

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, June 30, 2021

The House met at 10.30 a.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE REPORTS**(Presentation)****Fisheries Management (No. 2) Bill, 2020**

The Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Brian Manning): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present:

Report of the Joint Select Committee appointed to consider and report on the Fisheries Management (No. 2) Bill, 2020, First Session (2020/2021), Twelfth Parliament.

Representation of the People (Amdt.) (No. 2) Bill, 2020

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present:

Report of the Joint Select Committee appointed to consider and report on the Representation of the People (Amdt.) (No. 2) Bill, 2020, First Session (2020/2021), Twelfth Parliament.

TOBAGO ISLAND GOVERNMENT BILL, 2021

Bill to repeal the Tobago House of Assembly Act, Chap. 25:03, and to provide for the powers and functions of the Tobago Island Government and the Tobago Legislature and for related matters [*The Minister of Planning and Development*]; read the first time.

UNREVISED

Motion made: That the next stage be taken later in the proceedings. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*] *Question put and agreed to.*

RESUMPTION OF BILLS

(SECOND SESSION TWELFTH PARLIAMENT)

Madam Speaker: The Leader of the House.

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):

Thank you again, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 79(3), I beg to move that in the Second Session of the Twelfth Parliament, the proceedings on the following Bills be resumed:

1. The Fisheries Management (No.2) Bill, 2020; and
2. The Representation of the People (Amdt.) (No. 2) Bill, 2020.

Question put and agreed to.

TOBAGO ISLAND GOVERNMENT BILL, 2021

Madam Speaker: Minister of Planning and Development. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):

Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I beg to move:

That a Bill to repeal the Tobago House of Assembly Act, Chap. 25:03, and to provide for the powers and functions of the Tobago Island Government and the Tobago Legislature and for related matters, be now read a second time.

Madam Speaker, this is the companion Bill to the Constitution (Amdt.) (Tobago Self-Government) Bill, 2020, which is now before the committee of the whole of this House. Madam Speaker, as you would recall, we spent the last two days discussing the provisions of these Bills and this procedure is now required to formally move this Bill through the required stages to become law. This Bill, Madam Speaker, will provide the legal mechanisms to set in motion the new

Tobago Island Government in its widest sense, that is to say, the Tobago Executive Council and the Tobago Legislature.

Madam Speaker, it is important that these arrangements be set out in foundation law, although the actual operations will be put in place over a period of time. Madam Speaker, it will be the operations, the institutions all of these will be left for Tobago to put in place to make this law a reality. Madam Speaker, the question may be asked: Can the measures in this Bill be amended? And Madam Speaker, the question is answered, yes. Yes, they can, as is the case with all other laws, Madam Speaker. But as the mover of this Bill, let me state categorically that this law ought not and will not be arbitrarily amended. And this is similar to how this Parliament has treated with its predecessor Act, the Tobago House of Assembly Act.

Madam Speaker, this Bill, if I go through the provisions, provides the clear and unambiguous jurisdictional boundaries of the Tobago Island Government by prescribing that Tobago's administrative responsibility for marine waters would extend to a distance of 11 nautical miles from the low watermark of the island of Tobago. And Madam Speaker, you will find this in clause 5(2) of the Bill.

The establishment of the offices of Chief Administrator and Administrators is to be found in clauses 9 and 10 respectively, and by clause 11, the Tobago Island Government can employ persons on contract as the Government sees fit. Clauses 12 to 27 deal with the new Tobago Legislature and provide for the following: the time limit for swearing in, remuneration of members, the establishment of oversight departmental committees—much the same as exists in the national Parliament—the establishment of the Public Accounts Committee, the establishment of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee, and the exemption of members of the Assembly from jury service.

Madam Speaker, it mirrors what the Government of the State of Trinidad and Tobago has in place. And Madam Speaker, what is very noteworthy is that committees such as the Public Accounts Committee, the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee, are all oversight committees which will exist for the new Tobago Island Government. Madam Speaker, clause 22 provides that:

“The House of Assembly is a public body for the purposes of the Prevention of Corruption Act.”

And by clause 23, Members of the Assembly are made persons in public life.

