniappe in that we got Elm and Holly paved also, and I know the residents of La Florissante are very happy for that. We also had a problem with flooding in Phase I and we have since had a drain—

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, your original speaking time is now spent, you are entitled to 10 more minutes to complete your contribution.

Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn: Thank you, Madam Speaker, [Desk thumping] We had a drain constructed and the road paved and that problem with flooding has been in alleviated in Phase I in La Florissante.

Madam Speaker, one of the greatest needs of the constituents of Lopinot/Bon Air West, based on constituents who visit the constituency office, and those who come out when we have the caravan in the
respective areas, is the issue of housing. And, Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to report that within the constituency we have had the Bon Air north and the Trestrail housing developments phase I completed and houses distributed. [Desk thumping]

In our neighbouring areas of Malabar, Bon Air south and River Run Through, we have also had phases completed and houses distributed. And I am very happy, based on feedback from some of my constituents, some of them have benefited and are very thankful, Madam Speaker.

In terms of plans for 2019, the HDC has indicated that they would be installing play parks in Pine Ridge development, Cleaver Heights and Guanapo in Five Rivers.

The community centres in Surrey, those are going to be renovated and upgraded, and Tacarigua is finally going to get a new community centre; great news for the people of Bon Air West. [Desk thumping]

Based on the budget, we can also expect to have landslips, flooding, our drainage and roads addressed. And this, Madam Speaker, will benefit residents of Lopinot, Martinez in Arima, Cumberbatch in Arima, Five Rivers, Paradise and Tacarigua. Madam Speaker, I am saying to my constituents, we are in this together, and thus far, it has worked very well.

Madam Speaker, as I close I wish to thank the staff of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. All the achievements that we have made would not have been possible without their dedication and their hard work. [Desk thumping] I also wish to thank the staff of the constituency office in Lopinot/Bon Air West, and again, I thank my constituents. Of course, I thank the Minister of Finance and his hard-
working staff in the Ministry of Finance because without them and the Prime Minister leading, we would not have had this exceptional budget. [Desk thumping]

And, Madam Speaker, as I close I thank you for the opportunity to support this exceptional “Turnaround” budget, and as I close, I close with a quote from political analyst Mr. Winford James in the Express of October 04, 2018, when he would have stated and I quote:

“The Rowley administration has managed to compose one of the more positive budget that I have seen in some time, and this has left me with a good taste in the mouth…the 2018/19 budget is one of mostly good vibes.”

Madam Speaker, I thank you. [Desk thumping]