



BUDGET STATEMENT

for Fiscal - 2024

Building a Sustainable,
Prosperous and Resilient Tobago

Presented by the
Chief Secretary and Secretary of Finance, Trade, and the Economy
Honorable Farley Augustine

June 26th, 2023





**BUDGET STATEMENT
FOR
FISCAL 2024**

BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE, PROSPEROUS, AND RESILIENT TOBAGO

**Presented By:
Honourable Farley C. Augustine
Chief Secretary and Secretary of Finance, Trade and the Economy
Monday 26th, June 2023 at 10:00 a.m.**

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BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE, PROSPEROUS, AND RESILIENT TOBAGO

1 INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Madam Presiding Officer,

Deputy Chief Secretary,

Secretaries,

Assistant Secretaries,

Minority Leader and other Members of the House of Assembly,

Administrators of the Tobago House of Assembly,

Senior Staff of the Tobago House of Assembly,

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen in the public gallery,

Local and international audiences following this presentation on radio, television, and other live streams,

Members of the Media,

Good Morning.

- 1.1 Madam Presiding Officer, it is a great pleasure for me to present the second Budget of my Administration before this Honourable House. The Budget Statement is a statutory obligation under Section 41 of the Tobago House of Assembly Act 40 of 1996.
- 1.2 Madam Presiding Officer, the Budget Statement is undoubtedly the most important policy statement of the Tobago House of Assembly (THA). It constitutes the strategic objectives, the projects and programmes designed to achieve these objectives, and the estimated expenditure that is required to achieve the desired outcomes and the estimated revenues of the THA for the ensuing fiscal year (2024).
- 1.3 Madam Presiding Officer, it is worth mentioning again, as I did last year, that the current fiscal and budgetary legislative frameworks denies the THA the full transformative reach and powers that are inherent in a budget. More will be said about this later in the presentation.

- 1.4 This Budget is being presented against the backdrop of a global economy that is still struggling to recover from the debilitating socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and from the increasing socio-economic displacement caused by climate-induced natural disasters and supply chain disruptions blamed on the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war.
- 1.5 Madam Presiding Officer, here at home, we continue to be confronted by a rising tide of crime and violence, a national economy that is seemingly sluggish, a Central Government that is demonstrably unsupportive of the fiscal and financial needs of Tobago, and constitutional and governance arrangements that are less than ideal.
- 1.6 Madam Presiding Officer, politics, like cricket, is a game of glorious uncertainties. Despite the political developments that have occurred in the last year, I want to seize this opportunity to say to the national community and, more directly, the Tobago community that this Administration remains committed to delivering on the mandate it received from the people in 2021. We are pressing ahead towards building a sustainable, prosperous, and resilient Tobago. Notwithstanding the political noises coming from Minority Leader A and Minority Leader B and Minority Councillor C, I am proud to lead this young and rapidly developing team on the journey to make ***Tobago the greatest little island on the planet.***
- 1.7 Madam Presiding Officer, this Budget Statement could not have been completed without the valuable inputs and contributions of several individuals and groups. I want to thank in particular the Secretaries and Assistant Secretaries for their contributions. I also want to thank all the individuals who came out and shared their perspectives in the Executive Council Town Hall meetings. To the persons who on a daily basis shared their ideas with us and the groups that submitted contributions, I say thanks.
- 1.8 To the public officers across the Divisions of the THA who put together the various estimates and contributed to the planning of this fiscal package, I extend my gratitude to you. To my dear wife, beloved daughter, and family who have supported and loved me during this extraordinarily hectic period, I extend my sincere appreciation. Most importantly, Madam Presiding Officer, I want to give praise and thanks to Almighty God for his continued grace and mercies upon Tobago.

- 1.9 Madam Presiding Officer, for the remainder of the presentation, I will proceed as follows. First, I will provide an outlook for the international, regional, and domestic economies. Second, I will deliver a review of the fiscal operations and achievements over the last year. Third, I will articulate the strategic policy objectives for Fiscal 2023. Fourth, I will present the Estimates of Expenditure and, thereafter, the financing options. Finally, I will conclude the presentation.
- 1.10 Madam Presiding Officer, I want to inform the listeners that it is my calculated decision not to go for four hours as I did in last year's presentation.
- 1.11 Madam Presiding Officer, I will now examine the outlook for global and regional economies, and then the outlook for the national and Tobago economies.

2 OUTLOOK FOR THE GLOBAL, REGIONAL, NATIONAL, AND TOBAGO ECONOMIES

a. Global Economic Outlook

- 2.1 Madam Presiding Officer, the prospects for Tobago's development must be seen in the context of current and future trends in the global economy. Global economic growth in recent years has been sluggish as the world continues to struggle with the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Russia-Ukraine war continues to disrupt global trade with spin-off effects on global inflation. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) forecasts global economic growth of 2.8 per cent by the end of 2023, which will increase slightly to 3.0 per cent in 2024. Relatedly, global inflation is projected at 7.0 per cent for 2023 and 4.9 per cent for 2024.
- 2.2 While the advanced economies are projected to grow modestly at 1.3 per cent and 1.4 per cent in 2023 and 2024 respectively, emerging and developing economies are projected to grow by 3.9 per cent and 4.2 per cent in the same periods. With respect to the advanced economies, output in the United Kingdom (UK) and Germany is projected to decline by 0.1 per cent and 0.3 per cent respectively in 2023 but to increase by 1.1 per cent and 1.0 per cent in 2024. Interestingly, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) foresees global tourism returning to pre-pandemic levels by about

the end of 2023 and supports targeted investment in the sector. Compared with the first quarter of 2022, the first quarter of 2023 has seen a more than 100 per cent increase in international tourist travel. New trends in tourism in 2023 include multigenerational "ed-ventures" – a combining of awareness of children's education needs with holiday travel for the rest of the family; "bleisure" – twinning business with leisure travel; sustainable tourism; and luxury travel. Madam Presiding Officer, these are developments that we must continuously monitor because of their implications for Tobago's economic growth and development.

- 2.3 Furthermore, among the emerging and developing countries, China and India are forecasted to grow at 5.2 per cent and 5.9 per cent in 2023 and by 4.5 per cent and 6.3 per cent in 2024, respectively.
- 2.4 According to the United States (US) Energy Information Administration (EIA), the West Texas Intermediate (WTI) price of oil is forecasted to average US \$77 per barrel by December 2023 but is expected to fall to US \$72 per barrel by 2024. The Henry Hub price of natural gas is expected to average US \$2.91 per MMBTU by the end of 2023 and increase to US \$3.72 per MMBTU in 2024. The projected movements in the prices of oil and gas have material implications for our national economy and our own economy.

b. Regional Economic Outlook

- 2.5 Madam Presiding Officer, in our Latin America and the Caribbean region, growth is projected at 1.3 per cent in 2023, increasing slightly to 2.4 per cent in 2024. Within the Caribbean region alone, projected growth rates are 5.6 per cent in 2023 and 5.7 per cent in 2024. Tighter financial conditions have stifled investment in most of the islands, which has made debt difficult to roll over and/or manage. This has resulted in lower growth rates in the countries, except notably Guyana which is enjoying a petroleum-driven economic boom.
- 2.6 The reliance on tourism, remittances, and the export of commodities has made Caribbean economies extremely susceptible to negative economic shocks in advanced economies. Added to this susceptibility are increased risks arising from natural disasters. These risks have been exacerbated by the negative effects of climate change such as Sea Level Rise (SLR) and Rising Sea Surface Temperatures (RSST).

2.7 Madam Presiding Officer, the data suggest that there are significant development opportunities related to the diversification of Tobago's economy – in digital competitiveness and connectivity, and in the uptake of smart technologies. Development opportunities also exist in financing related to climate change.

c. National Economic Outlook

2.8 Madam Presiding Officer, nationally, the outlook for the economy shows mixed fortunes within the energy and non-energy sectors. The Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, in its latest Economic Bulletin in January 2023, reported an expansion in domestic economic activity in the third quarter of 2022. This was fuelled by rapid economic growth in the non-energy sector, which increased by 10.5 per cent, offsetting the 2.5 per cent decline in the energy sector.

2.9 Madam Presiding Officer, the non-energy sector growth was led by developments in professional, scientific, and technical activities; transportation and storage; and accommodation and food services. The decline in the energy sector was driven by contractions in the petrochemical and condensate extraction sub-sectors. However, in the third quarter, growth in the energy sector was driven by gas production from the following projects: Colibri, Barracuda, bpTT's Matapal, and DeNovo's Zandolie. This is contrasted with a decline of 9.2 per cent in petrochemical production in the second quarter due primarily to a drop in ammonia production, which outweighed a 1.2 per cent increase in methanol production.

2.10 Notably, Madam Presiding Officer, the country's gross official reserves as at the end of December 2022 stood at US \$6.8B, representing about 8.6 months of import cover. The Central Statistical Office (CSO) recorded a 5 per cent unemployment rate in the fourth quarter of 2022, which is similar to the rate recorded for the corresponding period one year before.

2.11 In April 2023, the rates of headline and food price inflation nationally were 6.0 per cent and 11.2 per cent, respectively, and core inflation was recorded at 4.8 per cent. Notwithstanding rising global interest rates, the Central Bank in December 2022 kept the repo rate at 3.5 per cent, guided by the pace of domestic recovery and inflation rates.

2.12 Generally, the domestic economy is still largely reliant on the fortunes of the energy sector. This sector, as we all know, is highly vulnerable to the vagaries of global market forces and speaks to the urgent need for diversification.

2.13 Madam Presiding Officer, I now turn my attention to the Tobago economy.

d. Tobago's Economic Outlook

2.14 Madam Presiding Officer, the most recent data produced by the Economic Management Research Unit (EMRU) in the Division of Finance, Trade and the Economy indicate that Tobago's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at constant prices for 2022 was approximately TT \$1.65B. An examination of the composition of the island's GDP points overwhelmingly to the need to diversify the island's economy and develop new economic drivers.

2.15 In fact, Madam Presiding Officer, the data indicate that the state sector was the largest contributor to Tobago's GDP in 2022, accounting for approximately 46 per cent of the island's GDP. The second largest contributor was the finance, insurance, real estate, and business services sector, accounting for about 27 per cent. The tourism sector was the third largest sector, accounting for about 14 per cent of GDP in 2022. The transport, storage, and communication sector accounted for approximately 4 per cent of the island's GDP. And construction and quarrying contributed about 3 per cent. Finally, the data suggest that the agriculture and manufacturing sectors were relatively small, collectively contributing about 2 per cent to Tobago's GDP in 2022.

2.16 Madam Presiding Officer, shifting my attention to labour market conditions in Tobago, the most recent labour market data available from the CSO for the fourth quarter of 2022 suggest that the rate of unemployment in Tobago was approximately 1 per cent – a figure which is significantly below the national figure of 5 per cent. However, the reported 1 per cent unemployment rate for Tobago must be interpreted with caution and subjected to deeper labour market analysis. Madam Presiding Officer, the share of the labour force employed in the government sector stood at 55 per cent, with the private sector employing about 45 per cent. Comparatively, the share of the national labour force in the government sector stood at 26 per cent, with the private sector employing about 74 per cent.

- 2.17 The share of the island's labour force with tertiary education as the highest level of attainment was 28 per cent; the share with secondary education as the highest level of attainment was 60 per cent; and the share with primary education as their highest level of attainment was about 12 per cent.
- 2.18 Madam Presiding Officer, the most recent data on prices available from the Central Bank suggest that Tobago recorded headline and food price inflation in April 2023 of 6.2 per cent and 17.0 per cent, respectively. Core inflation, which excludes food and energy, was recorded as 4.4 per cent. This situation, particularly with respect to food price inflation, is of significant concern to us and which we proposed to address frontally through our food sovereignty and food security initiatives.
- 2.19 Given trends in the national and international markets, the forecast is for continued rising inflation in Fiscal 2024. Madam Presiding Officer, there is a need for us to boost our defence against inflation and protect the population from the falling real standard of living it inevitably brings. As you know, given our current productive base, most of the food price inflation we experience in the island is imported from Trinidad and elsewhere.
- 2.20 Madam Presiding Officer, the foregoing analysis represents the economic context in which we do our budgetary estimates for Fiscal 2024.
- 2.21 I now turn my attention to highlighting some of the key achievements of this Administration over the last fiscal year.