I turn now to clauses 28 to 42, and these clauses, Madam Speaker, deal with financial issues. Significantly, by virtue of clause 28, the Secretary of Finance is made the corporation sole for the Island of Tobago and for the Tobago Island Government, a position similar to the Minister of Finance for the State of Trinidad and Tobago. Other clauses in this part provide for the seal of the corporation sole, as well as the Tobago allocation which we spoke about at length being established as a minimum at the level of 6.8 per cent of the annual appropriation. A major improvement, Madam Speaker, from the 4.3 per cent that now exists. The Tobago Fund, the power to borrow and the power to invest, are all set out in this part of the Bill.

Madam Speaker, clause 43 establishes the Fiscal Review Committee, also discussed during the debate on the Joint Select Committee's Report. This Committee will be charged with ensuring that all revenues, all fees and duties collected in Trinidad, that are attributable to Tobago are held for the account of Tobago, and it is this committee that must work towards the establishment of a mechanism for revenue sharing between the national Government and the Tobago Island Government.

Madam Speaker, should the Tobago Executive Council require an allocation above the legislated 6.8 per cent it will also be the duty of the Fiscal Review Committee to make the determination of what additional sums should be provided. Madam Speaker, with all legislation that makes such a major change, we must put in place transitional arrangements and the transitional arrangements have been made clear in clauses 44 to 55, and provide for the continuation of matters and rules of the Tobago House of Assembly, the saving of employment and the continuation of association of representation and collective arrangements, so the union representations and all the collective arrangements are saved for this transition, during this transition, Madam Speaker.

By virtue of clause 53:

“all lands and other property of every kind...vested in the former Assembly are...vested in the Secretary of Finance who shall hold them in trust for the Tobago Island Government;”

Clause 54 provides that:

“Legal proceedings pending immediately before the coming into force of this Act by or against the former Assembly may, on the coming into force of this Act, be continued by or against the Tobago Island Government as the party to the proceedings”—in place of and—
“instead of the former Assembly.”

Clause 56, Madam Speaker, provides for the amendment of Schedules 1 and 2, and provides as follows, and I quote:

“The President may by Order, subject to negative resolution of Parliament, amend Schedule 1 and Schedule 2 to add any other matter.”

To add, Madam Speaker, not to take away. You will recognize that this clause expressly provides for the enlarging of Tobago’s executive and legislative powers,

but it is notably silent on any process to reduce powers already devolved. Madam Speaker, that is very significant as it is only to add, I repeat, and not to take away, and this was very important to the Tobago stakeholders.

Consequential amendments to certain Acts are made in clauses 57 to 60, including the Interpretation Act and the Statutes Act. Clause 28 repeals the Tobago House of Assembly Act. Of extreme importance, Madam Speaker, is clause 61, which proposes the deletion of the words:

“...’, the Island of Tobago shall be a Ward of the Colony of Trinidad and Tobago...’...”—from the—“Trinidad and Tobago Order in Council, 1898...”

Madam Speaker, this was of extreme importance emotionally and otherwise, for the stakeholders and for the people of Tobago.

Schedule 1 of this Bill lists matters for which the Tobago Executive Council shall have exclusive administrative jurisdiction in Tobago, whilst Schedule 2 lists the matters for which the Tobago Legislature shall have exclusive lawmaking powers in Tobago.

Madam Speaker, enumerating the powers devolved from the national legislature is very necessary to promote legal certainty which is required by both the national Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago and the proposed Tobago Legislature when making laws. Clarity is also required in order to minimize conflict and judicial uncertainty. In this way, also, the people of Tobago as well as those in Trinidad will know exactly what areas of legislative responsibilities are possessed by the Tobago Legislature.

Madam Speaker, the model recommended in this report will also facilitate smooth transitional arrangements since all laws will continue to have effect in Tobago until Tobago enacts specific laws pursuant to the specified list.

Madam Speaker, this Tobago Island Government proposal, and now this Bill was discussed quite extensively during the debate on the report and with these few words, Madam Speaker, I thank you and I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed.

