

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY



SPEAKING NOTES OF

THE HONOURABLE KAMLA PERSAD-BISSESSAR, SC

POLITICAL LEADER OF THE UNITED NATIONAL CONGRESS

LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION

MONDAY NIGHT FORUM

BARATARIA

18 JUNE 2018

[CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY]

INTRODUCTION

The Choice –A Failing PNM Government or A Brighter Future under the UNC

Good night, my UNC family, I'm happy to be back in Barataria to hear your concerns and to speak with you about the UNC's plans to move this community, and T&T forward.

Thank you for welcoming me and the UNC team

I know several members of our team including our local government candidates have been walking the streets and meeting with you, and listening to what you have to say.

They are both excellent candidates - they have been working in the community and shown their commitment to continue working on your behalf, and I am happy to invite them to speak with you tonight.

(1) Sharon Maraj-Dharam - Barataria

(2) Lianna Babb-Gonsalves – Belmont East

I want to also acknowledge and thank all the persons who put themselves forward as nominees for these two seats.

On July 16th it is important and I urge you to go out and vote for your UNC candidates.

NATION IN CRISIS

My friends, tonight, we come to you at a time when our nation is in crisis under this Keith Rowley-led Government. We are facing serious problems in almost every sphere of human endeavour.

We're at about the halfway point of this PNM Government, in fact close to three years and I don't know about you, but I worry whether our country can survive a full term of this PNM Government.

Our beloved nation is in crisis, and the Rowley-led PNM has no clue how to take us out of this crisis and return us to growth and prosperity.

In fact, in 2015 when they were "red and ready" they had a 10-point crime plan. Today not one of those points has been implemented. The Minister of Labour – she too came with a 10-point plan for labour and jobs and today not one single plan has been implemented. I see they're moving away from the 10 points now – the Minister of Agriculture said he had a nine-point plan for Agriculture.

Tonight let us say zero points equal zero votes!

They are sleeping on the job. Prime Minister Rowley WAKE UP and DO YOUR JOB!!! Our country is in crisis!

Crumbling Economy under the PNM

They've been desperately trying to give the impression that things are getting better.

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

I ask you – do you think you are better off today than you were in 2015?

Do you feel safer today under this Rowley PNM?

But, that is the way they operate. The PNM is about living for today – they have no concept of plans or preparing for the future; of ensuring sustainability.

It's all about taking care of their friends, their families and the 1%.

They do not care that people who have lost their jobs can't put food on the table; that they can't send their children to school; who cannot afford to buy books. They do not care about those who are living in the depths of despair.

For the Finance Minister all he cares about is taxing people into poverty.

PROPERTY TAX LIE

Tonight I want to remind you how this Government lies to the people of this country.

[clip of Imbert]

Now at a PNM meeting Imbert claimed that pensioners, disability grant recipients and low income earners do not have to pay property tax under the 2009 Act.

You hear lie? That is another lie.

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

I don't know what law Mr. Imbert is reading, but I have the law and I will share it with you.

He clearly said that the 2009 law states that if you are a pensioner, if you are on disability – what did he say? “You are not liable to pay taxes.”

This is how they continue to misinform and lie to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Under Mr. Manning in 2009 they passed the Property Tax Act, which is now contained in Chapter 76:04 of the Laws of Trinidad and Tobago.

In Section 16 of the Act all the exemptions are listed - exemptions meaning that you are not liable to pay.

If you are not listed in those exemptions it means you are liable to pay. The law says charitable organizations, religious bodies, State enterprises etc are exempt – not pensioners, persons with disabilities. What the law said is that you can apply for a deferral of the tax.

- (2) An application under subsection (1) shall be made in writing in the prescribed form and shall be accompanied by evidence that the applicant—*
- (a) is in receipt of—*
 - (i) a public assistance grant;*
 - (ii) a disability grant;*
 - (iii) a senior citizen's grant; or*
 - (iv) a Trinidad and Tobago conditional cash transfer card, from the State; or*

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

(b) does not receive an annual income exceeding the maximum amount specified in section 3 of the Senior Citizen's Grant Act.

You can apply for a deferral on the grounds of the impoverished position of the owner and his inability to improve his position by reason of age, health, or other special circumstances.

