Mr Speaker, As I rise to make my contribution on the budget I cannot help comment on the emotional, financial and physical state of the island of Saint Lucia at this time.

This budget presented yesterday is nothing more than a list of aspirations with no strategy to achieve anything. A list of the usual empty promises and with the absence of a strategy it was no surprise that there were so many contradictory statements. A major area of concern for all St Lucians is the uncertain and deteriorating state of our health care system.

The Prime Minister’s budget gave no indication of when the National Health insurance scheme, would come into force. And if as it looks, given the amount of preparatory work needed the scheme will not be in place during this fiscal year, how then will the operation of the new OKEU hospital be funded if as he promised it will be open in the fiscal year 2018/19? Let’s not forget he made similar promises about the opening of St Jude’s hospital by December 2016.

The Prime Minister made much of transparency and accountability in his budget address as if he believed in it. According to him it would take over $100m to complete the St Jude’s hospital and therefore it would be an unlikely decision of the government to continue with the hospital. If that is the basis of the government’s decision he should table the relevant report in the parliament in the spirit of transparency so that its findings can be assessed. This is far too important a matter to be concealed from the public. Your words are not enough on this issue Mr Prime Minister. We need the relevant information otherwise the citizens will rightly believe that that there are other reasons why this government wants to discontinue works at St Jude’s hospital.

The redevelopment of HIA a matter I will have more to say about later remains uncertain with regards to commencement and completion of works. No details provided except it would be done in phases. When Mr Prime Minister?

Mr Speaker the Prime Minister in his budget states on page 47 that “our public debt continues to grow as a consequence of deficits from previous budgets” the figures in the Social and Economic review show that under his administrations all the deficits increased a reverse trend from the decreasing deficits of previous years. Mr Speaker the Prime Minister refuses to mention the effect of re-basing on the GDP to debt ratio.
He promised no new taxes but has committed minibus drivers, fishermen, taxi drivers, and other motorists to an increase in the price of gasoline by over $1.00 per gallon.

Is the fuel surcharge not a tax Mr Speaker? A tax that would impact on the cost of living and affect negatively on most Saint Lucians.

A sector that will feel the burden of that tax is the fishing sector. Mr Speaker Labour party Government understands the difficulties that fisher folk undergo every day. A Labour party government will take measures to relief the burden of the fuel tax on the fisher folk in Saint Lucia.

The Health Insurance levy is a new tax.

The Prime Minister expressed concern about the negative impact of high debt servicing commitments on the ability of government to meet the educational and social needs of the nation but he is willingly lending the proceeds of our passport sales to foreign investors at a concessionary rate of 2% under the CIP program while his government is borrowing at 5%-8% in the market.

This budget has been prepared against a background of a certain mindset of this government never mind the list of aspirations. A mindset of vindictiveness, high-handedness and a dangerous anti Saint Lucian spirit which will further divide and erode the social fabric of this country.

Mr Speaker the Saint Lucia Labour Party believes that the so called investigations are a witch-hunt aimed at intimidating the opposition and forcing us into silence. It is the first time that an investigation using taxpayer’s funds is taking place and the tax payers do not know who is caring out the investigation. Let me make it clear, the opposition will not be Silenced or Threatened by kangaroo court and I have full confidence in the members of my team. The Labour party will be resolute in defending our parliamentarians and our legacy.

Mr Speaker when I speak of vindictiveness, I speak of the proud and boastful statement of a Minister who seems not to care about the families of 1000 NICE workers who lost their jobs because by his own admission more than 95% of them were supporters of the Labour party. He later shamelessly bragged that he had made a mistake in that the initial number was understated at 80%.

Mr Speaker it may be comfortable for the bragging Minister to hurt and try to ridicule me but to cause former employees of Nice to suffer and cry by dismissing them from their jobs is heartless. These 1000 people have children and families who depended on the NICE salaries for their survival.

Then another Minister derogatorily referred to some civil servants as Labour “hacks” who were impeding the progress of the government. Mr Speaker I ask: was that the reason for the dismissal of the workers of the Saint Lucia Tourist Board and Radio Saint Lucia. Was there no regard by the government for their mortgages and student loans commitments? Was that what was meant by the words “you just start to cry”.
And the pattern continued with a third Minister abusing the immunity of this Honourable House to attack and castigate a civil servant who was interviewed and legally hired by the Public Service Commission. Not to be outdone the Prime Minister launches an attack on the former CEO of the CIP unit aimed at casting aspersions at the Member for Castries South but instead damaging the future career opportunity of a citizen from his constituency.

The government has embarked on wholesale political cleansing of thousands of people, a situation unique to this government and unprecedented in the history of Saint Lucia. All of this practiced and said in the presence of the Prime Minister and with his tacit approval of the uncaring and heartless actions of his ministers.

Mr Speaker I speak of that vindictiveness because I am sure that this budget will not yield much good since the population continues to be threatened by a government that is determined to be revengeful and to make its opponents cry – it’s that thinking that has caused the government to withdraw the subvention from the National Trust. The first government to do so in over thirty years since its creation by Sir John Compton. Mr Speaker according to an official of the Folk Research Center our culture has suffered in recent times and the evidence is there for all to see. The stopping by the UWP government of the Derek Walcott Museum and Theatre project in Grass Street in Central Castries, the closure of the Walcott House, the uncertainty surrounding the location of the Cultural Center and now sadly the unfortunate fire at the Folk Research Center.