Madam Speaker: Attorney General. [*Desk thumping*]

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. May I just confirm that it is 20 minutes speaking time? Much obliged. Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: Attorney General, you are the first person responding, so I will give you 30 minutes.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Madam Speaker. What a novelty and yet what a tragedy at the same time. Madam Speaker, I will exercise the entitlement as the first responder to the 30 minutes and I thank you for allowing me that clarification. Madam Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to join in this debate. I must say that it is certainly not a pleasure to be in this Chamber with only the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago present. And I will say why. Madam Speaker, the Bill before us now is the product of two Joint Select Committees having sat back to back for nearly three going on four years.

The Bill before us, the Tobago Island Government Bill is a product which originated from the 2016 deliberations of the Tobago House of Assembly. Now, Madam Speaker, permit me to put it in this regard. Currently, in section 29 of the Tobago House of Assembly Act, the Tobago House of Assembly has the capacity to produce Bills for consideration. They do not have that which this Government and which the Joint Select Committee of two Parliaments back to back, they do not have the power to make laws. Because the power to make law for the peace, order

and good government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago is entrenched in section 53 of the Constitution as the power of the Parliament.

Section 22 of the Constitution sets up that the Parliament is the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the House of Representatives and the Senate. The two Joint Select Committees meeting in the period 2018 right up to 2021, fashioned the view coming from legislative proposals in the context of Bills generated by the Island of Tobago that Tobago should have legislative capacity, and that legislative capacity was born out of the deep desire to give the people of Tobago the equality of status to Trinidad and Tobago when considered between the two islands. After all, is it not fair, reasonable, desirable, altruistic, that Tobago ought to have its own island government, its own legislature, its own power to borrow? Should Tobago not have the advantage of a further and immediate access to \$1.2 billion of expenditure coming into the hand of its corporation sole?

The Minister of Finance in the law of Trinidad and Tobago stands as the Corporation Sole, there is a Corporation Sole Act. Why should Tobago not have its Secretary of Finance as a corporation sole? Why should the Secretary of Finance in the Island Government of Tobago not be the trustee for all lands in Tobago? Why should the equivalent of an Attorney General in Tobago, the Minister with responsibility in Tobago becoming the Secretary for Legal Affairs, why should the Secretary for Legal Affairs, the equivalent of an Attorney General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago in most senses, not have the capacity to make laws?

You see, Madam Speaker, the Bill before us is a critical piece of law and, Madam Speaker, for the record, this Bill unlike fulminations that I heard coming from the Opposition as recently as yesterday, and not going into that, but now in the public domain carried and I read it in the newspapers, there was this argument presented that somehow, this Bill before us plopped out of the sky, came like

man from heaven and that everybody was caught unawares. Madam Speaker, that is the furthest thing from the truth. Because when you look to the Bills before us, the Bill before us, Madam Speaker, the Tobago Island Government Bill, 2021, and we look to the 61 clauses and two schedules, they spring exactly from the 2016 legislative proposal from Tobago, the 2018 proposal from Tobago, both of which went to joint select committees, two joint select committees. And Madam Speaker, it brings to life an ambition, a desire, a burning flame of want of this Government and of the Tobago House of Assembly, Chief Secretary Ancil Dennis, or Mr. London, the previous Chief Secretary or Mr. Charles, the previous Chief Secretary, of many other Chief Secretaries that have acted, Madam Speaker, that burning desire to give Tobago its fair share, to give it equality, to give it dignity, to give it constitutional anchor which springs into this Bill.

Now, how does this Bill operate with the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago? We have, without reviving debate on another Bill, but relevant to this debate, from the constitutional amendments that came, we have a springboard in the Constitution which brings this to life, this Bill to life. The springboard comes from a few places. Number one, it comes from the amendment to section 53 of the Constitution, which allows Tobago, the Legislature of Tobago, the power to make laws for the peace order and good government of Tobago, Madam Speaker. And that, Madam Speaker, is to be found in this Bill, when we look to the Tobago Island Government in Part II, but more particularly in Part III of this Bill, beginning at clause 12, the Tobago Legislature.

