
National ordinance amending the National Ordinance Budget 2024 (National Ordinance Budget amendment 2024)

NOTE FOLLOWING THE FINAL REPORT

Parliament in its meeting of the Central Committee has exchanged views with the Government on the Draft National Ordinance amending the National Ordinance Budget 2024

Parliament considers the present draft to be adequately prepared when the questions below are answered in time for the public meeting so that the draft can be discussed in a public meeting.

In order for Parliament to consider the current draft to be adequately prepared, so that the draft can be discussed in a public meeting, Parliament is hereby provided with the answers to the questions stated in its final report.

The text of the questions as stated in the final report is expressed in black, while the text of the answers is provided in blue.

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The Unified Resilient St. Maarten Movement-faction has taken note of the draft with interest and commences with the Ministry of Justice. The faction inquires if any justice workers had received their payments already.

244 Justice workers have thus far received payment.

How much percent of the justice workers have had their rechtspositie (legal position), their LBs, signed? How much is still remaining?

Thus far about 60%. Roughly 250 remains

The faction inquires about the payment that the Justice workers are expecting. When can they expect such payment for the ones that didn't object? Has this total amount been budgeted for? Where can the faction find that?

Total amount budgeted is NAF 44,588,500.00

When can the Justice workers who have received their LBs expect their first payment? The faction was informed that certain payments are in the tranches. Hence, when can the Justice workers expect their first payment?

Once the letter of agreement is signed and the employee signs for pick up at DIV, the payment is processed in the following payroll.

The faction would like to know how the Justice Ministry is ensuring growth and safety while the budget has been cut.

Every year, the Ministry of Justice holds a conference to present their annual plan and budget challenges. These discussions help in generating ideas for the way forward and setting priorities to ensure safety with minimal resources. However, it can be difficult to deliver results when resources are limited.

To address Sint Maarten's border management challenges amid personnel shortages at IBPS, leveraging the Versterking Grenstoezicht (VGT) protocol and taking a holistic, multi-agency approach is essential. The VGT's focus on integrated enforcement, intelligence, and investigations can help streamline operations and reduce inefficiencies caused by departmental silos. The sharing of information must get a renewed focus.

Negotiating with BZK for increased support is critical, given the reliance of cooperative efforts on Sint Maarten's standing. This support could address personnel shortages through temporary deployments or regional manpower sharing, while also upgrading the foreign detention center to meet CARINET needs.

The newly launched automated border control systems at Princess Juliana International Airport (PJIA) will ease immigration processing, making up for staffing gaps. Additionally, implementing the API/PNR legislation will ensure the mandatory use of this technology, further improving border security and operational efficiency. Regular assessments under the VGT protocol will help monitor progress and adapt to future needs.

The faction mentions the Crime fund and states that based on the law in regards to the Crime Fund it mentions that every year, by submitting the budget, the Minister needs to submit a "Beleidsplan" a plan where it is specifically mentioned which projects will be tackled in that year. Also, the finances in regards to that. The faction would like to know where this plan is and where can this be seen in the budget?

The current plan is still under development and has not been finalized.

The faction has looked but has yet to find it. What is the amount in this Crime Fund?

Balance as of today: 8,282,576.67 ANG (includes BZK funding balance of ANG 3,691,578.12). BZK: for Versterking Grens Toezicht (VGT), Bestuurlijke aanpak ondermijning , and Bestuurlijk aanpak.

To which projects have the funds been going to? The faction states that we are at the end of the year, and the faction has been looking for the different projects in regards to tackling the crime, especially seeing the rising crime, and the factions has not seen this.

Spent:

- Placement of 2 individuals at Brasami
- B.14 Measure Country Package - FIU- Workstream 1 Effectiveness and Compliance training
- Bestuurlijk aanpak ondermijning

The faction continues and mentions the draft legislation. The Minister of Justice wrote an article that there is a new draft legislation in the making to tackle the crime fund, so the faction would like to know how far that draft legislation is. When can it be expected?

The draft legislation is currently undergoing legal review.

The faction states that, seeing that it is currently not clear which projects are currently in the Crime Fund, the faction would like to know budget-wise where this can be found.

The aforementioned will be formulated and incorporated into the 2025 budget.

Especially more so in today's newspaper article where the Minister of Justice has decided that there is a need for police cars and that there are currently few police cars available. Hence, the Minister has decided to purchase police cars through the Crime Fund. The faction would like to know based on what that decision has been taken.

The CF is dedicated to combating crime, and acquiring vehicles is crucial in achieving this goal. I made the decision to do so. Additionally, vehicles are being purchased through the CAPEX 2023 budget, and the process for tendering is being prepared. The Ministry has many vehicles that are over 4 years old and more.

Was it already budgeted based on the plan and regulations the law gives the Ministry of Justice?

Yes through the CAPEX 2023. The amount budgeted via the CAPEX is not sufficient seeing this deficit. As such the decision was made to purchase through the CF as new vehicles are considered tools to combat crime.

Additionally, why has the Minister of Justice yet to decide to use the same method to tackle the holding cells and not request assistance through BZK?

Yearly maintenance should be included in the budget and is managed by the Ministry of General Affairs. Currently, there is no system in place for yearly maintenance.

Why was it decided to tap into the Crime Fund? Furthermore, in regards to the holding cells, the faction is happy to see that the newspaper has also shown that the Minister of Justice is actively busy and that the holding cells, which is a very important topic, especially seeing that at this moment the holding cells are not how they should be, are being repaired. The faction refers to the holding cells not in Point Blanch but at the police station in Philipsburg. How are we making sure that there is no violation regarding those holding cells, taking into consideration the European Court for violation of human rights? Therefore, what is being done budget-wise to tackle that matter? The faction would like to know where those funds will be coming from.

Funds have been allocated for the repair of the cell, and the NRPB is responsible for project management, which is currently in the tendering phase. Additionally, BZK has provided funding for emergency repairs on the cell. The emergency repairs will commence next week, starting with the initial phase, which involves assessment.

The faction mentions that it understood from the Minister that based on the law, there should be an annual plan, but there is currently no annual plan, or it is not finalized. How is it possible that there is no policy plan, but yet the crime fund has been used in the past and is currently being used?

The intention is to draft a policy plan on a yearly basis. A draft plan was completed for 2024; however, this is tentative, given that the legislation for the Crime Fund is still being finalized. Typically, we would have liked the policy to pre-date the completion of any projects or spending; however, due to the urgency of acquiring enough vehicles to address the increase in crime and safety issues, the Minister has decided to prioritize this matter.

How is it possible that there is 3.6 million guilders of BZK in the Crime Fund? The faction understood from the Minister that there is 8.2 million guilders currently in the Crime Fund, but how is it possible that BZK funding, which is not meant to prevent crime, is currently in the Crime Fund?

It was upon the Ministry of Justice's request to expedite the processing of payments for the advice submitted by the border services. In the first ORVG project back in 2018, the Ministry encountered some delays in the processing of payment of the advice due to the funds being deposited into the Government's general coffers. While this ensured careful oversight, it also led to some challenges in clarity regarding detailed expenditures. This time, by utilizing the crime fund, we aim to streamline the process and enhance transparency.

The faction understood that one of the previous projects was the placement in Brasami. The faction would like to know how that is possible. The faction acknowledges that this did not happen under this Minister but the previous, but unfortunately, the faction will have to ask the current Minister. How was the placement in Brasami covered for by the Crime Fund? What other projects that the Crime Fund was used for?

We will send a breakdown of this writing.

Is it correct that 4 million guilders has been spent from the Crime Fund? If so, what was that amount spent on? Can an exact breakdown of this use of the Crime fund be given? Placement of Brasami. How was it determined that this was a project for the Crime Fund? Give precisely how much was spent on Brasami and all other projects.

The faction also inquired about receiving a detailed plan for the previous years. If there was no plan, the faction would like to receive the legal basis on which those projects were executed. The faction would like to receive a list of the projects.

We will send a breakdown of this writing.

The faction mentions the police vehicles and that the Minister mentioned that it was budgeted for, but unfortunately, it was not enough, and the Crime Fund will be used for the remaining amount. How much will it cost to use part of the Crime Fund for the remaining cars? How many cars will be purchased through the budget, and how much will be purchased through the Crime Fund, and for what amount? And after purchasing those cars, what is the remaining amount that will remain in the Crime Fund?

9 cars will be purchased for an amount of NAF 517.779.- A total of NAF 161K is budgeted in the CAPEX, which will be sufficient for 3 cars. A detailed breakdown will be provided in writing to illustrate the remaining balance after purchases.

The faction acknowledges the fact that the Ministry needs funds for police cars and that police cars are one of the important subjects in tackling crime. However, the faction is posing this question in detail and specifically about the Crime Fund because the faction would like to know when it will be used for the rehabilitation and resocialization of repeat offenders. This fund was initiated to combat and prevent crime in the community. Hence, the faction is wondering when Sint Maarten can also have a few projects ongoing like that in Curacao with their 18 projects. When can Sint Maarten have at least one, two, or three projects going on? Hence, the reason the faction is so hard on the Crime Fund.

Rehabilitation and resocialization are priorities of the crime fund, which align with the overall strategic plan for crime prevention; however, as mentioned, the legislation is still being finalized, and the annual policy plan should be developed.

The faction mentions the lottery and casino holders that cannot open a bank account but need to be able to also bring funds into the coffers of Sint Maarten. What is the short-term solution to tackle that matter? Seeing now that the Caribbean guilder will be coming to Sint Maarten to make that transfer from the Antillean guilder to the Caribbean guilder, the faction would like to know what will be in place for those lottery and casino holders who cannot open a bank account at this moment?

Whilst we understand the question there is no short-term solution for this matter.

To provide some context, the draft national ordinance on the basic bank account which is currently in legislative process, provides for the right of the consumer (natural persons only) to open a basic bank account under less stringent conditions. These conditions are as such that they will not lead to violation of Anti-Money Laundering (AML) legislation by the payment service provider (bank) or result in problems with correspondent bank relations. The target group are those in our community for whom it is difficult to meet all the requirements to open a regular bank account. The risk profile of the target group is also considered relatively low which made it possible to ease the on-boarding requirements. The situation with lotteries and casino holders is entirely different as these concern high risk entities, which require enhanced on boarding requirements. These entities should comply with the on-boarding requirements of banks in order to open a bank account. It is subsequently up the bank if it wants lotteries and casino holders as clients taking into account their risk-profile and the risk-profile of their correspondent bank as without same a bank cannot operate.

Please note that this matter has our attention we that will continue to look for a solution for this group taking the previous mentioned constraints into consideration.

The faction continues and mentions the legal help desk. When will the new start date be? The faction would like to avoid unnecessary misinformation or confusion. The faction would like clarity for the people of Sint Maarten so that the vulnerable community that is in need of legal assistance can get that legal assistance through the help desk and that they can have a date to look forward to instead of it being communicated that there is no date as yet.

The relevant department will be having a meeting with law firms in the coming week and following this meeting a flyer will be created to indicate the start of the program, which is anticipated to start in November. This meeting will also determine how additional legal minded persons will be contacted and included in the process.

The faction understood that the hiccup was in regard to the participation of the lawyers needed. After the article in today's newspaper, the faction received several calls from lawyers in regard to this project, especially seeing that they have informed the faction and also the Ministry that they are willing to assist. Seeing the remarks in regards to the hiccup of the lawyers, the faction made it its business to also pile up that information for the Ministry to make it easier for lawyers to commit. There are currently 6 law firms that are interested in participating, so therefore, to make sure that everyone who has a legal background or is legally minded can participate in this project because the more, the better, and it will benefit the people of Sint Maarten, the faction would advise the Ministry to make sure that it is communicated through the social media channels when this project will start and how other legally minded people can also apply to participate in this project.

The faction states that it is aware that we are here for the budget amendment, and often we hear there are no funds available on Sint Maarten, but now we have a project that will not cost any money and will be beneficial to the people of Sint Maarten. The faction, therefore, believes that we all need to come together and make sure that this legal help desk can start.

The relevant department will be having a meeting with law firms in the coming week and following this meeting a flyer will be created to indicate the start of the program, which is anticipated to start in November. This meeting will also determine how additional legal minded persons will be contacted and included in the process.

The faction states that it is indeed correct that based on the law in Article 5, every year, when submitting the budget, the Minister needs to provide a policy plan that clearly outlines which projects are to be tackled in that budget year.

The faction inquired about the current draft policy plan. How do we have a draft policy plan, which is still in the draft phase, but we still have to tackle justice matters? Hence, if there is a draft policy plan, when will this draft policy plan be finalized? Additionally, can the Members of Parliament be provided with this draft policy plan before the Public Meeting, even if it needs to be confidential? The faction would like to see this draft to know what is in it and the Minister's explanation.

The intention is to draft a policy plan on a yearly basis. A draft plan was completed for 2024; however, this is tentative, given that the legislation for the Crime Fund is still being finalized. Typically, we would have liked the policy to pre-date the completion of any projects or spending; however, due to the urgency of acquiring enough vehicles to address the increase in crime and safety issues, the Minister has decided to prioritize this matter.

Also, it was explained by the Minister that police cars, which the faction understands are also important to tackle the current rise in crime, but based on what legal basis are the police cars being purchased through the Crime Fund? Can a breakdown also be given regarding the different projects?

The police cars are being purchased on the legal basis of Article 2, Section 1 of the relevant legislation, which establishes a fund specifically for financing projects aimed at combating crime. Since the acquisition of police cars can be considered a measure to enhance crime prevention and control, it falls under the scope of this fund's purpose, thereby justifying the purchase through the Crime Fund.

It was mentioned that we would receive that in writing before the Public Meeting and then have it specified exactly what project and for what amount. For example, mental health patients, Brasami for what amount and the date and year.

Please see attached report.

The faction mentions a question from the UP faction regarding the policy for releasing persons. Can that explanation be repeated?

Has been repeated in the public setting.

The faction would like to know when those police cars will be purchased. Or have they been purchased already?

We have expedited this and await CoM's decision mandating my person to proceed with the purchase agreements.

The faction references the cuts and has the following questions. Are any of these cuts directly or indirectly affecting our seniors or other vulnerable groups?

The cuts of the 2024 budget do not affect the budgeted amounts which can be used to assist the elderly and the vulnerable groups.

The faction understood that there was a cut with regard to the Ministry of Education and mentioned the breakfast and meal program for our children who go to school. Does the cut in the Ministry of Education affect what is currently being made available to schools for certain meal or breakfast programs?

No cuts were made to the budget account 43421-6320 'Voeding' which covers the feeding program within the Public Schools.

We speak of ways of generating funds. The faction mentions the BOA program. Is this a project that is completely cut out of the budget, or is it something that we are going to see within short? Or was it overlooked?

The vacancy for the Training Coordinator position is currently open. In relation to the BOA program, a course outline is required for the course to be certified by the Ministry of ECYS. Once this is attained then the program can commence.

The faction would like to know what conditions the ministries are in. Is this 2024 budget cut going to be reflected in the 2025 budget?

Yes

The faction mentioned that there are many cuts in personnel and expertise. Considering that there is so much technical assistance that is going to be needed for pending legislation, are these cuts limited to only 2024 and will be restored in 2025 for acquiring expertise from outside of government where needed?

The budget cuts to the Department of Education include a reduction in the Department's personnel budget for a Senior Policy Officer who left the Department in 2024. This is a critical vacancy, and this cut will adversely affect the Department's ability to deliver on pending legislation and agreements made in the Country Packages in 2025.

How do these budget cuts relate to the employee survey recently conducted and to the proposed cuts to personnel? One of the things that ministers and departments complain about is a shortage of personnel. The faction believes that it is important to

invest in our people in order for our people to give us the service we deserve in the community.

Two of the main points that came out of the employee survey were the need for career advancement and training. The cuts have a direct effect on the overall functionality of the various departments. Prior to the additional cuts, the organization already was faced with the situation that 25% of functions within government were not filled, whereby these vacancies were not evenly distributed. The impact thereof is mostly noticeable in functions scale 9 and higher. As the vacancies cannot be filled, it creates a higher workload for existing employees, which also has an effect on the increased departure of employees from the government apparatus.

In addition, as the training budget has also been affected by the cuts, there is still no adequate investment in career development and training. In addition, I can inform parliament that different departments have their challenges concerning the shortage of personnel.

Are the cuts also, when it comes to personnel, a result of the recent increase in the situation where a lot of our civil servants are leaving government service in order to go to the private sector? Is that one of the reasons why you see a drop in certain areas within the budget?

Yes, this partially reflects that situation. Civil servants who have left in the meantime were initially budgeted for the full year (12 months) in the approved budget. However, if their positions have not yet been filled, they are now budgeted for a shorter period, such as 3 or 6 months

For the past three consecutive years, the Ministry of Education has, for various reasons, been unable to fully utilize its personnel budget, and the forecast indicates that the same will hold true for 2024. This trend appears to be consistent across the entire government, making it difficult to argue that the reduction in personnel costs is unrealistic or will hinder the achievement of goals, especially when we have been unable to fill all vacancies and fully utilize our personnel budget for the last three years.

Notably, there are at least two individuals working in the Ministry who are affecting the budget of other Ministries. Additionally, at least five individuals are impacting the Ministry's budget while working in other Ministries or Cabinets. This situation affects the Department's or Division's ability to achieve its goals, as there are fewer staff members present than those being paid from the budget. Clearly, the organization faces challenges in processing personnel matters promptly, which affects its ability to fill vacancies and fully utilize its personnel budget.

Departments and Divisions have been advised to hire temporary employees through employment agencies for the remainder of 2024, particularly in areas where there is an urgent need for manpower.

See the overview below of budgeted versus actual personnel costs for the period 2021–2024.

2021		2022		2023		AUG 2024	
Personnel cost budget	26,740,324	Personnel cost budget	27,917,608	Personnel cost budgeted	27,911,695	Personnel cost budgeted	18,842,134
Personnel costs booked	25,094,233	Personnel costs booked	24,822,236	Personnel costs booked	25,194,299	Personnel costs booked	17,352,091
Surplus/Deficit	1,646,091	Surplus/Deficit	3,095,372	Surplus/Deficit	2,717,396	Surplus/Deficit	1,490,043

The faction thinks that the presentation given by the Minister was very clear. The faction would like the Minister of Finance to explain why that amount was required, the amount for the budget to be adjusted by. Is it possible for the Minister to explain why that request was made? The faction understands that some of it was based on the recommendation, but perhaps there is something else in addition to that as well.

The faction would like to know if it was the Minister who was directly instrumental in the cuts or if it was the Minister of Finance or someone else or a different organization within the Ministry. The faction thinks it is very dangerous to mess with our national security, especially when cutting such an important aspect of our budget. Who was actually responsible for it? [Due to the necessity of reducing revenue, each ministry was required to implement necessary budget cuts to balance the country's finances. Consequently, each Ministry conducted an assessment to identify areas within the ministry where reductions could be made. These proposed cuts were determined internally.](#)

The faction mentions the scanner for containers. The answer given in an earlier meeting was that a quotation was asked. The faction looked through the budget to see if there was a quotation or an amount for it but still hasn't seen it—perhaps it was overlooked. So, can the Minister indicate whether or not it's there or if it's something that will be placed in the 2025 budget? The faction believes that this is very important because crime is on the rise. A lot of our children are finding themselves with weapons, with drugs that they're actually using. So, for the faction, it's very important that this is added, whether in the 2024 or 2025 budget. The faction would just like an update on this.

[No, it is not included in the 2024 budget.](#)

[We are interested in acquiring a container scanner for the harbor. However, we face two challenges: finding a suitable location at the port for a fixed-base scanner and ensuring the long-term sustainability of a mobile container scanner.](#)

[We are currently compiling a list of requirements for both options. Once complete, we will compare the investment and long-term return on investment while also considering maintenance and sustainability.](#)

Given our current staffing shortage, the fixed-base or mobile container scanner would significantly reduce the strain on our team.

Due to recent budget cuts, we cannot make this investment. However, we are preparing a presentation for BZK, and once all the compiled data has been reviewed, we will request their support in financing this investment.

The faction notes that an increase in security with VKS walking at night in the town area has been seen. The faction would like to compliment the Minister and also the men on the floor, in the districts, and in the community who are protecting us. The faction knows they are doing the best they can, and it is appreciated.

The faction would like clarification as the cuts affect the truancy department, which actually has four FTE but currently only has two truancy employees, and this would remain so. One of the tasks of a truancy officer is to tackle the issues of students being truant, dropping out, and being absent from school. One of the responsibilities, or so-called authorities, that a truancy officer should have is the ability to give fines. The faction would like to know if it is the plan to perhaps do whatever has to be done with regard to giving those truancy officers the ability to write fines. Is that one of the plans for the rest of the year?

The Ministry has every intention to equip the Inspection Truancy Officers with the authority to issue fines, but for this, the legal basis must be established. Once the Draft Law for Education Supervision or in Dutch “Landsverordening Onderwijs Toezicht or (LOT)” is established and the Delegated Regulations are ratified, Truancy officers will be able to issue fines. The draft LOT will be submitted to Parliament for decision making after the “Further Report” or in Dutch “Naderrapport” has been vetted by the Ministry of General Affairs.

In anticipation of the approval of the draft law, The Inspection Department has done all in its ability regarding the printing of the fine books and the drafting of the internal protocol on the issuance of administrative fines.

As it regards people traveling with their students unlawfully, is there an interministerial agreement between the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of ECYS so that when parents break the law, some form of fine or sanction can be given to them?

According to the Compulsory Education Ordinance, the school is responsible to notify the Inspectorate of the Ministry of ECYS when students do not attend school.

While there is no interministerial agreement between the Ministries of Justice and Education. Parents are required to request exemption from school in connection with traveling. This process is done via school to the Inspectorate of Education. According to the Compulsory Education Ordinance, the Head of a school is responsible for notifying the Inspectorate of Education.

The faction also notes that it was stated that the cuts do not affect the breakfast program, which is a good thing. The faction would like to know what happens to the

rest. Right now, Public schools receive funding. Is it the intention, or is it possible that the other schools, subsidized schools, can also receive similar programs?

Funded school boards have not given any indication to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport that the existing programs are not sufficiently catering to their current needs. Current breakfast programs are delivered in collaboration with the private sector and NGOs.

Does the Ministry of Education have any outstandings when it comes to vendors? How much are these outstandings? When is the intention to start to pay these vendors so that the supplies can reach those who need them the most — our students?

The Department of Education does have outstanding balances with vendors. They are currently busy working with these suppliers to regulate all outstanding bills to ensure that they continue to receive goods as supplies for the public schools. The goal is to ensure that no large bills are being brought over to the 2025 budget.

The faction continues and mentions that a lot of our schools, especially in the classrooms, are meeting challenges with regard to children with behavioral issues and even mental issues. The faction knows that in the past, there was supposed to be an institution by the former Bell School that was supposed to be organized. The faction understands that after the hurricane, that was destroyed, and that the plan is now currently at NRPB with regard to the rebuilding of that institution. But in the meantime, the situation is getting worse in the classrooms. The faction would like to know what is being done in the meantime until that building is completed and can be occupied? What is being done in the meantime to help the teachers and the schools with regard to dealing with these children with behavioral issues and also mental issues as well?

Challenges at the schools concerning students, that cannot be handled by the schools and their respective care teams, are elevated to Student Support Services Division (SSSD) or other external agencies that provide psychological and behavioral services.

Behavioral and mental health issues are oftentimes manifestations of larger issues within the family, school and larger society which requires a systematic approach.

The faction continues to reiterate the point of the meal program for our students. The Minister has indicated that schools have not indicated that there is a need for such. The faction advises the Minister to please reach out to the schools again individually and request this information—how many students are in need of some form of meal program? Is there an organization already supporting it? How much are they short of? There are still a lot of students who go to school hungry, and the coverage is not enough, even with the help of the private sector and organizations. The faction believes that the meal programs are much needed.

The food program mentioned was executed by the Ministry of VSA. DEI (Division Education Innovation) does not have the information the MP is referring to; however, we will reach out to the Ministry of VSA as it is important to ensure that we are informed and take the necessary actions.

Note that in the Public Schools the Division of Public Education takes responsibility for matters like meal programs. All other educational institutions, including schools that receive funding from government, are expected to cater to the needs of the students and where necessary address government for additional support. Those schools usually have meal programs in place that are supported through private initiatives. We want to recognize those efforts as they are instrumental and benefit the community.

The faction mentions the process of truancy. The faction wanted to highlight that this is an area where we can gain additional funds for a ministry that is in dire need of more funds.

The faction states that it reaches a point where the students or the parents arrive at the airport, and that's where the gap lies—there's no way to hold them accountable, no way to fine them. That's the direction the faction would like to go. Is it possible to look into a ministerial agreement with the Inspectorate of Education and Immigration at the airport to find some way, for example, before the parent takes off, they have to pay a fine as long as they don't have the approval letter from the school? This can be additional income for the budget, whether for this budget or for the future budget of 2025.

It is the plan of the Ministry to give Inspection truancy officers the authority to write fines. Once the National Ordinance for Education Supervision ('Landsverordening Onderwijs Toezicht' (LOT) is established and delegated regulations ratified, Truancy officers will be able to issue fines. The draft LOT will be sent to Parliament for decision making once vetting of the (Further Report) "Nader Rapport" is completed by the Ministry of General Affairs.

The faction continues and mentions that a former Minister took away the mandate from the inspectorate. Can we get an update on this? Does the inspectorate now have its mandate completely so it can execute its task? The faction believes that it is very important for the inspectorate to have its mandate to do what it has to do in order to prevent these young children from escalating—from being dropouts to becoming criminals on the streets and ending up our houses doing things they are not supposed to be doing.

Yes, the National Decree containing general measures establishing the method of monitoring compliance with the Compulsory Education National Ordinance (National Decree on Supervision of Compulsory Education) was established on March 22, 2023.

Can the Minister give an update as to what exactly is going on with the original Prince Willem Alexander School in St. Peters? What are the future intentions for this school?

The Prins Willem Alexander School in St. Peters is still under construction. The contractor has recently submitted new invoices for progress work that was recently completed.

Please note that VROMI New Works has temporarily taken on the responsibility for project supervision as a result of ICE not continuing the supervision due to outstanding payments.

The goal of the Division of Public Education is to have the school relocated to its original location as soon as the construction is completed. DPE will collaborate with VROMI New Works to supply a technical update for parliament as soon as possible.

The Democratic Party-faction has taken note of the draft. The faction mentions that there has been news about a beach bar around the Simpson Bay area near the beachside. The faction would like some clarity on this from the Minister of VROMI. The faction understood it is not allowed to build on our beaches. Hence, the faction would like the Minister to elaborate on what is happening there. Is there going to be a stop to this?

Indeed, a building permit was issued under the administration number Bp # 245/2023 signed on May 2nd 2024 and picked up on May 8th 2024.

On October 1st 2024, the Inspection department visited the site and only the foundation was being constructed and was in accordance with the site plan and foundation plan. Therefore, no warning nor building stop was warranted at that point in time.

However, what can be said is that after looking at the advice from the Permits department, no advice was requested from the Nature Foundation. I as a Minister through you Madame Chair, am of the opinion that the advice from the Nature foundation is critical when assessing cases such as this, that touch our beaches and further environment. It is also good to note that NO change of purpose was granted for the parcels in question, and that currently according to the deed no beach bar would be allowed. The department is looking into reevaluating this permit and assess what the real issue is.

Furthermore, the faction states the following. The faction is consistently hearing about revenue-generating ideas from colleague Members of Parliament. However, they also spent four years within the Government and had plans that did not seem to have any execution. Hence, the faction would like to give the current Minister of Finance the chance to come back with the 2025 projections and budget and provide those revenue-generating ideas. Also, the faction wants to remind everybody that we are working with a budget that the previous

Government brought forward. This is being amended by our current Government for the next three months, not the following year, 2025.

The faction mentions that it also agrees with the UP faction regarding having a closed-door meeting to elaborate on revenue-generating ideas for 2025 moving forward.

The faction continues and inquires about the status of our stoplights, the one stoplight that we have in Sint Maarten. What is the status of it? Is it in the planning to get them back up in order?

The electrical cables for the traffic lights were accidentally damaged during reparation work on the Pince Bernard Bridge. The solution design is currently under consideration and will be planned for implementation as soon as possible.

The faction would like to know how we are prioritizing the beautification of Philipsburg.

We are committed to revitalizing Philipsburg and making it a more attractive and vibrant area. As a first step, we are procuring the services of an urban planner to develop a comprehensive master plan that outlines strategies for beautification, increased foot traffic, and economic growth. Once the plan is finalized, we will implement a phased approach, focusing on infrastructure improvements, aesthetics upgrades, and targeted economic development initiatives.

The faction also mentions the EDC. If the faction is not mistaken, there was a director. What was accomplished during his tenure? What is the financial status of the EDC?

The tenure of the previous interim director of the Economic Development Corporation (EDC) concluded in July. During this period, the primary focus was on reestablishing the EDC, which had been inactive for a significant amount of time.

Regarding the corporation's financial situation, reviews and assessments are currently being conducted to gain a clearer understanding of its fiscal health. We are carefully evaluating this information to determine the best path forward for the EDC. My goal remains to ensure that the EDC operates effectively and plays a key role in driving our economic growth.

The faction continues and mentions our justice chain. The faction would like to know how many personnel are in each part of the chain. The faction would like a complete breakdown of how many are in immigration, police, prison, coast guard, and so on.

Stafbureau: 12

Judicial Affairs: 9

IBPS: 111

Customs: 42

KPSM: 212

LR: 15

FIU/MOT: 10

CoG: 13

HvB: 100

Also, the faction would like to know how many are on sick leave.

Stafbureau: 0

Judicial Affairs: 0

IBPS: 12

Customs: 10

KPSM: 8

LR:

FIU/MOT: 1

CoG: 1

HvB:

Which parts of the Ministry are understaffed?

All departments within the Ministry are faced with some form of understaffing.

How many justice workers received their new LBs, and how many are pending?

244 received. Presently 25 are at the Governor for review. 25 are at FBBB.

Roughly 230 are pending.

There has been a serious increase in crime associated with scooters. What can be done to tackle this problem?

1. Bergplaats en budget to crash undocumented and not retrieved scooters
2. Increase fines (minor infractions)
3. Tackle reckless behavior with dedicated team as action point with O.M. to impound scooter with court date for the driver.

The faction would like the Minister of Justice to provide a percentage (%) breakdown of the crimes committed by nationality. One of them that interests the faction is, in particular, the percentage of total crimes committed by Americans.

The OM cannot provide input on this question, would advise to request this information from the point balance prison. (refer to report PG)

The faction mentions the prison and would like to know how many people are awaiting the carrying out of their sentences.

Question 1: How many people are awaiting the carrying out of their sentences?

Please be advised that this answer depends on where within the criminal justice process a person is, for instance if a person has appealed his or her case. Moreover, due to the short timeframe it has not been possible to differentiate between persons whose case has been in first instance (Gerecht Eerste Aanleg), in appeal (Hoger Beroep) or in cassation (cassatie).

As of 2023, there were between 175-200 persons awaiting to begin their sentences in Point Blanche. At this time, it is not possible to provide the numbers for 2024 regarding the unexecuted sentences. Due to the short term in which input was required from the OM, please be advised that these numbers are an approximate.

Seeing the amount of time they have been waiting to sit their sentence, is there a maximum time you can wait until one sits? The faction has heard stories of people being called in 5 years after they received their sentences.

Refer to report PG answer Question 2 and question 3

The faction inquires if this was normal. Is this also within human rights?

Question 4: Is this normal and is this within human rights?

According to the law there are terms within which a sentence expires that must be adhered to, better known as the "verjaringstermijnen". To put the amount of Sint Maarten in perspective, there are at least 2400 people (as of April 2024) in the Netherlands awaiting the execution of their sentence. Meaning that the challenge Sint Maarten is dealing with in this matter are not only a challenge here.¹

What is the ratio

presently of prison guards to inmates on a shift? Is this ratio acceptable and safe?

Point Blanche has 80 male inmates and 6 female inmates. We have 7 Prison Officer for the male inmates and 1 prison officer for the female inmates.

The faction would like to know if the prison has enough guards.

The prison is understaffed. The reason for this is that:

8 Prison Guards who are on the payroll of the prison, but they are working for others departments within the Ministry of Justice.

When MLC opened het doors Guards from HvB Point Blanche Prison were sent to MLC without compensating HvB. Currently 11 Prison Guards working at MLC.

15 Prison Guards left HvB Point Blanche Prison since 2019 without replacement.

The security posts in the prison are executed by the VKS and not Prison officers, 6 positions.

Are there any programs after a prisoner is released? Programs to help them get back into society. The faction would like to get a detailed explanation of how this is

done in terms of assistance with housing, job enlisting, or any help to resocialize them. Who determines the release of inmates based on the overcapacity issues?

Yes, SJIS offers several programs to help ex-inmates reintegrate into society. The Probation Department supports various groups such as conditionally suspended, conditional dismissed or sentenced individuals and those released from pretrial detention or prison.

Programs and behavioural intervention training offered include:

Safe Home: Support for domestic violence perpetrators and victims.

Aggression Replacement Training: Helps individuals with anger management and aggression issues.

Social Skills: Teaches effective communication, conflict resolution, and behavior regulation.

Cognitive Skills Training: Aims to change negative or criminal thinking patterns.

Parenting Classes: Provides guidance on responsible parenting, discipline, and communication.

Life Skills: Focuses on substance abuse prevention, decision-making, and practical living skills.

Alcohol & Violence Program: Addresses issues related to alcohol misuse and violent behaviors.

Additionally, the Probation Department provides:

Substance abuse treatment/halfway house: Through partnerships with organizations such as Turning Point respectively Key to Freedom

Mental health treatment: In collaboration with mental health professionals such as the Mental Health Foundation (MHF).

Job Readiness: Referral to VSA employability training and programs.

Job application: Inhouse assistance by probation officers focusing on finding job opportunities, providing job referrals, application help, and assistance through Ministry of VSA programs.

Assistance with financial support and medical insurance: Assistance with application for government aid (financial assistance and medical care) through the Ministry of VSA.

Restorative justice programs: Including victim-offender mediation, which promotes conflict resolution and community healing.

There are currently 165 persons placed under the supervision of the probation department.

Electronic Monitoring Program: This program tracks individuals under supervision to make sure compliance with court-ordered conditions or conditions ordered by the minister of justice. It assists the probation department in monitoring client's movements, helping prevent reoffending and providing an added layer of accountability. By enabling remote oversight, it supports the rehabilitation process by allowing clients to remain in the community while still being closely monitored. This balance allows clients to continue working or attending rehabilitation programs while adhering to legal restrictions, promoting positive behavior and reintegration. Currently, there are 8 persons participating in this program.

Community Service Program: The SJIS-Probation Office also runs a community service program, where currently 150 individuals contribute 12,000 hours of unpaid work. This has a measurable economic impact of around US\$180,000, benefiting local non-governmental and non-profit organizations. It also supports rehabilitation by instilling responsibility, personal growth, and skill-building. Many participants secure employment through their community service experience.

Housing programs: Unfortunately, there is no halfway house for ex-inmates in St. Maarten. Housing support is limited, and ex-inmates often rely on personal networks. SJIS assists by verifying housing options, coordinating with networks, and monitoring housing stability. Probation officers also stay in contact with family members to ensure ex-inmates have a stable living environment. Emphasis is placed on helping them find and maintain employment to secure long-term housing stability.

Other services: SJIS conducts research, and risk assessments, and prepares advisory reports for the court, prosecutor's office, and Minister of Justice. To date, 320 advisory reports have been produced.

In addition, SJIS manages various alternative measures to incarceration, but with only 7 full-time probation officers, they face significant challenges in fully monitoring and addressing each client's needs. In contrast, the probation department in the Caribbean Netherlands employs 16 officers with a much lower caseload. The sharp rise in referrals to SJIS is primarily due to the shortage of detention spaces and the growing reliance on alternatives to incarceration by the judicial system, which is the core task of SJIS. This growing workload increase strains SJIS resources, but the staff remains dedicated to ensuring rehabilitation and reintegration take place.

The faction would like an update on any possibility of house arrest to ease the overcapacity in Point Blanche.

Based on article 1:32 Penal Code sub 2:

The Minister of Justice may attach special conditions concerning the behavior of the convicted person to the conditional release, taking into account a recommendation to that effect from the Central Board for Probation (CCR). The CCR will give in their advice that the inmate should stay in one place for a set period of time(locatiegebod). This is based on article 1:32 sub c:

An obligation to be present at a certain location at certain times or for a certain period of time.

Also refer to report from PG with answer to Question 5 page 2 of report.

The faction inquired why the Governor is the one who can give pardons and not the actual Government of Sint Maarten.

Based on article 118 of the Staatsregeling Sint Maarten, clemency can only be granted through a landsbesluit. Artikel 118: Pardon shall be granted by national decree after advice has been obtained from the judge by whom the judgment was rendered in compliance with regulations to be established by or pursuant to national ordinance.

So that article makes the governor the rightful authority to grant clemency

What policy does the OM use for releasing inmates?

Criteria for early conditional release as perused by OM:

There are two legal grounds for conditional release in the Sint Maarten Criminal Code.

Article 1:30 and 1:31. Article 1:37 contains a special regulation for cell shortage.

Based on article 1:30 of the Sint Maarten Criminal Code the conditions are as follows:

1. Lifelong sentence
2. Twenty-five years served
3. Imprisonment reasonably no longer serves a purpose (Joint Court of Justice decides)
4. The position of victims, relatives and risk of repeat offense are taken into consideration

Based on article 1:31 of the Sint Maarten Criminal Code the conditions are as follows:

1. Prison sentence of at least 1 year unconditional
2. Irrevocable sentence
3. No extradition requests
4. 6 months served (1/3 of the remaining time to serve is complete); or
5. 1 year served (2/3 of the remaining time to serve is complete)

Based on these conditions the OM decides

Is this based solely on their liking? Shouldn't that policy be transparent?

It is the authority of the Minister of Justice to decide on conditional release and early conditional release with or without the special conditional of electronic monitoring. However, this is only possible with the parameters set by the Criminal Code. Pursuant to Article 1:31 of Criminal Code, an inmate can be eligible for conditional release after 2/3 of the sentence. According to Article 1:37 of the Criminal Code, an inmate can be eligible for early conditional release before the 2/3 of the sentence if that inmate sat out the highest percentage of his/her sentence compared to other inmates serving their sentence in Sint Maarten.

The faction would like to know, as we approach the budget 2025, being approximately 10 weeks away from the end of the year, and we are talking budget 2024. The faction understands that some serious changes have been made, and of course, those changes need to be reflected in the budget. However, the implementation reports that we get every quarter is extremely important.

Currently the budget for 2025 also has the budget cuts that are being reflected in the 2024 budget. However, it is the idea to make an amendment in the first quarter of 2025 based on the Q4 actuals.

The faction would like to reiterate that comparing these reports with the budget is not easy, as recognized by the General Audit Chamber. Nevertheless, we get those reports based on the Kingdom Law Financial Supervision, and they give an accurate account of how the budget is being implemented. In looking more at going towards the discussions on the draft budget to be received for 2025, the faction would like to inquire about the status of the draft budget for 2025.

In the context of looking at next year’s budget, the faction would like the Minister to provide Parliament with an overview of our taxpayer base in terms of numbers, of course. How many registered taxpayers do we have? If the numbers are based on estimates rather than registered taxpayers, the faction would like to know how many Crib numbers are in place and a comparison between the two. Do we have an official taxpayers base, and if not, and that is only based on the crib numbers, then how many are there?

Can the Minister get us an update with respect to the overall financial position of the SZV, as well as a similar overview of the APS?

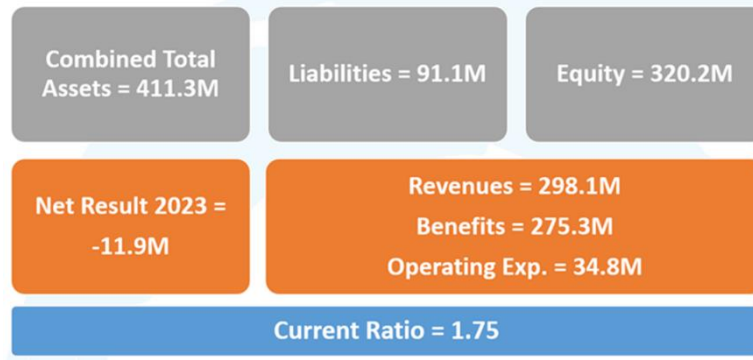
SZV:

At the end of Q2 the outstanding for SZV is Naf 113,7 mln and APS 11,2 mln

	Revenues	Expenses	Net Loss
2024	291,557,337	303,810,132	21,378,335

2025	299,863,023	310,608,539	19,051,202
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Financial overview (Financial Metrics 2023)



Also refer to Q2 report submitted for further details.

