

## **Presiding Officers as the Head of State in Trinidad and Tobago: The Creation of a Westminster - Washington Hybrid**

by

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### **ABSTRACT**

The provisions in the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago for the presiding officers of Parliament to act as Head of State in cases where the President of the Republic is unable to perform the functions of his office represents the search for impartiality in the acting arrangements for these presidencies, but may also reveal the influence of the Washington model on constitutional reform in Trinidad and Tobago and a compromise with its Westminster roots.

The removal of the Monarchy and the Governor-General and their replacement by a republican parliamentary system brought with it the need to preserve the accepted impartiality of the Crown with an indigenous presidency whose acceptance by all sides of the political spectrum could be secured. The key challenge lay in being able to ensure the extension of this political acceptance into the acting arrangements for the presidency as there was no longer the imprimatur of the Crown to maintain the veil of such acceptance.

In the circumstances, an attempt was made to create a hybrid arrangement using the Washington model where the Vice- President of the United States presides over the Senate and the Speaker presides over the House of Representatives. While in the United States these offices are decidedly partisan, in Trinidad and Tobago's bicameral Parliament, the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives are regarded as politically neutral.

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