Clauses 12 to 27 of this Bill represent the prescriptive elements that the Constitution allows in the amended version in another law which says amend section 53 of the Constitution, allow Tobago the right and priority and just due of making its own laws, subject to matters prescribed, the matters are now prescribed

in this Bill, clauses 12 to 27 and in Schedule 2 of this Bill. Schedule 2 of this Bill says the list of matters for which Tobago Legislature shall have exclusive lawmaking powers in Tobago. And when you go, Madam Speaker, into Schedule 2 of the Bill and you look at the fact—and I want to focus on this. I want to look at item 17 in the Schedule; that Tobago and only Tobago, the Island Government of Tobago with its own legislature, its own Parliament, comprising the President and the House of Assembly. Let me repeat that, Madam Speaker, understand what equality looks like in black and white. If the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago has a legislature set up, being the President and the Senate and the House; Tobago has its equivalent, the President and the House of Assembly. That is what the Joint Select Committee does; that is what Part III of the Bill before us does; that is what Schedule 2 does.

And item 17 says that that privilege of making law gets to matters such as this:

“Land and Buildings other than land and buildings vested in the State and specifically appropriated to the use of the Government, including holding of land by persons who are not citizens.”

This Bill brings to life, Madam Speaker, the ability of the people of Tobago to fix one of the burning issues that has gripped them for centuries that is rooted in the manner in which we move from a Crown Colony into the civility of independence and then republicanism, the ability to manage their land titles.

Where yesterday we saw the pale reflection of death on the front page of our newspapers, young man killed in a boundary dispute with a relative as it is alleged, Madam Speaker, this Bill brings to life the ability of the people of Tobago with their own equivalent of an Attorney General to make laws for the peace, order and

good government of Tobago. This Bill, Madam Speaker, when we get to the position of Part II of the Bill, Part II of the Bill is the Tobago Island Government.

Madam Speaker, Tobago is being asked via this House of Representatives to receive not a body corporate as this Bill seeks to repeal the THA Act, the Tobago House of Assembly Act creates a body corporate, a statutory entity, a creature of law.

11.00 a. m.

This Bill asks us to tie it back to the Constitution and instead of a statutory authority, to receive a creature of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. The Constitution has a bill of rights. The Constitution has remedies. The Constitution sets up the Judiciary, the Supreme Court of Judicature. The Constitution sets up the President, Madam Speaker. And when we look to these matters, as today is the International Day of Parliamentarism, June 30th, today is that day, the day we celebrate parliaments and recognize the significance of parliamentary systems of government in shaping modern societies. Today this Government says, in accepting the recommendation of the Joint Select Committees established to look at Tobago reform and autonomy, today this Parliament, on the day of celebrating International Day of Parliamentarism, we say, Madam Speaker, elevate that statutory authority from where it is, as an Act of Parliament created by simple majority anchored in Chapter 11A of the Constitution, with four meagre clauses to underwrite the Tobago House of Assembly, take it from statutory authority, put it into the Constitution, bring it to life in this Bill, in Part II Tobago Island Government, Madam Speaker. Let me repeat that, Tobago Island Government.

A “Tobago Executive Council” with “Jurisdiction for administration”, clause 5, attached to Schedule 1. How the Prime Minister should meet with the Chief

Secretary? Why should the Prime Minister not meet with a Chief Secretary other than in law? The “Tobago Island Government to act on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago”, clause 7. Clause 8, the “Powers of a Secretary”, materially including a Secretary with responsibility for Legal Affairs. No Cabinet in the Commonwealth system is established without a Prime Minister and an Attorney General. And in having a Secretary of Legal Affairs, Tobago gets more than equality of status in lip service and in vague ideas of what equality means like a nebulous cloud, it gets it in prescriptive law. It gets it in the Constitution and it gets it in this Bill.

Why should Tobago not have a Chief Administrator? Why should that Chief Administrator not be anchored back to the equality of treatment that Trinidad and Tobago’s structures give? Clause 10, “Administrators”. Clause 11, “Appointment on contract”, where we take advantage for the benefit of the administrators to ensure that the SRC has operation, to ensure that the terms and conditions are settled in law and not by vagary as Deputy Permanent Secretaries. Why should Tobago not have its equivalent of the Clerk of the House?