APS:

	Revenues	Expenses	Net Result
2023	109,355	25,362	84,051
2022	-23,009	21,763	-44,500

The faction would also like to comment regarding the cleanliness of our island. While some may say that we don't have any laws in place, and while we don't have laws covering everything, we do have laws in place, for example, where garbage is concerned. The faction believes that one of the biggest problems is the lack of control and inspection. The faction would like to know if this can be confirmed and if it is so, does the Government have any plans to address this matter?

The faction notes that there are laws, such as the old yet relevant garbage ordinance. Does the Minister concur, and can the Minister find out if her colleagues can concur, that in so many areas TEATT, VROMI, and other, we lack the capacity of inspection and control? If that is felt the same way by the Council of Ministers, can the Council of Ministers prepare a plan to deal with this matter?

Our focus should be on facilitating the community with effective policies, improved facilities, and infrastructure to support proper waste disposal.

We are making progress in the island's cleanup efforts, such as clearing vehicle wrecks and even addressing the island scout ship on Great Bay Beach. However, we still face challenges with household waste management. The root cause of this issue

lies not in control and inspection particularly, but in the widespread dumping of household waste in inappropriate locations.

The faction mentions the zoning of the country. It was mentioned in the past that the idea of individual district zoning or the intention or efforts has been abandoned, and now it is the idea to come up with a complete overall zoning for the country. The faction would like to know where those plans are.

Indeed, a shift from a district to general zoning is the current trajectory. As we are facing capacity challenges, assistance for this will form part of the request for capacity support. Note that the individual (draft) zoning plans are being used to advise when developments are proposed. These draft zoning plans have also been published on our website.

The faction mentions the collection of fees from casinos, lotteries, and even smaller fees for using public property. There are laws, and while the revenue from such might be small, it also has a deterring effect. Are these being enforced? Those permissions are necessary and come with a cost, albeit small, but they also have a deterring effect.

Madame Chair, most of the lottery booths are currently on either private property, or on long lease property issued to a person or company. That means that they would be subleasing from those owners. We would have to do an assessment as to whether or not some of these lottery booths are on unoccupied government land, in which case I agree should come with a rental agreement from VROMI.

The faction notes that with respect to the lottery and lottery booths, late last year, an ordinance containing General Measures was established by the government. One was established for lottery permits, booths, and branches, but the implementation of that LBHAM was left up to the Government to do by a national decree. The faction would like to inquire whether this national decree has been issued, and if not, when is it the Government's intention to issue the national decree to put into force the LBHAM regarding lotteries and the like.

The national decree is currently at the governor, at this point in time we cannot say when it will go into effect.

The faction would also like to join its colleague's congratulations on the successful National Job Fair. The National Employment Service Center was created not only to support job matching but also to follow the process of persons being told that they could get employment or even some who received employment or employment offers on the spot. Can we get an overview of that unemployment//employment picture on Sint Maarten, as the unemployment numbers differ depending on what source is used to put forward the unemployment number on Sint Maarten? Talking about sources, the faction knows that the IMF has recently in their report referred to these types of revenues. Has any account been taken of the comments by the IMF?

The faction would like to know about the ring road and surrounding area and mentions the vendors in that area. In the context of offering and or allowing small and micro businesses to exist in a planned way.

The ring road has been used as an illegal dumping site in the past. The ministry had first cleaned up the area and modified the traffic flow to counteract illegal dumping. We are happy to see that these measures have improved in this regard. The Ministry is busy with a policy regarding vendors, in particular in the Philipsburg area, for a structured approach to improving overall aesthetic, quality, and hygiene. Regarding the plans of the Chamber of Commerce, they are finalizing technical drawings for their new building, which will include commercial as well as performing arts components.

What exactly are the plans and the plans that the Chamber of Commerce had for this area? What is happening, and is it being coordinated?

The Chamber of Commerce is still in the planning phase in regard to their development. Intends to continue moving steadfast to ensure completion. An agreement already exists with current vendors there in regard to the use of the property. The Ministry of TEATT continues to work alongside the Ministry of VROMI to address aesthetics and spatial development to ensure there is uniformity and standards to further enhance our product as an island.

The faction noted the upcoming FCCA conference. The faction would like to state that the island is dirty. The outlook of the island is that it's not being taken care of. Where do we stand with the car wreck removals?

The Ministry has maintained and is continuing with the car wreck removal program. This continues to be a positive contributor to the cleaning up of our island. This will be accompanied by a public awareness campaign to address the significant increase as well as supporting the ministry to improve controls.

The faction would also like to ask if the Government has looked at the results of the population census and if there are any actions that need to be taken on the results of the census. If so, which actions does the Government believe needs to be taken?

The Results of the Population Census was presented to the community. A few of the Ministries and along the previous COM by the Ministry of TEATT, Stats Dept. The major findings were that there is an aging of the population, which we know will have some impacts on the Health Care system. To this end, the importance of obtaining a General Health Insurance system is critical. There are some other various key results which will be taken up into the priorities of such a relatively low level of Education of the population, low birth rates, etc. These matters will be looked into by the Organization and discussed with the various Ministries to ascertain specific synchronization of policies, priorities and/or projects. One of the challenges that the Department of Statistics faced was personnel. that the project leader of the Population Census is no longer with the Ministry and the previous Department Head is

presently the Minister of VSA. The Department is currently in the process of recruiting another Senior Researcher, so that they can continue the project to ensure that the Government take the critical policy matters into account. This also applies for Stakeholders that may equally need this information for sound decision making on their part.

For 2025, the faction would like to see a public budget made available online, where people can understand what the Government has been putting the different revenues toward.

The faction also asks the Minister to provide an update on the laws that are at the Council of Advice, specifically where are those draft laws that needed to be completed having to do with the vacation allowances and pay increases. Where are those laws that needed to be completed ever since the vacation allowance and the increases would be paid?

The adjustments are in the national ordinance amending the 'Regeling vakantie en vrijstelling van dienst', and the national decree containing general measures amending the 'Bezoldigingsregeling ambtenaren'. In the meantime, the government has received the advice of the Council of Advice on both, and currently the "nader rapport", is being finalized by the department of Legal affairs, and the department of P&O. It should be noted that just like other departments, these departments also have a shortage of personnel.

In addition to the questions posed by the faction's colleagues, the Minister gave an answer with respect to the SZV and also indicated that this will be provided to Parliament. The faction would like to know if those numbers include a breakdown.

The faction states that the Minister indicated that the cuts would have an effect on the social registry. Now, the faction knows that that is a program that was done in the context of the NRPB, so the Trust Fund. What effect exactly will this budget amendment and the cuts under the Ministry of VSA have on that particular project?

We will not be able to continue with the hiring of the additional staffing to support the social registry such as the additional household managers, household coordinators. We are still able to continue with data collection though on a more reduced basis. After the execution of the pilot, emphasis will be placed on the communication plan and innovation for data sharing or application updates.

The faction would like to know if the agreement with the VNGI has been renewed.

The second phase of VNGIs' support will come to an end in November 2024. The current budget is funded by BZK in the Netherlands. There is still a lot of work to be done, and also other areas where VNGi could support VROMI. VNGi has the capacity and shared their willingness to continue providing their support. VNGI, VROMI and TWO are in discussion to find a solution to this matter.

What date was the road fund ordinance implementation to be? Has there been any delegated regulations based on that ordinance? Is there an updated road plan of the Ministry?

Ordinance is present. The Ministry is in discussion with SOAB for the “inwerkingsdatum”, implementation, of the law.

Does the Minister have any update on the plans of the Chamber on the Ring Road?

The chamber of commerce was granted a building permit some time ago. We have recently taken contact with the Chamber of Commerce on this, and still awaiting further clarity on the status of their plans.

The faction would like to know the state or status of the government property in Cole Bay on Orange Grove Road. What's the status there?

The property is government-owned. VROMI has cleared the debris on the terrain. As it was bought upon the Ministry of Justice's request, the Ministry is responsible for deciding how the land will be used.

The faction mentions the so-called fuel gasoline excises for the amount of over 11 million guilders. From the numbers in the budget, it is estimated that in 2022 just over 9 million guilders were collected. Can the Minister provide a brief overview on this matter of the gasoline excises that fall under Customs? The faction would like to know what was collected in 2023, as the budget only provides the actuals of 2022, and if a brief overview of the excises on fuel gasoline can be given.

Has been sent in writing because list is extensive

In the budget, we have several justice bodies that Sint Maarten contributes to based on Kingdom Laws. The faction would like the Minister to provide an overview of these, as they are not specified in the budget, but we see them mentioned, the judicial agencies and the amount that Sint Maarten is contributing.

Has been sent in writing because list is extensive

The faction would like to stress that we have taken on the responsibility of paying our part in some of these justice agencies, such as the Court of Justice, the Council for the Maintenance of Law, etc. There are several of them in the budget under the Ministry of Justice. Can the Minister provide an overview of those and the agreement based on which, every year, we have to contribute to these services as Sint Maarten? We are part of but are responsible for paying our share.

The faction knows that the Ministry of Justice also uses the services of the VKS. From the perspective of the Minister can we get the status of that? We know that they have presented several proposals to the Government, etc., so if that can be highlighted as well.

The VKS operates under the authority of the Prime Minister, making the outcomes of proposals to the government more appropriately addressed by his office. However, a service agreement exists between the Ministry of Justice (HVB) and the VKS. As part of this agreement, the VKS supplies personnel to prison daily.

The faction notes the issue of vaping amongst our young people has been of concern to the faction, not only today or yesterday but for several years, as this phenomenon continues to grow in Sint Maarten. In questioning the Government over the years, it was understood from the former Minister of Justice that this matter is so multifaceted that an interministerial group was created to deal with the matter of vaping amongst our young people. It was supposed to include the Ministry of ECYS, the Ministry of Justice, and, the faction believes, TEATT. The faction would like to know if such an interministerial group has been established. Was the Ministry of Justice part of it? How was it established—was it done by LB or MB—and if so, can this be shared? And this is in respect to the statement of the previous Minister of ECYS.

Yes, the Inter-Ministerial Committee assigned an Inter-Ministerial Workgroup with representatives of the Ministry of Justice, TEATT, VSA and my Ministry of ECYS with the objective to adjust the relevant National Ordinance regarding the sale of cigarettes and alcohol to incorporate the definition of vaping products and, include it as restricted item for sale to minors under the age of 18.

Yes, the Interministerial group has been created. The Ministry of Justice, TEATT, VSA, and ECYS are included in this group. The objective is to adjust the relevant National Ordinance regarding the sale of cigarettes and alcohol to incorporate the definition of vaping products and include them as restricted items for sale to minors under the age of 18.

The faction has already asked the same question that was asked to the Minister in the capacity of Minister of Justice regarding vaping amongst the youth. The faction would like to repeat it here as part of the Ministry of ECYS. It is that Ministry that informed the faction in the past that an interministerial group of civil servants was to be put together. The faction would like to know if that was done. Was it established? With which ministries and with what specific objectives?

Yes, the Inter-Ministerial Committee assigned an Inter-Ministerial Workgroup with representatives of the Ministry of Justice, TEATT, VSA and my Ministry of ECYS with the objective to adjust the relevant National Ordinance regarding the sale of cigarettes and alcohol to incorporate the definition of vaping products and, include it as restricted item for sale to minors under the age of 18.

The faction believes that it would be important for us to get an overall picture of the counseling and crisis intervention initiatives in our educational system, especially, but not solely, in our high schools. Can the Minister get the state of that type of student service? Counseling and crisis intervention. How much of it do we have? As for Sint Maarten's educational system, how do we fare in that respect?

All schools have their designated care-team which caters to the psychological, behavioral, and educational needs of all students. Care-teams may consist of Student Care Coordinators, Social Workers/Guidance Counselors. Several schools also have psychologists and educational diagnosticians.

Care-team members also receive ongoing professional development initiatives from SSSD to better cater to the needs of their students.

There are no laws, policies or regulations in place that allow the SSSD to gather the bigger picture on care in our schools.

The faction states that the Special Education policy was finalized and believes that special education is one of the areas in education that needs our attention. With that policy in place, what steps have been taken or will be taken, and according to what timeline will these different steps be taken?

As mentioned, the Roadmap towards Implementation of the Special Needs Education Policy is being drafted. It will serve as a strategic guide, outlining the necessary steps, timelines, responsibilities, and resource allocation to ensure the successful integration of SNE Policy into Sint Maarten's educational framework. This is expected to be finalized by the end of 2024, with the implementation phase starting in 2025.

Additionally, the Department of Education is in the initial stages of developing a framework for soliciting funding for students with special educational needs, including indicators that would be used to track progress in meeting the needs of these students over time. The intention is to realize this change in policy for funding as per the 2025-2026 academic year, codifying it in the "Lbham Bekostiging Onderwijs" shortly thereafter.

Furthermore, since the establishment of the Special Needs Education Policy, the Professional Development Program was expanded this year to include the Special Education Program, with several teachers enrolled.

Finally, the Ministry of ECYS is working on an Inclusive Education training which will be developed in collaboration with the National Recovery Program Bureau (NRPB) via the Fostering Resilient Learning Project (FRLP), in the hopes of realizing this training as soon as possible.

The faction notes that the capital budget for education for 2024 has been reduced by approximately 12 million guilders. Is that reduction the project that was presented by the Government at the time for the Charlotte Brookson Academy? Since that was taken out of the budget for 2024, and in the budget, it is anticipated that in 2025, a capital project for a high school will be included; the faction would like to know if that is the same thing. The amount in 2025 is less than 12 million, but is it the same thing, or is this high school projected in 2025 a public high school on Sint Maarten?

The Naf.12 million originally listed in the 2024 capital investment budget, which has now been reduced, was allocated for a high school and not specifically for Charlotte Brookson Academy. The capital investment for 2025 does not include a high school in its 2025 budget." At the time of the finalization of the draft budget 2025, the necessary substantiation was not available, making it impossible for the 12 million to be placed on the budget which was also the case in 2024.

The faction would like to refer to information that was received—answers that were received as Parliament—from the question regarding what is taking place on the Ring Road. What are the plans from the Government building right down to the traffic light? What are the Government's plans, and where the Ministry of ECYS is concerned? The faction took note that the plans of the Chamber of Commerce include a Performing Arts Center. The faction would like to know if the Minister is aware of these plans. What exactly should the faction imagine when it is stated that a Performing Arts Center in the building is to be constructed by the Chamber of Commerce on the Pond Fill/Ring Road?

The Department of Culture has not been made aware of any plans regarding any proposed plans for a Performing Arts Center to be constructed in the center of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry. No discussions of that nature have been had as far as we are aware.

The plans that we are aware of are the plans by the Government for a Performing Arts Center projected on the location of the John Larmonie Center on Longwall Road. Those plans are being reviewed as they stem from about 10 years ago and were designed without any indebt involvement by the users.

The project that was presented in the 2024 budget for the Charlotte Brookson Academy was to include such a center. The question at the time was if this is going to be for the general population's use. So, the faction is quite interested in knowing if the Minister knows of these plans of the Chamber of Commerce and what exactly is to be imagined when it is stated that it includes a center for the performing arts.

The faction would like to support the request for the report on the state of education.

The State of Education Reports of 2017-2018, 2018-2019 and 2020-2022 have been submitted to the Minister of Education. A digital presentation of The State of Education Report of 2020-2022 was also done on June 21, 2024, to the ECYS Cabinet. The State of Education Report 2022-2023 is in draft pending corrections based on data received from schools.

The faction was able to so quickly forward the investment and diversification policy guide of the Government because the faction had it at hand. Given that policy plan and recommended steps, is there an implementation plan of the Ministry with respect to the particular items that are being proposed? If not, can such be made, especially in the context of when we get to the 2025 budget, so that where funds are

necessary to execute certain parts of this investment and diversification guide, it can then be reflected in the budget?

As it regards the agriculture policy that is also there on the books—a very comprehensive one. Can the steps to be taken on an annual basis be identified so they can be reflected, where necessary, in the budget? Minister, referring to the agriculture policy and the efforts in the area of agriculture, the faction wants to know if the Ministry is aware of the recent article written by the local expert in this area, Mr. Beervoets, with respect to the devastating effects of the invasive species on Sint Maarten on agriculture. If not, the faction can have this sent immediately to the Ministry, as it is extremely important what is written in that latest report by the local expert.

Yes, we can, and we will. Agriculture, Livestock, and Fisheries are key areas of focus for the Ministry of TEATT. Despite the 2024 budget cuts, the Department of ETT has prioritized the "Agri in Schools" project, which promotes agriculture in school curriculums to encourage local food production.

The department has also applied for external funding to continue key initiatives, such as expanding local agriculture, supporting small farmers, and working to reduce food imports. Plans for farmer's markets and agri-tourism will be included in the 2025 budget to ensure progress toward increasing local food production and boosting food security.

The Ministry is coordinating with other departments to finalize an action plan and secure funding, which will be presented in the 2025 budget discussions.

Yes, the Ministry is aware of the article and by extension as mentioned via the Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries Policy invasive species is a threat to the development of this industry. Through various programs and studies, we are currently assessing the best ways to deal with these issues moving forward.

The faction mentions a recent article by Turning Point regarding an offer made to them and their response to that offer coming from a group or company that either has or is expecting permission to have something to do in the area of cannabis. The faction did not fully understand the interaction between Turning Point and the group and would like to know if the Minister can provide some explanation regarding that matter.

The Native Nation group, contracted by the previous administration, is responsible for establishing cannabis legislation and regulations for St. Maarten. They have met with Turning Point to share information and discuss concerns and insights.

The current board of Turning Point is aware of the article regarding its former management, the Stichting Cooperation, and has since met with Native Nation representatives. Turning Point is assessing Native Nation's plans for cannabis legislation and its potential impact on St. Maarten and their foundation. No decisions or positions have been made yet.

With respect to SME development the faction mentions that we also have a policy on SME development. Are there any reports on the execution of this policy?

Since the approval of the MSME Policy in 2021, several key initiatives have been launched to support micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in St. Maarten:

- SEDP Pilot Project: Provided training for MSMEs, with 47 participants completing the course and 26 new businesses incorporated. A loan application for \$891,390.64 was submitted to the NRPB for further business growth.
- RED Carpet Treatment Pilot (2022-2023): This program, in collaboration with the Department of Economic Licenses, reduced costs and simplified procedures for obtaining business licenses.
- Small Enterprise Development Center (SEDC): Launched in September, the SEDC offers support to entrepreneurs, including business counseling, plan writing, training, networking, and B2B meetings.
- Enterprise Development Program (EDP): Four training sessions scheduled for 2024-2025, with 30 participants in the first session. These aim to equip entrepreneurs with the skills needed for success.
- Seasonal Events: Initiatives like Back Street Bonanza and Koopavond provide MSMEs the chance to showcase products and boost sales during peak seasons.

Access to finance and continued training remain priorities for MSME growth.

Minister, the Gaming Control Board, the amount in the budget has been reduced by 91,000 guilders, but there is still 84,000 guilders remaining. Given that the plan is being prepared via the Landspakket, the faction would like to know what that amount is for that is in our budget.

This budgeted amount is Sint Maarten's contribution to the overall cost to draft the individual actions plans for the establishment of the Sint Maarten Gaming Authority which is being majority funded by TWO.

Given the movement of the vendors at the Philipsburg Market, will they be exempted from paying their monthly/ annual fees because of the uprooting?

Article 1, par. h of the Ordinance on Street Trade (Landsverordening openbare straathandel) defines the right to being in possession of the market vending license (the so-called 'vergunningsrecht') as being equal to the amount owed to the country for holding a license such as this. The ordinance that regulates these fees is the Precariorechten- en Retributieverordening and falls under the authority of the Minister of Finance. The Minister of Finance is therefore the relevant authority to indicate whether an exemption of paying the market vending license fees is possible under the aforementioned ordinance.

The faction asked about the permits and fees in connection with the law that regulates the use of public spaces (*pricario rechten*), and the fees associated with that. The faction asked if these monies are being collected. Recently, a firm made a statement regarding their payment made in order to put down advertisement boards, and a board was vandalized. Are all these fees collected for those making use?

The issuance of advertisement board permits falls under the authority of the Minister of Justice. The collection of the annual fees falls under the authority of the Minister of Finance.

The faction would like to know if the national decree for the lottery booths was issued.

If this question is referring to the LB to implement the LBHAM regarding lottery booths, etc., no it did not as it is currently at His Excellency, The Governor for decision making. Once a decision is taken the Ministry will inform via publication on the Government platforms. See also my previous answers.

The faction would like to know if there is any way that Union Road could be given some attention, given the developments that are taking place in Cole Bay around Union Road. The faction believes that we will be seeing some serious issues with respect to traffic movement, pedestrians, etc., and related issues.

The faction notes the ongoing discussion about Winair shares, including whether to sell them or not, and reminds that there was a motion passed by Parliament when the matter of selling Winair shares came up in the budget.

When it comes to government-owned institutions like these, due diligence is essential. The government must closely monitor its companies to ensure that crucial decisions regarding their future are not made at the 11th hour, which then forces the shareholder to take urgent action.

The faction is asking for further clarification on a question regarding the Charlotte Brookson Academy and the amount that was on the Government budget for that school, if understood correctly, in the established budget, there was not only an amount on the capital budget of the Government for that school but a whole presentation was made by the Minister of Education about the plans for this school. With that not being in this amendment, the faction is asking whether the project has been scrapped.

The faction would like to know if the Charlotte Brookson Academy project has been completely scrapped. In 2025, according to this budget amendment, there is a post for 12,100,000 guilders for a high school under the “*Dienst openbare onderwijs*”. The faction is asking whether that is a replacement for the 12 million that was in the 2024 budget for the Charlotte Brookson Academy.

So, would there be a National Center for the Performing Arts, whether it be in the building of the Chamber of Commerce, or whether the renovations at John Larmonie

are going to be of such a nature since there is only 2 million budgeted for that, that there would then be a center there for the Performing Arts?

The amounts allocated for the construction of a high school have been removed from the 2024 budget and also the 2025 budget. The required substantiation and detailed cost projections are to be included in the request for Capital Investment. Indeed, the investment for Naf 12.1M incorporates the construction of an entirely new campus for a high school on the island of St. Maarten, complete with state-of-the-art facilities. This would include Theater Arts Dance studios, Theater Arts Drama studios, a recording studio, sports facilities, and a 500-seat state-of-the-art theater to nurture artistic talent, foster creativity and promote cultural exchange.

The Party for Progress-faction has taken note of the draft with interest and has the following questions. The faction mentions the amendment overview that notes the changes that are made in this budget versus the original budget. Tracing the *baten en lasten* from the 2024 approved budget in March versus this amended budget in 2024, there is a 50,000 difference in the *baten* for the old one. The faction would like to know if this is something very small that could be adjusted. The original amount refers to an amount of 574832303. Can we make sure that that is corrected?

This will be adjusted via Nota van Wijziging, thank you for pointing this out.

The faction noted the significant reduction significant reduction, as stated by the Minister of Finance, in personnel costs that were overstated by some 12 million. The faction continues and mentions that these are its expectations based on the presentation from the Minister of Finance of the 12 million decreases in budget costs. The faction mentions that was noted for the Ministry of General Affairs is budgeted vacancies of 9 whereas in the original budget it was 5 vacancies. The budgeted personnel vacancies cost this year was 536300, and in the previous year, it was 580906. If our budgeted vacancies count, number of employees, are going up by 4, why are the costs going down? Did the makeup of the 9 employees or the budgeted employees change? Was it persons with less salary, for instance, that would basically match the fact that you have more employees, but they cost less in comparison to the 2024 approved budget of March?

The reason the budgeted vacancies remain the same while the amounts are lower is due to the shorter time frame for which these vacancies are now budgeted. Initially, they were budgeted for 6 months, but currently, they are planned for only 2 months. Consequently, even though the number of vacancies may increase or stay the same, the budgeted amount appears lower because of this shorter period. With only about 2 months remaining in 2024, it's important to make realistic budget adjustments to reflect how many people we can reasonably expect to hire in the remaining time.

Ministry of Finance. Is there a change in the profile of the vacancies compared to the 2024 approved budget? Ministry of Justice. The budgeted vacancies count in the 2024 approved budget was 53 employees whereas now it is down to 3. The faction continues and mentions that the cost associated with 53 employees versus 3

employees is a significant amount of 2.8 million, which is an expected trend that you will see. You have less people; you have less cost. Can the Ministry explain why we are now budgeting for 50 persons less than in March of 2024?

The reductions were necessary as the funds as projected in the approved 2024 budget would not be collected due to the pending legislation not yet finalized. Further, the tax collection is lagging behind in comparison to last year's budget. Without these adjustments, the government would lack the financial resources.

Additionally, these adjustments are crucial to secure, among other things, the EUR 16 million contribution from the Netherlands for the prison project. If SXM failed to secure its own contribution (a loan request via the Netherlands), we would lose the Dutch contribution as well. This would mean that SXM would need to secure ANG 75 million instead of the currently requested ANG 43 million, resulting in an additional ANG 1 million annually in interest costs for the country for perhaps the next 15 years, based on an interest rate of 3.4%.

The loan request is contingent on approval from CFT, which is granted through a positive Article 12 advice on the budget. If the budget is deemed unrealistic by CFT, we would not receive this positive advice.

Failure to make these adjustments as advised by CFT would have resulted in losing the funding from the Netherlands, as these funds are contingent upon SXM securing its portion of the funding.

The total cuts for justice were: NAF 3.8 mln of which NAF 1.5 mln under personnel (vacancies that were not filled yet at the time cuts were made) and NAF 2.3 "materiele kosten" primarily under goods and services.

In the Ministry of ECYS, there was also a big decrease in budgeted vacancies from 24 persons to 6 persons in the right direction. Is this including the actual critical vacancies needed for the Ministry of ECYS considering that is a difference of 18 employees? The faction mentions that the Ministry of VSA seems very straightforward in terms of the changes.

The decrease in budgeted vacancies was based on two areas where budget cuts could be implemented: personnel costs (NAf 2.1 million) and goods and. These cuts were not limited to eliminating full vacancies; they also included adjustments services (NAf 1.3 million). The Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth, and Sport could not reduce the goods and services budget as much, so most of the cuts came from the personnel budget based on the number of months personnel were reflected in the budget. For example, this occurred when personnel transferred out of the Ministry or retired during the year. The six remaining budgeted vacancies are in the Division of Public Education Teaching Staff.

As it regards the Ministry of TEATT, the faction would like an explanation as to why the budgeted personnel for the current year shifted from 185 to 183 persons, but

the associated costs for that is about 1.7 million. Can the Ministry explain the 1.7 million costs when we have a change of two personnel? If we're looking at budgeted vacancies for the current year the count went down from 11 persons in this amended budget from 17 in the prior year with a decrease of about 1 million. The faction would like to get an overall understanding, for this one, like the others, if there is a change in the vacancies and the associated salaries with those vacancies?

In the original 2024 budget, certain vacancies were planned for a full 12-month period. However, with the amended budget, we took a more realistic approach by adjusting the start dates for those roles. As a result, the months allocated for some positions were reduced to 4 or 5 months, depending on the circumstances. Additionally, we had a few cases—three in total—where civil servants left the organization, either due to retirement, resignation, or a leave of absence. While the months allocated for these positions have been cut accordingly, they are still reflected in the budget as active workers.

The faction continues and mentions the Ministry of VROMI. The budgeted vacancies for the current year for the Ministry of VROMI are now 8 in this amended budget, and it changed from 1 in the budget that was approved in March. However, this year's budget for personnel vacancies is 8 persons, which is 28,000 guilders versus 44,000 guilders for 1 employee. The faction is of the opinion that this doesn't make sense unless the 8 employees are getting paid somewhere around less than 3000 guilders a year in total.

[Refer to previous answer provided on vacancies.](#)

The faction also mentions that the budgeted personnel cost for the current year is 112 in this amended budget versus 108 in the approved March budget, but the cost went down. The total budgeted personnel costs are now 8.7 million versus 9.4 million with less employees. The faction would like an explanation as to why we have a decrease in salaries that don't really match with what the vacancies would be. The faction would like a little bit more information on the type of vacancies that are there. The faction would like to avoid that we are playing around with numbers so that we could match the decrease. It is important that we can substantiate that 12 million decrease with actual items that we need to make this realistic.

[Refer to previous answer provided on vacancies.](#)

The faction mentions the Ring Road and would like to know whether or not the Ring Road is still going to be considered as a traffic alleviation route. Besides the vendors that are there, is it going to be used to ease up a little bit of traffic in the town?

The faction mentions the cash burn rate regarding NV GEBE. The faction believes the answer received was 3 million less than the money coming in. The concern of the faction is that you have a significant portion of customers that are not paying because customers have now, unfortunately, not paid on a regular monthly basis. The cash available on hand for GEBE to use to cover expenses is now coming under significant

threat. What decisions do we need to take to help GEBE with its burn rate? The faction hopes that it is not 30 days. The faction believes that internal decisions need to be made to make sure we slow down that burn rate. You have to start looking at where you cut costs or where you start collecting cash. If decisions that have been taken lately to help people pay have not worked for the last year, harder things need to happen, uncomfortable decisions need to happen, and cost-cutting needs to happen. We are talking about an existing company and not a start-up. The faction believes that 3 million less is not a sufficient answer.

The faction would like to make sure that the cut that we saw in the 50 had nothing to do with additional persons related to the changes in the function book. The faction would like to verify that there was nothing in there that would affect function book changes related to all the work that had to be done for the persons to bring them up to proper standing within the function book.

The faction inquires regarding the parameters of the loan for GEBE for the generators. What is the plan behind it? What is the concept behind it?

The plan of government is to obtain the loan from the Netherlands, and with the loan purchase the generators. NV Gebe and the Government will sign a lease to own agreement so GEBE can receive the generators from the government. The government will pay back the loan with the payments received from GEBE. During the last months, together with GEBE, the Government concluded that this option is more feasible and transparent.

Also, what happens in case of disaster to that concept? What consideration is given to the possibility of a disaster that impacts the island and GEBE and thus makes it difficult for them to repay this loan?

Considering the responsibility that the gov has towards the people of Sint Maarten in whatever unanticipated disaster that may present the government will have to assume its responsibility to make sure that the commitments made are being adhered to. Depending on the complexity of the challenge, the government will pragmatically look for alternative solutions.

Looking down the road, the faction would like to know from GEBE and from the fact that the Minister of Finance has highlighted that our debt position is growing, and we have to manage it carefully. Hence, what are the Government's plans when it comes to Telem and GEBE if any type of catastrophe befalls us?

The Government, in its capacity as shareholder representatives, will assume its responsibility for these very important government owned companies. It is a known fact that there is a backlog in the situation of these companies, being it maintenance of the building or equipment, or the financial situation, and the level of service that should be provided.

It is known what the government is doing with GEBE, at least on the urgent measures to try to guarantee a constant and stable service. The next step is to take

measures to strengthen the management of GEBE and finalize the recruitment process for a more permanent managing board.

With Telem, the Government is currently at the table and discussing the various options for the survival of Telem.

The faction inquires regarding the status of the tax reform legislation that the previous Government informed Parliament about. The faction is not yet certain if the document is at the Council of Advice. Can the Minister give an update on that? It continues to be a recurring issue. The CFT signaled and highlighted this issue as well to improve our tax compliance and our entire tax regime so that we can find ways to generate more revenue for the country.

There is a tax program focused on tax legislation, which is part of the *landspakket*. When I took office, this was one of my first priorities. To be completely honest, it seems that this specific project has been stagnant. While externals have been hired to draft laws, it appears that none of these laws have been submitted to government. There is a follow up meeting set with the Working Group Tax Improvement in the beginning of November, where we will go over all the details of the program so far, after which a plan of approach will be agreed upon.

In addition, I have met with **Audit Team Sint Maarten (ATS)** and instructed the Department of Fiscal Affairs to draft a '**Nota van Wijziging**' to include ATS in the Tax Law to improve **tax compliance**. They are currently working on this amendment.

ATS is staffed with competent **local Sint Maarten professionals**, but they are currently limited in executing tax-related tasks because they are not included in the law. As it stands, only **SBAB**, a Curaçao-based entity, is included in the law. It is crucial that we safeguard and empower our local professionals.

The faction would like to know the Government's outstanding debt to SZV and APS, considering our debt positions.

At the end of Q2 the outstanding for SZV is Naf 113,7 mln and APS 11,2 mln.

The faction inquires about the status of the proposed Airbnb/other housing platform tax. The reason for this question is that we hear again that the tourist tax is coming back, but, in the past, it has been shared by our private sector small and large hoteliers that stakeholders have resisted the implementation of such a tax. This is not an unknown thing. Airlines and cruise lines usually say that they only favor such a tax if it is directly reinvested into tourism products. Hence, the faction is assuming that this tax will face the same resistance now under this Government as under the previous Government. So, what is the status of the discussions on whether Airbnb and other housing platforms pay their fair share into the tax coffers?

The *logeerbelasting* (roomtax) applies to Airbnb revenue at a 5% rate. I understand that there is at least one stakeholder, the SHTA, who opposes the tourist tax, arguing that it could deter tourists from choosing Sint Maarten as their destination. However, as I previously stated, we cannot continue to place the financial

burden solely on the people of Sint Maarten. The 5% Airbnb tax alone will not generate the additional revenue required to support the country, which is why both are necessary compliance and collection of the lodging tax and implementation of the tourist tax.

Our plan is to establish a dedicated team to focus on collecting Airbnb taxes, starting with larger villas. The **tourism tax** is a key priority for me and this government, and we are currently awaiting advice from the SER (Social Economic Council) to proceed further. While some stakeholders may disagree, I hope that the SER will fulfill their task without unnecessary delays. I have been informed that we should receive this advice back from the SER before the end of the year, and I remain hopeful to have it in hand by then.

The faction continues and would like to know, as it relates to the HAP and medical referrals, if there will be some other type of action taken to hold whoever is accountable for fraud. It is a fiscal crime whether it happens here, in Santo Domingo, or in Panama; at the end of the day, what it boils down to is that it's fraudulent behavior with semipublic or public funding, and either way, it is a crime.

The Soualiga Action Movement-faction has taken note of the draft. The faction would like to receive all of the departure taxes from all of the airports in the region. Sint Maarten, Aruba, Antigua, Anguilla, St. Kitts, Curacao.

As requested, a comparison of departure taxes, fees, and passenger charges across several Caribbean islands, effective as of 2024:

- Curacao: Total fees for international destinations are \$64.47, with a breakdown that includes a passenger facility charge and fees for safety oversight and border security.
- Bonaire: Fees total \$22.47, including similar breakdowns.
- Aruba: U.S. Customs, Immigration, and APHIS fees are listed, totaling over \$67 for international travelers.
- Antigua: Departure taxes are 10% of the fare for all flights except those to Barbuda. Additional administration charges apply for flights, depending on whether passengers are in transit.
- St. Kitts: Total departure fees of \$37, with airport charges and environmental levies included.
- Anguilla: Departure fees range from \$20 to \$67 depending on the passenger's age.
- St. Maarten: Departure tax ranges from \$42 (international) to \$26 (domestic), with incremental increases planned through 2029.

Can the Minister provide the financial positions of all government-owned companies? Not only the ones that we know now that are facing challenges, which are TelEm and GEBE. THE faction would also like to know about the harbor and the airport. The faction would also like to know the financial situation of the SZV.

At the end of Q2 the outstanding for SZV is Naf 113,7 mln. In addition the Q2 report was submitted with regard to the financial position of the government owned companies and SZV page 23-29 from Q2 report.

What went wrong with the loan that was approved some years ago for the purchase of two brand new generators for GEBE, but GEBE never drew on the loan? Can the Minister explain why that loan, to the tune of 90 million U.S. dollars, was never drawn on? Why didn't that happen?

How much money does the government owe the SZV? The faction would also like to know who was in government when all of those monies were loaned from the SZV to the government. Can the Minister give the amount of cost-cutting measures that were presented in the 2024 budget that was presented in March? Were there any cuts in that budget, and how much? Can the Minister name the companies that received the tax holiday? Can the Minister tell us who those companies are? As government, what incentives do we offer to investors, whether local or foreign investors? Is there a package that the government has that it offers to its potential investors, whether it be local or foreign?

Unfortunately, I am unable to answer the question regarding who has been granted Tax Holidays for the following reasons.

In accordance with Article 62 of the Constitution, every member of the Parliament has the right to ask questions to the ministers. The ministers must answer these questions within a reasonable period, unless it is considered that answering them would be contrary to the interest of the Country or the Kingdom. The requested information is subject to a legal confidentiality obligation, namely Article 50 of the General National Tax Ordinance, as it requests the names of individual taxpayers who enjoy a special tax treatment. Considering this, in this case in order to determine whether answering the specific question is or is not contrary to the interest of Sint Maarten, a consideration of interests must be made between, on the one hand, the interest of those concerned in keeping their information confidential, and, on the other hand, the interest of parliament in being well-informed. The individuals involved are major investors who should be able to trust that their tax information will not be disclosed to anyone other than those involved in the implementation of the tax ordinance. If this trust is breached, Sint Maarten could suffer significant damage to its image, which could negatively affect the investment climate in Sint Maarten. Therefore, I believe that, in this case, the interest of those concerned in maintaining the confidentiality of their information outweighs the interest of parliament in being well-informed. In this case, answering the aforementioned question is therefore considered to be contrary to the interest of Sint Maarten, and as a result, the relevant question must remain unanswered.

From a Finance perspective the incentive is Tax Holiday. Besides this there are no property taxes which is also an incentive for external investors.

The Ministry of TEATT in December of 2022 has published its Investment & Diversification Strategy (policy doc). Said document refers to the need to provide incentives for Investors both Foreign and Local that will have an impactful ROI. We continue on a interministerial level to develop such and will surely present and publish once completed.

The faction mentions that we have a population of about 60,000, and we have more than 13,000 persons who are over the age of 60 years old, and we have a problem with our cemeteries. Our cemeteries are 85 to 90% filled. It's a looming problem, and the faction believes that we have to get ahead of it before it becomes a major crisis.

The faction would like to know how long the Minister has been the Minister of VSA.

The Minister was sworn in as Minister of VSA on May 3rd, 2024. 5 months and 12 days.

Can the Minister explain, on page 98 of the budget, the drastic drop off where it is showing 1.1224.750 guilders to a reduction of 412? Which projects were these, and when did they end? Did they yield positive results?

This pertains to a difference between the budgeted amount of 2023 to 2024. The projects are the Public Health law, mental health legislation, national health insurance and legislation on implementing a Registrar for health care professionals. These projects are now linked directly within the technical support programs of TWO and VNGI.

On page 96, *dienst arbeidszaken*, hiring of employees for departments of licenses through the outsourcing agency. Which outsourcing agency is this?

Sint Maarten Placement Network was previously used.

Why 115,000 for this process while we have unemployment on the island? Couldn't this be placed in the newspaper, and wouldn't that have been cheaper for the department?

This was a provision put in place following hurricanes Irma and Maria as well as COVID 19, when there was urgent and immediate need to have the Division boosted with the Human Resources. Currently, these persons, who are locals, have been placed within the Organization and are no longer under the outsourcing agency.

On page 91 there is 125 thousand allocated. Who is this medical advisor? Is it one or more that the Minister is talking about? What is their advice and their findings on Sint Maarten's situation? If so, has the Minister taken any measures according to the advice that the Minister has received? Are these funds being accounted for?

The medical advisor mentioned here pertains to a medical doctor who provides the medical support for the ambulance services and the oversight for all the medical

related responsibilities and procedures. The advisor bears the ultimate responsibility of the medical actions carried out by the ambulance nursing staff and therefore addresses complaints regarding the ambulance services and evaluates and provides training for staff continuously. The overall advice of the medical advisor is discussed with department head and taken up in the enhancement of the processes and procedures of the services provided by the ambulance.

The faction states that it is aware that the government contracts certain medical practitioners to be the doctor on call to do the *overlijdingsaktes*. The faction does not know if that is still the case. It knows that this was the case in the past and that those doctors would be paid through the government. Families are now complaining that when they go for the *overlijdingsakte*, they are being charged by the practitioner for this. The faction would like to know if that funding for those doctors has been discontinued or if it is something now that when the family goes for the *overlijdingsakte*, they pay the doctor directly and they pay for the service. The faction feels that it is unfair for the government to be paying on one end and then subsequently the family has to pay for the *aktes* as well.

There is no established tariff for this service, however the funds Government has budgeted pertain to an amount allocated as on-call services for physicians to be available in the event this service is needed. The family still has to pay for the *akte* itself in the event that the service was used.

The faction continues and mentions the *BIG registratie*. The faction states that it knows that that registration allows primarily for recruitment for medical practitioners out of the Netherlands. Are there any considerations for the recruitment of medical practitioners that can come from within the region to Sint Maarten?

The recently published policy “ Policy Establishment of Healthcare Services” includes the procedures assessment of competencies of medical professionals who are not registered in the BIG to establish themselves on the island.

Can the Minister give what the financial consequences and repercussions were for our economy as it pertains to GEBE? The faction believes that we have to put real emphasis on what the financial repercussions are to our economy and the long-term effect on our economy if we do not get a handle on this GEBE situation.