3 PERFORMANCE HIGHLIGHTS FOR FISCAL 2023

- 3.1 Madam Presiding Officer, truth and science must be the foundation of everything we do. Therefore, a fair and material assessment of what was achieved thus far for Fiscal 2023 must be positioned against the level of funding that was actually allocated to the THA to provide public services to Tobagonians.
- 3.2 Madam Presiding Officer, you will recall that in Fiscal 2023, I requested a total package of \$3.97B, comprising \$3.07B for recurrent expenditure, \$900M for development programme expenditure, and \$59.59M and \$53.17M for URP and CEPEP, respectively. The unfortunate truth is that the THA was only allocated a total of \$2.6B, comprising \$2.2B for recurrent expenditure, \$400M

for development programme expenditure, and \$18M and \$9.2M for URP and CEPEP, respectively. This constituted an under-funding of the THA by \$1.3B (or 33.3 per cent) of the money requested to meet the expenses of our planned programme of works for Fiscal 2023. It is important to also note that we inherited over \$700M in debts owed to contractors and other service providers.

- 3.3 Madam Presiding Officer, what is even more fiscally and financially abusive is the illegal conduct of the Minister of Finance in single-handedly reducing the amount of money approved by the national Parliament for the Assembly. Our reconciliation exercise revealed that between fiscal 2017-2022 alone, the Ministry of Finance did not release **\$152M** in approved allocations to the THA. Added to this, Madam Presiding Officer, the Minister of Finance increased the national budget by \$3.80B in the 2023 Midyear Review and allocated only \$100M to the THA as oppose to \$153M in keeping with 4.03 per cent minimum of the Dispute Resolution Commission (DRC), once again breaking the law. This now makes it a total of \$205M owed to the THA by the Central Government. Madam Presiding Officer, this is a clear case in which the Central Government has been caught stealing from Tobagonians.
- 3.4 Madam Presiding Officer, this grossly abusive, insensitive and unfair situation was formally brought to the attention of the Minister of Finance, who replied that he had the authority in law to reduce Tobago's meagre share of the national budget. The matter was also raised with the Prime Minister who disappointingly, but not surprisingly, supported his Minister of Finance. Let me make it pellucid that my Administration will take all steps to ensure that every penny that was approved by the national Parliament for Tobagonians comes to the THA to do our business. I say no more on this matter – for now.
- 3.5 Madam Presiding Officer, even with the meagre allocation provided to the THA for Fiscal 2023 and the numerous obstacles placed in our way, we were still able to deliver for Tobagonians. Some key highlights of our achievements over the last year are:
- In the social sector:
 - We commissioned and commenced operations at the Roxborough Hospital, taking tertiary-level care directly to Tobagonians in the east and northeast of the island.

- Three hundred and seven (307) cataract surgeries were successfully performed through the cataract backlog programme, reducing the backlog by 63 per cent.
- We increased the social grant from \$500 to \$1,000 for families of five or more members.
- We successfully completed upgrade and repair works to primary and secondary schools to the tune of \$30.0M under the annual school repairs programme.
- We provided financial support to four hundred and fifty (450) families to purchase school supplies.
- We provided financial assistance to seventy-one (71) new tertiary level students and continued assistance to fifty-one (51) students under the Financial Assistance Programme to the tune of \$2.6M.
- We paid backlogged gratuity and increments to teachers and other employees of over \$25.0M.
- We outfitted our schools with furniture and furnishings at a value of \$7.7M.
- We distributed one thousand and seventy-two (1,072) computers and tablets to students and teachers at primary and secondary schools.
- We exposed approximately two hundred and fifty (250) young persons to the World of Work through the Youth Department and the Youth Energised for Success (YES) Programme.
- We disbursed over \$6.0M to six hundred and forty-eight (648) beneficiaries under the Home Improvement Programme.
- We launched the Social Housing Construction Programme with the successful construction and delivery of one of the model houses to a client in Bon Accord. Twenty (20) more houses are to be completed and distributed before the end of 2023.
- We successfully trained one thousand (1,000) persons in the Vocational Skills Programme.
- We successfully reconstituted and operationalised over twenty-one (21) Village Councils / Community Councils.

- We constructed the Montgomery Walk-around Track at a cost of \$1.16M.
- We lit up the Patience Hill Playground.
- We upgraded the swimming pools at Kendall and Turtle Beach.
- We restructured the Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP) to improve operational efficiency and productivity.

- In our financial and economic operations, we:
 - commissioned a Forensic Audit, which revealed that the claims made by contractors were on average 60 per cent overvalued. The Audit also identified contractors who were paid tens of millions for projects on which they did no work. It also points to an organised criminal conspiracy to steal Tobago's money, which conspiracy seems to have involved members of the previous Executive Council.
 - exposed over one thousand (1,000) Tobagonians to financial literacy training.
 - provided COVID-19 relief to hoteliers and guesthouse owners to assist with repairs to, and upgrade of, their facilities.
 - paid the Reserve Electricity Bill for five hotels in the amount of \$3.0M to keep them open.
 - increased salaries and wages for CEPEP and Unemployment Relief Programme (URP) workers by 100 per cent and 88 per cent respectively.
 - Provided eight hundred **(800) jobs** on a rotating basis in the Division of Infrastructure, Quarries and Urban Development. (Going forward, we will be converting these to **full-time jobs**.)
 - Employed three hundred and seventy-seven **(377)** persons in the Division of Health, Wellness and Social Protection and one hundred and thirty (130) persons in the Division of Food Security, Natural Resources, the Environment and Sustainable Development. Additionally, we increased the wages of Reforestation Workers.

- successfully delivered the Lure Great River Experience facility.
 - completed the renovation and upgrade of Manta Lodge.
 - successfully hosted the inaugural Tobago Carnival in October 2022.
 - launched the Tourism Industry Customer Service Programme and trained over two hundred (200) service leaders.
 - successfully negotiated the resumption of the Condor flights from Germany to Tobago.
 - successfully launched our diaspora engagement initiative in New York.
 - improved operational efficiency at Tractor Pool with the acquisition of six (6) wheeled tractors, an excavator, a trailer truck, a bucket truck, and a dump truck.
 - distributed Smart Garden Units to fifty-seven (57) schools.
 - upgraded the Water Quality Lab through the acquisition of additional equipment to test for lead, sulphide, phosphorus, and iron, and to do advanced testing for nitrates.
- In the area of physical infrastructure development, Madam Presiding Officer, we delivered the following:
 - the Smithfield to Dutch Fort Connector Road.
 - the St. Peter's Bay Road, giving residents vehicular access to their homes.
 - the connector road from Lammy to Roxborough.
 - the Little Tobago jetty, main house, and pagoda rehabilitation projects.
 - refurbishment and upgrade of the prison at Scarborough.
 - a bridge at Gru Gru Patch and other civil works, giving residents vehicular access to their homes.
 - a restored and reconfigured Assembly Legislative Chamber to now accommodate fifteen (15) [instead of 12] Assemblymen.

3.6 Madam Presiding Officer, the foregoing is only a snapshot of this Administration's social and economic delivery to Tobagonians. There are many

more achievements to talk about, but, based on time constraints, I will end here. The other Secretaries and Assistant Secretaries will provide greater details in the debate which will follow.

- 3.7 Madam Presiding Officer, I will now set out in detail my Administration's Strategic Policy Agenda for Fiscal 2024 and beyond.

4 STRATEGIC POLICY AGENDA FOR THE BUILDING OF A SUSTAINABLE, PROSPEROUS, AND RESILIENT TOBAGO

Introduction

- 4.1 Madam Presiding Officer, our longer-term strategic outlook for Tobago is one that speaks to a sustainable, prosperous, and resilient society. Therefore, our budget for Fiscal 2024 is aptly themed **“Building a Sustainable Prosperous, and Resilient Tobago”**. Please permit me to elaborate on the core elements of the theme.

i. Sustainability

- 4.2 Madam Presiding Officer, sustainability and resilience, in the context of Tobago's growth and development, speak to the strengthening of our governance institutions. More precisely, they demand the strengthening and digitalisation of the business processes, procedures, systems, and human resource capabilities of the institutions and agencies of the Assembly. Strengthening and modernising the island's institutions will enable us to maintain and deliver enhanced prosperity and resilience continuously over time through improved effectiveness and efficiency in project and programme delivery.
- 4.3 Madam Presiding Officer, this concept of sustainability has three kinds of interrelated components: economic, environmental, and social. Collectively, they focus on the balance between social and economic prosperity and the value of the ecological systems that serve to foster economic growth and social development. Sustainability includes serious consideration of the impacts of environmental, social, and economic drivers on changes to the well-being and welfare of Tobagonians.

ii. Prosperity

- 4.4 Madam Presiding Officer, it is only on such a system of sustainability and resilience that prosperity will be delivered. In this regard, building prosperity speaks to creating practical socio-economic opportunities for every child, family, and community to be successful in their pursuit of self-actualisation, wealth accumulation, good health, and general happiness. These are more valuable measures than the traditional tools of per capita income and GDP used to indicate development.
- 4.5 Madam Presiding Officer, it is widely held that prosperity will emanate from the markets that develop from the pursuits of individuals and their evolving need for goods and services that they can't produce themselves. In promoting prosperity through effective, accountable, and inclusive governing institutions at all levels, we expect Tobagonians to have deep and loving relationships and a life worth living. We also expect Tobagonians to become more empowered and motivated to make Tobago *the greatest little island on the planet*.

iii. Resilience

- 4.6 Madam Presiding Officer, the lessons learnt from the catastrophic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on lives and livelihoods and from the widespread damage and socio-economic displacements in our region caused by the increased frequency and intensity of natural disasters that themselves are powered by climate change, have deepened the necessity to mainstream **resilience** as a critically important social development policy goal.
- 4.7 Accordingly, we conceptualize resilience as a “**system property**” that should be mainstreamed in institutions of Tobago's government. In this regard, resilience represents the mechanisms that are designed and socially engineered into our governance arrangements that would allow our Divisions and Departments to seamlessly reorganise and continue to function in the face of events such as health pandemics, socio-economic disruptions, and natural disasters.
- 4.8 Therefore, Madam Presiding Officer, building resilience into our governing institutions is about developing and enhancing systems, processes, procedures, technology, and human resource capacity and capability to deliver results over

time credibly, legitimately, and quickly during **precipitous** and **fast-moving** life-changing events.

a. Strengthening Our Governance and Constitutional Framework

- 4.9 Madam Presiding Officer, we live in a digitally-fluid world where there are many dangers and accelerating changes. The list of problems facing our island in this post-COVID-19 world is long, and it includes the lingering tail-wind effects of the pandemic, food shortages, climate changes, and increasing inequality. We have only one tool for collective action to meet these challenges, Madam Presiding Officer, and that's our Tobago government (the THA) and its constituent governing institutions.
- 4.10 Madam Presiding Officer, our nation, Trinidad and Tobago, is a Constitutional Republic by virtue of our 1976 Republican Constitution. What this means, Madam Presiding Officer, is that our governments must operate and function in accordance with the laws and regulations of the Republic.
- 4.11 It follows, Madam Presiding Officer, that the constitution and the THA Act 40 of 1996 represent the foundation on which the powers, authority, and responsibilities of the Tobago government stand. They constitute the bedrock on which sustainability, prosperity, and resilience are built and delivered to all of us as Tobagonians.
- 4.12 Madam Presiding Officer, this takes me to the critical issue of **“internal self-government”**, i.e., the strengthening of the constitutional and legislative frameworks that would establish the Tobago Island Government. The current arrangements, notwithstanding the incremental improvements, are, in large measure, still akin to what can be justifiably labelled **“constitutional colonization”**. Because the existing agreements give the Port of Spain-based Central Government the **constitutional power** and authority to intervene in, override, and decide on virtually every exercise of the authority the THA has been given by Schedule 5. The Central Government behaves in this way without invitation by either good cause or reason, even in the face of Tobagonians having elected their own island government.
- 4.13 As a result, Madam Presiding Officer, we have been experiencing and engaging in publicly-displayed disagreement between the THA and the Central Government over time and more so now. They have certainly placed administrative impediments in our way. They have even taken us to court in

some matters. There is no need for any further evidence and/or arguments to prove that these disruptive actions are manifestations of the colonial provisions of the existing constitutional and legislative framework on which the governance relationship between the Central Government and the THA is established.