Look at the service that the Clerk of House and the Clerk of the Senate give to the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago in the House of Representatives and in the Senate. Where would we be without the type and distinction of service of Jacqui Sampson-Meiguel or Brian Caesar, and all their predecessors, Madam Speaker? This country and this democracy owes a debt of gratitude to people such as those that I have just named, who serve without fear or favour, malice or ill will—government is government, regardless of who holds the reins—and have served with distinction. Tobago is being asked to have its equivalent with protection offered in the law.

Madam Speaker, look at Part IV of the Bill on “Finance”. Clause 28 of the

Bill, Madam Speaker, we are talking equality, we are talking dignity and we are talking specifics. Clause 28, “Establishment of Secretary of Finance as a corporation sole”. Madam Speaker, that does not exist in the law at present. The Tobago House of Assembly Act, fashioned in 1980, refashioned in 1996, vests its property in the body corporate of the THA. No Westminster system comparator of a corporation sole, no Commonwealth comparator of a corporation sole as the Minister of Finance in law stands as Corporation Sole for the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. This law says in clause 28 that the Secretary of Finance is the Corporation Sole for Tobago.

And, Madam Speaker, when we look to clause 30, the “Tobago allocation”; 31, the “Tobago Fund”; 32, the “Collection of revenues”; 33, “Expenditure”; 34, “Audit of accounts”; 35, “Retention of monies”; “Surrender of surplus monies” in clause 36; and 37, the “Power to borrow”; clause 38, the “Power to invest”; clause 39, “Financial Rules”; clause 40, “Description of property”; clause 41, “Tobago Appropriation Bills”; 42, “Contingencies Fund”, and 43, “Fiscal Review Committee”. Let me put it simply this way, Tobago is being asked to receive the very form and fashion and process anchored in the Constitution for money bills for appropriation.

Tobago is being asked to have a “Fiscal Review Committee” in clause 43 and clause 43 sets out:

“There shall be established a Fiscal Review Committee....

a Chairman, who shall be the Minister...for finance...

a Deputy Chairman...Secretary...for finance...”—in Tobago—

“one member...by the Tobago Executive Council...

two members appointed by the Cabinet.”

I flag now, we wish to amend this. This clause is proposed to be amended at

committee stage, so that we match up that there will be one from Trinidad, one from Tobago, effectively—alternatives in that regard—and that there shall be two other people appointed by the President, in, effectively, sole discretion. In other words then, there is no preponderance or balance for the Government.

And what happens with the Fiscal Review Committee? The Fiscal Review Committee shall submit their reports to the Parliament. The Fiscal Review Committee gets, in the desire of bringing equality to Tobago, the ability to present the views and the disagreements, Madam Speaker, the transparency of light into the all four context corners, so that the Parliament can see it in broad daylight. No Cabinet blocking, no majority will factor. It comes to the people of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, in the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Who would deny Tobago this? Where is the Opposition of the Republic of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago in promoting this desire, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker, Part V treats with the “Transitional Provisions”, and very importantly, I would like to point out to every public servant, every person on contract working with the THA, the power of clauses 45, 46, 47 and 48. Madam Speaker, there is a statutory recognition of the trade union representation and recognition, keeping in line with the Martha Perch decision.

There is a transfer. If you are at the THA, the Tobago House of Assembly, you go across to the Tobago Island Government, no loss, no detriment, no battle with the Recognition Board to have a trade union recognized, but yet preserving the freedom to associate in a trade union, if you so desire. Madam Speaker, who would stand in the way of this, is the question? Why would they stand in the way of this, is another material question? Who could look at the equality of status and protection of employment positions and deny the people of Trinidad and Tobago the decision that gives Tobago its equality, its dignity, its primacy of presence,

Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker, clause 53, again, in “Transitional Provisions”, we are dealing with the vesting of powers, rights and property in the Tobago Island Government. Let me repeat that. The marginal note, “Vesting of powers, rights and property in the Tobago Island Government”, not in a body corporate. Let me remind, Madam Speaker, in the other Bill, which is the companion to this, we seek to entrench, by an amendment to section 54(3)(b) of the Constitution, the fact that you cannot interrupt the new Chapter 11A, beginning with sections 141A as in “Alpha”, right down to 141R as in “Romeo”, you cannot change that without a three-quarters majority of the Parliament. Who would deny Tobago that protection? Why would you deny the people of Tobago that protection, Madam Speaker? Why would you do that? And of all days, Madam Speaker, of all days that the Commonwealth celebrates and recognizes the International Day of Parliamentarism, June 30th, today.