The faction states that Sint Maarten is dirty. The faction would like to know the plans of the Minister for clean up and a facelift for us to start to take pride in. You cannot legislate decency and pride. The faction would like to know the plans of the Minister for the beautification of this island, especially the areas that are traveled the most.

At the end of November VNGi will deliver an improved collection strategy and plan for solid waste on St. Maarten. The aim is to find the major root cause of excessive as well as illegal waste disposal and work towards an efficient solution that can be applied easily implemented. VNGI is also working with VROMI and the Inter

ministerial waste cooperation committee (IWCC) to ensure other ministries' waste related matters are included in the strategy and plan.

Beautification of the island will be addressed in an Aesthetics policy, addressing, amongst other things, standards to enhance the beauty and quality of public spaces.

The faction mentions that another looming crisis is regarding the cemetery. Our cemeteries are at capacity, and with the alarming rate of persons passing away, we will soon find ourselves in a crisis where we won't have places to bury our people.

In the short term, the use of above-ground burials, commonly known as mini-vaults, is being considered as a solution to the limited space. This method has already been implemented in other areas and is currently being explored for the Cay Bay Cemetery.

The faction wanted to know the departure tax of all the airports in the region.

The faction mentions that it always thought that it was important to have a strategy, and not only a strategy but to put things in an investment package, whereas when you go to these trade shows and when you are trying to solicit persons to come and invest in your economy, that you have something that is concrete that you can offer. Whereas it does not come across in Parliament that when the persons on the executive branch do give some kind of incentive to investors, that is something nefarious. The faction believes that this should be done for local investors where local investors, to a certain parameter, are given a tax holiday as well. The faction thinks that this will put a balance between what a foreign investor invest and a local investor, but it also makes the local man, the proverbial small man, feel like government is doing something on their behalf.

What is the economic impact that the power outages of GEBE had on our country? The same small businesses and the same local businesses that we talk about were gravely affected by these constant power outages.

In the third quarter of this year, the Ministry recognized the importance of conducting an Economic Impact Assessment to evaluate the effects of power outages on the economy and businesses. To achieve this, the Economic Census Survey was launched in August 2024, with fieldwork expected to conclude by the end of October 2024.

Once the data collection is complete and the results have been thoroughly analyzed, the Ministry will be able to present comprehensive findings on the economic impact. We kindly request that the Honorable Member of Parliament allows the Department of Statistics and the Department of ETT to finalize this critical project, enabling us to respond with accurate and informed insights.

The faction would like to know what GEBE paid in concession fees to the government over the last four years. What was the amount taken out of GEBE in

2017/2018 to balance the government budget? Can the Minister give that exact amount?

A settlement agreement was made between government and GEBE during the tenure of former Minister Geerlings. The utility bills of government are offset with the concession fees every quarter. At year-end monies of the concession fees are transferred to government. This transfer did not take place since either 2021 or 2022. The offsetting of the bills is up to date. By 2017 government owed GEBE 13 million in utility bills. GEBE paid Government 30 million, so the surplus at the time was 17 million guilders.

The faction mentions the Winair situation. In the opinion of the Minister, is it wise to sell government assets in order to balance the government's budget? The faction states that it is reminded of another scenario where some 20 something million guilders was taken out of another government-owned company to balance the government's budget and now that government company finds themselves in a quagmire in which you have to take capital expenditures to help that very company. Why is it that whenever a company seems to be doing good, it is the first modus operandi to go and, in our local twang, rinse out that company?

The faction states that it is in favor of acquisitions, mergers, and takeovers. The faction would like the opinion of the Minister of Finance on whether it is a wise decision to liquidate the assets of your government-owned companies to balance the budget of the government.

The faction commends the Minister of VSA on the trip she took to get an assessment of what is going on in Panama and Colombia. The faction believes that in 2020, the amount that SZV paid in medical referrals was somewhere in the range of 30 million annually. Can the Minister inform if that price has gone up or gone down? Are there more medical referrals? The faction believes that it is important to also take the persons who are in need of care into consideration. The faction advises the Minister to revisit that whole arrangement and see if it can be tweaked.

Based on the audited financial statements, the medical referral expenses incurred during 2019 was ANG 29.8M. In 2020 there was a precipitous decline to ANG 18.1M. This decline was attributed primarily due to the travel restrictions imposed by referral countries due to the COVID 19 pandemic amongst others.

Medical referrals increased to ANG19.9M in 2021 and further increased to ANG 23.1M during the year 2022 with a further increase to ANG 33.7M in 2023. The incline in medical referrals after 2020 is due to:

Relaxation of Covid 19 pandemic protocols which led to relaxing of travel restriction for care overseas.

Increased medical referral expenses to Columbia and the Netherlands and high referral cost to Panama.

Although there is an adjusted medical referral expenses process whereby general practitioners are only allowed to refer to a specialist at SMMC. The specialist at SMMC will then assess if the treatment can be provided locally. If not, only then can the client be referred overseas. This measure has resulted in a significant decrease in the number of medical referrals abroad in recent years; however, the cases being referred abroad are more complex and generally more costly.

Moreover, in the table below it depicts the number of persons that were referred per fund for the period 2019-2023:

Persons Referred 2019 - 2023					
Fund	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
FZOG					
Number of persons	97	36	32	44	54
Number of referrals	147	48	38	53	61
Average	1.52	1.33	1.19	1.20	1.13
OZR					
Number of persons	381	131	155	165	205
Number of referrals	554	158	171	189	248
Average	1.45	1.21	1.10	1.15	1.21
ZV					
Number of persons	755	262	249	343	398
Number of referrals	1,080	308	289	396	472
Average	1.43	1.18	1.16	1.15	1.19
Total number of persons	1,233	429	436	552	657
Total number of referrals	1,781	514	498	638	781
Average	1.44	1.20	1.14	1.16	1.19

In addition, the following table below illustrates what the top ten specialisms SZV's patients were referred to during the period 2019 through 2023.

Top 10 Specialisms Referred To										
#	2019		2020		2021		2022		2023	
	Specialism	Count	Specialism	Count	Specialism	Count	Specialism	Count	Specialism	Count
1	Orthopedics	308	Neurosurgery	75	Radio diagnostics	101	Radio diagnostics	108	Neurosurgery	107
2	Neurology	275	Radio diagnostics	74	Ophthalmology	69	Ophthalmology	76	Surgery	95
3	Neurosurgery	272	Orthopedics	73	Cardiology	55	Cardiology	72	Radio diagnostics	91
4	Oncology	173	Ophthalmology	44	Neurosurgery	54	Surgery	71	Ophthalmology	90
5	Radio diagnostics	168	Cardiology	41	Orthopedics	49	Orthopedics	70	Oncology	80
6	Ophthalmology	129	Neurology	34	Surgery	31	Neurosurgery	67	Cardiology	78
7	Pediatrics	123	Oncology	29	Gastroenterology	30	Oncology	46	Orthopedics	78
8	Cardiology	99	Pediatrics	29	Gynecology	27	Maxillofacial Surgery	37	Maxillofacial Surgery	66
9	Surgery	91	Surgery	26	Oncology	26	Pediatrics	31	Gastroenterology	40
10	Maxillofacial Surgery	57	Maxillofacial Surgery	24	Maxillofacial Surgery	25	Gastroenterology /Urology*	25	Pediatrics	36

The faction mentions Charlotte Brookson. The faction is aware that about a year ago, there was a situation where the financial controller embezzled well over a million guilders from that school of government subsidy. Can the Minister update the Members of Parliament as to what ultimately happened with that?

To clarify, not the Financial Controller, rather it was reported that someone internally at CBA is suspected of embezzling funds from CBA. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport has engaged the SOAB to execute financial

audits at CBA as the Ministry currently has little insight into the school's financial administration.

The faction believes the answer regarding the EDC was very vague. What are some of the accomplishments of the director in the year that the director was there? What was the financial position of the EDC then, and what is the financial position of the EDC now?

What is the annual subsidy from the Government to the EDC?

The task of previous interim director of the EDC focused primarily on re-establishing the organization after a period of inactivity. During his tenure, the EDC acquired office space which is still not functional, and created a website. However, progress in revitalizing the organization was limited as to date little was done.

The EDC does not receive an annual subsidy from the government. Instead, it generates revenue through lease payments from the port for the property adjacent to the harbor, which amount to \$100,000 USD per year. Unfortunately, the EDC is currently facing financial difficulties and is unable to cover its rental expenses or fulfill its financial obligations to the supervisory board.

The National Alliance-faction has taken note of the draft with interest and has the following questions and comments. The faction knows that a couple of months ago, while leaving office, there was a situation where funeral arrangements were made for an active staff member, and it was signed off on before leaving, but there was a bit of controversy as it was stopped. The faction would like to know if the Minister, along with the Government, can consider now structurally putting something else in place.

The faction knows that a certain percentage is covered, but for active civil servants, the faction would like to know if we can at least cover 13,000 guilders for their funeral costs. The reason is that, at the end of the day, we depend on these civil servants to go above and beyond for compensation that cannot compare to the private sector. The faction believes it is only fair to honor their legacy once they have worked and supported the Government; at least, we can consider putting a structured policy in place to cover their funeral costs. The faction would like to know how open the Minister of Finance and the Government are to something like this. The faction doesn't believe that this is a bizarre request, as it is very unlikely for a civil servant to pass away during active duty, although it has happened before. The faction thinks this is a way to show appreciation to the men and women who wake up every day and decide to hold public office in whatever capacity without discrimination as to their function.

Currently it is NAf 4.500 this is from the past we can look into it to verify to adjust.

I understand that the current amount stands at **NAf 4,500** and has remained unchanged for several years. I am open to exploring the possibilities of increasing this amount and will look into potential adjustments that could be made.

The faction knows that there are several housing project initiatives under different mixes, but the faction would like to zoom in on the one being handled via the Trust Fund. There was discussion about it being halted, restarted, etc., but for the last couple of months, it has been very quiet. The faction would like to know the update on the housing project that is earmarked for Hope Estate. The faction would like an update on that, as there is a dire need for housing, especially social housing, here in Sint Maarten.

I want to clarify again that the housing project via the trust fund has been off the table since April 2023. The project had 4 requirements for execution to access the USD\$20 million, none of which were achieved during the period 2021-2024. I am in discussions now to find a way to have the funding come back to Sint Maarten. The Ministry at the same time, is actively working on the housing policy.

The faction has another concern that has been raised over the past few years in various forms but has never materialized. The faction would like to know how open the Government is to allowing not only ex-police officers but also ex-uniformed officers who had permission to carry firearms while executing their duty to keep their firearms for five years after retirement. The reason for this is that officers serve for 30-40 years, often creating enemies, and when they retire, they are told to go home to fend for themselves. The faction would like to know if a special budget can be allocated for this. It is not as if 30-40 officers are going on retirement at one time. The faction would like to know if a structure can be put in place to allow them to be able to have a firearm in order to protect themselves once they retire.

This should be addressed through a policy or a memorandum. Former officers are not automatically eligible for a gun permit. No budget is required for this. Currently, an ex-officer is classified as a civilian and must request a permit. For this to change, the weapons policy will have to be adapted. However, I agree with such a policy for ex-uniformed officers with an honorable end of service.

The faction continues and mentions the Ministry of VROMI. The faction is glad to see that the roadworks for the main road project have finally kicked off, although very late, as these documents were signed before the faction left office. Nevertheless, the faction saw that they started in Point Blanche and would like to request a structured schedule as to where is next. As the former Government, it was fought hard to secure these funds for capital expenditure, and the faction would like a clear detail as to the road of priorities. One road that has been emphasized over the last few years is Arch Road, connecting to Madame Estate, which is one of the most deplorable roads on the island. The faction hopes it has not been taken off the priority list.

The faction also remembers that an agreement with the Government was made in 2013 or 2014 regarding the Causeway Project, where the Port would pave Union Road. The faction thinks that that never materialized, and the agreement was shifted to have the Port contribute to paving the road in Point Blanche. Now that the Government is paving that road, the faction would like to know if the Port is

collaborating on this project, and if not, how then will the Port contribute to our infrastructure as agreed back in 2013 to contribute towards Union Road.

Thank you for the question regarding the Port's role and contributions to infrastructure updates, specifically in the Pointe Blanche area and related to the cruise and cargo sectors.

It is important to note that the Port of St. Maarten, as a key strategic asset, has continuously invested in infrastructure developments that support both the tourism (cruise) and logistics (cargo) sectors, vital to the country's economy. The Port's strategic plan recognizes the need to enhance St. Maarten's appeal as both a tourism destination and a logistical hub, all while ensuring that growth remains sustainable and within the carrying capacity of the island. These goals are aligned with the national vision for balanced and environmentally conscious development.

Key Points on Beautification and Infrastructure Efforts:

- Ongoing Beautification and Infrastructure Projects

- The beautification efforts at Battery Point and along the Pointe Blanche road are part of the broader initiative to enhance the visitor experience. These efforts contribute to the area's aesthetic appeal as it serves as a gateway for cruise passengers, significantly improving the first impression visitors have of St. Maarten.

- The Pointe Blanche road is also critical for cargo operations, and as such, the Port continues to partner with relevant stakeholders, including government agencies, to address infrastructure needs in the area.

- Port Contributions to Infrastructure

- The Port has been actively investing in infrastructure projects, such as the Cruise Pier South and ongoing Cargo Repairs, which are set to continue for the remainder of 2024. These repairs are necessary to maintain the Port's operational efficiency, especially in light of the growing demand for both cargo and cruise services.

- The Port's strategic investments include plans to address long-term infrastructure upgrades, ensuring that St. Maarten remains competitive in the region. This includes assessing and improving pier capacities, terminal facilities, and supporting road networks.

- Sustainable Growth and Carrying Capacity

- The Port's strategy aligns with the need to manage St. Maarten's growth in a sustainable manner. This means taking into consideration the carrying capacity of our infrastructure—roads, utilities, and environmental resources—to ensure that our cruise and cargo sectors can grow without negatively impacting the island's residents and natural environment.

- The discussions on comprehensive infrastructure improvements are ongoing and are being done in partnership with the Ministry of TEATT, other government bodies, and private stakeholders. The goal is to balance growth while maintaining quality of life for residents and preserving the island's natural beauty.

- Coordination with Government

- While in the past, the partnership may have been different, the Port's current role focuses on partnering with the government for wider infrastructure initiatives. This includes contributing to the overall development through joint projects and public-private partnerships.

- TEATT continues to coordinate efforts with the Port and other stakeholders to ensure that necessary infrastructure updates, such as road improvements in key areas like Union Road and Pointe Blanche, are addressed within the country's broader development framework.

In a Nutshell:

The Port remains committed to supporting St. Maarten's infrastructure growth, with specific focus on projects that directly enhance the cruise and cargo sectors. These initiatives are part of the long-term strategy to improve the island's appeal and functionality, ensuring that infrastructure development keeps pace with economic growth while safeguarding the environment and local communities.

The faction also noticed a decrease in the Side Road Project but saw it pick up again over the last two weeks. The faction would like to know if the planning has changed in terms of the format in how the roads are being executed. If so, could a calendar be provided? Can the Government provide a detailed plan as to which roads are next that would help the public understand when their road is up to be fixed?

Indeed there are some delays which have to do with elements not taken into consideration when the projects was started. These also includes elements like drainage. This of course will impact the budget of the project, however we are endeavoring to ensure completion as soon as possible.

The faction heard the Minister's presentation regarding long-lease land being allocated and making more money via hotels. The faction would like some clarity so that the faction can confirm that we are speaking about the same thing. Can the Minister provide clarity if the Minister is talking about the same project the faction is talking about?

The faction also has a question regarding the 18 million guilders for the sewage network via the NRPB. There was 15 million guilders put aside via de CAPEX on a multi-annual approach which would have been for three years, 2024, 2025, 2026 for the project, totaling 45 million guilders. The faction would like to know whether the 18 million guilders is separate from this, if the 15 million has been scrapped and replaced, or if it is separate from the regular country budget with respect to the CAPEX.

When looking at the 2024 CAPEX you will notice an amount of 45 million guilders which is the total of the 27 million secured in 2023 and transferred towards NRPB plus the 18 million which the Netherlands (Trustfund) agreed to contribute towards this project. Although the 18 million is a contribution and not a loan, the total amount 45 million still has to be mentioned in the CAPEX since it is seen as a government's asset. So, to answer your question the 18 million is from the NRPB.

The faction states that sitting in the seat of Government, there must be creative revenue generation. We must be creative in how we handle certain things. The faction came up with an idea regarding the debt for SZV: to lease SZV a piece of land for which they paid 60 years in advance, and that would come off of what we owe them as a Government. The faction would like to know what creative ways, per the Ministry, are being implemented to generate revenue. The faction notes that we are just talking about cutting, but the faction is missing the sense of creativity when it comes to ways and means that we could generate revenue and minimize the burden on our people.

Indeed, we must be creative in addressing our financial challenges. However, it is crucial that we not only prioritize but also ensure that we focus on implementation. Too often, we spread our focus across many areas but fail to implement any meaningful changes.

The priority areas are the tourist tax, increasing the room tax, decreasing profit tax and wage tax, while simultaneously improving compliance and collection efforts. However, I am always open to new ideas and greatly appreciate the suggestion made by MP Lacroes. Collaboration is key, and we must work together to make these initiatives successful for the country of Sint Maarten.

The faction states that under the past Government, a task force collection was started. Big businesses that refuse to pay long lease in over 25 or 26 years was collected from, generating millions. The new Government discontinued the task force, stating it could handle it on its own. The task of domain affairs was very heavy, and there was a personnel shortage. The faction would like to know how much money has been generated from people who have owed outstanding amounts for many years. What was the main reason for discontinuing it?

With respect to the loan that was taken out in 2014, the Minister mentioned that it was under the NA Government, but NA was not in Government in 2014. The faction would like some clarity as to who took that loan and who was leading the Government at the time. How much do we owe?

The loan expiring in 2029 that I stated that was taken out under government NA, DP and independent members, however it was under the government of UP, DP and independent member (RL). This loan at the time was taken out for capital investments for the country of Sint Maarten and NA was indeed not part of government.

With regard to the point made during the ennia meeting regarding the loan expiring in 2029. While it was initially mentioned that this loan was taken out under the government consisting of NA, DP, and independent members, it was actually under the government formed by UP, DP, and independent member RL. This loan was taken out at the time for capital investments for the country of Sint Maarten, and to clarify, the NA was not part of the government at that time.

The faction mentions that traffic continues to be a major issue and that it doesn't think that will really change until we get new roads. As this is an interministerial situation, the faction would like to know if the Government would explore the option of setting up a hub system for school buses, possibly at locations such as the Jose Lake Ballpark or the Raoul Illidge Ballpark. Instead of parents driving all the way into Cul de Sac with many vehicles, can something like this be set up? The faction suggests that this could be funded through the regular school bus system via the government, or parents can pay 25 guilders a month, which would be a savings in terms of gas. The faction would like to know if this is something that the Government can consider. The faction is aware that mainly the Education ministry is over transport, but TEATT and Justice play a role when it comes to traffic as well.

The faction mentions revenue generation. The faction believes that we should become more creative and more open-minded. Over the years, there has been this saying that tinted cars contribute to violence, but the faction doesn't believe in it. Around the world, tint is regulated in different ways, and the faction believes that we now need to move away from that stigma that it is a crime. We need to see how we can legalize it and also be creative in terms of generating revenue. The faction would like to know if the Government is open to, for instance, being tied to your number plate purchase, if you want to have a tinted vehicle, that you pay an extra 50 guilders per year. The faction believes that Curaçao was already busy with legislation where that is concerned, so the faction doesn't think there is a need to reinvent the wheel.

This matter will need Parliament's input as it involves the Leges Verorderning. Furthermore, we want to ensure that this does not make it more difficult for law enforcement officers to do their jobs, so their advice will also be required.

The faction mentions that one question keeps burning. With respect to the loan for GEBE, if we don't have any details on the what the money is being spent on exactly, how can we possibly be taking out a loan without any substance as to what you are taking out a loan for? We are being asked as a Parliament to approve a figure and wait for more details in the future. This doesn't sound realistic to the faction and the faction would like to get some substance and clarity to it.

As government has already informed parliament, based on an estimate, an amount has been presented to the Netherlands for a loan. The Netherlands are open for this and one of the requirements is to have this amount incorporated in the budget.

After this amendment is approved, the Government will inform the State secretary and discussions on the details of the loan will begin.

This is almost the same procedure as the previous requests from the government for Capital investments.

Related to the aftercare center, the HAP, is the faction to understand that the discussion is ongoing to continue with it or to look for an alternative. The faction believes that this service is quite essential. What is the government's thinking with respect to this? If we are going to have energy for one thing, we should exercise that energy across the board because, with respect to medical referrals, we are not hearing anything about that. There are a lot of questionable things taking place with that.

Yes, this is correct. As previously stated, the need for a HAP is recognized, and internal discussions are currently ongoing regarding solutions that will lead to a HAP that yields the intended results.

The faction a couple of weeks ago, there was a situation where a young lady came to the faction with an issue at her job, and based on the faction's knowledge and experience, it was considered a legal situation. Are these situations where a legal help desk can be used in the sense that people are not able to afford it? How does that work? The faction would like to suggest that it be placed on the government's Facebook page and website. This is a great initiative and once our people are able to have resources like this, they can then better defend themselves. The faction seeks clarity on this point.

Regarding the specific case you mentioned—a young lady experiencing legal issues at work—this type of matter is an example of what the Legal Helpdesk can potentially facilitate. However, as this is a labor-related issue, the correct course of action would be to first file a formal complaint with the Labor Affairs office. The office will then attempt to mediate the issue. If this mediation process is unsuccessful and the matter needs to be taken to court, a "yellow card" can be issued, allowing the individual to be assigned a lawyer from the list of participating legal professionals, free of charge. The legal advisors at the Helpdesk will be able to guide individuals accordingly.

The suggestion to promote the Legal Helpdesk on the Government website was already in the planning and once the legal agreements with the participating lawyers and or legal minds are finalized and a new launch date is set, we will ensure that all relevant information is made available on the Government website and through other communication channels.

The Minister mentioned that a company paid 1.2 million in *erfpacht*. The faction would like to know if the Minister can tell which company that was.

The said amount is not yet paid by the company. We expect this to come in soon.

Also, the faction asked about the top 10 offenders, and there wasn't a response. The faction would appreciate some clarity there as well.

We have received the latest list of top 10 offenders amounts outstanding in 2022 is hereby provided. 2023 is not yet available. Due to privacy matters the names and crib numbers are not provided.

With respect to the land that was issued or reissued, it seems to be a matter of wordplay. How was the land reissued with respect to the *Didam arrest*? The faction would also like to know which notary allowed this in the absence of the policy or if the policy has been issued, which the faction hasn't seen.

One of the reasons the faction talks about the policy is because the former Minister was back and forth here in Parliament regarding the same policy. It sat by JZW for about 6 months and by the former Secretary General of General Affairs for about 8 months. How far is the policy? Was the policy issued thus far, and is that the reason why that land was able to be issued?

How did this Government take office without any proper research and issue something where a fraudulent case was cited, and someone lost their job? The faction would like some clarity from the Minister on that point.

A reissuance of long lease land to the same owner was finalized recently. In cases of reissuance of a long lease right that is about to expire, the DIDAM jurisprudence has no influence or obstruction. This is only the case where land is newly issued to a new person or entity. Although there are recently specific circumstances mentioned by the supreme court where, also in the absence of a land issuance policy, it is possible to issue land to a new person or entity. The said policy has not been issued yet and is currently being worked on. I expect this to take about another 8 to 12 months, seeing that this new policy most likely needs to have a legal base in a national ordinance. There is a small chance that the verdict of the supreme court can be used as legal basis for the said policy, our legal team is looking into this. Of course, seeing the utmost importance of this subject for the country, I will keep parliament updated on this topic. But to note, the Didam verdict does not stop the issuance of land. It has to do with the notaries being able to deed a decree or not, depending on the justification given by Government.

The specific right of long lease has been reissued based on the ministerial decree from the minister of VROMI, dated January 29, 2024. In short, the decree extends the expiry dates of the decrees for everyone who has received a long lease decree before that date. So the reissuance of the MAHO property was done based off two ministerial decrees, both signed by then minister. The decree for the MAHO property, dates back to 2021.

With respect to the housing project being off the table since 2023. Can the Minister provide documentation stating that these matters were off the table so that we can get some clarity on that? So, the faction would like some clarification on that,

and if so, as well, all meeting minutes that correlate with the story of the project being off the table since 2023.

The World Bank informed the Streeting COmmittee meeting on April 10th 2022 of its decision to cancel the project. The Prime Minister was immediately informed of the World Bank's decision by Mr. Halman, the steering committee member for Sint Maarten. In terms of documentation, I kindly refer the MP to the World Bank's webpage for the project, which states that the project has been dropped (<https://projects.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/project-detail/P177804>).

The faction continues and states that it heard the Minister mention priority roads that have an economic impact, which is fine, and the faction agrees to a certain extent, but the faction would like to know what the Minister's sentiments on Arch Road and Madame Estate are. Is it the intention of the Ministry to handle this as the next road priority? The faction is of the opinion that it is in a deplorable situation right now.

The MP mentions economic impact. In my statement I mentioned economic and social impact, as both these factors must be considered. In my remarks made last week as well as in press statements regarding the road resurfacing project, Arch Road is listed as a priority road.

As stated, Arch Road is in fact on the priority list. However, there are issues such as permanent running water in some areas of the road that must be addressed first before we commence works. Very similarly, passersby would notice that the longstanding running water on Juancho Yrasquin Blvd is being addressed before we finalize the road. If this isn't done, we are then all works ongoing will be carried out in vain

With respect to the building permit that the Minister talked about being signed on May 2nd, the faction would like to know if the Minister can provide this, whether in a confidential or open manner, once respecting the person's situation, to Parliament so that we can justify this.

Indeed permit can be shared.

The faction would like to know if positive advice has been received from the permits department on this building permit project that is taking place in Simpson Bay. What was the advice from the permits department? And how do you, as Minister, assess building permits once received? Do you not trust advice from the permits department once all the checks and balances are there? The faction would like to know how the Minister assesses those and how he makes a decision if a permit has positive advice or not.

A building permit was issued. The permit says that there is sufficient public parking space for approximately 40 vehicles available to accommodate this facility.

So to be clear, a building permit was issued under the administration number Bp #

245/2023 signed on May 2nd 2024 and picked up on May 8th 2024. On October 1st 2024, the Inspection department visited the site and only the foundation was being constructed and was in accordance with the site plan and foundation plan. Therefore, no warning nor building stop was warranted at that point in time.

However, what can be said is that after looking at the advice from the Permits department, no advice was requested from the Nature Foundation. I as a Minister through you Madame Chair, am of the opinion that the advice from the Nature foundation is critical when assessing cases such as this, that touch our beaches and further environment. It is also good to note that NO change of purpose was granted for the parcels in question, and that currently according to the deed no beach bar would be.

The faction would like to know if the Well Road is also on the priority list. What is the intention in terms of the start date for those roads?

Well Road, despite its very important function, is not as the good MP would know is not designated as a main road on Sint Maarten. The current priority list deals with those recognized as such by the Ministry. Well Road falls under the category of secondary road and will be considered for CAPEX 2025, which has a larger budget and longer execution timeline.

As it regards former uniform officers being allowed to carry firearms, the faction would like to know if the Ministry is open to allowing this. What are the thoughts in terms of reaching this goal?

In no way does the faction wish to hamper or interfere with the current school busing system that is in place. The faction is referring to stakeholder engagement, whether it be a meeting with private bus owners and parents or a public meeting, so to speak, where the option can be explored for parents who opt not to drive all the way into the Cul de Sac, instead to allow a sort of system to take place at Jose Lake and Raoul Illidge. The faction is saying something totally separate, which could come as an initiative from the Government in collaboration with the Ministry of ECYS and the Ministry of Justice. Is the Ministry open to exploring such an option?

With respect to the causeway and the permit agreement to build the causeway, there was a clause in there that the Port would contribute to the repairs of the entire Union Road. That was never done. About two years ago, if the faction is not mistaken, Union Road was repaired by the Government with government funds, and then a discussion started for the Port to repair Juancho Yrausquin Boulevard, which they are busy with now, which is the road leading to the Port. The faction would like to know whether these funds are coming from the Port, or are these funds coming from government coffers, may it be capex or the regular road repair project?

The discussion was had at the time relating to the upgrade of union road however the following factors made it not achievable such as but not limited to:

- Government was to acquire properties along the union road to allow said road to expand
- Port was to be granted a tax exemption for TOT for the Causeway construction which did not materialize. The Port paid more than NAF 3.5 million guilders in TOT
- The fact that the Airport roundabout development and costs were initially intended to be covered by PJIA of which the Port paid NAF 9 million. The works included the revetments, connection of the shoulder road to the bridge, the expansion of the airport road, the roundabout & associated beautification of the area.

The faction heard a number being mentioned in terms of what is still owed with respect to the causeway loan that the Port is paying. The faction would like to know how much the causeway has cost the people of Sint Maarten. How much is exactly owed? How much has the causeway cost the people of Sint Maarten from 2014 to 2024? The faction knows that the Port was busy exploring different means to try to sell it because, of course, it wasn't serving its purpose in terms of revenue generation that the initial plan was. The faction would just like some clarity on that.

Currently the outstanding on the loan in total attributing to the causeway is USD 47,553,598. The repayment as seen in the below table escalates significantly in the coming years concluding in 2035 as the Port can repay.

The breakdown of the remaining principle through 2035 is as follows:

2024	47,553,598
2025	45,163,939
2026	42,774,280
2027	39,786,221
2028	35,438,163
2029	31,008,506
2030	26,408,848
2031	21,639,191
2032	16,189,534
2033	9,638,545
2034	3,087,555
2035	0

Per Ministry, the faction would like to know how many persons within the Ministry are currently working outside of their function and if they are being properly compensated.

Currently there are 4 individuals in the Ministry of TEATT working outside of their designated functions, and yes they are being compensated.

How far along is the Ministry with the STA? The faction knows it has been a discussion for over a decade. Is there any concrete plan from the Ministry as to a potential actual start date? What is the goal in terms of the start date for the STA?

We are dedicated to establishing the STA as a priority. To ensure a successful implementation, we engaged in stakeholder consultations with various industry associations. Our approach will be inclusive, involving both government representatives and industry stakeholders in the development and implementation of the STA. This collaborative process aims to avoid past pitfalls and create a fair and transparent framework. The advice will be handled in the Council of Ministers in the coming weeks. Thereafter, concrete timelines for the STA will be established soon.

The faction heard the Prime Minister repeatedly refer to the fact that the housing project was canceled in April of 2024. The faction would like documentation to substantiate this.

I (Prime Minister) was informed by the NRPB, that the documentation requested is part of the internal documentation of the World Bank. The NRPB is not authorized to share this kind of documentation.

However, NRPB still provided the section which includes the substantiation of the decision. The following is from the report of the Steering Committee meeting (April 8-10, 2024), regarding the Housing Project:

“The [Steering Committee] recognized the improvements in the SXM Housing Development Foundation's institutional standing and capacity made possible by the Bank's and the NRPB's engagement with them throughout project preparation.

Ms. Burunciuc expressed that given the limited time left in the overall Trust Fund program to complete this project, its complex technical structure, the roadblocks experienced during preparation (performance agreement not having been finalized and failure to sign a lease of land), and experience implementing similar projects in SXM and other countries, the World Bank decided to drop the project. She also stressed that even if the project were presented for approval, Bank management would not move forward because of the project's lack of readiness and high risk of unsatisfactory completion.

The faction would like to know once again if we can put in place a structured mechanism where the Government covers the funeral costs up to 13,000 guilders. Does the Prime Minister believe the life of a civil servant who has worked and contributed—whether for a very short time or 30 years, as the faction does not discriminate—should be honored? The oath of office and the service are quite significant. The faction would like to know from the Prime Minister, who oversees P&O and General Affairs, if the Prime Minister would consider putting this policy in place to regulate so that the funeral costs of an active civil servant be covered by up to 13,000 guilders.

The decree governing deceased benefits, established in 1996, provides a framework for such benefits. However, considering the significant inflation in burial fees over the years, this policy may no longer adequately support the families of

deceased civil servants. The financial burden on families during such a difficult time can be substantial.

Given the invaluable contributions of our civil servants, it is both reasonable and compassionate to revisit and update this policy. By adjusting the benefits to reflect current costs, we can ensure that the families of deceased civil servants receive the necessary support, easing their financial burden partially.

In addition to this, Government is now looking into the possibility of proposing to civil servants an optional funeral insurance.

The faction would like to know that with respect to the 4-day work week, the faction believes it can work, but it will require bold moves in terms of decision-making. To give a simple example, the island is plagued with a serious traffic situation. A pilot project could be started via the Government and perhaps spread out to government-owned companies, whereas not all employees start work at 8:00 a.m. Some could start from 8 to 5, and others from 10 to 7, just to see flexibility and mitigate the workload. The faction urges the government to consider these points in one department; for instance, Fridays were a preparation day, so they could prepare for the following week. The faction hopes this can be explored.

Thank you for your question MP. However, working hours for Government employees falls under the purview of the Minister of General Affairs and so the temporary project mentioned, once it is to roll out organizational wide would be something that, MIN AZ would need to decide on in combination with the P&O department and the relevant UNIONS in the CCSU.

As it pertains to Government-owned companies, this would still need to be a plan that management of the respective company chooses to have happen. This would be so whether it is for a reduction in days or for flexible work hours. Your question seems to indicate the latter, a sort of “flex hours”, therefore with that as a starting point, legally and utilizing the currently applicable legislation that is possible as none, mention start or end times but only total hours (40) & max days (5 or 6).

But again it depends on management, workers and unions that exist within those companies to determine if they want to pilot this project.

Although discrepancies caused the organization to stop functioning, the faction would like to know if an interim solution could be sought, perhaps house practitioners offering care until 12:00 a.m. at the very least, allowing non-emergency cases to be dealt with and easing the load on the St. Maarten Medical Center.

I fully agree, and the need for a HAP is acknowledged. As mentioned earlier, internal discussions are ongoing to find solutions that will lead to a HAP yielding the intended results considering the fact that the majority of GPs have indicated that they are not willing to work after hours.

The faction notes that in Latin America, they have 24-hour pharmacy services. Currently, the pharmacy in Maho remains open until 9:00 or 9:30 pm. If someone needs something urgent, they would have to go to the emergency room. The faction would like to know if there are any thoughts within the Ministry regarding a 24-hour pharmacy service or having one open until 12:00 a.m., even on a rotational basis. This rotation could be published for the general public.

Yes, after hours pharmacy service is also one of the areas that must be in place in order for a HAP visitor to receive optimal care.

The faction notes that with respect to the water parcel that initially the Minister said was collected, then not collected, to be collected, and then the water rights were issued, the faction is trying to understand if the Minister is saying that the water rights that was used for a period of years was issued in hopes that they might pay the 1.2 million. Initially, the Minister said that they paid the 1.2. The faction is now understanding that it wasn't paid. Can the Minister confirm if it was issued in anticipation of this?

The decree for the water rights was never deeded but the water was being used. Canon will increase from 10K --> 250K per year.

If it was collected or if it is still to be collected in the budget projections, would it be incorporated in the budget? The faction does not see this reflected in the amendment. 1.2 million is quite a significant number and can make a lot of difference, hence the reason for the question and clarification being sought.

The faction heard the Minister mention the weighbridge, a previous administration had paid a company to install a weighbridge. They never complied, and the government took them to court. The faction would like to know if this is the weighbridge that is on its way or if this is a different weighbridge. If this is a different weighbridge, where is the government in terms of the court proceedings with that particular company? The faction is aware that this government has been settling many cases since taking office. There have been a lot of court cases settled with no appeals. The faction would like to know if this was also one of those settled cases where the country continues to lose.

VROMI is inquiring on the status of the court case and eventual noncompliance with the verdict.

The faction seeks clarity with respect to this May 2 permit that continuous reference is being made to. Is the Minister saying that the permit department's advice misled the Minister? The reason for this question is that there is a continuous sound that the change of purpose was not done, which is a prerequisite, and the Minister is 100% right about that.

Unfortunately it is not possible for me to know the exact reasons for why the previous administration made certain decisions or if they were misled.

The parking policy and beach policy were not taken into consideration. The faction states that once a Minister receives an advice, it is advice to approve or advice to disapprove. There are always motives as to why.

The faction would like to know if the former Minister was authorized to sign any documents on May 2, and was that the only document signed? Is the Minister signing documents these days, considering the Minister is also in a caretaker status.

Yes, a minister in St. Maarten who is in a demissionaire (caretaker) state can still sign documents. However, in general, their powers are limited compared to a regular minister. I have signed off for documents for the past months. If I would not have done so, the Ministry would be at a complete stand still.

The faction would like to know with respect to the land in regard to Maho and it being signed off because it was already issued and reissued. The faction would like to inform the Minister that the whole situation sparked confusion due to the fact that 2,000 to 3,000 square meters were issued in error or utilized in error for years. This is the reason someone lost their job in the Cadaster. All the evidence is there.

The specific right of long lease has been reissued based on the ministerial decree from the minister of VROMI, dated January 29, 2024. In short, the decree extends the expiry dates of the decrees for everyone who has received a long lease decree before that date. So the reissuance of the MAHO property was done based off two ministerial decrees, both signed by then minister. The decree for the MAHO property, dates back to 2021. If anything concerning the certificates of admeasurements is incorrect and needs to be corrected, this will be done afterwards and will be looked into. A meeting with the contract party is scheduled for mid November 2024.

The faction would like a breakdown of the 12-18 months for the land policy, and how do we move forward with those that are pending now?

The land issuance and pricing policy is part of the landspakket E7. VROMI foresees hiring technical assistance in January 2025. From then on, the timeline to draft, finalize and implement a policy is approx. 6 to 18 months, depending if the existing national ordinance needs to be adjusted or renewed. As long as the policy is not established, new government (domain) land can/will not be issued in principle. Reissuance of expiring long lease rights does not fall under the DIDAM criteria. Those procedures and files are therefore not affected.

The faction continues and mentions that the Minister indicated that on April 10, a correspondence the Government was informed. If there is documentation, the Minister of Housing should have the documentation that the project was ending.

The faction wants to know how this was communicated that the project was ending and if it can be proven that it was communicated to the Ministry of VROMI. If it is off the table, how can we assist as Members of Parliament in getting it back on the table?

The faction would like to state that Winward Roads is not doing voluntary work; it is on Winward Roads to regulate their workload. These bids were done early this year, and they knew they won the bid. All these discussions were had in negotiation, even preliminary discussions on priority roads. The faction would hope the Minister would take more of an approach of saying, "I will do everything in my power to get it done ASAP,". The faction hopes that we do not repeat the same mistakes again.

The faction would like to get some clarity because it is not clear whether the Minister said that the decree was signed in 2007 or 2013. The faction would like to know which year the Minister mentioned and which Minister or Commissioner signed these water rights that were never issued.

The faction would like clarity regarding the point of the intent being signed and not being deeded. The faction would like to get clarity on that so that everyone knows how to move forward.

This faction mentions that it was a surprise to learn from an outside entity during orientation week about a loan for GEBE while the Prime Minister was in Parliament previously. When we look at the budget, it says in the *toelichting* in 3.6 that GEBE is looking for a loan of \$30 million. In the presentation from the Minister, it says that there's a loan for \$75.6 million. The faction would like to confirm: is it \$30 million for the loan or \$42 million? Or is it that we are taking out a loan for GEBE, and GEBE is also looking for an additional \$30 million? This can be found on page 154 in the *toelichting*.

I am surprised that there was a lack of knowledge regarding the **GEBE loan** being included in the budget amendment 2024, as this information has been provided and stated multiple times by the Prime Minister as precautionary measure taken by government to ensure that the generators can be purchased as soon as possible. Given the severity of the GEBE situation that we have been facing in the last months.

To clarify, the correct total amount for the loan is USD 42 million for three generators, with an estimated cost of USD 14 million per generator.

In that same *toelichting*, it mentions that GEBE commits to delivering audits for the fiscal years up to and including 2022 and 2024. The faction would like to know if a deadline has been set for that. And what happens if GEBE does not deliver these audits? What are the consequences for GEBE if they do not deliver these audits?

The faction has noted that some of the questions posed by the legal affairs department remain unanswered. Who exactly is taking out the loan? Is it under the Ministry of VROMI or General Affairs?

The loan will be taken out on behalf of Country Sint Maarten, and authorized by my person as the Minister of Finance.

It also states the start and end date. Does this mean that the agreement between GEBE and the Government begins on November 1, 2024, or does it mean that GEBE will begin making the monthly payments from November 2024?

The repayment date will depend on when the funds are actually received, as well as the loan terms agreed upon with the Netherlands.