I want to re-iterate that a Labour Party government under my Leadership will immediately reinstate the annual subvention to the National Trust. I also want to assure Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) in receipt of government subventions that it will NEVER be the policy of any Saint Lucia Labour Party government to victimize any organization which expresses a different view on any development project or programme being promoted by the government.

Mr Speaker this budget is premised on the theory that government must be run like a business.

This administration repeatedly speaks of running the government as a business as if it were some forward thinking initiative that will increase and improve the quality of public services. Mr Speaker running a government was never intended to be a high level business model. Government and businesses are at different ends of the continuum of the provision of services. Governments are about providing public services that are driven and motivated by the need to serve the common good. Businesses on the other hand are about providing services that are essentially driven and motivated by the creation of profits. These are two very different approaches. The first addresses the needs of every citizen especially those most vulnerable and the other is concerned with only those who have the resources to pay for their services and profits for shareholders. So this idea of running a country like a business is flawed and misguided and is only likely to serve a few at the expense of the majority.
I am in no way condemning the role of businesses in the development of our country. We need businesses and they are an essential part of our economic landscape. However their reach in meeting the needs of our society is limited to those with the financial resources to pay for their services. The government cannot be the referee and a player in the business space. Governments exist to ensure workers and all businesses are treated fairly by creating the enabling legal environment for all the actors to have a fair chance of succeeding.

If the Prime Minister wants to draw on the business model he should draw upon the more relevant and applicable aspects of their operations- good corporate governance structures-where directors account to their shareholders for their stewardship through audited financial statements, operating within the rules of the corporation, respecting the rights of workers as stakeholders, directors being prepared to answer questions about their stewardship.

It is clear that a good governance structure is not of any interest to this government. They continuously flout procurement and other rules that were intended for good order transparency and accountability. They give away the resources of the country and feel no need to account-taxes to foreign companies waived, vast sums of land rented for a pittance to a foreign entity, the wages of foreign companies paid by taxpayers. This government prepared to take risks that they would never dream of taking with their own funds.

This Prime Minister and his Ministers have adopted a position of arrogance forgetting that they are in power to represent the interest of the citizens of this country and that he is supposed to be the agent. He does not listen to the voices of concern about the reckless path he is taking this country. His behavior is now clearly about looking after the interest of friends, family and foreigners.

Mr Speaker a Labour Party government understands that we are in government to represent the interest of the citizens of Saint Lucia.

An SLP government that I lead will never threaten or intimidate the opposition or the press, we categorically object to any form of press censorship especially when it is selective and aimed at threatening and victimizing particular shows and talk show hosts. We believe that the public will be the final arbiter of what is true and what is not true and not governments aided by access to tax funded consultants, press advisors and tax funded media.

Mr Speaker this arrogance of power, revengefulness, boastfulness and callous nature of the government has caused this country widespread pain and suffering not to mention loss of opportunities for the people of Saint Lucia.

Mr Speaker opportunities have been lost in all sectors of the economy, we have lost two years of projects, two years of economic, educational, social and sporting opportunities. In every aspect of the development of our island we can find that misguided policy of vindictiveness and the desire to crush the legacy of the Saint Lucia Labour Party. Even the Jazz festival has been stopped.
There are many examples Mr Speaker that I will deal with later in my presentation. I want at this point to mention the $24M meat Processing Plant at Vieux Fort initiated by the Member for Babonneau, and which the Saint Lucia Labour Party government continued, improved and completed, now only to be marked for demolition by the UWP regime; and would you believe Mr Speaker that this government which claims to be a “Farmers Government” is also stopping livestock farming in the Beausejour area in Vieux Fort. Has the government figured out the impact on the diplomatic relations between our island and Taiwan? Is that the difference in ideology that the Minister of Finance spoke about recently?

An SLP government will respect the contribution of our diplomatic friends and never squander or pay such scant regard to their generosity to our island. We are well aware that it’s the tax payers of these countries who make sacrifices to provide this assistance.

Mr Speaker I want to remind the Prime Minister that the 6 constituencies represented by the opposition have not been consulted on the use of CDP funds in their constituencies and this is not in keeping with the spirit of the CDP.

Mr Speaker the budgetary proposals as outlined by the Prime Minister must be considered in the context of rising deficits and lower surpluses and a widening deficit on the merchandise trade account. The Social and Economic Review states that the trade deficit increased to $1.55 Billion or 34.5% of GDP in 2016 from $1.35 Billion or 30.4% of GDP in 2015. That negative balance of trade is due to a large extent to the wider deficit on the merchandise trade account. It is estimated that the merchandise trade deficit further widened by 41.9%. This imbalance is due to an estimated $190M worth of imports of diesel and related items particularly in the generation of electricity. One would expect that a government concerned with rising deficits would make a concerted effort to reduce the high oil import bill and reduce the cost of electricity generation – and encourage energy renewable projects.