Madam Speaker, I have read the opinions in the newspapers today, the editorials. I have seen the usual, “parliamentarians you ought to cooperate and kumbaya your way through this”, “come on, let us get along”. Madam Speaker, we are in a Parliament today. We have suspended a committee stage temporarily. We are introducing a Bill here now. What is before us? The committee of the whole Parliament.

I have put on record that since Tobago was treated in coming in as a Crown Colony entrant, 250-something years ago, becoming a ward—Tobago becoming a ward of Trinidad by the island council, the Order in Council of 1889—Madam Speaker, 1889, you know what was going on in the world in 1889? Slavery, oppression, lack of dignity. None of us immigrants and settlers and entrants to Trinidad and Tobago had the rights of standing right where we are with the

freedom that we enjoy today. We celebrate it in movies, we celebrate it in philosophy. Today we can celebrate it in law in the committee of the whole, because a committee of the whole allows the people of Trinidad and Tobago to consider clause by clause, idea by idea. But, Madam Speaker, as Attorney General, participating as a member of the Joint Select Committee, we asked for submissions on the law.

Madam Speaker, I have piloted a significant number of Bills in this Parliament, and in that significant number of Bills in the Parliament, as Attorney General, as the person with conduct with the law, I have suspended debates, awaited comments from the Law Association, for example, received them in black and white proposed textual amendments, and made the amendments. And today, as Attorney General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, given that capacity by the hon. Prime Minister, I call for whatever shape, fashion, text, methodology that anyone can send, so that it can be considered. Because the room for consideration is at a committee stage, where all 61 clauses in this Bill and the two Schedules in this Bill and the clauses in the companion Constitution amendment, together amounting to over 109 sections of proposed law— Madam Speaker, I find it curious, disturbing, unsettling that after eight years, since the Green Paper was issued in 2012, nearly nine years, Madam Speaker, eight years, that we do not have a scrap of paper from the Opposition of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. You see, Madam Speaker, unfortunately, in the House, in its construction here in this Parliament, the only two benches that exist are under the PNM Government and the UNC government.

Madam Speaker, I have received submissions, yesterday, coming from Mr. Hochoy Charles and Mr. Farley Augustine, and because there is nobody to present those submissions to this Parliament, I have engrossed them as proposals for

consideration at committee stage under the name of the Attorney General. Let me explain that. These are not my proposals on the recommendation of the Government. We have taken the voice of people that cannot speak in this Parliament—Farley Augustine, Hochoy Charles—and converted them into proposed amendments for discussion. Let me repeat, for discussion at committee stage. Which other Government has ever done that? Which other Government has ever done that, Madam Speaker?

So wedded are we to the idea of democracy, but democracy has to have an outcome. It is a feeling of safety, of security and the ability to enjoy your country and its rights and privileges within the contract. But, Madam Speaker, after 257 years, you have to draw the line. The Order in Council is 1889. When will that law be repealed? When is it going to be enough?

There is a process before us, Madam Speaker. The process involves legislative consideration. We have 41 Members of this House. We have a Senate, in a bicameral structure that can consider all of the recommendations. Our record demonstrates that we have, on many occasions, stopped and considered, as we have done already. Today, in moving the Island Government Bill, Madam Speaker, I would like to say this is important law to give Tobago and the people of Tobago—and we in the PNM representing the majority of the people of Tobago, as has been scientifically demonstrated at the polls, we in the People's National Movement say that we want to pass the law, and that we want to do it with alacrity, we want to do it with quick but safe measure. We cannot pass law, as currently constructed, in another Bill, without the Opposition support. What we can do, Madam Speaker, is to use the 22 votes that we have in the best way possible.