The faction believes that it was mentioned by the Prime Minister and also in the presentation from the Minister of Finance that we would take out a loan and then lease it to GEBE. The faction would like confirmation: Are we leasing to GEBE, or are we taking a loan for GEBE and allowing GEBE to purchase the engines then? Cause that's two different things. The faction believes if we are leasing it, that means the asset goes by us. The asset should then be reflected by us. The faction does not see anywhere in the budget where the insurance for the engines is or where it would come from. Can this be made clear to the faction? Where is this insurance taken up? What is the potential cost for us of insuring these engines? If they are going to be loaned to GEBE, like what was done at the airport airport, would we consider this a similar system to the reflows? What interest rate are we expecting? With the Airport, the Government is getting money back from the reflows, so if you're going to loan to GEBE at, let's say, getting a loan at 4% or 5%, are we then loaning this to GEBE at 6% and making a gain? When the airport refinancing was being done, different options were looked at. The faction would like to know from the Government if there are no co-financing options available. Were there no public-private partnerships available?

The government will take out the loan to purchase the generators and subsequently lease them to GEBE. We are not permitted to take out a loan and lend it directly to a subsidiary. Given the severity of the situation, this solution was discussed and agreed upon with the Netherlands as a way to address this urgent issue.

The generators cannot be taken up in the budget as they have not been purchased yet. It can only be shown as an asset and be activated once they have purchased. The listing in Staat C in the budget will only show per SNA code the total amounts that have been activated. Government will first have to get the loan to be able to purchase these generators and that can only happen if this budget amendment is approved. The matter pertaining to insurance can be addressed by the Prime Minister, as this is a topic that can certainly be discussed with GEBE during the negotiation of the lease agreement terms to determine who will cover these costs.

The insurance is not included in this budget as the generators have not yet been acquired. This matter will be addressed during the **lease agreement negotiations**, where it will be determined who will cover the **insurance and maintenance expenses**. Once these terms are finalized, any necessary provisions will be incorporated into the government's **multi-annual budget**. For further details on this subject, the Prime Minister will be able to provide additional information.

Between 2022 and 2023, the then-MP Heyliger-Marten kept insisting on a specialist financier, Mr. Midema. The faction would like an update on this from the Minister of Finance. The faction would like to know if the Minister of Finance has had a discussion with Mr. Midema. Have you had a discussion with Mr. Blackman? Have you had a discussion with the Minister of TEATT concerning the refinancing of our

COVID loans? That question also goes to the current Minister of TEATT—has the Minister taken up her own idea and concept of this?

No, we have not.

The faction does not see any preparation for the transaction tax in the budget. Where is it budgeted? Is it no longer the almighty "Hail Mary" savior for us when it comes to generating revenues? Because what we see in the budget now is cuts, but when it comes to money-making and generating revenues, the faction wonders if all the great ideas for the last four years just disappeared. We had so many great ideas, but now we don't see them reflected by the MPs that went into ministry to be able to execute.

Min Fin: The budget amendment is reflecting what is going to be happening this year and no policy changes have been included in this budget amendment given the limited timeframe. As stated previously with regard to transaction tax I am currently still doing my research to understand the effects of a transaction tax on Sint Maarten the pro's and cons once I have done my thorough research I can provide my input on this.

MinTeatt: While I remain supportive of transitioning to a transaction tax, it is important to acknowledge that given the challenges we faced this year, including the inadequacies of the 2024 budget, forcing major cuts, as well as the disruption caused by the fall of the government, its introduction was not feasible. As we continue to strengthen our economy and modernize our tax system, we will explore the potential benefits and drawbacks of a transaction tax to determine if it aligns with our long-term goals.

The faction makes reference to a local paper a few weeks ago that the Government lost the court case for the tax system. The faction also recognizes that the Government did not appeal, and the faction believes this to be very interesting. What is the impact now on our tax systems? Because we have a lot of questions about money-generating and tax legislation, but if we're going to have another delay of two to four years on the tax system, where are we now? What are the current plans? And what is BZK or TWO saying on this in terms of the money now basically lost? Are we starting now from scratch? What are the steps or the plans going forward?

The decision not to appeal was made because, while the outcome of an appeal is uncertain, the process itself is expected to take at least a year. As a result, it was decided to **retender the tax system** instead. The funds are still available for Sint Maarten to purchase a tax system via **TWO**. A few weeks ago, the State Secretary visited the tax office and received a presentation on the plan and understands the urgent need of a new tax system for Sint Maarten. The tender was publicly retracted in accordance with the court's verdict.

To be totally honest, the reason we still don't have a tax system 7 years later is due to the political maneuvering by the **NA** over the past years, where continuity was

not prioritized. This lack of focus on continuity has directly contributed to the country's inability to **get or implement** a much needed new tax system.

The faction would also like confirmation if BearingPoint has any staff, former staff, now currently doing any projects in the tax office.

As stated previously, the decision not to appeal was made because the process is expected to be lengthy, and the outcome remains uncertain. Given the urgent need for a new tax system in Sint Maarten, we have decided to **retender the tax system at the soonest** to expedite the process. This decision was made in discussion with TWO as they are funding the project.

The faction would like to know what the impact of the funds from TWO is, given this project. The faction has noted that the budget has a surplus, but this surplus is mainly due to the unspent monies from the TWO funds actually. So it's not based on money that we generate, but we have a surplus because we didn't spend money. The faction would like to confirm, looking at the multiannual, in particular 2025, that any surplus there does not include the TWO money. The faction would like to know if we minus the TWO for 2024; any surplus we have for 2025 is all money generated from us. If that's the case, what project did we have there in the next few months that's going to generate that money that we missed from the TWO surplus?

Your statement is incorrect. The funds allocated for TWO have corresponding expenses, which means they have no impact on the budget. Therefore, neither the 2024 nor the 2025 surplus includes any funds received from TWO.

The faction makes mention that the budget has a lot of cuts but very little revenue generation. There were a lot of projects that were already started that could have potentially generated revenue for this budget. For example, in the project that started for the parking lot across from the old post office, most of the system was already in place; it was almost ready to go, but the Government changed. So, where is that project now? It was a simple project where we would put a boom and have a payment system; the company was already identified. Where is that system now? This budget has a lot more potential to generate revenue; we could have actually cut a lot less, especially in education. The current Government has been here since May, so we have had enough months to generate revenue for this budget. So where is that project now with the boom system, and why isn't that being looked into?

MinFin: This parking lot project has my utmost attention, as I believe it is necessary and the funds are available. I requested information and was informed by the Ministry of AZ that three quotes were received, but this was never tendered. However, given that the balance exceeds 50K, this project must be tendered publicly in accordance with the law.

Together with the Ministry of AZ we will publish the tender soon, so that we can proceed with the purchase and installation of the boom.

MinAZ: The Minister of Finance already responded and i wish to reiterate that the project at the old post office location was identified and planned. However, the public tender that took place in 2023 was never finalized because the awarding advice was not completed. Additionally, the budget was not allocated before the tender process occurred. As a result, the project has been put on hold.

Currently, our focus is on the Automatic Parking Boom Payment System project at Clem Labega Square parking lot in Philipsburg, where a similar system was in place but was never replaced after Hurricane Irma. Concerning the project at Clem Labega Square, funds have already been allocated for its completion.

The Department of Facilities Service has now provided new Terms of Reference with all the updated specifications for this project. The Terms of Reference will be published in the newspaper next week, and once this is done, we will proceed with the public tender. The goal is to finalize the Clem Labega Square project, with the system fully operational by the second week of January 2025.

For the project at the old post office location, we will ensure that the correct specifications are stipulated in the Terms of Reference. We also must consider that this project involves significant investment, particularly concerning the infrastructure. The foundation at the old post office location must be concrete, lights need to be installed, and all our infrastructure must be factored into a public tender, followed by the Automatic Parking Boom Payment tender.

We aim to begin the public tender for the old post office location by mid-December, with full operation of the system at Clem Labega Square finalized by the second week of January 2025.

The faction mentions that we are not here just to bash the budget. The faction would like to see things progress, not that every single thing is stopped that the former Government brought forward. The faction emphasized the collaboration with the former Minister of TEATT on the issue of lottery booths and their regulation. We worked on that and started a policy, maybe even legislation, to ensure that lottery booths pay their fair share. Where is that now? The faction doesn't see it reflected in the budget. We are not just looking at the budget and figures, but also the *toelichting*—part of our future revenue generation is this project, and we are starting with this amount of money. It's not in the *toelichting*, so the faction assumes that it's not budgeted.

The national decree containing general measures is currently at the Governor for his approval.

The faction has posed this question before: Is every lottery booth that we have now legal? Are they legally established? How many lottery booths do we have on the island? If we establish a legal basis for them, how much money will they generate?

The ministry, as previously stated, prepared draft legislation to establish a regulated process for lottery permit holders to establish lottery booths. The last lottery booth count was approximately 102 (Aug. 2023).

Given the approximate amount of Lottery Booths as mentioned above, we are estimating approx. Naf 22,000.00 per month or Naf 264,000.00 annually.

Another item brought forward by the Ministry of TEATT was inspection fees. The legislation was very outdated, and the process was far along. Can we get an update on that? Has that process also been stopped, the inspection fees? Is this government planning to continue with that?

With respect to the charging of fees for the movement of small animals to and through Sint Maarten, the ministry has finalized its study on the potential revenue generating opportunity. This information has been placed on a list of priorities for legislative changes for 2025.

The former Government started a process of collecting the backlog of casinos. What was collected up to date since May? How many casinos are up to date with their backlog and remaining current? How many are not up to date, with their backlog and remaining current? What is being done to enforce this collection?

I would like to report that nine casinos have complied with their obligations regarding compliance and payment of the agreed balances. In total 4.2 million was collected of outstanding balances. However, four casinos have not complied, and appropriate measures have been taken to collect the outstanding balances. Further actions will be taken as necessary.

I must commend the previous Minister of Finance for enforcing these collection efforts, and I as the current Minister of Finance will continue to ensure that casinos and lotteries meet their financial obligations.

The faction continues on the point of the dismantling of the task force in VROMI. This task force brought in a lot of money within a short period. The Minister of VROMI stated that he didn't see the sense in it anymore and that the Department of Domain would take it over. Since the department took over that responsibility from the task force, how much money has the department collected since then, in particular from the ten biggest offenders? The faction would like to know who the ten biggest offenders are when it comes to a domain itemized. How much has been collected from those top 10 from domain? How many years do they owe?

The Government also came out and said that they are not selling WINAIR shares. The faction believes that this is a missed opportunity as the shares could have brought relief to citizens affected by GEBE today. The faction offers clarification on the process; it wasn't that the former Government alone wanted shares to be sold. WINAIR themselves wanted to sell shares so that the Government would have generated money to be able to put it anywhere. In terms of WINAIR shares, the concept of the former Government was that a portion of those shares would be going to the staff of WINAIR, all shares would be sold to local entities like APS, and a portion

of those shares would be sold to the general public which means that instead of taking out a loan at 5% to 6%, the public would be able to participate and invest in WINAIR and be able to collect dividends over the next how many years. The faction again emphasizes that this is a missed opportunity that would have allowed local Sint Maarteners to have something to invest in, as there are not many opportunities for us to invest. The faction believes, again, that this is a missed opportunity, but considering how things are going, we will be back there very soon.

Winair has communicated previously that no prior conversations have taken place regarding the sale of their shares.

Update: Regarding the sale of Winair shares, I have received minutes from the Secretariat on October 15, 2024 which indicate that in May 2023, there was a confidential Council of Ministers (COM) meeting where the potential sale of Winair shares was discussed with Winair to address budgetary needs and financial challenges facing the country. One important factor is that the composition of the board has since changed. I have noted that those in attendance at our current COM meeting were not present at the 2023 meeting. Therefore, the information shared with us was accurate from their perspective, as no discussions on the topic had occurred under the current board's tenure.

As such, I respect the confidential nature of COM discussions and cannot divulge further details. However, as stated by the Prime Minister, this government currently has no intention of selling Winair shares. Our focus is on implementing structural revenue increases for the country of Sint Maarten, as this is more sustainable than relying on incidental revenue sources.

The faction mentions the draft legislation at Parliament regarding, among others, inheritance tax and tax holidays, a variety of them, some of which are actually already here, including the banking law. What's the position of the Minister of Finance on these legislations? Is this something that the Minister still sees herself in—the ones that are at Parliament already—and can we get a timeline on when we could have those meetings or when the Minister will be ready to execute those meetings? The Minister mentioned, in particular regarding ENNIA, that the 4 million dividends from the Central Bank could have gone to education, justice, and civil servants among others. We need to start to find ways to generate revenue. We need to be able to find new money. However, the faction finds it interesting that the first opportunity that the Government got to generate revenue for the 2024 budget, they gave this money away. When they had the opportunity to collect taxes, this Government decided to give a tax holiday, and that was done as a demissionaire government before elections. The faction would like to know if we are really trying to generate revenue or give money away. In addition, the faction believes that we have a lot of hypocrisy because the former Minister of VROMI was bashed severely for focusing on construction, focusing on development, and making sure that the one pillar that actually brought us out of the pandemic succeeded. It was heavily criticized, but then parties that are part of this Government also supported the same tax holiday, supported the same entity that they complained about during the whole campaign—

no more supporting Cupecoy, no more supporting big developments, construction pause. But we still support a tax holiday for that same area.

The **tax holiday** that was granted does not have any impact on the 2024 fiscal year. Its effects will be felt in future revenue cycles. Therefore, for 2024, no revenue was "given away." While revenue is undoubtedly important, the focus must also be on attracting investments, creating job opportunities for the people of Sint Maarten, and fostering economic growth—all of which will eventually lead to increased future revenue for Sint Maarten.

When considering a tax holiday, we must not only focus on the loss of tax revenue but look at the broad picture and also recognize how this incentivizes future gains through increased economic activity and tax revenue in the long run.

The faction would like to mention that it also came to the former Government, and when it came, what was said was that if you're going to give out any tax holiday, we wanted something in return. And that social responsibility was ensuring that all schools, or all public schools at least, had solar panels with batteries. The faction would like to know what the potential loss in revenue is by giving out that tax holiday.

This is a very sensitive matter, as initiatives like this are not currently included in the Tax Holiday Law and can be seen as bribery. However, we will certainly look into this issue, as it would be beneficial to consider incorporating such initiatives into the law in the future, where social responsibility could become a requirement for obtaining a tax holiday.

We have a budget cut for education of 13.1 million guilders. Couldn't that have been filled by the potential revenue lost from this tax holiday?

The tax holiday granted does not result in a revenue loss for the current year. Please note that this tax holiday applies to **future revenue**. Therefore, the answer is no—the tax holiday cannot be used to fill the **NAf 13 million decrease** in the **ECYS** budget for 2024.

Again, the faction believes it is hypocritical to sit here and say to the police officers, the teachers, the people at SZV, and the citizens of Sint Maarten that we had to cut so much money because we could not generate funds, yet we gave out millions of dollars, and opportunities waste to collect revenue.

The tax holiday granted does not result in a revenue loss for the current year. Please note that this tax holiday applies to **future revenue**.

The faction mentions SZV and that there was a draft agreement on the amounts owed. The faction knows that this has been a topic for years, and SOAB and CFT actually said that the agreement that was reached should be executed and to get it done as soon as possible. But again, looking at the multiannual budget, the faction does not see that agreement impacted in the budget or *toelichting*. The agreement for

SZV on the amounts owed—is there an agreement? Is there a timeline for the agreement? And is that reflected in the multiannual budget?

Upon taking office, SZV requested an update on the contract. However, when a detailed specification was needed to justify the amount in question as included in the draft agreement, it was not available. As a result, I could not in good conscience just sign this agreement. SOAB will assist in determining a well-substantiated amount that both the Government and SZV can agree on. While I acknowledge that there is a debt that needs to be settled, it is important to ensure that a detailed specification is provided, clearly explaining how the payment amount to SZV is calculated. This is also crucial from a financial management standpoint, as we need to be able to demonstrate and explain significant amounts, such as this debt, to the auditors with proper substantiation.

Also, the APS and the SZV management of the building itself, that was also a draft that was left and should have been finalized for execution in 2025, but faction does not see them taken up in the *toelichting* or the multiannual budget or even for this year. The faction does not see it reflected. Where are we regarding the maintenance of the building?

The meetings held with SZV have been highly constructive, and we are confident that finalizing this plan will not only bring much-needed clarity but also prevent similar issues in the future. The ministry is optimistic that an agreement can be reached soon which will be reflected in the 2025 budget.

The Department of Facility Services is rolling out a strategy to improve maintenance of government buildings. A key initiative is the Facility Management Information System (FMIS), which will centralize data on maintenance, repairs, and asset management. This system, potentially funded by the Temporary Work Organization (TWO), aims to boost efficiency, proactive planning, and transparency.

The department is also addressing mold prevention, air conditioning servicing, and hazard testing, which have been managed reactively in the past. A proactive approach will ensure these tasks are handled regularly to protect the health and safety of civil servants and the public.

Additional funding is requested to support this shift to proactive maintenance, which will reduce long-term costs and risks. The department is working with the TWO and other stakeholders to secure these funds, ensuring sustainable, safe, and cost-effective facility management.

The faction makes reference to an article from the Minister of VROMI, listing accomplishments, and a significant portion of land was given out earlier this year. When you look at the (*RFT*) *Rijkswet Financial toezicht*, it states that over a certain amount of money, a decree has to be made up and published. The faction would like to confirm if this was done for any land given out this year, especially the one mentioned in the accomplishments?

In the list of accomplishments a significant portion of land was re-issued in long lease. According to the MP, the Rijkswet Financial Toezicht regulates that in some cases and one in particular, a landsbesluit needs to be made. However, the Rijkswet RFT does not say this. If it does, I would invite the MP through you madame chair to mention the specific article he thinks is applicable.

The MP however, through you madame Chair, might be confused as to what the articles 20 and 21 of the RFT state. In those articles it specifically mentions a “besluit tot het aangaan van een financiële verplichting”. A long lease issuance is not a financiële verplichting, in a long lease issuance government spends no money but only gains money. Also, nowhere in the RFT does it speak of any landsbesluit being necessary, so this does not fall under the RFT. Furthermore, article 1 of the long lease ordinance is clear, the Minister of VROMI is the one who is authorized by law to issue government land in long lease.

The faction noted a discrepancy and mentions that it was stated for example in one of the answers that a tax holiday does not lead to loss of revenue, but the previous answer states the tax holiday potentially only leads to loss of revenue in the following years. Which one is it? Does it lead to a loss of revenue, or doesn't it? In addition, the answer even stated that it will have a decrease in potential TOT, room tax among other taxes. If it's a decrease in tax, isn't it then a potential loss in income? The faction would like clarification, especially for the public. The public deserves to understand what a tax holiday is. If we are saying it does not lead to a loss of revenue, what is the advantage to the person requesting the tax holiday, and what is the risk for the Government? Because the faction believes there is a gain and there is a loss.

To clarify and break down the mathematics: a tax holiday may lead to a reduction in revenue from a specific tax, such as a reduced profit tax rate. However, when you look at the broader economic picture, this reduction is offset by other gains. The initial loss is balanced by increased employment, which leads to higher wage tax contributions, along with additional revenues from turnover tax (TOT) and other related taxes. When all these factors are considered together, the overall impact is not a loss in revenue, but rather a shift in where the revenue comes from. Hopefully, this provides clarity on how a tax holiday works.

I appreciated this question from the honorable MP. And to clarify to the public as requested by the MP, a tax holiday is a temporary reduction of certain taxes granted by the government to encourage economic activity, attract investment, or provide relief to businesses or individuals. During a tax holiday, businesses or individuals may be exempt from paying specific taxes for a designated period.

Governments often implement tax holidays to stimulate growth in particular sectors, attract foreign investment, or support recovery during economic downturns. While a tax holiday reduces immediate tax revenue, the aim is to generate long-term economic benefits by boosting business activity, employment, and overall economic growth.

I am therefore almost certain that the 5 tax holidays granted by the previous administration namely, 3 in December 2021, and 2 in January, 2022 were for this same purpose.

The faction notes the answer provided by the Minister of Finance that we have to look at potential for investment, we have to attract investors. The faction also notes that the tax holiday was granted, but the investor was already here, already constructing, so then what was the gain if the investor was already attracted? Again, the answers are contradicting.

The law exists and investors, whether local or foreign direct investors- can request a tax holiday once they meet the requirements. The legislation is in place and Tax Holidays are granted by a National Decree.

It was also stated that we can't calculate the expected revenue loss, but in the answer it was stated about future revenue gains. So how can we now not calculate our loss, but we can now predict or calculate our future revenue gains by attracting economic activity? It can't be we could do one and not the other. Again, the faction believes it's contradicting.

Regarding the WINAIR situation, some members of this faction sat on the other side. They are not making things up. The Minister of Finance has access to the Council of Ministers and the Secretariat. In June of 2023, discussions happened. The faction, therefore, requests the Minister to please get the information from the Council of Ministers. This faction has no reason to lie, and at the end of the day, the options and the discussions that were had were in the best interest of Sint Maarten. The faction knows that there is documentation proving that these discussions took place and documentation showing that WINAIR wanted this.

When we came to Government, we were dealing with a situation where an outgoing government on the eve of a transition sent an email out to a company indicating to them that they won the bid, and this was the Chief of Staff of then Minister Perry Geerlings. For the Government to say that the previous Government has messed up the tax system, and we were there for four years, and this situation was dealt with before we came in is very alarming to the faction. In addition to that, the faction reminds the Minister of Finance that there is a sworn affidavit by all the members of the committee who were dealing with the tax system that said we never gave permission to the Chief of Staff to send that email out, and we never awarded that entity the bid. The faction would like to know who messed up the whole tax system. It was definitely not this faction, definitely not the National Alliance government, and the only Government at that time, and the Minister at that time was the DP Minister Perry Geerlings. The faction is of the opinion that it is very dangerous to be playing these games when the evidence and facts are there.

Regarding the matter of our tax system: the previous National Alliance led government, which governed continuously for four years—a fact they take pride in, as it hadn't been done since 10-10-10—was unable to secure and implement the much-needed tax system for Sint Maarten. I can assure you, Gods willing, if I have the honor of serving as the Minister of Finance for the next four years, Sint Maarten will have a new and reformed tax system in place.

Reference is made to questions posed by a colleague within the faction regarding the road funds. On September 4, during the press briefing of Government, the Minister of VROMI, mentioned that the road fund would be established in the budget amendment. The faction, however, does not see this in the amendment. The faction is of the opinion that we have to be able to trust the Government. If the MinisterMinister says something in the press briefing, we have to trust that it's true. The reporter at that time even asked a follow-up question, so if we establish a road fund and the road tax is going to the road fund, then there will be a decrease in government revenue. The Minister of VROMI acknowledged this and said yes, we would be dealing with budget cuts. The staff of VROMI have acknowledged that this will impact them, but as a government, we have to find ways to generate more revenue. He further went on and said that as a Council of Ministers, we will be approving this and continuing this discussion on the road fund and finding ways to fill this gap. That's not faction's words, although the faction may be paraphrasing.

Minister of Finance: Regarding the road fund, I am not certain what was expected to be seen in the budget, as this is a law. With 2.5 months remaining in the year, there are still funds available in the capital expenditure (capex) for road projects. Therefore, a reallocation at this point would not be practical. As mentioned previously, together with the Ministry of VROMI, we will further assess how to go about the road fund and the appropriate implementation of this. This may involve adjusting or retracting the law to improve the utilization of the intended funds and to prevent both overallocation and underutilization.

Minister of VROMI: Honorable MP, all things I state are to be trusted, just as much as I would assume that whatever you say is said in good faith and not with malicious intent. I understand the mp's question stems from the announcement made that the establishment of the road fund would be reflected in the budget amendment. As this is not yet finalized it can in no way be reflected in the amendment and the inclusion of any unfinished thoughts or ideas, in any budget, would be irresponsible.

The faction is therefore surprised that the budget amendment does not talk about a road fund and does not talk about road tax.

The faction would like to know from the Minister of VROMI if when we as the public watch the press briefing, should we be able to trust the words that are coming out of the mouths of the ministers. The faction just wants to confirm that.

The faction was very happy to see that something the MinisterMinister campaigned on, was going to be in the budget amendment 2024, which was the road fund and the road tax. The faction would like some clarity on this.

The Minister mentioned that the task force was dismantled because it was unclear how much revenue was brought in. Then it was mentioned that the department was able to collect 1.2 million guilders. The faction wants to be very clear—collecting and supposed to collect are two different things.

I believe the question is in reference to the outstanding amount of long lease canon owed over the years over a parcel of water, first realized some years ago. In

2019 a decree was issued to the developer in which the amount of 1.2 million in outstanding fees and penalties was to be paid before the issuance of the water parcel (in use for more than 15 years, but never got deeded). This amount is to be collected.

The faction would like to know if that has been recorded in the budget. So, is that a receivable recorded in the budget, and the faction would like that confirmed by the Ministry of Finance.

Amounts related to long lease are budgeted on an accrual basis, meaning they are not included in the budget based on the amounts collected, as is the case with taxes, which are budgeted on a cash basis. Therefore, the amount included in the budget reflects the total invoiced for the specific year.

The question of the top 10 offenders within the domain remains unanswered. It was mentioned that the information has to be retrieved from the receiver's office, etc., The faction expected that the Minister would get the information; why wasn't that done? When the task force was there, they went to the receivers and got the information, and a list was presented. Can the list of the top 10 offenders and the amounts be given to Parliament? The faction can't imagine that the department or ministry doesn't know who owes them.

This will be provided by e-mail, due to the size of the file. The Ministry will work to create a post on social media with a schedule.

These are the 10 outstanding long lease canon up to 2022 received from the Receivers:

- 48,000.00 fls
- 51,528.54 fls
- 66,486.40 fls
- 91,393.00 fls
- 97,557.98 fls
- 104,960.80 fls
- 117,103.00 fls
- 127,608.00 fls
- 130,978.21 fls
- 201,324.55 fls

The Receiver's Office does the collection of long lease canons.

The taskforce was deemed ineffective by the new administration when they came in. The taskforce consisted of the then acting head of Domain Affairs, and two eternal

lawyers. The composition of the taskforce through you madame Chair, did not make sense from the jump. And this is why.

The ministries of Finance and VROMI are well aware, or at least they should be, about the current administration system we are using for long lease land. At this time, there is absolutely no direct link between the Receivers office, which collects the long lease fees, and the Domain Affairs department that handles the administration of long lease issuances. So, if Domain wants to find out if a person or company has outstanding long lease fees, the department needs to request this information from the Receivers on a case by case basis, and wait for the response from Receivers.

To date, we cannot find any information within the Ministry. If the MP is aware of this information and is able to share, this would be much appreciated. Important to note that it is without the existence of the task force that Government first identified the outstanding payments and we are currently working to recoup these funds.

The faction mentioned that the Minister referred to the side road project. Can the public get a detailed schedule? Can the public get a detailed schedule similar to the side road project for the car wrecks? Also, can the public receive an email address or a phone number where the public can call in or send an email for complaints regarding the Car Wrecks?

The process of car wrecks removal is an ongoing activity whereby contract managers who are tasked with monitoring District Cleaning activities identify car wrecks as part of their location controls. The ministry will publish a post via our social media with the email included.

The Department of Infrastructure Management plans to increase awareness of wreck removal in Q4 2024, by informing the public when certain locations will be cleared of car wrecks.

There is currently no specific fines to individuals or businesses as it relates to car wrecks or dumping in general. VROMI plans to undergo Bavpol certification which will enable its personnel to issue fines under all responsibilities of the Ministry. There is also a finebook that requires updating in collaboration with the prosecutors office for this endeavor to be truly effective.

The faction would like to know the Minister's Minister's stance regarding the tax holiday.

A decision pertaining to this still has to be made by this new Government. As previously answered there is a follow up meeting set with the Working Group Tax Improvement in the beginning of November, where we will go over all the details of the program so far, Afterward, a plan of approach will be agreed upon, and the matter of the tax holiday can be discussed. This will allow the new government to make a well-informed decision, taking into account the broader context of the overall tax

reform. It is essential that any decisions align with the long-term goals of a sustainable and effective tax system for Sint Maarten.

The faction would like to know if the Minister's Minister's, at least if his political stance on overdevelopment has changed since they supported this recent tax holiday. So, has the Minister's Minister's political party's position changed on overdevelopment, and overdevelopment specifically in certain areas?

The faction would like to know, regarding the car wrecks, if we as a government are looking into holding those persons who are leaving the cars accountable. Together with the Ministry of Justice, getting the VIN numbers or perhaps even starting an awareness campaign where if you see it, you report it. The faction thinks it's a pretty expensive project for persons to be just leaving cars there every month. The faction believes it's unsustainable, and the same goes for trash being thrown in the garbage, especially by Jose Lake Ball field. The faction sees that there are clear signs stating what you cannot throw there, and basically, every day, there's a violation. So, what does the ministry plan to do?

The Department of Infrastructure Management is collaborating with NSI to determine short and long term solutions for this area.

The faction makes reference to a previous speaker who spoke on the cemetery space shortage. The faction believes that the former Minister of VROMI also brought this project to the attention previously regarding the limited space that we have left at the cemeteries. In the budget for 2024, we allocated about 10 million for the purchase of land in the area of Bethlehem from the Plantz family. The faction would like to know if that is still something this Government will continue to pursue and if these discussions will continue. Is it a priority for this Government to get the capex to purchase that land, considering a portion of that land was actually going to be a modern cemetery with a policy?

The faction would also like to know if the Government is working on such a policy so that the maintenance and burial of individuals become self-sustainable, as it is in other countries. Is that a priority for this Government as well?

Is this 10 million a dollar or guilders amount? I assume the MP is referring to the 18.2 million which MP Ottley also asked a question about. My answer remains the same, by moving it towards 2025 shows the commitment that we are still willing to pursue this project.

As it regards Erfpacht the Faction states that the task force actually collected about 2 million guilders when it was established. The total amount at that time was 14 million outstanding, so now it has been reduced to about 11-12 million guilders. And again, the faction asks the Minister of VROMI to contact the Ministry of Finance to maybe even get the list of top 10 offenders so you could continue to work on this so that we do not need to have so many budget cuts in 2025 and actually go after those persons that owe us. Some of the locations and businesses are exploiting the land they have and they are making money, but they're not paying Government their dues.

We have received the latest list of top 10 offenders amounts outstanding in 2022 is hereby provided. 2023 is not yet available. Due to privacy matters the names and crib numbers are not provided.

These are the 10 outstanding long lease canon up to 2022 received from the Receivers:

- 48,000.00 fls
- 51,528.54 fls
- 66,486.40 fls
- 91,393.00 fls
- 97,557.98 fls
- 104,960.80 fls
- 117,103.00 fls
- 127,608.00 fls
- 130,978.21 fls
- 201,324.55 fls

The Receiver's Office does the collection of long lease canons.

The faction would like to address a few points regarding the budget and allocations of funds for the GEBE. Specifically, the faction inquires what the *rente las norm* will be for the collective sector. When was this last calculated, and has that been updated to include the current loan we have in the budget? The faction would like to know what our limit is and by us taking on this loan, would it then exceed this limit.

This was last calculated in 2021. In 2021 the interest expense norm was 5%. If we take out these loans we will not exceed our limit. Currently in the IMF report the interest norm is estimated at 4.2% this aligns with our assessment taking into account discussions with CFT. Please note that in the initial budget 2024 the investments included were 122 million in this amended budget the amount is 123 million as such in both instances the interest expense norm will not be exceeded.

In 2021, it amounted to NAf 32,692,000. Currently the Netherlands, Sint Maarten and Curacao are all working together in accordance with the RFT to establish the Collectieve Sector. There were capacity issues at the Netherlands Statistic Bureau which led to a delay in the process. Even though the interest norm has not been officially updated it is projected to be 4% hence the reason we are able to take out these loans. This is also verified by CFT as it is included in the RFT which is the exact

reason we remain in close discussions with them when assessing the amount of capital investments we can include in the budget of the country.

The faction seeks clarification on the current status of the lottery booths. What is the legal basis for the booths we have now, and do they all possess the necessary licenses to operate? The faction asks what licenses do they have to operate are required for lottery booths if the operators are paying taxes, such as SZV, and whether they have a BV or NV. They collect money and distribute money, so what gives them the legal right to execute this task?

The legal basis for the lottery booths can be found in article 3, paragraph 1, under a, of the Lottery Ordinance and in article 2, paragraph 1, under c, of the NATIONAL DECREE, CONTAINING GENERAL MEASURES, for the implementation of articles 3, third and fifth paragraphs, and 4, second paragraph, of the Lottery Ordinance. The issued lottery license states that the lottery license holder must send to the minister an overview of the locations from which the lottery tickets are sold. In addition, each new point of sale must be reported to the Finance Department and the Department of Economic Licenses.

They operate under the lottery license of the license holder (the lottery company) for which they sell tickets and do not have their own business license from the Ministry of TEATT, nor are they operating as an independent legal entity (B.V. / N.V.). In addition, the National Decree that is currently at His Excellency the Governor will have the regulations clearly defined for Lottery License Holders, Booths and Point of Sales.

In this National Decree, the following matters are regulated:

- the lottery license holder needs to ask the minister for permission to have a sales point;
- the lottery license holders have to pay a monthly “vergunningsrecht” for each sales point;
- each sales point has to comply with the legal requirements;
- withdrawal of permission.

This will also ensure fees are paid monthly and by extension assist with compliance of taxes. Once the decision process is completed, all required information will be made available via publications. The lottery license holders will be granted the time to prepare for the new rules for their licenses.

This information should be provided by SZV respectively the Tax Inspectorate/Receiver’s Office.

The lottery booths currently operate under the license granted to the license holder; the license holder is either an N.V. or a B.V. As stated earlier, this matter will be further addressed once a decision on the National Decree is made by His Excellency.

The legal basis for the lottery booths can be found in article 3quater, paragraph 1, under a, of the Loterijverordening and in article 2, paragraph 1, under c, of the *"Landsbesluit houdende algemene maatregelen, ter uitvoering van de artikelen 3bis, derde en vijfde lid en 4, tweede lid, van de Loterijverordening"*.

The faction notes that the Minister mentioned there are 106 booths and would like to know how many sale points they have, such as grocery stores or gas stations being able to sell these items. On what basis are they allowed to execute this? Is anyone allowed to sell lottery tickets or numbers?

The last inventory conducted indicated about 350 sales points as of 2023. They currently operate legally based on the issued permits. As mentioned before, The legal basis for the lottery booths can be found in article 3quater, paragraph 1, under a, of the Loterijverordening and in article 2, paragraph 1, under c, of the *Landsbesluit houdende algemene maatregelen, ter uitvoering van de artikelen 3bis, derde en vijfde lid en 4, tweede lid, van de Loterijverordening*.

With regards to taxes and fees, please refer to my previous answers.

The faction inquires about the inspection revenue generating scheme and the dated inspection policy. Is that a plan to continue with the vehicles whether there are plans to continue this under the current Government?

Yes.

The budget projections were cut, so the cost wasn't cut, but the projections were cut because of revenue generation. So there were items like the WINAIR, the tax levy, the one cent per liter, and inspections, among others. What revenue generation items were presented by this Government for this budget amendment? So again, yes, the faction agrees that cuts will come if the Government removes any sort of revenue generation—that's logic. But what it was replaced with is more important.

The expenses were cut in line with the reduction in revenue.

The faction states that it would also mean that if all these items are removed in 2024, the Minister of Finance mentioned that for the budget 2024 and 2025, no policy

changes are coming. That would mean that the current Government is not planning to make any policies regarding revenue generation, which is very rare to the faction.

Given the limited time left in 2024, it was agreed, including with the CFT, that adding any new policies for this year would be unfeasible. The revenue-generating policies cannot realistically be implemented and received before year-end. As such it was agreed to align the revenue with realistic expectation and reduce the expenses accordingly.

The faction would like some clarity on that. Is the Ministry of TEATT not working on any policies regarding revenue generation?

The Ministry of TEATT does have policies that can be revenue generating. Eg. The LBHAM that will go into effect via National Decree for Lotteries, Lottery booths etc. before the end of Q4. However, to be realistic, we can only account for said revenue in 2025. We are working closely with the various Ministries to do the necessary in preparations for Budget 2025 where more details can be shared on what these policies and revenue generating items will be. For the record, the legislation in regard to the 1% excise tax was not drafted by the Ministry of TEATT. The former Minister of ECYS was spearheading this project with the Dept. and SOAB. The Ministry of ECYS can further elucidate on their progress to date.

The faction has a final opinion on the WINAIR discussion. The Minister mentioned that the board members stated they didn't have any information, but as a Council of Ministers, we don't depend on external parties to update us. We have what we call the Secretariat. Any information that you want regarding meetings that have been held, you ask the Secretariat, you ask your staff. So it's very concerning to the faction that on three occasions, it was said these meetings never happened, but the Government itself didn't notify the Minister.

Regarding the sale of Winair shares, I have received minutes from the Secretariat on October 15 which indicate that in May 2023, there was a confidential Council of Ministers (COM) meeting where the potential sale of Winair shares was discussed with Winair to address budgetary needs and financial challenges facing the country. One important factor is that the composition of the board has since changed. I have noted that those in attendance at our current COM meeting were not present at the 2023 meeting. Therefore, the information shared with us was accurate from their perspective, as no discussions on the topic had occurred under the current board's tenure.

As such, I respect the confidential nature of COM discussions and cannot divulge further details. However, as stated by the Prime Minister, this government currently has no intention of selling Winair shares. Our focus is on implementing structural revenue increases for the country of Sint Maarten, as this is more sustainable than relying on incidental revenue sources.

The Secretariat was present during the meeting when the question was posed, and an answer was provided. In my previous response, I mentioned that October 15, 2024, was the first time I received information from the Secretariat on this matter, at which point I confirmed that those in attendance were not the same as in the prior meeting.

The faction mentions the answers provided to questions on the Tax Holiday. It was also stated that during the tenure of the last Government, five were given out. The faction believes in avoiding misrepresentation of the truth. A tax holiday was given out to a project that consisted of multiple entities, but it was approved by the relevant departments—the Ministry of TEATT and also approved by the Fiscal Affairs Department, and the Council of Ministers. This was a time during the pandemic, and like the Minister said in one of her answers, and a time when even the Parliament of Sint Maarten, was stating we have to do our best to attract these individuals, to bring in companies, especially dealing with the Netherlands and finding money on our own. So, with the support of Parliament, yes, every single approval was given, not one negative advice at that time for the project.

Regarding your request to see the documents, I regret that I cannot answer the question regarding to whom the Tax Holidays have been granted for the following reasons.

In accordance with Article 62 of the Constitution, every member of the Parliament has the right to ask questions to the ministers. The ministers must answer these questions within a reasonable period, unless it is considered that answering them would be contrary to the interest of the Country or the Kingdom. The requested information is subject to a legal confidentiality obligation, namely Article 50 of the General National Tax Ordinance, as it requests the names of individual taxpayers who enjoy a special tax treatment. Considering this, in this case in order to determine whether answering the specific question is or is not contrary to the interest of Sint Maarten, a consideration of interests must be made between, on the one hand, the interest of those concerned in keeping their information confidential, and, on the other hand, the interest of parliament in being well-informed. The individuals involved are major investors who should be able to trust that their tax information will not be disclosed to anyone other than those involved in the implementation of the tax ordinance. If this trust is breached, Sint Maarten could suffer significant damage to its image, which could negatively affect the investment climate in Sint Maarten. Therefore, I believe that, in this case, the interest of those concerned in maintaining the confidentiality of their information outweighs the interest of parliament in being well-informed. In this case, answering the aforementioned question is therefore considered to be contrary to the interest of Sint Maarten, and as a result, the relevant question must remain unanswered.

The Minister mentioned the reason why we give tax holidays, and there are some reasons, for example, why the Ministry of TEATT would not give a tax holiday. For example, the Ministry of TEAT, which gives advice first before it goes to Fiscal Affairs, would mention things like maybe overdevelopment in the area. They would mention

things such as an entity already receiving significant economic benefits, such as tourists already buying condos. They might mention that construction in certain areas may lead to gentrification. They might also mention that there's already separate financing and other examples of concerns. Were these in place with the approval? What would the reason be if it was approved against all the answers the Minister gave herself for the reasons why to give? If the reasons were given why we give a tax holiday, but the advice given by the ministries was exactly the opposite or negative of those same answers, then why?

To be clear, it's not that the faction is against or for tax holidays. The faction is highlighting the hypocrisy—the fact of saying one thing and doing the exact opposite of those things.

The faction would like to know if the Minister knows about the governmental trend of divesting companies over the last 15-20 years. Why are they going through this process around the world? So, this is not a local trend. The faction thinks we're one of the few in the world that still have so many or 100% shareholders of government entities. Does the Minister view, for example, a difference with selling an asset and selling shares in a company? In addition to that, does the Minister believe in strategic mergers and acquisitions? Do you believe in selling shares to gain a partner? For example, with GEBE, if you have a big solar company that has the ability to buy shares within GEBE, GEBE now has a strategic partner within their reach that could not only give advice but, because they are invested in the company, they can say, "Hey, if we need a generator, we'll put the money in." Because by bringing a generator in, X amount of revenue is generated.