- 4.14 Therefore, Madam Presiding Officer, for us Tobagonians to build a sustainable, prosperous, and resilient economy “***child by child, family by family, and village by village***”, we must together ensure that the necessary enrichments are made to the constitutional and legislative foundations of our collective agency – the Tobago House of Assembly.
- 4.15 In this regard, Madam Presiding Officer, in the coming months and continuing into Fiscal 2024, this Administration in concert with Tobagonians will be relentless in our pursuit for the following basic enriching amendments to be made to the constitutional and legislative foundational governance relationship between the Central Government and the THA:
- **A constitutional definition of Tobago that is shaped by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, UNCLOS, and that references the social, cultural, economic, and political histories of the peoples of Trinidad and Tobago.**
 - **The conferral of final constitutional authority and powers on the THA for all the matters / items listed in the Fifth Schedule. Put perhaps more clearly, Madam Presiding Officer, the Constitution must be amended to clearly state the matters for which the THA has final authority and control over in Tobago. And likewise, the Constitution must be amended to state the matters for which the Central Government will have special authority and control in and over Tobago.**
 - **There must be appropriate amendments to section 53 of the Constitution to create the Tobago legislature with constitutional authority and powers to make laws and adjacent regulations for the matters for which the THA has final constitutional responsibility and control.**

- **There must be appropriate amendments to section 75 of the Constitution to place a fetter on the Cabinet in relation to the matters for which the Executive Council of the Assembly will have final constitutional authority.**
- **Section 113 of the Constitution must be amended to provide the constitutional guarantee of a minimum of 7 per cent of the national Budget (and any other national sum / allocation) to be appropriated to meet the expenditure of the THA in a given fiscal year.**

- 4.16 Madam Presiding Officer, these basic constitutional improvements will strengthen the governance foundation of the Tobago Island Government. Moreover, they are proposed to provide clarity, predictability, peace, justice, fairness, and accountability, and to protect and promote the human rights and entitlement of Tobagonians to determine their destiny. This is the constitutional foundation on which Tobago will strengthen and build strong governing institutions to deliver sustainability, prosperity, and resilience to Tobagonians.
- 4.17 Madam Presiding Officer, after more than fifty (50) years of struggles, the self-government project is no longer a guessing game for us. It is a project for which Tobagonians are now prepared with fuller knowledge and understanding of the minimum constitutional amendments that must be made for democracy to work for us in the twin-island Constitutional Republic.
- 4.18 Madam Presiding Officer, we are going to lead the integration of all the new ideas and previous works into a Tobago position paper. This paper will inform the critical minimum amendments to be made to the proposed Constitutional Amendment Bill currently at the Committee stage of the Parliament. An expenditure of **\$6.0M** is programmed to fund this project in Fiscal 2024.
- 4.19 Madam Presiding Officer, I now look at our strategies for strengthening and digitising the public administrative business processes and procedures of the Assembly.

b. Strengthening and Digitisation of the THA Public Administrative Functions

- 4.20 Madam Presiding Officer, strong public institutions are essential for sustainable socio-economic development, prosperity, and resilience. Strong institutions play a lead role in reducing poverty, improving the rule of law, increasing economic growth, and managing environmental change. It is against the backdrop of the foregoing that Goal 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is “*Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions*”. The stated aim of SDG 16 is to improve people’s lives by reducing violence, improving access to justice, and promoting effective, accountable, strong, and inclusive institutions.
- 4.21 Madam Presiding Officer, without a doubt, this Administration is settled and nested in the knowledge that strong institutions are a prerequisite for Tobago to move into a position of sustainability and resilience. Strong institutions will give birth to our future prosperity – “*child by child, family by family and village by village*”.
- 4.22 Madam Presiding Officer, the warning signals across our institutional landscape are blinking red. As policymakers, we have a make-or-break opening and an obligation to invest the resources on the strengthening of the island’s governing institutions and, thereby, build the foundation of a sustainable, prosperous, and resilient Tobago.
- 4.23 Madam Presiding Officer, in Fiscal 2024, we propose to accelerate the strengthening and digitisation of the public administrative business processes and procedures into an e-government platform called “**TOBAGO ONLINE**”, of which “**My-THA**” is the first phase. The strategic goal is to bring all the Assembly’s public service delivery functions into a *high-security, high-speed, single digital space* that will allow remote online access to Tobagonians wherever in the world they may be.
- 4.24 Madam Presiding Officer, the substantive progressive outcome is that Tobagonians will stay in the comfort of their homes, log in to **My-THA**, and apply for and receive the decisions on their applications with respect to issues such as:
- **Social Assistance;**
 - **Pensions;**

- **Home Improvements Grants;**
- **Housing Applications;**
- **Financial Assistance Loans for Tertiary Education;**
- **Business Development Loans;**
- **Business Development Grants; and,**
- **Application for State Lands.**

4.25 Madam Presiding Officer, the sustainability of the My-THA e-government platform will be dependent on three critical factors:

- **The reliability and resilience of the hardware and software components of the My-THA digital infrastructure.**
- **The capacity and capability of public officers to discharge their duties and responsibilities effectively and efficiently in this digitised environment.**
- **Public sensitization, accessibility, and capacity development.**

4.26 Madam Presiding Officer, in this regard, we have been having extensive discussions with the Minister of Digital Transformation and have secured his commitment to provide technical and financial support for this initiative. Relatedly, fourteen sites have already been identified across the island for the establishment of “**technology centres**”, which will provide support to members of the public in their interface with My-THA. Moreover, Madam Presiding Officer, the Ministry has also undertaken to work with the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (TATT) and the service providers towards ensuring that every child, family, and community has reliable connectivity and free Wi-Fi access in all government offices and popular public spaces.

4.27 Madam Presiding Officer, alongside the MY-THA initiative, we propose to develop and operationalise our diaspora registration and mobilisation online platform in Fiscal 2024. This online platform will provide a comprehensive and secure database of Tobagonians abroad that includes their skill levels and the areas of the development of Tobago that they are interested in. This project will enable Tobagonians residing abroad to actively participate in, and

contribute towards, the social, cultural, political, and economic advancement of their island.

4.28 Madam Presiding Officer, as we computerise the public service processes and procedures of the Assembly, we must simultaneously equip our public officers with the new skills and knowledge products necessary for them to operate efficiently and effectively. This will require our public officers to have 21st century skills that go beyond reading, mathematics, and science. Therefore, our workforce development, education, and training initiatives will seek to build capacity in the following areas:

- **Thinking critically and making studied judgements:** which will empower them to assess the credibility, accuracy, and value of information, analyse and evaluate information, and make reasoned decisions.
- **Solving complex and multi-discipline problems:** by identifying problems, thinking through solutions, and exploring new options if required.
- **Creative and entrepreneurial thinking:** the ability to think unconventionally, question processes, and imagine and come up with new and more creative ways to get the work done.
- **Communicating and collaborating:** by interacting competently and respectfully with others because of the cross-institutional functionalities that come with an integrated and digitised public administration.
- **Making innovative use of knowledge, information, and opportunities** – to create new services and processes, and find better ways of doing the public’s business.

4.29 Madam Presiding Officer, in Fiscal 2024, we propose to fully operationalise the Tobago Public Service Academy (TPSA) using the already accredited Tobago Hospitality and Tourism Institute (THTI) as the executing entity. The Academy will be our main workforce development, reskilling, retraining, and retooling institution. We view training as both an internal control and quality assurance mechanism.

4.30 Madam Presiding Officer, the disparity between wages/salaries and the performance of a significant number of workers in the THA could severely

stymie efforts to build sustainability, prosperity, and resilience. This is an issue that we must collectively address. In this regard, my Administration will intensify efforts to strengthen the performance management and monitoring systems with the introduction of electronic attendance recording technologies across the entire Assembly. Adjacently, where performance defects are identified, the necessary training and support will be provided. And where corrective action is required, it will be taken in keeping with the industrial relations laws and regulations. Our goal is to create a culture of ***“work for reward and reward for work”***.

- 4.31 Relatedly, Tobago has to deal decisively with the institutional anomalousness that fuels the exodus of our senior public servants to Trinidad. Currently, Madam Presiding Officer, our Administrators are paid significantly less than a Deputy Permanent Secretary (DPS). This situation has led a number of Administrators to leave the THA and go to Trinidad to act as DPS. A formal comparative study of the duties and responsibilities of a DPS and an Administrator revealed that the Administrator’s workload is about 100 per cent more than that of a DPS in any Ministry in Port of Spain.
- 4.32 With that said, Madam Presiding Officer, to address this brain drain, in Fiscal 2024, my Administration will continue to engage the Salary Review Commission (SRC) and Chief Personnel Officer (CPO) with the direct aim of getting them to bring the matter to the attention of the Cabinet for redress. This would build stability and predictability into the administrative functions of the Assembly.
- 4.33 Madam Presiding Officer, if nothing else, the delays in the appointment of a Chief Administrator to the Assembly have made pellucid the urgent need to change the process by eliminating the direct involvement of the Prime Minister as proposed in the Bill currently before the Parliament. Additionally, the time has come for us to give serious consideration to the establishment of the position of Deputy Chief Administrator of the Assembly.
- 4.34 Madam Presiding Officer, modern inclusive governance demands that the ideas and ideals of the people are embodied in the solutions to public problems. This is why we continue to engage Tobagonians in our Executive Council Town Meetings from Charlottesville to Crown Point. These meetings will continue even after this budget presentation. But listening to the people is not enough;

we must build the formal institutional structures that will enable us to translate the wishes and aspirations of Tobagonians seamlessly from talk into action. That is why we took the action of issuing mandate letters to every Secretary early in our first year. This is our way of ensuring that the people's mandate remains at the forefront of the work to be done.

- 4.35 We have achieved quite a bit thus far. At the same time, we recognise that there is still a lot of work to be done. We also recognise that a significant challenge for us is the limitations of the institutional environment for public engagement. Consequently, we intend in Fiscal 2024 to finalise a policy position on public engagement, which will lead to the establishment of a Public Engagement Framework based on the fundamental principle of public participation and related principles, including inclusion, transparency, deliberation, and collaboration.
- 4.36 Madam Presiding Officer, please permit me now to look at how this Administration intends to strengthen the THA's fiscal and financial management systems.

c. Strengthening of the THA Fiscal and Financial Management Systems

- 4.37 Madam Presiding Officer, the Assembly continues to express a keen interest in this long-standing issue of the modernisation and digitisation of the public financial management landscape. We are taking all the necessary steps and making the required investments towards the successful implementation of the Integrated Financial Management Information System (IFMIS) project. This project is geared towards the enhancement of public sector efficiency in the delivery of public services, transparency, and accountability in the management of public funds.
- 4.38 Madam Presiding Officer, the Administration is quite mindful that the formal adoption of IFMIS in the THA requires substantive partnership with the Central Government as it is a national project championed by the Ministry of Finance. I am well aware also that implementation requires high-level commitment, training, implementation of new processes, amendment of the legal and regulatory framework, and serious change management. Notwithstanding the requirements, I wish to place on public record my dissatisfaction with the pace of implementation and the level of set-backs

experienced in preparation for several **‘Go live’** dates set by the Ministry of Finance to operationalise the system (IFMIS).

4.39 Madam Presiding Officer, since last year, the Assembly has been demonstrating a keen interest in advancing its efforts vis-à-vis the formal adoption of the new Public Financial Management (PFM) system, and outlined the key deliverables that have been achieved, indicating our readiness:

- **The selection and assignment of two (2) officers within each of the eleven (11) Accounting Units to act as Change Agents.**
- **The execution of end-user training, capacity building, and change management sessions for all users across the Assembly.**
- **The provision and availability of adequate Information Technology (IT) hardware resources and secure connectivity access.**
- **A facilitated and supported hard data migration process.**
- **Reform of the THA’s cash management system to conform to the IFMIS.**
- **The appointment of a THA Representative on the National IFMIS Steering Committee.**

4.40 Accordingly, Madam Presiding Officer, there is no doubt that the PFM reform strategy through the IFMIS project will redound to significant benefits to Tobago in particular and the country as a whole. We are hopeful that, later this year, the project will kick off successfully in the **“go live”** phase as we continue to work with the Ministry of Finance throughout the implementation process.