Mr Speaker as stated earlier electricity generation is costly and the provision of street lighting from the present high pressure sodium and mercury vapour street lights is a costly venture of $9M per year for the tax payer. Inspite of what the Prime Minister says in his budget about energy saving the government of Saint Lucia has cancelled a loan from CDB of $10.6M US and a grant of $300,000US to replace 21,500 high electricity consuming bulbs with high efficiency low energy bulbs. Changing these bulbs would reduce our islands street lighting cost and greenhouse gas emissions. The project was found to be so necessary for the economic well-being of Saint Lucia that the CDB agreed on a waiver of its lending policies so as to allow the GOSL to borrow up to 90% of the cost of the project instead of 80%. The CDB also agreed to a waiver of the CDB Guidelines for Procurement and to permit Lucelec to apply the private sector procurement methods permitted under CDB Lending Policies.

Why then would the government not accept this loan which was approved in May 2016, the results of negotiations of the Saint Lucia Labour Party.

However in 2018 the government speaks about energy saving and climate change.
Mr Speaker this decision by the government illustrates a pattern of behavior as it relates to procurement of goods and awarding of contracts. The government preferred to frustrate the project, and forgo the opportunities only because ministers would not be able to determine by direct award who would be awarded the contract. Mr Speaker another example of the private interest of friends and family coming before the people of Saint Lucia.

The lack of support given to the investor at the Dennery Wind Farm Project is another example of the government’s double standards as it relates to energy and climate change. These projects were long overdue and would commence the process of improving our island’s carbon footprint long before.

The people of Saint Lucia have been told for a long time that the Roseau Dam needs to be de-silted to return it to its maximum capacity. The Labour party government negotiated and agreed with a consortium of lenders to a project with its main objective to ensure a reliable climate resilient supply of portable water to residents and businesses in the north and to enhance the management and operational capacity of WASCO. A component of the project was the rehabilitation of the John Compton Dam reservoir to its original capacity of 3 Million cubic meters. Funding of $14.7M was secured from the European Investment Bank (EIB) Inter-American Development Bank (EDB) and Caribbean Development for that purpose. The loan was approved with a grace period of 5 years and was only awaiting a government guarantee.

The project was launched in November 2015 with the following ancillary works to be undertaken: repairs to spillway and access road, development of supplementary intakes, (1) Installation of Dam, (2) Equipment, capacity building at WASCO, (3) Tete Chemin Rainwater Harvesting initiative, (4) restoration of the watershed, (5) Project management and monitoring.

Mr Speaker considering the sustainability goals of the project why is the government delaying for so long to conform to the institutional lenders’ Rules, Guidelines and Processes and move to guaranteeing this loan?

Mr Speaker I can tell you why. The pattern of this government in dealing with infrastructural projects is now well established and easy to detect. The level of accountability required by institutional lenders does not facilitate their theme of looking after their friends, family and foreigners. The processes of institutional lenders require transparency and accountability and in so far that they can avoid those principles of good governance they will.

Wasco through a special levy have been collecting funds for the de-silting of the dam. That money is now in part available so they are now free to grant contracts unencumbered (as they would see it) to owners of heavy equipment to commence the de-silting process. And who would these contractors be? The usual of course – their friends, family and foreigners.

Speaking of heavy equipment Mr Speaker I have noticed an influx of trucks or all categories and heavy equipment imported in the island and being used on our roads
and seen clearing a site in at least one location at Vigie. You may recall Mr Speaker that the then government arguably reduced vehicle licenses for truckers and owners of heavy equipment so as to give owners of trucks and equipment an opportunity to improve their businesses. Now the government has not only not reduced the licenses by 50% but allowed the importation of trucks and heavy equipment most likely duty-free to complete with local owners. Mr Speaker this is yet another example of double standards of this government.

Mr Speaker the $260M grant from the British was negotiated while the Saint Lucia Labour Party was in office and was intended to be used to construct a north south link road which would in a real way open hundreds of acres of land accessible for economic development. A first feasibility report had been prepared with grant funding from the Caribbean Development bank.

Why would the government cancel such a project – the only reason I can profer is to attempt to excise the legacy of the Labour government.

**GROS ISLET HIGHWAY**

I am sure Mr Speaker that you are aware of the frustrating traffic situation on the Gros-Islet Castries Highway. The inordinate amount of time it takes for commuters to journey across a ten-mile route, is not only unnecessary but highly unproductive.

Mr Speaker you heard the Prime Minister speaking of road infrastructure and plans for improvement of the roads in the island.

It’s the same Prime Minister who cancelled a loan by OFID and KFAED for the upgrading of the road from Choc to Gros-Islet and the improvement and rehabilitation of a number of Secondary roads. The scope of the project included the (1) Widening of the existing 2 lane road to a 4 lane dual carriageway, (2) Upgrading of 7 junctions, (3) Construction of 10 overhead foot bridges, (4) Addition of another north board lane to eliminate the existing bottlenecks. With the growth of the population in the North and commercial activity its surprising and puzzling that the government would cancel such a loan but then again they theme must persist the need to satisfy their friends, family and foreigners. The lending requirements of international financial agencies concerning procurement rules must be avoided at every turn by this government even if it means cancelling loans agreed upon by the previous government.

Mr Speaker the millennium highway should have started long ago. In June 2016, the OPEC Fund for International Development (OFID) approved a loan of $116.6M US to undertake works. The loan at an interest rate of 5% was cancelled.