I believe in assessing the situation carefully and determining the best approach for our country and each unique company. Every decision should be based on what benefits the country in the long term, rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all solution.

The faction would like to know if the Council of Ministers is following the cabinet policy in terms of hiring.

My understanding of this question is, if the ministers are following the cabinet policy to hire their staff. If that is the case, the answer is yes.

Regarding this budget amendment, the faction believes the main topic here would be the loan for the generators. Among us as MPs, we've had many discussions on this, and the Prime Minister also mentioned that since June, he went to the Netherlands, and there have been discussions since then. The faction notes that we're a few months removed from June and would like to know if we can get an update on what the potential terms of the agreement would be with the Ministry of Finance and BZK. Have you had even informal discussions on that? Do these terms or agreements look anything similar to that of the airport terms and agreement on their refinancing? Were these in any way part of the discussions?

As I have already informed parliament, based on an estimate derived as a result of market research conducted by GEBE, an amount has been presented to the Netherlands for a loan. The Netherlands, by letter of the State Secretary, confirmed

that they are open for this and one of the requirements is to have this amount incorporated in the budget.

Once the Parliament approves this budget, the faction understands that we basically give carte blanche for you to continue this process, so the Prime Minister doesn't necessarily have to come back to Parliament to do the tendering process. What the faction would like to know is: before the agreement is finalized, will you be updating Parliament on what this potential agreement is? Because now, once you approve this, the Prime Minister has that power already. What we've also done in the past is get agreements and then come to Parliament to amend a budget because we already know the terms, and Parliament is then empowered. So now we're kind of doing it backward. The faction would like to know if the Prime Minister is going to inform Parliament or the public of what these agreements are or what the terms are.

I can assure Parliament that you will be updated as we go along with the discussions on the loan with the Netherlands.

There was also a question posed by a previous speaker regarding GEBE to the Minister of Finance, and in there it was stated that the 1.5 million budgeted was an expected dividend. Has GEBE paid dividends before, and what's the likelihood of them being able to pay the 1.5 million guilders in dividends?

MinFin: In accordance with accounting standards and practices, revenue must be included in the budget based on accrual accounting. This means the correct amount owed for concessions in the year is accounted for, regardless of when or if these funds are received. The discussion about whether these amounts can be collected or netted off is a separate matter, but the full amounts must be accurately reflected in the budget. The only revenue that is not based on accrual accounting is tax revenue, which is projected based on the actual expected income for the year. The 1.5 relates to concession and not dividend, concession is netted yearly with the expenses owed to Gebe.

MinAZ: Dividends are generally paid when a company has excess profits that it does not need to reinvest or maintain reserves. The payment of dividends often reflects the company's strong financial health and ability to generate profits over and above its operational needs and future growth plans.

NV GEBE is focused on recovering from multiple crises, including the 2017 hurricanes, COVID-19, and a cyber-attack that limited the ability to invoice accurately for a year and a half. In addition, power generation problems caused by lack of investment and maintenance must be addressed. GEBE's excess financial resources must be deployed to restore the health of the company's power generation infrastructure and long-term financial health.

Also, has any government-owned company paid dividends in the last few years?

In the past few years we did not receive any dividend from any Government owned company.

The faction mentions the three-month trial last year within the Ministry of Finance from November up until December. The process started with a survey and an exit survey. In that survey, there were 20 questions to gather their sentiments. The results of the survey actually showed, especially since it was mostly women who participated, that most persons within the department actually valued their time almost more than money. The faction was even surprised by that. Persons valued their time, and for example, one person said, you know, I would have more time with my kids. Another person said, you know, I'll have time; at least I could focus on one day where I can focus on my hobby that could generate revenue instead of, let's say, having to rush from work or after work participating in this hobby.

There is a possibility to have that implemented, and the faction would like that we actually look into that. The faction believes our staff has been neglected with COLA for years, more than 10 years, while inflation continues to rise, and this would be one way to be able to give back to our civil servants and show them that we care not just about their work but their quality of life while they work.

Regarding the questions about the legal help desk, a few months ago, the faction saw two articles come out. The faction wants to know which concept we are working with for the legal help desk, the one from MP Roseburg or former MP Akeem Arrindell.

The faction doesn't get why we just can't start because if there are no financial consequences, why can't we just start?

The faction encounters a lot of individuals who can't read Dutch, and they ask for help, and they have no place to go. Also, for a person who has never been introduced or never gone to a lawyer for, let's say, non-criminal reasons, for example, or never had to go to a notary, it's very intimidating for them. So if they know that this entity is set up where they're able to just get advice—not even, let's say, go to a court procedure—just get advice. The faction was very shocked to see how much request just for information, just for knowledge on how to proceed in certain matters. The faction believes that this is a very good setup for Sint Maarten, and the faction would just like to know when we could get an official start date. If not, why? The faction saw that there were a few lawyers. How can we maximize the list? How come you get most of the lawyers on board? Can we increase the number of lawyers to the legal help desk? The faction believes that the ministry needs to take ownership of it now and just start promoting the start date because the faction thinks this is something very much needed for our community.

[A: The proposal is the proposal of MP Roseburg. The relevant department will be having a meeting with law firms in the coming week and following this meeting the start date of the program will be confirmed. This meeting will also determine how additional legal minded persons will be contacted and included in the process. The project will be promoted extensively via social media.](#)

The faction noted that the list of planned road schedules for the side roads will be sent in writing. The faction hopes that that'll be done before the public meeting, but

the faction also asked if you could have it done for the public in general. The faction mentions that the former Minister published the schedule for the general public, especially those that will be affected by the road schedule, months in advance. Can that and when will that be done for the public?

The road repair works is contingent to several factors. This includes limited overall capacity and scheduling conflicts. While we strive to announce, within the days of commencing of road works this cannot be predicted very far in advance.

Minister, the Faction noted that you mentioned the timeline for the aesthetics policy. The faction believes there was already a draft in Government. What is the timeline of the Minister for this aesthetics policy? When will this be presented to us, and actually going into implementation?

There is no specific timeline at the moment. A 1st draft policy is in place, however it depends on capacity becoming available and planning to finalize and implement this policy.

The Minister mentioned privacy with the top 10 offenders, but the faction never asked for the names of these top 10 offenders. The faction asked for the amounts, so what are the top 10 offenders, and what are those amounts? In addition to that, what is the ministry doing to go and actually collect this money?

These are the 10 outstanding long lease canon up to 2022 received from the Receivers:

- 48,000.00 fls
- 51,528.54 fls
- 66,486.40 fls
- 91,393.00 fls
- 97,557.98 fls
- 104,960.80 fls
- 117,103.00 fls
- 127,608.00 fls
- 130,978.21 fls
- 201,324.55 fls

The Receiver's Office does the collection of long lease canons.

The faction noted that it was anticipated of one entity collecting 1.2 million. The faction would like to know if that's reflected. Has that been communicated to the

Ministry of Finance? Is that supposed to be collected this year? Is that part of the current budget amendment?

Amounts related to long lease are budgeted on an accrual basis, meaning they are not included in the budget based on the amounts collected, as is the case with taxes, which are budgeted on a cash basis. Therefore, the amount included in the budget reflects the total invoiced for the specific year. In 2024.

The faction is referring to the schedule of the side roads. The faction mentions that Windward Roads is not the only company that has the contracts for side roads. The faction is again asking if the schedule for the side roads can be published and keep the public up to date. Can it be sent to us and the Minister's priority list in terms of the roads that are up next?

The road repair works is contingent to several factors. This includes limited overall capacity and scheduling conflicts. While we strive to announce, within the days of commencing of road works this cannot be predicted very far in advance.

The faction is still very confused regarding the 1.2 million guilders. The faction heard the Minister mentioned that there was a letter of intent by a minister to give the land. Then, after, you're planning to issue it; isn't that then a new issuance? Because a letter of intent doesn't mean that it has been issued. Intent isn't the same as actually issuing the land out or deeding the land out. The faction would like some clarity on that. Is it part of the budget or not? Is it expected to be collected for 2024 or not?

The faction congratulates the Minister of VROMI for restarting the road resurfacing projects, specifically the one where they are busy on Pointe Blanche Road. The faction has questions concerning that with reference to the July 10th article. The Minister made some claims about taking the road resurfacing projects, going forward, to another level when it comes to quality. Mention is made of a couple of things regarding the thicknesses of asphalt. The Minister mentioned 6 to 7 cm or 6 to 8 cm of asphalt, and all these numbers have a trickle-down effect on the expenditures of the project. The faction would like to know the thickness of the construction that is being done now on Pointe Blanche Road.

The mentioned thickness of minimum 6 cm, an increase from 4cm, is the norm and where necessary, is adjusted accordingly.

The faction takes notes of the statements of the Minister regarding tackling drainage systems, stating that fewer meters of road would be done but with more in-depth work to tackle all the challenges related to the roads. The faction would like to know what is being done concerning that on the Pointe Blanche Road?

This road has drainage points at the Great Bay side of the road. During installation of the new road surface, the decision was taken to increase the road's slope towards Great Bay. This will improve water runoff towards the drainage. In addition, the slope and size of current drainage outlets will be enhanced.

The faction mentions the Prince Bernard Bridge. The faction reminds the Minister of a tender to repair the bridge, some 500,000 plus guilders. Since then, the faction has noted the construction of a stone tablet with the name of the bridge on it, as well as painting and a lot of superficial things being done to the bridge. What is the timeline for the exact construction elements for the bridge? When will it be repaired? What are they doing, and who is doing it?

There has been some delays with the supply of materials by the contractor (Omega constructions). All materials are expected in 2 weeks in order for the project to be completed by February 2025.

The road fund. The faction references a statement of the Minister of VROMI about the road fund being part of the 2024 amendment. The faction did not see it reflected in the amendment. The faction understands that the aim is to reallocate the road tax to the road fund along with other revenue-generating ideas. What are the exact current ideas for revenue generation other than corporate social responsibilities? Is the Minister of the opinion that reallocating the road tax funds to the road fund should be done in a more phased manner? The faction is of the opinion that reallocating the funds, even for the 2025 budget, could mean moving one problem into another, while the faction understands the long-term vision behind it.

SOAB in collaboration with the Ministry is busy working on the finalization of the road fund. While, the law exists currently, I agree with the MP that this should be done the right way. As such, the approach needs to be comprehensive noting that it should also consider the ability to absorb all funding generated by the fund.

In the national ordinance concerning the Road fund, in Article 2B of the law it is clear that the road tax goes to the Road Fund. This is not a choice by the Minister, but this is the current law, as regulated in national ordinance (<https://lokaleregelgeving.overheid.nl/CVDR211289> ex).

The Ministry does have a meeting with the General Audit Chamber on this matter.

The faction refers to a press briefing where it was stated that the tender for the tiles in the classrooms is now out for the MLK. The faction is concerned that the roof of the school was handed over in February, and, between February and now, only things being discussed is paint, windows, and tiles. The Faction question what has been done in the meantime and what is the timeline moving forward? What do we plan to do and use the school for between now and the next school year?

The retiling of the MLK Jr. School is currently in progress and is estimated to be completed in five (5) weeks. The repainting will also be undertaken simultaneously, with an estimated completion time frame of three (3) weeks. If all targets are met, the repairs to the MLK Jr. School should be completed by the end of November 2024.

Furthermore, there's been a cut in school funds of 13.1 million. The faction would like to know what the plans are to mitigate the loss in school material funds. A lot of the different schools and teachers are frustrated with the fact that they do not have the proper school materials to teach the kids.

The NAf. 13.1 million decrease was for capital investment projects in the Capital Investment budget only, and not for Goods and Services. The reduction for Goods and Services in the operational budget is equivalent to NAf. 1.4 million. There will be a negative impact from the budget cuts, but this was unavoidable given the changes in government priorities.

What is the Minister of Finance's stance on securing funds for a proper forensic lab moving forward? The faction would like to know about the plans for establishing a forensic lab.

There is no concrete plan for establishing a forensic lab, as maintaining a facility of that magnitude would be unsustainable. The focus is instead on equipping personnel with sufficient and innovative resources to carry out their tasks efficiently.

The faction is concerned about a tax holiday being offered to a major developer. The faction requests access to the documents outlining the agreement, specifically what it entails in terms of corporate social responsibility, where it will be directed, and to whom. The faction hopes it will benefit an area in need rather than those who already have.

Unfortunately, I am unable to answer the question regarding who has been granted Tax Holidays and provide any documentation for the following reasons.

In accordance with Article 62 of the Constitution, every member of the Parliament has the right to ask questions to the ministers. The ministers must answer these questions within a reasonable period, unless it is considered that answering them would be contrary to the interest of the Country or the Kingdom. The requested information is subject to a legal confidentiality obligation, namely Article 50 of the General National Tax Ordinance, as it requests the names of individual taxpayers who enjoy a special tax treatment. Considering this, in this case in order to determine whether answering the specific question is or is not contrary to the interest of Sint Maarten, a consideration of interests must be made between, on the one hand, the interest of those concerned in keeping their information confidential, and, on the other hand, the interest of parliament in being well-informed. The individuals involved are major investors who should be able to trust that their tax information will not be disclosed to anyone other than those involved in the implementation of the tax ordinance. If this trust is breached, Sint Maarten could suffer significant damage to its image, which could negatively affect the investment climate in Sint Maarten. Therefore, I believe that, in this case, the interest of those concerned in maintaining the confidentiality of their information outweighs the interest of parliament in being well-informed. In this case, answering the aforementioned questions is therefore considered to be contrary to the interest of Sint Maarten, and as a result, the relevant question must remain unanswered.

The faction has questions concerning revenue-generating ideas and the stance of the Minister of Finance concerning these. For example, operational licenses per branch instead of per entity for lottery booths.

There are some 200 slot machines in grocery stores—what are the thoughts on taxation for that?

There's a lot of things to consider regarding the lottery category that hasn't been implemented yet. The faction is curious about the Minister of Finance's position on those moving forward, especially since we need to be creative to generate funds. With 100 booths and over 200 slot machines, which is a lot of potential funds that could be generated there.

MP York requested my opinion on the matter of lottery booths and slot machines. While I do not yet have the full picture, I understand there was an initiative regarding booth license fees, regarding slot machines in grocery stores, a license is required. I will examine the booths and slot machines further in collaboration with the Minister of TEATT. This is a matter that warrants careful attention, and once I have more information, I will be able to provide a more comprehensive response to ensure that any decisions taken are in the best interest of the public and stakeholders involved.

The faction continues and states that there have been drastic cuts in the sports budget for local and regional tournaments, which are essentially the means of exposing our athletes and getting them the needed experience and development. While the faction understands that cuts have to be made, are there any strategies to mitigate these and to try to get our athletes the attention they deserve?

The drastic cuts impact our ability as a Ministry to support local and regional tournaments in the way we would like, and for this reason, we are encouraging the private sector to join us in supporting our efforts. As a government, we emphasize public-private partnerships in every sense of the word.

Since we are giving away tax holidays to major developers, if that is true, the faction would like to know what about tax holidays for small business owners, especially startups, for the first two years? What is the Minister's stance when it comes to that?

I believe this was answered previously however, I have no problem reiterating, this sounds like a nice initiative and something I am definitely open to looking into.

The faction would like to know the status of the legal helpdesk.

This initiative, which is a collaborative effort, aims to provide crucial legal support to the community. The Legal Helpdesk will operate within the framework of the existing Community Helpdesk, with the Hope Estate location identified as the pilot site.

While the structural framework for the Legal Helpdesk has been drafted, we are currently awaiting the participation of external stakeholders—namely, lawyers and

legal professionals. Their involvement is vital to the success of this project, as the helpdesk will rely on their expertise to offer the necessary legal assistance to those in need.

At this stage, we are still awaiting a finalized list of participating lawyers and legal minds who will sign agreements with government to formalize their involvement. Without the active participation of these legal experts, the project cannot fully move forward, as their contribution is the foundation upon which this pilot program is built.

We are optimistic about the program's potential to provide much-needed legal assistance to the community and look forward to the full implementation of the project once the legal professionals are confirmed.

The faction mentions the stoplight. The old system that we used for the stoplight was basically a time-based system. The faction agrees with the current Minister of VROMI that we should take infrastructure to the next level and would like to know if we replacing that with the same system, or are we going to go over to an intensity-based system, where, for example, at late at night, you don't have to sit at a red light when there's zero traffic on the road?

Government is going to a newer system that is compatible with different types of sensors and technology.

As it regards the road resurfacing project, the faction would like to know if there are any height surveys being done for the roads of choice before any grading or construction of the road is taking place. So, are there any height surveys being done?

No height surveys have been done.

The faction has questions about the reflows as the airport project is slated to be completed this year. Are the reflows supposed to start with immediate effect? If not, do they have a grace period? And if there's a grace period, until when is this grace period? The faction would also like to know what the Government's plans are concerning the reflows of the airport.

Start date 31 December 2027, the intention of the steering committee is for the reflow to be directed to a disaster fund that is yet to be established; however, the interest payments may potentially go to the country.

The Prime Minister indicated that the cost of the rental for the new generator will not be passed on to the consumer. Can the Government provide an overview of the fuel clause rate from 2021 to present? Can that overview also include factors with reasons for the increase, other than the fuel costs?

The faction mentions that the calculation of fuel clauses is still fascinating. What is the current percentage of the cost not related to the cost of fuel and the throughput fees in the makeup of the fuel clause? Please specify exactly what these costs are, if any.

Is the electricity concession ordinance of 2014 with GEBE still valid? Yes or no, please.

There are a lot of questions concerning the loan for the new generators. It is unclear if the information that is lacking from our end is being withheld for loan purposes or negotiation purposes. The faction would suggest, if that's the case, that we can have a closed-door meeting where those documents or whatever are seen as classified documents, and we could have an open dialogue concerning everything where the loan is concerned to avoid any misunderstandings for when the time for voting comes around.

The faction understands that the Minister is waiting on the lawyers to get back to the Minister. What is the exact tentative date for the start of the legal helpdesk? The faction hasn't seen any promotion as yet. The faction would like some more clarity where that is concerned.

The new start date for the Legal Help Desk is yet to be confirmed, however this is being finalized as we speak and will definitely be promoted via the various means of communication.

One of the main costs that plagues SZV are the enormous medical costs when it comes to patients that are sent abroad, and even though the care is cheaper than in some other places in the region, it's still expensive cumulatively when you add it all up.

Following my recent work visit to Colombia, Meetings were had with the referral team of SZV to ensure that the communication between SZV and the patients and between SZV and the Colombian physicians is adequate. Some of the bottlenecks identified in Colombia through discussions with over 50 patients and their companions were discussed and solutions were sought to make improvements. It is the ministry's intention to put a structural solution in place that could involve a special envoy or a liaison office to ensure that the referral costs are reduced while still providing adequate healthcare for our people.

(As previously indicated to MP Gumbs, a control unit is currently being established that will be charged with the responsibility of controlling execution of the care products procured. This will entail both a medical as well as a financial control).

What are the checks and balances moving forward that the Government plans to initiate concerning the handling of patients abroad?

Right now, the SZV has an intermediary in places like Colombia, etc., that handles the communication between the hospital and Sint Maarten, basically SZV. The faction is of the opinion that the third party is the judge, jury, and executioner for all patients and chaperons abroad. Oftentimes, the SZV doesn't have the necessary communication with the patient, and everything is trusted to this third party or these third parties. The faction mentions that sometimes a patient who is supposed to be over there for two weeks ends up staying two months or three months, and the costs keep going up and up, higher and higher.

To clarify, the agreement that SZV has in Cali is with the Hospital(s). The hospital has an international office within the hospital, it is not a third-party company. The international office provides a liaison service between international patients and the employed specialists within the hospital. This means that the care/service is provided by the employed specialists of the relevant hospital, and the international office facilitates the patient in this process. The nursing staff of the international office assists the patient with getting to and from these appointments, translating in-person where necessary and following up with them daily on their medical status. The medical doctors in the international office, oversees the treatment process of the patients and translates written reports in English, which are then shared with SZV and the referring specialist(s) on St. Maarten.

SZV's medical referrals officers (MROs) are the contact person for the patient in St. Maarten and the officers follow each case virtually through medical updates provided by the international office and discusses this intermittently with the Medical Advisor who approves/denies procedures/consultations based on the information provided by the specialists translated by the medical doctor of the international office. If there are doubts or questions based on the translated report, the international office is required to submit the original Spanish reports and diagnostic results for review by SZV medical advisors for further decision making. Though not all MAs have a strong command of the Spanish language, the expertise is available within the group of MAs.

SZV's MROs advocate for the patient where possible. However, this can only be done when the MRO is aware that there is a reason to advocate on behalf of the patient or their companion.

The hospitals abroad are required to inform patients if follow-up by a specialist is necessary but are not permitted to require patients to return to their facility for follow-up as this is at the discretion of SZV based on requests made by specialists locally after first seeing the patient. Though this has occurred in the past, SZV is diligently enforcing this requirement, and all patients are seen by a local specialist and requested to be referred to said facility, if follow-up treatment is not available locally. There are no instances where SZV refers a patient back to a hospital abroad, based on the request of the hospital abroad. Every referral abroad is based on a request submitted by a registered local specialist at SMMC using the SZV portal.

Does the Government have any plans to implement anything to mitigate these things from happening?

The agreement between the hospital abroad and St. Maarten is with SZV.

SZV performed a tender for medical referrals abroad. Though the tender took longer than expected, SZV is currently in the process of finalizing the contractual agreements with a new hospital in Cali, Columbia. The use of this facility is projected to yield savings in medical costs in the upcoming year(s). Additionally, regular evaluations are being held based on the existing agreements in place to ensure better enforcement of express scheduling of appointments, timely reporting to SZV, and

shortest possible stay abroad. This remains the priority of SZV and is being diligently enforced within the legal parameters SZV has.

This would also raise the quality of the service, or basically the customer experience, with the customer being the patient's experience. Does the Minister have any plans for this moving forward for the ministry?

Besides the research that was done of the pertinent issues experienced by the patients in Colombia, the ministry is looking into the possibility of designating a small team to communicate directly with the international office and to assist patients better and facilitate the process for them, with the end goal of shortening the process while maintaining the level of healthcare needed.

3rd Party services in the region (such as Coomeva) has been terminated for quite some time, and has been replaced by the international desk of each individual Hospital.

Are there any plans concerning the function book of the ministry of VSA? The faction mentions that there a lot of employees functioning outside of their position that has a lot of implications when it comes to salary or expectation or being able to be properly evaluated. What are the plans when it comes to the updating of the function book of the ministry?

The Ministry is actively working with P&O and their relevant Consultant, to draft the revisions of the Function Book of the Ministry. Currently the final reviews per Departments / Units are being finalized to be signed off by the SG VSA as the first step in the legal advisory process.

Concerning the car wrecks and the cars on the side of the road, the faction would like to bring up a particular area, namely St. James Estate. Although a private area, it is often used as a place to store cars and, in particular, wrecks. The faction would like to know if that area is under the Minister's purview to also clean up when it comes to car wrecks. Because it's private property, it's an added expense for the landowners in the area. Can the Minister look into this as well?

Wrecks located on private immovable property must be given permission from the property owner in writing prior to removal of mentioned wrecks. The Ministry is unaware of any communication between the Ministry and property owner about wrecks. Additionally, property owners have the responsibility to keep their properties clean and not be dependent on Government.

When it comes to the priority list for the side roads—because St. James was also once a priority road on the side road project— the faction would like to know if it is still there. Is it the next road to be done, or is it going to be something that's going to be pushed off again because St. James Estate still has overhanging GEBE lines? The faction states that it is not customary to pave a road and then address the lines. The faction knows that, in the past, GEBE has had contact with the landowners regarding

signing over the necessary permission to be able to put the lines down. What is the status of that, and is that going to be done prior to St. James being up for the next road to be paved?

The Ministry has inquired with NV GEBE on this item and will provide a response in writing once adequate information is received.

As it pertains to the road surfacing, in particular the Point Blanche part of the project, the faction asked if there were any height surveys being done, and the Minister said no. Going off the Minister's article, he stated a couple of months ago that 6 cm would be kind of the base minimum that they will be operating from and where needed, more.

The reason why the faction is asking these questions is because, aside from the customary 4 cm, which the Minister claimed would be done in the past, the faction is afraid that, although the Minister means well—that we're taking steps backward where technical specs are concerned instead of taking steps forward. The faction has information as it regards the most recent works on Union Road and Bush Road. Bush Road, for example, had areas and lengths of road where 10 to 12 cm of asphalt was applied.

The faction believes that before agreeing or coming to terms with the thickness of the roads, the Minister needs to look at the category of the roads. On Sint Maarten, up to now, we only look at side roads and main roads as the two categories, but also the usage of the road. Point Blanche is a particular road that is used differently than other roads because of the enormous intensity of the freight trucks. Because of this, a lot of times, we tend to look at the top layer, which the Minister is now upgrading, but where freight trucks are concerned, the most important thing is the underlayer, not the top layer.

The faction is of the opinion that we are not really addressing the problem of the road. It's more, in that situation, of beautification because the main problem with Point Blanche was the fraying of the asphalt.

The faction knows that the project does not include any asphalt reinforcement. The faction observed that no asphalt reinforcement was being used. That is something that keeps the top layer and the bottom layer from shifting. The faction is concerned about removing the top layer and not addressing the underlayer because the underlayer is used for weight distribution and maintaining the structural integrity of the foundation. So, if we effectively remove the top layer and not address the underlayer, you're not fixing the problem. And because there were no height surveys done, there were also no drill cores taken, so effectively no one knows what the thickness is of the underlayer. And because you're going thicker allegedly with the asphalt, you can end up in a scenario where you have a thicker top layer than underlayer, and that structurally is more disruptive than productive.

The faction noted that the Minister mentioned the sloping of the road vertically. The faction is of the opinion that if the road is to be assessed prior to addressing the road, a major problem would be after 15 to 20 minutes of rain it would basically be a pool of water and that is mainly because of the horizontal problems when it comes to sloping.

The faction would like to inform the Minister that because there's no height surveys taken, then the horizontal sloping of the road can never be done. And if the horizontal sloping of the road can never be addressed, then the pits actually become superfluous because you can't guide the water to the pit. So, if we slope vertically, we're actually creating another problem if the horizontal is not also tackled.

The faction reminds the Minister that if 6 cm is used on the high side of the road, if you're sloping horizontally, which means on the lower end, you're using the same 4 cm that ministry would refrain from using. Can the Minister clear that part up? Because if one side is higher than the next, it also has implications where height is concerned.

The faction believes the Minister when he said that he wants to take the next step in improving our road infrastructure, and that is something that, although expensive, saves money in the long run. The faction would like to remind the Minister that by addressing the horizontal and vertical slope issues, you also tackle the drainage issues as well.

The faction mentions the road fund. The Minister's answer was basically it's handled via national ordinance, end of sentence. The faction would like to remind the Minister, in all respect, that he is a co-legislator. So, if something is a national ordinance, that ordinance can be amended or repealed at our discretion. The question was more pertaining to the personal opinion of the Minister on what the Minister thinks should be the right way to implement the reallocation of the road tax to the road fund. The faction expresses concern about doing it too quickly, where you're alleviating one problem on one end and creating a problem on the next end.

MinFIN: I have taken note of the report of the audit chamber and I am aware of the Road Fund as established by the Road Fund Ordinance, which Ordinance is based on Article 24a of the Motor Vehicle Tax Ordinance. While acknowledging the legal requirement to allocate the funds for road investments in accordance with the Road Fund Ordinance, I pointed out that it may not be realistic at this moment since the Road Fund was not used by Sint Maarten Government and it seems to be a challenge to spend the amounts taken up in the budgets. I have also noted that in 2023 and 2024, 8 million was approved for road investments, in addition to the millions budgeted for maintenance of the roads, however these budgeted funds have not been fully utilized, indicating a more complex situation that requires further assessment. I proposed reconsidering the allocation of funds, possibly establishing a separate team to manage these funds, and adjusting the law accordingly or retracting it, this to improve the use of the intended funds, and to prevent overallocation and underusage of these funds. However, this will be further evaluated and discussed with the ministry of VROMI.

The faction would like for the Minister VROMI to provide an overview of the number of vacation rental properties on Dutch Sint Maarten based on issued building permits and address information. What steps can be taken to assess these property owners for income, profit, and/or TOT taxes? The faction knows right now there's nothing in place for that, but the question is, what is the vision where that is concerned?

MinVromi: I would like to make reference to a response by the minister of Finance to a similar question:

“The lodging tax (logeerbelasting) is in existence and also applies to vacation rentals like Airbnb at a rate of 5%. Additionally the tourism tax proposal is a key priority for this government, which is currently awaiting advice from the SER (Social Economic Council) to proceed further.”

Madame chair, through you, I also want to share that this specific combination of the data is not being registered within VROMI.

Although the faction knows it's more of a taxation question, the faction would like to know what the Minister's opinion or stance is on property tax for non-residents, basically investors that come to Sint Maarten, invest, and leave. What are the Minister's opinions where that is concerned? We often talk about generating new revenues, and the faction believes something like this would be very advantageous for the coffers.

Indeed, as stated the Ministry is open to considering this for non-residents.

The faction would like to know what the Minister's long-term vision is when it comes to the drainage issue in Cole Bay. The faction would like to know where the Minister plans on starting and if he has started to think on those solutions as yet.

The Ministry is presently looking into a long-term vision for the drainage situation in Cole Bay starting with the adjacent side roads with the Union road.

The faction is asking for clarification, maybe it was missed, but the faction did not fully hear the answer to the question pertaining to the forensic lab. What plans does the ministry have for the forensic lab of the police station? Will that be taken up in this budget, the 2025 budget, or any budget?

There is no concrete plan for establishing a forensic lab, as maintaining a facility of that magnitude would be unsustainable. The focus is instead on equipping personnel with sufficient and innovative resources to carry out their tasks efficiently.

As it pertains to the Martin Luther King School the faction would like to know what the plans are between November and the new school year for the school and the building.

The school will continue to be utilized even during the painting and retiling which is expected to be completed by the end of November. There are three (3) classrooms unaffected by tiles lifting, which are being used. The retiling-project has started and is estimated to be completed in five (5) weeks.

The faction would like to know about the one-cent-per-liter provision, which has been cut, like several other things. The faction knows the legislation reached as far as

the money being able to be allocated to the ministry, but the entity to use it was never addressed. What is the state of affairs with that?

The former Minister of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport included the amount of NAf. 110,000.00 in the budget with the title “Sports Fund 1 cent per liter gas/diesel)”, but the legislation was not completed at the time the budget was approved. In conclusion, the budget of NAf. 110,000.00 was not derived from 1 cent per liter of gasoline excise duties collected.

The draft legislation is not yet completed and consequently no funds will be generated based on the 1 cent on the gas/diesel per liter.

The faction notes that most budget cuts are based on expenditures, whereas the one-cent-per-liter is basically an income, yet it was cut. Was it cut because it went to another post? What was it cut for?

The faction mentions the VWO and the technical vocational Education. What are the long-term visions of the Minister and the ministry of Education to ensure continued access to VWO and technical vocational Education, considering the concerns from school boards that the lump-sum compensation system, which is based on the number of students insufficiently cover the costs of these special forms Education with extraordinary high cost.

The Lump sum system affects all funded schools. The Ministry has prioritized the review of the lump sum system to ensure that all school types are adequately funded.

Regarding the enrollment of students attending Pre-University Education, the Ministry’s objective is to increase student enrolment and participation in Pre-University Education. The Ministry has also engaged school boards in introducing strategies to improve access and effectiveness of Pre-University Education delivery.

The faction inquires if the lump-sum compensation system was evaluated by a consultant. If yes, what were the findings and recommendations of the consultant? Were these recommendations implemented? If not, why? If yes, please indicate how ?

The current evaluation of the Lump Sum System has not yet been concluded. The Ministry remains committed to finalizing the current review of the system and the National Decree for the Funding of Education, to introduce improvements in the funding of education in collaboration with school boards.

The faction states that there is an increase in subsidy for subsidized school boards while according to the data there have been a decrease in the number of students in primary and secondary schools since 2017. Can the Minister provide the reasons for

the increase and moreover the legal justification for the increase in the absence of an increase in the number of students based on the lump sum compensation system.

The funding calculations for education use student numbers and the appraised value of school buildings and inventory to calculate funding for all primary, secondary, and advanced vocational education schools. The funding of education is not based solely on student numbers.

The increase in educational funding to schoolboards noted on the 2024 budget amendment is mainly to account for the increase in personnel expenses due to indexation of salaries, vacation allowance and 1% COLA payments that were not accounted for on the approved budget 2024. Once the draft amendment is approved, the respective amounts will be disbursed to schoolboards.

The faction continues and mentions that one of the main complaints from businesses is that the education system is not properly aligned with the labor market needs of Sint Maarten. What initiatives and or educational innovations is the ministry pursuing to better resolve these issues.

The issue of education not aligning with labor market needs has prompted the Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth, and Sports (ECYS) to focus on several education innovation initiatives aimed at addressing this gap. One such initiative is the Council of Education & Labour Market. This council is tasked with advising on aligning education programs with the evolving demands of the labor market. Their efforts include profiling members who represent both education and labor sectors to foster collaboration and ensure that educational outcomes meet economic and industry needs.

What are the plans, seeing all the cuts in the budget, for special Education? The faction has not seen this reflected in the budget.

The Roadmap towards Implementation of the Special Needs Education Policy is being drafted. Also, a framework is being developed to solicit funding for students with special educational needs, including indicators used to track progress in meeting these students' needs over time.

Furthermore, the Professional Development Program has been expanded to include the Special Education Program.

To support the Ministry in meeting its goal of ensuring that Special Needs Education is available across all levels of education, the National Recovery Program Bureau (NRPB) is supporting the development of an Inclusive Education training for all in-service teachers.

Finally, the possibility of soliciting funding via the “Tijdelijk Werkorganisatie” or (TWO) for the assessment of physical infrastructure & material requirements and any additional training needs is also being explored.

In accordance with the legislation the Minister of Education is required to present a state of education report to Parliament. Can the Minister please provide an update on the state of education report and indicate when it will be presented in Parliament?

The State of Education Reports of 2017-2018, 2018-2019 and 2020-2022 have been submitted to the Minister of Education. A digital presentation of The State of Education Report of 2020-2022 was also done on June 21, 2024, to the ECYS Cabinet. The State of Education Report 2022-2023 is in draft pending corrections based on data received from schools.

Lottery booth license holder with ten booths and the other has 100 booths we are paying the same in taxes. What are the plans when it comes to legislation to tackle that? The more branches one has, the more taxes one pays, leading to increased revenue generation for the Government. This has also to do with the difference between lottery booths and ticket vendors in various stores and gas stations.

Please refer to my previous answer regarding the pending National Decree. The Ministry of TEATT does have policies that can be revenue generating. Eg. The LBHAM that will go into effect via National Decree for Lotteries, Lottery booths etc. before the end of Q4. However, to be realistic, we can only account for said revenue in 2025. We are working closely with the various Ministries to do the necessary in preparations for Budget 2025 where more details can be shared on what these policies and revenue generating items will be. For the record, the legislation in regard to the 1% excise tax was not drafted by the Ministry of TEATT. The former Minister of ECYS was spearheading this project with the Dept. and SOAB. The Ministry of ECYS can further elucidate on their progress to date.

The faction had a question about online gambling. A major pet peeve these days is all the regulations at the bank, and it has a lot to do with the regulations from the FIU and Sint Maarten being on the grey list. Many individuals face challenges when trying to open a bank account or submit amounts of \$2,000 or \$3,000. This situation is partly due to lack of legislation that regards the online gambling sector. The faction would like to know what the plans are when it comes to legislation of that category.

The CBCS regulates the banking sector, while the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) oversees designated non-financial businesses, including gambling providers. Compliance with their respective laws and international best practices is required. Questions about their legislative agendas should be directed to the relevant regulators

or the Ministers of Finance and Justice. For TEATT, existing online gambling regulations are being updated, with new rules (e.g., customer protection and addiction prevention) added to meet international standards.

The airport. The faction would like to know if the airport commenced the repayment of the loan granted by the Government in 2018 and 2019. If not, why not? If yes, can the Minister indicate how much has been recouped to date?

According to the response received by PJIA, the loan payments (debt service) to Government will start in Q1 2027. To date no payments have been made for the World Bank/GoSM loan. Debt service payments will be made twice per year.

The faction mentions the throughput fee. The faction believes that this has never been explained. What is it comprised of? How is that calculated? What is the pie chart of the throughput fees? What percentage goes to Government and what percentage goes to other entities? Who are these entities?

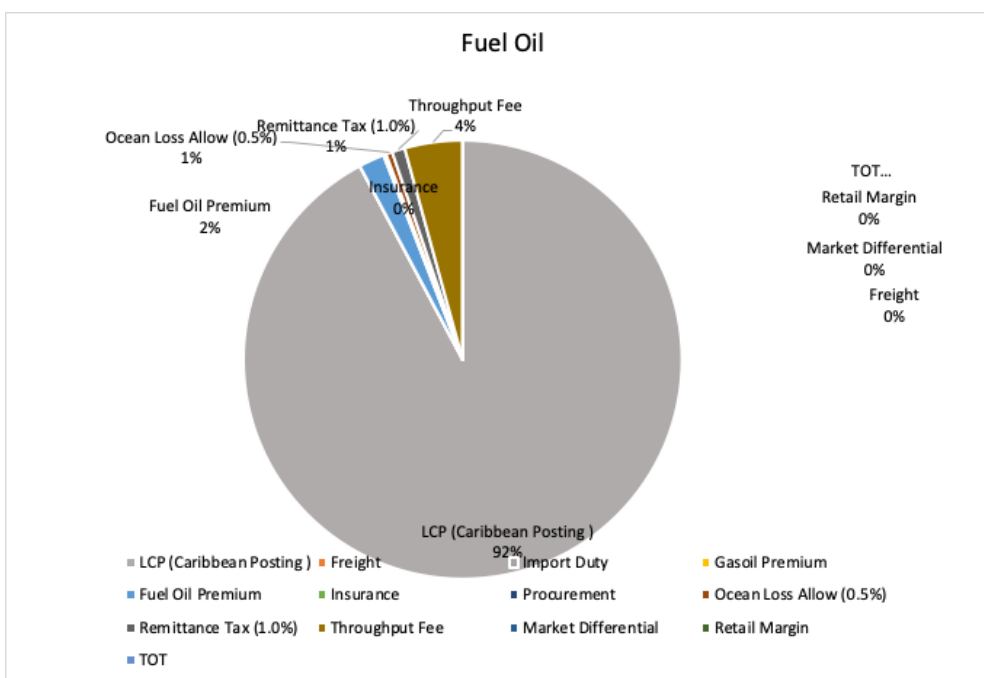
The throughput fees were established in 2007 by the Island Council being 4 NAF cents and were approved & increased in 2012 by the then Ministry of TEATT to 4.4 NAF cents for GEBE & Airlines fueling at PJIA and 8 NAF cents for all other liquid bulk imports (such as gasoline, gasoil etc.).

Based on the introduction of the throughput fee, Port St. Maarten commenced with the contribution for the concession totaling NAF 5.2 million per year through 2017 and then NAF 4 million per year thereafter up and including 2024. To date Port St. Maarten has contributed more than NAF 70 million guilders in concession fees to Government.

MinTEATT: Please see below the breakdown of the effects of the throughput fee on the consumer.

Fuel to SOL destined for GEBE.

Description	Fuel Oil NAF/Liter
LCP (Caribbean Posting)	92%
Freight	0%
Import Duty	0%
Gasoil Premium	0%
Fuel Oil Premium	2%
Insurance	0%
Procurement	0%
Ocean Loss Allow (0.5%)	0%
Remittance Tax (1.0%)	1%
Throughput Fee	4%
Market Differential	0%
Retail Margin	0%
TOT	0%
Sub Total	100%



- The LCP Caribbean Posting is the price of the raw fuel at the point of purchase.
- Note based on this example breakdown if the price of fuel per liter to GEBE is Naf. 2,00 per liter then the affect from the throughput fee is 8 cents per liter.
- Note an alternative source had to be used to create the breakdown, therefore direct figures were not provided.

Table on Gasoline and Diesel breakdown based on the latest update from Government (Oct 22nd):

Description	ULG Gasoline (270)	Gasoil - Diesel (251)
LCP (Caribbean Posting) Usc (AG)	55%	63%
Freight	5%	6%
Import Duty	12%	0%
Throughput Fee	3%	4%
Whole Saler Margin	10%	12%
TOT (5%) Whole Saler	4%	4%
Retailer Margin	6%	7%
TOT (5%) Retailer	5%	5%
Max Consumer Price	100%	100%

The table shows the marginal effect the throughput fee has on the total price (between 3 – 4%).

*This breakdown reflects the data currently available and is subject to change once additional information becomes available.