4.41 Notably, Madam Presiding Officer, we were able to secure the commitment of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) through the Caribbean Regional Technical Assistance Centre (CARTAC) to provide technical assistance in the areas of fiscal and financial management, research, data collection, and debt management.

4.42 Madam Presiding Officer, before I conclude this section permit me to treat with some of my Administration’s proposed policy and institutional responses to the findings of the forensic audit. We propose to: -

- **Take legal and administrative actions against all persons that are culpable.**
- **Renegotiate all claims that are overvalued to ensure that the THA gets value for money.**
- **Ensure that all the THA procurement activities are in strict conformity with the New Procurement Act 1 of 2015.**
- **Provide contract administration and management training to staff of the THA.**
- **Strengthen the project development and management capabilities of the Project Implementation Units (PIUs) across the Assembly.**

4.43 Madam Presiding Officer, corruption is an insidious plague with an extremely high socio-economic cost, especially in Small Island Developing States (SIDs) like ours. As Chief Secretary, I am ready and prepared to deal decisively with any act of corruption or even the mere appearance of corruption.

4.44 Madam Presiding Officer, I will now detail some of our plans to stimulate the economy.

d. Stimulating the Economy

4.45 Madam Presiding Officer, we recognise that, to stimulate the Tobago economy and build resilience, we must create an enabling environment for businesses on the island to prosper, and provide incentives to attract investments in key growth sectors. It is in this way that we will develop high-paying private sector jobs and improve the standard of living and the quality of life of our citizens. Many of our businesses on the island are still grappling with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, a 2022 study conducted by the Economic Management and Research Unit in the Division of Finance, Trade and Economy, which looked at what happened during the COVID period, found that:

- **Approximately 91 per cent of businesses in Tobago suffered a reduction in their revenue.**
- **Sixty-three (63) per cent experienced cashflow shortages.**

- **Forty (40) per cent experienced difficulties in meeting their payroll expenses.**
- **Thirty-seven (37) per cent experienced difficulties in honouring their obligations to financial institutions.**
- **Thirty-six (36) per cent faced challenges in paying their rent.**
- **Thirty-five (35) per cent experienced disruptions in their supply of raw materials.**

- 4.46 Madam Presiding Officer, since coming into office and taking note of the reported findings, I have been in constant communication with the various organisations representing businesses in Tobago about what is happening and how, as an Assembly, we could improve the situation. What has become clear is the fact that the existing THA financial support systems for businesses in Tobago through the Business Development Unit (BDU) and the Venture Capital Equity Fund Limited (VCEFL) are inadequate.
- 4.47 Madam Presiding Officer, a four-member Oversight/Technical Committee was established with the mandate to devise a programme to provide relief to the business community in Tobago to assist in their recovery from the debilitating effects of the pandemic. In keeping with its mandate, the Committee has developed a loan guarantee programme, which is being reviewed. The Loan Guarantee Programme is designed for implementation through an enhanced and strengthened BDU with cross-fertilization from VCEFL and the commercial banking sector.
- 4.48 Madam Presiding Officer, the policy which will provide the framework for the governance of the Loan Guarantee Programme as well as the procedures for the management of arrears arising from any loan secured by a THA guarantee have already been developed and is currently being reviewed by the Bankers' Association of Trinidad and Tobago (BATT).
- 4.49 Madam Presiding Officer, over the longer term, the Committee will take all the necessary steps for the establishment and registration of a Tobago Development Bank (TDB). The TDB will be a critical vehicle for driving development in the island through the sourcing and provision of medium- and long-term development financing coupled with cutting-edge technical assistance to both the Tobago House of Assembly and businesses operating in

Tobago. The THA is currently having discussions with persons with Central Banking and International Banking experiences to provide technical support for this initiative.

4.50 Madam Presiding Officer, a repurposed Eco-Industrial Development Company of Tobago (E-IDCOT) remains one of our primary vehicles to deliver enhanced economic and business development opportunities. In Fiscal 2024, E-IDCOT will seek to deliver the following projects and programmes designed to promote business development in Tobago:

- **Development of an e-incubator programme.** The programme will host the first of a series of workshops geared to assisting with mentorship, education, and access to professional resources for small and start-up businesses. E-IDCOT will also offer current and prospective tenants ad hoc business development services to assist in the preparation of their applications for tenancy at the Cove Park.
- **Provision of Land Campaign Incentives.** In order to stimulate interest in land tenancy at Cove, E-IDCOT has launched a series of incentives, which include a waiver of lease payments of up to five (5) years, as well as complimentary access to E-IDCOT's project management services. This marketing effort will be taken throughout the country and region.
- **Establishment of Animation Studios.** The company will officially launch its animation studio, e-Pixl Studios, in July 2023. The venture, which is owned by E-IDCOT and housed at Cove, is the first of its kind in the island. e-Pixl Studios' cadre of young animators have been in the development stage of the company's signature production, Tobago Trek, for more than two (2) years. With that experience and specialized trainers on board, e-Pixl Studios is now poised to undertake animation work for external clients around the world.
- **Development of Additional Built Spaces.** Due to the demand for built space by Tobago-based entrepreneurs, E-IDCOT is actively seeking to construct additional buildings at Cove. These spaces will be specifically earmarked, and designed accordingly, for agro-processing and light manufacturing, which have been the major areas of interest of businesses.

- 4.51 Madam Presiding Officer, Studley Park Enterprises Limited (SPEL) continues to present our greatest potential for enhanced revenue generation. In this regard, I have mandated SPEL to aggressively seek export opportunities for its products in markets such as Guyana and elsewhere in the region. The projected export earning of the company is in the region of **US \$100M** in three years, which will be a significant boost to the Assembly's revenues and the country's foreign exchange earnings. Therefore, it is our hope that the current challenges relating to the company's application for an export license and licenses to operate are resolved in short order. SPEL has also been directed to explore the options for developing value-added products such as sandpaper, stone tiles, and brake pads, using the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) modality. Critical to the company delivering on its mandates is the need for it to strengthen its management, modernise its operational systems, and build resilience into the physical plant. This will require a significant capital investment which we are committed to undertake. As such, we have budgeted \$60.0M in fiscal 2024 for the acquisition of a new crushing plant.
- 4.52 Madam Presiding Officer, as it relates to investment, my Administration is actively looking at different models and strategies to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into Tobago. In this regard, we have recently commissioned the development of an investment prospectus, which will provide information and data on all investment opportunities in the island, as well as the statutory requirements, incentives, and the THA's support. Additionally, we are also pursuing the development of a **diaspora investment fund** as a means of moving foreign investment capital into Tobago.
- 4.53 Further, we put out a general Request for Proposals (RFP) for phase 1 of the Tobago Infrastructure Development programme. This initiative has attracted the attention of a number of potential investors, who have submitted, and are still submitting, proposals.
- 4.54 Madam Presiding Officer, these initiatives will be implemented in collaboration with the Central Government. In this regard, we intend to have discussions with the Central Government towards making the legislative arrangements governing FDI more investor friendly, thereby improving the ease of doing business in Tobago.

4.55 Madam Presiding Officer, let me speak now to agriculture and food sovereignty.

e. Agriculture and Food Sovereignty

4.56 Madam Presiding Officer, the availability of healthy, safe, and affordable food is the number one priority of this Administration. Therefore, a critical element of our developmental strategy as it relates to agriculture and food sovereignty is the building of safe, sustainable, and resilient food supply systems through the deployment and elevated uptake of science, research, smart agriculture technologies, and institutional strengthening. Our food sovereignty strategy is anchored on the development of modern, sustainable, and resilient agricultural systems and practices. Madam Presiding Officer, by food sovereignty we mean the appropriate use of sustainable farming methods that can produce the base level nutritional support to sustain a population, especially during a disruptive event like the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, as I mentioned earlier, our food sovereignty strategies are intended to deal with the rising food price inflation.

4.57 Madam Presiding Officer, it is estimated that about 80 per cent of the fresh agricultural produce sold and consumed in Tobago comes from Trinidad, and the island's agricultural sector contributes less than 1 per cent of GDP. Our agricultural policy must address these issues frontally.

4.58 Therefore, in Fiscal 2024, the Division of Food Security, Natural Resources, the Environment and Sustainable Development proposes a number of initiatives aimed at boosting our agricultural production and food sovereignty agenda. One critical initiative is the development of two mega farms. These farms will allow us to derive available benefits from economies of scale, thereby placing us in a position to make food available to Tobagonians at cheaper prices. Our mega farms policy objective is to put a minimum of two hundred (200) acres into productive usage, under a scientifically and technologically informed engineering design to promote cross-fertilization effectiveness and efficiency.

4.59 Madam Presiding Officer, the mega farm project is intended to be implemented using the Public Private Partnership (PPP) modality where the Assembly will provide the lands as its equity holdings in the project, and the infrastructure,

production systems, smart technologies, and knowledge capital will be jointly supplied. The proposed start-up areas of productions are:

- **Poultry;**
- **Fresh vegetables;**
- **Small ruminants (goat and sheep);**
- **Citrus, banana, and other indigenous fruits;**
- **Pork; and,**
- **Aqua-culture.**

- 4.60 The mega farms will also serve as research and demonstration facilities to our wider agriculture and food security sector, delivering knowledge and technological transfer opportunities. It is hoped that this project will serve as a fillip to the island's agriculture sector and as such \$51.8M is budgeted for its implementation in fiscal 2024.
- 4.61 Madam Presiding Officer, another major initiative pertains to the operationalisation of Tobago Agriculture Research Institute (TARI) at the Kendall Farm School, which will become Tobago's Centre of Agriculture Science, Research, and Development. TARI's work and outputs will form the evidence that informs our transformative policy prescriptions for the sector. Relatedly, it will serve as the island's main workforce development and training institute, delivering 21st century skills and knowledge.
- 4.62 In this regard, TARI will deliver our Tobago Youth in Agriculture Training Programme. We propose to train and equip a minimum of two hundred (200) young persons through TARI in Fiscal 2024. The strategic objective is to create a continuously growing cadre of skilled young agri-entrepreneurs to drive the sustainable development of the sector and thereby infuse resilience into the labour supply. TARI will make greater use of virtual training and more community-centric, face-to-face training as it seeks to make its offerings more accessible. It will also develop seed banks thereby enabling us to preserve our indigenous varieties for future generations.
- 4.63 Madam Presiding Officer, another critical initiative is the construction of two (2) markets/food hubs, one in Mason Hall and the other in Roxborough, aimed at giving greater opportunities to our farmers to market their products in dignified manner. The next initiative relates to the establishment of a flour

factory to manufacture alternative flours such as sweet potato, breadfruit, plantain, and dasheen flour. This initiative is being spearheaded by the Tobago Agribusiness Development Company (TADCO), which has secured the space at Cove where the factory will be located. TADCO has also been conducting viability assessments to inform decision-making relating to the possible expansion of its fleet and to aggressively develop value-added products from fish.

4.64 Madam Presiding Officer, other initiatives of the Division of Food Security, Natural Resources, the Environment and Sustainable Development to boost agricultural production over the next fiscal year include: -.

- Upgrade of the livestock facilities at the various Demonstration Stations;
- Upgrade and restructuring of the Tractor Pool Facility at Shaw Park to comply with Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) standards and to enable the provision of more timely services to farmers;
- Transformation of existing fishing facilities to allow users to operate in conditions which comply with OSH requirements and meet Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) standards;
- Completion and outfitting of the Parlatuvier Fishing Facility to provide adequate user space for fishers in the area;
- Construction of the veterinary diagnostic laboratory to cater to the health needs of livestock on the island;
- Establishment of two (2) abattoirs to allow for the slaughtering and dressing of carcasses; and,
- Expansion of the Breadfruit Initiative through the Tobago Reforestation and Watershed Rehabilitation Programme (TRWRP).