Mr Speaker the infrastructure projects mentioned were either started, initiated or negotiated by the Labour government. If the government instead of wasting time on investigation and trying to change procurement rules and contractors, many of these projects would have been completed in the 22 months since they have been in office. These include projects to be financed under the DVRP:
1) Dennery Infant and Primary Schools
2) Choiseul Secondary School
3) Dennery Polyclinic
4) Rehabilitation of Soufriere Hospital

Many other projects should have started already, these include:

1) Marcus Garvey Community Center
2) Roblot Community Center
3) Piaye Community Center

The GINET programme should have been completed.

HEALTH

Mr Speaker I come to the vexing issue of the state of health in Saint Lucia a cause of great concern to the public, and medical professionals. Let me take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the nurses and doctors who work in the healthcare system. The SLP and the people of Saint Lucia will continue to appreciate your service and as a government will try our best to improve your well-being and welfare. I will admit that as a country we have always faced health care challenges but I can state without fear or contradiction that the leadership of this government on this issue has been as uncaring as one could be. No government has been so clueless, directionless and hopeless like this present UWP government. Let me say this to the Prime Minister and his government you were elected to govern the country it’s time you stop the excuses and casting blame on others. If you can’t handle it then it’s time to get out because people are dying at St Jude’s Hospital in increasing numbers because of your inactivity.

Mr Speaker the last government of the Saint Lucia Labour Party understood the complexities of the provision of affordable health services to the country and invited the Opposition to participate in a bi-partisan committee on Health Financing. The then Opposition UWP was not interested and unwilling to cooperate on the issue. Today they are faced with the responsibility and are now blaming others why they can’t deliver. In the meantime the Prime Minister makes his usual off-the-cuff comments about plans for the future of the country’s health care services.

It is instructive Mr Speaker as we look back and review the situation of health services in Saint Lucia on June 6th, 2016 when the UWP were voted into power and now, 22 months later, how much health care has deteriorated and its future plunged into uncertainty, with talk of privatization.

We believe that healthcare is a right of every citizen. This requires that the government approaches it prudently and objectively and considers all the available options regarding the governance, management, finance, regulation, oversight and outsourcing of any healthcare services in the best interest of the citizens. This is best done within a transparent and accountable framework of open dialogue and consultation with key stakeholders and the public, whose right to accessible, affordable
and quality healthcare must be protected. Such an important matter must not remain shrouded in secrecy, but must be brought to light. The critical issues of healthcare financing and health coverage must endure the highest level of scrutiny to guarantee optimal use of our limited financial resources while providing value for money in services delivered to the public.

**ST. JUDE HOSPITAL**

Mr Speaker let us reflect on the St Jude’s issue.

In June 6th, 2016 work was continuing on the construction of St Jude Hospital – the footprint of this project had been expanded by the UWP government in August 2011 but no additional funds had been secured to match the expansion.

It is considered normal and prudent practice for a new client to seek from the project manager the state of construction when a project is handed over. (give analogy of house under construction).

This government upon coming into office in 2016 chose to conceal the fact that they had in their possession a document called St Jude Hospital Reconstruction Project Handover Report for the period ending 14th August, 2016. The report provided a detailed account of the state of play under the following captions:

1) Background and Project Overview
2) Project Management
3) Project Finance,
4) Issues Challenges and constraints,
5) Outstanding Issues for Action etc.

Mr Speaker if the government really wanted to find out the situation at St Jude they could have studied and discussed that document and engaged the project management team to decide on a way forward – instead the government acted in bad faith concealed the document and embarked on a one man crusade to discredit the work going on at St Jude.

In its usual callous manner the government embarked on a torrid dose of misinformation aimed at trying to make the government of the Saint Lucia Labour Party look bad. The police were used to invade and search the homes and businesses of private individuals in search of government property when the handover document had clearly stated where the items had been stored. The objective was not a search for truth but instead a witch-hunt against individuals they deem to be supporters of the Labour Party.

Then the government still on its agenda of trying to discredit the work to date at St Jude’s commissioned an almost one million dollar audit of St Jude, the results of which are yet to be made public. What was not known at the time was that the government was creating the environment to announce the demolition of St Jude Hospital and for
what purpose to facilitate some pipe dream project- DHS. It is believed that the location of St Jude’s hospital is within the Equine Free Zone and a threat to horses.

Mr Speaker, the people are telling the government in very clear terms to change course on St Jude’s but it is not listening – the Prime Minister has in his possession over eleven thousand signatures from Saint Lucians home and abroad but he is adamant, it’s his way or the by -way. The question must be asked who is this Prime Minister and his government there to represent.

Mr Speaker the opposition is convinced that there is no reasonable justification for the government to stop work on St Jude. When we were last in government the Saint Lucia Labour Party inherited a St Jude’s Hospital under construction and we continued the work with a view to completing it. And so this government should do the same because the people of the south deserve better. They must not be allowed to suffer and die on account of a self-fish government with a misguided narrow agenda of looking after their friends, family and foreigners.

Our position is clear – the government has created a crisis where there need not be any. We insist that there should be no alternative use, no demolition and that the government moves speedily to complete St Jude – this is our position and the position of the people of the south and the wider Saint Lucian public.

**OKEU HOSPITAL**

Mr Speaker the decision to construct the New National Hospital was taken in 2002 after an extensive review of existing plans to rehabilitate Victoria Hospital built in 1887. The New National Hospital has been 16 years in the making. There was extensive design and stakeholder consultation on the New National Hospital and the EU had agreed to finance the bulk of the costs toward the Owen King EU Hospital. The intention at the time was to maintain the Victoria Hospital site as an urban poly clinic for Castries.