That is not an exemption – you are liable.

Under the 2009 law, when you apply Section 23 tells us
(3) A certificate under subsection (2) shall be conclusive of the owner's inability to pay tax assessed under this Act.

Now look at what these wicked people did. When they brought the amendment to the Parliament in 2018, they amended Section 23. You can apply for the deferral but look what happens now – they are saying they would give you the deferral for two years.

In the Property Tax (Amendment) Bill, 2018,
"Section 23 of the Act is amended by repealing subsection (3), and substituting the following subsection: " (3) The relief granted under this section shall be valid for two years and may be renewed if the conditions of the applicant as evidenced under subsection (2) remains unchanged."

Now you tell me – a pensioner's condition would change in two years? A person on disability grant?

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

And if that pensioner dies you know what's going to happen? They are coming for your child or your grandchild, and if they cannot pay it, they will seize the property.

Mr. Imbert, we do not believe your lies.

They amended the law to include every structure on a property to be included in the assessment – the dog house, the chicken coop, the latrine – you know some people are calling it a toilet tax but it is far more serious.

I want to quote a little from Michael Harris writing in the *Express* Monday 18th June, 2018 "My Last Hurrah on the Property Tax":

"The fact that the Government has eschewed the simplicity and transparency of the area-based assessment for the contentious and complicated ARV might well be telling. For, as one commentator has pointed out, the ARV will be 'impossible to administer in an equitable and efficient manner' and precisely because of that it opens the way for corruption and political victimisation. And maybe, that is exactly as the Government wants it to be."

I am saying to the Government that this Property Tax in the way you have formulated it to be, we voted against it, you went with your simple majority – I am saying tonight – the day we form the Government again we will repeal the Property Tax.

Labour

There is more that is happening in Trinidad and Tobago's economy.

Tomorrow we celebrate Labour Day but what is there to celebrate?

Yes, we celebrate the 81st anniversary of the modern trade union movement, but we do that in a scenario where there are over 50,000 people without jobs.

Jobs that have been lost under this wicked Rowley-led Government.

Now when you look at what was done under the Government which I led, you will see that we had a plan that was working, and we had a vision for our country's future. We created more than 57,000 jobs.

Today, what is disturbing is that you cannot find statistics to have a clear understanding of how many jobs have been lost under the PNM Government.

In one of our meetings I rolled out our plan to create jobs.

I have many innovative plans as we move forward, and I will be sharing little by little with you on how we will transform our nation together.

This Government has produced not one shred of a plan, or any idea of how they will create jobs.

Rowley-led Government's Alarming Apathy towards crime

My UNC family, I know that each of you, and each and every citizen of this country is feeling the negative effects of the spiraling crime rate. Everyone lives in fear in this country – that you will become the next victim, the next statistic.

As usual, the Prime Minister offers no solutions – other than sending out his waste of time Ministers of National Security to walk aimlessly in so-called crime hot spots.

And I am shocked to learn of an issue which I will share with you, and it has to do with unmarked contracts.

Unmarked Contracts

In the last quarter of 2017 the Ministry of National Security delivered expressions of interest packages to specific companies. Existing contractors were included in the EoI to supply unmarked vehicles to the Ministry.

The due date for submitting the expressions of interest was a public holiday and persons were notified that the deadline was extended. The evaluation process took several months, and at the end of March several long-standing contractors who had been in the business for over 10 years were notified in writing that the contracts were terminated effective April 30, 2018, and they were to make arrangements to collect their vehicles at the IATF – the Inter-Agency Task Force compound in El Socorro.

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

So these companies with a track record of supplying vehicles for more than 10 years were told to take back their vehicles.

In April, the contractors who were terminated were contacted by the Ministry and asked if they were willing to work with them bearing in mind the current economic climate, all the contractors said yes, and collected a document which provided a suggested rental rate, which had to be submitted by the end of the day, which they met, however, to date they never heard from the Ministry again.

I understand that a person identifying himself as a police officer indicated that the owner of one of the selected companies Alison Holder Clement received the contract to provide vehicles to the Ministry while the others were terminated.