To the Minister of TEATT and the Minister of ECYS The faction would like to know the status of the cooling system/ airco at the LB Scott Auditorium. What is the status of that promise. There is a lot of activities being done right now at the LB Scott Sport Auditorium and it's very hot so that promise will be very advantageous for those who attend these events.

The installation of an air conditioning system in the LB Scott Auditorium is a collaborative project between the Ministries of ECYS and TEATT. We have finalized the draft terms of reference (TOR) for the public tender and the advice is currently making its rounds. The tender announcement will be made public once a decision is made.

The faction noted that a couple of years ago, there were various studies done by VSA on the state of affairs of gambling addiction on the island, and it was made clear numerous times that Sint Maarten suffers from a gambling addiction problem. What are the Minister's sentiments moving forward as it pertains to the law that states that entities of 200 or more rooms automatically fall under the category of being able to have a casino license?

I haven't had the opportunity yet to review the reports that the MP is referring to. However, I know that gambling addiction is a serious affliction that affects many families in our society. In terms of regulations regarding requirements for casino licenses, I will review the reports mentioned and other relevant information and discuss this with my colleague of Public Health. Important to note that this too will be taken into account when establishing the gaming control board.

The faction notes that we sit back on both sides of the room and say something is not possible or, why is something not possible or, why it isn't possible or, why we are not doing something, or we can't do something because of X, Y, and Z. The faction believes that both sides of the room are guilty of that. A lot of times, the step is being skipped; what are we doing to get ready for that position in order to do that down the road? The faction states the WINAIR idea was pulled off the table, the reason being at the time was, a lack of legislation. What is being done with that legislation moving forward in the sense of are we getting ourselves prepared in the event of us ever wanting to sell the shares of WINAIR or any other entity of that magnitude? What is the state of affairs when it comes to the legislation? Is the legislation even being made, or are there plans to make it?

Tax holidays are also granted based on economic growth or people hired to whomever the tax holiday is granted. To the Minister of Finance, what is the number of expected employees to be hired by this person or persons?

[As explained before, I cannot disclose any information on this specific tax matter.](#)

The faction would like to know from the Minister of Finance what the plan of the Government is concerning the reflows of the airport moving forward once they recommence. When are the reflows slated to start?

[31 December 2027, The intention of the steering committee is for the reflow to be directed to a disaster fund that is yet to be established; however, the interest payments may potentially go to the country.](#)

The faction mentions the loan for GEBE. The faction suggested a closed-door meeting where the Prime Minister would be able to share more information as it pertains to the loan and the possible conditions and reasonings, and details behind it. The faction doesn't want to end up in a situation where it is asked to vote for something without all the information again. So, the faction would like to know in advance, before that time comes, what the stance of the Prime Minister is as it pertains to a closed door.

[The answer provided to the MP's question was the same as the answer provided to MP Doran, namely that there have been no negotiations yet, therefore there are no specifics yet.](#)

[The possibility of a loan was discussed, and the State secretary mentioned in his response, that he is in agreement with the request, if it gets positive advice from the CFT and is approved in this amendment to the budget 2024. As soon as this amendment is approved, the State secretary will be notified, and conversations on the details of the loan will start. I will keep parliament updated.](#)

Furthermore, the faction understands via some investigative work that GEBE could not apply for a loan of that magnitude because, of course, of the hack of the last

couple of years and their financial books. What was the last year GEBE had a finalization of their financial statements? What was the last year that the financial statements were green?

The last audited financial statements for GEBE were for the fiscal year of 2022. The financial statements from 2020 to 2022 were not “green” due to data loss caused by a cyber hack.

The faction sees a lot of cuts done over the various Ministries as it pertains to personnel costs; It's a significant difference in the budget cuts for personnel in comparison to the traveling budget. Is there a reason for that? If so, what are the reasons, and what is the motivation behind keeping the traveling budget as much intact as possible and cutting the budget for critical vacancies?

It is important to clarify that it is not the intention of the Ministry to imply that the travel budget is more important than filling critical vacancies.

The reality is that the travel budget had already been utilized for planned activities, making it challenging to implement cuts in the travel budget. As mentioned by the Minister of Finance, personnel budget reductions were carefully assessed to target only vacancies that were not in the advanced stages of hiring. This approach ensured that all aspects were thoroughly evaluated before finalizing budget cuts, while recognizing that funds already allocated and utilized cannot be retroactively reduced.

Pertaining to the SOL agreement, the faction would like to know when the contract is going to be finished. What are the plans of the Prime Minister or the Government as it pertains to either renegotiating or seeing their stance in the market when it comes to other companies? What is the stance and vision when it comes to that?

SOL and GEBE have not formalized a new agreement. Negotiations have been ongoing.

The faction mentions the new generators. What assurance can the Prime Minister give us, that the fuel to be used in these generators is not diesel versus the other two types? Because the use of diesel actually increases the fuel cost, and that is one of the reasons why the prices are where they are today. So, what assurance can GEBE and the Prime Minister give to Parliament, that the fuel to be used in the new generators will not be diesel?

The new containerized generators operate exclusively on diesel (LFO) fuel. However, if the MP is referring to the three new larger units, the goal will be to use the most affordable fuel to minimize costs. Under ideal conditions, NV GEBE estimates that it will purchase 95% Heavy Fuel Oil (HFO) and 5% Light Fuel Oil (LFO) annually.

The faction would like to know where the legal helpdesk stands on the priority list of the Minister of VSA.

This project is viewed as a high priority given it will provide legal guidance for persons in the community who need it. Tis Ministry priority is to ensure that the persons in the community get relevant assistance whenever we can.

The faction mentions monuments and the monument Council. Moving forward, the faction's question is: what are the plans of the ministry when it comes to the protection of monuments and the penalties for those responsible for their destruction? What is the status of the investigation as it pertains to the offenders that ruined this one?

The Minister explained that VROMI moves car wrecks and not abandoned cars and that because it's private property (St. James Estate), it requires permission from the landowner. But the Minister also said that it's the responsibility of the landowner to organize it themselves. The faction does not understand: can landowners request this from VROMI but not depend on them to do it all the time? Is this something that can be worked out between VROMI and the landowners? In certain areas, like St. James Estate, abandoned or wrecked cars often end up on vacant lots owned by landowners who are not present, creating an issue. Can VROMI assist in barricading these properties or helping the landowners? The faction would like to know what the options are.

Specifically, when hills are excavated, what plans are there for the dirt that results from excavation? Much of the landfill is actually dirt, not garbage. The faction understands that plans involve separating dirt from garbage, but the question is: what happens to the dirt? With more excavation planned, particularly with hills as flat land becomes scarce, there is a need for a plan for dirt storage or usage.

Regarding property tax for non-residents, did the faction understand correctly that the Minister is open to this? The faction is aware that property tax exists but hasn't been implemented. The question is specifically about taxing non-residents or foreign investors who benefit from their properties in Sint Maarten without living here.

MinVROMI: Property tax is established by law on Sint Maarten but is currently not implemented. There is a longstanding reason for this. The intention of not implementing this law was to prevent Sint Maarteners losing their property due to the inability to pay. This right also extends to non-residents who purchase property on Sint Maarten. While, I agree with not having this tax implemented for residents, the country can generate much needed revenue from implementing a foreign owners property tax. This of course will need to be discussed with all stakeholders including the Ministry of TEATT, Finance, and real estate agents.

The faction would like to know if the Minister would be open to implementing three things: drill cores prior, drill cores post, and height surveys before any asphalt is laid.

The Monuments. The Minister alluded to the fact that the prior administration didn't have the necessary follow-up that was needed at the time. But the faction would like to know what the Minister is planning to do with this case moving forward and with future cases, or to mitigate future cases moving forward?

The faction understands that the Minister contacted GEBE, and upon response from GEBE the Minister will be able to elaborate more. Is St. James Estate on the list?

The faction understands that exact dates cannot be given as there are too many factors involved, but can you provide tentative or rough estimates for when you would like to get it done? Things can change, people understand that, but the residents of those roads that are on the list would appreciate something to look forward to, whether it's in the near or far future. The faction thinks that would be enough for them—not an exact date like the 12th of the month or the 11th, but a general idea.

As it pertains to the lab, the Minister of Justice alluded to the fact that something of that magnitude would not be sustainable. The faction never specified what size—whether big, small or in between—so when you said "magnitude," was the Minister referring to an extensive state-of-the-art lab or something more than what we have today? Can the Minister elaborate on that?

When the Minister said it's not sustainable, were you referring to the money required for the investment or the upkeep? And when you said "magnitude," can you specify what magnitude you were referring to in this context?

Additionally, has a study been done that concluded that it would not be sustainable for the island? The faction is not sure if the opinion of the Minister is based on any prior studies. What is the vision of the ministry as it pertains to the lab?

The faction noted that the Minister alluded to the fact that the 1 cent per liter post of 110,000 guilders was not from the 1 cent per liter provision, but it was there, and now it's not there anymore. The faction's question is, what's the story around that? Where did the money come from, and where has the money gone?

The next question as it pertains to the lottery, booths, sales points, casinos, the faction would like the Minister's stance, especially seeing that she's going to do her research. What is the Minister's stance, on a moratorium on all of the above? It's a simple yes or no.

Once I have the necessary information, I will be able to provide my opinion on this matter. For now, the Minister of TEATT, who has all the relevant information regarding this sector, can address this issue. Additionally, I would like to refer to the statement made by MP LaCroes for further context.

MinTEATT: A moratorium on lottery booths is being considered.

The faction was more looking for what the costs of the last 10 years are by way of the cost Causeway, with the fees incurred by way of the Throughput fee. So, what are the total costs that the Causeway has cost to date by way of the throughput fee?

10%

The United People's Party-faction has taken note of the draft with interest. The faction indicates that looking through the budget, there are a lot of questions. The faction mentions the Ministry of TEATT and states that the tourism marketing initiatives went from 2.5 million to 2.4 million. What was taken away? The faction would like to understand what was actually taken away.

The faction mentions that when it thinks about business, and it thinks government is a business, if you don't take care of your people, you will get no work done. The jobs and the positions that were budgeted for in the beginning were positions that are needed. The faction understands that if it was budgeted for the year, and we are now in September/ October, so the previous amount was taken. However, the faction would like to know if the jobs are still available. How have we been recruiting? What jobs are missing? Where have we been looking?

The faction mentions that it has heard Members of Parliament ask what are the ideas that every Ministry has to increase the coffers of government.

The priority areas are the implementation of the tourist tax, increasing the room tax, decreasing profit tax and decreasing wage tax, while simultaneously improving compliance and collection efforts. However, I am always open to new ideas and greatly appreciate the suggestion made by MP Lacroes. Collaboration is key, and we must work together to make these initiatives successful for the country of Sint Maarten. While the tax reform is a large project covering various taxes, my intent is to focus on the implementation of the measures that will have the greatest impact on our revenue. Once these are in place, I will shift my main attention to the other areas while of course these continue to be worked on by the project team. Sometimes we focus on so much and get nothing done and that will not be my approach.

The faction would like to suggest that one day, the Council of Ministers sits a closed-door meeting with the Members of Parliament and let's brainstorm and dialogue as the representatives of Sint Maarten and come up with ideas. Where does CoM need the Members of Parliament, and how could the Members of Parliament assist CoM? The faction is of the opinion that the only way we are going to reach anywhere is by doing it together. The faction would like to understand how and why these cuts were made.

Budget cuts in general are proposed by the Ministry of Finance in response to a broader financial situation. The Ministry of TEATT will work within these parameters to ensure that their key priorities are still addressed adequately.

The cuts to the budget were necessary because the revenue in the initial budget was overstated. When you decrease your projected revenue, it becomes essential to also decrease your expenses in order to maintain a balanced budget. Additionally, you cannot budget for costs that you do not have the funds to cover. Therefore, when revenue projections decrease, corresponding cuts must be made to ensure that expenses are aligned with the reduced revenue.

The faction states that we are asking civil servants to do more work. However, it has not been seen anywhere in the budget where and how they are going to be compensated for this. The faction suggests that if we are cutting down because we didn't hire people, let's give them something extra because they have been doing the work.

The faction mentions that sometime back the previous government made a plan on how to collect the taxes owed by the casinos and the lottery companies. How far are we with those? Have they moved on the offer to get the discount and pay up some money? Has the Minister looked into those that did not take up the offer?

I would like to report that nine casinos have complied with their obligations regarding compliance and payment of the agreed balances. In total 4.2 million was collected of outstanding balances. However, four casinos have not complied, and appropriate measures have been taken to collect the outstanding balances. Further actions will be taken as necessary.

I must commend the previous Minister of Finance for enforcing these collection efforts, and I as the current Minister of Finance will continue to ensure that casinos and lotteries meet their financial obligations.

The faction mentions that it did not see anywhere anything concerning carnival. The year before, they didn't ask for the money, and then they did because some of those supporters/ sponsors pulled back, and then the Government made some type of payment. The faction states that it hasn't seen this in the budget reflected anywhere.

The SCDF did not submit a subsidy request for the 2024. As many of you may know, the Carnival Foundation faced unforeseen circumstances this year that led to organizers pulling out unexpectedly. However, to ensure that Carnival can still go on and continue to be a central part of our cultural heritage, the foundation reached out to Government through a CoM decision Gov't decided to support then with Naf 200K (80040) Festival.

75,600,000 guilders that is being requested in the budget will not get the support of the faction. Once information is forthcoming, you will not get this type of reaction.

With the total budget cut of approximately 4.6 million, how does the ministry plan to prioritize the various department's activities and manage resources efficiently?

This is an already approved budget, including the necessary policies by the previous government.

Secondly, and as a consequence, the focus of this government, in general, is to implement the cuts as advised by the CFT.

The cuts are mainly in personnel costs, for vacancies which have not been filled, or where no recruitment process has started.

Thirdly, I can inform Parliament that I have already met with the management team of the Ministry of General Affairs. In this meeting, the challenges and priorities of the departments were discussed for the drafting of the 2025 budget.

The specific answer to this question is that the priorities and policies of the ministry will be reflected in the draft budget for 2025.

What long-term strategies are being developed to mediate the effects of this budget reduction on public service delivery and departmental effectiveness? The long-term strategies to mitigate the effects of the budget reduction are comprehensive and multifaceted, focusing not only on public service delivery but on the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the entire organization. These strategies will be detailed in the amended draft 2025 budget, which will be presented to Parliament.

How will the Ministry maintain staff morale and retention with cuts in salary allowances and training across multiple departments?

The cuts that the government are implementing, based on the advice of the CFT, are not in salaries and/or allowances.

Concerning the training, I was informed that there has been a notable lack of training and career development in general areas across various ministries for a long time, which has been a significant source of dissatisfaction among some civil servants, as highlighted in the MTO survey. Therefore, it is not because of these proposed cuts that the civil servants will lack training.

I mentioned however, that the organization, recognizing these challenges, is taking proactive steps to address them.

For example, with the launch of the Government Training Center (GTC), it will mark a significant milestone in our mission to strengthen the public administration of Sint Maarten.

The GTC, a virtual training platform, is designed to provide a comprehensive range of essential courses that respond to the specific needs of our civil service, ensuring continuous development and upskilling opportunities for government employees. Government will make sure that initiatives like these, coming from within the organization, will get the necessary funding in the future.

Furthermore, through strategic affiliations with international and regional organizations, the organization started to ensure that training becomes more accessible to all government employees. These collaborations enable civil servants to participate in task-specific training that is aimed at enhancing their skills in critical areas.

Training accessibility is being coordinated across ministries, aiming for a more holistic approach to capacity building.

In the draft amended budget 2025, the government will pay attention to this, and make sure to include, even if partially, the necessary funds for training.

How will reductions in training and development funds affect employee growth and succession planning? What measures are in place to address potential gaps in staff skills and capabilities due to the decreased training opportunities?

The budget allocated was reserved for training and development of personnel within the Ministry of TEATT. By mid-year, budget cuts were required, and no training was requested. Given that there was available room for adjustments in the training budget, the Ministry of Finance made cuts to this budget post.

What impact will the reduction of the advertising budget have on the department's ability to communicate effectively with the public? Are there plans to seek alternative funding or methods for public outreach?

Cutting the marketing budget has impacted St. Maarten's ability to attract tourists and maintain brand visibility. With reduced exposure, it's harder to reach new audiences and retain interest. We were forced to re-shift our focus to address this, by:

- Focusing on Digital Marketing: Using social media, SEO, and influencers to reach audiences cost-effectively.
- Prioritizing Key Markets: Concentrating on high-return areas like the USA, Canada, and the MICE market.
- Community Partnerships: Collaborating with local businesses to extend reach and share costs.
- Using Data: Focusing on past successful campaigns to maximize returns with limited funds

I can assure parliament that in any case for the coming two months of this year 2024, the department is able to continue with its current level of communication with the public.

Currently, government (service) departments collaborate with our Department of Communication through initiatives such as the "Inside Government" informative editions and event-specific campaigns that are extremely beneficial to the public. In addition, a variety of social media platforms and creative outreach methods are utilized, which have been effective in delivering essential information to the public.

Additionally, the government is committed to enhancing stakeholder engagement by continuing to utilize multiple communication platforms, including digital media, traditional outlets, and direct community interactions. These efforts are designed to be both creative and fiscally responsible, ensuring comprehensive outreach without unnecessary strain on the budget.

What strategies are in place to manage the secretariat's operational expenses with the reduction in personnel costs? How will the secretariat prioritize activities and expert consultations, given the budget constraints? How will reductions in personnel and third-party services affect the service center's ability to deliver services to the public?

Are there any plans to streamline operations to accommodate these budget constraints?

In addition to the previous answers, as a rule, ministries need to work together in a situation where there is a lack of budget by any department.

Will the reduction in personnel expenses affect the Ministry's capacity to engage in diplomatic initiatives?

Diplomatic initiatives will continue to operate. These cuts will not hamper the work of the department for the coming two months.

What measures are in place to ensure that foreign relations priorities are not compromised due to these reductions?

The Department of Foreign Relations will continue to operate based on the priorities of the Government. The Department will also continue to collaborate with partners at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Netherlands, the Netherlands Embassy in Trinidad and Tobago, and the Permanent Representation of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the United Nations in New York. These cuts will have limited impact for the coming two months.

How will the reductions impact the department's ability to attract and retain legal professionals?

Unfortunately, I have to mention that even before any budget cuts, the department has been struggling to attract and retain legal professionals. Therefore, it can be concluded that it is not the availability of the budget which is the main reason for attracting legal professionals. It should be mentioned however, that the recruitment process has just finished, and a new legal professional is to start very soon in the department.

Furthermore, during a management meeting, the department of P&O proposed some structural adjustment in the ministry, which can lead to a more efficient functioning ministry and create a more attractive work environment. Since the proposal will include the adjustment of the national ordinance Landsverordenening Inrichting and Organisatie Landsoverheid, the involvement of parliament is required. At this moment we are still in the phase of brainstorming. By the beginning of next year, a proposal will be presented to the Council of Ministers.

What alternative training opportunities are being explored, given the decrease in training funds?

I want to refer to my previous answer to the MP on this subject and repeat the following.

I was informed that there has been a notable lack of training and career development in general areas across various ministries for a long time, which has been

a significant source of dissatisfaction among some civil servants, as highlighted in the MTO survey.

Therefore, it is not because of these proposed cuts that the civil servants will lack training.

In my previous answer, I provided parliament among others, with the initiatives taken by the organization, like the government training center (GTC) and making use of the international and local affiliations.

What impact will the reductions in funds for training and equipment have on the fire department's operational readiness? How does the department plan to address the potential shortage in essential goods and services for disaster response? How will these cuts affect the staff bureau's ability to retain qualified staff and maintain morale?

As mentioned before, the ability to retain qualified staff and maintain morale has been a challenge for the government. However, for the next two months these cuts are expected to have limited impact on all the departments.

For the remaining two months of this year 2024, no measures will impact the service center's ability to deliver services to the public. Operationally, the departments within the service centers are able to forecast peak periods and anticipate potential shortages of staff.

Where necessary, adjustments are made by reallocating staff to ensure service continuity. Even during peak periods or in the case of staff shortages, these adjustments allow the departments to maintain service levels and ensure that the public's needs are met without compromise.

As was confirmed to me, the cuts to the disaster funds were a minimum. I can assure parliament however, that in the case of a disaster, the government will make sure that the necessary funds will be available, for example by reallocating the funds.

What plans are in place to ensure continued staff development? What will the impact of the decreased funding for government agencies be on the Plenipotentiary Ministries' activities?

Just as in the case of all the other departments, the cuts for the two coming months will have limited impact on the functioning of the cabinet.

How does the Ministry intend to maintain effective relations with other entities given these cuts? How will the reduction in the budget for other goods and services impact the Minister's ability to manage unforeseen operational expenses?

As mentioned before, these cuts are for the rest of the year 2024 (2 months remaining). The government expects limited impact on the functioning of the organization for the coming two months. However, I still want to assure parliament, that when needed, operations will be streamlined by ministries working together.

Are there plans to relocate funds from other areas to cover potential shortfalls in essential services?

How many requests from doctors are pending? Do we have a list of how many doctors are waiting to be able to come to Sint Maarten to treat our patients?

There is currently no pending applications for Employment permits for doctors. Nor do we currently have a pending list for establishment permits.

How much has it saved SZV bringing the doctors here instead of sending our patients away?

Based on the information received from both SZV and SMMC, there is a decrease in the amount of medical referrals, however due to the complexity of the cases being referred abroad, there is an increase costs incurred amongst these patients.

The faction mentions the homeless shelter that was temporarily in Sucker Garden. The Dr. J facility. How far are we with relocating or helping those senior citizens?

The five elderly individuals remaining in the Tshelter at the time of the downsizing and closure, have been relocated to the White & Yellow Cross Foundation a reduced guided living program tailored specifically for these elderly.

How does the Ministry plan to manage the reduced legal and expert advice budget, especially for departments that are heavily reliant on these services?

Legal and expert advice has been taken along in the technical support projects of the TWO country packages, the VNGi, and international organizations such as PAHO and Carpha.

Will the reduced subsidies impact social programs or community support initiatives, given the reductions in the social benefits and emergency provisions?

The budget for subsidies was adjusted in accordance to the formal request for funding support as submitted in line with the subsidy ordinance.

(So, subsidy recipients are asked to submit for subsidy before March 1 the year before the subsidy year.)

What measures are in place to ensure vulnerable populations continue to receive adequate support?

It is expected that the remaining budget for the coming 2.5 months will be enough to cover the costs of social benefits and emergency provisions.

Are there alternative funding sources or partnerships being considered to address these cuts, particularly in departments like public health and social development?

Yes, Many of the projects of the departments of public health and social development have been linked directly to the technical support projects of the TWO country packages, the VNGi, and international organizations such as PAHO and Carpha.

Does the Minister have any plans for parking in Phillipsburg? The faction also mentions the clean-up and maintenance of Phillipsburg. Are these businesses being fined for putting garbage outside before or even after the drums have passed?

Businesses nor individuals are being fined as mentioned the answer to MP Irion. VROMI and TEATT are collaborating on a project whereby businesses and residents have better and more attractive places to dump trash in Philipsburg including the Boardwalk. A recent assessment proved that a major issue is insufficient or inadequate dumping facilities. The project aims to ensure that stakeholders such as Philipsburg Promotional board and the tourist office also provide input.

Are there any plans to reduce the continuously rising prices of homes in Sint Maarten?

Do we have any plans for the bricks on Front Street? The faction believes we should start moving in the direction of a whole different plan and save us that money.

Yes, as part of the next CAPEX the situation with the bricks on Front Street can be permanently addressed.

The faction would like to know if we have any homes available in Belvedere or any other locations.

There are several homes being renovated by the Sint-Maarten-Housing-Development-Foundation in the Belvedere area. These homes are uninhabitable in their current state. There is already a waiting list to occupy these homes upon delivery.

The faction mentions that it saw a letter from a gentleman that he received a bill for a building permit that he requested seven years ago. For a building permit that he no longer needs and wants. Can the Minister help to deal with that as there are a lot more out there, and those will now be as income in the budget, which will never be reached because those persons have no need for those building permits anymore?

Could the MP share more information to us in private of this case so that we can look into this.

The factions implores that the Minister ask secretariat for the advice from De Jong that sits concerning the issuance of water rights. That is a project waiting to be finalized, which the faction believes will bring a lot of money to the country.

If someone has a piece of land that is being paid for every year, and the person gets a building permit, and then the neighbor doesn't like what is being built and complains, then it is taken away. But the question is, what happens with all the years that the person paid for that land?

If you have a piece of long lease land, you must pay for it annually. This is the long lease canon, which should be seen as the rent for the land, the long lease. This is separate from the building permit. With private land, you do not pay government a fee.

However with both these types of land, all other procedures must be followed when you want to construct on these (or any) parcels. This ensures that all policies and regulations are upheld which also prevents possible issues with neighbors, the environment etc. Madame chair, through you, is this an actual case brought under the attention of the MP? Could the MP through you share more information with the ministry about this?

I want to elaborate a bit on the process of Permits, as I believe there is a misconception of how long lease land relates to building permits. What the MP is suggesting that after a long lease parcel is received by government, and a building permit is approved and received, that this building permit can then still be stopped if the neighbours complain. Yes, in theory this can be true. This is the law. The law gives the neighbours, or in Dutch they call it “belanghebbenden”, meaning those who have a valid interest, the possibility to object to the building permit. Government then has the obligation to answer on these objections, whether agreeing with them or not. But in theory, not because you have the rights to a property means you are allowed to build whatever you want, even if you have a building permit. The law gives others a specific timeframe to object, and once only this is over, should you start building.

So if in that timeframe objections are made that the Minister or judge find have merit, then indeed, the building permit can be retracted. What does this mean through you madame Chair? This means that the owner of the land or long lease holder, will then have to simply request another building permit, one that does not go over the limits of the law that justifies objections from others. A denial or a retraction of a building permit does not mean that the property cannot be built in, it just means the plans have to change in order fall within the law.

How does the Minister see us hiring our own? We are talking about brain drain, but if we don't hire our own, we definitely will need to look into this, especially if we send them away to study because it is alarming when you hear someone say hey, I'm thinking about leaving after we've paid their scholarship for all those years.

Thank you for this. Our Secretary General is in contact with the Nature foundation on this matter. As it pertains to a private citizen we suggest not to elaborate this on the floor of parliament.

The faction requested the Minister to give an explanation of what the Minister thinks is the difficulty the cost cuts brought to the Ministry itself. What effects will this

have on the Ministry? Was this a choice of the Minister, or was it Finance that made these cuts?

Cuts for the Ministry of TEATT are as follows:

Stafbureau

- External Personnel (personeel van derden)
- Training and Courses

Dept Economic Affairs, Traffic en Telecommunication

- Books and Subscriptions
- Oilgram Price Report
- Projects and Activities:
- Diversification Study
- National Economic Development Plan
- Public Transportation Assessment

Meteorologie Dept:

- External Personnel (personeel van derden)
- Various Specific Goods
- Contributions and Memberships

Lisc Dept,:

- External Personnel (personeel van derden) Internal Personnel

Statistics Office:

- General Statistical Research
- Specific Statistical Research

Civil Aviation and Maritime:

- Training and Courses
- External Personnel (personeel van derden)
- Air and Sea Transport Lawyer

Tourist Bureau:

- Product Development (318 to 100)
- Online Travel Agents (OTA) (

- Internal personnel
- Marketing Staff active personnel cut to 0 months
- Market Researcher

Semi-private and NGO Organizations:

- Tourism Bureau Subsidy:
- Heineken Regatta
- Sports Tourism

Ministry of VSA

Listing of changes not including personnel

Minister

Rechts- en ander deskundig advise – 353,803 (contracts were ending)

Stafburo

Roll out of Social Registry is impacted

Dept of Labor

Rechts- en ander deskundig advise impact the database to link business community and students

Social insurances & medical costs

Financial aid – impact is minimum based on the average monthly expenses so far. It is estimated that we will still have funds surplus

OZR mental health foundation – 1,300.000 was added

Ambulance

Rechts- en ander deskundig advise – process can be started

Collective Preventive services

Project and activities – some funds were taken related to mitigation of a possible covid outbreak recurrence / port health project (800,000 -> 400,000) (285000 -> 50,000)

Community development, family and humanitarian affairs

Project and activities – No direct impact as the funds are linked to downsizing of the Tshelter

The faction comments and states that we have doctors coming in but not thoroughly doing what they should do. This can cost money, and the faction would like the Minister of VSA to look into this.

This is definitely an unfortunate situation that requires further assessment. As such, I will gather information from the respective entities to address this matter accordingly. However, I would like to make use of this opportunity to remind persons that they should always consider reporting any issues with breakdowns in quality of care to IVSA.

The faction believes that we are losing monies by the collection on drawings lottery games that are being drawn on Sint Maarten. The faction states that one of the stipulations in the lottery ordinance is that the drawings should be held here on Sint Maarten. We have a couple of lottery companies for which the drawings are abroad. There is only one lottery company that has a license to be able to sell numbers here abroad. The faction believes that with the oversight committee, the government is losing money and the drawings because it's 50,000 per game that is played on the island. We are losing money there also, and it brings somewhat of a disadvantage to the lottery companies that are actually doing the right thing by doing all their drawings here. The faction estimates that we are losing at least literally 500,000 to 600,000 a month with that alone. The faction would like the Minister to look into this.

[Will discuss the idea with the oversight committee.](#)

The faction has questions related to VSA. Looking at post 43476, a cut was made of 300,000 guilders for legal and other expertise. Originally, this establishment was for the ambulance legislation to further regulate the department and night hours. The department has requested and urged for such to be looked into for many years, so it's a bit of a shame to see it cut. The faction would like to know from the relevant Minister why this was cut. Is it no longer seen as a priority?

[Dark hours need a legal basis and will be regulated in the legal status of the ambulance.](#)

[The minister of VSA, Secretary General and head of the ambulance department recently held a meeting to discuss regulating the dark hours amongst other issues faced by the ambulance department. The interest shown in getting this matter regulated emphasizes that the minister considers this department a very important department.](#)

[The budget post for legal and technical assistance has 50.000 Guilders which can still be used for the revision and updating of outdated draft legislation including the drafting of the “rechtspositie \(legal status\) for the ambulance dept”.](#)

The faction noticed there are significant cuts in Community Development, Family and Humanitarian Affairs, budget—post 43489. We had 300,000 in projects and 84,000 for third parties. Now, bear in mind, while we may say there are three

more months in 2024, the 2025 budget still has to come. The 2024 budget came in March and still needs to go through the process. So, let's not just make cuts, viewing the fact that there are three more months left. The faction believes that Community Development is important to the progress of Community Family Development. This was a key reason for success in VSA, and the faction hopes this department will not be neglected.

Referring back to the ambulance, in the *toelichting* on page 89, the original amount still states 150,000, so that means someone didn't correctly review. The faction noticed that there are a lot of discrepancies with the *toelichting* and the budget.

300.000 Guilders was cut from the CDFHA (Community Development, Family & Humanitarian Affairs) budget. This reduction was possible due to the discontinuation of the T-shelter which according to its contract was downsized as per October and more affordable housing was allotted to the small group of persons remaining in the shelter

The faction continues and mentions that it was informed that the job fair was not budgeted further and that this would probably be the last one. This is important because it showed two different things: that the government is taking an initiative and also outpouring for employment. The faction is of the opinion that it would be a shame to see something deemed a success will not be continued.

The very successful job fair was carried out just last week based on its 2024 budgeted amount. A further budget has already been earmarked for projects of the NESG in 2025.

Can the Minister clarify specifically what was taken out of the capital expenditures for VROMI? On the listing for capital expenditures, the faction does not see specifically the 75 million. The faction notes 31 million added to VROMI. When the faction reviews the details, it does note the 75 million. In order for that to work, something had to come out. One of the things that the faction does notice is out and placed on a wish list is phase one of the Cay Bay project. This is a problem that has been going on for many years. Cay Bay and Dutch Quarter are places that often feel neglected.

There are other substantial cuts that the faction will go through per Ministry,

"Madame Chair, through you, CFT has highlighted that the Capex allocated for 2023 has not been fully utilized to date. They have requested that we adjust the Capex budget to reflect what can realistically be executed this year. If we keep multiple Capex items in the budget without realistic timelines, we risk jeopardizing our chances of securing any Capex funding. It is important to understand that including Capex in the budget does not guarantee that we will receive a loan for it. The loan still requires approval, which is reviewed by CFT.

The Capex for 2024 has been moved to the 2025 budget, as it is more realistic that the projects can be executed in that year. After discussions with CFT, we agreed to keep only three Capex items in the current budget:

1. **GEBE**, due to the severe situation in our country,
2. **The Mental Health Foundation**, which is a co-financed project with the Trust Fund, for which we do not have sufficient funds this year, and
3. **The Prison**, a co-financed project between the Netherlands and Sint Maarten.

These projects could be jeopardized without the proper financing. Additionally, there are concerns about the appropriate substantiation of these investments, including extra Capex that cannot realistically be executed this year, would prevent us from securing the necessary loans. Therefore, most other capital investments have been deferred to the 2025 budget."

but the faction wanted to touch directly on that Cay Bay project for it to be taken out and put on a wish list. The faction doesn't want it to be proposed or sold as if the 2025 capital expenditures is guaranteed, because it is not.

Firstly, please note that the monies secured for the 2023 CAPEX were shifted towards 2024 for execution and consequently the amount submitted for the 2024 were moved towards 2025. So in actuality no cuts were made, anything removed from 2024 was moved towards 2025. The reason why the amounts were shifted from 2024 towards 2025 is that we are already in the 4th quarter of 2024 thus it would not be feasible to lend these monies in this short time period.

When comparing the original 2024 CAPEX with the amended 2024 CAPEX you will indeed see an increase of 31 million.

This is due to the shifting of:

- o WWTP Phase 1 Cay Bay of 16.9 million towards 2025;
- o The land purchase of 18.2 million towards 2025;
- o 5 million of the Main Roads resurfacing from 2024 to 2025;
- o 4 million of the Hard Surfacing Dirt Roads Project from 2024 towards 2025;
- o And the purchasing of vehicles and a vessel totaling 445,507K from 2024 towards 2025.

On the other hand the purchasing of the generators for GEBCO of 75.6 million was included in the 2024 amended budget which was seen as an emergency. We are looking into the possibilities to secure these monies even though we are almost at the end of 2024 due to the urgency of the matter.

So in recap, the 31 million increase could be explained by adding the 75.6 million for the GEBE generators and subtracting the amounts that were shifted from 2024 to 2025 totaling 44,5 million.

The faction mentions the tourist tax. We did a study when in office based on the Caribbean, \$15 - \$25 dollars per person and we would not be out of the region in regard to competition. Is it the intention of the government to continue the process? Indeed, there was no SER. The faction understands the Minister's reasoning for removing it; we still have to go through the process, so more than likely, it won't be for the 2024 budget.

This study that was mentioned will surely be reviewed, as it was not part of the transition documents. While it is valuable to benchmark ourselves against the neighboring islands, we must consider the broader implications of implementing a significant tourism tax. Given our island's past neglect of tourism development, it is crucial to find a balance between investing in our product and imposing hefty financial burdens on visitors. While I do understand the need for dire structural revenue for country Sint Maarten and agree with the Minister of Finance that we cannot continue to place the financial burden solely on the people of Sint Maarten once we received the advice back from the SER together with the Minister of Finance we will review and discuss the best way forward.

The faction notes that for the vending villages, there is a reduction of 200,000. When the Minister was here, she said there were no increases or decreases, but she also withdrew that statement and asked for a period of a week or two to give answers. Now we see in the budget that there is a significant reduction in the budget.

During the 2024 budget debate, the previous Minister decided to prioritize the marketplace project over the vendor village. As a result, funds initially allocated to the vendor village were redirected to the marketplace. By making this adjustment, the government's contribution to the marketplace ended up being less than what was originally budgeted for the vendor village, leading to a budget reduction for the vendor village project.

The faction continues and indicates that it is also concerned about the reduction in online marketing, online agencies, the beautification process, and product development. We have the FCCA coming in a couple of weeks, and we are speaking of product development, but that was one of the main key points brought forward during an attendance of the FCCA. When asked about the survey as to why tourists don't return to Sint Maarten, the number one reason was one, traffic; two, there was no new attraction; and three, of course, they found the place was not clean compared to other countries.

Regarding the online travel agency (OTA) strategy, it is included the Capital Expenditure (Capex) Budget, specifically through the Post 1109 Intellectual Property (IP) initiative. This initiative is designed to build brand equity by developing various digital and online marketing campaigns.

Further, one of the most successful campaigns to date has been with Expedia, which has significantly increased the visibility of our destination. This partnership has proven highly effective in driving visitor interest and bookings. The final stages of this campaign are on track to be completed in Q4 of this year, ensuring that the destination maintains strong momentum in attracting visitors through strategic and targeted online marketing efforts.

Despite the reduction in the number of marketing agencies, the focus on a quality tourism destination and marketing effectiveness remains our priority, and we continue to optimize our resources to ensure maximum impact for the tourism sector.

To enhance the visitor experience and drive economic growth, we are developing a masterplan for the economic and aesthetic enhancement of Philipsburg. This plan includes initiatives to beautify the area, improve visitor experiences, and promote local businesses.

Additionally, we introduced the “Soualiga Routes” initiative, aimed at identifying key locations along popular tourist routes where local art can be displayed. Furthermore, we plan to clean and restore national monuments in a phased approach, preserving our historical heritage.

The faction believes we have to start putting these little things in progress. What may seem small can affect our tourist product. The faction hears the Minister of Finance speak of revenue generation, but the faction does not see any revenue-generating projects in this budget. The faction believes that you generate revenue through taxation. If there is another way, the faction would like the Minister of Finance to explain how the Minister plans to generate revenue other than taxation. The faction knows that TEATT is very much responsible for revenue generation.

The main source of revenue for Country Sint Maarten is through taxes. My plans to generate additional revenue include:

- Implementation of the tourist tax
- Increase of the room tax
- Strengthening tax compliance and collection efforts across the board

At the same time, my priority is also to reduce the following taxes: profit tax and wage tax. Additionally, I am exploring options to ensure that AOV payments

made to pensioners are not considered taxable income for income tax purposes. While I am aware that there is a broader tax program with various other plans, these are my priorities, as it is crucial to focus on actual implementation. Sint Maarten needs concrete changes, and these reforms have been long overdue. It is important that we move from planning to action to truly address our revenue needs.

The faction would like to know, specifically, what the cost of the Causeway Bridge loan was. What is the balance on this loan? How many years remain for this loan?

As of June 30, 2024, the outstanding bond loan stands at US\$142 million. Of this, 34%—approximately US\$48.2 million—is directly attributable to the construction of the causeway, a vital infrastructure project that significantly enhances access to the port and surrounding areas.

The bond loan also included the refinancing of the Port's existing loans, consolidating them at a more favorable interest rate. This allowed the Port to better manage its debt obligations while continuing to invest in strategic projects essential to the growth of both the cruise and cargo sectors.

The loan is scheduled for repayment through 2035, providing a long-term, stable financial outlook. However, in the coming years, the port will see an acceleration of principal payments, which will contribute to the gradual reduction of the overall debt burden and further strengthen the Port's financial position.

The faction would like to have from the Ministry of Finance an overall on the tax received from 2019 to the present, be it profit tax, tot, income tax, or wage tax.

Has been sent in writing.

The faction would like to know the amount of registered businesses, particularly sole proprietors.

Business Licenses issued to Sole Proprietorships up to December 2023 is a total of 1294.

Does the government have a tax reform plan or vision? If so, the faction would like this shared with the Members of Parliament? The faction would like to know if the Minister of Finance is in agreement with a reduction of profit tax, and if so, what is the desired amount? The faction would also like to know this for the transaction tax. The faction takes note of the error on page 46, in the English version, and could be in the translation. The factions note the mention of a fund for a tax reform bill. Is the bill already drafted? If so, can this detailed amendment be provided?

Yes I am in agreement with the reduction of profit tax in stages to 15%. With regard to transaction tax I am currently still doing my research to understand the effects of a transaction tax on Sint Maarten the pro's and cons once I have done my thorough research I can provide my input on this.

The faction mentions GEBE and takes note of the 75.6 million that is being requested for three generators. Was there a bid carried out?

At this moment we still need to secure the loan first. As soon as that is arranged, GEBE will search the market for the best options, and if necessary, we will open a public bidding.

The government is being asked to approve 75 million, so based on corporate governance, a bid needs to be carried out. The faction recalls that when questions are asked about the generator, it is constantly stated confidential. It was stated before that this could have changed, as there was no bid. It was often said that GEBE would acquire the cost, but this is definitely not the case. What is the financial position of GEBE at this moment for the Government of Sint Maarten to have to invest 75.6 million guilders for GEBE?

According to in-house figures, the financial position is positive because the total inflow for the first 9 months of the year 2024 is 24 million guilders more than our outflow.

What is GEBE's burn rate?

According to NV GEBE, their cash burn rate is approximately 3 million guilders lower than their monthly collections.