Mr Speaker if one listens to the government one would think that the last government had no plans for health. This of course is not the case. The government as usual refuses to speak the truth, trying their best to destroy the legacy of the Labour Party, a legacy however hard they may try they can never destroy because the light of the truth will always expose lies and acts of deception.

Mr Speaker the government has in its possession a report prepared by the Ministry of Health officials called “New National Hospital Commissioning Project Status Report” as at March 21st, 2016. The eighteen page report details the way forward including financial requirements for the commissioning of the hospital. The Budget Estimates for the additional resources required to commissioning the hospital as a new spending request.

Part of that process was the setting up of new legislation. In 2015 the Millennium Heights Complex Act and this UWP government should have by now passed the
Medical Records and Mental Health Bills which has been in the Office of the Attorney. These bills provide the legal environment for the administration of the OKEU hospital.

The divestment of our public health assets into private hands is a very serious matter, one that requires broad national consultation, transparency, access to information and detailed risk/benefit analysis so as not to disadvantage the public whose greater social good should never be sacrificed for political and economic expediency.

Mr Speaker the governance structure contemplated for the OKEU was a Statutory Board not a private company. A statutory board is a completely different entity to a private, public partnership/ company. The composition of a statutory board is appointed by a designated Minister of the government. Private companies are ran by a board of directors appointed by the shareholders of the company. What is so difficult for the Prime Minister to understand here that he continues to confuse the two models? The Labour government never intended to privatize the OKEU hospital and the Prime Minister should cease repeating this untruth.

Mr Speaker when the UWP came into power the Ministry of Health had engaged an HR consultant to develop an HR manual to include a performance appraisal system with respect to the contracting policies of the Medical Complex.

The Ministry of Health had explored the possibilities of increasing capacity through a collaborative approach with the European Union to cover initial short term and long term training in sterilization, intensive care and radiology.

As early as October 2015 the first staff wide consultation was completed with 90% of Victoria Hospital and 70% of Mental Wellness staff.

By March 2016, the following had been accomplished as it related to the administration of the OKEU hospital.

- Staff and facility orientation had commenced with the staff of the Mental Wellness Centre being first routed through the New National Hospital. Two thirds of all staff had completed the familiarization tour.
- Phase one testing of the primary systems of the New National Hospital had commenced with all the electrical, mechanical and fixed equipment being tested.
- Certification of the Radiology Department had been initiated with the finalization of the terms of reference and potential engagement of a physicist to undertake the certification.

COUNTERPART FACILITIES

Mr Speaker the works on the counterpart facilities to complete the hospital compound had begun. Work had started on the telecommunications, Cafeteria, Laundry, Kitchen and Link road and Car Park at a total cost of approximately $10M.
Mr Speaker a modern Information system is a necessity for a 21st century hospital. Through a tendering process the Central Tenders Board awarded the firm RioMed the contract to install and commission the new software platform for the medical complex at a cost of $5M over a period of 5 years.

EQUIPMENT

Mr Speaker the Saint Lucia Labour Party government by February 2016 had secured all equipment for the OKEU Hospital.

In order to secure the final equipment lots for the New National Hospital, the extension of the DS + 3(a funding source of the EU) was facilitated through the collaboration with the National Authorizing Office. Final approval had been issued on July 31st, 2015 by a Brussels delegation.

The remaining equipment procurement was facilitated through a negotiated procedure. At a coat of $9,041,282.00 in February 2016 all of the remaining equipment lots were contracted and in March of 2016 all commencement orders were issued. All equipment should have been installed and commissioned and training completed by September 2016.

Mr Speaker twenty-two months later the government has done nothing and is now debating on the way forward for the OKEU. This is another example of the callous and uncaring nature of this government. They are a group of men and women drunk with power and floundering all over the place filled with rage and hatred trying to obliterate the legacy of labour. In the meantime the hospital remains closed and as usual pretending nothing was done, but planning nonetheless to find the next opportunity to enrich their friends, family and foreigners with privatization of the hospital.

Mr Speaker it is shameful that the government has done nothing to complete commissioning of the new hospital even after the technocrats in the Ministry of Health has worked so hard with officials of the EU to allow Saint Lucians access to the new hospital.

HEALTH FINANCING

The Prime Minister gives the impression that the Saint Lucia Labour Party government never considered planned or contemplated how it would handle the issue of health financing. The Saint Lucia Labour Party has always advocated Universal Health Care. The previous Saint Lucia Labour Party government under the first phase of UHC had planned for free medication for diabetes and phase two free medication for diabetes and hypertension.

The Saint Lucia Labour Party administration of 2011-2016 had commissioned a study financed by the European Union called “Development of a Sustainable Financing Mechanism for the Saint Lucia Health Sector”. The study completed in March 2015
had been discussed by the officials of the Ministry of Health and Finance after extensive discussions with all stakeholders including community groups.

Several financing options were proposed

1) Employment business earnings
2) A small portion of VAT earnings
3) Assignment of the insurance benefits in private plans
4) Government support of primary care
5) Government support of secondary care
6) Payment by non-citizens for health care

Mr Speaker these options were not prepared by politicians but by experienced health economists, planners and financial experts.