To date that company has not been able to supply vehicles to the Ministry. How could a company with no track record, indeed they owned no vehicles whatsoever be given the contract?

The question is – is there some connection between the owner and director of this company and a high government official?

I am asking Minister Dillon to tell the country whether there is any truth to the allegation that this came about because of the involvement of a high government official.

We have three Ministers of National Security and each of them and the entire Rowley Government have failed to deal with the crime scourge.

I promise you on Friday in the Parliament we will hold the Minister of National Security to account, as we move a **motion of no confidence in Minister of National Security Edmund Dillon.**

The time has come where we say enough is enough, this Government has failed, they cannot do their job effectively and they must get out of office.

So many allegations, and no action taken by this Government. But they are quick to attack.

The PNM dirty tricks campaign – they are fast at work.

We've seen what they've done with the man who was nominated to be Commissioner of Police. It was the Prime Minister is the one who pulled the race card on this issue but there is no race in crime. It affects every man, woman and child, every citizen of this country.

So Prime Minister, nobody is taking your race baiting. Let us vote for performance. Let us vote for those who will deliver and can work for you, and who care about you.

I have been disheartened by the number of funerals I've been invited to attend – young people. Our sons and daughters being killed and what is the response of the Government?

None. Rowley is not serious about dealing with crime.

Now remember when the Government was clamouring for the Anti-gang legislation, which they said would bring an end to gang violence? They said they had all the information and just needed the legislation to come into effect?

They said that the blood was on the UNC's hands – remember that? Because we were pressing for important amendments to ensure the rights of citizens were protected.

Now the legislation has been in place for weeks, but what have we seen? Has it had the effect the Government claimed it would?

But they have no solutions. They remain focused on legislative fixes but that alone will not make a dent in crime.

And now they are attempting once again to rush the passage of another Bill – the Anti-terrorism Bill.

But we do not trust them and we will ensure that this piece of legislation is properly scrutinized.

UNC best option to move TT forward

I want to share with you what I recommit to, and what our great party stands for.

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

The United National Congress is committed to working to improve the lives of all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, to ensure good governance and protect the rights of people.

Our values are integrity, excellence, partnership, participation and responsiveness.

We stand for:

The safety and security of all citizens. This is of paramount importance to the UNC, and we will ensure that mechanisms are put in place to restore a safe and secure environment for our people.

The UNC believes in opportunity for all citizens, ensuring that citizens have the chance to become employed in sustainable, well-paying jobs.

We believe in empowering citizens through education and skills development, promoting economic independence.

We stand for progress and positive development of Trinidad and Tobago, through economic diversification, and the development of the innovative and creative potential of our people to engage in the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

The Prime Minister right here in Baratavia, expressed annoyance at the word “diversification.” His annoyance is probably as a result of his confusion of what diversification entails. Prime Minister if we do not diversify we will die – our economy will die.

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

We stand for integrity and good governance and believe the Government must be transparent and accountable to the people.

We believe in building a society based on merit. That is how our democracy should run, that is how we should be governed based on merit, not based on friends and family and financiers.

We believe in strengthening the family and promoting independence by engendering a home owning democracy.

We believe in creating a shareholding democracy, in which citizens can own a piece of the country's assets.

We also believe in a land owning democracy.

We believe in fostering entrepreneurship and facilitating the creation of new businesses and new industries, as an efficient and productive private sector is a major source of employment and wealth generation.

We believe in restoring Trinidad and Tobago's image as a leader in the region, and in creating a globally competitive economy.

The UNC is of the view that the Government must listen to and be responsive to the needs of citizens.

We believe our diversity is our strength and when we are united we can move Trinidad and Tobago forward.

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Your party has prepared a vision and a plan to return stability to our nation and take us on a progressive path.

If you believe in that vision, I ask you to join us. Stand with the United National Congress.

I ask that we come together, all citizens; one people, to work to make our country safer, for ourselves and our children.

Are you ready to move with us? Are you ready to return the party with a plan to rescue Trinidad and Tobago from this uncaring, incompetent Rowley-led Government?

Remember on July 16th, send a clear message to the PNM that enough is enough. Vote for your UNC candidates Lianna and Sharon.

Let us work together to return our beloved nation to greatness.

God bless and thank you all.