4.65 Madam Presiding Officer, please permit me to look at our strategies for the building of a sustainable and resilient tourism sector and cultural industries.

f. Tourism and Cultural Developments

4.66 Madam Presiding Officer, because of its largely untapped economic potential, tourism remains the island's most promising commercial sector. Therefore, the building of a sustainable and resilient tourism that will deliver prosperity

to Tobagonians is of great urgency to this Administration. Tobago, by its defining environmental, cultural, historical, and socio-economic properties, can be labelled “**The Green-island of Festivals**”. This is supported by the following facts:

- *Tobago has the oldest protected rainforest in the Western Hemisphere.*
- *Tobago has received the “Man and the Biosphere” designation.*
- *Tobago has one of the largest brain corals in the region.*
- *Tobago has the Buccoo Reef and the Nylon Pool.*
- *Tobago has a Heritage festival, a Goat and Crab Race festival, a Bluefood festival, a Jazz Festival, Harvests and two carnivals.*

- 4.67 Madam Presiding Officer, as we seek to develop a prosperous and resilient society, we must intensify ongoing efforts to exploit the potential resident in tour tourism and culture industries. It is therefore incumbent on us to address some perennial challenges facing the industry. These challenges pertain to inadequate airlift arrangements, insufficient marketing, and inadequate product development and room stock.
- 4.68 Madam Presiding Officer, as it relates to airlift, the Condor Airlines out of Germany will resume service to Tobago in the winter season of this year. Building on this, in Fiscal 2024, the Tobago Tourism Agency (TTAL) will continue ongoing negotiations to secure airlift out of Western Europe and Scandinavia. We are particularly interested in the Scandinavian market because, in the past, it proved to be extremely lucrative for us. The Agency will also be seeking a low-cost carrier as a replacement for Virgin Atlantic, with the aim of building financial sustainability over the longer term.
- 4.69 Relatedly, Madam Presiding Officer, in order to boost our marketing efforts, we will seek to have representation in the Scandinavian market. We propose to set up a Tobago desk in two (2) Scandinavian countries, namely Norway and Sweden. Further, with the recent appointment of a Destination Representative for the US Market and with established representation in the Canadian Market, we will intensify our marketing efforts in the North American market. Moreover, we will seek to exploit all the tourism marketing

opportunities that will emanate from our hosting of the 2023 Commonwealth Youth Games.

- 4.70 Madam Presiding Officer, as it relates to product development, we will continue efforts to improve customer service in the industry. In this regard, TTAL will continue to collaborate with the Tobago Hospitality and Tourism Institute (THTI) on a Customer Service Programme aimed at improving customer service through the tourism industry. We also intend to establish, through TTAL, a Tourism Services Bureau of Standards, which will be mandated to inspect the condition of resorts and food and beverage establishment customer service output, and report data and findings to the Division of Tourism, Culture, Antiquities and Transportation for further assessment and recommendations for remedial actions.
- 4.71 Madam Presiding Officer, as we continue to enhance our product offerings, over the next Fiscal year, we will see the construction of a \$300M Water Park at Friendship Estate by Synergy Water, which will create hundreds of private sector jobs. Additionally, we propose to upgrade the Charlotteville jetty facilities to accommodate safer docking of larger vessels and to also include further service offerings to our cruise ship passengers. Other significant upgrades are proposed for the product offerings at Pigeon Point Heritage Park, Store Bay Beach Facilities, and the Bloody Bay Facility. We also propose to develop a robust framework for the regulation of touts and reef tour operators, and for the deployment of precepted Reef Rangers under our Department of Public Safety.
- 4.72 Madam Presiding Officer, in order to improve the quality of our room stock, construction will begin on a 500-room five-star hotel at Kilgwyn in October 2023, which will create two thousand six hundred (2,600) well-paying jobs and inject US \$100M in capital into the Tobago economy. At this stage, the company, Apple Leisure Group, has submitted the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Report and has been given a date for the determination of the Certificate of Environmental Clearance (CEC). We also expect to see the start of construction of the Marriott Hotel at Rocky Point. In addition, operations at Manta Lodge Hotel, Speyside are expected to commence in the coming months. Further, negotiations for a buyer and/or developer for Sanctuary Villas are in train.

4.73 Madam Presiding Officer, closely linked to our strategy to develop the tourism industry is our thrust to develop our cultural industries. We view the orange sub-economy as a driver of the economy, with significant untapped potential. Leading this Administration's drive to monetise our potential in this orange economy will be the Tobago Performing Arts Company (TPAC) and the Tobago Festivals Commission. In this regard, over the next fiscal year, TPAC will:

- host a series of workshops, mentorship programmes, and master classes aimed at providing a holistic learning environment that promotes artistic growth and professional development for Tobagonians in the performing arts;
- host a major Arts Festival aimed at showcasing the rich tapestry of talents across all our creative departments, in areas such as dance, drama, music, and film;
- host a film production named 'REEL MATRIMONY', aimed at captivating global audiences and piquing their interest in our island's vibrant, unexplored, green landscapes. The production will have deep technological cross-fertilization with the animation studio at Cove;
- develop state-of-the-art rehearsal spaces, high-tech recording studios, and a well-equipped film production hub aimed at improving performance spaces and improving the quality of performances; and,
- host a Children's Arts Camp named 'Creative Calabash' that will be an immersive arts camp designed for children to explore and express their creativity, thereby assisting to nurture the next generation of artistic talents.

4.74 Madam Presiding Officer, the Tobago Festivals Commission also has a crucial role to play as we elevate our exploitation of the opportunities in the orange economy. This year, we have taken a deliberate decision to do a scaled-down version of the 36th Tobago Heritage Festival. We intend to restructure the Festival to widen and sweeten its attractiveness, cultural appeal, and sustainability. Likewise, the Tobago Jazz Experience is being purposefully reviewed for economic viability and resilience. In relation to our October Carnival, the newest addition to the island's calendar of festivals, we have taken note of the lessons learnt from the introductory event last year. Our

public officers, technocrats, and producers are actively working on improving the Carnival for this year. While these festivals are not intended to produce a financial return to the THA, our policy going forward is to ensure that they are executed in keeping with the principles of value for money.

4.75 Madam Presiding Officer, please allow me to turn to education.

g. Education

4.76 Madam Presiding Officer, we cannot develop a sustainable, prosperous, and resilient society without delivering 21st century education and skills to Tobagonians. As stated before, we live in a very complex and digitally fluid world. Therefore, for us to participate effectively in this new world, our students and workers need to think critically, communicate effectively, collaborate with diverse peers, solve complex problems, adopt a global mindset, and engage robustly with information and communication technologies.

4.77 Madam Presiding Officer, to achieve this, we must create an education system based on established learning pathways that link knowledge systems, teaching methodologies, and outcomes with real-world problems. This model requires us to upgrade and modernise our learning and teaching infrastructures. It also presents the need for the ongoing retraining and upgrading of the capacity and capability of educators and instructors.

4.78 Madam Presiding Officer, I want to turn my attention to the immediate and pressing need for changes in the education system post-COVID. We have learned valuable lessons from COVID-19 that can help us to build a resilient education system. COVID has taught us that, at short notice, we must be able to move seamlessly from an **in-person model** of teaching and learning to an **online model**.

4.79 Madam Presiding Officer, one key lesson we did not learn, however, is that the ideal response to **fast-moving and precipitous** changes, such as those brought on by COVID, is an online system that is mainly **asynchronous**. Such a system involves the student working independently at mostly his/her own pace and with his/her own schedule that are different from another students. It also involves the teacher providing instruction intermittently. What we have done (**not us but those whom we succeeded**) is to transition from an in-person, face-to-face synchronous system to an online face-to-face synchronous system.

- 4.80 Madam Presiding Officer, while the latter has its benefits, it still retains many elements of the in-person synchronous system. Many teachers would argue that online face-to-face teaching and learning is as demanding as in-person teaching and learning. What we need to develop, Madam Presiding Officer, is an online system that will allow students who can learn **independently** to do so with intermittent teacher supervision. It will also allow parents with the capacity and time to teach their children at home. This component that requires parental assistance can be linked to an official THA work-from-home policy in the future.
- 4.81 Madam Presiding Officer, the idea of an online education system, as I have articulated here, will lead to a decrease in synchronous teacher contact time online. Supporting an online asynchronous system will mean building an **online education architecture** to support self-directed and parent-assisted teaching and learning. This is one of our core educational development projects for Fiscal 2024. We have done the research and are now at the design stage. Additionally, Madam Presiding Officer, we propose to execute the following projects and programmes in Fiscal 2024:
- Upgrading and modernising of our schools towards smart-school classification and certification.
 - Special and targeted intervention programmes to deal with the COVID-19 induced learning losses.
 - Commencement of pre-construction works for the new Scarborough Secondary Smart-school.
 - Continuous teacher and instructor training and capacity enhancement towards the delivery of 21st century education and skills.
 - Construction of a modern school for the hearing impaired at Signal Hill.
 - Repurposing of our School Nutrition Programme (School Feeding) into a significant component of a general school health programme. This is intended to address the rising level of obesity and other non-communicable diseases (NCDs) among our children.
 - Introduction of a dual-track system of education and training by establishing at least two technical training institutions. A strong policy consideration here is the conversion of Roxborough Secondary School into one such institution.

4.82 Madam Presiding Officer, in addition to the foregoing, we need to develop the institutional capacity and capability to do a more deliberate job of teaching and measuring our advancement in 21st century skills, since they are an indispensable currency for the building of sustainability, prosperity, and resilience. All Tobagonians need these skills that will increase our marketability, employability, and productivity.

4.83 Madam Presiding Officer, permit me to speak about health and social protection.

h. Health and Social Protection

4.84 Madam Presiding Officer, this Administration is quite cognisant of the strong link between the health and well-being of our citizens and their overall quality of life. We are also aware of the fact that we cannot develop a resilient and prosperous society in any sustainable manner unless we protect and safeguard the health and well-being of our citizens. In this regard, we aim at developing our health care and social protection systems in ways that are innovative, responsive, and positioned to deliver holistic, high-quality, client-centred health and social protection to the people of Tobago.

4.85 This requires improvements in our health care facilities and in the quantity and quality of healthcare practitioners, and the deployment of more technologically-driven and efficient management systems. Therefore, we will continue to invest in developing a modern health care system and promote and protect the interest of our vulnerable groups.

4.86 Madam Presiding Officer, in Fiscal 2024, the Division of Health, Wellness and Social Protection propose to:

- expand the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (ICU) at an estimated cost of **\$1.8M** to increase its capacity for the treatment of newborns.
- expand the Oncology Unit to provide more access to screening and long-term dignified care for our cancer patients at an estimated cost of **\$2.5M**.
- acquire an MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) machine at a cost of **\$10.0M** and a sixty-four (64) Slice CT (Computerised Tomography) Scanner at a cost of **\$7.0M**.

- upgrade Canaan Health Centre to a District Facility. This will allow for 24-hour service, increased diagnostic services, the treatment of a wider variety of ailments and injuries, and enhanced screening at the Facility. The strategic goal is to promote health care delivery at the community level.
- procure and commission ten (10) new ambulances for use by the Tobago Emergency Medical Services (TEMS) Department at an estimated cost of **\$12.0M**.
- upgrade the Plymouth Health Centre to better service the needs of patients.
- conduct an intensive educational health promotional campaign to treat with the rising incidence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs). This will include well-being counselling related to exercise, nutrition, and early screening for lifestyle diseases.
- develop a structured programme for continuous training and upgrading of our medical and support staff with cutting edge medical knowledge.
- undertake an education drive to enlighten and empower persons with scientific facts on mental health and to expand the capacity of the Mental Health Unit to better serve the needs of the population.

4.87 Madam Presiding Officer, allow me to shift gears to our efforts to provide social protection to at-risk groups. We realise that, as development occurs whether we like it or not, there will be unintended consequences because of socio-economic and other factors. The COVID-19 pandemic placed significant stress on our social support systems, making it necessary for us to widen our safety net to protect the vulnerable. We have to take care of these people. In fact, a society is judged by how well it caters for its at-risk groups. Madam Presiding Officer, as we move forward to making Tobago **the greatest little island on the planet**, we are committed to building resilience, efficiency, and effectiveness into our social protection programme. In this regard, we propose to:

- intensify efforts to fully digitise the social protection processes, as part of our My-THA project, to ensure greater accessibility and more timely delivery of support to our most vulnerable;

- restructure the Social Protection Department to ensure that staff at all levels are provided with capacity-building opportunities in the areas of leadership, industrial relations, public service policies, performance management, report writing, and social protection department policies;
- review policies and streamline the processes of the Social Protection Department to ensure diversity, equity, and inclusion and, more importantly, to ensure that no one is left behind;
- institute a robust community engagement programme across the island where staff of the Social Protection Department are available at our Health Centres, Community Centres, and other community-based facilities to deliver greater access to the services of the Department; and,
- review and streamline the processes of the Social Emergency Card and Food Card Unit to ensure greater public accountability and transparency.