Mr Speaker the government has not discussed with the public the United Nations recommended Free, Prior and Informed consent model of consultation. It is ready to impose a health insurance scheme on Saint Lucians and privatize the health services and in the process causing consternation among health professionals the very people upon whom the success of the hospital depends.

Mr Speaker allow me to quote from the Health and Human Rights Journal 2014.

“Private provision of health services does not change the role of the state as the ultimate guarantor of the realization of health rights obligations, but it makes implementing its responsibilities more difficult. Fragmentation of the health system complicates oversight and the promotion of a rights-based approach to health. Segmentation of the health system, with a poorly functioning public sector catering primarily to the poor and better quality private health institutions catering to the more affluent, tends to undermine support for investing in improvements in institutions for the public provision and financing of health care and likely erodes commitment to the right to health as well. Additionally, the goals and priorities of private health care institutions tend to differ, often significantly, from the values and norms in the human rights paradigm. Working effectively with and through private-sector providers also requires management skills and complex health information systems that many governments, particularly those in poor and middle-income countries lack”.

Mr Speaker the Saint Lucia Labour Party believes that the government’s position on health financing is flawed, ill-conceived and misdirected. There has not been sufficient discussion and consultation with the health professionals and the people of Saint Lucia on this proposed privatization. It shows a certain contempt for the citizens of this country and the health professionals who ran our Heath sector. Against this background of no consultation, privatization of the health sector, OKEU hospital or health insurance is doomed to fail.

What has been achieved since the last budget?
Mr Speaker my colleagues with great ease will further illustrate the non-performance of this government as it relates to the promises made in last year’s budget. I will deal with the economic policy charges promised.

In 2017-2018 the following were promised

1) A Credit Bureau  
2) A Public Finance Management Bill  
3) Simplification of the PAYE system including reform of allowances and deductions – charges in personal income tax  
5) Confirmation of financing for Hewanorra International Airport  
6) Five to eight hundred jobs in Phase 1 of DSH  
7) Comprehensive incentives package which will create employment within the private sector  
8) Work will commence on Honeymoon Bay resort very soon that will consist of two hotels, golf course, museum and club house  
9) Work on the re-development of Reduit beach to begin within the last quarter of 2017 with a luxury 500 five star dual branded hotel called Curio by Hilton  
10) Black Bay luxury touristic community consisting of luxury branded hotels and villas.  
11) Eight fishing villages to be transformed into unique tourism villages  
12) A Sovereign Fund  
13) A Residency Programme

Mr Speaker all these were promised but how many have started. None. How can we then have faith in what the Prime Minister is saying or promising in this year’s budget? Here is my problem with the Prime Minister and Minister of finance – The Prime Minister has stated far too many projects that have not happened to the point where it is difficult to have any confidence in what he says and as the chief architect of this budget it is difficult to have any confidence in any pronouncements that may offer hope of better days.

TOURISM POLICY

Mr Speaker the member for Castries South will speak directly to the tourism policy of this government. There has been no innovative marketing strategies or product development initiatives within the tourism industry but this government has been swift in dismissing 25 staff members at the St Lucia Tourist Board.

The government claims increase numbers but fails to recognize the Royalton Hotel’s contribution to the hotel stock completed under the last Labour government. The UWP fails to mention that the increase in cruise numbers is due to a large extent to the devastation of the northern Caribbean islands following the passage of hurricane Irma causing cruise ships to be redirected to Saint Lucia. In terms of our readiness to accommodate the increase volume of cruise traffic, the improvements to Pointe
Seraphine berthing facilities was initiated by the Saint Lucia Labour Party government.

The government has not encouraged the growth and development of high quality boutique properties and guest houses. There are many success stories in the local hotel industry: Bay Gardens, Le Sport, Anse Chasanet, Auberge Seraphine, – however the government policy is to encourage a foreign dominated hotel ownership structure.

Philosophically the government appears to believe that Saint Lucians should not strive to be owners of hotels or wealth creators but be in a permanent state of wage dependency. Saint Lucia Labour Party will encourage foreign direct investment in our tourism industry and will make direct policy interventions that promote and create an enabling environment for locals to be part of the industry at the highest possible levels.

A Labour government will endeavour to return the jazz festival to its previous position as one of the best musical festivals in the world.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

As a small island developing State, the pursuit of diplomacy is vital to Saint Lucia’s interest and can determine its grant funding. The posturing of this government in sensitive diplomatic theatre is symptomatic of a government ignorant of tactful and sensitive diplomacy.

Saint Lucia has been known to stand by the principles of respect for the rule of law, democracy, sovereignty, territorial integrity, human rights, multilateralism, and peaceful and just settlement of disputes. The recent showing by the government suggests a shift in the way we conduct our external relations. It appears that some good friends who have stood with us particularly during very difficult periods have been thrown under the proverbial bus.

We have adopted the posture of the popular soca song: “Ducking”. We ducked the vote on Israel at UNESCO, we ducked the vote at the UN General Assembly’s resolution condemning America’s plan to move its Israel embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. We voted against Venezuela and associated ourselves with the Lima group and abandoned our association with CARICOM.

The Saint Lucia Labour Party is concerned with the current situation in Venezuela and believes that CARICOM, as a collective, should play a neutral and facilitating role in Venezuela, and its individual member states should adhere to that position and refuse to be drawn into the positions of other groups of countries. We should never be seen as a flip-flopping country, genuflecting at the altar of expediency.