In the beginning, the faction was a proponent of finding ways within the CAPEX to support GEBE until we had various meetings where it was repeated that GEBE would absorb the cost. GEBE could afford the generators; there would be no cost relayed to the people of Sint Maarten. The faction believes that once we speak about the budget of Sint Maarten, we speak of the Taxpayer's money.

The bidding process can only begin once the necessary funds for the loans have been secured. Therefore, it is important that this budget amendment is approved before we can move forward with the bidding process for the GEBE generators. The Prime Minister would be able to provide further details on this matter.

The faction would like to know if the Prime Minister supports the SAAHA as is.

Any attempt to reorganize the sustainability of the financing of the healthcare for the people of sint maarten has my support. My concern is that a broadening of the pool of premium contributors should result in more than keeping the financial

balance on a thin line. My concerns regarding this thin line will be further discussed in the COM.

Does the government have any plans for new revenue-generating measures?

it must be noted that this is an amendment of the budget 2024, which was already approved by parliament in February of this year. Based on the advice of the CFT to cut, and considering the available time to do so, the government's focus was on the cuts.

The vision of this government, including possible measures taken by this government, for among others, revenue generating measures, and also cost cutting measures, will be presented to parliament in the draft budget 2025.

Does this amendment include the securing of financing to start anything new as it relates to drafting new legislation for revenue-generating measures?

I would like to refer to the previous answer, namely that the focus of this amendment was the cuts as advised by the CFT on an already approved in parliament.

With severe cuts in personnel costs, how will the government increase productivity?

Again, this is an amendment of an already approved budget. Considering the months left of the year 2024, the government expects that these cuts will have a limited effect on recruitment and productivity for the remaining 2 months of 2024.

The faction refers to page 79 of the *toelichting* and quotes the following, "The delays in hiring new staff and lack of senior policy officers are negatively impacting the department's productivity levels." The faction believes this was a cry; it did not start now, but it is a cry. The decrease in personnel staff negatively affects the government apparatus.

The cuts are based on actual figures and the understanding that it would not make sense to keep 12 million in the budget when we know it will not be utilized. Over the years, we have observed that the personnel budget is consistently inflated, as reflected in the country's annual financial statements. Therefore, adjustments have been made, especially considering that we are now in the final quarter of the year. It is unlikely that some vacancies will be filled by year-end, given that the hiring processes for several of them have not yet begun.

The faction mentions hearing the Minister of Finance also speak about revenue-generating projects through VROMI, something with lease land or hotels. The faction stands to be corrected. It shows, in the opinion of the faction, the importance of getting permits out and building permits out and moving. But taken from page 120 from the Staff of VROMI, "the years of staff shortages have led to an

overload of the existing staff." The faction states that we hear the cry of the civil servants saying we do not have enough personnel. Now, today, we see a cut in the personnel.

The faction observes in the capex a cut for the police force country Sint Maarten of .4 million. The prison remains the same. For Immigration Services, there is a cut of 326713. For National detectives, there is a cut of 175,000. National Detectives, again, there is an item line 01120, and 1.3 million is deducted. We are seeing now the police, national detectives, immigration, all of these services that basically lagged behind for many years, no fault of the persons but due to budgetary constraints, and now we are finally receiving CAPEX where we can invest into the members of Justice, we are seeing cuts. The faction would like to know what the reason for these cuts is and how will we supplement these cuts to the relevant Minister.

The reductions were necessary as the funds as projected in the approved 2024 budget would not be collected due to the pending legislation not yet finalized. Further, the tax collection is lagging behind in comparison to last year's budget. Without these adjustments, the government would lack the financial resources.

Additionally, these adjustments are crucial to secure, among other things, the EUR 16 million contribution from the Netherlands for the prison project. If SXM failed to secure its own contribution (a loan request via the Netherlands), we would lose the Dutch contribution as well. This would mean that SXM would need to secure ANG 75 million instead of the currently requested ANG 43 million, resulting in an additional ANG 1 million annually in interest costs for the country for perhaps the next 15 years, based on an interest rate of 3.4%.

The loan request is contingent on approval from CFT, which is granted through a positive Article 12 advice on the budget. If the budget is deemed unrealistic by CFT, we would not receive this positive advice.

Failure to make these adjustments as advised by CFT would have resulted in losing the funding from the Netherlands, as these funds are contingent upon SXM securing its portion of the funding.

The total cuts for justice were: NAF 3.8 mln of which NAF 1.5 mln under personnel (vacancies that were not filled yet at the time cuts were made) and NAF 2.3 "materiele kosten" primarily under goods and services.

Also, the faction would like to know what is the amount needed to pay the Justice workers with these LBs being signed. The faction is extremely happy to see LBs being signed, but they come with a cost. What is the total amount?

Total amount budgeted is NAF 44,588,500.00 for the entire process.

And with LBs being signed, it means that personnel go into new positions, higher positions. So, what is the monthly increase and the yearly increase? And how do we plan on maintaining this increase.

We have factored in a 15% contingency in the budgeted amount to proactively address any potential increases. This ensures that we are well-prepared to handle any unforeseen circumstances and maintain financial stability.

While we're making personnel cuts for the Ministry of Justice, for years, there has been a cry, and according to international standards, we are in a deficit of police officers. This means that we are in need of hiring. What is the plan to encourage police officers? The faction is aware that this will be an increase in personnel.

KPSM has updated its recruitment strategy to focus on using social media more and to target young talent from Sint Maarten. The new approach involves having young talents as the face of the recruitment campaign. In addition, police schooling is now free of charge, and students will receive an allowance while studying.

Also, to the Council of Ministers, the faction would like to know if there is a plan for the monthly payment of OZR. It was realized that there was an issue with SZV, and there was an increase by 1. something million. The faction did not see any increase in the amendment, and the faction didn't really get any plans for SZV, which means if SZV collapsed, our healthcare system collapse. The faction foresees that the same problem of ENNIA is right around the corner for SZV, but yet, in the budget amendment, the faction does not see anything to supplement this. There is over 30 to 40,000 pensioners and we see nothing to supplement this, when we, the government of Sint Maarten, owe SZV over 200 million. The faction believes it's time for we to really start to look into how we're going to save we.

The faction notes a decrease of 13.1 million in education. Our most important investment is education. The faction looks forward to an explanation on this.

The decrease in Capital Investment for the Ministry of ECYS consists of NAf. 12.1 million was originally allocated for the construction of a high school in the 2024 budget. However, the dossier for the project lacked sufficient substantiation, as it did not include concrete cost estimates or architectural plans for the high school, and no land had been secured for construction. As a result, the investment could not be approved in its current state.

Additionally, NAf. 200,000 for computer hardware and telecom equipment was removed from the 2024 CapEx budget due to priority changes in capital investments approved by the CFT.

NAf. 500,000 for the equipment and setup of SMVTS was also excluded from the 2024 CapEx budget due to these changes.

Lastly, NAf. 300,000 for ICT hardware and software was deducted for the same reason.

In total, the deductions from the 2024 CapEx budget amount to NAf. 13.1 million.

The faction observes in the budget that we have 75.6 million for GEBE, but in the *toelichting*, it is asking for Parliament to approve and give the Prime Minister authority to enter into a contract with GEBE, where the details have not even been drafted out. The faction has learned from the ENNIA saga, as clearly stated on the floor of Parliament, that while the loan agreement came to Parliament, the details of the loan agreement did not. Hence, even though Parliament approved this loan agreement, today, we ended up in a bind where there was something that linked us negatively to an increase in rates in the detailing.

Hence the reason during the meeting, this faction supported the request for every bit of detail concerning the 75 million because what the faction cannot support is for us to depend on GEBE to pay us back, and when GEBE can't, we're in a quagmire because they're going to present, "Hey, government, if we pay you this year or pay you this amount, we will go belly up." Then what?

The faction sees that there's an expectation of a 1.5 million increase in GEBE's dividends. It's extremely positive because, from what the faction has noticed, we have no doubt that we'll go up, but in normal everyday life, you go down before you rise, and GEBE is in a building process. So, to have budgeted and increased dividends, is concerning to this faction. The faction would like to see, before the public meeting, a contract drafted in detail on what the government or how the government plans to negotiate this repayment with GEBE.

This is not an increase in dividend it is an increase in concession the concession is calculated based on legislation, the increase is in accordance with indexation as mentioned in the law.

There are a lot of other things that the faction believes could be looked at, and, while GEBE is viewed as a crisis. Putting 75 million into GEBE when the generators are up and running—our people of Sint Maarten will still be without light because we can't afford it. We received a petition today from a citizen of Sint Maarten pertaining to the fuel cause.

The faction would like to point out that in VROMI there's a minus 18.2 million taken out of the capex for land purchasing. The faction believes that while we have a GEBE crisis, we also have a housing crisis. The faction would like to know the

ministry's position on the cuts made. Specifically, the Minister and the SG of each department on the cuts made, especially in the Justice sector, his feelings on that.

The Ministry of Justice embraces the financial challenges brought about by the reduction of -18.2M from the CAPEX for land purchasing. In response, the Ministry is adopting a strategic approach by identifying projects that have not yet commenced or vacancies that are unlikely to be filled in 2024. This will allow for a reassessment of priorities while ensuring that essential services and initiatives continue with minimal disruption. Each department within the JUS sector is working closely with relevant stakeholders to ensure that any adjustments made reflect the overall goals of public safety.

In the case of the Ministry of General affairs, understandably there were some challenges raised by, especially but not limited to, the departments which service the other ministries, like the department of facility services, the ICT department, and the department of personnel and organization. I would also like to refer to the previous answer.

The faction noticed that subsidies are taken out for TEATT, and then again, we speak on revenue generation. No budget is there for certain subsidies that can increase or bring attraction to the country.

The faction would like to receive, for each ministry, the names of all consultants hired by each Minister, including the contractual pricing for each consultant hired by each Minister. The faction would also like to know how many cabinet staff are in each cabinet.

Ministry of VSA: 7 Cabinet Members of which 4 were civil servants. 655,000 was originally budgeted. 353,803 Guilders was cut from the initial 2024 budget. This was possible due to 3 consultant contracts coming to an end. The current remaining budget 301,197 can be used by 4 remaining consultants.

Ministry of TEATT: In response to the query regarding the Cabinet of TEATT, I can confirm that the TEATT Cabinet currently consists of seven (7) members. Additionally, there are three consultants hired by the Government for this Ministry's Cabinet. with a combined total allocated budget of Naf*205,000.00 from the period commencing in May and ending in December, 2024.

These consultants are engaged based on specific needs aligned with the ministry's goals and are in accordance with the Government's policies for consultancy engagements.

Ministry of VROMI: The Cabinet of VROMI consists of the following persons: Sergio Dias, Raeyhon Peterson, Luciano Nicholls, Theodorus Snyders, Miklos Giterson and Howard Villareal.

Only two people have a labor contract. On the subject of cutting the budget, not having a contracted third party is not reason to cut all third-party costs as matters may arise outside the scope of the Cabinet or Ministry's capacity and would therefore require ad-hoc assistance, especially in the area of legal assistance.

Ministry of Justice: The Minister of Justice has five cabinet members, and a consultant for PR services.

Consultants not Cabinet Staff:

- The perfect Image for NAF 49,000.00 to be paid in 7 installments of NAF 7,000.00
- Innova Quest for NAF 48,000.00 to be paid in 6 installments of 8,000.00
- Duncan & Brandon for NAF 50,000.00 for the retainer fee.
- Mariflex Attorneys and Consultants B.V.
- Bushlawyers N.V.

Ministry of ECYS: There are six cabinet staff members in the Cabinet ECYS, the Minister ECYS has hired no consultants.

Ministry of Finance: in the Cabinet of the Ministry of Finance there are currently 5 staff members.

Ministry of General Affairs: First, I need to indicate that there are no consultants in the cabinet of the Minister of General Affairs and or the Prime Minister. The staff of the cabinet consists of 5 members, three civil servants, and two based on a labor contract. The monthly salary of all the staff is in accordance with the policy "plaatsing politieke assistenten".

The cabinet of the Minister of General Affairs, consists of one Chief of Staff, one legal advisor, two policy supports and one executive assistant. The chief of staff, one of the policy support and the executive assistant, are civil servants. They receive their current salary with an additional allowance. The legal advisor and one policy support both have a contract, which is in accordance with the policy as referred to already. Cabinet functions are not public functions therefore, I cannot divulge what is private information. Finally, as mentioned previously, there is no consultant in the cabinet of the Minister of general Affairs.

The faction would like to know about the holding cells in Philipsburg. There was also an international court case held that states the holding cells are inhumane. Our entire prison is inhumane, but the holding cells— we speak of UNOPS. Will UNOPS prepare a budget for the holding cells in town? The faction has seen that the Minister of Justice indeed urges renovation, so that's good, but

will the money be provided? The faction does not see this mentioned in the budget. So that is also something we need to look at.

Funds have been allocated for the repair of the cell, and the NRPB is responsible for project management. The project is currently in the tendering phase. Additionally, BZK has provided funding for emergency repairs on the cell. The emergency repairs will commence next week, starting with the initial phase, which involves assessment.

The cemetery is very important. This has been a cry to try to find more land space because one thing that is inevitable is death. The faction has taken note of the explanation in the capex for the same land acquiring that was referenced earlier about for 18.2 million that was taken out, the cemetery is also listed in there. These are things the faction believes we have to be very careful about because, right now, there is barely any space. The faction also has a query about a statement made when elections were called by the Prime Minister that he has to go to Washington, DC because there's \$200 million waiting on him. The faction would like to know from the Prime Minister if he has ever seen this \$200 million. Is it in our coffers? Was this \$200 million ever received from this trip to Washington? Because since then, the faction has not received any update of this.

The mission to Washington DC was a key pending objective outlined in the transition document of the previous government.

My involvement directly tackled the capacity challenges within VROMI as now Minister of VROMI was also present, safeguarding the continuity and success of vital projects under the Trust Fund for which over 200 million US Dollars remains available.

Key achievements of the mission included additional financing for a new mental health facility, a commitment of the Netherlands for extensive technical assistance to the Ministry of VROMI and a final approval of the Steering Committee on 25 million USD for the wastewater management project, as was published in the local media with the World Bank and NRPB officials in the month of August.

I also proposed to start negotiations for a possible extension of the supervisory role of the World Bank after 2028.

The faction would like to touch on an article from sometime back where MP Roseburg, the Minister of VSA, and everyone were starting the legal help desk, and this was going to be a project to help communities and push forward. The faction believes we have to look at CDFHA—Community Development Family Humanitarian Affairs—this is very important. What is the update with the legal

help desk to the relevant Minister? The faction believes this falls under the Ministry of VSA.

This initiative, which is a collaborative effort, aims to provide crucial legal support to the community. The Legal Helpdesk will operate within the framework of the existing Community Helpdesk, with the Hope Estate location identified as the pilot site.

While the structural framework for the Legal Helpdesk has been drafted, we are currently awaiting the participation of external stakeholders—namely, lawyers and legal professionals. Their involvement is vital to the success of this project, as the helpdesk will rely on their expertise to offer the necessary legal assistance to those in need.

At this stage, we are still awaiting a finalized list of participating lawyers and legal minds who will sign agreements with government to formalize their involvement. Without the active participation of these legal experts, the project cannot fully move forward, as their contribution is the foundation upon which this pilot program is built.

We are optimistic about the program's potential to provide much-needed legal assistance to the community and look forward to the full implementation of the project once the legal professionals are confirmed.

The Minister of TEATT said that there was an increase in the throughput fee due to the building of the bridge. Previously, the Prime Minister clearly stated that the throughput fee was established to pay for the bridge. The faction is seeking a clear answer on which one it is.

The throughput fee was established as a revenue post to facilitate with the contribution of the operating cost of the port and was established unanimously by the Island Council in 2007.

The throughput is not only related to the causeway bridge it is a source of direct operating revenue for the port. The throughput also helps finance the entire harbor and is also part of the operating income for the harbor.

In the letter to the CFT, dated June 12, 2024, it stated that an injection of 36 million will go into CAPEX or the budget for the prison. Now we see 75.6. Was this updated by the CFT? The faction would want freedom from the CFT, but it is used when it's convenient. The faction also observed the article indicating the extension of the CFT till 2027. Was there an updated letter sent? The faction would like to view it, also with the response?

The increase is due to the inclusion of the contribution of BZK in the amended budget. In the initial budget this contribution by the Netherlands of 33 million was

not included only disclosed in the notes. Seeing that the funds will be transferred to the Government and the execution will fully happen by the Government this has been taken up in the amended budget.

In the letter sent to CFT, we initially stated the amount as 36 million dollars, not guilders. However, based on discussions with GEBE and their technical experts, this amount was adjusted to 42 million dollars. This adjustment was communicated to both CFT and BZK, as the loan request will need approval from both CFT and BZK.

The faction has taken note that the ED card system will start during our high season. The faction considers this to be a good thing but cautions the Minister of TEATT to be very careful and refer back to the legislation. The law allows persons to not only do it online but also fill it in when they arrive. The faction has noted that the Minister stated there will be no arrivals if you do not do it before. Again, the faction cautions the Minister to be very careful, as was learned during the COVID time that systems and a lot of people missed their flights and canceled their flights because of the inability to do it online. The faction advises the Minister, until the legislation is changed, to give the opportunity to go back to how it used to be: do it online, and if you missed it while you're on the plane, you can get that. The faction emphasizes the importance of this for our tourism product.

An update news release was shared and, in a way, to move towards improving efficiency, the process is transitioning online, where all necessary information will be filled out digitally. While residents are not obligated to complete this form, it is strongly recommended as doing so can significantly expedite your entry and departure process. Currently, the system is in a testing phase, allowing for evaluation and adjustments before it becomes mandatory for all visitors and transit passengers traveling to or through St. Maarten. No official date has been set for when this requirement will be enforced.

The faction mentions stakeholders having issues with the health levy or tourist levy or tourist tax, and the faction action is of the opinion that at some point, we have to put our foot down and be able to say, at the end of the day, it worked out. The faction advises the Ministers not to hide and cower behind negative reviews, while we lag behind this money-generating product, Aruba has implemented it. The faction is concerned with the fact that we are always having to see other countries do it for us to feel safe and then say it's okay? The faction emphasizes that this is a general statement and counts for the Member of Parliament as well because the legislation has to come to Parliament, and it will benefit our people. The people will come. The faction is of the opinion that there is something about St. Martin. People are going to come, but we have to believe in ourselves. We have to believe that we are going to better the product for people to

come. The faction goes on to state that if we want them to come, so let us invest in our environmental system—remove the dump. Let us invest in our traffic. The faction is looking for the urgency because the phase one of the Ring Road was involved in the capex, so it'll be interesting to see what will come out because we have to enhance our brand. And while we are trying to save one product, we need to ensure that we can generate more revenue to receive monies to replace whatever is taken out or put us in the best position to receive CAPEX 2025.

The factions mentions that the MER Group placed a lien on all receivables of TELEM. The faction is of the opinion that this is concerning. However, TELEM acted quickly, and within a couple of days, we saw in the newspaper that an agreement had been reached. The faction would like to know what amount was paid. The faction is getting indications of an amounts of 3.8 million. What was the amount paid? Who paid this amount?

The amount paid to Mer was US\$ 3.0 million (including the license fee and the claim of SZV). The original claim of MER was US\$ 3.77 million.

What is the effect on the budget of TELEM having to pay this amount?

Telem used the Facility II of US\$ 3.0 million to settle the claim. Facility II is an overdraft, which was meant as working capital of Telem.

Was the amount to be paid in one shot or installments? And does this affect future salaries or bonuses? Christmas time is around the corner.

It was one payment.

The faction would like to know what the Minister's view on the hotel room tax is. It's been said that we have one of the lowest, if not the lowest, room tax rates in the Caribbean. What is the thought on increasing it—being competitive, but increasing the amount? We did an entire study within the region and the study which showed that Sint Maarten can be can be compatible to between \$15 to \$35 per passenger and be competitive.

Our island's tourism product has undeniably fallen behind in recent years. While low hotel rates are a competitive advantage, we must address the broader issues hindering our appeal. A balance must be considered between generating revenue and providing a quality visitor experience.

The view aligns with the Honorable MP, and I agree with increasing this to at least 7% to be more in alignment with the region.

The faction makes reference to a newspaper article—Minister of Finance warns merchants to stop imposing purchase limits for cards. The faction finds this to be very important. The faction commends the Minister of Finance for taking a stance, but what is in place to penalize violators? What is in place to ensure that

these problems are dealt with? Too often we see everyone relay the cost of everything.

As mentioned in the press briefing, the contract governing these matters is between the merchants and the banks. Two actions can be taken if merchants fail to comply: their payment terminals can be removed, and they can be blacklisted, preventing them from acquiring a terminal from any other bank.

I strongly encourage merchants to comply with the regulations to avoid such measures. Additionally, I urge residents who encounter issues to report them by sending an email to sintmaartenbankersassociation@gmail.com. It is important to notify the Bankers Association so that appropriate action can be taken.

Let's work together to ensure compliance and a smooth resolution process. At this moment, the Bankers Association is responsible for penalizing non-compliant merchants. However, if these blatant violations continue, I will assess, together with the Minister of TEATT, what additional stringent measures the government can implement to prevent these illegal acts. It is essential to ensure that compliance is enforced and that such violations are addressed effectively.

The faction makes use of this opportunity to ask about the HAP. What is the update on that? Are conversations being held? The faction asks this as its related to our health care, and our health care is related to the budget because SZV will carry this strain, and SZV accounts for 75% of VSA's expense.

The HAP was audited by SZV.. After this audit, SZV issued a letter to the HAP indicating that the contract would not be renewed after June 15, 2024. This decision was taken because of financial irregularities identified in the audit. Having realized the importance of having a HAP, a meeting was held with SZV, the minister and the HAP operator in June 2024 to indicate necessary improvements and to give the HAP operator time to improve. An Extension to the contract was then given. An evaluation was also started .

As of now, there are active discussions taking place among key stakeholders to review the audit and evaluation of the operations of the HAP. These discussions aim to address the areas of concern identified in the recent audit and evaluation of the entire HAP operations.

The faction points out that the evaluation or audit that they use was actually for the first 6 months only. The faction found this out recently, whereby we don't even recheck if checks and balances were done. The faction is of the opinion that we can point at SZV how much we want, but SZV falls directly under the Minister of VSA. If the Minister wanted this project to continue with stipulations, it would have

because the faction believes almost everyone here has benefited from this project.

The Social & Health Insurances (SZV) recently conducted an audit that identified discrepancies related to billing practices thru April 2024, which could have significant financial repercussions. The government, using this audit report, conducted a thorough assessment through professionals in the healthcare sector.

The findings from this assessment reaffirmed that the HAP is necessary and beneficial for improving emergency services within the healthcare system.

However, it was also determined that the services provided under the HAP need to be delivered as initially intended.

The way the HAP has been functioning so far could potentially result in considerable financial consequences for SZV, and by extension, for the country. As such, adjustments will be made to ensure that the project operates in a sustainable manner, safeguarding the interests of all parties involved.

Last Tuesday a tripartite meeting was scheduled with the Council of Ministers to discuss among other topics, the HAP. This meeting was postponed due to ongoing Parliament meetings and was rescheduled for next week. This fact underscores the minister's commitment to continue to solve all issues confronted in a sustainable manner in the best interest of the community.

The faction mentions that sickness doesn't wait, stress and emergency don't wait—so the Minister does not get to determine the timeline because they are leaving and thus leave the decision to an incoming Minister.

The faction takes note of the comments of the Minister of Finance on the two and a half more months remaining, and the faction reminds the Minister to be very careful with those statements when handling the budget, especially this late in the year, considering that the 2024 budget will be used until the 2025 budget is passed. When is it expected for the 2025 budget to reach Parliament? And what is the location at this moment of the 2025 budget?

As previously answered the 2025 budget is currently at legal affairs and will be sent to the council of advice for their advice. We hope to receive this back and send it to parliament for handling in November 2024. My goal remains to have this approved by December 15, 2024.

The faction would like to know what is the Minister's update with the recent article from the Netherlands to cut Caribbean investments, and also, there are talks of cutting the TWO. We all know that these tax programs and other initiatives for the government were funded through the TWO, which was funded by the Netherlands. It did help a lot with the legislative trajectories of the government,

but now there are talks of cuts in investments. If anything has changed since then, has communication been made with the government in the Netherlands to secure these investments and ensure that we can continue?

The Ministry of Finance has already secured and received funding for both projects related to tax and financial management. These funds are allocated for the implementation of the new tax system and the ERP system, and they also cover the costs of third-party assistance currently supporting the Ministry with both projects.

Also, it was stated that the debt of SZV is 130.7 or 13.7. The faction would like the correct figure outstanding for SZV. What is the monthly amount requested by SZV for OZR? The faction knows that there were numerous discussions. The former Minister of Finance and the CEO of SZV had numerous discussions on what would be a preferred figure. An increase was made by the then government. The faction would like to know if it is the intention for 2025 to meet the required budget of SZV, or is the discussion still ongoing as to how we will supplement what is missing?

The total outstanding amount is NAf 113.7 million, based on information provided by SZV. As mentioned previously, SOAB will review this figure to verify its accuracy. Currently, the monthly payment for OZR is NAf 5.2 million, while the requested amount is NAf 6.5 million, which includes payments toward the outstanding balance that is part of the NAf 113.7 million owed to SZV. Discussions will continue with SZV to decide on the best way forward to pay the outstanding balance.

The faction is also glad to hear that the Minister of Finance is a proponent of the tourist tax. The faction would also like to know what the plans are for the tourist tax. When the tourist tax was being done previously, it was first initiated as a health levy, whereby, in discussions also with the CFT, it was championed through VSA. Everything legislative was championed through VSA, and the allocation of the money — it would have been an agreement, and the allocation of the money would go towards SZV and the rest towards specific projects. What is the intention of this government for the monies collected once the tourist tax is instated? It was estimated to make us between 15 to 18 million yearly, so the faction would like to know what the current plan is.

Once we have received the advice from the Social and Economic Council (SER) on the legislation submitted to them, we will assess and determine which adjustments need to be made. Following this, we will carefully evaluate how the funds received can or should be allocated within the budget for continuity purposes.

The Minister of Finance also mentioned CAPEX not being guaranteed. Not because CAPEX is in the budget means that we are guaranteed to have it. It is a request. It goes back to the faction's point that moving the CAPEX to 2025 does not guarantee that those projects will be executed. It all depends on our budget, our financial income, and expenditures, The faction wanted to make it clear that when we're in this presentation and hearing certain projects moved for CAPEX to 2025, to the public of Sint Maarten, that is not a guarantee.

The process for securing a CAPEX loan is as follows: First, the loan must be included in the budget of both Sint Maarten and the Netherlands. Only after this step can the Netherlands formally initiate the request for the loan. Once our budget has been approved by Parliament, the CFT must then grant Article 12 approval. After this approval is obtained, the funds are guaranteed, and Sint Maarten can proceed with submitting its request for the loan. It is important that we are also in close communication with CFT beforehand to not include investments which they would not approve of because this would mean that the entire capex would be at risk. Hence the reason why all investments for the year 2024 were removed from the budget, with only three remaining. Of these, two are co-financed, the prison and the mental health building, and one is dedicated to GEBE, given the urgent need for reliable energy in Sint Maarten. This decision reflects a prioritization of particularly the stability of our energy supply for the coming years.

Well it wasn't a guarantee either that we would have received CAPEX 2024 prior to the amendment. However this amendment is necessary because it is not realistic to utilize this budget in 2024.

However, by moving it towards 2025 shows our commitment that we are still willing to pursue these projects.

The faction also heard the Minister state that she's in agreement with the reduction of the profit tax in stages to 15%. The faction is very happy to hear that, as that was one of the things this faction championed. The faction looks forward to us working very closely to ensure that this happens. It was done in Curaçao, and the faction doesn't believe we need to reinvent the wheel all the time. It would increase compliance, and we would get a real look at what our real GDP is because it's no secret that a lot of businesses hide their true profit because of 34,5%.

When it pertains to GEBE, it is said that a bid will be done once the budget or the request is approved. What is the 75.6 million based off? The faction notes that a price per generator was given, but why are we purchasing or using that price if no bid has been done? How do we know the price? Is the 75.6 million a safe projection or not? The faction would like to know where that amount came from.

And if it came from a specific company, why are we using that specific company as a benchmark when no bid has been done?

Based on the fact that the generators will be acquired by Government we will need to follow the procurement process as mentioned in article 47 of the Accountability Ordinance (Comptabiliteitsverordening). The question in reference to the 75 million and what it is based on will be answered by PM.

Regarding GEBE, we can all agree that action is necessary, whether through the government or GEBE itself. If GEBE were to secure funding independently, they would still need to meet all their obligations, likely at an interest rate of around 6% to 7%. However, by leasing the generators through the government, GEBE would benefit from a more favorable interest rate, which would be more beneficial to them, also taking into consideration their current financial circumstances.

This lower interest rate would hopefully also help address the absurd fuel clause amounts being invoiced to the residents and businesses of Sint Maarten. By reducing financial pressures, we aim to explore ways to alleviate the burden of high energy costs on the population, ensuring a more fair and sustainable approach to energy pricing.

Whichever path is taken, as shareholders, we must take on our responsibility and ensure that GEBE fulfills its obligations. It is crucial that we oversee the process and support GEBE in securing the most beneficial terms for the long-term energy stability of Sint Maarten.

The faction reiterates the note of the letter dated June 12 to the CFT, where it clearly stated that 36 million guilders will be the investment for GEBE. The faction is therefore asking, why are we seeing now 75.6? And was this letter updated to the CFT, letting them know that the amount has changed to 75.6? The faction understands the miscommunication.

In the letter sent to CFT, we initially stated the amount as 36 million dollars, not guilders. However, based on discussions with GEBE and their technical experts, this amount was adjusted to 42 million dollars. This adjustment was communicated to both CFT and BZK, as the loan request will need approval from both CFT and BZK.

The faction continues and mentions that the Minister spoke on her plans for the tax levy, profit tax reduction, and wage tax, and spoke of increasing compliance. The faction is missing how the Minister of Finance plans to increase compliance.

The new tax system is expected to significantly improve tax compliance. With this system, filing will become more user-friendly through electronic tax filing (e-filing) and payment systems, which will be accessible to all taxpayers, reducing

the time and effort needed to comply. In addition, more frequent audits and inspections will also help to increase compliance. By increasing the number and frequency of audits, particularly in high-risk areas, we can ensure that enforcement is fair and transparent. This is also why it is critical to amend the law to include ATS in the legislation as they will be able to assist in this area.

The faction would like to know if the 1.5 million is a realistic contribution for GEBE. And would further like to know GEBE's views on this and if they can afford and live up to such contributions?

In accordance with accounting standards and practices, revenue must be included in the budget based on accrual accounting. This means the correct amount owed for concessions in the year is accounted for, regardless of when or if these funds are received. The discussion about whether these amounts can be collected or netted off is a separate matter, but the full amounts must be accurately reflected in the budget. The only revenue that is not based on accrual accounting is tax revenue, which is projected based on the actual expected income for the year.

The faction continues and mentions that it was also stated that the intention was to approve the amount for the government to purchase the generators and lease. The government is not allowed to buy and lend. The faction would specifically like to know if we are allowed to then buy and lease. And then, it was also said that it was discussed with the Netherlands; the faction would like to know where this is allocated and what gives us permission. The faction would definitely like to know where in the realms of the law we are allowed to buy and lease because, as stated before, in the *toelichting* that approving this budget gives the Prime Minister the permission to engage in such an agreement with GEBE.

The loan currently being requested is based on Article 16 of the Financial Supervision Law (RFT). Under this article, the government is only allowed to secure loans for capital goods and is prohibited from lending these funds to third parties. Given the severity of the situation at hand with GEBE, this matter was discussed with the Netherlands, and a solution was identified to ensure reliable energy for Sint Maarten. This collaboration demonstrates the importance of securing a stable energy supply for the country, and we are committed to working together to address this urgent need.

The faction believes it is important to have every aspect of this agreement. Because what we are asking now is for the budget to approve 75.6 million without knowing insurance fees, without knowing certain things, and the faction has taken note of the statement of the Minister about other expenses being taken up in the next budget. Who will be responsible for the structuring of this contract? Because

it is a government contract — the 75.6 million — and everything needs to be in place.

As previously mentioned, the details of the contracts still need to be agreed upon. PM will give further details on this topic. The honorable MP Meyers through you madam chair also posed a very important questions asking what went wrong with the GEBE loan of some years ago and why it was never drawn. This is a question which also will be answered by the PM.

The faction is of the opinion that if this government wants this faction's approval as it pertains to the 75.6 million, all the information will need to be provided. The faction does not want to approve this and later down the line hear that GEBE cannot meet the obligations, government is in a financial burden because GEBE doesn't meet the obligations, or we do not know the intricacies of the contract that we are allowing the government to then enter into agreement with GEBE. The faction would like all the information pertaining to such.

Regarding GEBE, we can all agree that action is necessary, whether through the government or GEBE itself. If GEBE were to secure funding independently, they would still need to meet all their obligations, likely at an interest rate of around 6% to 7%. However, by leasing the generators through the government, GEBE would benefit from a more favorable interest rate, which would be more beneficial to them, also taking into consideration their current financial circumstances.

This lower interest rate would hopefully also help address the absurd fuel clause amounts being invoiced to the residents and businesses of Sint Maarten. By reducing financial pressures, we aim to explore ways to alleviate the burden of high energy costs on the population, ensuring a more fair and sustainable approach to energy pricing.

Whichever path is taken, as shareholders, we must take on our responsibility and ensure that GEBE fulfills its obligations. It is crucial that we oversee the process and support GEBE in securing the most beneficial terms for the long-term energy stability of Sint Maarten.

The faction referred to a previous speaker and their statements on TELEM and GEBE and expresses its feelings of disrespect. The Prime Minister comes in and runs around the answer. The faction asked about plans for GEBE and Telem, but no clear plan or security plan was given.

The faction also asked the Prime Minister about the MER Group case, that is 3.8 million owed. The faction would like to know how much was paid, the implications of paying this, whether it was paid in installments or a one-time payment, and what implications that had on the cash flow or budget of TELEM.

The faction also inquired about the liens being placed on all the receivables of TelEM, as these are important factors.

Telem has requested assistance from both the Lenders and the Shareholder:

Lenders:

- Covert Facility II into a loan, this means technically increasing the Facility I with US\$ 3.0 million.
- Reinstitute an overdraft Facility of US\$ 3.0 million.
- Extend the grace period of Facility II till the end of 2025. This Telem Group will only make interest payments over 2025.
- Allow part of the proceeds from the sale of the properties (the headquarters, the warehouse and the earth station) to finance some of the capital expenditures. These capital expenditures, like the new mobile network, improvement of the ISP core and the improvement of the network coverage are necessary for Telem to be competitive.

Shareholder/Government:

- Conversion of the amount owed to BTP into share capital will strengthen the equity of Telem Group and lower the gearing significantly.
- Guarantee of ANG 5.0 million from the Government for the financing of the redundancy project of Telem. This will free up the ANG 5.0 million deposit that is currently used as collateral for the financing of the redundancies.
- A 6-year Moratorium on the concession for the fixed infrastructure, Telem is the only company on Sint Maarten, that has a fixed concession. Flow is rolling out a fixed network without a concession.
- Purchase of the headquarters of Telem.
- Telem Group to become the preferred Telecommunications service provider for the Government and the Government subsidized entities.

NRPB

- Request for ANG 10.0 million to finalize the roll-out of the fiber network.

Telem Group

- Improve the network infrastructure to increase the reliability of the services.
- Increase the service level by training the of the personnel.
- Improve the efficiencies through automation and change of the business model

-Continue with the cost cutting exercise.

Management has a strategy to make the business profitable and sustainable, but the assistance of all the stakeholders is needed. It is obvious that Telem is very important for Sint Maarten.

The faction doesn't just want to hear that everyone knows the situation of GEBE and that we are working on it.

The faction asked questions about the bid for GEBE, and it was stated that once it is approved, they will move forward. However, the faction is of the opinion that people often request a quote before going to the bank, and the bank will determine if they can deal with the amount. The faction questioned how do we know the amount. Where is the 75.6 million coming from, and who provided this information? The faction was told earlier that 4 million is allocated for a generator and asked where this information came from. Which company provided the information, and why are we using the information from this specific company? The faction would prefer to acquire multiple quotations to establish an estimate of where the budget needs to be. Instead, the government is publicly asking for 75.6 million without having all the necessary information and then planning to go into a bid afterward. The faction humbly asks for this information before voting on the budget.

The faction also asked if the Prime Minister supports the SAAHA "as is." The answer provided seemed to avoid a direct response. The faction would like to know if the Prime Minister supports SAHA as it stands, yes or no.

Based on the remarks made by the member of parliament, I can conclude that according to the member of parliament, I was not specific enough with my answer to his question.

But I can only repeat what I already mentioned. In the first place, that any attempt to reorganize the sustainability of the financing of the healthcare for the people of Sint Maarten has my support.

In the second place, my concern is that for the sustainability of healthcare, a broadening of the pool of premium contributors should result in more than keeping the financial balance on a thin line.

Since the process has already started, with a draft national ordinance by the advisory bodies like the SER, in my answer to the member of parliament, I informed parliament that my concerns regarding this thin line will be further discussed in the Council of Ministers when the advice is received.

The faction asked about revenue-generating plans, but the responses only referred to the amendment. The faction was asking for the government's broader revenue-generating plans, as this is relevant to the budget debate.

Again, it must be noted that this is an amendment of the budget 2024, which was already approved by parliament in February of this year. Based on the advice of the CFT to cut, and considering the available time to do so, the government's focus was on the cuts.

However, as we move towards to the 2025 Budget, I can state that some of the government's revenue generation plans are as follows:

1. Tourist tax
2. Room Tax
3. Strengthening of compliance
4. Strengthening of tax collection
5. Reduction of profit tax
6. Reduction of wage tax

The faction also indicated to the Minister of Finance to be cautious about mentioning "two months, unless the 2025 budget is ready to be signed off by January. Otherwise, the amended budget will be used in 2025 if the new budget isn't ready.

The faction asked the Prime Minister about consultants. The Prime Minister responded that he has no consultants, only cabinet staff and two people on labor contracts. The faction would like to know the names of these cabinet staff and the individuals on labor contracts.

The faction asked about the 200 million from the Trust Fund. The response was that yes, the Trust Fund has 200 million. Then, projects such as mental health and wastewater projects were mentioned. Was Sint Maarten given the green light for the 200 million? These projects were approved before going away for the 200 million. The faction observes now in the budget that we have to inject 14 million to save SZV, as that was a discussion and a certain amount was needed. In order for that amount to be sufficient, we needed SZV to inject more. However, we are being asked to inject more into mental health for the same reason, which the faction could understand, but the funds for the project were already there. The wastewater project when we had to reprioritize, the Trust Fund said not to touch the wastewater project. The faction questioned what new funds, the 200 million, is being used for?

The faction requested an update on the housing project, which falls under. Lastly, the faction reiterates the request for all information pertaining to the 75.6 million for GEBE generators that the government has been provided to the Members of Parliament.

The faction believes it is important that we, one, find out what is going wrong financially, two, how can we remedy the situation, and three, the real persons seeking attention at the HAP. The faction believes that 90% of us in here—has benefited from the HAP at some point.

The HAP was a pilot project, and the report was a six-month project that stated various findings, such as asking not to prescribe medication and not giving certain injections or medications to ease the pain. But it's kind of redundant when you come to the HAP due to non-urgent care, but it is still a semi-emergency. You have pain, or whatever it may be, and you're expected to just see the person and say, "Okay, go home."

The evaluation that was done of the HAP determined that there is a necessity for a HAP, however, the HAP has to be executed in the manner it was intended to be done.

At the termination of the pilot project, it was determined that the HAP was charging for services and frequent visits of the same patients which was not in line with the agreement. The findings also indicated that instead of referring the patient to their GP for follow up treatment did not take place. Other medical services, which were not included in the agreement were also carried out and billed to SZV. The HAP was used as a means to receive late hour GP service (this service is already included in the existing capitation/subscription fee applied by ZV fund for all GP's).

The HAP was not closed by either Government or SZV.

Regarding the potential, as indicated to MP Doran internal discussions are currently ongoing regarding solutions that will lead to a HAP that yields the intended results

3) assessment yielded a total of 3294 clients, of which

- 48% required GP service
- 30% were direct patients of SMDC
- A total amount of 11598 services were declared to SZV. So to Answer your question, HAP submitted declarations for a total of 3294 unique patients for whom a total of 11598 services were declared. Based on a random sample, SZV came to the realization that not all services declared by the HAP were rendered.

Unfortunately, and these are things that we need to look at while prescriptions are given if we look at Curacao, there have actually been patients that have died because of lack of attention. The faction believes that we need to structurally sit together and see how it can be done. The faction is happy to hear that the Minister is willing to have that conversation and sit with a third party, with SZV and the HAP, to find a solution because it is definitely needed. The faction mentions the night hours and mentions that it is glad that this is still being taken up but questions how much of this is a priority for the ministry.

