

The TTMA Is Encouraged by the Budget

The Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers' Association (TTMA) has reviewed the government's Appropriation Bill for 2018-2019 entitled "A Genuine Economic Turnaround" and would like to commend the government of an overall management of the deficit from 6.2 billion to 4.02 billion. This is a step in the right direction toward a balanced budget and so placing less burden on our future generations to meet these payments.

Christopher Alcazar, President of the TTMA however stressed "while we are optimistic by the growth of 7.3% in the manufacturing sector, the Association remains cautious that this may have included the reclassification of the non-energy sector to include down-stream derivative sectors of energy production such as Ammonia, Urea and Methanol production". Further he noted the upturn in the energy sector and hopes that it "does not distract the government from furthering the efforts and strides already made in the more sustainable non-energy manufacturing sector and the diversification process."

Alcazar added, "The TTMA is pleased by several items highlighted by the Minister of Finance namely the EXIM Bank Forex facility, which is functional while there are some issues that still need to be ironed out." The TTMA will continue to work with those officials to ensure the facility would be beneficial to those most in need.

The TTMA is also encouraged by the announcement of the following measures:

- 1) The implementation of the Revenue Authority to ensure more efficiency in tax collection. Such an Authority will broaden the catchment of tax payers which would allow for the government to collect greater revenues via this framework as opposed to placing additional burden on those who are already compliant;
- 2) The roll out of the government's procurement framework in the beginning of 2019, which highlights the government's commitment to transparency, accountability and local content;
- 3) The stressing of the importance of the incremental export allowance, which was also highlighted in the 2017/2018 fiscal budget. The TTMA would like to underscore that it is imperative that such a facility is implemented in the shortest possible time in 2019 to act as a catalyst in moving manufacturers to become exporters. In this regard the TTMA continues to do its part in exploring new markets by participating in numerous trade missions over the last year with another planned in the later part of this month. The government must move ahead with the introduction of such an allowance with urgency as this is what the growth agenda of our industry demands during this critical period;

4) The stimulation of the economy by injection of expenditure in the construction industry via the building of highways, hospitals, other capital projects (ports, fishing markets) and other projects mentioned in the fiscal package 2019;

5) The improvement in infrastructure in industrial parks to encourage investment and growth in the country;

6) The focus on the issue of crime with the introduction of cameras, drones and tablets in police vehicles, computerization of police stations- all with the purpose of faster crime detection. These are welcomed initiatives. The emphasis on electronic and cyber-crime is also positive news and so we are looking forward to the roll out of an efficient operations Command Centre as indicated by the
Minister;

7) Maintaining diesel prices at the current rate, increasing pensions, addressing littering and forest fire issues, stressing child protection and no stamp duty for first time home owners up to 1.5 million, - all which seek to strive for a better quality of life for citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and embody the goal of Proudly T&T as initiated by the TTMA;

The TTMA notes the large injection in Education and emphasizes that as seen in the past, a highly educated work force does not automatically translate into a productive work force. The issue that we have found is not in the lack of availability of educated individuals but in the availability of educated individuals in the right areas of speciality and individuals with the right work ethic to be a productive part of the work force.

The TTMA was hopeful for some information with respect to a holistic plan to clear off the debt of VAT refunds to manufacturers and clarity on the application of property tax to plant and machinery.

The TTMA therefore looks forward to the details that will be revealed in the ensuing debate.