We call on the Prime Minister, who is also our External Affairs Minister, to clearly articulate Saint Lucia’s Foreign Policy.

A Saint Lucia Labour Party government would strengthen ties with our Caricom neighbours including Cuba and we call for the removal of the trade embargo on Cuba.
While our government demonstrates ingratitude towards some of the countries that have stood by us we call on St Lucians to remain grateful for the many countries that has stood alongside us. We on this side of the house remain thankful to all the friendly countries for their support and pledge that we will respect the sovereignty of all states and cherish their gifts (not destroy them).

CIP

Mr Speaker the position of the Saint Lucia Labour Party is clear, we believe that CIP as implemented by the UWP is fraught with problems and is very unlikely to reap the intended benefits. This has been evidenced by the last revenue estimates with less than half of the projected revenue of $43m being realized ($21m) from passport sales.

Confidence in our CIP process has already taken a battering with a number of CIP passports issued to questionable characters being revoked and differences between revenue from passport sales and the number of CIP passports issued remains unexplained.

Mr Speaker the Minister of Finance’s handling of the finances of this country is a shocking demonstration of financial illiteracy. This government goes to the money market to borrow money between 5% – 8% per annum and is willing to lend free money collected from passport sales to foreign individuals at an interest rate of 2%. This government is needlessly burdening current and future generations with high debt servicing obligations in the face 0% interest rate funds from the CIP program. This situation needs to be corrected because it does not make financial sense.

Mr Speaker you heard the Prime Minister’s response to Cambridge Analytica. The truth is that story is growing and St Lucia remains a subject of it. The PM has yet to make all the relevant information available to this house. The government may try to control the press in Saint Lucia but the World Wide Web cannot be censored and the truth will eventually unfold.

Mr Speaker the PM sounds very excited when he speaks of the holders of St Lucia diplomatic passports. I would like the PM to disclose to this honourable house how many diplomatic passports has the UWP government issued from June 6 2016 and whether the recipients of these passports were subject to the normal due diligence process.

Mr Speaker the government has thwarted efforts put in place by the last Labour government to secure the successful establishment of the CIP programme – they have failed to follow the transparent, accountable and well-regulated model established by the Saint Lucia Labour Party. They are busy trying to erase the legacy of the Saint Lucia Labour Party and in the process damaging the reputation of this country.

YOUTH

The government constantly repeats the old cliché that “the youth are the future”. But do they really believe this and are their policies reflective of this? Sadly their actions
do not reflect their pronouncements. And here is why? Their first act upon assuming office was to downgrade youth affairs from a full-fledged Ministry of Youth. Then they allowed not surprisingly playing fields to deteriorate becoming almost unplayable and ensuring that a part of the 95% – calculation of Saint Lucians employed under NICE involved in maintaining playing fields were no longer able to look after their families. Yes! They were fired. So much for caring about the youth of this country.

As if their words about “youth are the future” was not empty and hollow enough they present estimates that contain no capital expenditure for youth development but sure enough $1.5 Million in consultancies and advertising have been set aside for foreign consultants.

Meanwhile the Prime Minister recommends discussion of state adoption for poor, young pregnant teenagers and removes the allocation for the SMILE programme to assist young mothers. So directionless is this government that they are prepared to waste state funds on witch- hunts but can find no money for sporting equipment for our youth.

Mr Speaker this is the government’s record on youth development.

In 2006, the Saint Lucia Labour Party government made a quarter million dollars in seed money available to artists for financing sustainable income generating activities with the launch of the Artist Assistance Program.

Under the initiative, funds were made available to artists and entertainers in amounts ranging from five thousand to twenty thousand dollars in the form of grants for music production equipment, recordings, music videos and the purchase of musical equipment. This initiative yielded tremendous benefit and resulted in a marked improvement in the quality of music produced on the island.

We hold the view that instead of disincentivizing the work of our brave young music pioneers, we should support and harness their creative abilities and initiatives like the Artist Assistance Program was designed to do.

Mr Speaker the Saint Lucia Labour Party has confidence and belief in the young people of Saint Lucia and will whenever possible make tangible investments in their overall development because we truly believe that our future lies with them.

GENDER ISSUES

Mr Speaker a Saint Lucia Labour Party government will facilitate an environment that addresses gender imbalances through policies, programmes and other initiatives promoting equity and social justice.

These will include:

- Developing and implementing a comprehensive national response to gender based violence which will include a review of sexual abuse and domestic
violence legislations, strengthening and establishing social support services for single parent households.

- Reviewing children family laws
- Advancing the social economic and empowerment of women by ensuring equity in the participation of women in positions of political leadership.

The Saint Lucia Labour Party salutes all women involved in the social and economic development of Saint Lucia and thank them for their meaningful participation.

CRIME

Mr Speaker we all agree that the level of crime and crime detection is unacceptable. When in opposition this government used the incidence of crime as a weapon to attack the performance of the Labour government.

Mr Speaker we made great strides in addressing the issue of crime but never played the political card because we recognize the complexity of the issue. We call on the government to take leadership in the fight against crime and make available adequate resources to the police. While necessary, the police communications unit is not sufficient capital investment to fight crime in this fiscal year.

We salute the members of the police force, the majority of whom do their best in a challenging working environment to keep us safe.