4.88 Madam Presiding Officer, let me now turn to housing.

i. Housing

4.89 Madam Presiding Officer, the availability of affordable housing is perhaps one of the most significant issues facing my Administration. But while we acknowledge this, we also note that this is not a peculiar Tobago problem. It is obvious that it is now quite difficult for the average Tobagonian to realise their dream of homeownership.

4.90 The average conventional three-bedroom house in Trinidad and Tobago is somewhere in the vicinity of **\$1.5M**. When we add the price differential for **Tobago**, we could be looking at a price closer to **\$1.7M**. To qualify for a mortgage for this amount would require a household income of more than \$30,000 monthly or \$360K annually. In light of the fact that the majority of Tobagonians do not make that kind of money, any proposal for housing solutions for Tobagonians must include significant subsidies from the THA.

4.91 Madam Presiding Officer, the question is how much subsidy the THA can really afford, given its perennial underfunding by the Central Government. We inherited a database of approximately **seven thousand five hundred**

- applicants.** We have to respond to the housing needs of all applicants with careful consideration of the available resources.
- 4.92 Madam Presiding Officer, our response to the housing needs of Tobagonians is made even more urgent, given the increasing demand for housing in Tobago, the number of low-income households, and the high price for reasonable accommodation on the rental market. Our response to this affordable housing crisis is by way of policy prescriptions, with the objective of meeting the **housing needs of applicants.** The policy prescriptions speak to a basket of approaches. We have already begun to roll out our policies. To this end, we have just completed a very successful pilot project entitled **Home Ownership Made Equal.**
- 4.93 The timing and launch of this programme, Madam Presiding Officer, are significant. What we are doing is sending a strong signal to those who are least able to afford a home that their Assembly is prepared to put them at the head of the line. In keeping with the lessons emanating from our recent mission to Jamaica, the Executive Council has mandated the Secretary of Settlements to supply **twenty (20) low-cost units** for Tobagonians before the end of the current Fiscal 2023.
- 4.94 Madam Presiding Officer, at the same time, we have announced and launched the largest housing construction initiative in the history of Tobago. Our ambition is to deliver more than five hundred (500) housing units to Tobagonians. The Division of Settlements, Public Utilities and Rural Development has already issued the Request for Proposal (RFP). We are asking Tobago contractors to come and join us. Go to your banks and begin to raise the finance and get registered with the Officer of Procurement Regulator!
- 4.95 Madam Presiding Officer, we also intend to put about eight hundred (800) service lots across the island on the market. We know the success of this tried-and-true formula of providing service lots to Tobagonians, and the beneficiaries have some of the most beautiful homes on the island. The housing developments at Signal Hill, Sou Sou Lands, Calder Hall, and Belle Garden provide the evidence that the provision of affordable service lots is one of the best solutions to Tobago's housing affordability crisis.
- 4.96 We intend to continue with this strategy and provide service lots at Shirvan, Courland, Adelphi Estates, and Riseland. In Tobago East, we are targeting

the Louis D'or Estate, Roxborough Estate, and other villages where there are appropriate lands to drive our village expansion project.

- 4.97 Madam Presiding Officer, these new initiatives will be packaged with our existing programmes, including our home improvement grants. We are also exploring a Rental Assistance Programme (RAP). We are actively designing a programme with the associated feasibility calculations of running a pilot involving low-income single mothers and single fathers. The pilot will tell us how sustainable the programme could be. The RAP would immediately bring relief to many families struggling to pay monthly rent. It would also free up much-needed income, which could be used to purchase other essentials such as groceries and personal care products.
- 4.98 We recognise that a major housing challenge is the lack of a coherent and comprehensive housing policy. We intend to fix this and, to this end, the Division of Settlements, Public Utilities and Rural Development is currently working on its Tobago Comprehensive Housing Strategy.
- 4.99 Madam Presiding Officer, our housing development strategy will focus on:
- Establishing the institutional framework for the implementation of the housing strategy;
 - Analysing demographic trends;
 - Determining housing demand and needs;
 - Assessing the current housing stock;
 - Locating available and suitable lands;
 - Analysing the financial feasibility and fiscal capacity;
 - Conducting infrastructure and utility audits; and,
 - Determining future infrastructure and utility requirements.
- 4.100 Madam Presiding Officer, in addition to our core public sector projects, programmes, and strategies listed, this Assembly is committed to partnering and working with private housing developers to deliver affordable housing solutions to market.
- 4.101 Madam Presiding Officer, I now speak to our strategy for building sustainable, prosperous, and resilient communities.

j. Building Sustainable, Prosperous, and Resilient Communities

4.102 Madam Presiding Officer, in every sense of the word, Tobago is an island of tightly-knit communities. Therefore, the building of sustainable, prosperous, and resilient communities, *child by child, family by family, and village by village*, remains a key development goal of this Administration. However, we must be mindful of the challenges we face at the community level. Our resources are limited, demands for our services are increasing, and we are witnessing the alarming consequences of environmental and societal degradation, with the stark realities of the changing global economic environment impacting every sector. But I firmly believe that within every challenge lies an opportunity for growth and positive change.

4.103 One of our sustainable community development programmes for Fiscal 2024 is a comprehensive capacity-building programme called “**TAKE CHARGE**”, designed to help communities take responsibility for, and control of, their human capital, as well as their physical and financial resources. The key components of the programme are:

1. Family Management training across all communities;
2. M.A.C.C.O (mastering aspects of community cohesion and organization);
3. Community Leadership training;
4. Spiritual Wellness seminars with Faith-based Organisations (FBOs) to improve social community **CARE**;
5. After-school and Mentorship Programmes; and,
6. Institutional strengthening of youth, sporting, and community-based organisations, including Village and Community Councils.

4.104 Madam Presiding Officer, another of our programmes is the **Skill-sharing and Exchange Programme** aimed at promoting self-sufficiency and resourcefulness. This Programme is designed to empower and encourage community members to **STEP UP** and share their skills, knowledge, and resources with each other, thereby fostering a culture of collaboration and sustainability. Key elements of this Programme are:

1. The **Tobago Road Market Experience and Community Trade Shows** – creating platforms for trade, product sharing, and development of cooperative ventures.
2. A **Handicraft Training and Exchange** programme, promoting inter-generational partnerships and transfer of indigenous knowledge and skills.
3. **MACHO (Male Mentorship and Internship)** programme), aimed at providing structured leadership support and guidance to our young males.
4. **Sport and Youth Leadership Development** training programmes.

4.105 Madam Presiding Officer, we have also programmed the implementation of a number of community prosperity and empowerment initiatives. These include:

- The hosting of the annual **Vocational Skills Training Programme** to provide community-based introductory training and prior learning assessment and certification of skilled persons, through our network of Community, Youth, and Multi-purpose Centres.
- The establishment of the **Tobago Skills Development Training Centre**, which will offer level 1 and level 2 CVQ (Caribbean Vocational Qualification) and TTNVQ (Trinidad and Tobago National Vocational Qualification) that assess and certify individuals' competence in various occupational areas, thus integrating literacy development and improvement.
- Encouragement and support of innovation and enterprise development through the hosting of **Targeted Apprenticeship Programmes** in areas such as:
 - i. Youth Agro and Agro Processing training.
 - ii. Exploration and implementation of initiatives in the blue economic sector, such as **aquaculture techniques and training**. By embracing the principles of the blue economy, our coastal communities will be empowered to harness the economic potential of their Marine Parks while safeguarding their long-term health and economic prosperity.

4.106 Madam Presiding Officer, through sustainable practices, responsible governance, and meaningful community engagement, we will create a more prosperous and resilient future that balances the island's economic growth with its environmental sustainability requirements.

4.107 Moreover, Madam Presiding Officer, to build resilience and social cohesion at the community level, we propose:

- The activation of the **community management systems and protocols** embodied in the work of Community Councils and other civil society institutions. This will entail the active **mainstreaming of the operations of Village and Community Councils, Youth Councils, and Sporting Associations** based on the establishment of standards of operations, certification, contribution agreements and monitoring and evaluation.
- The implementation of a comprehensive **Volunteerism and Youth and National Service Programme**, to foster community pride, strengthen community cohesiveness, and encourage civic engagement for the betterment of our communities.
- The implementation of a **Tobago Community Safety Programme**, as an initiative for enhancing the safety, security, and well-being of our communities. **The Safe Community Competition Campaign** emanating from this programme will represent the culmination of active capacity building, awareness and education, and implementation of people-centred policing and positive engagement. Madam Presiding Officer, these initiatives form part of a wider body of work to treat directly with the security and safety issues confronting our communities.

4.108 Madam Presiding Officer, please allow me to turn to youth and sports development.

k. Youth and Sports Development

4.109 Madam Presiding Officer, the holistic development of young people constitutes another top priority of my Administration. In this regard, we see the

investments in our youths as a critical and necessary input towards developing a sustainable, prosperous, and resilient society. Relatedly, our strategic goals are to create the socio-economic and institutional enabling environment that is populated with practical opportunities for our young people to exploit for their self-actualisation.

4.110 Madam Presiding Officer, our first order of business is to strengthen the institutional capacity and capability of the Youth Department to better serve our young people. In this regard, we are going to train and reskill the staff and develop new and more efficient ways of treating with the diverse needs of our young people.

4.111 In Fiscal 2024, we intend to elevate our youth inter-face with the aim of better meeting their needs. In this regard, we propose to deliver the following youth development projects and programmes:

- Job skill training to prepare our youths for a more seamless entry into the world of work. The Youth Department will lead the implementation of this programme with targeted throughput of at least one thousand (1,000) persons in Fiscal 2024.
- Provision of financial literacy education and training with a focus on digital currencies, saving, investment, and business development. The Financial Literacy Secretariat (FLS) of the Division of Finance, Trade and the Economy will spearhead this initiative with a set target of one thousand (1,000) participants in Fiscal 2024.
- Aggressive search for internship opportunities for our young and upcoming professionals at national, regional, and international institutions such as the Central Bank, the Caribbean Development Bank, Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the International Development Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank. Madam Presiding Officer, as I speak, two of our tertiary students are at the Central Bank on internship but, unfortunately, a third student declined the opportunity.
- Youth and Technology Development training geared towards equipping our young people with the soft technical skills to function efficiently in this technologically-driven world. This programme will be delivered by Tobago Information Technology Limited (TITL) and we are aiming to

have one thousand two hundred (1,200) youths participating in this programme in Fiscal 2024.

- A Youth Innovation/Invention programme, which will provide financial and technical support to young innovators and inventors. This programme will also be executed by TITL with a target of at least five hundred (500) participants in Fiscal 2024.
- Institution of a Know Your Tobago History programme aimed at developing the civic-mindedness and consciousness of our youths about the socio-economic and political history of their island. In Fiscal 2024, we are aiming to have at least one thousand (1,000) youths participate in this programme.
- A Youth Health Project designed to promote healthy living and life choices among the young people, with easy and direct access to testing and screening through our healthcare facilities. In Fiscal 2024, we propose to test and screen one thousand two hundred (1,200) youths, working in collaboration with youth organisations and other community-based entities.

4.112 Madam Presiding Officer, in Fiscal 2024, we propose to intensify our ongoing efforts to create a sustainable, prosperous, and resilient sporting sector in Tobago. In this regard, we propose to implement the following:

- Technical and financial support for our sporting organisations, with the aim of increasing the use of science and technology in their training and development programmes. This will be accompanied by the necessary institutional strengthening and system management development at the level of the organisations.
- The upgrading and modernisation of sporting facilities throughout the island to facilitate the seamless use of sport science and smart technology. The sustainability and resilience of this programme will be built on a community-based maintenance and management model. This model will operate on **formal contribution agreements** between our sporting organisations and the Division, which will perform the monitoring and evaluation functions in keeping with its policy directives.