I stand guided, Madam Speaker, by the wisdom of the hon. Prime Minister, who has been in the political arena longer than I have known myself, consciously. I

am now learning what he has forgotten, and I mean that in all honesty. We respect our colleagues in this House, we respect their views. We would like to respect the Opposition more, and that respect would be if they would even bother to condescend to putting their amendments in writing, having started a Green Paper process—the Member for Siparia—in 2012. But the Member for Siparia, as the only Senior Counsel in the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, in the House of Representatives and in the Senate, is never present and has not a single amendment to make. So, I call upon the Opposition to provide their recommendations in writing or in discussion. I call upon them to turn up. The first act of starting is to actually get here.

Madam Speaker, the people of Tobago deserve support and we are here prepared to give it to them, and I thank you for this opportunity to contribute.

[Desk thumping]

11.20 a.m.

Madam Speaker: Member for Arouca/Maloney. *[Desk thumping]*

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I would simply say that a new season is upon us and a new season of blessings has to be coming given these Bills that we have brought and given the Report of the Joint Select Committee. And with those few words, Madam Speaker, I beg to move. *[Desk thumping]*

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a second time.

Madam Speaker: This Bill has 61 clauses and two Schedules.

Bill committed to a committee of the whole House.

House in Committee.

Madam Chairman: Leader of the House, will we be putting 1 to 42 as a block?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Yes, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, if I may, just for your guidance, Madam Speaker, we have a list of amendments for several clauses—*[Interruption]* We have a list of amendments for several clauses that the Secretariat has prepared but are tied into conjunction with the other Bill, which is in committee. So for your guidance the question would be where we take—how we manage a process in this regard?

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Sorry, AG. Madam Speaker, what would happen now, the amendments to which the AG refers are the ones that he spoke about in his presentation that we formed into amendments given what Farley Augustine and Hochoy Charles said, but those are within the Constitution (Amdt.) Bill. *[Interruption]* The AG is now telling me that he has others for the Tobago Island Government Bill.

Mr. Al-Rawi: So, Madam Speaker, if I could just explain and therefore have your guidance, and I thank my colleague for allowing me.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Sorry.

Madam Chairman: So those amendments have not yet been circulated?

Mr. Al-Rawi: No, Madam Chair, because there was a need for some guidance.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: So in the circumstances, Madam Chair, may I ask for a few minutes just for us to look at them and then we will come back to you? Thank you very much.

Madam Speaker: So could we have an idea of how long, because what I think I am understanding is that we will suspend this committee meeting and reconvene. So 15 minutes, 20 minutes, half an hour? If I can get—

Mr. Al-Rawi: Up to you.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Okay. I would say about 15 minutes.

Madam Chairman: All right. So if I say we return here at 11.45, we should have enough time.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Certainly, Ma'am. Thank you very much.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So this committee meeting is now suspended. We shall resume at 11.45.

11.25a.m.: *Committee suspended.*

11.45a.m.: *Committee resumed.*

Madam Chairman: Okay. Leader of the House.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very kindly, Madam Chairman. Madam Chairman, in accordance with Standing Order 70(14), I beg to move that progress on the Tobago Island Government Bill, 2021, be reported to the House.

Question put and agreed to: That the Bill be reported to the House.

House resumed.

Madam Speaker: Leader of the House.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I wish to report that no clauses were considered in relation to the Tobago Island Government Bill, 2021 in the committee, and I beg to move that the House agree with this report of the committee's progress thus far.

Question put and agreed to.

CONSTITUTION (AMDT.) (TOBAGO SELF-GOVERNMENT) BILL, 2020

[Third Day]

The committee of the whole House resumed its deliberations on the Bill.

[*Chairman: Mrs. Annisette-George*]

Madam Chairman: Minister of Planning and Development.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much kindly, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 70(14), I beg to move that progress on

the Constitution (Amdt.) (Tobago Self-Government) Bill, 2020, be reported to the House.

Question put and agreed to: That the Bill be reported to the House.

House resumed.

Madam Speaker: The Prime Minister. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I wish to report that no further clauses were amended—considered and amended and I wish to ask that the House agree with the report of the committee’s progress so far.

Question put and agreed to.

Madam Speaker: Leader of the House.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I beg to move that the House do now adjourn to Friday the 2nd day of July, 2021, at 1.30 p.m. Madam Speaker, at that time we will deal with the Finance Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 11.52a.m.