In our fight against crime the government needs to resist the temptation to make political capital out of the work of the Director of Public Prosecution. The DPP is a constitutional position and his independence must be preserved at all times if he is to be perceived as fair and effective in carrying out his duties. We urge the government to respect the constitutional position of the DPP and refrain from giving the impression that he is a functionary of the executive.

And with regards to day to day management of the police, the Saint Lucia Labour Party believes that there should be no political interference in the day to day workings of the police and that the commissioner should be allowed the freedom to conduct police operations in a professional and non-partisan manner.

PUBLIC SPACES/ BEACHES

Since the withdrawal of the subvention from the National Trust we have noticed a steady encroachment of hotels and other developments on our beaches and public spaces. The government elected to serve the interest of the people appears unconcerned and in many cases are active facilitators of this growing encroachment on our beaches and public spaces.

The Saint Lucia Labour Party re-affirms its position that all beaches are for the enjoyment of all St Lucians and will remain public with unfettered access.
Mr Speaker we note that the clearing of an area of land near Vigie Beach. We believe that this area should be acquired through negotiation by government and kept for public enjoyment.

Mr Speaker we urge the government to investigate the uncontrolled sand mining in Micoud as it is a major environmental disaster.

HEWANORRA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

Mr Speaker the Prime Minister has spoken about the redevelopment of the Hewanorra International Airport.

The government has rejected the Public Private Partnership agreement that would have been supervised and monitored by the IFC an arm of the world bank. All plans for the construction of a modern state of the art Hewanorra International Airport had been finalized by the last Labour government with work about to commence without the government incurring any related debt. The airport would have been leased for a period of thirty years and the end of which commercial control would revert back to the government of St Lucia. This arrangement had three major benefits: oversight of the project would have been done by a competent agent of the World Bank – the IFC; there would be no additional debt incurred by the government of St Lucia and we would have had a long awaited state of the art international airport.

Having rejected and cancelled this agreement in September, 2017 the government was offered by the investment arm of the Canadian government to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding to provide all the expertise in designing, financing, constructing and delivering the airport and the north south highway. The project would have been guaranteed by the Canadian government with no need for debt financing by the GOSL.

Mr Speaker the government has spurned this offer as well and has not even had the decency of communicating its position to the Canadian government, meanwhile they are busy trying to contract the works to the usual suspects. Mr Speaker the question remains why is the government persistent in trying to avoid dealing with reputable international agencies that encourage good governance especially as it relates to procurement rules.

Mr Speaker we appear to be revisiting the age of A&M which is still a subject of investigation by the US State Attorney.

You will recall Mr Speaker that when the UWP last governed in 2011 A&M had failed the due diligence test and its proposal to undertake work at HIA was rejected by the Deutche Bank.

Can the Prime Minister tell this house what are the contractual relationships between his government and this company or its look-a-like for the redevelopment of HIA. We want to know.
The Prime Minister needs to clarify the procurement methods and whether an open tender process will be used given the size of this HIA redevelopment project.

Mr Speaker this airport redevelopment project has been the source of much discussion and speculation. There has been talk of interference in the process of awarding of contracts, allegations of bribery, investigation by the US state attorney and promises by the Prime Minister to investigate requests for information about his Ministers.

Mr Speaker let me be clear this would be one of the largest infrastructural projects to be undertaken in Saint Lucia and it must be done right. The Prime Minister must ensure total transparency, accountability and prudence in the execution of this project.

DSH

Mr Speaker our positon on this project remains.......there has been not enough consultation on the environmental, social and economic impact on livelihoods on the people directly involved. We believe that the project is too risky and surrenders too much land.......1000 acres to one man at 99¢ per acre and the sale of our passports. The government should listen if it fails the Saint Lucian Labour Party will pursue the matter at another level.

CONCLUSION

Mr Speaker, this budget will not reap any intended benefits because the damage has already been done since 2016 when this government came into office and they have done little in this budget to correct the lost momentum.

The policies of the last government placed the fiscal position of the country on a path of sustainability but UWP reversed it by stopping key capital projects, imposing a hefty fuel tax on the transport sector and depleted the treasury with unnecessary generous incentives to foreigners. This budget Mr Speaker is nothing more than a blunt instrument designed by a Minister of Finance with a narrow and limited understanding of what it takes to grow and sustain a balanced economy that will provide hope for our young people, expand and grow small businesses and improve the lives of the vast majority of citizens.

Mr Speaker the Labour Party that I lead is indeed fundamentally different from this government. Our development philosophy is based on upholding and promoting a set of social and economic principles which is embodied in a commitment for Bread Freedom and Justice for all Saint Lucians. The Saint Lucia Labour Party when in government will seek to advance national development by creating economic opportunities for the many, not friends, family and foreigners, uplifting the workers of the country, protecting the most vulnerable while creating an enabling environment for the private sector to grow and flourish.

Mr Speaker a Labour government will encourage a divergence of views to allow for the use of the collective knowledge, experience and intelligence of all the people of Saint Lucia rather than a few people who mistakenly believe solely by reason of being elected
into government that they and their friends have all the answers to our challenges as a nation.

We shall seek to continue the journey started earlier, to provide affordable health care for every Saint Lucian without the need to privatize public health care services.

And the next Labour government shall continue its tradition of embarking upon economic policies that will bring about stable growth as opposed to high risk economic policies that disrupt and destroy existing livelihoods with little chance of long term success.

I thank you.