- The training and retraining of our coaches in 21st century skills and knowledge, with emphasis on sport science, health, and technology.
- Support for our sportsmen and sportswomen to meet the academic standards required to obtain international sporting scholarships.
- A recognition and reward programme, which will provide performance incentives to our sportsmen and sportswomen who excel at regional and international events.
- An improved system of monitoring and evaluating coaches assigned to our school sports programmes.
- A sport internship programme in which our sportsmen and sports women are sent on learning-journeys at high-performance training centres regionally and internationally.
- A sport health programme that provides medical and dietary support and knowledge to our sportsmen and sportswomen to ensure that they will perform at their optimum.

4.113 Madam Presiding Officer, in the area of sports infrastructure development, we propose to move ahead with the construction of the Bacolet Indoor Facility. My Administration has taken the conscious decision to expand the scope of this project, and thereby giving it the chance of being commercially viable and make it into a facility that will give impetus to our sport tourism efforts.

4.114 As for the Goodwood Pavilion that was being constructed without proper consultation with the residents and other stakeholder groups, my Administration has painfully decided to continue with the visibly vexing project because of the huge costs associated with its demolition and relocation.

4.115 Moreover, Madam Presiding Officer, my Administration is currently in discussion with an international entity that is interested in establishing a **modern cricket stadium** on the island. This development would enhance Tobago's **sports tourism offerings**. With such a facility, we can approach the Caribbean T20 franchise holders with a proposal to include Tobago in their annual T20 calendar.

4.116 Madam Presiding Officer, as you know, we are in the process of getting a number of our facilities ready for our hosting of the 2023 Commonwealth Youth Games in August. Our approach is to ensure that Tobago sportsmen and

sportswomen benefit from the upgrade works long after the games are finished. In this regard, we are building the first full-size beach volleyball facility in the country at Black Rock, which will be a significant legacy item. In keeping with this strategy, we are very deliberate with our purchasing of the equipment for the four sporting disciplines to be hosted in Tobago, namely, beach volleyball, netball, rugby, and the triathlon. We are also hosting the closing ceremony, which we have taken the decision to use as a global marketing event for our tourism offerings.

4.117 Therefore, Madam Presiding Officer, let me take this opportunity to invite all of Tobago to come out and support the Games and display our sweet Tobago love and hospitality.

4.118 Madam Presiding Officer, please permit me to look at our strategy for infrastructure development.

1. Infrastructure Development

4.119 Madam Presiding Officer, early in our first year in office, we completed a reconnaissance and an assessment of our road networks, coastal and terrestrial retaining structures, and our drainage systems. What we found was that the infrastructure outlived its useful life cycle, particularly design standards that are not aligned to changing climatic conditions. We also discovered significant deficits in our infrastructure requirements.

4.120 Our initial assessment led to a two-fold response strategy, including the upgrade of maintaining existing infrastructure works where necessary while at the same time executing new projects based on new environmental realities and requirements.

4.121 Madam Presiding Officer, the response to our infrastructure challenges has been further exacerbated by the damage caused to road-network and retaining systems in the northeast of the island by the unusual levels of rainfall in the latter part of 2022.

4.122 Fixing Tobago's infrastructure deficit is a multi-year and multi-dimensional undertaking. Notwithstanding, this Administration recognises the importance of green, modern, and resilient infrastructure as a necessary prerequisite to stimulating economic activities, social development, safety, and the general enhancement of the life of Tobagonians. Therefore, we must develop our

infrastructure and do so at a scale and rate that can quickly transform the Tobago economy.

4.123 Madam Presiding Officer, in Fiscal 2024, this Administration proposes to:

- accelerate the restoration and upgrade of the island's road network that was damaged by the unusually high level of rainfall in the latter part of 2022. Some of the places where major works are scheduled to be done under this programme are Bad Rock, the Roxborough-Bloody Bay Road, the Castara Road, and the Charlotteville-L'Anse Fourmi Link Road;
- conduct coastal protection and restoration works at Grange Bay, Black Rock, Pigeon Point, Crown Point, Lambeau, and Roxborough;
- upgrade the drainage infrastructure in areas prone to flooding, such as Carnbee, Lowlands, Canaan/Crown Point, and Scarborough;
- resurface and upgrade works to primary and secondary roads across the island;
- accelerate work on the Friendship Bypass Road and the Bon Accord to Pigeon Point Road, which are critical to treat with growing traffic congestion in the Canaan, Bon Accord, and Crown Point area;
- commence pre-construction works on the Scarborough Development Project, which will include over time a modern cruise port, an administrative complex, a hotel, a modern commercial plaza with connections to a parkade and transportation hub. The project also includes upgrading current green spaces, including the Botanic Gardens and Fort King George; and,
- construct a Utility Corridor in Scarborough to pass T&TEC lines and all other utility cables underground.

4.124 Madam Presiding Officer, to improve efficiency and effectiveness in the management of our infrastructure projects, we envisage a greater role for E-IDCOT. The company has been mandated to enhance its project management and procurement management capabilities and capacities to take on this critical responsibility. This has become even more necessary given UDECOTT's unusual decision to disengage from doing projects for the THA.

4.125 Madam Presiding Officer, I now turn to the Environment, Climate Change, and Energy Transition.

m. Environment, Climate Change, and Energy Transition –

- 4.126 Madam Presiding Officer, this THA Administration remains committed to fully exploiting all opportunities for the conservation of our natural resources and the socio-economic development and marketing of a Tobago that comes with the designation of the north-east as a UNESCO Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Reserve. Central to this effort is the meaningful inclusion of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Community-based Organisations (CBOs), and the business community in the decision-making process regarding the governance of the Biosphere reserves in accordance with democratic ideals. Accordingly, this Administration intends to establish a Management Trust, through which a progressive and inclusive management arrangement will be implemented. The governance framework will provide the opportunity for representatives of the THA, civil society, and the private sector to have an equal and meaningful influence on the management of the resources in the Reserve, which is critical to the socio-economic well-being of our people.
- 4.127 Investment in the blue economy is growing increasingly in small island developing states. The real promise of the pursuit of a blue economy agenda is rooted in the conservation of the ecology and resources in the blue space while providing a sustainable socio-economic future for our people based on the wise use of those resources.
- 4.128 Madam Presiding Officer, the potential of the oceans, coastal resources, and other aquatic resources to help meet many of our socio-economic ideals is significant. However, our oceans and coastal waters are under increasing pressure from many misuses and threats – threats that are both natural and anthropogenic in nature. I will not attempt to share an exhaustive list of threats, but offer instead three of the most common: climate change, marine pollution, and overexploitation of resources rooted in less than effective management.
- 4.129 If we in Tobago are to unlock this potential and effectively pursue investment in the development of the blue economy in an effort to meet the diverse and growing needs of our people, it is critical that we commit to following an approach that integrates science-based environmental management directly with economic development and social development goals.

4.130 This Administration intends to do exactly that by developing and rolling out a strategy for considered, structured, long-term investment in the blue space. In this regard, the THA has collaborated with the Inter-America Development Bank (IDB) in developing a Blue Economy Roadmap (BER) report geared towards identifying the most effective and sustainable pathway for us to use ocean resources and associated marine ecosystems in our development. Key recommendations coming out of the roadmap are:

- Restoration of marine ecosystems while providing local food security and resilient livelihoods;
- Development of resilient coastal infrastructure;
- The definition of Tobago's marine boundaries through adjustments to existing legislation;
- Oil & gas energy transition to marine renewables;
- The development of a Centre for Maritime Research and Blue Economy Technology Development; and,
- Port expansion to support blue growth activities.

We will continue to work with the IDB towards implementing these initiatives.

4.131 Madam Presiding Officer, other environmental initiatives of this Administration for the next fiscal year include:

- Economic valuation of our natural resources, including forests, wetlands, and coastal resources like seagrass beds and coral reefs to document our contribution to addressing the climate crisis more comprehensively, as well as support trading of green and blue carbon credits as a contribution towards GDP.
- Further developing and implementing strategies that help to build climate resilience at the community level, including a more focussed exploration of nature-based infrastructural solutions to the challenges we face.
- Building on efforts over the last fiscal period regarding the installation of renewable energy infrastructure for use at public facilities on the island. The intention is to expand this drive to widen the use of

renewable energy at public facilities and incentivise adoption at the residential and commercial levels.

4.132 Moreover, Madam Presiding Officer, the leading conversation emanating from the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 27) was compensation for less-developed countries, including Small Island Developing States (SIDS) for loss and damage arising from issues related to climate change.

4.133 At COP 27, the leading nations in the world accepted that their economies were significant contributors to climate change. They also committed to contributing US \$100B annually in climate financing.

4.134 Madam Presiding Officer, we do not know how Tobago will benefit from this compensation because we were not involved in negotiations at COP. While we hope to benefit from compensation for loss and damage, we must do what we must to protect our environment. To this end, we will seek to allocate a budget of \$20.0M under the new line item 'Climate and Energy Transition Financing'. This will allow us to:

- establish a Climate Emergency Fund to finance our response to climate-related disasters;
- retrofit some of our existing buildings as we transition to more renewable sources of energy;
- establish a pilot solar panel farm at the Cove Eco-Industrial Estate;
- establish an incentive programme for hotels and guest houses to transition to more renewable sources of energy; and,
- establish electric vehicle (EV) charging stations in Scarborough, Canaan, Roxborough, Castara, and Charlotteville.

4.135 Going forward, we will establish our Energy Transition Policy to guide a more targeted, coherent and robust **NET ZERO** strategy and our Biodiversity Protection policy and our **NO NET LOSS** biodiversity protection strategy.

4.136 Taking a protected-area approach to environmental management makes sense because, invariably, we will be focusing on protecting more than four thousand (4,000) hectares of the land mass of Tobago, including the Main Ridge Forest Reserve, Little Tobago and Giles Islands, and perhaps other areas that we can

designate as protected and marine space, including the Buccoo Reef Lagoon Complex and other reefs in areas such as Courland and Speyside that contribute significantly to Tobago's social and economic development.

4.137 In the meantime, Madam Presiding Officer, we have developed a proposal for establishing the Tobago Coastal Management Agency (TCMA). The Agency will represent a significant upgrade from what exists currently as a Coastal Unit within the Division of Infrastructure, Quarries, and Urban Development.

4.138 This institutional upgrade and strengthening will result in the Agency being staffed with expertise in coastal engineering, coastal design, and coastal modelling, giving us the institutional capacity to scientifically undertake the management of Tobago's coastal areas fully. Given its design, the TCMA will be able to create approximately twenty-five (25) jobs for young professional Tobagonians.

4.139 Madam Presiding Officer, the foregoing constitutes the programmes, projects, and initiatives designed to meet our strategic policy goal of laying the foundation for a sustainable, prosperous, and resilient Tobago. This is the framework that will ensure that we develop Tobago into the **greatest little island on the planet**. Madam Presiding Officer, while we acknowledge the need for, and have started the work of preparing, a comprehensive development plan, the world is not waiting for us. Therefore, we have to implement critical aspects of the development plan while we continue to work toward the completion of the plan. Some intellectuals among us don't seem to have any appreciation for this tactical requirement. As the executive head of this Administration, it is incumbent on me to have such an appreciation.

4.140 That said, Madam Presiding Officer, I now present the draft Estimates of Expenditure for Fiscal 2024.

5 THE 2024 EXPENDITURE ESTIMATES

5.1 Madam Presiding Officer, the total Estimates of Expenditure for Fiscal 2024 amount to \$4.54B, of which Recurrent Expenditure Estimates amount to \$3.39B, Development Expenditure Estimates to \$1.15B, URP Expenditure to \$92.07M, and CEPEP Expenditure to \$44.77M.

5.2 Madam Presiding Officer, using historical trends, our forecast produced a national budget of \$65.78B for Fiscal 2024. Accordingly, the Assembly's total estimated expenditure was predicated on a national budget of \$65.78B for Fiscal 2024 and a revenue share of **6.9 per cent** in keeping with the upper end of the Dispute Resolution Commission (DRC) recommendation. It is our hope that the Prime Minister will demonstrate his love for Tobagonians and his sensitivity to the socio-economic realities of the island and instruct his Minister of Finance to break with the tradition of allocating the THA a customary percentage of the budget of around 4.03 per cent that is at the bottom end.

a. Recurrent Estimates and Highlights

5.3 Madam Presiding Officer, the Recurrent Estimates for Fiscal 2024 totalling \$3.40B are disaggregated as follows:

▪ Personnel Expenditure	--	\$854.0M;
▪ Goods and Services	--	\$1,042.1M;
▪ Minor Equipment Purchases	--	\$125.5M; and,
▪ Current Transfers and Subsidies	--	\$1,424.8M.