Yes, it is. That's why we had the meeting with the head of the ambulance department.

The faction recalls experiences while speaking with the head of the ambulance and then when speaking to the staff itself, sometimes urgencies can be relayed very late. The faction urges the Minister to pay attention, be on it, and ensure that this is done. The faction would like to have an update on the breakfast program. Is it budgeted for? The faction knows that it was also budgeted in 2024; it was the intention to do three schools and then the rest. Why hasn't it started? Is it budgeted? Is it the intention to continue, and if so, why? If not, why not?

The Nutri Kids Healthy Breakfast Program was approved for a 3-month pilot project under the directive of the then Minister of VSA and was executed by CPS in collaboration with a local restaurant from November 2023 through February 2024.

An evaluation report was drafted by CPS and the findings and recommendations included: setting clear objectives and direction for the program and the need for the program to be financially sustainable.

The report also highlighted the need for collaboration between primarily the Ministries of VSA and ECYS. It is necessary to establish an integrated strategic plan where each ministry lists their respective objectives and responsibilities to contribute to the successful sustainable execution of the project.

The faction would also like to know about the health information system. What is the update on this? This is very important, and this was also on the priority list. This can help link, especially with the doctors flying out, flying in, and changing doctors; it is very important that we have this information system.

The Health information System project currently being implemented under the supervision of SZV, will be able to generate the necessary data output once completed. If all goes according to plan, this project will be finalized by the 2nd quarter of 2025.

The faction would also like an update on the St. Maarten General Hospital. It is very important that this hospital stays on track. As we know, it's a lot of difficulties, but it seems to be moving. The faction asks if there is any additional

cost. Can the Minister at least notify the Members of Parliament of the cost at the start of the project and the cost now?

According to information received from SMMC, the status regarding the construction is as follows:

- The design of the building was adjusted in July 2024 to meet the 4th revision of the Design and Build Contract

- Main Building:

- o basement, including water tanks and the seismic isolators for earthquake protection, is completed,

- o ground floor is approximately 50% ready , to be completed by the end of October 2024.

- o Main Building is expected to be ready by the end of the first quarter 2026, Hereafter, the Hospital will move from the old to the new hospital after which the old hospital will be demolished, and the lobby of the New Building will be constructed. This should be ready by the end of 2026.

- Retaining walls were completed except for one last section of approximately 50 meters between Technical Building 1 and 2.

- The structural works on Technical Building 1 is ready

- The structural works on the Waste Water Treatment Plant is completed, installing of the equipment has started. The Waste Water Treatment Plant will be operational by the end of the year.

- Procurement of the large Medical equipment is ongoing.

There were no significant additional costs since the previously amended contract of July 2023. The minor variation orders were covered from the budget line unforeseen.

The faction saw the article whereby about 300 work permits will be granted. Is the Minister satisfied with the number of locals working on the project? Finzo knew that the former Minister was not satisfied with that, and the intention was then to have job fairs per profession, and then the permits would be granted. They would also be granted for national interest expedited once they met local requirements. The faction sees that this is mentioned in the article and would like to know if the Minister is satisfied with the number of locals there and if there is a plan to do another job fair.

FINSO, The General Hospital and other main contractors were present at the National Job Fair on October 2, 2024. The opportunity remains to have locals take

up the jobs at all projects. I would have liked to see more locals working on the hospital, however, we understand that there are not that many trained and certified locals in the construction industry applying.

Also, yes, the update on the General Hospital is important because we also know SZV is the biggest investor. What are your plans to ensure the recoup of the funds for SZV?

SZV and government are in discussions regarding all outstandings owed to SZV and the monthly contributions to render services on behalf of Government.

The faction would also like to know the thoughts of the Minister of VSA on the SAHA. The faction is aware that the Minister came to Parliament, presented it, and basically said that the Minister is in agreement. The faction would like to know if the Minister agrees with the SAAHA as is.

I trust the advice of the ministry and I wholeheartedly believe in the purpose of the SAAHA which is to ensure that we have affordable healthcare for all citizens of Sint Maarten. I believe however that there is room to still tweak some parts of the implementation to optimize the sustainability as it is very important that this project is a success. (phased implementation).

The faction continues and would like to know what the update is with the Dutch Caribbean Hospital Alliance. The faction asks this because this was put together for us to save with biddings and other various means and also for Sint Maarten to ensure their own specialty. The agreement would be Curaçao, the BES, and Sint Maarten. For example, if Sint Maarten specializes in brain surgeries, then we do medical tourism where persons from these countries will be transferred to Sint Maarten. The faction would like to know the update on that, as in the future, it can definitely help us, and it was an important factor.

Dutch Caribbean Hospital Alliance, which was officially established as a cooperation in June 2022. Membership expanded with the care institutions in Saba and St. Eustatius. Currently 6 members: HOH of Aruba, CMC of Curacao, SMMC, and FM, SCF, SEHCF of the BES islands.

The projects as outlined in the multi annual plan are ongoing based on the Project Initiation Documents. An updated project plan including an audited financial report is expected soon.

((The projects are:

- Project 1- Effective organization of Hospital Care
- Project 2- Education and training

- Project 3- Procurement
- Project 4- Pandemic preparedness
- DCHA ICT workgroup is active and working on several projects.))

The effects of budget cuts on personnel—The faction is happy to hear that Community Development was not affected, but the faction urges, while you save money from the T shelter, do not be afraid or be slow to increase the budget of Community Development—a very important factor.

Also, this is something important as Minister of Labor: the possibility of four-day work weeks. The faction would like the ministry's thoughts on that. What are your thoughts on that? What are the ministry's thoughts on the four-day workweek? The faction is a proponent of it and definitely will be looking into it, but the faction would like to know your thoughts as Minister of Labor.

Thank you MP. The Ministry will make contact with the financial accounting department to get an overview of the pilot and what exactly the outcome was.

The possibility for SXM to implement a four day workweek exists, once this is well motivated by Government, Employers and Workers.

A SER advice on this would be needed. However, based on a quick overview that was performed, SXM would need to amend several legal obligations for this to be possible. These obligations provide basic occupational safety and health requirements such as, sickness insurance and vacation to name a few.

(When asked my thoughts on this, I requested to work 4 days a week in my last year working in the Netherlands, Will this work in St. Maarten? I don't know because all indications are that we have a shortage of qualified workers in the labour market already and this would mean that we would need more workers to fill the positions. More research will be needed to form an informed opinion.

While we wait on the Sint Maarten General Hospital, many improvements have been made late The Member of this faction mentioned the following: made numerous improvements to SMMC—the operational room, the additional staffing, the training programs. The faction hasn't heard much from SMMC itself. What progress has SMMC made so far while waiting on the General Hospital to better its services to the public of Sint Maarten? Also, is there an update on the CFO position at SMMC?

SMMC has expanded its services as planned since 2017 in accordance with the SMGH Business Case. This has led to a decrease in medical referrals from circa 5800 to approximately 700 on a yearly basis.

SMMC provides 19 medical specialty services, and continues to improve on its services in accordance with its quality framework.

The Supervisory Council is working on recruitment for statutory CFO. In the interim, Versant Accountants & Consultants fills the position to ensure that CFO responsibilities are met.

Faction wants to know specifically, is in this budget from the NESC job fairs allocated? NESC's budget is different from the budget for job fairs.

The National Job Fair will remain budgeted for the foreseeable future. In addition, strides have been made to have the job portal launched (www.nesc.sx) and more information on this will be forthcoming from the Division responsible via social media.

The faction is happy to hear that the Minister is a proponent of the legal help desk, but the faction noticed that it was stated that they are waiting on the lawyers. Was there a call or something sent out to the lawyer association? Because from the faction's point of view, the holdup is the fact that we are not able to get lawyers on board. And if so, is it a pricing issue? What is the issue that we are not able to get these lawyers on board?

The new start date for the Legal Help Desk is yet to be confirmed, however this is being finalized as we speak and will definitely be promoted via the various means of communication. The relevant department will be having a meeting with law firms in the coming and following this meeting a flyer will be created to indicate the start of the program. It is anticipated to start in November.

Can we have the latest update on the health survey? The health survey that was done is very important. Now, you may think, what does this have to do with the budget? How healthy is Sint Maarten determines our medical cost.

The data collection phase of the STEPS survey is scheduled to be finalized at the end of this month. Report is expected to be ready for publication/dissemination in the first quarter of 2025.

Is the Minister aware that the CEO position for SZV will soon be vacant? The faction would like to know if the Minister has started to prepare for that.

Yes. The CEO position will become vacant October 2025. Preliminary work has commenced by the Supervisory Board of SZV. The board of SZV will start the recruitment procedure soon in order to have a period of transfer of knowledge from the current director to the new to be appointed director.

As Minister of Health, the Minister is in a hard place because the Minister is in government, but the Minister is also responsible for SZV, and the faction knows SZV is owed millions by the government and also owed for maintenance of the building. Is there talk of an increase in the monthly OZR payment? The faction is aware that there was an agreement made. It may not be in this amended budget, but the faction would like to know if there are talks because it's important to know the solvency and future of SZV.

SZV and government are in discussions regarding all outstandings owed to SZV and the monthly contributions to render services on behalf of Government. The minister of Finance also answered this question in more detail earlier today.

The faction would also like to know the ministry's top 10 priorities in order of time and realistic approach at this moment. The faction would like to know the vision of the ministry.

With regards to a realistic approach, seeing the limited time left for me as a minister there is not much that can still be completed even though I intend to work until the end on the projects I deem important.

These are:

-General Health Insurance: I believe that this project is of importance to the population of St. Maarten as far too many people (11% according to the last census) do not have health insurance. The uninsured pose a liability to our healthcare funds as they are less inclined to take advantage of preventative healthcare and could pose a heavy burden on the healthcare system if they need critical healthcare assistance.

This is also the second point mentioned by the governor in the formation document.

-Amendment of the labour legislation: Labor legislation is quite outdated.

(An interministerial approach between primarily the Ministry of VSA and Justice has to be formally established to tackle the pressing issues.

Age limits can also be adjusted)

-I met with the WYC foundation and they were able to present their plans for expansion. These plans will make it possible for us to provide more spaces in the home care and elderly daycare section which will allow elderly to be able to stay at home longer without moving to the care facility. There is also expansion of the guided living section and elderly care section.

In order to make this expansion financially sustainable, I have asked SZV to look at the expansion plans with the WYC so that all parties are on one line and we

can have this implemented as soon as possible to shorten the current wait time for the various forms of elderly care.

-I would have liked to solve the ILO issues so that we do not have to go back to the tribunal in Geneva. We made great strides during our last visit and have scheduled a follow up meeting with the regional director for next week.

-We are very proud of the work done on Mental Health so far in collaboration with the NRPB based on us being able to find the funds necessary with the help of the PM and Min Fin.

On this same point, We are also proud of the new budget post for mental health care that was added to the amended 2024 budget, I now look forward to seeing the further implementation of the project which includes institutional support of MHF, the department of health and other mental health stakeholders as well as the new building.

-Continuation of the Community Development projects. In particular projects related to strengthening of families and projects empowering men and addressing issues related to men in our society. Also projects for the elderly and projects for otherwise abled. The department of Community Development Family and Humanitarian Affairs and CPS department are doing quite a lot of great work in community awareness.

Unfortunately, I find that not enough people make use of these free information sessions. As such I have discussed ramping up the marketing efforts of the VSA departments.

-Assist with the reduction of the annual costs of referrals. Via SZV referral team or new VSA team.

-If we had the funds, I would have liked to support an organization such as Keys to Freedom for recovering addicts and other vulnerable groups with institutional strengthening first and once they are administratively up to par, structural financing because they are doing great work.

-Similarly, if there was funds available, I would have liked to offer subsidy to turning point as well as this organization also contributes valuably to our society.

-I would have liked to see the completion of the new Sint Maarten General Hospital. This is not directly my responsibility but wherever I can facilitate while I am here, I will.

-Hire an Inspector General: We are already in the process of getting this ad out.

What are The Minister's plans to enhance community engagement? Also, the faction noticed that CPS has gone dormant, placed on a back burner, or not been given that much exposure. During COVID, the entire country depended on CPS, and it was an important factor to realize that CPS is more than just COVID. They are the information system to our community for any communicable diseases and health risk factors. The faction understood that in this amendment, the CPS budget was cut for projects and developments, and the faction would echo the sentiment that the faction has stated before to the other ministers before: please do not just view the 2024 budget as two more months, as we would have to use this budget until the 2025 budget is passed.

This pertains to a multi-departmental response as there are several departments who are busy with community projects.

For example, the Division Labor Affairs & Social Services, NESC (National Employment Services Center) engages the Business Community through the work of the Business Officers and the general population (target group unemployed and underemployed) through the work of the Employment Service Officers. The work of Social Services, engages with the community via the in-community and the home engagement sessions carried out by the social workers.

The activities of the CDFHA include various empowerment , collaborations with community partners, and community outreach programs while the CPS continues to work with community organizations to provide health related information sessions. were implemented; some have concluded in the interim, two are ongoing while one is about to start in November. These initiatives are designed to enhance community engagement. Additionally, the Ministry also continues to engage the community with aspects related to disaster management response and preparedness.

The faction mentions the draft LBHAM submitted to the Minister in order to facilitate work permits once local resources have been maximized or sorted. Did the Minister receive this LBHAM, and is it the intention of the Minister to follow through with this LBHAM?

The Ministry would like to thank the MP for this draft provided. The Ministry is aware that there is a need to update the LVO & LbHAM that regulates the employment of foreign workers and that this must be done in a comprehensive manner that takes into consideration all key stakeholders. Therefore the ideas brought forward in your drafts will be taken along as part of the complete package of reforms when this comprehensive legislative change is brought forward, taking into consideration resources and priorities.

Some points brought forward in your draft were already being discussed in the ministry with the legal consultant such as the increased fee for Rapid Permit Processing.

I have assigned the respective Department of Labor to review the proposed changes , and to discuss these with the Execution Agency (Labor Affairs). The Department of Labor is expected to draft a Nota on the proposed laws on what is attainable and the timeframes tied thereto.

The faction would like to know the names of everyone in the cabinet of the Minister of VROMI, the names of any labor contract, and also, if you do not have any third parties, then we can cut that from the budget and put it somewhere else.

The Cabinet of VROMI consists of the following persons: Sergio Dias, Raeyhon Peterson, Luciano Nicholls, Theodorus Snyders, Miklos Giterson and Howard Villareal.

Only two people have a labor contract. On the subject of cutting the budget, not having a contracted third party is not reason to cut all third-party costs as matters may arise outside the scope of the Cabinet or Ministry's capacity and would therefore require ad-hoc assistance, especially in the area of legal assistance.

The faction is concerned about the move of the Cay Bay phase one project to Capex 2025. The faction hopes that we can get it done in 2025.

The faction understands that the housing project is off the table, and the faction was kind of hoping for a "but" and an "and"—my plan and our plan further—but the faction didn't get that. 18.2 million allocated for land purchasing, and in the details, it says housing, different aspects, cemetery—all of those things were allocated for. It's moved to 2025. The faction knows that we are in a crisis situation and understands that certain moves were made to fit this 75.6 million. The faction doesn't want the government or the people of Sint Maarten to basically be left with false hope.

By moving it towards 2025 shows our commitment that we are still willing to pursue this project. The discussion of course needs to be had with stakeholders as to what commitments have been made.

The faction commends the taxi drivers for the cleaning and the movement that they have started. The faction would like to know the opinion of the Minister of VROMI on this. Is this an indication that cleaning should be enhanced? Is this an indication that maybe different areas or aspects of the cleaning project need to be looked into? Because while the faction commends the taxi drivers, it should not be their job.

The islands' cleanliness is an area for improvement and a review of district cleaning contracts is necessary. As Government we applaud any efforts to promote cleanliness.

The faction will wait to see if the paid parking will come in the 2025 budget. The faction hopes that there are plans for paid parking and renovation of Front Street because when you drive there, you get seasick. We need a real plan for Front Street. The faction advises the Minister to look into private-public partnerships. The faction is pretty sure if the Minister goes to Front Street, you can get about 5 or 10 thousand from each vendor store that'll be willing to contribute to help alleviate the government's budget.

A plan of approach still needs to be established in collaboration with other Ministries.

The faction would also like to know the role of the Minister of VROMI within GEBE. Are you involved in any consultations, any contracts, or anything as it pertains to the government?

The role each Minister in Government-owned companies has been a longstanding discussion. As it relates to GEBE this is legally the Minister of VROMI. This is outlined in a landsbesluit issued in 2013. Shifts in which Minister is responsible for GEBE happened under the last administration. This continues today, especially as it relates to the ongoing energy crisis. For the longterm sustainability of these companies.

The faction would like to see what was given to the third parties before these cuts in the budget amendment.

The faction acknowledges that while there are many congratulations for police presence, that also comes with a cost. The faction congratulates the Minister but notices specific cuts in the police, National Detective, as well as cuts in immigration and other areas of protection. The faction states that everything in our protection was cut.

The faction continues and states that we are approaching the Christmas season; the faction cautions the Minister and reminds that there used to be additional police brought in from Curaçao during this time due to a customary rise in crime. The faction cautions regarding the cuts, as security needs to be beefed up during Christmas time.

Given a strategy to look at unfilled vacancies or projects that have not started, we do not anticipate any detriment to national security for the rest of 2024. However, we have noted the challenges of budget cuts in general.

The faction would like to know how the Minister goes about the release of prisoners who are critical or terminally ill. Who is responsible? Is it the Minister or the prosecutor?

I am aware of the critically ill prisoner in question, and his punishment was suspended to undergo treatment as per the recommendation of the Public Prosecutor (OM).

Please note that there is currently no formal policy for the release of terminally ill prisoners, so there are no specific guidelines regarding the timing before their expected passing.

For release in general, the process is as follows: a request is submitted to the governor, who then forwards it to the Minister of Justice for further handling. The minister seeks advice from the Parole Board, the Prosecutor, who reviews the case. Based on these recommendations, a decision is made. The final decision is formalized through a ministerial decree (MB) prepared by JWZ and signed by the Minister. The ultimate decision lies with the Minister of Justice.

The faction made mention of answers received, one regarding the health levy and listed the negative impacts and then that we will see what the SER says. The Minister of Finance saw the Health Levy as one of the revenue-generating factors for this government. The study was transferred; it's in the entire legislation, which is now by the SER and can go up to \$35, and what was being opted to do was go to 15. Everywhere around us, we are seeing these taxes and these levies being implemented, and the faction thinks that it definitely can help, and during this budget debate, the faction is hearing CFT. Since CFT, they actually had liked the structure that was presented, the faction would urge the Minister of TEATT to look into it and really, even if you have to suit it to fit the vision of the government, just bring it. Aruba instituted it, and the faction thinks Aruba is actually \$20, so we were still vying to be less than Aruba.

The faction would like to know regarding the hotel tax and the health levy; the hotels did not mind an increase in the hotel tax rate, so that's another option. The faction also mentions the \$1 safety fee, for which a letter was sent to the airport via the COM stating that payment would have to start. The faction would like to know if it did start and if it is allocated in the budget.

PJIAE has allocated the US\$1 for the security fee and per LB of 2019. Parties have set a start date in Q4 2023, which must be formalized with the existing government. An estimated amount of US\$750-850K per year can be allocated for this. Upon my recommendation, it was decided in CoM on July 30th of this year that the security fee as required by law, will no longer be waived. I subsequently sent a letter to PJIAH informing them of this decision and requesting them to

initiate the payment of the fee by PJIAE. We are in the process of establishing the protocol for billing and receipt.

The faction continues and states that it has a couple of questions pertaining to the causeway bridge: how much is the exact amount that the Harbor pays towards the causeway bridge?

The construction of the causeway was financed through a (bond)loan issue. The loan will be fully paid off in 2035 (11 years from now). The yearly loan payments (principal plus interest) are as follows:

yearly payments		USD	
principal	interest	Total	
Causeway		yearly payments Causeway	
34% of total bond loan			
1,029,660	2,488,904	3,518,564	2023
1,709,659	2,420,421	4,130,081	2024
2,389,659	2,317,938	4,707,597	2025
2,389,659	2,198,455	4,588,114	2026
2,988,059	2,064,013	5,052,071	2027
4,348,058	1,880,610	6,228,668	2028
4,429,657	1,661,167	6,090,824	2029
4,599,657	1,435,434	6,035,091	2030
4,769,657	1,201,201	5,970,858	2031
5,449,657	945,718	6,395,375	2032
6,550,989	645,702	7,196,691	2033
6,550,989	318,153	6,869,142	2034
3,087,555	77,189	3,164,744	2035

How much does NV GEBE pay towards the through port fee?

Throughput landed fee costs charged to SOL destined fuel to GEBE:

- 2022 : USD 1.634.876.
- 2023 : USD 1.865.381.
- 2024 : USD 989.172 (9 months, extrapolated to 12 months 2024 : USD 1.318.896).

Note that the throughput fees were increased by 0.4-guilder cents in 2012-2014 in relation to the loan issue to 4.4-guilder cents per liter. As such 10% of the above amounts (0.4 of 4 cents) relates to the loan issued in 2012, which includes the causeway:

o2022 : USD 163.487.

o2023 : USD 186.538.

o2024 : USD 98,917 (extrapolated: USD 131.890).

Does any other company contribute to the payment of the causeway bridge?

No, no other company pays for the causeway.

The throughput levy system are NAF 4.4 cents to airlines (via SOL, via airport) & NAF 8 cents to other bulk liquid fuel landed in Caybay.

How much debt does the Harbor presently have? What is owed for? How much does it pay towards loans in its entirety? And how much is the monthly burn rate?

The table below shows how loans will be repaid in the next 10 years. All current loans will have been repaid in the next 10 years:

			2020	2021	2,022	2023	2024 - June	2025	2026		
Bond Loan			150,802,933	151,687,969	147,920,340	144,891,928	142,377,722	132,835,114	125,806,706		
Carnival Loan			16,424,706	17,431,366	17,308,916	15,167,377	12,858,231	9,597,234	5,976,108		
RCCL			10,867,916	7,282,306	3,429,893	-	-	-	-		
RBC Bank			1,505,288	584,975	-	3,236,830	3,010,312	2,295,398	1,788,029		
Stichting Econ. Ontwikkeling			1,174,088	942,510	-	-	-	-	-		
WIB			2,289,712	2,008,233	1,712,393	1,401,002	1,239,393	710,232	184,920		
Total			183,064,643	179,937,359	170,371,542	164,697,137	159,485,658	145,437,978	133,755,763		
			2027	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032	2033	2034	2035
Bond Loan			117,018,297	104,229,892	91,201,487	77,673,083	63,644,679	47,616,277	28,348,661	9,081,045	1
Carnival Loan			2,015,410	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
RCCL			-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
RBC Bank			1,254,703	694,263	104,977	-	-	-	-	-	-
Stichting Econ. Ontwikkeling			-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
WIB			-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total			120,288,410	104,924,155	91,306,464	77,673,083	63,644,679	47,616,277	28,348,661	9,081,045	1

Burn rate: total operating expenses and interest expenses and principal loan payments of the Port, based on its 2024 budget amount to USD 49 million for 2024. Based on the Ports current cash position the Port can meet all its commitments for longer than a year in a situation where it would have ZERO income.

A natural disaster such a major hurricane is externally insured including business interruption. Additionally, the projected net results are favorable based on their business projections which will help the Port to build additional reserves. This will make them further shock proof and enable them to make key investments linked to business continuity and business growth.

What is the annual maintenance cost of the causeway bridge? Who maintains the Causeway Bridge currently? What outstanding CAPEX projects are still pending for TEATT, but particularly the Harbor? Considering the FCCA and its members are leaning towards LNG, what is the Harbor's position on being able to

offer energy-related services to the cruise industry? The faction believes that this cannot only save GEBE but generate revenue for us.

The expected maintenance costs for 2024 linked to the causeway are estimated at USD 328K. The causeway is currently being maintained by the main manufacturer of the swing bridge and technical components. Also, local companies and Port employees carry out the day-to-day maintenance and upkeep.

LNG is very much a discussion in the industry as an alternative option and immediate solution while industry leaders further research and develop solutions that's not fossil fuel based (such as: Hydrogen, Methanol, Hybrid). These items are on the agenda to further strategic discussions with the industry partners during the upcoming FCCA conference in SXM. The transition to renewable fuel sources and ability to fuel/ power these vessels is a collaboration of several local stakeholders including Gov & GEBE amongst others.

Will a transfer of assets and debt from the Harbor to the government help the port in any sort? Given the recent economic conditions, has there been any re-evaluation on the port's capacity to manage financial risk such as those posed by a natural disaster or pandemic?

The faction states that in discussions with CPS, it was stated that in the preparedness plan, we can estimate every 10 years that a pandemic will be here. It is in trajectory; right now, we're 5 years off 2019, so it's always good with preparedness.

PSG has had discussions regarding recapitalization since 2016. The Port has requested in the past a contribution in kind through an extension of its current water rights as well as a transfer of the causeway bridge.

Is it still the interest of the port or part of the port of Sint Maarten to sell or enter discussions with Global Port? Is that still an interest, still a topic, still a discussion?

The Port is not intending to have further discussions with the Global Port. Global Port is still active in the Caribbean and approaching many destinations, however the Port has maintained and improved its strategic agreements with cruise partners directly and as such maintains and appreciates the direct relationship with the cruise industry executives/ partners.

The vending village. The faction needs clarification: what is the vending village? Where is it at this moment? And where is it intended to be moved to?

The Vending Village has been removed from the CAPEX and is currently being worked on by the Ministry to be presented again in 2025 for Budget 2026.

The faction would just like to revert back to the projections and telling the public exactly what a budget is, and this refers back to the faction's point exactly why the faction is very critical of the big change in having the 75.6 million for GEBE just placed, and whereby other projects that are for government to carry out to be moved to 2025. The faction states that this is a wish list. So, while we have an approved CAPEX, which we didn't have for many, many years, it's very important how we carry out projects throughout.

The faction specifically asked a question on the issue with the MER group, with the liens that were placed on TELEM, and the article came out saying that it was handled. The faction would like to know what the amount was. The faction is hearing 3.8 million. What was paid? Is it in installments? Is it a one-time payment that was made? How does this affect TELEM's budget, and what are the plans moving forward to remedy this? [Previously answered in report. One time payment.](#)

The faction also did not hear the answer on the consultants and the cabinet staff. The only persons who gave a clear-cut, concise answer were the Minister of VSA, the Minister of Justice, and the Minister of TEATT. But for some reason, the faction cannot get this answer from the Prime Minister, and the faction asked for a specific reason. Please provide the names of the persons with labor contracts that you have in your cabinet, the amount, and also your cabinet staff. [Previously answered per cabinet. We cannot divulge what is considered private information regarding amounts of individual scales of individuals.](#) The faction also wants to know because if there are no consultants, then the 96,000 can be placed towards Justice or something.

The faction just has a couple of clear, concise questions. Does the Prime Minister think that Sint Maarten has a housing problem? The faction notes that the Trust Fund is canceling the project—does the Minister think that now, especially with that being canceled, with the light at the end of the tunnel being closed, that we have a housing problem?

[Obviously this project was initiated to address an existing situation. With the cancelling of this project the situation will remain the same. Therefore, yes, I am in agreement with the previous government that Sint Maarten has a housing problem.](#)

Does the Prime Minister also think and agree that we have a poverty problem?

[Based on information received, it can be concluded that Sint Maarten has a poverty problem.](#)

Does the Prime Minister champion relief for the people of Sint Maarten and relief for all of us who are having issues with GEBE?

As mentioned earlier, this government does champion relief for the people of Sint Maarten. That is why a meeting will be scheduled with the stakeholders and the ministers of TEATT and VSA, to discuss amongst others, the components forming the fuel clause.

What are the Prime Minister's thoughts on some persons receiving a 100 guilder bill from GEBE but the fuel clause is 500 guilders?

If this is an actual situation, it would be unacceptable. Whether this is an existing situation or not, as mentioned, soon we will meet with the stakeholders and discuss the components in the fuel clause.

GEBE generates revenue by collections. Nonetheless, there was a hack that created an issue with the billing system. Now, bills are coming in, and granted, some consumers did not even pay, but there are a lot of wrong bills. But persons are now being threatened that they are going to cut the bill, and they have three months or a 50% downpayment. The faction knows that some of these people cannot afford this down payment.

What percentage of the fuel clause goes towards the throughput fee? Also, the loan of 75.6 million. Can GEBE afford this loan? The faction would like to know if GEBE can afford this loan and it is that the government is offering the services for a favorable interest rate.

While current power generation challenges have introduced additional expenses, since GEBE is receiving payments from the customers, GEBE will be in a position to meet the financing requirements. More importantly, planned investments are necessary for the long-term sustainability and reliability of the company's operations.

Government will offer the loan at a favorable interest rate to GEBE, with the aim to support the company's capacity to manage the loan effectively while continuing to address operational needs.

The faction notes a picture of the 20 generators reaching here. The faction would like to know the reason for purchasing 20 one-megawatt generators. The faction is of the opinion that there will be a lot of maintenance and a lot of technical aspects.

Answer: The decision to buy 20 1MW generators rather than a single 20MW generator or two 10MW generators was driven by various factors, including availability, lead time, and financing. Larger capacity units, such as a 20MW generator, require a long production lead time—typically 18-24 months—and come with significantly higher costs, which would need capital financing. In contrast, the 1MW generators were available more quickly, providing a faster

solution to the immediate power needs. The short-term plant of 10 MW uses similar capacity units.

Additionally, these units were considered ideal in the short term, as they can be deployed faster. The smaller generators offer greater flexibility and are part of an interim solution as longer-term plans, such as integrating larger capacity units and introducing solar power, are implemented.

The faction would like a timeline because it doesn't want the public to think that this 75.6 million means that GEBE is good tomorrow. The faction would like a timeline on passing the budget, a bid, ordering the generators, the generators being here, installed, and hooked up. What is the estimated time frame from the passing of the budget?

Despite the question, I hope the process establishing and approving (or passing) the budget, or any other draft national ordinance is known to all members of parliament.

Regarding the generators, with reference to answers already provided, the agreement is that after this amendment is approved, the Government will inform the State secretary and discussions on the details of the loan will begin.

As soon as an agreement is reached on the conditions with the Netherlands, a discussion will start with GEBE on the loan.

Large units typically take about 18 to 24 months from agreement to commissioning. In other words, once the budget is approved and the funds are available, it will take approximately 18 to 24 months before the engines are commissioned.

The faction would like to know why the Prime Minister is the spokesperson for GEBE. The faction does not agree with this. What legislation, what policy, what decree causes this?

By national decree of September 26, 2019, all the national decrees authorizing Ministers to be the shareholder representatives have been cancelled. The consequence of this is that the Council of Ministers is in effect the shareholder representative.

Therefore, in the Council of Ministers it is agreed which Minister will be representing the shareholder on the terms agreed on in the Council of Ministers. In the case of GEBE, it is the Prime Minister.

Is this the same for the hospital? Which Minister does the hospital fall under? The faction is seeing a lot of hospital updates but seeing more of the Prime Minister when it comes to the hospital than the Minister of VSA. The faction would like to know if there was a change in the structure of this Council of Ministers.

The hospital falls under the responsibility of the Minister VSA. No, there are no structural changes in the CoM.

The faction understands what the government is trying to do. The questions posed by the faction and the detailing are ensuring that if it supports this budget, it can live knowing that it is doing the right thing. The faction would like to know what happens if this loan is approved and GEBE defaults. The faction doesn't see any government daring to put a loan on GEBE that will cause or hamper permanent outages. But what happens if they default?

Government will remain responsible to pay back the loan.

Last but not least, the faction asked about GEBE being able to afford this loan. What about GEBE acquiring the loan and the government standing guarantor for the loan?

The answer was already provided. I can repeat that after reviewing all the options, we considered that this would be a more transparent option.

The faction believes that standing guarantor allows us to carry out projects. The faction keeps asking, and the faction heard the Minister of Finance say that all projects moved to 2025 Capex are not guaranteed. We have not received Capex since 2019. So, what the faction is saying is, while we have an assurance and an approved Capex for 2023, the faction does not want us to lose the opportunity as the government to carry out housing, social, and all of these other projects that were intended, while GEBE can acquire this loan and the government stands guarantor.

The process for securing a CAPEX loan is as follows: First, the loan must be included in the budget of both Sint Maarten and the Netherlands. Only after this step can the Netherlands formally initiate the request for the loan. Once our budget has been approved by Parliament, the CFT must then grant Article 12 approval. After this approval is obtained, the funds are guaranteed, and Sint Maarten can proceed with submitting its request for the loan. It is important that we are also in close communication with CFT beforehand to not include investments which they would not approve of because this would mean that the entire capex would be at risk. Hence the reason why all investments for the year 2024 were removed from the budget, with only three remaining. Of these, two are co-financed, the prison and the mental health building, and one is dedicated to GEBE, given the urgent need for reliable energy in Sint Maarten. This decision reflects a prioritization of particularly the stability of our energy supply for the coming years.

The faction specifically asked the question as it relates to GEBE because, as noticed, there are hopes and plans that this will be rectified as the Minister over

GEBE. Many times in press briefing the questions would be directed to the Minister of VROMI, but yet the faction is seeing the Prime Minister. Then, when the faction realized the budget of VROMI is taking the hit, the CAPEX aspect of it. The faction would like to know the Minister's thoughts on that. The faction would also like to know the Minister's thoughts on the process of GEBE being placed in the CAPEX for VROMI.

As Minister of VROMI, I am responsible for GEBE. I am in close consultation with management and note that the loan is a backup to GEBE's own financing plan.

Additionally, the faction would like to know the Minister's plans for VROMI and asked it specifically because the Prime Minister answered a question today regarding the validity of the concession ordinance.

The electricity ordinance and concession agreement are still valid. In the context of this discussion, it is important to note that in said agreement GEBE has an obligation for 2% renewable energy. Given that this is not currently adhered to, supporting this transition is my priority.

The faction would like to know if the Minister of VROMI is aware of the responsibility and power that he has when it pertains to a national crisis. The Prime Minister speaks of a national crisis, but the power is implicated for the Minister of VROMI in a national crisis. Also, the Minister of TEATT controls the tariff in pricing. The faction sees the two relevant ministers that can actually bring relief and change to the people, yet only the Prime Minister is seen. The faction would urge the Minister of VROMI not to throw his hands up but definitely use some of those innovative ideas.

VROMI by itself cannot bring relief to the people, this is decided by the government as a whole. Each ministry has its responsibilities and tasks during a National Crisis. The Minister of VROMI (ESF3) is to develop and implement disaster preparedness plans, coordinate emergency response efforts, and collaborate with relevant agencies to mitigate the impact of disasters on housing, infrastructure, and the environment.

The faction mentions the concession ordinance and that an ordinance trumps policies and decrees. Therefore, the faction would like to see the thought pattern on it, and if the Minister is not familiar with the ordinance, once read, the faction would like to know how the Minister of VROMI intends to take control of the situation.

The faction would like to know the following from the Minister of VROMI as it relates to GEBE. Why did GEBE opt to purchase 20 individual one-megawatt generators? Are these engines currently running on heavy fuel? The containerized

generators that were brought earlier, who is bearing the cost of that, and who is bearing the cost of the 20 generators that just arrived? The faction sees a lot of excitement from the public, but we are talking about 20 megawatts, so could there be an elaboration on what 20 megawatts can power?

[Awaiting answer.](#)

Why didn't the government or has the government approached APS or even Vidanova for a total guarantee on a loan instead of directly taking a loan? Also, wouldn't a guarantee on a loan rather than taking a loan itself help to avoid encumbering the government's finances and allow the government, particularly the Ministry of VROMI, to allocate funds towards housing projects and land?

[As of June 2024, APS has invested Naf. 454.5 million locally. These investments consist of real estate projects such as Oryx Residences and the Sint Maarten General Hospital, and several loans and bonds to local organizations. Furthermore, as of the end of the 3rd quarter 2024, APS is projected to have Naf. 32 million in cash and Naf. 126.2 million in time deposits. So, in essence there are funds available, but we must bear in mind that there are other potential projects already going to a vetting process which could take up to 6 to 8 months for final approval. So, if GEBE's request comes in now it would not take precedence over the ones that are already in process and being reviewed now.](#)

The faction hears the Minister speak of the Trust Fund ending the housing projects, and while there is a national energy crisis, there is also a national housing crisis.

[The World Bank informed the Steering Committee meeting on April 10, 2024 of its decision to cancel the social housing project for which 20 million US Dollars had been reserved to construct more than 100 new social and affordable homes for Sint Maarten Housing Development Foundation.](#)

[The previous administration was immediately informed of the World Bank's decision by Mr. Halman, the Steering Committee member for Sint Maarten. Main reasons for the World Bank to cancel the project were the limited time left in the overall Trust Fund program to complete this project and the roadblocks experienced during preparation, especially that the Government at that time had not finalized the new performance agreement with SMHDF and the land lease for the project before the agreed upon deadlines.](#)

[During my visit to Washington DC I had extensive conversations with the World Bank on all the ongoing Trust Fund projects. Key achievements of the mission included additional financing for a new mental health facility, a commitment of the Netherlands for extensive technical assistance to the Ministry](#)

of VROMI and a final approval of the Steering Committee on 25 million US dollars for the wastewater management project.

Regarding the much needed social housing project, which was unfortunately already cancelled by the World Bank during the tenure of the previous Government, I have and will continue to negotiate extensively with the World Bank and the Netherlands for additional support especially to extend the deadline past 2028.

The agreed upon technical assistance to the Ministry of VROMI is expected to include some support on housing as well.

With the CFT's oversight on borrowing, how can the government ensure that funds directed towards GEBE are managed effectively without risking any further financial constraints?

The faction noted that when a previous speaker asked the Prime Minister today about BZK and their regulations, no agreement has been brought forward yet, but what the faction foresees is something, particularly like the airport, where a CFO or someone will be requested. What is the update with the management team of GEBE, the Big C's? When will they be placed? What is the plan? What are we waiting on? The faction expects conditions, and if there are going to be conditions, the faction would like to know how much of APS funds have been based abroad and directed locally. There's a proportion in APS regulations, that they're supposed to invest a certain amount abroad and invest locally. The faction would like this to be relayed to the relevant Minister to find out the amount that has been invested locally. Maybe there is enough, or they have sufficient funds to invest towards GEBE, whereby GEBE is a monopoly. The faction wants the public to realize that the problem is the mismanagement of funds while we are in this predicament. But GEBE, being a monopoly, will definitely recoup funds.

GEBE is an entity on its own of which the Government of SXM is the only shareholder. That being said, the government does have some influence on GEBE but cannot decide or instruct on their daily operations. GEBE's is managed daily by the 3 big C's. These are appointed by the supervisory board which is appointed by the shareholders which is the Government of SXM. So, to ensure that these funds will be utilized effectively we will need to appoint a qualified CEO, CFO and COO through by appointing a competent and effective Supervisory Board. This Supervisory Board will need to conduct itself in a manner that is beneficial to the company and be willing to hold the 3 big C's accountable for any mismanagement.

Can the government ensure that funds used for GEBE needs are balanced with investments and other vital areas like housing and education, considering our current financial constraints? The faction is of the opinion that we are in a bind.

We see in the newspaper that SZV is projecting to lose 23 million this year and 19 million next year. The government is in no financial situation itself to play the hero, and the faction wants to ensure that we are not trying to play the hero but take the best possible route.

Why hasn't the government negotiated with banks to structure a loan with GEBE's assets as collateral, which would avoid placing an additional burden on the government and allow projects like the Cay Bay phase one to continue? There was once a statement by the legend Claude Wathey, "Nobody is going to come and take an airport, take GEBE, or take a harbor; they can't take it up and go with it." Let us find means and ways that we can fix the problem, while the Minister of VROMI can carry out the projects that are needed for this country. GEBE, yes, is a government-owned entity, but it is its own entity. If we can find ways for them to access their funds while we can allocate our funds and carry out our projects, it would be a win-win for this country.

[GEBE is in discussion with a consortium for financing. The loan via BZK is a backup plan.](#)

The faction also would like to know if the Minister could clarify the turnover tax and throughput fee structure, especially since the TOT 5% is applied on top of the throughput fee. All of this is related to the fuel clause in the GEBE bill. A lot of us speak on throughput fees, but we neglect the turnover tax, which is coming out to be higher in the GEBE bill.

[This is a question which only GEBE and or the Ministry of Finance can clarify.](#)

Speaking about having our companies in order, the faction would like to know the update on the head of BTP. The faction knows that the interim head worked hard to put BTP back in a position where it can start to see the light. The faction would like to know if this position is finalized. Is the person still interim, or will the person become the definite head because the faction believes that they definitely do deserve that with the way they brought BTP back in a reasonable State?

[The BTP board is currently handling recruitment process for the director of BTP.](#)