5.4 Madam Presiding Officer, in Fiscal 2024, the recurrent expenditure of the Assembly is programmed to increase by \$193.2M (or 16.3 per cent) over the amount requested for Fiscal 2023. The disaggregation of the recurrent estimates by Division for Fiscal 2024 is as follows:

▪ Assembly Legislature	--	\$29.99M;
▪ Office of the Chief Secretary	--	\$253.74M;
▪ Office of the Deputy Chief Secretary	--	\$43.77M;
▪ Finance, Trade and the Economy	--	\$323.27M;
▪ Tourism, Culture, Antiquities and Transportation	--	\$243.26M;
▪ Education, Research and Technology	--	\$574.31M;
▪ Community Development, Youth Development and Sport	--	\$162.84M;
▪ Infrastructure, Quarries and the Environment	--	\$517.14M;
▪ Food Security, Natural Resources, the Environment and Sustainable Development	--	\$263.84M;

- Health, Wellness and Social Protection and, - - \$933.92M;
- Settlements, Public Utilities and Rural Development - - \$41.91M.

5.5 Madam Presiding Officer, some major programmed recurrent expenditures for Fiscal 2024 are:

- Tobago Regional Health Authority (TRHA) \$602.6M;
- School Feeding Programme \$60.5M;
- Tobago Tourism Agency Limited (TTAL) \$60.0M;
- Studley Park Enterprises Limited (SPEL) \$60.0M;
- Project Financing Repayment \$60.0M;
- Development of Mega Farms (2) \$51.7M;
- Tobago Festival Commission \$50.0M;
- Tobago Agribusiness Development Company (TADCO) \$27.5M;
- Development of Green Spaces \$20.0M;
- Reforestation and Watershed Rehabilitation \$16.7M;
- Tobago Performing Arts Company (TPAC) \$15.0M;
- Information Technology Centre \$12.9M; and,
- Assistance to Sporting Organisations \$5.8M.

5.6 Madam Presiding Officer, I will now present the Development Programme Estimates.

b. Development Programme Expenditure Estimates and Highlights

5.7 Madam Presiding Officer, the Estimates for the Development Programme for Fiscal 2024 amount to \$1.15B. This represents an increase of \$250M or 27.8 per cent over the \$900M requested for Fiscal 2023. Across the Sectors, the Estimates are disaggregated as follows:

- Pre-investment - - \$1.00M;
- Productive Sectors - - \$1.50M;
- Economic Infrastructure - - \$403.55M;

- Social Infrastructure - - \$563.38M; and,
- Multi-sectoral and Other Services - - \$181.57M.

5.8 Madam Presiding Officer, in keeping with our strategic objectives to drive business development and stimulate the economy, the Development Programme Estimates provide support for:

- The Eco-Industrial Development Company of Tobago (E-IDCOT) \$14.0M;
- Venture Capital Equity Fund Limited \$10.0M;
- The Business Incubator Programme \$8.0M;
- Enterprise Development Loan Programme \$5.0M; and,
- Enterprise Assistant Grant Programme \$5.0M.

5.9 Madam Presiding Officer, as we move to build sustainability and resilience into our tourism sector, the Development Programme Estimates cater for:

- Tobago Tourism Agency \$16.0M;
- Pigeon Point Infrastructure Works \$7.0M;
- Store Bay Beach Facility \$6.0M;
- Restoration of Historical Sites \$2.7M; and,
- Construction of Tobago Cruise Ship Berths \$2.0M.

5.10 Madam Presiding Officer, as we strive to attain food sovereignty, the Development Programme Estimates provide for:

- Construction of Abattoirs [2] \$20.0M;
- Livestock Production and Health \$10.0M.
- Improvement to Beach and Landing Facilities \$6.0M; and,
- Establishment of TARI \$3.0 M.

5.11 Madam Presiding Officer, as we continue the programme of modernisation of our education system to deliver 21st century education and skills, our Development Programme Estimates make provision as follows:

- Improvements to Primary Schools \$18.5M;

- Improvements to Secondary Schools \$8.0M;
- Upgrade of Mason Hall Government Secondary School \$5.0M;
- Construction of Childhood Centres \$4.0M;
- Pre-construction Consultation on Scarborough Secondary \$4.0M; and,
- Construction of a School for the Deaf \$1.0M.

5.12 Madam Presiding Officer, as we seek to provide affordable housing solutions and improve our housing stock on the island, our Development Programme Estimates provide for:

- An Integrated Housing Development at Shirvan \$100.0M;
- A Home Improvement Grant and Subsidy \$17.0M;
- An Affordable Housing Project \$15.0M;
- Development of Adventure Phase II \$12.0M;
- A Housing Development Incentive Programme \$10.0M; and,
- A Village Expansion Programme for Charlotteville \$8.0M.

5.13 Madam Presiding Officer, we continue to upgrade and expand our road infrastructure and protect our coastline from the harmful effects of coastal erosion. Accordingly, our Development Programme Estimates provide for:

- Major Improvement Works on Secondary Roads \$35.0M;
- Road Resurfacing Programme \$32.0M;
- Windward Road Special Development Programme \$15.0M;
- A Scarborough Enhancement Project \$12.0M;
- Construction of Sea Defence Systems \$8.0M;
- A Turpin Bend Solution \$6.0M;
- Improvements to Milford Road Bridges \$5.0M; and,
- Rehabilitation of the Claude Noel Highway \$3.0M.

5.14 Madam Presiding Officer, the Development Programme Estimates are associated with the critical and strategic areas identified as necessary to start the building of a sustainable, prosperous, and resilient Tobago. It is my sincere hope that the Minister of Finance will recognise and appreciate the importance

of the proposed body of development works and provide a more meaningful allocation consistent with the needs identified.

c. Other Expenditure Estimates

5.15 Further, in Fiscal 2024, we intend to spend \$92.07M and \$44.47M for URP and CEPEP, respectively. These figures are programmed based on the increases in salaries of the workers in these Programmes.

5.16 Madam Presiding Officer, I now present the financing options.

6 FINANCING THE 2024 EXPENDITURE ESTIMATES

a. Revenues

6.1 Madam Presiding Officer, for Fiscal 2024, the estimates of tax and non-tax revenues are as follows:

1.	Taxes on Income and Profits	--	\$132.25M;
2.	Taxes on Property	--	\$5.0M;
3.	Taxes on Goods and Services	--	\$65.86M;
4.	Taxes on International Trade	--	\$2.7M;
5.	Other Taxes	--	\$4.1M;
	Total Tax Revenue	--	\$209.91M;
6.	Property Income Taxes	--	\$0.09M;
7.	Other Non-tax Revenue	--	\$1.45M;
	Total Non-Tax Revenue	--	\$1.54M;
	Total Revenue	--	\$211.45M.

6.2 Madam Presiding Officer, the total revenue projected to be collected in Tobago for Fiscal 2024 is \$211.45M.

6.3 Madam Presiding Officer, it must be noted here that the revenue projections above do not represent Tobago's true revenue-generating capacity. As you know, several entities are operating in Tobago that still pay their taxes in Trinidad. This is in direct contravention of 49 (2) of THA Act 40 of 1996, which requires that those institutions with subsidiaries operating in Tobago should pay the subsidiary taxes in Tobago. This situation must be comprehensively

addressed in any constitutional and legislative upgrade designed to afford Tobago true internal self-government.

b. Multilateral Engagement

- 6.4 Madam Presiding Officer, the Assembly has continued its engagement with various multilateral agencies, including IMF, Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) and Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), to access grant funding, loans, and technical support for some of our infrastructure projects. In this regard, discussions continued with the Inter-American Development Bank for a repurposing of the Scarborough Renewal Programme and Riseland Housing Development. Additionally, this Administration continues to hold discussions and work with the Development Bank of Latin America (CAF) and the Ministry of Finance to draw down the \$100M that has been approved for coastal protection and restoration works on the island.

c. Foreign Direct Investment and Diaspora Engagement Funds

- 6.5 Madam Presiding Officer, to drive our foreign direct investment strategy, this Administration has taken the policy decision to develop and publish a comprehensive prospectus that will highlight all the available investment opportunities on the island and the approximate timelines to obtain the required statutory approvals. This arrangement will make it easier for foreign investors to do business in Tobago. We are opening Tobago for business, Madam Presiding Officer! Let today's Budget presentation serve as a public notice that we are calling investors far and wide to come and do business with the THA and Tobago's private sector. We have received a few exciting and promising expressions of interest from investors with which we are working.
- 6.6 Madam Presiding Officer, our diaspora investment strategy remains active. In this regard, we have completed the engineering and design of our online diaspora registration platform as presented above. This platform will be the main vehicle by which members of the diaspora are targeted and encouraged to invest in their homeland.

d. Design, Build, Finance (DBF)

- 6.7 Madam Presiding Officer, to continue to treat with our budgetary constraints, we will creatively and judiciously utilize the Design, Build, Finance (DBF)

modalities to execute some of our housing development projects as well other major public infrastructure works.

e. Long-term Borrowing

- 6.8 Madam Presiding Officer, it has been said repeatedly in this Honourable House over the years that the THA Budget is significantly underfunded, especially as it relates to its development programme. The **'cottage industry'** development budget that is allocated annually to Tobago will certainly not allow us to modernise and upgrade the island's infrastructure. In the face of this debilitating reality, this Administration has been actively exploring the option of utilizing E-IDCOT to engage in long-term borrowing to fund critical infrastructure projects on the island. We are open to discussing this and any other viable option with the Central Government.

f. Arrears of Previous Years (2017-2022) Parliamentary Allocations

- 6.9 Madam Presiding Officer, as I indicated earlier, the THA is owed \$152M in arrears from approved parliamentary allocations from fiscal 2017-2022, as well as the additional \$53M from the 2023 Mid-Year Review, in keeping with the DRC recommendation. I am again calling on the Central Government and in particular the Prime Minister to give the THA in Fiscal 2024 the monies owed to it.

7 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 Madam Presiding Officer, as I conclude today's presentation, please permit me to leave you with a few parting words. Allow me to share some reflections on where our beloved island is along the development curve and the structural issues that we must collectively respond to. Tobago is our land, we live here, we work here, and we play here, and most of us will die here. Some of us don't seem to understand this. Many of us like to profess our love for this island but the behaviour of some leads me to question their love for Tobago. If we truly love and care about Tobago and Tobagonians, we will not allow narrow partisan political interests and selfish personal agendas to trump the interests of Tobago.

- 7.2 Madam Presiding Officer, the vision and commitment of my Administration are to make *Tobago the greatest little island on the planet*. As difficult as it may seem, I am confident that if we come together and work in unison, putting our hands to the plough as one Tobago, as aptly depicted on the cover page of this Budget Statement, this vision can be achieved. What is required is for us to coalesce around the values, principles, and qualities that truly define and distinguish us as Tobagonians. This will allow us to harvest our inner strength, as a people, to successfully overcome the challenges we are confronted with and to grasp the opportunities that will come as we develop.
- 7.3 Madam Presiding Officer, this year, the Budget is deliberately themed **“Building a Sustainable, Prosperous, and Resilient Tobago”**. This theme was chosen because of the critical and urgent need to reset, refocus, and reinvigorate the island’s development efforts. In proceeding in this way, we must immediately *de-projectize* our approach to development and focus instead on building the institutional ecosystem and governance framework that will deliver sustainability, prosperity, and resilience. This approach to development is based on the simple but profound fact that development is driven by the quality of our governing institutions. My fellow Tobagonians, let us therefore focus on strengthening our institutions of governance and lay the foundation on which we will build a **“Sustainable, Prosperous and Resilient Tobago”**.
- 7.4 Madam Presiding Officer, with that said, let me thank the members of this House and the listening public for journeying with me today. I hope that the essence of this presentation will ignite our passion, power our collective efforts, and catalyse the development of our beloved island.
- 7.5 Thank you.
- 7.6 I beg to move.



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